

## Achieving quality and standards in the management of Nigerian secondary schools: Policy goals, current practice, trends, challenges, and opportunities

Ayeni, Adeolu Joshua 

Ondo State Quality Education Assurance Agency, Akure, Nigeria ([ayeniadeolu@yahoo.com](mailto:ayeniadeolu@yahoo.com))



ISSN: 2243-7770  
Online ISSN: 2243-7789

**Received:** 20 September 2011

**Revised:** 15 December 2011

**Accepted:** 9 February 2012

**Available Online:** 11 February 2012

**DOI:** 10.5861/ijrsm.2012.v1i2.46

OPEN ACCESS

### **Abstract**

This paper highlights the objectives of secondary education and the principals' supervisory roles in the attainment of quality education in secondary schools. It also examines the effectiveness of instructional management in ensuring quality inputs, process and outputs, together with the constraints to the performance of instructional tasks and students' learning outcomes. The paper concluded that challenges that principals and teachers faced require effective application of systemic model and goal-oriented partnership between the school and other stakeholders as means of improving the quality of teaching and learning for the attainment of the set goals in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** secondary school; educational objectives; quality assurance; principal's tasks; systemic model; learning outcome

## **Achieving quality and standards in the management of Nigerian secondary schools: Policy goals, current practice, trends, challenges, and opportunities**

### **1. Introduction**

Education is regarded as instrument par excellence and the means of achieving human capital and national development. This underscores the value being placed on quality and standards which encompasses quality learning resource inputs, instructional process, teachers' capacities development, effective management, monitoring and evaluation, and quality learning outcome in secondary schools. Prior to the formulation of the National Policy for Education Quality Assurance in Nigeria in 2008, the process of monitoring the quality of education service delivery in schools was by external inspection commonly referred to as quality control by the Inspectorate Services Department of the Ministry of Education. The quality control mechanism basically involved the policing of schools by the Inspectors of Education to enforce compliance with government's policies, with regard to such aspects of school's operations as staffing, curriculum delivery, infrastructure, management, corporate life, laboratory practical and library services being implemented. All these are required to ensure a complete well-rounded education and production of quality students from the secondary school system as contained in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) which aptly states that the broad aims of secondary education in Nigeria are: 1.) preparation of students for useful living within the society; and 2.) preparation of students for higher education.

Specifically, the secondary school system is geared towards catering for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles; provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades; develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage; inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence; foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity; raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labor, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens; and provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development (FRN, 2004).

The aims and objectives make it clear that the ultimate goal of secondary education is to develop the individual's mental capacity and character for higher education and useful living within the society since the future of any nation depends quite considerably on the quality of education it provides for its citizens. The realization of these objectives hinges on quality of teachers, infrastructure and learning environment, resource inputs, teaching process, classroom management, academic assessment, principals' supervision roles and students' commitment to learning. In spite of the societal demand for quality assurance education and the need for thorough supervision in schools, there is a growing concern about the realization of secondary education objectives due to doubt that the inspectorate department and many principals give little attention to supervision of instructional activities in secondary schools.

#### *1.1 Challenges of School Monitoring and Evaluation*

The societal quest for quality teaching which is a vital aspect of quality education assurance is imperative because of the emergence of new information technologies, the evolution of the global digital economy, and the global competition for technically skilled workers creates a national urgency to improve the educational system. This is an issue of preeminent national importance that must serve as guide post to principals and teachers, so as to effectively prepare all students to be contributing citizens and productive workers in the 21st century (CEO Forum, 2001). This poses serious challenge to principals, teachers and students in the school setting.

The inability of successive administrations to adequately fund education over the years led to the systemic

mal-functioning of the Inspectorate system, characterized by weak administrative structure, lack of financial autonomy, shortage of professionally trained inspectors, absence of a uniform and reliable instrument to assess schools and facilitate feedback, and acute shortage of project vehicles to carry out effective monitoring and inspection of schools. The resultant effect is the poor teaching and learning that culminated into a large scale examination malpractice and abysmal performance of students in external examinations, which depicts non-achievement of quality assurance in teaching and students' learning outcomes in secondary schools (Adeniji, 2002; Ogunu, 2001).

