

## FRENCH IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM : TOWARDS A MORE FUNCTIONAL SECONDARY FEEDER PROJECT

### Abstract

*Educational systems are organised in strata. Accordingly, the products of one stratum stream into the next, from the lowest to the highest. This natural streaming from one sub-stratum to a higher one is what is dubbed as the feeder project. Consequently, the feeder that deserves attention in this article is the secondary feeder line and its relationship to the ultimate stratum, the University Undergraduate French Studies. Drawing out from the theoretical framework of the significance of feeder systems in the overall success of an educational system, it is necessary to relate the illustration of a feeder road project in the area of French studies in Nigeria and to posit that there are some major defects which ought to be corrected if the feeder must be functional. Essentially, therefore, the article is organised in three parts namely, the theoretical framework of a feeder line, Undergraduate French Studies in the theoretical framework of feeder malfunction and towards a more functional secondary feeder project.*

### Introduction

Feeder significance, feeder malfunction and feeder restoration, these are the three focal points for discussion in this paper. In this article, the term “feeder” is borrowed from its domain of general usage in the area of transportation where it simply means “a service, a minor route or means of transport that links outside areas with the main route”, according to an ordinary dictionary definition. From a general perspective, a feeder is a service unit that is central to the success of an event or process that is organised in phases. Education is one such set-up that is organised in phases. For the purpose of this discussion, the author is extrapolating from the earlier general definition of feeder to state that the minor and main routes are the secondary and university levels of French Studies, respectively. As language educators at the university level, the highest rung of French language education in Nigeria, the author is interested in what goes on at the secondary level which constitutes a vital service unit, a springboard to success in higher

education in the area of French. Such a service unit cannot be neglected, neither should there be a disconnect between what goes on at that level and what goes on at the university level since it is common knowledge that higher education feeds from the products of secondary education. To discuss the feeder with respect to the Secondary French Feeder in the overall survival of the university undergraduate French studies in Nigeria, one needs to first of all illustrate the significance of a feeder in a theoretical framework. Secondly, there ought to be a highlight of the theoretical framework of feeder malfunction in the area of French studies. Finally, suggestions shall be made pointing out the way towards restoring a more functional secondary feeder project.

### 1.0. The Theoretical Framework of Feeder Significance

To state that feeders are important is begging the question. Generally speaking, a feeder is about ensuring harmony, continuity, making sure that there are no hiccups or bottlenecks in a system. It may be necessary to quickly illustrate the importance of a feeder with a developmental programme that was kick-started during the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. The programme was captioned Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). As the name suggests, the programme was about bringing development to the rural areas. The conceptors of the programme were conscious of the fact that the success of such a programme would, to a large extent, depend on the provision of what they called feeder roads. It was considered that feeder roads had a number of advantages which could, in the long run, impact on sustainable development. Such a programme was believed to have the potential of not only creating avenue/outlet for the sale of agricultural products, thereby ensuring free flow of goods and services but also forestalling rural-urban migration.

From the point of view of the present author, there are many ways of appraising feeder significance. A possible strategy may consist of taking a look at the direct beneficiaries (i.e. the categories of people being served by the feeder). For instance, one may decide to consider different people with varied activities and consider how the feeders

impact on their overall interest. From such a standpoint, it is obvious that good feeder roads would naturally be of immense value to one in the area of farming, one in the area of buying and selling, one involved in transportation or even one who is simply a rural dweller. A big-time farmer can take his produce to wherever they are needed provided the feeder roads are there and are in good condition. As a subsistent farmer, one can even take his products to nearby local markets, on their specific market days. In the case of those in the area of buying and selling, it is possible for them to go anywhere in the hinterland that is considered as a food basket. For such people, if there are good access roads to such food baskets, there will not be much multiplier effect on the cost of products. As for transporters, good feeder roads will make transportation a delightful business because there would not be much wear and tear on their vehicles. Even an ordinary rural dweller can stay back in the comfort of his serene rural environment and enjoy the peaceful setting far away from the hustle and bustle of a city, when the condition of the feeder road assures him that he can travel easily to the city and back.

Feeder significance may equally be appreciated in the light of feeder specificity. In appraising feeder significance/advantages in the light of feeder specificity, it is a question of analysing the feeder road types. Feeder road types determine the role they play (the extent of their role). All roads are not the same. Feeder roads can be categorised along location and size. In terms of location, some are rural in nature going into the hinterland, some are on the borderline. The point being made here is that feeder roads are situated where they are most needed. In terms of size, some are narrow, some are wide. Some are short, while others are longer.

