



LINGUISTIC STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LINGUISTIC STUDIES: A STUDY OF GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

Abdullahi Usman Garko¹

Musa Ibrahim²

Aisha Umar Ahmad³

^{1,2&3} Department of Languages and Linguistics
Gombe State University,
augarko@gsu.edu.ng¹
musanagombe@gmail.com²
ashham3433@mail.com³

Abstract

This study examines the perception of linguistics studies in higher education with specific focus on Gombe State University (GSU), Nigeria, in order to determine whether the programme is perceived as progressive or deprogressive by students. Linguistics plays a vital role in understanding language structure, communication, culture, and social interaction, especially in a multilingual society like Nigeria. Despite its importance, concerns remain regarding students' perceptions, relevance of the curriculum, and future career prospects associated with linguistics studies. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and employed a structured interview as the main instrument for data collection. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twenty undergraduate students from the department of languages and linguistics across 100 to 400 levels. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by Tyler's Objective-Based Evaluation framework, which focuses on evaluating educational programmes based on their objectives, learning experiences, organisation, and outcomes. Findings from the study reveal mixed perceptions among students. While a majority of respondents view linguistics studies at GSU as progressive due to exposure to analytical skills, applied linguistics, and interdisciplinary opportunities, some students perceive the programme as deprogressive, citing challenges such as difficult course content, limited practical exposure, and unclear career pathways. The study also shows that senior students (300–400 level) tend to have more positive perceptions compared to junior students, largely due to increased academic exposure and understanding of applied areas of linguistics. The study concludes that linguistics studies at GSU show signs of progress but still require improvement to enhance relevance, student motivation, and employability. It therefore recommends increased practical-oriented teaching, better career orientation, and stronger integration of interdisciplinary and applied linguistics components to strengthen the programme and improve students' perceptions.

Keyword: Perception; Linguistics; Interdisciplinary; Progressiveness; Deprogressiveness

Introduction

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, has continued to gain recognition as an important, discipline in higher education across the world. It provides tools for understanding the structure of human language, the relationship between language and society, and the role of language in education and communication (Crystal, 2010; Yule, 2017). In Nigeria, linguistics is taught in many universities as both a core and elective discipline, aimed at training students in phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and applied fields such as language education and translation studies (Adegbite, 2009; Olateju, 2013).

The role of linguistics in nation-building cannot be underestimated, especially in a multilingual nation like Nigeria where language is tied to education, governance, and identity (Bamgbose, 1991; Yusuf, 2018). However, the actual growth and acceptance of linguistics as a course of study remain debated. While some scholars describe it as progressive due to its contribution to knowledge and language policy (Akere, 2004; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015), others view it as deprogressive in Nigeria due to lack of awareness, low enrolment, and limited career opportunities (Ibrahim, 2021; Yusuf, 2018). At Gombe State University (GSU), linguistics has been offered as a degree programme for over a decade. Yet, questions remain: Are students satisfied with the programme? Do they see it as preparing them for the future? Do they view the discipline as growing or declining? These questions highlight the need to evaluate the progress of linguistics at GSU from the perspective of students, who are the direct beneficiaries of the programme.

Although linguistics has established itself as an academic discipline, there is limited empirical research on how students perceive its progress in Nigerian universities, particularly in GSU. Most existing studies (Odebunmi, 2010; Yusuf, 2018) focus on general attitudes toward language studies in Nigeria but neglect localized settings. In GSU, anecdotal evidence suggests mixed attitudes: some students see linguistics as prestigious and intellectually stimulating, while others view it as less practical compared to professional courses like law, medicine, or engineering. This concern is consistent with global debates on the employability of linguistics graduates (Lyons, 1995; Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2018). The perception of linguistics as a “non-professional” course (Olateju, 2013) may lead to declining interest and limited support from stakeholders. Failure to assess students’ perceptions may lead to continued neglect of linguistics in curriculum planning, resulting in further decline of the discipline. Hence, this study investigates the state of linguistics studies in GSU, specifically from the viewpoint of students.

