

## THE NATURE, DIRECTION, AND EXTENT OF THE DROP-OUT PROBLEM IN THE NIGERIAN FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASS

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The first serious attempt to teach French in Nigeria was made soon after independence in the early sixties. French teaching had to start from the universities and advanced teacher training colleges in those days (as a pilot project) in order to produce a large corps of qualified teachers for secondary institutions. This was intended to help solve West Africa's peculiar "language problem" which Markward (1967) had lamented. (1) Soon after the launching of the pilot scheme French became a popular subject in Nigerian secondary schools, gradually replacing Latin. In those days it was customary to see advertisements like "Entrance examination to ABC High School, FRENCH and SCIENCE taught", and a school which taught French and Science was considered a good school.

But it now appears that French is gradually losing its attraction and popularity. A large number of schools has stopped the teaching of French because "teachers were not available" or because "our students are not interested in the subject". Henri Evans, one of the pioneers of the teaching of French in this country, has even lamented "the wholesale abandonment of the subject after class III". (2) French language teaching in Nigerian Secondary schools is therefore facing a very grave crisis.

My interest in the drop-out problem began in 1971-72 and has continued to date. The discussion below represents the answers I have been able to obtain from my inquiries into the problem during the past three academic years.

### THE LAGOS SURVEY (1971-72)

The purpose of this was to find out "une vue d'ensemble" of the French language teaching situation in the secondary schools of Lagos city. The findings of the survey have been published elsewhere. (3) The most striking feature of these, however, is the rate of drop-out. As can be seen from Table I the enrolment in twenty French classes in the third form was 682 (an average of 34 a class). This fell to 209 (an average of 10 a class) in the fourth form and fell further still to 134 (an average of 7 a class) in the fifth form. Table II shows the drop-out rate in percentages. A striking feature here is the tendency for the drop-out rate to be higher among boys than it is among girls. This finding of course confirms studies carried out in other contexts and environments. (4) If eighty per cent of those who began the study of French in the first form in Lagos drop-out by the time they get to the fifth form the situation in the interior or the country must be really serious. This was the consideration that led to a further probing of the drop-out phenomenon outside Lagos.

Table I

French Enrolment in Forms III-V  
(From 20 Lagos City Secondary Schools)

Year	Class	Boys	Girls	Total	Average class enrolment
1970	Form III	377	305	682	34
1971	Form IV	94	115	209	10
1972	Form V	47	87	134	7

Table II

Drop-Out Rate in Percentages

Year	% Drop-out		
	Boys	Girls	Whole Group
1970-71	74	61	69
1971-72	50	24	31
1970-71-72	87	73	80

THE IBADAN STUDY (1972-73)

This aimed at determining the popularity of French as a secondary school subject. Nine schools in and around Ibadan were chosen for this study which involved 1,117 pupils (606 boys and 511 girls). These pupils were given a subject-preference questionnaire on which were printed sixteen most commonly taught secondary school subjects to be arranged in order of preference. Six of the schools were situated in the city of Ibadan and three in the rural areas around Ibadan. The main criterion for the selection of schools was the availability of teachers of French as a previous study has shown the teacher supply problem to be a determining factor of the success of the French teaching enterprise. (5)

As can be seen from Table III French tends to diminish in importance as one goes up the secondary school ladder. From fifth position in the first form it jumps down to tenth position in the fifth form.

Rural children gave significantly lower ratings to French than did urban children. The Ibadan study showed, like the Lagos one, that sex is an important factor in the French language drop-out problem. Table IV, for example, shows the numbers and percentages of fifth and fourth forms boys and girls in the Ibadan sample who were still studying French at the time of the study. Thirty-two per cent of the whole group were still studying French, but almost half of the girls (47%) were in this group while the figure for the boys was around one-fifth (21%).

Table III

Trend in the Position of French among 16 School Subjects

Class	No. of pupils involved	Average Rank assigned to French
I	232	5
II	257	7
III	230	8
IV	222	9
V	176	10

THE ILORIN STUDY (1973-74)

This was a longitudinal study of secondary school students preference for, and attitude to, the study of French. Two hundred and eight first formers (166 boys and 114 girls) were used for the study. They were all from the three government-owned secondary schools in Ilorin. One of these was a mixed school, the second a boys' school, and the third a girls' school. Government owned secondary schools were selected for the study because they are most likely to maintain an uninterrupted flow of qualified teachers of French.

Table IV

Voluntary choice of French in Forms IV and V

Sex	+French	-French	Total
Boys	46 (21%)	177 (79%)	223
Girls	75 (47%)	85 (53%)	160
Total	121 (32%)	262 (68%)	383

The pupils concerned had to complete a subject-preference Questionnaire (as was the case with the Ibadan study) as well as a French Attitude Scale (FAS). This procedure is to continue for three years - up till the time French ceases to be a compulsory subject. Tables V and VI represent progress reports on this study, as at the end of the first year (May 1974).

