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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE MISUSE OF PREPOSITION AMONG STUDENTS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY AWKA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the misuse of prepositions among students of English department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, with a focus on the most common errors, contributing factors, and strategies to improve on the use of prepositions. The population consists of 200 students randomly selected from the English Department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Data were collected using questionnaire and writing tasks, which included a range of sentences that required the use of prepositions. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics, specifically t-test was used to determine if there is significant difference in their scores and responses. Findings revealed that participants encountered significant difficulties with prepositions particularly in terms of choice and placement. The study identified common preposition errors, explored potential causes and proposed pedagogical interventions to enhance prepositional accuracy.

Keywords: preposition errors, causes, tertiary institutions, English language teaching.

Introduction

English language, as a global lingua franca, is indispensable in academic, professional and social spheres. Users have referred this language as a complex and nuanced language with many subtleties and intricacies that can be difficult to master. Jenkins, (2009) assert that the complexity of preposition usage in English can be attributed to the language's Germanic and Romance roots. However, its correct usage is paramount for effective communication. It has been observed that one area of particular difficulty for many learners is the use of prepositions. Prepositions are an essential part of language, used to indicate location, direction, time and other relationships between entities. However, their proper use is crucial for effective communication for errors in preposition usage can lead to confusion, misinterpretation and breakdowns in communication.

In the context of Nigerian tertiary education the misuse of prepositions is a common error among students of English. Prepositions such as in, on, at, for, with, of,

by, about, etc can be of concern to student. This error can be attributed to various factors, language-related factors (first language interference, (Chen, 2019), limited exposure and inadequate exposure), learning and teaching factors and cognitive factors (Chen, 2019).On this note, this study aims to investigate the misuse of preposition among English department students of Nnamdi Azikiwe university, Awka, and identify preposition misuse among the students, their underlying causes and potential solutions.

Preposition as fundamental component of English grammar, play a crucial role in conveying meaning and establishing relationships between words in a sentence. Their correct usage is essential for effective communication, both written and spoken. Despite their significance, preposition often pose challenges for learners of English, especially foreign speakers.

Research has consistently shown that the misuse of prepositions is a widespread problem among language learner (Liu, 2020), hence impacting their overall language proficiency. English prepositions often have multiple meanings and uses, making them difficult to master (Baldwin, 2017). Numerous studies have investigated propositional difficulties among learners of English as a second or foreign language, limited research has focused on the specific challenges faced by English learners specifically at university level.

Given the importance of effective communication in academic and professional settings, understanding the prepositional challenges faced by English department students is crucial. By identifying common prepositional errors and exploring their underlying causes, this study aims to contribute to the development of targeted instructional strategies to enhance prepositional accuracy among these students.

Cognitive factors also play a significant role in preposition errors. Learners' limited linguistic knowledge and processing capacity can lead to errors in preposition usage (Zhang, 2020). Memory difficulties can equally constitute a factor in usage of preposition. It has observed that overreliance on intuition brings about errors in preposition usage.

Research Purpose

1. To identify most common preposition errors committed by students of English department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
2. To examine the underlying causes of preposition misuse among the students of English department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
3. To propose strategies for improving prepositional accuracy among English department students.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common prepositional errors committed by students of English department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?
2. What factors contribute to prepositional misuse among these students?

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3. How can prepositional accuracy be improved among English department students?

Hypotheses

1. Ho_1: There is no significant difference between degree year one and degree year two English department students' mean scores on common preposition errors.

2. Ho_2: it is expected that there will be no significant difference between degree year one and degree year two students mean responses on causes of prepositional misuse among them.

Research Method

The study adopted descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 200 English students enrolled in the first and second years of the program. These year levels were selected due to the observed prevalence of prepositional errors. While 200 questionnaires were distributed, only 195 were retrieved and included in the data analysis. Also a test consisting of eight filling the blank space with most suitable preposition were asked under the monitoring of the researcher and they were retrieved at the end of the exercise. Descriptive and frequency analyses were employed to analyze the data, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses.

Presentation of Results

Demographic information

Source: Research computation, 2024.

Figure 1 shows the characteristics of the sample used. It reveals that 99 respondents representing 51% are year 1 students while 96 respondents are year 2 students of the department studied. This shows greater number of degree year 1 representation in the sample units.