The aim of this study is to evaluate students’ perceptions of the progress of linguistics at GSU. The specific objectives are: to examine students’ reasons for choosing linguistics as a course of study, to examine the status of linguistics studies being progressive or deprogressive, to propose recommendations for improving linguistics studies at GSU.

Literature Review

Linguistics is widely defined as the scientific study of language, including its structure, development, and social functions (Crystal, 2010; Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2017). It examines phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, providing a framework for understanding how humans communicate and process language (Lyons, 2009). In higher education, linguistics bridges theoretical knowledge with applied practices, such as translation, language teaching, computational linguistics, and sociolinguistics (Hudson, 2019). The discipline also emphasizes critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills, which are transferable to diverse professions, including education, media, policy, and artificial intelligence. Bamgbose (1991) highlights that linguistics contributes to cultural preservation, language planning, and national development, especially in multilingual societies like Nigeria.

Progressiveness in higher education refers to innovation, positive transformation, and alignment with global academic standards. It encompasses curriculum development, student engagement, graduate employability, and institutional recognition (Omoregie, 2015; Adegbite, 2003).

Conversely, deprogressiveness signifies stagnation, decline, or regression in academic quality, research output, and practical relevance. Nwogu (2017) and Dike (2020) argue that deprogressiveness often occurs when universities fail to adapt curricula, incorporate modern pedagogical methods, or address student and labor market needs. Within the context of linguistics at Nigerian universities, progressiveness involves modernizing course content, integrating ICT tools, encouraging applied linguistics research, and fostering collaboration with industry (Yusuf, 2019). Deprogressiveness is reflected in low enrolment, outdated teaching methods, lack of career guidance, and inadequate institutional support. A comparative study by Akindele and Adegbite (2020) revealed that universities investing in ICT integration, teaching resources, and faculty development witnessed greater student satisfaction, higher enrolment, and better academic performance in linguistics programs.

Yusuf (2019) found that integrating applied linguistics approaches — such as translation studies, language technology, and sociolinguistics — enhances student engagement and professional readiness, suggesting that universities with modernized curricula achieve higher outcomes.

Oloruntoba-Oju (2021) reported that many undergraduates in Nigerian universities lack career orientation related to linguistics, which contributes to low motivation and misconceptions about the discipline's relevance. Similarly, Emenanjo (2020) emphasized that exposing students to practical applications in linguistics significantly improves their attitudes toward learning and enhances their career prospects.

Akinmade (2022) highlighted that infrastructural challenges — such as overcrowded classrooms, poor internet access, and absence of language laboratories — negatively influence student performance and engagement in linguistics. Uche (2022) reinforced this view, showing

that institutions with better ICT integration and continuous staff training achieve measurable improvements in linguistic education outcomes.

Musa (2022) specifically examined students' perceptions at Gombe State University and found that low enrolment, limited awareness of career paths, and inadequate technological resources contribute to students' perception of linguistics as less marketable. Sani (2021) further noted that negative student attitudes often result from unclear career trajectories and lack of motivation. Other studies have explored institutional and pedagogical factors affecting linguistics education. Alabi (2021) found that lecturer competence, availability of instructional materials, and support from university administration are crucial determinants of students' academic success and perception of progressiveness. Oloruntoba-Oju (2017) also emphasized the importance of well-designed curricula that align with students' expectations and labor market needs.

Framework

The research adopted a descriptive survey design, which is suitable for educational investigations that aim to assess opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of participants on a specific issue (Kothari, 2004). This design enables the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data from a population sample to describe the characteristics of a phenomenon—in this case, whether linguistics studies are progressive or deprogressive in higher education. According to Orodho (2005), a descriptive survey design allows the researcher to gather information without manipulating variables, thereby providing a realistic reflection of the existing condition. This design is most appropriate for the present study because it seeks to describe and analyze students' views, institutional challenges, and perceived relevance of linguistics in higher education.

