

ADOPTING A LINGUA FRANCA: CHALLENGES FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA'S MULTILINGUAL MILIEU

Victoria Akpan and Stephen Abia

Abstract

The reality of Nigeria's multilingualism breeds controversies in relation to official language use, hence, the challenge of adopting a lingua franca for the country. Multilingualism portends multicultural and other diversities, and so, a dire need for pragmatic governance in order to sustain a united and progressive nation. In our quest, therefore, at promoting good governance, this study examined the challenges of adopting a lingua franca for the country. Two theories made up the theoretical framework for this study: Language Ideology Model and World Bank Model of Good Governance. A total number of one hundred (100) respondents were randomly selected for the study. The findings revealed that the multilingual provisions by the National Policy on Education (2013) and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) are not properly implemented by educational administrators and the legislature, respectively. The results also showed that the future of English language in Nigeria is very bright since it now appears to be the language of education, officialdom and even social interaction. This opinion paper, hence, recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria should enforce its multilingual provisions, develop the orthographies of indigenous languages and provide relevant educational materials in Nigeria's indigenous languages.

Key Words: Multilingualism, Indigenous Languages, Good Governance, Nigeria's Language Policy, Lingua Franca.

Chief among the problems of Nigeria's multilingual state is the adoption of a lingua franca for the nation. The term multilingualism may be used in the description of a nation, a group or an individual in relation to language use. Language is a vital element in human relationship, serving as a means of communication among the members of a society and a system or tool of communication by facilitating the exchange of messages or information between persons or groups.

Multilingualism is the use of several languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers (Ibrahim and Gwandu, 2016). A nation or group (of speakers) that regularly uses more than two languages in communicating national or group needs may be said to be multilingual. In a similar way, "an individual who uses more than two languages

in his daily communication, switching from one language to the other, (in the office, in the club, at home, in school, in the market, etc) may be said to be multilingual” (Eka 2000, p.18).

It is widely known that multilingualism is a global phenomenon since there is hardly any country (nation-state) in the world that does not have people who speak more than two languages. Quite often, goods for the world market carry multilingual instructions. Africa itself is sometimes said to be typically multilingual in that practically every country in it has several languages. This has remained the situation overtime. Multilingualism portends multicultural and other diversities, hence, a dire need for pragmatic governance in order to sustain a united and progressive nation.

In Nigeria, the English language has often been described as the ‘official language’ because it is the language used officially though it has never been explicitly pronounced by statute or decree of the federal government to be the official language of the country (Jowitt, 2000). Nevertheless, English has become the language of business, politics, commerce, administration of education and culture, and indeed, the language of the creation of the political entity itself (Eka, 2000a).

Internationally, in recent years, the term ‘English as a lingua franca’ (ELF) has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages. Since about only one out of every four users of English in the world is a native speaker of the language (Crystal 2003), most ELF interactions take place among ‘non-native’ speakers of English. The English language, therefore, plays different roles such as officialdom, legislature, mass media, politics, official business, education and in social interaction.

The scope of this study is examining the challenge of a lingua-franca using the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) and the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (amended 1999) given their provisions in respect of the nation’s language policy embedded in those documents. This study also delves into the effectiveness of the English language as a national language in Nigeria, with the hypothesis that the provisions of multilingual language use contained in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) and those contained in the *1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* with regards to the language of the States and National Assembly are not properly implemented, and this does not augur well for good governance.

In achieving the set objectives of this study, the following questions were raised:

1. Do schools implement the multilingual provisions of the NPE?
2. Does the legislature implement the constitutional provisions in respect to language use in law making?
3. What impressions do Nigerians have of English language as the official language?
4. What is the future of English language in the Nigerian multilingual milieu?

It is in the light of the above, and in our quest at promoting good governance, that this paper seeks to study issues bothering on Nigeria’s language question with particular reference to the challenge of adopting a lingua franca.

