



THE POLITICS OF ACCESS

University Education
and Nation-Building in
Nigeria, 1948–2000

OGECHE EMMANUEL ANYANWU



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*To the memory of my dear mother,
Patience Anyanwu*

*To my lovely wife, Chidinma,
and daughters, Ubechi, Ozioma, and Amarachi*

List of Abbreviations

ABU	Ahmadu Bello University
AG	Action-Group
ACEC	Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies
AHK	Arewa House Kaduna
ASUU	Academic Staff Union of Universities
CCNY	Carnegie Corporation of New York
Cmd	Command Paper issue by the British Government
CO	Colonial Office
COFHE	Committee on the Future of Higher Education
CUE	Committee on University Entrance
CUF	Committee on University Finances
CVC	Committee of Vice-Chancellors
ETF	Education Tax Fund
Fifth NDP	Fifth National Development Plan
First NDP	First National Development Plan
Fourth NDP	Fourth National Development Plan
FNRP	First National Rolling Plan
FUT	Federal Universities of Technology
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GNPP	Great Nigeria People's Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUC	Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies
JAMB	Joint Admission and Matriculation Board
JCC	Joint Consultative Council
NAE	National Archives Enugu
NAI	National Archives Ibadan

NAK	National Archives Kaduna
NAUT	Nigerian Association of University Teachers
NDA	Nigerian Defense Academy
NCE	National Council on Education
NCE	National Certificate of Education
NUC	National Universities Commission
NUNS	National Union of Nigerian Students
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NPP	Nigerian People's Party
NRB	Nigerian Education Bank
NSLB	Nigerian Student Loan Board
NPE	National Policy on Education
NOU	National Open University
NICRHEN	National Implementation Committee on the Report of the Review of Higher Education in Nigeria
NCNC	National Convention of Nigerian Citizens
NPC	National Progressive Party
PRO	Public Record Office
PRP	People's Redemption Party
PPT	Petroleum Profit Tax
PPB	Presidential Political Bureau
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SNPE	Seminar on a National Policy on Education
Second NDP	Second National Development Plan
Third NDP	Third National Development Plan
UME	University Matriculation Examination
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UA	University of Abuja
UNN	University of Nigeria, Nsukka
UCI	University College of Ibadan
UGC	University Grants Committee
UI	University of Ibadan
UPN	United Party of Nigeria
WAEC	West African Examination Council

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Introduction

Background

Access to university education in Africa was inadequate during the colonial period. At independence, however, African countries departed from the elitist colonial education system by embarking on programs aimed at providing education to all, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender, or creed. Nowhere in Africa has the question of access to university education reached such a crescendo of concern and posed such a challenge to the polity than in Nigeria. This book constitutes a history of the policies and politics surrounding the push for mass university education (massification) in postcolonial Nigeria. The concept of massification as used in this study refers to Nigeria's postcolonial shift from elitist university educational system to mass education. As the most populous, oil-rich nation in Africa, with a protracted ethnic and religious conflict between the predominantly Muslim North and Christian South, the push for mass university education is central to understanding Nigeria's postcolonial socio-economic and political history. This book argues that the premise of building a modern Nigerian nation underscored the pursuit of mass university education policies by Nigeria's successive postcolonial governments. It shows the centrality of a vision of university education to the "nationalist project" in Nigeria and demonstrates that the move to mass university education

was an essential social imaginary for Nigeria's vision of itself as a modern, dynamic nation state.

Through analysis of the politics that drove the massification agenda, this study bridges and recasts scholarly understanding of the challenges of national integration and socio-economic development in Nigeria's pluralistic society. It accounts for, and provides new insights on, how internal religious and ethnic/regional politics in Nigeria coalesced with external interests to shape policy initiatives on mass university education and the shifts and outcomes of the country's education policies. In illuminating Nigeria's experiment with mass education, this book enhances our understanding of the difficulties of the country's postcolonial social engineering, as well as providing a valuable glimpse into some of the similar challenges facing African countries. If we are to grasp modern Nigeria, with its intractable tensions, as well as its political instability, we must understand the dynamics of higher education policies. Thus by exploring the nature, problems, and pitfalls of the shift towards a system of mass university education throughout its colonial configuration, the immediate postcolonial adjustments, and several years of transition of military, democratic, and neo-liberal leaderships, this book provides a window into the promise and problems of Nigeria itself.