The school should therefore strive hard to achieve educational goals (ideal vision) in the task of training the students since effective schools are found to be those which have high expectations of all students and think that every child has potentials to achieve. It is this belief that should inform the school principal, most of the time, of the need to be goal-oriented and optimally maximize human and material resources, and be more proactive in monitoring, evaluating and coordinating teachers' for effective task performance that will lead to the achievement of the set educational goals (Ogundele, 2002).

### *1.2 Trends in Students' Academic Performance*

The results of Senior School Certificate Examination conducted by the West African Examination Council and the National Examination Council were extremely poor in Nigeria between 2007 and 2010. The percentage of students who obtained credit level passes in five subjects and above including English Language and Mathematics was about 25% in Nigeria while in Ondo State, students' results in WASSCE between 2007 and 2009 ranged from 16.7% to 19.1% and the same in NECOSSCE ranged from 3.2% to 27% and the 2010 WASSCE/NECOSSCE ranged from 19.6% to 43.6% (Bello-Osagie & Olugbamila, 2009; Owadiae, 2010; Quality Education Assurance Agency, 2010). Also in 2011 May/June Senior School Certificate Examination conducted by the West African Examination Council, only 30.99% of the 1,540,250 candidates obtained credit level passes and above in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics in the 36 States of the Federation, and the Federal Capital Territory (Owadiae, 2011).

The abysmal performance of students in examinations had been largely attributed to inadequate learning facilities (Earthman, 2002). This situation has been a source of concern to the school administrators, government and other stakeholders. According to Fafunwa (2010), there is a big gap in quality, resulting from large number of students in crowded classrooms, using inadequate and obsolete equipment and with disillusioned teachers. These combined deficiencies perhaps constituted a major gap in the quality of learning facilities, thus, many challenges bear on teaching and learning that prevent the education system from getting the best out of its efforts to achieve the required level of attainment in teaching and learning activities in secondary schools. A consideration of the above shows that there is a greater challenge ahead of external evaluators, principals and teachers partly because of existing gaps and inadequacies in their instructional and supervisory duties.

## **2. The Principal's Tasks in Quality Assurance Practice**

Realizing the need to reverse the downturn in education quality which had been partly attributed to ineffective inspectorate system, the National Council on Education (NCE) at its 54th meeting held at Katsina on December 2007, agreed to restructure and strengthen the Federal Inspectorate Department to be able to meet the demands of improving the quality of Education in Nigeria. This decision has transformed the Federal Inspectorate Services to Nigeria Education Quality Assurance Service, with greater emphasis on stakeholders' collaboration, participation and contributions towards ensuring sustainable education service delivery by using the mechanism of Whole School Evaluation (WSE). This philosophy has been translated into reality by the Ondo State Government which blazed the trail in the establishment of an autonomous Quality Education Assurance Agency and still remains the only state with an autonomous Agency in Nigeria.

The Whole School Evaluation model keys into the current global quality assurance process which

encompasses internal and external monitoring and evaluation of resource inputs, instructional process and outputs. The model recognizes the vital role of school principals as the link points/key players in the quality assurance process since the practice cannot succeed if it is operated externally alone without involving the school principals who are the immediate supervisors in the secondary school system. Thus, responsibilities have been specified for the principals to administer and interpret quality assurance instrument based on uniform quality criteria-elements and standards to ensure quality with integrity, accountability and consistent review of performance and evaluation procedure, to bring about continuous improvement in the quality of resource inputs, process and outputs in schools (FME, 2008).

Principalship is a well established position of the chief executive who performs staggering range of roles that are enormously complex and multi-tasking (psychologist, teacher, facilities manager, philosopher, security officer, diplomat, social worker, mentor, public relation director, coach, cheer leader etc.); provides instructional leadership by coordinating curricula, co-curricular programs and is responsible for the general administration of the secondary school. The principals being instructional leaders are at the vantage positions to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate and disseminate current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery.