Framework for the study

To provide a systematic and scholarly basis for analyzing the data, this study adopted the Objective-Based Evaluation Theory developed by Ralph W. Tyler (1949) as the analytical framework. Tyler's model is widely recognized in educational research for its practical approach to assessing whether educational objectives are being effectively achieved. The model consists of four guiding questions:

1. What educational purposes should the institution seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

According to Tyler (1949), effective evaluation depends on the degree to which clearly defined objectives are realized through systematic educational activities. This framework aligns with the focus of this study, which examines whether linguistics studies in higher education (specifically Gombe State University) meet their academic and societal objectives. The model was also used by Ornstein and Hunkins (2014) and Ololube (2013), who emphasized that Tyler's systematic process remains a valid analytical tool for evaluating curriculum design, teaching methods, and educational

relevance. In this context, the framework helps the researcher to analyze the progressiveness or deprogressiveness of linguistics education by comparing intended objectives (curriculum goals) with actual outcomes (student perceptions and employability).

Methodology

The methodology employed in the study titled *Linguistic Students' Perceptions of Linguistic Studies: A Study of Gombe State University, Nigeria* It presents the design, population, sample and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations. It also identifies and discusses the framework that guided the analysis of the data collected. The methodological approach was developed in line with established educational research principles (Creswell, 2014; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The population of this study comprises undergraduate students of the Department of languages and Linguistics at Gombe State University. These students are directly involved in the study of linguistics and are best positioned to assess its relevance, implementation, and progressiveness. The total population is approximately 20 students across different levels of study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a population is the entire group of individuals or items that a researcher wishes to study and draw conclusions from.

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured interview schedule. The interview questions are designed to elicit responses concerning students' perceptions of the progress or decline of linguistics studies, the relevance of the curriculum, and factors influencing students' attitudes toward linguistics.

Interviews are preferred because they provide an in-depth qualitative data and allow for clarification and probing during the discussion (Kvale, 2007). The questions are both open- and close-ended, ensuring flexibility in responses while maintaining focus on the research objectives.

Data presentation

The section presents the analysis and discussion of data collected through interviews conducted with twenty students of Linguistics at Gombe State University. The analysis follows a qualitative thematic method, as stated in Chapter Three. The responses are analysed according to the research question and interview questions, with emphasis on students' perceptions of linguistics studies as progressive or deprogressive.

Excerpt 1:

"I choose linguistics because I want to understand how language works and how people communicate".

"My learning experience has been good because most lecturers explain well".

"I have faced so many challenges in nominal and verbal groups. I even failed verbal group in second semester one hundred level".

“To me, the programme is progressive because new ideas like degree in Hausa language are introduced”.

“I recommend more practical classes because they help students understand better”.

“I have interest in language studies because it relates to daily communication”.

“I like English and Education because it prepares me for teaching”.

Simple Analysis

The sentence represents a progressive phenomenon in language study because it emphasizes learning, discovery, and future understanding rather than backward influence or decline.

Excerpt 2

“I choose linguistics because I wanted to understand sentence structure through Syntax”.

“My learning experiences are both good and bad, some courses like Syntax and morphology are challenging”.

“A major challenge is understanding places and manners of articulations in Phonetics and phonology. I am still having issues with this course”.

“The programme is slowly progressive because new courses are introduced gradually”.

“I recommend simplifying difficult topics like Syntax theories”.

“Yes, I am interested in language studies because it helps analytical thinking”.

“I like English and Communication because it improves public speaking”.

Simple Analysis

The sentence represents a progressive phenomenon in language study because it emphasizes learning, discovery, and future understanding rather than backward influence or decline.

Excerpt 3

“I choose linguistics because I want to study Hausa and English together but during my programme, Hausa courses are not yet introduced. I found it difficult sometimes”.

“My learning experience is interesting because I learned new things about language such as semantics and psycholinguistics”.

“A major challenge is lack of practical exposure because most lessons are theoretical”.

