I. Situation to 1967

The independence of the African countries entirely alters the situation that obtained during the colonial period and has certain major implications in education:

- education must become really African;
- it must be made to suit the needs of a developing country that has to make good the lag as quickly as possible.

Progress has undoubtedly been made in these regards in the French-speaking countries of Africa, especially since 1963. One striking example - the Conference of French-speaking Education Ministers of Africa and Madagascar which, in 1967, adopted uniform history and geography curricula for secondary schools in the countries concerned. These curricula were worked out two years before at Abidjan and applied experimentally, after approval by the Conference of Ministers held in Paris and Cabourg in May 1965. However, none of the existing textbooks was suitable, so history texts had to be written, corrected co-ordinated and sorted out in all the countries concerned. Quantities of books were purchased with the assistance of the French Secretariat of State for Co-operation. In July 1966, a symposium held at Grigny, France, of teachers who had tried the new curricula suggested ways in which the curricula could best operate, how teaching materials could be improved, and proposed the establishment of a permanent infrastructure to include an Association inter-africaine et malgache des professeurs d'histoire et de géographie, a liaison bulletin and an inter-African and Malagasy centre for reproducing and distributing educational documentation.

In April 1967, at Tananarive, the curricula were drawn up in final form and a history of art curriculum was also adopted.

II. Present situation

Present problems are of two types, not without repercussions on one another, although reforming educational content is usually easier than changing structures.
A. Content

The reform of content has three main facets:

(1) Adaptation to African values (primarily involves literature and humanistic studies),

(2) Adaptation to African economics (primarily, but not solely, involves science and technology)

(3) Adaptation to African social conditions, and particularly to the world as it appears to the African child.

(1) Adaptation to African values

Basic changes have been or are to be made regarding history and geography, teaching through French, and other subjects including philosophy and languages.

The new history curricula for secondary schools mentioned above were preceded by the Africanization of primary school curricula as from 1960, and are now being immediately followed by the current reform of university courses in history and geography, (since prospective teachers obviously must follow courses that fit them to teach the new secondary school curricula). Hence the emphasis on the methodology of African history and various related subjects, including archaeology, palaeobotany, ethnology, oral traditions. However, although the curricula are centred on Africa, two-thirds of the lessons on an average are devoted to countries outside Africa and Madagascar, giving a broader view of the world than is given by most foreign curricula; and is hoped also to link up or co-ordinate with the other French-speaking countries in the Maghreb and the English-speaking countries of Africa.

Open to the world - but as seen from Africa. Stress is laid on Africa's historical and geographical handicaps, so that the technical feats of the advanced countries and the marvels of the civilization of plenty which children see any time they go to the cinema will no longer seem produced by the magician's wand but as the culmination, or rather as one stage, of a long evolution over generations. History and geography can thus demystify, and give a more rational view of the world. The history of art curriculum, however, is based exclusively on Africa. Regarded as an introduction to the civilizations of Africa and, through them, to those of the world, it is treated as a supplementary subject, despite its vital importance because of the place of art in all aspects of African life (history, religion, sociology, folk wisdom, economics, and so on).

After history and geography, the teaching of French is radically changing in the French-speaking countries of Africa - perhaps even more radically, in the long term. French is not the mother tongue of young Africans. This evident fact, so long neglected, has now become the keystone of the whole educational edifice. Only one in a thousand of the families with children in school speaks French to the exclusion of any African language. Although the State may be French-speaking, the population is only very superficially so. The answer of the French colonialists was assimilation: cultural segregation of the children who, as schools were few, were quickly detached from their native soil, with a ben on the speaking of African languages at school, and the teaching of authoritarian and dogmatic vocabulary and the mechanisms of grammar. However, classes were small, teachers relatively better trained, and this hot-house forcing produced rather good results. The language might be bookish, stilted, artificial, sometimes inflated, but it was sure and correct.
Almost all the French-speaking African writers who are known today have had this training.