Conceptual Framework

(i.) The Concept of Lingua Franca

A Lingua Franca is frequently used in inter-group communication and it is in most cases close to an indigenous language because it has a strong connection with the identity of its users. The Webster's dictionary defines it as "a language that is used among people who speak various different languages". As noted by Onwukwe et al (2016) lingua francas have developed around the world throughout human history, sometimes for commercial reasons (so-called "trade languages") but also for cultural, religious, diplomatic and administrative convenience, and as a means of exchanging information between scientists and other scholars of different nationalities.

Lingua Franca, also known as a bridge language, common language, trade language or vehicular language, according to *Wikipedia*, has been conceived as a language or dialect systematically (as opposed to occasionally, or casually) used to make communication possible between persons not sharing a native language or dialect, in particular when it is a third language, distinct from both native languages. Lingua Franca may, therefore, be seen as an indigenous or alien or neutral language used for all group communication by a multilingual nation.

(ii) The Concept of Good Governance

Good governance is about the operational dispositions of government towards the welfare of the governed, including how the people are treated like citizens who have the right to hold their governments accountable for the actions they take or fail to take on issues and policies.

In the opinion of Vartola et al. (2010), good governance as a concept does not have a straightforward definition though it has been expanding rapidly in the discourse of development. Asaduzzaman and Virtanen (2016) note that in general, good governance is associated with efficient and effective administration in a democratic framework. It is equivalent to purposive and development-oriented administration, which is committed to improving the quality of life of the people and enlarging the scope of people's participation in the decision-making process of development. In short, according to Huque (2001), it is a citizen-friendly, citizen-caring, responsive, decentralized local government system; an autonomous political society; an efficient and accountable bureaucracy; strong civil society; and a free media. Good governance, hence, has such factors as transparency, participation, accountability, and the rule of law, and entails government's responsiveness to its laid down obligations and policies.

Nigeria's Language Policy: A Brief Review

(i) The National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013) and Language Use

Nigeria's language policy is enshrined in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) (2013). But it is important to note that prior to the publication of the first edition of this document in 1977, there were numerous conferences and workshops all of which paid

attention to both education at all levels in general, and language matters in particular, Eka (2000, a).

The first public document on the language situation in Nigeria was *A Philosophy of Nigerian Education* published as a report of the National Curriculum Conference which was held in September 1969. The National Educational Research Council (NERC) had since organized series of workshops based on the report and recommendations of the 1969 conference. Quite a number of conferences, workshops and seminars have been held in respect of language use in the education sector.

In the current edition of the *National Policy on Education* (NPE) (2013), government has made certain provisions having in mind the mother tongue of the Nigerian child and the nation's multilingual setting. In section 1, subsection 8, sub-headed "The Importance of Language", the NPE states:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of National Unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

In relation to pre-primary education, the policy states in Section II, subsection II, No. III that:

In order to achieve the objectives of government, government will ensure that the medium of education will be principally in the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.

To ensure the above, it states that "government will develop the orthography of many more languages". It goes on to state that government will produce text books in Nigerian languages.

For primary education, the policy stipulates in section 3, sub section 15, paragraph 4, thus:

... Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in primary school is initially the mother tongue or language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English.

It goes on to say that in pursuance of its objectives in primary education, government will make provision for adequate educational services.

With regard to secondary education, the Policy has Nigerian languages among core subjects, and in Section 4, sub-section 19, paragraph 4 notes that:

In selecting two Nigerian languages students should study the language of their own area in addition to three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba subject to availability of teachers.

In relation to Adult and Non-formal education, Section 52 subsection 6 provides that:

A new nation-wide emphasis will be placed on the study of Nigerian Arts and Culture. The National Commission will work out the overall strategy for the inclusion of Nigerian Arts, Culture and Languages in Adult Education programmes.

These provisions obviously express the intent of the government with respect to its policy on language in Nigeria.

(ii) Constitutional Provisions on Language

The *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) in Section 55 provides in relation to the Senate and the House of Representatives that:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangement have been made therefore.

With respect to the Houses of Assembly of the various states in Nigeria, Section 97 of the Constitution states that:

The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the house in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may by resolution approve.

Again, these provisions obviously express the intent of the government with respect to its policy on language in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Two theories made up the theoretical framework for this study.