“The programme is progressive because some improvements are noticeable”.

“I recommend making applied linguistics a core course because during our time it is an elective course”.

“Yes, I have interest in language studies because it connects culture and society”.

“English and mass communication interest me because it can support journalism, the field I want to work”.

Simple Analysis

The program is both progressive and retrogressive/deprogressive:
So, this part shows a retrogressive tendency (not fully supportive or developed).
Progressive in terms of theoretical knowledge and exposure to linguistic disciplines
Retrogressive in terms of curriculum design, especially the delayed introduction of Hausa

Excerpt 4

“I choose linguistics because I want to understand grammar better”.
“My learning experience is okay because lecturers are trying their best”.
“One challenge is difficult topics like tree diagrams in Syntax, due to its hardness, I manage to pass with D grade”.
“The programme is deprogressive because students' motivation is low. Most students prefer literature courses than that of language”.
“I recommend improving teaching methods because it will motivate students”.
“I am interested in linguistics because language is part of daily life”.
“I like English and Communication because it improves speaking skills”.

Simple Analysis

The sentence represents a progressive phenomenon in language study because it emphasizes learning, discovery, and future understanding rather than backward influence or decline.

Excerpt 5

“I choose linguistics because I enjoy reading and analyzing grammatical elements in English language”.
“My learning experience is good because learning conditions are average”.
“The challenge I face is lack of modern facilities because learning is not interactive”.
“The programme is not fully progressive because technology is limited”.
“I recommend introducing digital class because it will modernize learning”.
“I have interest in linguistics because it improves writing skills”.
“English and Security Studies, I think this interdisciplinary study will help in investigating criminals. Language is important in security activities”.

Simple Analysis

The sentence represents a progressive phenomenon in language study because it emphasizes learning, discovery, and future understanding rather than backward influence or decline.

Excerpt 6

“I choose linguistics at GSU due to interest in how people use languages daily”.
“The learning experience feels engaging, especially in courses like Discourse Analysis and English Grammar”.
“Some topics look abstract and need time to understand”.
“The programme looks progressive since students gain analytical skills”.
“More practical examples during lectures would help”.
“Yes, I enjoy language studies”.
“English and Communication interests me due to media relevance”.

Simple Analysis

The sentence represents a progressive phenomenon in language study because it emphasizes learning, discovery, and future understanding rather than backward influence or decline.

Excerpt 7

“Linguistics attracts me because language plays a role in society”.
“Learning feels challenging but meaningful”.
“Syntax analysis creates difficulty sometimes, especially tree diagrams”.
“Language studies appear progressive with gradual improvement”.
“More interactive classes would improve learning”.
“I have interest in linguistics”.
English and Education appeals to me.

Simple sentence analysis

The overall pattern is progressive language learning with manageable difficulties, especially in syntax analysis.

Excerpt 8

I chose linguistics to understand language structure.
Learning feels serious and academic.
Phonology symbols confuse me sometimes.
The programme shows progress academically.
More revision sessions would help students.
Yes, I like language studies.
Regarding interdisciplinary studies, English and Linguistics is the best for me.

Simple sentence analysis

The overall pattern is progressive language learning with manageable difficulties, especially in syntax analysis.

Excerpt 9

Linguistics becomes my choice due to curiosity about language differences.

Learning feels informative.

Some courses like English grammar and spoken English require deep concentration.

The programme looks progressive but slow.

Introducing applied linguistics earlier would help.

I enjoy studying language.

English and Communication attracts me.

Simple Sentence Analysis

The expression reveals a progressive orientation toward linguistics, where curiosity about linguistic diversity motivates subject choice, and the learning experience is perceived as informative and intellectually beneficial.

Excerpt 10

I chose linguistics because I have passion for communication.

Learning feels organised and clear.

Technical terms create difficulty.

Language studies seem progressive.

More examples from real life would help.

Yes, I have interest.

English and Education appeals to me.