Quality assurance is achieved in schools that have strong principals who devote considerable time to coordinating and managing instruction; such principals are highly visible in the school and monitor the instructional process. In many instances, effective principals adopt continuous and consistent classroom visitation to ensure adequate teaching and learning processes (Peters & Waterman, 1988). At the same time, instructional leadership is in many ways a shared responsibility. It engenders a common sense of commitment and collegiality, and expands the resources and pool of knowledge among the staff.

Effective school principals establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement, and they concentrated their available resources and their operations on attaining them, provide adequate time-table for teaching, routine check of lesson notes and subject dairies, observation of classroom instruction, continuously monitor students progress to determine whether their instructional goals are being met, provide feed-back on student performance, motivation of teachers for improved performance, reinforcement of students for excellent performance, maintenance and appropriate usage of physical facilities, enforcement of discipline to ensure peaceful atmosphere, capacity building of teachers for effective service delivery and provision of instructional facilities and materials to enhance quality teaching-learning processes.

In furtherance of quality assurance, it is necessary for an ideal school principal to set reasonable expectations for work and achievement. The concept of the school as a place of learning is communicated clearly to the students, and a commitment to learning is expected in every classroom. Expectations of the society are manifested in the performance standards set by the school. High standards reflect high expectations; low standards reflect low expectations. It is therefore crystal clear that the complex task of the principal is how to organize the school to meet the various challenges facing school administration so that the education aims and objectives can be achieved.

As the Chief Executive of the school, the principal must make it possible for staff to have access to suitable facilities of all kinds in order to discharge fully their responsibilities in achieving the educational objectives. The teachers must be well supervised and motivated in order to sustain their interest and make them dedicated, committed, willing, enthusiastic and inspiring teachers. The quality of the supervision of teachers' instructional tasks by the principal is an index of effective school management. Of all the major tasks of a school principal, none is as sensitive and as challenging as the one relating to the supervisory role and it is expected to be given the deserved attention in the scheme of things.

Instructional supervision is an internal mechanism adopted by principals for school self-evaluation, geared towards helping teachers and students to improve on their teaching and learning activities for the purpose of achieving educational objectives. The principal ensures effective supervision by interacting academically and

socially at a regular basis with teachers and students within and outside the classrooms. The primary aim is to monitor the implementation of curricular and ensure desirable increase in teachers' capabilities, upgrade their conceptual knowledge and teaching skills, give them support in their work to facilitate better performance in teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning outcomes in the school settings (Wiles, 1975; Oyekan, 1997, Adepoju, 1998; Olagboye, 2004; Adetula, 2005).

### *2.1 Components of School Quality Assurance Process*

In meeting the task of instructional evaluation, that is, the assessment of quality of curriculum delivery, Abolade (2007) identified the main components of school quality assurance process as follows:

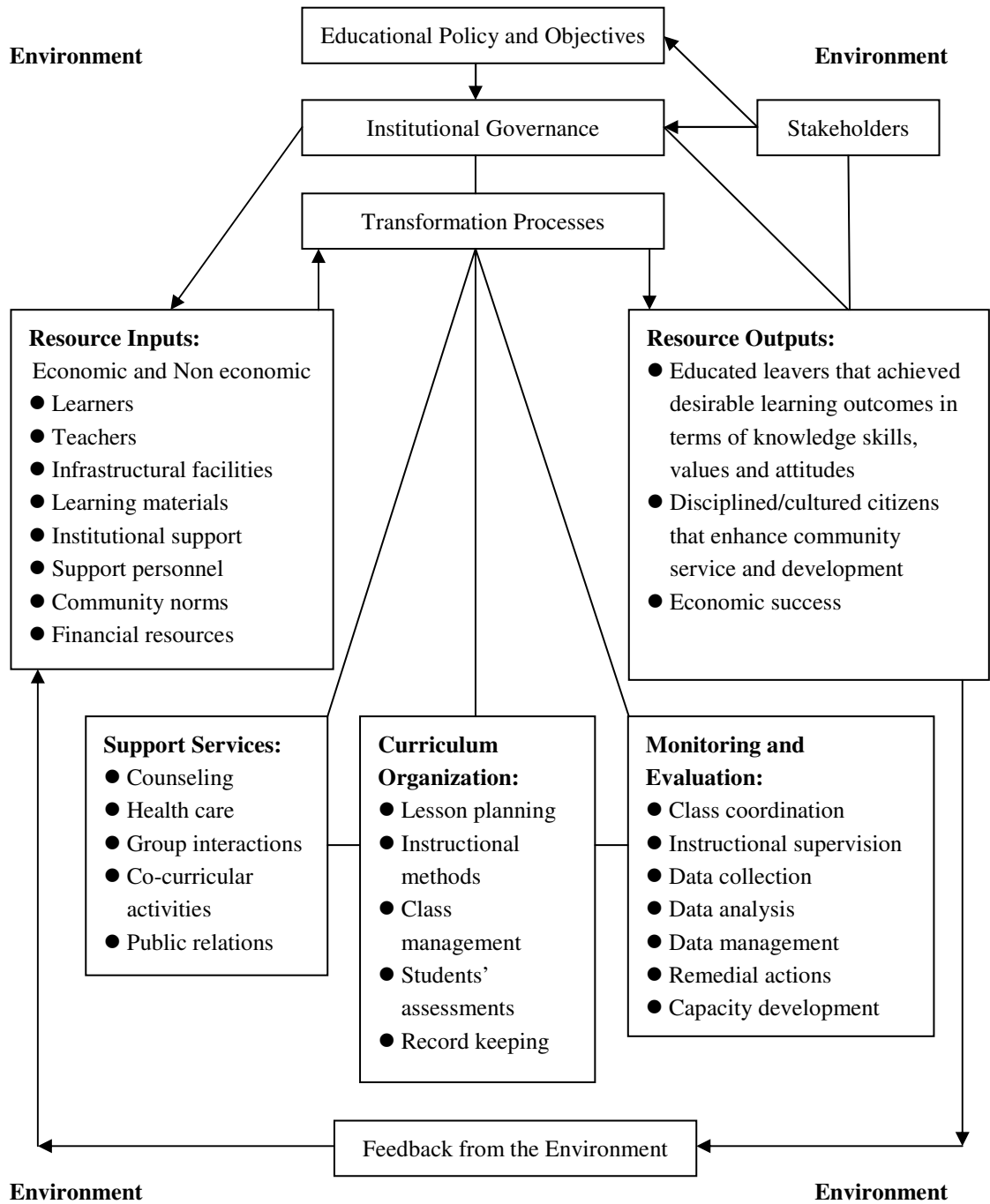
1. Systematic monitoring and observation of the core activities of a school especially teaching and learning
2. Collection and storage of data collected from monitoring activities
3. Collation and evaluation of data collected to make decisions about maintaining, modifying, accepting or rejecting programs particularly on curriculum issues, teachers' instructional styles, students' abilities, needs and behaviors as well as textbooks, organizational structure or personnel.
4. Implementation of necessary remedial action to improve teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning outcomes.
5. Feed-back to all stakeholders affected by the program in order to ensure quality with public accountability and consistent review of performance and evaluation procedures, to bring about continuous improvement in teaching and learning processes in schools.

The performance of these activities was further stressed by Ayeni (2010) as the core responsibility of the head-teacher who is the driving force behind the school program to clearly define the goals, mobilize all members of staff towards effective service delivery and adequate keeping of records; so as to provide necessary information to the commitment-holders: governing board, parents and the community towards identifying the school strengths and weaknesses, evaluate and review of the school policies, programs and activities so as to take appropriate decisions on type of follow-up action required to improve teachers' inputs and students' learning outcomes for the attainment of goals set and sustenance of integrity and accountability in quality assurance practice. This shows that quality assurance is a collective responsibility of all the commitment-holders in education.

### **3. Systemic Model of Quality Assurance**

It is clear that the complex task of the principal is how to organize the school to meet the various challenges facing school administration and curriculum delivery so that the education aims and objectives can be achieved. This situation calls for an improvement in the system approach in practice; an attempt has therefore been made to build a systemic model of education quality assurance for the operation of the school system to achieve desired quality in teachers' instructional task performance, principals' supervisory roles and students' academic performance. The operational structure and components of the systemic model of education quality assurance is explained diagrammatically below:

In pursuit of quality assurance within the context of the systemic model, the school is seen as an open system that maintains a network of relationships among individuals and activities within it, and continuously inter-relate with the external environment, particularly the stakeholders who formulate the National Policy on Education that provides the objectives and operational guidelines for the principal to implement.