But times have changed. Classes have increased tremendously. Teachers are less well trained. Geographically, linguistically and sociologically, pupils are more immersed in their own environments, than they used to be. It is tempting to increase school enrolment to the point where a new linguistic environment is created in order to stimulate acculturation; it has sometimes been tried, and was recommended by the Unesco Conference at Addis Ababa, which envisaged universal schooling in Africa within twenty years. But the race was lost before it started, population increasing more rapidly than both school enrolments and the domestic and foreign financial resources available for equipping schools and training teachers. Hence the quandary of the French-speaking countries: either they must concentrate on quality and save the essential, inculcating a knowledge of French sound enough not to be sapped by environmental erosion; or they must continue the intensive approach, approximate linguistic occupation of the terrain, ending up with a more and more degenerate lingua franca that will also pass the point of no return in the bad sense, becoming an autonomous dialect that takes the place of French.

This being the alternative, the first course is increasingly favoured. The methods of teaching French in French-speaking Africa are in a state of flux. What are the trends?

Here again, it is axiomatic that French is not the mother tongue of young Africans. The child has to be regarded as coming to school without the slightest notion of the language of Racine; when he leaves school, he must be able to speak, not the language of Racine, but twentieth-century French, correctly, fluently, expressively and with every shade of meaning. This entails beginning at the beginning imitating the mothers who, with their babies, use the most direct method imaginable - gestures, manipulation, pictures, mimicry, in short, all the motions of everyday life - to fix in small heads vocabulary and linguistic structures that are built into sentences and bound up with situations and needs. In this way pupils painlessly acquire the structural foundations of the language. The teacher, like the mother, must pay particular attention to pronunciation, without, however, breaking up words artificially or distorting the natural rhythm and intonation of the sentence, which give it its full meaning. He must start therefore with the spoken language and lively, simple dialogue. The child must first listen and watch and act, and then express his action or that of others in words. Certain situations can stimulate the child to mobilize a minimum of linguistic mechanisms spontaneously and to put them together correctly in order to express a comment, an opinion, a feeling, an idea.

Only then should the teacher go on to reading and written expression. At the outset French should be a means of communication, used perhaps prosaically as a bridge, but a solid and serviceable one. This should be its vital purpose during primary and the first two years in secondary, after which it should be supervised, broadened and systematically consolidated right through secondary school, with the accent placed increasingly on aesthetic and literary values and, finally on culture which, rooted in history, should lead on at university level to the history of literature and the comparison of civilizations. Many corollaries follow from these basic principles. As education is meant to benefit the pupil and not the contrary, the teaching of French must start from the African child and his environment, the child learning to use French gradually to describe the African world he sees around him,
using the forms he has himself found, tried out and polished. Memory and empty repetition should give way to true, spontaneous expression and creative imagination. From basic French, children should go on little by little to a deep understanding and a kind of marvellous complicity, without plagiarism with the great creators who have fashioned and furnished the French language. The child should remain himself. And this is the heart of the problem. He does not start French with his mind empty as the virgin wax, but has his head buzzing with a store of African words, a tangle of forms, a little world of its own of language patterns, the contagion phenomena which lead each person to speak French with phonetic or syntactical deformations deriving from the local linguistic substratum. The Centre de linguistique appliquée de Dakar and the Bureau pour l’Enseignement de la langue et de la civilisation française are accordingly making a comparative survey of African languages and French in order to analyse and classify common or recurrent mistakes which, because so many African languages are interrelated, are often common to a number of countries. Prevention of such errors can ensure that the foundations of French in Africa are better grounded. But we must go further. Africanizing textbooks means more than making a superficial change of setting, replacing the apple-tree by a palm tree, putting a little Ali under the tree instead of a little Dupont: it means substituting truly African situations. Less space should be devoted to the great classics of the French Seventeenth century, the Renaissance and Old French; they are too remote from the young African, who should start with contemporary literature. Horizons should be broadened to include, through translations, the literary masterpieces of other countries, not so much tracing the course of French literature as comparing the great themes that recur in all literatures. Greater emphasis should be laid on the analysis of carefully selected passages than on the formal essay, which too often only encourages a nonsensical aping of the classics. Above all, a thorough grounding in French, as a means of communication should end up by providing a means of exploring all civilizations and, to start with, the African civilization and culture. This would entail studying modern French-speaking African authors, and traditional African literature handed down by word of mouth: chronicles, poems, tales, epics, cosmogonies, representing original creation which could form the basis of an African renaissance and at the same time enrich French with additional facets. Shall we go as far as teaching the African mother tongues before the second language, as is done in the English-speaking countries? It is too early yet to say.