Table V shows that French is a high priority for over 35% of them and low priority for the remaining 8%. The chances are, then, that over 50% of these students are likely to continue with the study of French in the senior classes. One wonders however, whether this is likely to be the case.

An analysis of Ilorin students' responses to the French Attitude Scale is given in Table VI. It is interesting that even at this early level of their educational career, students are not too keen on studying French for its own sake (see their responses to items 1 and 4). Their response to item 12,

which also stresses the intrinsic value of French is different. These children seem fascinated by the sounds of French. It is equally interesting that they are already thinking of the utilitarian values of French. They seem to agree that they will need French in adult life (items 3,6,), that a knowledge of French could mean a well paid job (item 7). They recognize the need for international communication (item 8) and need to enrich oneself linguistically by adding French to the number of languages already known (item 11). The children seem to feel that French is a difficult subject (item 5) and that it could also be intellectually challenging (item 2). A large number of the students are not satisfied with the type of teaching they are getting (item 14). Parents and friends of pupils are far from exercising negative influences on pupils, as far as encouragement to study French is concerned (items 13,15,16).

Table V

Summary of 1st-Year Preference for French

Order of Preference	Girls		Boys		Whole Group	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	7	6.86	11	7.14	18	7.03
2	11	10.78	15	9.74	26	10.16
3	9	8.82	20	12.99	29	11.33
4	15	14.71	23	14.94	38	14.84
5	15	14.71	18	11.69	33	12.89
High Priority	57	55.08	87	56.50	144	56.25
6	10	9.80	14	9.09	24	9.38
7	9	8.82	10	6.49	19	7.42
8	12	11.76	15	9.74	27	10.55
9	3	2.94	6	3.90	9	3.52
10	5	4.90	7	4.55	12	4.69
Medium Priority	39	38.24	52	33.77	91	35.55
11	2	1.96	4	2.60	6	2.34
12	-	-	-	-	-	-
13	1	0.98	2	1.30	3	1.17
14	1	0.98	2	1.30	3	1.17
15	1	0.98	3	1.95	4	1.56
16	1	0.98	4	2.60	5	1.96
Low Priority	6	5.88	15	9.74	21	8.20

Table VI

Analysis of FAS (French Attitude Scale) Questionnaire

(N + 280)

Statement	Very true	True	No opinion	Untrue	Very far from the truth
1. For his education to be complete every child will need to learn French.	17 (6.07)	27 (9.64)	38 (13.57)	51 (18.21)	147 (52.50)
2. French is meant for those who cannot cope with other school subjects.	3 (1.07)	22 (7.85)	38 (13.57)	52 (18.57)	165 (58.92)
3. In adult life one will certainly not need French.	10 (3.57)	43 (15.35)	70 (25.00)	51 (18.21)	106 (37.85)
4. The sounds of French are marvellous and so one should learn to speak the language.	29 (10.35)	76 (27.14)	49 (17.50)	61 (21.78)	65 (23.71)
5. French is too difficult a language for the average Nigerian child.	32 (11.42)	89 (31.78)	41 (14.64)	46 (16.42)	72 (25.71)
6. A Nigerian does not normally come in contact with speakers of French. So he does not need the language.	10 (3.57)	20 (7.14)	56 (20.00)	47 (16.78)	147 (52.50)
7. A knowledge of French will earn one a well paid job.	40 (14.28)	66 (23.57)	68 (24.28)	56 (20.00)	50 (17.85)
8. We all need to know French because our country is surrounded by French-speaking countries.	55 (19.64)	55 (19.64)	43 (15.35)	41 (14.64)	86 (30.71)
9. I do not feel I need French but my teacher makes me like it.	51 (18.21)	97 (34.64)	29 (10.35)	24 (8.57)	79 (28.21)
10. A knowledge of French means that one will be able to communicate with a large number of people.	37 (13.21)	57 (20.35)	68 (24.28)	44 (15.71)	74 (26.42)
11. One does not need to be able to read and write French because one already knows English and a Nigerian language.	10 (3.57)	30 (10.71)	28 (10.00)	40 (14.28)	172 (61.42)
12. It will be simply satisfying to be able to read and write French.	66 (23.57)	120 (42.85)	28 (10.00)	28 (10.00)	38 (13.57)

Statement	Very true	True	No opinion	Untrue	Very far from the truth
13. My friends will laugh at me if I stick too much to French.	22 (7.85)	37 (13.21)	37 (13.21)	31 (11.07)	153 (54.64)
14. I would have taken my French seriously if I had a good teacher.	86 (30.71)	98 (35.00)	23 (8.21)	16 (5.71)	57 (20.35)
15. All my friends will admire me if I can speak French fluently.	84 (30.00)	96 (34.28)	49 (17.50)	22 (7.85)	29 (10.35)
16. If I take French seriously I shall be disobeying the wish of my parent.	1 (0.35)	7 (2.50)	13 (4.64)	18 (6.42)	241 (86.07)

N.B. The figures in brackets are percentages.