If the advantages of feeders can be felt by people of different calling and in different places and if feeder location and size have direct bearing on feeder significance as has been highlighted above, one can hardly imagine the situation without feeder roads. What this means is that absence of feeders or poorly maintained feeders (i.e. feeder malfunction) can create a serious problem. If there is no connection between a minor route and the main route, either way there will be no

harmony. One basic resultant effect will be that of isolation which if not well managed can lead to a halt in the normal flow of activities. An extreme case may even be that of the highway becoming highly congested with the vehicular traffic of undesirable elements including that of vehicles and human agents who have no business filtering into such a specialised highway.

So far, the focus has been on feeder road significance, but in the light of the topic discussing about the feeder with relation to the educational system, the question is, "Is there any feeder system in the Nigerian educational system?" In order to address that issue, it is important to talk about the second aspect of this paper, which requires situating Undergraduate French Studies in the theoretical framework of feeder malfunction.

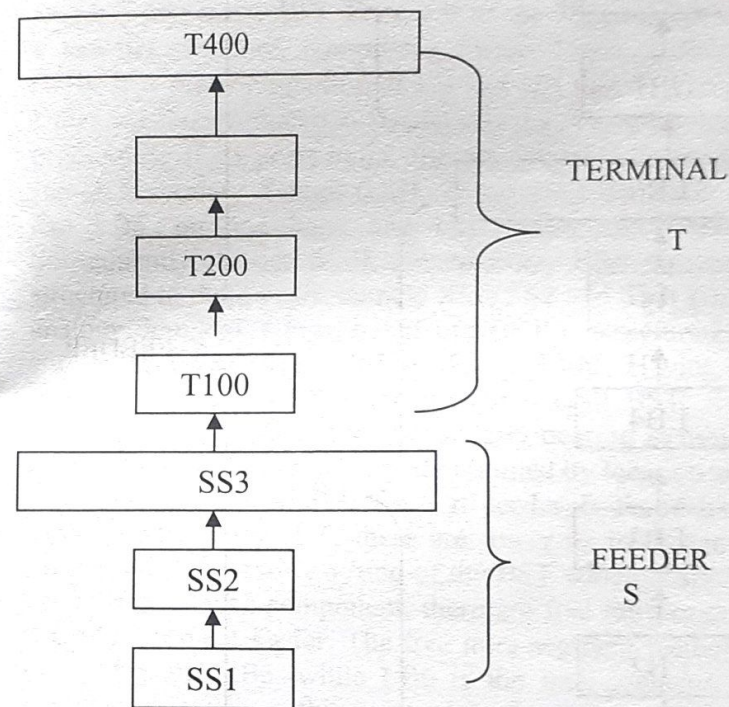
## 2.0. Undergraduate French Studies in the Theoretical Framework of Feeder Malfunction

Arising from the topic, "French in the Nigerian Educational System: Towards a More Functional Secondary Feeder Project", the natural question that one would ask is, "is there any feeder in the educational system?" And if the answer is 'yes', the question is, "What is the nature of such a feeder?" Every educational system has a structure and so the Nigerian educational system is not an exception. It is therefore expedient to quickly examine the structure of the Nigerian educational system and identify all the feeders in that structure.

## 2.1. Structure of the Nigerian Educational System

Not long ago, the Nigerian educational system used to be known as the 6.3.3.4 structure, comprising the primary, the junior secondary, the senior secondary and tertiary education. Essentially, the system was of a tripartite nature that one could summarise as Primary, Secondary and Tertiary, (the PST). Though nomenclatures may have changed of late, the structure of the Nigerian Educational System can still be summarised in a tripartite schema that one may want to refer to as Basic, Senior

Secondary and Tertiary, a structure the present author would refer to as BST, a 9.3.4. educational structure (see figure 1).