Source: Ayeni, A. J. (2010). *Teachers' instructional task performance and principals' supervisory roles as correlates of quality assurance in secondary schools in Ondo State*. Doctoral dissertation, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, p.95

**Figure 1.** Systemic model for quality assurance

In a bid to actualize the educational objectives, the principal relates with the stakeholders to secure necessary inputs in form of human resource, finance, facilities and materials; these are transformed through effective curriculum organization and delivery, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning processes and provision of top quality care and support services to enhance learners' participation and progress.

Having successfully completed their education, the learners are released as outputs into the environment

(society). This underscores the reason for making education the child centered in order to ensure quality human capital development for sustainable self-reliance of the individual and the overall development of the nation for mutual benefit of the citizenry. The school can also achieve a dynamic recycling process in the resource-feedback from the environment to the school. This cyclical relationship of elements containing inputs, process and outputs has been the means of achieving the goals sets in schools overtimes.

#### **4. The System-Resource Evaluation**

The operation of the systemic model also integrates system-resource evaluation to determine the relevance, effectiveness and impact of learning resource management on quality of instruction and learning outcome in the light of the stated goals. The system-resource evaluation is considered imperative to the fulfillment of the school's goals and as a great determinant of school success since the school cannot achieve quality assurance without the availability, rational utilization and assessment of resource inputs that will assist the school in performing its functions effectively. In a bid to provide resource inputs that are needed for the smooth and healthy internal operation of the school, the principal identifies, analyses, relates and interprets the school problems and critical variables in interaction rationally in order to establish connection between resource inputs and production of desired quality outputs. This process enables the principal to know how well a school performs in different aspects of the instructional program and solve educational problems by making contact with commitment-holders and mobilizing them for the supply of resources to facilitate and enhance smooth and effective operation of the school system for the achievement of the set standards and overall system improvement at individual institutions.

##### *4.1 Quality Assurance Opportunities*

The opportunities that are inherent in quality assurance practice were highlighted by Ayeni (2010) as follows:

- Quality assurance practice in secondary education will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational effectiveness and teacher quality. The emphasis placed on teachers' pedagogic practices and students' learning processes will enable both teachers and students to have clear information about learning outcomes and develop strong commitment to the achievement of educational goals.
- It is expected that the emphasis being placed on quality assurance will raise the level of awareness of principals of secondary schools with regard to adequate provision of suitable teaching materials/facilities, conducive working environment, capacity building of teachers, staff and students welfare and cordial interpersonal relations with subordinates to facilitate effective supervision that will ensure quality assurance in secondary education.
- It is envisaged that the quality assurance practice will encourage school principals to pay special attention to their supervisory roles to enable them evaluate their school programs and to establish procedures that would help those teachers and students that do not perform well in order to achieve optimum productivity and quality assurance. This will provide teachers with relevant information on the effects and efficacy of their teaching pedagogy and stimulate them for better performance.
- The whole school evaluation will generate information on students' performance that will facilitate greater synergy among stakeholders in education to find solutions to problems of quality in secondary education; so that academic norms are not undermined at the expense of social norms, but that both would complement each other. This will also highlight the weaknesses inherent in the leadership behavior of principals and stimulate government to see the need for capacity building of secondary school principals in order to improve institutional management and instructional supervision in secondary schools.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper concluded that the attainment of quality and standards is undoubtedly determined by effective institutional and curriculum management, while inadequate learning resource inputs are major challenges that principals and teachers faced in the tasks of instructional management, curriculum delivery and students' learning outcomes. These challenges require effective application of systemic model of education quality assurance to enhance active and goal-oriented symbiotic working relationship among the personnel within the school as well as the cooperation and involvement of significant and relevant stakeholders in its environment. This will no doubt strengthen the capacities of principals and teachers in meeting students' instructional needs and dealing effectively with the various challenges affecting the realization of desired quality and standards since the school cannot achieve the set educational goals in isolation.

### 5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to improve teaching-learning process and instructional supervision for the achievement of the set educational goals in secondary schools.