Simple Sentence Analysis

The expression reveals a progressive orientation toward linguistics, where curiosity about linguistic diversity motivates subject choice, and the learning experience is perceived as informative and intellectually beneficial.

Excerpt 11

I choose linguistics because language affects culture and identity.

My learning experience has been interesting because I learned about society.

One challenge is unclear career path because job opportunities are not explained.

The programme is deprogressive because students are confused about the future.

I recommend career orientation because it will guide students.

I am interested in language studies because it is relevant everywhere.

English and Education because it supports teaching career.

Excerpt 14

I choose linguistics because I want to become an editor in the future.

My learning experience has been fair because teaching quality is mixed.

The challenge is lack of teaching aids because learning sometimes becomes boring.

The programme is deprogressive because facilities are poor.

I recommend providing teaching aids in spoken English because they enhance learning.

Yes, I am interested in linguistics.

English and Education interests me because it is career-oriented.

Simple Sentence Analysis

The expression reveals a goal-oriented and professionally motivated interest in linguistics, particularly for future editorial work. However, the learning experience is only moderately positive due to inconsistent teaching quality and insufficient teaching aids, which sometimes reduce learner engagement.

Analysis of interview responses

The interview data were analysed under key themes that emerged from the responses.

Reasons for Choosing Linguistics

The findings reveal that most respondents chose linguistics due to a personal interest in language and communication. Many students expressed curiosity about how language works, sentence structure, grammar, and meaning. Courses such as Syntax, Phonetics, Semantics, Morphology, and Discourse Analysis influenced their choice.

Some respondents chose linguistics because of career-related reasons, such as teaching, media work, editing, translation, and applied language fields. A few students stated that linguistics was not their first choice but later developed interest after understanding its relevance to daily communication and society.

This finding suggests that linguistics attracts students mainly through intellectual curiosity and perceived usefulness of language skills.

Students' Learning Experiences

Most respondents described their learning experiences as good, interesting, or challenging but meaningful. Students appreciated lecturers' explanations and classroom activities such as sentence analysis, pronunciation practice, and discussions on language use in society. However, some respondents reported that learning was too theoretical, making certain courses difficult to understand. Syntax, Phonology, and Morphology were frequently mentioned as challenging areas. Overall, the learning experience appears positive, though students desire more practical engagement.

Challenges Faced in Language Studies

The major challenges identified by respondents discussed:

Difficulty with Syntax, especially tree diagrams and sentence analysis, problems understanding Phonetics and Phonology, including symbols and articulation, confusion with technical linguistic terms, abstract nature of some concepts, and finally limited exposure to practical application. A few respondents also mentioned unclear career direction and low student motivation. These challenges indicate that linguistics requires strong analytical skills and better instructional support.

Perception of Linguistics as Progressive or Depressive

The responses show mixed perceptions. Most respondents believe linguistics at GSU is progressive or slowly progressive. They noted gradual improvement through introduction of new courses, development of analytical skills, and exposure to applied linguistics. On the other hand, a smaller number of respondents described the programme as depressive, citing low motivation among students, limited facilities, and slow development. This suggests that while linguistics shows signs of progress, certain institutional and instructional issues affect students' perceptions.

Summary of Findings

The study concluded by revealing that most students chose linguistics due to interest in language and communication, learning experiences are generally positive but challenging, syntax and Phonology present major difficulties, linguistics at GSU is viewed as gradually progressive, students desire more practical and applied learning, and also interest in interdisciplinary studies is highly emphasized.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that linguistics studies at Gombe State University show signs of progress, although the progress is gradual. Students recognised the academic and social relevance of linguistics, especially in communication, education, media, and applied language fields. However, the study also reveals that challenges such as abstract course content, limited practical engagement, and unclear career orientation affect students' perception of the programme. These issues, if not addressed, may contribute to negative attitudes toward linguistics. Overall, linguistics at GSU cannot be described as completely depressive; rather, it is a developing discipline that requires further improvement to reach its full potential.

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