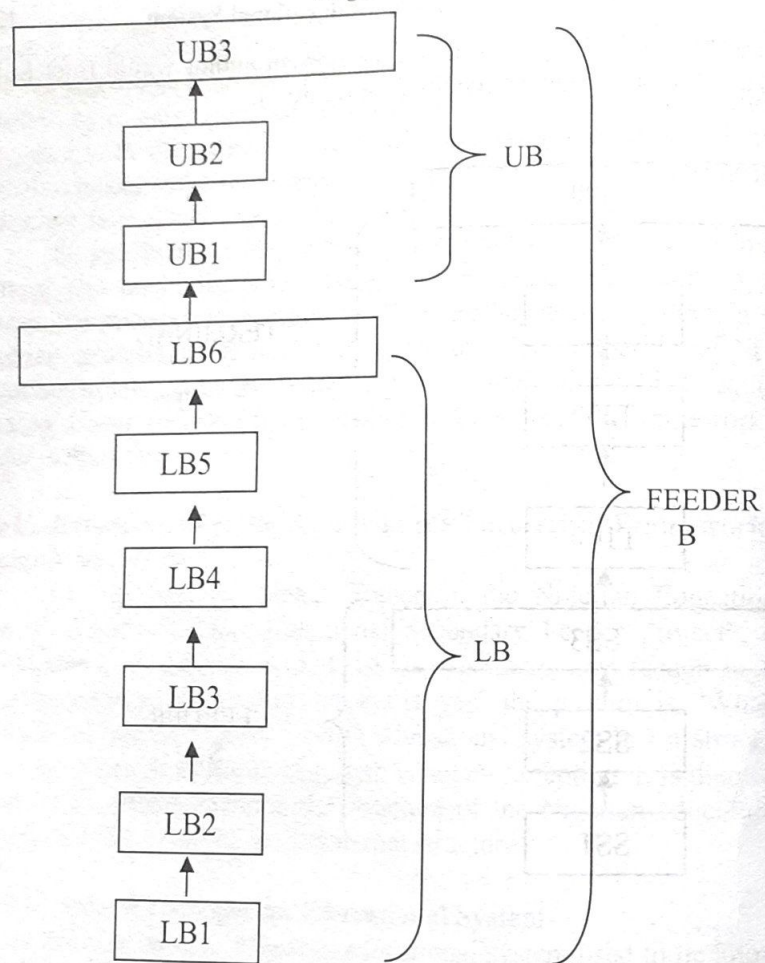


FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE OF THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Figure 1 shows the current structure of the BST and the lines that follow will give further details about the categorisation and the specification of the feeders in the BST. From the point of view of streaming, the products of feeder B stream into feeder S and those of feeder S into terminal T. Feeder B of the Nigerian educational system is a two-tier structure, comprising Lower Basic (LB) and Upper Basic (UB). It is the combination of LB and UB that fit into nine years of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme. Thus, the UBE is a nine-year programme of six years in the primary school (LB) and the three years of Junior Secondary School (UB). These are LB1, LB2, LB3, LB4, LB5 and LB6, on one hand and UB1, UB2 and UB3, on the other. Subsequently, feeder S of the Nigerian BST educational system is structured in three years, namely SS1, SS2 and SS3. Following the same analogy, terminal T segment of our BST is structured in four years of studies to reflect T100, T200, T300, T400. Having highlighted the different categories that make up the overall BST, it is necessary to consider their specifications, particularly bearing in mind what was said earlier about feeder types being determined by location and size.

Taken individually then, if feeder B feeds into feeder S and feeder S into terminal T, there are lower or intra segment feeders. In other words, at the lowest rung of the BST which is situated at feeder B, which is a six-year component, there are five intra-segment feeders and one inter segment feeder. The five intra-segment feeders are LB1, LB2, LB3, LB4 and LB5, while LB6 is the inter-segment feeder. What is important to stress, at this juncture, is the fact that the location of these feeder components is very crucial. For instance, at the intra-feeder level adjustments may be made, whereas adjustments become increasingly not only undesirable but also impossible. What this means is that adjustments may be made by way of pupils repeating a class at the intra-feeder level. In contrast, however, at the inter-feeder level such adjustment by way of repeating may not be feasible and may result in pupils dropping out. This dropping out effect may be likened to what happens with the road network as well, where bad roads are abandoned.

What comes to mind, at this juncture, is the issue of feeder malfunction and by implication feeder restoration.