- The school principals should collaborate with the commitment-holders such as the Parents-Teachers Associations, (PTA), Old Students' Associations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Communities, Philanthropists and other Development Partners to provide adequate instructional materials and facilities for effective teaching and learning processes in secondary schools.
- The school principals should provide constant and adequate feedback to the teachers on their instructional task performance to ensure periodic review and facilitate further improvement in the teaching-learning process in secondary schools
- The school authority should provide constant and comprehensive feedback on students' academic performance to parents in order to sensitize and encourage them to provide the required textbooks and other learning materials for their children/wards.
- School principals should promote healthy academic competitions such as intra and inter-class/ school debate, quiz and essays among students to improve their knowledge, skills, competence and performance.
- School principals should promote capacity development of teachers through intensive and regular in-house seminar/workshop to improve knowledge, pedagogical skills and competence of teachers in various subjects.
- The Education Quality Assurance Agency should ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning process to improve the quality of inputs, process and outputs in schools.
- Government should organized periodic capacity development workshops for educational managers (Principals and Quality Assurance Evaluators) on institutional management and instructional supervision to improve the quality of teaching and learning processes and learning outcomes in schools.
- All the stakeholders in the education sector should collaborate to organize annual education summit for comprehensive review and assessment of the degree of success in producing the desired outputs and achieving the overall educational objectives to ensure sustainable improvement in resource inputs, institutional management, curriculum delivery and quality learning outcome in secondary schools.



## 6. References:

- Abolade, J. O. (2007). Whole school evaluation. Paper presented at the Induction and Re-orientation Workshop for Federal and State Inspectors of Education, Akure.
- Adeniji, I. A. (2002). Perception of principals and teachers of external supervisors' role in secondary schools in Ogun State. *Nigerian Journal of Clinical and Counseling Psychology*, 8(1), 43-56.
- Adetula, L. O. (2005). Improving the supervisory skills and competencies of inspectors of mathematics education in schools. *International Journal of the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria*, 1(1), 33-40.
- Ayeni, A. J. (2010). *Teachers' instructional task performance and principals' supervisory roles as correlates of quality assurance in secondary schools in Ondo State*. Doctoral dissertation, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
- Bello-Osagie, K., & Olugbamila, A. (2009, December 31). Events that shape education. *The Nation*, p. B2.
- CEO Forum Policy Paper. (2001). *Education technology must be included in comprehensive education legislation*. Retrieved from <http://www.ceoforum.org>
- Earthman, G. I. (2002). *School facility conditions and student academic achievement*. Los Angeles: University of California's Institute for Democracy, Education and Access. Retrieved from <http://www.ucla-idea.org>
- Fafunwa, A. B. (2010, October 13). Fafunwa's last interview: Remember me as somebody who promoted use of mother tongue in schools. *The Punch*, p 3.
- Federal Ministry of Education. (2009). Repositioning the Nigerian education sector. *Newsletter*, 23, 27–28.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National policy on education* (pp. 18-19, 39). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Ogundele, A. (2002). Planning an effective educational program for Nigerian schools. In *Educational administration for colleges of education and universities* (pp. 47-61). Owerri: Tony Ben Publishers.
- Ogunu, M. A. (2001). Problems of school inspection in Nigeria. In *Current issues in educational management in Nigeria* (pp. 270-281). Nigeria Association of Educational Administration and Planning.
- Olagboye, A. A. (2004). *Introduction to educational administration planning and supervision*. Ikeja: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd.
- Owadiae, I. (2010, August 31). West African senior school certificate examination result. *The Punch*, p 39.
- Owadiae, I. (2011, August 11). West African senior school certificate examination result. *The Nation*, p 4.
- Oyekan, S. O. (1997). *Groundwork of curriculum and instruction*. Ibadan: Alafas Nigeria Company Inc.
- Peters, T. J., & Robert Jr., H. W. (1988). *In search of excellence: Lesson from American's best run companies*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Quality Education Agency. (2010). *Analysis of results of WAEC/NECO senior secondary school certificate examinations*. Ondo state, Nigeria.
- Wiles, K., & Lovell, J. T. (1975). *Supervision for better schools* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

