CHALLENGES IN PREPOSITION USAGE AMONG PERI-OPERATIVE NURSING STUDENTS AT JOS UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL (JUTH), PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

Innocent Nasuk Dajang[1] **Gaksu, Faith Danjuma[2]**
[1]Department of English, University of Jos (Nigeria)
dajangi@unijos.edu.ng
[2]Department of General Studies, Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin-Ladi (Nigeria)
faithgaksu@yahoo.com

Abstract: Effective communication is vital in healthcare, particularly for peri-operative nursing students, whose work demands accuracy in language and clarity in instructions. Prepositions, as crucial elements of English grammar, present a unique challenge for non-native speakers, especially in specialized fields such as nursing where linguistic precision is necessary for academic success and patient safety. This study investigates the difficulties associated with the use of prepositions among peri-operative nursing students at Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), Plateau State, Nigeria. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and written assessments to explore the prevalence and causes of prepositional errors. Findings indicate that mother-tongue interference, limited grammatical instruction, and inadequate exposure to professional English are significant factors. These challenges hinder students' academic performance and their ability to communicate effectively in clinical settings, potentially jeopardizing patient outcomes. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of second language acquisition and communicative competence, providing a nuanced understanding of the issue. Recommendations include the integration of targeted grammar instruction within nursing education, the adoption of communicative language teaching methodologies, and the use of digital tools for language learning. Addressing these challenges is critical for enhancing the academic and professional capabilities of nursing students, ensuring better healthcare delivery.

Keywords: Communication, Grammar, Interference, Language, Prepositions

---

[1] Corresponding author : Innocent Nasuk Dajang, **ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3636-9462**

1. Introduction

Language is a central tool for communication, particularly in professional fields where accuracy, clarity, and precision are critical. Imelda Woa and Arima (2018) argue that English is one of some languages uses in international social communication. This awareness of the importance of English encourages people to learn English. In the field of healthcare, effective communication ensures the accurate exchange of information between practitioners and patients, minimizing errors and improving outcomes. For peri-operative nursing students, proficiency in English grammar is essential, as their responsibilities demand clear communication in academic, clinical, and administrative settings. However, many nursing students, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts such as Nigeria, struggle with various aspects of English grammar. Among these, the correct use of prepositions poses a significant challenge. According to Chen (2022) students need instruction to develop into competent authors. They need to practice converting their understanding of grammatical ideas from spoken to written form; that points out that students' grammatical choices can affect their writing styles.

Prepositions, though seemingly simple, are complex linguistic elements that contribute to sentence structure and meaning. They are used to indicate relationships of time, place, direction, and manner, among others. Errors in prepositional usage can lead to miscommunication, which in the peri-operative context, can have grave consequences. For example, an incorrectly phrased instruction about administering medication or positioning a patient can lead to adverse outcomes. Despite their importance, prepositions are often underemphasized in English language instruction, particularly in professional curricula such as nursing.

The prevalence of excessive preposition usage and preposition omissions has been identified as prevalent challenges among English as Second Language (ESL) learners. Furthermore, students often encounter challenges when attempting to employ prepositions effectively in their writing skills (Akhtar & Rizwan, 2017).

Prepositions are categorized as one of challenging areas in English Grammar for EFL learners in many countries. Even though they have learned about prepositions since a long time, they still feel confused to use prepositions in the sentences properly (Imelda & Arima, 2018). Prepositions in English are a well-known challenge for learners of English as a second language, as they are one of the most problematic areas (Lindstromberg, 2010). Many students have difficulties in understanding and using prepositions, whether they realize or not. Students lack of understanding the context in using appropriate prepositions and they do not know which preposition to use (Cabuk, 2009). Prepositions are notoriously difficult for English Language Learners to master due to the sheer number of them in their English language and their polysemous nature. Moreover, these prepositions has various meanings and usages that make the learning process equally difficult (Saravanan, 2014).

In Nigeria, the linguistic diversity and prevalence of English as a second language exacerbate these challenges. Many nursing students in Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), Plateau State, face difficulties with prepositions due to mother-tongue interference, inadequate exposure to English in their foundational education, and the absence of context-specific grammar instruction in their nursing programmes. Plateau State, known for its rich linguistic diversity, presents unique challenges, as students often navigate multiple languages, including their native tongues, Pidgin English, and Standard English.

This study aims to investigate the specific challenges peri-operative nursing students at JUTH face in using prepositions. It seeks to identify the most common errors, understand their underlying causes, and propose practical solutions to enhance linguistic competence. The research is guided by the following questions:

- What are the most prevalent errors in preposition usage among peri-operative nursing students at JUTH?
- What factors contribute to these errors?
- How do these linguistic challenges impact academic and clinical performance?
- What strategies can be implemented to address these issues?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the improvement of nursing education and healthcare delivery. By addressing language-related challenges, this research aims to equip nursing students with the tools they need to excel academically and professionally. Furthermore, the findings of this study may inform curriculum development and language instruction strategies, benefiting not only nursing students at JUTH but also other healthcare institutions in similar linguistic and cultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Prepositions in English Grammar

Prepositions are fundamental linguistic elements that establish relationships between words in a sentence. They indicate connections related to time (e.g., before, after), place (e.g., on, in, at), direction (e.g., toward, into), manner (e.g., by, with), and other abstract relationships. Despite their simplicity in form, prepositions are challenging for language learners because their usage often lacks direct equivalents in other languages, and their meanings can be highly context-dependent. Studies (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2021) have noted that prepositions are one of the most error-prone grammatical components for English as Second Language (ESL) learners, particularly because their functions are governed by idiomatic patterns rather than universal grammatical rules.