This problem has not yet been formulated in operational terms for political reasons (national integration), and also because most of these languages are not rich or fixed enough, lack a literature and are not widely enough spoken to serve as links with the modern world. But this is the solution put forward by P.P. Lacroix in an article entitled "Le français et l'Afrique(1) in Le Monde, 8 August 1965. Meanwhile the current reform, which must go deeper during the coming years with the help of specialized committees and logistic support from the African education centres - assisted in this regard by France - will certainly make a big difference to pupils. Meanwhile also, the African languages should be systematically studied - first at university level - so that they can be fixed, enriched, modernized and made more precise. This is essential, if only for the collection of the oral traditions. As Greek and Latin are being taught increasingly less in Africa's secondary schools, it has been suggested that these two dead languages be made optional where they would be compulsory in French higher education. On the other hand, Arabic and Malagasy could be taken as first living languages for a languages degree.

(1) He suggests it might lead to a change in teaching methods, which would at last adopt a logical progression, splitting up the difficulties by first imprinting the basic elements (reading, writing and arithmetic) in the pupil's mother tongue before he starts to learn French.
A few years ago I expressed surprise at the absence of Negro-African Vitalism from philosophy courses but laborious lectures on Kant: Behaviourism and Comte's Positivism. Clearly a philosophy course should not be a mere history of ideas, an interminable journey through the byways of Western thought alone, or almost alone, but an encounter with the great minds of the universe - conceptions of the world originating in Asia, Africa and America as well as in Europe; critical reflections on the eternal condition of man. Specific proposals are now being made for the study of non-Western systems of thought - Buddhism, Islam, African conceptions of the world, the idea of good and evil, of permitted and forbidden, of personality, African ideas and political systems, myths and symbols, the rôle of language, and so on. In sociology and cultural anthropology the emphasis could be laid on organization, systems and structures in African and Malagasy societies and their civilizations. Similarly, general psychology, social psychology, psycho-pathology, child psychology and educational psychology could repay Africanization. Only a knowledge of scientific psychology and educational psychology can enable the African educator to understand the children he has to teach. Overdeveloped memorizing faculty due to the atavism of the oral tradition? Precocious physiological maturity? Dependency on the family or some other group? Incantatory power of words? Submission to the irrational? All this must be clarified - and the investigation will of necessity extend to the environment - before educational methods can be decided on. When out of school, African pupils and students live in a social environment largely unrelated to the performances which are demanded of them. Cultural support is not so strong as it is in Europe. Young Africans are all the more isolated in that they come from a well-knit community. Under the circumstances it is important that they should have more moral support, more guidance and closer supervision of their work. Personal contacts should be stressed as much as possible. Lectures, very often learned as if they were magic formulas, should be kept to a minimum. On the other hand, exercises such as summarizing a passage, making an oral report on a question, prepared with the help of documents in a set time, reporting a debate, and so on, will test vivacity, clarity, precision and power of close reasoning.

Drawing and music are usually sacrificed to the "principal" subjects because the syllabus is overloaded. Yet drawing can provide a vital means of observing and assimilating linguistic and other structures. As for music, it is one of Africa's magnificent resources, as yet barely tapped. Song books such as Jeune Afrique chanté, however, are helping to introduce African airs and rhythms in the singing class.

In science, we find that Africanization, which seems less imperative here, has often taken place more quickly, either because it has fewer political implications than history, languages or philosophy, or because it could be taken for granted - as, for instance, in observation sciences.

The change-over begun very early in primary has now reached secondary and university science teaching. Many collections - some magnificently illustrated - are now in use. In higher education, African examples are frequently given in lectures, and especially during practicals in geology, botany and zoology. But Africanization is not an end in itself. The aim being to train minds systematically and coherently, examples which are typical and general should alone be selected, and they should be linked up with the results of serious scientific research. Research carried out by the many scientists who pass through Africa should be made known to the African research and education centres, with exchanges on a permanent basis, between English-speaking and French-speaking Africa, and teachers in science faculties should not be so overworked as to debar them from using this new scientific knowledge and incorporating it in their teaching. The careful preparation of specimens
and their presentation in transparent plastic cubes (taxidermy) is here of great importance, and has been started on a fairly large scale in some countries (including Upper Volta).