## 2.2. Feeder Malfunction/Feeder Restoration

The question is, "what can lead to feeder network not functioning?" First of all, it may be due to disuse, desertion or even under-utilisation. In wondering what may lead to a road being deserted or being under-utilised, many reasons could be responsible, foremost among them could be due to deplorable condition. Some roads may constitute booby traps, thereby becoming impracticable and this could be a function of poor maintenance or lack of it. However, abandoned roads may be restored by grading, asphaltting, resurfacing, etc. Sometimes even, one may have the case of raising the status of a road, say by dualising and suddenly changing a rural road to a trunk A road. It all depends on the level of importance attached to a road in terms of the vehicular traffic being generated. In all of these, certain actors are involved in checking the malfunction and carrying out restoration. Thus, in discussing any feeder malfunction and/or its restoration, it is necessary, *ab initio*, to know the actors or factors whose responsibility it is to ensure that the feeder is functioning optimally. This is because in the light of any detectable feeder dysfunction, those factors responsible for the general upkeep of the feeder will be the ones to eventually take up the task of feeder restoration.

From the foregoing, then, the question is, "who are the actors to keep a feeder line alive?" Keeping a feeder line alive requires an interplay of variables. In a general sense, some of the factors that can keep a feeder line alive include the raw materials, the products, the production line (i.e. the producers and the policy framework), the access route and the end users.

### 2.2.1. Understanding the French Feeder Malfunction

At this juncture, to effectively address the issue of the French feeder malfunction which is the major concern of this article, it is important to relate all that has been said about feeder specificity and the idea of mobilising all identifiable actors and factors in order to forestall

feeder malfunction in the area of an educational structure. In an educational system where the major activity is teaching/learning, the important variables include the learner, the teacher and the institutional support system. The principal human factors are the learners and the teachers. The learners are the raw materials who have the potential of becoming the end products. By the same token, the teachers are the change agents in the production line and it is through their efforts that pupils pass from the stage of raw materials to becoming the end products. The institutional support system is the enabling environment that facilitates the entire process and it takes its bearing from the underlying educational policy framework. For instance, it is the tone of the policy directives on a particular school subject that will determine not only the amount of time to be created for such a subject on the school time-table but also the level of support and enthusiasm a school head could express towards that subject.

For ease of analogy and in relation to the educational sector where the major activity is simply that of teaching/learning as guided by curricular dispensation, it is clear that all the specificities mentioned in talking about roads may be viewed in the light of the varied curricula of the different service units. The point being made here is that the different feeder lines have their curriculum. The feeder chains are kept alive when there is successful transition from one segment to another. Most specifically, such successful transition is determined by success at a certain examination (external or internal) which serves as a proof that the curriculum for that level has been mastered. In the educational set-up, therefore, the terminal structure of the feeder line is very crucial. Besides, successful feeder transition is of utmost importance.

In an attempt to relate what has been said so far to the area of French studies and ask the same type of fundamental question that was asked previously namely, "Is there any French feeder system?", the obvious answer is 'yes of course'. The next question that is a follow-up is, "what is the nature of the French feeder system?" Here, the answer will be a matter of discussion depending on initial remarks about the essence of a feeder. As a matter of fact, the curriculum for Basic French

is quite an elaborate one going by the Blueprint as prepared by the National Educational Research and Development Centre (NERDC). Against that backdrop, the discussion on the nature of the French feeder system should be approached from the standpoint of a feeder making for continuity as was stressed earlier. That being the case, the problem with the French feeder has nothing to do with the curriculum, but rather it has to do with feeder survival and the question one should be asking is, "Why, in spite of such an elaborate curriculum, should the feeder be suffering? (i.e. why should majority of entrants into the university undergraduate French programmes be starters?). To answer this question, the author posits that what happens with the French feeder system in the Nigerian educational system can be viewed in the same perspective as what happens when there is a neglected feeder road network. In other words, the answer proposed to this thorny question can best be captured under what is referred to as the Secondary French feeder malfunction. However, since some of the reasons may not be unconnected with lapses traceable to the actors earlier on identified as having the potential to keep the feeder line alive, it may be necessary to discuss those variables and see to what extent they are responsible for the feeder malfunction. That is why a reflection on the effectiveness of factors like the policy framework, the teacher and indeed the role of universities as end users of the secondary feeder line will help in understanding the Secondary French Feeder malfunction.

#### 2.2.1.1. Policy Framework in the Secondary Feeder Malfunction

First of all, it must be acknowledged that there are beautiful policy statements about French. Stressing on the importance of language, section 1, item 10(b) of the National Policy on Education (NPE), states:

For the smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary schools **but Non-Vocational Elective at the Senior Secondary School** [(NPE, 2004:p.10.) Author's emphasis.]