### CONCLUSIONS

This summary of research findings to date shows that a problem already exists. French is becoming increasingly unpopular. The enrolment figures for French language study are not encouraging. It is also the fifth best (on the average) for the Ibadan group. Teachers have a tendency to dismiss the looming danger of wholesale abandonment of French by saying "students are not interested in the language". The reason for the problem appears more deep-rooted, as can be seen from Table. VI. Solutions are therefore urgently called for.

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## EDUCATION IN FIJI

### A STUDY OF POLICY, PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION 1939 - 1973

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During the past 25 years remarkable progress has been achieved in promoting education throughout the world, but as C.E. Beeby and L.J. Lewis recently pointed out, educational planners lack a body of theory that takes account of all that has happened in education in this period 'during which educational events have far outstripped our capacity to think about them'.<sup>(1)</sup> Given this situation it seems important at the present time to bring into sharper focus a variety of key issues which appear to be of universal concern, rather than to seek final answers. This can seemingly best be done not by abstract theorizing, but by examining the actual experiences and conditions of education systems in a variety of areas. It was against this broader background of research needs that this work was undertaken. The general aim was to examine and account for the nature of government education policy and to highlight the difficulties experienced since the second world war.

The study was arranged on a chronological basis in order to maintain a sense of historical perspective, a component of educational planning which is perhaps not emphasized as much as it deserves. The early chapters provided an introduction to the physical and cultural milieu of Fiji, the development of British colonial educational policy between the two world wars, and an analysis of educational development in Fiji prior to 1939. The latter followed a pattern typical of most Crown colonies. Educational initiative was left to the Missions and other voluntary agencies. In the case of Fiji, the importation of many thousands of indentured Indians in the period 1879-1916 gave rise to numerous Indian cultural groups establishing their own schools. By 1939 the colony had a familiar array of educational problems. Provision for schooling fell far short of social demand, especially amongst the Indian population; the quality of schooling was very poor; schools were segregated on racial lines; the majority of children who did go to school only stayed on average for about three years; there was much repetition of grades; the training and supply of teachers was inadequate; very few girls received any schooling; the colonial administration exercised only minimal control over the establishment and running of schools; and there appeared to be little or no likelihood of any substantial infusion of finance to remedy the situation. Then came the war, the British Government's revised colonial development and welfare policy, and the arrival in Fiji

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(1) C.E. Beeby and L.J. Lewis: "Introduction" to the special review number on Education in Developing Countries, International Review of Education, Vol. XVII, 1971, pp. 131-137.

in late 1942 of Governor Philip Mitchell. Ostensibly he went to the South Pacific 'to wage war' against the Japanese but he also found time to concern himself with education in Fiji and was directly responsible for arranging for F.B. Stephens, a New Zealand 'administrative expert' to visit Fiji in 1943 to make a report on education.(2) Stephens was very critical of what he saw and convinced of the need for sweeping changes including a government take-over of most of the schools. F.R.J. Davies, a fellow New Zealander and the Acting Director of Education at the time, was given the unenviable task of drawing up a ten year development programme for education on the basis of the report. While Davies endorsed much of what Stephens had said, he was convinced that the report was politically unacceptable to the Fiji administration and the Colonial Office alike. Accordingly he spent many months working out a compromise agreement between the various interested parties. The eventual outcome was given guarded approval in London and the Ten Year Plan was launched in 1947 as part of a general development programme.(3) Within a year financial problems caused the plan to be curtailed, but not before a Government Teachers' College was established at Nasinu.

Throughout the early 1950s education suffered from inadequate funds and progress was slow. Adequate provision for schooling was made especially difficult by the rapid growth of Fiji's population in the post-war period. The 1946 Census also showed that Indians outnumbered Fijians for the first time. The rapid growth of the Indian population created a serious political problem. The Indians rapidly gained a monopoly of education and a serious imbalance began to develop between the numbers of educated Fijians and Indians.

In the late 1950s, Fiji's economy began an expansionist phase as sugar prices improved and this was reflected in education by a significant expansion of schooling, especially at the secondary level. At the same time the Government attempted to exert some control over the quality of secondary education by offering grants-in-aid to selected schools. Efforts were also made to encourage secondary schools to broaden their curricula to include practical subjects but the traditional desire for academic education proved too strong and only very limited progress was made in that direction.