In advanced physics and chemistry, experiments are increasingly made with materials used in pharmaceutics and other substances of African origin, and even on solar energy problems. But as almost all the material and equipment come from European industry, the main thing is to turn the environment and pupils' practical experience to good account.

Mathematics would seem impervious to Africanization, but primary and secondary textbooks relating mathematics to the children's everyday lives are already available. Problems, geometrical figures and arithmetic involving cost, selling price, profits, wages, expenditure and savings can serve to introduce children to the idea of a family budget. But people realize in French-speaking Africa as elsewhere, that mathematics enters into everything today, and can no longer be taught in an old-fashioned way without reference to the enigmas of twentieth-century science, industry and economics. Modern mathematics based on the study of sets and structures are accepted in the secondary schools, if only experimentally. The writer had occasion to follow an exciting lesson in modern mathematics (set grouping) in a first-year secondary class. The pupils, fascinated, were divided into groups for demonstration purposes. Starting from their own practical experience, the lesson progressed logically to precise definitions and the definitive formulæ and symbols set out on the black-board. The lesson was illustrated throughout by ready-to-hand examples. With this "situation mathematics" pupils can proceed from tangible experience to the most exacting abstractions.

For many years now, African students have been attracted to science; in Upper Volta, 60% are following scientific or technical courses.

But if science is really to penetrate, there must be a new attitude to Nature: the point is now not so much participation as control. And to control Nature we must first know it with precision. It has been noticed that the African's new solicitude for a pair of oxen, and for animals in general, marks a point of departure in his own greater development as a man.

(2) Adaptation to African economics

This is the great problem - adapting education to the economic imperatives of the African countries. Everywhere in French-speaking Africa today, there is talk of ruralizing education. The term is confusing. It is not that all schools need to be turned into agricultural institutions but that their curricula should become impregnated with the local realities of essentially agricultural countries. Even then, it is obvious that the curricula of urban schools cannot be "ruralized". What then? The position is that pupils left the schools inherited from colonialism without any specialized training, and were meant simply to serve as auxiliaries in the general administration. This no longer provides an answer to the economic requirements of free countries. Production must be diversified and increased to keep pace with the growth in population, to earn foreign currency to purchase the equipment needed for industrialization, and to finance the machinery of State. Productivity must accordingly be raised. And for that, trained technicians are necessary. The colonizers indeed were careful not to abolish practical agricultural activities in the schools. But for a number of reasons afterwards, including the reaction against what was a disguised form of forced labour, all manual work was abolished in the
schools. And formerly, the technical schools were just about good enough to take in the rejects considered incapable of going on to abstract studies.

The result is catastrophic. The numerous public services can absorb a negligible number only of those who leave school with a certificate but no specialization. The schools, at all levels, turn out thousands every year with no vocational training and no prospect but unemployment. In Upper Volta, about a thousand obtain the intermediate secondary certificate(1) every year, but there are places for only 400 of these in the next class. Almost all the others join the unemployed. After four years under the present educational system, the child has passed the point of no return as far as going back to the land is concerned. He is uprooted and lost to production. From the point of view of the community the productivity of the schools is infinitesimal, not to speak of their internal economics. Of Upper Volta's national budget, 20% is spent on schooling for 10% of its children - and that only to have 50% to 60% of them lost to production. Under these circumstances it may well be asked whether the school, instead of being a lever to progress, is not rather a factor of under-development. Education, therefore, must be integrated in the development plan, and various solutions are being considered. If schooling were generalized, children would obviously no longer have to leave the country for the towns in order to obtain an education, but this is not feasible in the foreseeable future. Hence the idea of splitting the primary course into two distinct parts, with a very severe test at the end of the first. In Upper Volta and elsewhere, a three-year, rural school has been set up to provide functional education for some of the rural youth. But here democratization problems arise. There is accordingly a distinct trend in all these States towards making education fit in with local realities - making it more practical, better integrated in the natural and social environment: school gardens, handicraft, arts and crafts, practical work, collections and small museums, apprentice workshops, work in teams, frequent contacts with the pilot development units arranged by co-operatives or as community activities in villages, introduction to technology in urban schools, book-keeping, typewriting and so on. There is no question of making children work prematurely. The technical and agricultural colleges encourage those who have once started to persevere. But it must be evident that the end of learning is not just to know, but to know how to. The schools must produce producers. This is the whole purpose of the ruralization idea, which is still groping its way today. Sooner or later all the States, beginning with the least industrialized, must accept the harrowing decision to revise their previous standards. The ideal would seem to be a four or five-year fundamental course with the accent very much on social and practical training, but also determined to teach elementary French and arithmetic; there would be a test before proceeding to a second four-year course, which would prepare the way for the intermediate and senior secondary courses.