The problem with this policy is that of making French a Non-Vocational Elective (NVE) at the Senior Secondary School. It is to be noted that this problem would have been averted if only the revised form of the NPE had paid heed to the JCC which had approved that French should be a core compulsory subject at the Senior Secondary School. As it stands, with the 2004 revised form of the NPE still making French a non-vocational elective subject at the Senior Secondary School, it would appear as if there is no political will to implement the government policy on French. This situation has dire consequences on the continuity of the Secondary French feeder system. This is because there is a disconnection between the products of the UBE and the SS. Being a NVE at the SS level, nothing compels the end products of the UBE to stream into French studies at the crucial segment of the feeder line.

#### 2.2.1.2. The Teacher Factor in the Secondary Feeder Malfunction

Another problem bedevilling the feeder line is the dearth of qualified French teachers. A survey conducted by a team of experts from the Nigeria French Language Village (NFLV) through series of stakeholders consultative fora between May and June 2005 in the six geo-political zones of the Federation revealed that there is a serious shortfall in the number of qualified French teachers that would be required to teach French in Nigerian secondary schools.

Related to the dearth of qualified teachers, one can also identify other factors. One of such factors is the lack of incentives which has ripple effects on the teachers, the pupils and the universities. Normally, French is supposed to be a special subject (see NPE, 2004). Since it is a special subject, French teachers should be paid special allowances like the one paid to science teachers, but this is not the case. Another ripple effect of lack of incentives is that demotivated teachers go off to more lucrative jobs (Amosu, 1994) thereby abandoning pupils midstream in their course of study. On the other hand, the poorly motivated teachers

eventually produce poorly motivated students (Richerich & Chancerel, 1978). The long-term ripple effect is the malfunction of a French feeder

that is not capable of supplying qualified entrants into university undergraduate French studies (Mbanefo, 2001, 2003 a & b).

### 2.2.1.3. The Universities in the French Feeder Malfunction

There can be no meaningful discussion on the Secondary French feeder malfunction without due consideration of universities and what they represent in the scheme of things in an organised feeder network setting. Ideally, the university is a place that should thrive on a well sustained feeder system. For instance, the first year or the 100 level of university French studies should be revision time for things learnt at the secondary feeder line. The university is a place for further studies. But the question one must ask is, "Are the university French departments really a place of further studies?" In reality, they are not. What is witnessed is that universities, of late, have become a place of crash programmes. Of course it must be conceded that there are bound to be different types of programmes, like French for pleasure, French for business, French for evangelism, etc... (i.e. programmes of commercial nature, for varied degrees of need of a life-long learning type). However, that notwithstanding, when it comes to French for further French, then certainly something urgent should be done to revitalise the secondary feeder line so that university French programmes can really focus on French for further French. That calls to mind the next part of the paper where the author intends to make suggestions towards restoring a more functional French feeder system.

## 3.0. Towards a More Functional Secondary Feeder Project

### 3.1. Teacher Factor in the Feeder Restoration

To have a more functional secondary feeder project, it is imperative to take a critical look at some of the problem areas identified in the feeder malfunction. One of the problems requiring immediate attention is the teacher factor. The two major areas of concern to which the author wants to propose solutions have to do with the number of teachers (i.e. teacher availability) and teacher motivation. To address the first problem - teacher availability - there must be a strong drive in French teacher education. In other words, there must be training and

retraining of teachers. The drive initiated by the NFLV in 2005 (by way of getting the mandate of the Federal government to train and retrain teachers) must be given a boost. The French Teachers continuing Education (FTCE) Department should be more responsive to this already identified area of need. It may also be necessary to keep track of teachers who have been trained with scarce funds and to maintain them in the system.

### 3.1.1. Incentives in the Feeder Restoration

Incentives should be provided for French teachers in the secondary schools by way of allowances. If French is actually a special subject as the NPE would make one to believe, then French teachers should be given extra remuneration for teaching a special subject.

### 3.2. Pupil Factor in the Feeder Restoration

The learner is the central figure in the feeder line because he is the one to be fed into University higher education in French. It was mentioned earlier that one of the problems in this regard is the lack of motivation on the part of the pupils. Well trained French teachers who are at ease with the psychology of language learning, in general, and second language learning, in particular, should not find it difficult attracting more students to the French class. One of the ways to succeed in this motivation drive is for teachers to explore all they know about psychological theories of reinforcement and feedback. Particularly, they should give students better feedback of their performance (Littlewood, 1984). This can be achieved by giving students **graded tasks** (Olaitan & Nwoke, 1988) and diversifying their evaluation instruments and methodologies. Co-curricular activities must form a good component of their French programmes. In this regard, the French club (*Le cercle français*) should be kept alive, where they are already existing and efforts must be made to form them, where they are non-existent.