Table 1: Gender of the Students

Sex	Number of Students	Percentage
Male	87	44.6
Female	108	54.4
Others	Nil	Nil
Total	195	100

Source: HOD's Office, 2024.

Table 1 shows that among the 195 respondents 87 representing 44.6% are male while 108 representing 54.4% are female. Overall, the sample population is slightly skewed towards females.

Research Question 1: What are the most common prepositional errors committed by students of English department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

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Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviation of students of English department of NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka on extent of most common prepositional errors committed by students based on the test conducted.

Statistics

Scores

N	Valid	195
	Missing	0
Mean		4.0564
Std. Deviation		1.26142
Minimum		2.00
Maximum		8.00

Table 2 reveals a mean score of 4.0564 indicating that student of English department are little above average in their proficiency in preposition usage. The standard deviation of 1.261 indicates a moderate spread of scores around the mean. This means that most students' scores fall within about 3 points of the mean.

Table 3: Scores of students on the test of use of simple prepositions

Scores

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	29	14.6	14.9	13.3
	3.00	55	27.8	28.2	30.3
	4.00	20	10.1	10.3	46.7
	5.00	46	23.2	23.6	57.9
	6.00	41	20.7	21.0	67.2
	7.00	1	.5	.5	79.0
	8.00	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	195	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that 29. 55, 20, 46, 41, 1 and 3 are the frequency of the scores of the students on the test conducted. It entails that 29 representing 14.6% of the students got 2, 55 of the students representing 27.8% got 3. Also 20 representing 10.1% of the students got 4, 46 of the students representing 23.2% of them got 5, 41 of the students representing 20.7% got 6. Furthermore, 1 student representing 0.5% got 7 while 3 of the students representing 1.5% got all the questions asked.

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Research Question 2: What factors contribute to prepositional misuse among these students?

Table 4: Mean ratings of English department students on the factors that contribute to prepositional misuse among them.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	STD DEV	REMARKS
1.	First language interference	3.59	0.60	Agree
2.	Limited exposure to English	3.56	0.54	Agree
3.	Lack of practice	3.77	0.42	Agree
4	Complex prepositional rules	3.75	0.43	Agree
5	Difficulties in remembering which preposition to use in specific context.	3.56	0.50	Agree

Table 4 reveals the mean ratings and standard deviation on the causes of misuse of prepositions. The table shows that the respondents agree with the statements on the causes of prepositional misuse among the students of English department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This entails that factors such as First language interference, limited exposure, lack of practice, complex prepositional rules and difficulties in remembering which preposition to use in specific context contribute to the misuse of prepositions as observed in the table above.

Research Question 3: How can prepositional accuracy be improved among English department students?

Table 5: Mean ratings of the students of English department on proposed strategies on how prepositional accuracy can be improved among them students.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	STD DEV	REMARKS
1.	More practice exercises involving prepositions	3.67	0.47	Agree
2.	Incorporating prepositions into different language skills(reading, writing, speaking, listening)	3.58	0.49	Agree
3.	Seeking clarification from lecturers or peers when unsure about preposition usage.	2.05	0.82	Disagree
4.	Utilizing online resources or language learning apps.	3.68	0.47	Agree
5.	Regular assessment of prepositional accuracy	3.32	0.61	Agree

In table 5, the respondents agree with all the statements except one as the strategies to improve the use of preposition among the English department students. It reveals that

with consistent practice, incorporation of preposition into different language skills, utilizing online resources and regular assessment of prepositional accuracy can enhance the its usage while seeking clarification from lecturers and peer on unsure prepositional usage was not agreed upon.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of degree year one and degree year two students of English department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka on the test of common prepositional use test.

Table 6: t-test on mean scores of degree year one and degree year two students on the common prepositional use test

Group Statistics

	level of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Scores	Degree Year one	99	3.34	1.313	.134
	Degree Year two	96	4.94	1.219	.123

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Table 7: Independent Sample test

Independent Samples Test

;		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Scores	Equal variances assumed	1.772	.185	-8.800	193	.000	-1.596	.181	-1.953	-1.238
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.790	190.912	.000	-1.596	.182	-1.954	-1.238

The tables show a mean score of 3.34 and standard deviation of 1.313 for degree year one students and a mean score of 4.94 and standard deviation of 4.94 for degree year two students. While independent samples test table shows p-value > 0.05(0.185) indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected while alternative accepted. This implies that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the students of year one and year two.