(i) Language Ideology Model

The Language Ideology Model, also referred to as Linguistic Ideology, first adopted by Cobarrubias (1983) in explaining ideologies that motivate decision making in language planning and the language policy type to be adopted in a given society was formalized by Woodlard (1992) as a model. It is used primarily within the fields of anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural studies to characterize any set of beliefs or feelings about languages as used in their social worlds. When recognized and explored, language ideologies expose connections between the beliefs speakers have about language and the larger social and cultural systems they are a part of, illustrating how these beliefs are informed by and rooted in such systems. The model links the implicit as well as explicit assumptions people have about a language or language in general to their social experience and political as well as economic interests. These assumptions shape linguistic forms and social processes.

The Language Ideology Model is relevant to the current study because it promotes planning, policy and decision making with regards to language use in a given society.

(ii) World Bank Model of Good Governance

The World Bank Model of Good Governance which encapsulates all ideas enunciated by the IMF, UNDP and scholars constitute the principles of good governance theory in relation to independent judiciary, accountability, transparency, rule of law, human rights,

among others. The World Bank (1997), for instance, from its lending experience in many developing countries, has realized that good governance is central in creating and sustaining an environment, which fosters strong and equitable development and its essential complements to sound economic policies. As noted by Ekundayo (2017), the World Bank has also identified a number of aspects of good governance, such as political accountability, freedom of association and participation, rule of law and independence of the judiciary, bureaucratic accountability, freedom of information, a sound administrative system, partnership between the government and the civil society organizations, and the like.

The World Bank Model of Good Governance as a theory is relevant to the current study because it emphasizes the need for governments to respect and keep to the terms of her policies, and in the instant case, as enshrined in the *National Policy on Education* (2013) and the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999 as amended) with regards to language use in Nigeria in view of the realities of multilingualism.

Empirical Studies

Writing on the topic, “Best options to safeguard Endangered Languages of the Trans-Saharan Region,” Haruna (2006) observes that multilingual societies in sub-Saharan Africa should see adoption of lingua franca as “best option to safeguard endangered languages of the region” (p.34). The researcher makes no specific recommendation of which language should be used as Nigeria’s lingua franca. He, however, states that a lingua franca option is possible in Nigeria when we look beyond sentiments to seeing it as a way of helping all our languages grow and be sustained.

Researching on the “**Language Policy on Education in Nigeria: Challenges of Multilingual Education and Future of English Language**,” Ibrahim and Gwandu (2016) investigated the current situation of educational policy in Nigeria, highlighting the challenges of multilingual education and future of English language. As a measure of saving the situation, the authors propose strict enforcement of the multilingual provisions in all sectors of education. They also seek the development of more educational resources and orthographies of indigenous languages to meet the demands of multilingual education.

In a paper entitled “Good Governance Theory and the Quest for Good Governance in Nigeria,” Ekundayo (2017) dwelt on good governance theory and its implications for good governance in Nigeria. As a specific objective, the researcher analysed the good governance theory, enunciated its principles and adopted them as indices to assess governance in Nigeria. The paper, having evaluated governance in Nigeria concluded that there has been no evidence of good governance in the country and that in actual fact poor or bad governance has been the order of the day. It therefore recommended that good governance should be embraced in Nigeria through governance reforms and by adopting the time-tested principles of good governance theory.

Methodology

To achieve the set objectives of this study, a total number of one hundred (100) respondents were selected from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), State Secondary Education Board (SSEB), Ministry of Information (in the State Secretariat complex), and the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly along Udoudoma Avenue all in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State in the South-South region of Nigeria. The participants were stratified into male and female, after which they were randomly selected. Twenty five (25) respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique from each establishment.