The British establishment of the first university in Nigeria, the University College of Ibadan (UCI), in 1948 was a response to decades of nationalist demand for an institution of higher education in the country. Afraid of the potential threat that educated Africans would pose to the colonial system and mindful of the financial implications of establishing universities in the colonies, colonial authorities had opposed the idea of higher education training for colonial subjects. Charles Wood, president of the Board of Control (1853–55) and secretary of state of India (1859–66) set the tone for British colonial higher education policy. In a dispatch to F.J. Halliday, lieutenant governor of Bengal, Wood had bluntly delineated the logic that ultimately shaped British colonial higher education policy:

I do not see the advantage of rearing up a number of highly educated gentlemen at the expense of the State, whom you cannot employ, and who will naturally become depositories of discontent. If they choose to train themselves, well and good, but I

am against providing our own future detractors and opponents and grumblers.¹

The end of Second World War marked a turning point in the history of higher education in Nigeria. As part of its postwar reconstruction and development agenda, Britain came to regard university education as an important instrument, not only in the social development of her colonies, but also in training future African leaders. Thus British colonial authorities set up the Asquith and Elliot commissions to advise it on how to meet its new education vision. These commissions submitted their reports in 1945. Following the broad principles outlined by the Asquith Commission and the recommendations of the Elliot Commission, UCI was established. UCI, along with other colonial university colleges, was established based on a erroneous premise that what was suitable for Britain equally applied to the colonies. In *Universities: British, Indian, African: A Study in the Ecology of Higher Education*, Eric Ashby, a British historian, writes that

[the] underlying British enterprise in providing higher education for her people overseas was one massive assumption: that the pattern of university education appropriate for Manchester, Exeter and Hull was *ipso facto* appropriate for Ibadan, Kampala and Singapore. If we were going to export universities to our overseas dependencies they would of course be British universities, just as the cars we export there are British cars. As with cars, so with universities: we willingly made minor modifications to suit the climate, but we proposed no radical change in design; and we did not regard it as our business to inquire whether French or American models might be more suitable.²

Soon Nigerians were disappointed with Britain's wholesale exportation of their pattern of university education to Nigeria. With an annual intake of less than 130 students, a low rate of production of (admittedly) highly trained graduates for the public and private sectors, and a lopsided curriculum and enrolment, UCI failed to satisfy the higher education needs of most Nigerians. Nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo thus rejected the elitist and conservative traditions of UCI and

not only demanded changes in the institution's curriculum and admission policies but also intensified their push for decolonization. It was not surprising, therefore, that when Nigeria gained independence in 1960, policy-makers reconfigured university education to fulfill a new mission: the mission of nation-building and socio-economic development. Like in other African countries, colonial rule impoverished Nigeria, limiting social amenities, mobility, and economic opportunities, as well as deliberately creating discord in the country's pluralistic society. "The fundamental challenge facing universities in a postcolonial setting," as Oluwasanmi puts it, "is that of development, of bringing social and economic change rapidly into a situation which has been deprived for so long."³ Understanding these problems and proffering solutions to them became a new task for postcolonial African universities. This book argues that attempts to engage university education to promote nation-building and facilitate socio-economic development largely shaped the shifts towards mass university education in postcolonial Nigeria.

Unlike the colonial period, the driving force behind Nigeria's postcolonial university education was hinged on Robbins's principle that "courses of higher education should be available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so."⁴ Thus, the most dominant theme in the history of postcolonial university education in Nigeria is what Martin Trow, a sociologist, called the shift from elite to mass higher education.⁵ Conceptually, Nigeria's massification agenda was an amalgam of three broad policies instituted by the federal government and its component units to reorganize its university education system in response to the needs of postcolonial Nigeria. First, it involved the expansion of access to university education through the establishment of more universities, the diversification of university curriculum, the centralization of university control, and the involvement of the private sector in the supply of university education. The idea was to train the country's labour force, especially in the sciences, not only to fill the vacancies created by the departing Europeans, but also to help champion future economic development and national integration.

Second, massification involved the liberalization of access to university education through measures such as state control of admission process to eliminate admission bottlenecks, the revision of the rigid British entry