Hypothesis Two

Ho_2: there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the degree year one and degree year two students of the English department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka on the causes of prepositional misuse.

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Table 8: t-test on the mean rating of the two levels of students on the causes of prepositional misuse

Group Statistics

	level of students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Causes_Misuse	Degree Year one	99	3.6500	.23215	.02369
	Degree Year two	96	3.6444	.19703	.01980

Table 9: Independent Samples Test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower
Causes_Misuse	Equal variances assumed	5.645	.018	.180	193	.857	.00556	.03080	-.05520

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	Equal variances not assumed			.180	186.063	.857	.00556	.03088	-.05536

The tables 8 and 9 show that degree year one mean is 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.23215 and mean of 3.6444 with standard deviation of 0.19703 for degree year two student. While table 7 shows a sig value < 0.05 (0.018) which implies that null hypothesis is accepted indicating that there is no significant difference between the mean rating of degree year one and degree year two students of Nnamdi Azikiwe on the causes of prepositional misuse among them.

Discussion

The findings in Table 1 indicate a slight gender imbalance among the participants, with a higher proportion of female students enrolled in the English program. While figure 1 shows a relatively equal distribution of students across the first and second years of study. The mean score of 4.0564 on the prepositional usage test suggests a moderate level of prepositional proficiency among the English department students. The standard deviation of 2.125 indicates a moderate spread of scores, suggesting a range of abilities within the student population. These reults align with previous research by Elaagip (2018), Wren and Martins (2017), Elnoor (2013), and Abdulkareem (2013), which highlighted the variability in prepositional competence among students.

Table 4 reveals that multiple factors contribute to prepositional errors among the students. These include first language interference, limited exposure to the language, insufficient practice, complex grammatical rules, and memory difficulties. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Altamimi (2018), Wijana (2014) and Al-Khairy (2013).

The results in Table 5 suggest that increased practice, diverse language exposure, and regular assessment are perceived as effective strategies for improving prepositional accuracy. However, the lack of consensus on seeking clarification from teachers or peers is noteworthy. This could be attributed to various factors, including teacher-student relationships, student confidence, and the availability of accessible support systems. The findings are in support of the studies conducted by Mueller (2011), Sotiloye et al, (2015), and Wijana (2014) the pedagogy change is paramount for prepositional rules retention and mastering.

The t-test results indicate a significant difference in prepositional performance between first and second-year students, with second-year students demonstrating higher proficiency. This finding supports the notion that increased exposure to academic English

through coursework contributes to improved language skills, as suggested by Kilimci (2017), Abdulkareem (2013) and Altamimi (2018). Conversely, there was no significant difference in the perceived causes of prepositional errors between the two year levels.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the prevalence of prepositional errors among English department students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. While the majority of the students demonstrate a moderate level of prepositional proficiency, the significant variation in scores highlights the need for targeted interventions. The identification of factors contributing to prepositional difficulties, such as first language interference, limited exposure, and inadequate practice, provides valuable insights for pedagogical development.

Recommendations

Conclusively, strategies for improvement were explored. Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Incorporate explicit preposition instruction into English language courses.
2. Provide ample opportunities for students to practice using preposition in different contexts.
3. Develop instructional materials that focus on common prepositional errors.
4. Encourage students to use dictionaries and grammar resources to improve their prepositional accuracy.
5. To address the issue of seeking clarification, fostering a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable asking questions is crucial. Peer tutoring or collaborative learning activities can also be implemented to encourage peer support.
6. By implementing these recommendations, it is anticipated that English department students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, will experience significant improvement in their prepositional accuracy.

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Appendix

Descriptive Statistics Descriptive Statistics on Causes of Prepositional errors and Strategies for Improvement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
First language interference	195	2	4	3.59	.597
Limited exposure to English	195	2	4	3.55	.538
Lack of practice	195	3	4	3.77	.419
Complex prepositional rules	195	3	4	3.75	.432
Difficulties in remembering which preposition to use in specific context.	195	3	4	3.56	.497
More practice exercises involving prepositions	195	3	4	3.67	.471
Incorporating prepositions into different language skills(reading, writing, speaking, listening)	195	3	4	3.58	.494
Seeking clarification from lecturers or peers when unsure about preposition usage.	195	1	4	2.05	.817
Utilizing online resources or language learning apps.	195	3	4	3.68	.469
Regular assessment of prepositional accuracy	195	2	4	3.32	.610
Valid N (listwise)	195				