A ten-item questionnaire entitled “Challenges for Good Governance in adopting a Lingua Franca Questionnaire” was developed and administered to the staff of the ministry/parastatals to find out their perception of multilingual education, multilingual law making and the future of English language in Nigeria. The questions were in a “yes”, “no”, and “not sure” scale and the participants were told to be objective in the process of responding to the questions. The data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Implementation of the Multilingual Provisions of the NPE

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1 | Do pupils and students in Uyo learn Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba? |
| Q2 | Are pupils and students taught in the indigenous language? |
| Q3 | Are there available textbooks and other teaching materials in indigenous languages? |

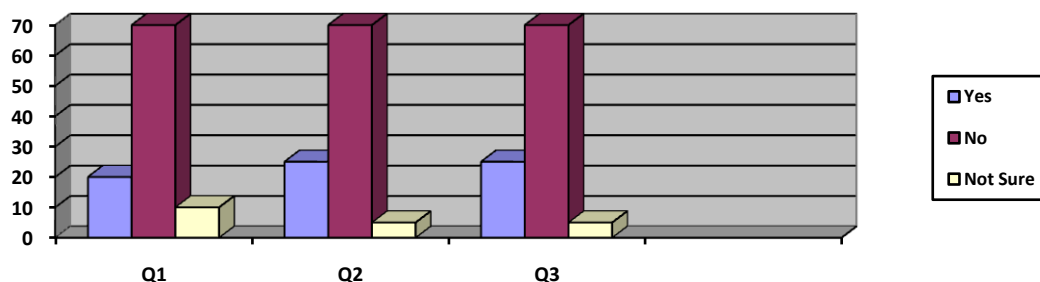


Fig. 1: Percentage rates on the Implementation of the Multilingual Provisions of the NPE

Table 1 and Figure 1 with 70% of respondents show that the NPE prescribed Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba are not learned by pupils and students. 20% responded in the affirmative, while 10% was not sure. On Question 2, 25% held a contrary view to 70% which show that the indigenous language is not used in teaching in schools in the study area. 5% was not sure. On the availability of teaching materials in the indigenous languages (Question 3), 70% responded that there were no such materials, while 25% affirmed and 5% was not sure.

Table 2: Language Use in Law Making

| | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1 | Do legislators use indigenous language in the House of Assembly? |
| Q2 | Are there state laws promoting the use of indigenous languages? |
| Q3 | Would you say English language is the language of law making? |

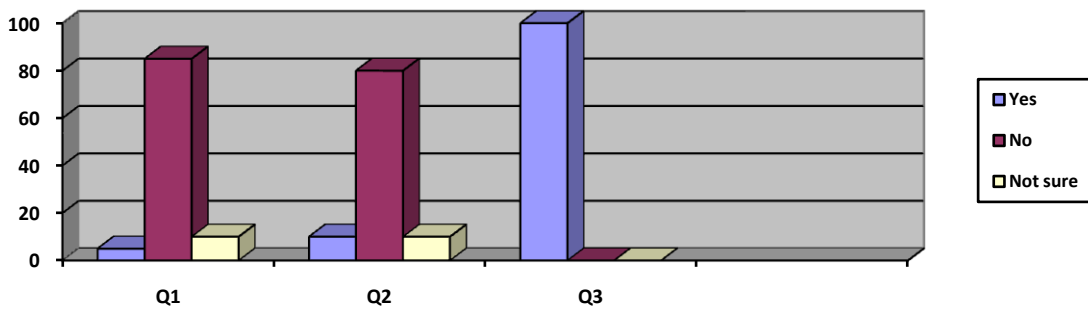


Fig. 2: Percentage rates on language use in law making

Question 1 in Table 2 by 80% of respondents shows that the indigenous language is not the language in use in law making as provided for by the Constitution. While 15% was in the contrary, 5% was not sure. On whether there were state legislations promoting the use of indigenous languages, 10% answered in the affirmative, 80% in the negative and 10% was not sure. On whether English language is the language of law making, all the respondents (100%) answered in the affirmative.

Table 3: English Language as the Lingua Franca

| | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1 | Do you know English language to be the official language or lingua franca in Nigeria? |
| Q2 | Is English language your language of office work? |
| Q3 | Is English language your language of social interaction? |