The quickening pace of educational growth in the late 1950s broke into a distinct gallop in the sixties. This was due to several reasons. Education assumed an economic importance in the minds of Fiji's development planners, the growing population created an ever rising social demand for more schooling, and the economy continued to expand. Nevertheless, despite the impressive growth of enrolments the quality of instruction in many schools remained poor. Schools were inadequately equipped and there was a high proportion of untrained teachers in charge of classes. In 1965, Fiji drew up its fifth post-war development plan (DPV)(4) which included the most comprehensive programme for educational development since 1945. However, in spite of the obvious qualitative deficiencies in the schools, the main emphasis was still placed on the provision of more schools, especially at the secondary level, to meet social demand. By the late 1960s the lack of educationally well-qualified Fijians was assuming grave dimensions.

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(2) F.B. Stephens, Report on Education in the Colony of Fiji, Fiji Legislation Council Paper (FLCP) 18/1944.

(3) Plan of Development for the Educational System in the Colony of Fiji FLCP 27/1946.

(4) Fiji Development Plan 1966-1970. FLCP 16/1966.



In 1969, the education system was the subject of a Commission of Inquiry headed by Sir Philip Sherlock.<sup>(5)</sup> The Commission was established at the request of the Education Department and the Fijian Affairs Board. The Department felt that Fiji was fast reaching a decisive point in its educational development and that a variety of costly decisions needed to be made. The Director of Education thought there was more chance of the Government voting the necessary funds if the recommendations came from an outside body. The Fijian Affairs Board had been concerned with the poor educational attainments of Fijians for several years and sought an investigation into the matter. The Commission emphasized the popular view that education was an investment of national importance, but it also warned against allowing the continued unplanned expansion of schooling prompted by social demand with its inevitable decline in standards and lack of matching employment opportunities for school leavers. Consequently the Commission recommended a slowing down in the rate of educational expansion in line with the supply of trained teachers. Much of the report was concerned with ways in which the quality of education could be improved. Major areas looked at in detail included the training and conditions of service of teachers, examinations, language difficulties, administration of schools, free and compulsory education, multi-racial schooling, and the future of secondary education. The final list of recommendations endorsed most of the ideas that the Education Department was trying to get included in the country's sixth development plan (DPVI), including the need to strengthen teacher-training and the importance of curriculum revision, both costly items to put up to the Government for priority rating in the face of strong popular demands for free and compulsory primary schooling.

In October 1970, Fiji became independent and soon afterwards DPVI was formally adopted.<sup>(6)</sup> It was the most ambitious and comprehensive planning exercise ever undertaken in the territory and was designed to shape the social and economic growth of the early 1970s. The educational component of the plan incorporated the educational objectives of the new ruling Alliance Party headed by Ratu Sir Karisese Mara. These included provision for a minimum of ten years of schooling for all children up to Form Four; a substantial improvement in the quality of teacher-training; the staffing of all primary schools by trained teachers, and smaller classes; increased equipment for secondary schools and curricula revision; the gradual introduction of fee-free education up to Form Four; measures to overcome the poor overall level of educational attainment by the Fijians; an extension of technical and vocational education; and the eventual assumption by Government of full financial responsibility for all schools willing to hand over these responsibilities. While it is evident that a strong emphasis was placed on improving the quality of education, it is perhaps even more significant to note that the overriding accent on quantity was still uppermost. Despite the Education Commission's main charge that successive Administrations had put quantity before quality, the social pressure for more education seemed to be the paramount concern of Fiji's politicians.

A major feature of DPVI was the provision for a network of junior secondary schools to cater for children after they have completed a basic six year programme of primary schooling. It is hoped that these schools, many of which are being located in rural districts, will help to overcome the premature drop-out of many Fijian children whose parents cannot afford to pay boarding

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(5) Education for Modern Fiji. Report of the Fiji Education Commission 1969. FLCF 2/1970.

(6) Fiji's Sixth Development Plan 1971-75. Central Planning Office, Ministry of Finance, Suva, Nov. 1970.

expenses for them in secondary schools in urban areas.

To achieve many of the Government's educational aims it is essential to control and decelerate the rate of population growth. Fortunately a vigorous family planning campaign is having an effect and it is hoped that 100 per cent primary school enrolment can be achieved in the late 1970s. It might then be possible to introduce compulsory primary education.

Since independence educational progress has moved steadily forward but a wide array of problems remain, especially in determining priorities when confronted with limited financial and manpower resources. Perhaps the most pressing problem facing educational administrators is how best to gain effective control of the education system so that an ordered list of priorities can be adhered to. This is a concern that has existed throughout the post-war years. The problem has arisen from the fact that virtually all Fiji's schools, of which there are over 750, are run by voluntary agencies. The Government can suggest and encourage various developments but it cannot force school committees to adopt new ideas. The Education Commission was very critical of private management of schools and recommended the gradual phasing out of the voluntary system and the adoption of a public system of schools operated by the Government. So far this suggestion has been resisted on financial grounds but now that the Government is heavily subsidizing the schools, it seems a logical step in the near future for it to assume direct responsibility for their well-being.