### 3.3. Institutional Factor in the Feeder Restoration

The school, the policy and the Federal Ministry of Education, these are all institutional elements that must assist in transforming the

French feeder system. There are many ways in which the school can provide institutional support to the teaching of French. First, the school must give institutional support to the teaching of French by providing more periods on the time-table. No doubt critics had argued that the school time-table is so congested that it cannot allow the number of periods being recommended for the teaching of French. Conscious of this argument, however, it has been recommended that the school day be prolonged by 15 minutes. Such minor addition would allow for French being given four periods per week. It is the view of the present author that this recommendation should be adopted in order to maintain a lively French feeder. Furthermore, under no circumstances should French teachers be made to teach English or other subjects, for that matter. School heads should be French-friendly by being supportive of their French teachers. They should not hesitate to send them to refresher courses where and when available.

### 3.3.1. The NPE as Part of the Institutional Framework

It was stated earlier that the policy statement in itself is not a bad one but that what seems to be lacking is the political will to implement it. To this end, one feels that the different aspects of the policy should be given a boost. For instance, restoring continuity in the feeder should require that the UBE segment should connect directly to the SS segment. Rather than being a core compulsory subject only at the UBE sub-sector and then being regarded as NVE at the SS, French should be a core compulsory subject throughout the secondary school system.

### 3.3.2. FME as an Institutional Support System

In every organisation that is interested in yielding desired results, there must be an arm charged with regulatory function. In the case of education, the FME is the supervisory arm of government. As far as revitalising the French feeder line is concerned, the inspectorate division

of the FME must be alive to its primary role of monitoring what goes on in the French class in the Senior Secondary School. That way, they will

certainly ensure that French teachers adopt best practice. The promotion of French teachers should be tied to their classroom performance.

### 3.3.3. University in the Feeder Restoration

It is obvious that the university is the zenith in the structure of French education in this country. Universities should therefore play a more committed supervisory role in the teaching/learning of French down the line. More research should be encouraged on innovative teaching methods that are constantly conceptualised and tried out in pilot or specially designated schools (Hawkins, 1987). Above all, universities should avoid an escapist approach of replacing their mainstream admission with starter programmes. At best, the starter programmes should provide room for comparative analysis of learner performance.

### Conclusion

The theoretical framework of a feeder road and its crucial role in the area of sustainable development, free flow of goods and services and the overall impact in stemming rural-urban migration was one way of showing that the main route will always depend on the minor route. If by reason of poor maintenance or lack of it, a feeder line is totally abandoned, there will be a crippling effect on the activities of the main route. However, if faults are detected on the feeder line and such faults like pot holes are rectified as and when they occur, the general feeder-end line relationship will be the better for it. Simplistic though the analogy may appear, it is borrowed as a starting point to posit that the Secondary School French life-line for the survival of the University French studies is in a state of malfunction. The article discussed the nature of this malfunction and made suggestions as to how best to restore the near decrepit service unit.

In all, it has been a wake-up call to all the actors in the area of French studies in the Nigerian educational system. The wake-up call identified the teacher factor, the learner factor and the institutional support as the major variables whose positive interplay would help to restore the Secondary French feeder system. In this regard, the article proposed that concerted effort should be made towards ensuring not only



availability of qualified French teachers but also adequate incentives for such teachers, in order to forestall their drifting to greener pastures. Such a move will go a long way in attracting and producing more pupils to be streamed into university French studies. A number of suggestions were made as to how to bring about more meaningful institutional support in favour of the Secondary French feeder project. Some of the proposals, in concrete terms, include school support by way of creating more time for French on the school time-table; a more committed policy framework in which French which is already a core compulsory subject at the UBE unit of the Secondary feeder line should retain the same status at the SS segment and the FME showing more commitment in the exercise of its oversight function. Above everything else, it is the considered view of this article that unless and until undergraduate French studies (otherwise known as Higher Education French) concentrate on building on the foundational French as provided by the three years of upper basic French and the three years of secondary school French, and not just indulging in an escapist ostrich approach of starting French in a place meant for further French, the last may not have been said about maintaining a healthy French feeder system in this country. For the French feeder line to be operational, in this respect, the university French departments must seek to feed and be fed from products of the earlier rung of the 9.3.4. educational structure.

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