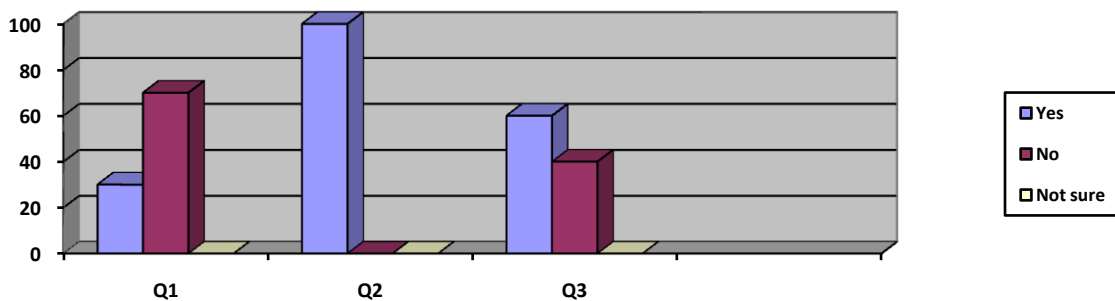


Fig. 3: Percentage rates on English Language as the Official Language

From analysis shown in Table 3, 30% is reported not to know English language as the official language, while 30% does. On whether English language is the language of office work, all participants (100%) responded in the affirmative. On whether English language is their language of social interaction, the response was 60% for 'Yes' and 40% for 'No'.

Table 4: The Future of English language in Nigeria

| | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Q1 | Is it likely that English will be the only language of instruction in Nigerian schools in 20 years' time? |
| Q2 | Would any of the indigenous languages be able to compete with English language in 20 years' time? |
| Q3 | Would English language take over as the lingua franca or official language in 20 years' time? |

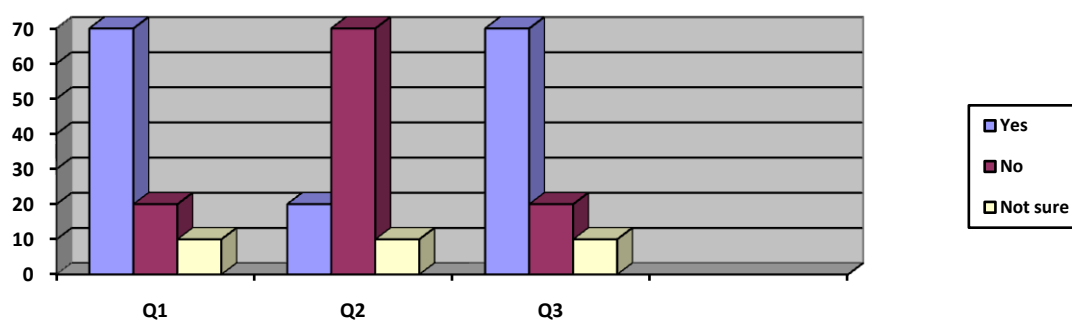


Fig. 4: *The Future of English language in Nigeria*

As presented in Table 4, English will be the only language of instruction in Nigerian schools in 20 years' time according to 74% of respondents. 19% said otherwise, while 7% were not sure. On whether any of the indigenous languages would be able to compete with English language in 20 years' time, 20% were in the affirmative, 70% in the negative, and 10% not sure. 70% opined that English language take over as the lingua franca or official language in 20 years' time. 20% objected to the opinion, while 10% was not sure.

Summary of Findings

- i. The multilingual provision of the NPE is not implemented as Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba are not taught in schools.
- ii. There are no available textbooks and other relevant teaching materials in indigenous languages in schools.
- iii. Legislators do not use indigenous language in the House of Assembly.
- iv. There are no state laws promoting the use of indigenous languages.
- v. English language is the language of law making by the legislature.
- vi. English is the language of office work and social interaction.
- vii. English is likely to take over as the language of instruction in 20 years' time.

Proposals in Search for a Lingua Franca

Scholars and linguists have made various proposals. Eka (2000a, p. 8) proposes a 'Trilingual Approach' (TA). This approach 'is concerned with getting Nigerians ultimately to learn a Nigerian language, first of their choice and later of a popular (government or public)

choice'. The approach also encourages proficiency in English where applicable (as in schools). The Trilingual Approach which is in two stages – the Flexible Trilingual Approach (FTA) and the Compulsory Trilingual Approach (CTA) – has three sets of participants: the Nigerian child/student, the Nigerian in public life and the Nigerian in private life. The author believes that with the progressive Trilingual Approach (from FTA to CTA) an era of dominant Nigerian language will be ushered in for all Nigerians.