But to succeed, this new arrangement would require contributions, private or public, from home or abroad, to support it from above and below - parents, the village, the information services, the national economics plan, agriculture, and so on. Adult education must often carry on from the school. Success will also depend on the readiness of society to absorb the students leaving school: agrarian reform to provide them with land, new co-operatives, trade distribution channels, credit to purchase agricultural equipment, and so on. The new school on these lines could provide a many purpose economic lever, and pave the way to a major general and structural overhaul.

(1) Brevet d'Enseignement du Premier Cycle, after the first four years in secondary
B. Structural problems

That is why success is inconceivable without considerable outside help. In the French-speaking countries the difficulties are aggravated by the fact that most of them have the same educational system as that of France, with the same examinations (the papers still sometimes come from Paris) and the same awards, such as the baccalauréat. This is a left-over from France's policy of assimilation, but it also shows how much these States still depend on France for teachers, equipment, buildings and subsidies; often, 80% of the secondary teachers are French.

Some States have opted for more freedom and autonomy, signing agreements with France to cover the equivalence of diplomas (Cameroun, because it is bilingual, and Mali), but others make awards which have full validity in France.

Why this difference? It is explained by the international prestige of the French diplomas, which is such that if French secondary schools were opened for French children in these countries, many Africans, and sometimes the most highly placed, would probably prefer to send their children to them rather than to the State schools, whose staff would not be up to the same standard. In these mixed schools, the parents of the French children would certainly refuse any tampering with the examinations. As regards curricula reforms, the fairly liberal principle applies that validity does not depend on the content of the curricula but on the level. But just how far can this principle go? Some political leaders have recently complained that the full validity system involves cultural dependence on France and hence, really, a penalization. And now, as well, French standards themselves are changing. The latest reform in French secondary and higher education was carried out unilaterally by France to meet its own economic, educational and research needs. The African States followed suit and managed to negotiate a few slight amendments which did not affect the content or structure of the examinations. In the long run, it would seem that the full validity system can scarcely last now that, as is more and more frequently happening, specifically African examinations and competitions are being held, new courses are being formed from old, curricula are recast to accommodate new subjects, and, in short, the educational structures are being geared to African needs. But these countries cannot very well abandon the French system unless they manage to co-ordinate or integrate their own systems and curricula on a regional basis, for a purely national diploma would not have much more standing than a purely national currency. In the interests of the efficiency of their whole educational system, they must co-operate to establish schools that may be very costly and to train cadres for something much wider than the comparatively small existing markets.

Conclusions

The current overhaul of the content of general education in the French-speaking countries of Africa has accelerated, especially over the last four years. Above primary, it is concerned essentially with secondary education but this has some repercussions on higher education. But as it proceeds some blind alleys appear, and other solutions will probably have to be sought. Perhaps the Franco-African authorities will end up one day with an entirely renovated system as a result of these structural changes. In any case, although obstacles of all kinds are not lacking, the machinery for reform exists: the half-yearly Conference of Education Ministers of the French-speaking countries of Africa and Madagascar, who meet with their French counterparts from the Education and Co-operation Ministries. These Ministers have also set up subject-matter committees which are doing magnificent pioneer work. The spirit of reform has spread to most Africans and an increasing number of far-seeing Frenchmen. For this is a vital change-over that aims at ensuring cultural authenticity, social equilibrium and economic survival.