Also as a measure of saving the situation, Ibrahim and Gwandu (2016) propose strict enforcement of the multilingual provisions in all sectors of education. The scholars also propose the development of more educational resources and orthographies of indigenous languages to meet the demands of multilingual education

Conclusion

This paper has examined the language question in Nigeria, especially with regards the government policies as embedded in the *National Policy in Education* (2013) and the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999 as amended). Paramount among the issues is the question of a lingua franca or national language for Nigeria. Should Nigeria have a lingua franca or national language or languages? And which language or languages should this (or these) be? There is also the question of whether Nigerians are comfortable with English (a foreign language) as a lingua franca or National language. The argument in some quarters, as noted in this paper is that, in spite of its usefulness as official language, English still bears the mark of colonization and can never fully help us realize our cultural potentialities. Adopting a lingua franca for Nigeria in the midst of her multilingual situation seems a hard nut to crack in furtherance of good governance in the country.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, it is hereby recommended that a strict compliance with the provisions of the *National Policy on Education* (2013) and the *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) would go a long way to helping the nation sustain the indigenous languages as an approach to adopting a lingua franca for the country.

Furthermore, the Federal government should fully develop more educational resources and orthographies of indigenous languages to meet the demands of multilingual education.

Importantly, too, Nigerian scholars in the field of language and allied areas should intensify efforts in the codification of aspects of indigenous languages and produce relevant teaching and learning materials for our schools.

References

- Asaduzzaman, M. and Virtanen, P. (2016). "Governance Theories and Models". *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*. A. Farazmand (ed.) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308911311>

Adopting a Lingua Franca: Challenges for Good Governance in Nigeria's Multilingual Milieu

- Cobarrubias, J. (1983) Ethical issues in Status Planning. In J. Corrubias & J.A. Fishman,(Eds) *Progress in Languages Planning: International perspective*. Berlin: Mouton.pp:41-85
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (As Amended).
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. (Second edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eka, D. (2000). *Issues in Nigerian English Usage*. Uyo: Scholars Press.
- Eka, D. (2000a). "Multilingualism and National Unity: The Situation in Nigeria". In: *Journal of Nigerian English and Literature*. Udofot (Ed.) Vol. 3, 1-9.
- Ekundayo, W. J. (2017). "Good Governance Theory and the Quest for Good Governance in Nigeria". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 7 (5). 2221-0989 (Online).
- Haruna, A. (2006). Best options to safeguard Endangered Languages of the Trans-Saharan Region. *Proceedings of the National Workshop on Best practices to Safeguard Endangered Nigerian Languages*. Abuja: UNESCO Publications. Pp: 49-67
- Huque, A. S. (2001) Governance and Public Management: The South Asian Context. *International Journal of Public Administration* 24(12):1289–1297.
- Ibrahim, J. and Gwandu, S. A. (2016). **Language Policy on Education in Nigeria: Challenges of Multilingual Education and Future of English Language**. *American Research Journal of English and Literature* (ARJEL). Volume 2, 1-10
- Jowitt, D. (2000). *Nigerian English Usage: An Introduction*. Lagos: Longman
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDC
- Onwukwe, C. D., Okugo, U. C., Ndimele, R. I. & Onukawa, E. N. (2016). "Revisiting the Lingua Franca question In Nigeria: Insights from the 2015 Electioneering Campaigns". *Online Journal of Arts, Management and Social Sciences (OJAMSS)*. Vol.1 No.1, September 2016, pg.145 - 159 (Maiden Edition).

Victoria Akpan and Stephen Abia

Vartola, J., Ismo, L. and Mohammed, A. (2010). "Towards Good Governance in South Asia: An Introduction. In: Vartola J, Lumijarvi I, Asaduzzaman, M. (eds) *Towards Good Governance in South Asia*. Finland: University of Tampere Press.

Woodlard, K.(1992). *Language Ideology*. London: Premier books.

World Bank (1997). World Development Report 1997. <http://www.decentralization.ws/srcbook/overview.pdf>, Decentralization: An Overview.