Prepositions are relatively short words that play a significant role in the overall sense of a sentence. They reveal connections between things, people, and locations. They're also crucial for establishing the flow of the phrase. In a sentence, prepositions are used to link nouns to one another or to other elements of speech. Even though prepositions don't always stand on their own, they're crucial to the dialogue process. Prepositions are an important class of function words that signal various connections between their complements and the parts of speech that come before them in a phrase. Prepositions can indicate a variety of functional relations, including temporal, spatial, and directional ones. Al-Bawaleez, M. and Abdullah, A. (2023)

2.2 Prepositional Challenges among ESL Learners

Numerous studies have highlighted the struggles of ESL learners with prepositions. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (2020), errors in prepositional usage are among the most persistent in the language acquisition process. These errors often stem from negative language transfer, where learners apply the syntactic or semantic rules of their native languages to English. For instance, in many Nigerian indigenous languages, the concept of prepositions is embedded in verbs or nouns, leading to structural mismatches.

Babalola and Olatunji (2022) conducted a study on Nigerian undergraduates' use of English and observed that prepositions were the second most frequently misused grammatical element, following tenses. The researchers attributed these errors to insufficient grammar instruction at the primary and secondary education levels, as well as the influence of Pidgin English, which simplifies prepositional usage compared to Standard English.

2.3 Language Challenges in Healthcare Education

In the healthcare sector, effective communication is non-negotiable. Nursing students, particularly those specializing in peri-operative care, must master a lexicon that combines medical terminology with precise grammatical structures. Studies have shown that linguistic errors, including those involving prepositions, can hinder accurate record-keeping, clinical instructions, and patient communication (Ajiboye & Adelakun, 2021). Errors in prepositions can alter the intended meaning of clinical instructions. For example, confusing "on the

patient" with "by the patient" in a clinical context could result in significant misunderstandings.

Globally, research on linguistic challenges in healthcare education highlights the need for tailored language instruction. In a study conducted in South Africa, Nyandoro and Mhlongo (2020) found that nursing students from non-English-speaking backgrounds struggled with grammar, which impacted their clinical performance. Similar findings were reported by O'Reilly and Peters (2022) in a study of immigrant nurses in the United States. Both studies emphasized the importance of integrating language support into nursing education to improve professional communication.

2.4 Studies on Prepositions in Nigerian Contexts

Nigeria's linguistic diversity presents unique challenges for English language learners. With over 500 indigenous languages, many Nigerians grow up bilingual or multilingual, often learning English as a second or third language. The prevalence of Nigerian Pidgin as a lingua franca further complicates the mastery of Standard English grammar. According to Adegbite (2020), Nigerian Pidgin simplifies grammatical rules, including the omission or substitution of prepositions, leading to fossilized errors among learners.

In the context of healthcare education, the limited focus on professional English exacerbates these challenges. A study by Ogundipe and Alabi (2023) on nursing students in Lagos revealed that prepositional errors were common in written and spoken communication, often resulting in unclear instructions or documentation errors. The researchers recommended targeted language interventions to address these gaps.

2.5 Implications of Prepositional Errors in Healthcare Communication

The consequences of prepositional errors in healthcare settings are far-reaching. Miscommunication can lead to errors in patient care, from incorrect medication administration to poor coordination among healthcare teams. In peri-operative nursing, where precision is critical, such errors can compromise patient safety. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), communication errors are among the leading causes of adverse events in healthcare, underscoring the need for linguistic competence among practitioners.

2.6 Strategies for Addressing Prepositional Challenges

Addressing prepositional challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Several strategies have been proposed in the literature:

1. Grammar-Focused Instruction: Traditional grammar instruction remains relevant for addressing prepositional errors. Larsen-Freeman (2021) advocates for contextualized grammar lessons that integrate prepositions into real-life scenarios, such as clinical simulations for nursing students.

2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): CLT emphasizes functional language use, helping students apply grammatical knowledge in practical settings. Studies (e.g., Richards & Rodgers, 2022) suggest that CLT can improve fluency and accuracy in professional contexts.

3. Technology-Assisted Learning: Digital tools, such as grammar apps and virtual simulations, can provide interactive and personalized learning experiences. Ajayi and Bello (2023) found that nursing students who used grammar-focused apps demonstrated significant improvements in prepositional usage.

4. Mother-Tongue Awareness: Recognizing the influence of mother tongues on English learning can help educators design more effective interventions. Babalola and Olatunji (2022) recommend contrastive analysis to address language transfer issues.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

A strong theoretical foundation is essential to understanding the linguistic challenges faced by peri-operative nursing students, particularly with prepositions. This study is grounded in theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and communicative competence,

which provide insights into the processes and challenges of learning English as a second language. These theories help contextualize the findings and inform the development of strategies to address the observed challenges.

1. Second Language Acquisition Theories

i. Interlanguage Theory

Developed by Selinker (1972), interlanguage theory posits that second language learners create a transitional linguistic system that incorporates elements of their native language (L1) and the target language (L2). This system evolves as learners receive more input and practice. However, the interlanguage can fossilize, meaning learners may persistently use incorrect forms if errors are not corrected.

In the context of JUTH nursing students, interlanguage theory explains why certain prepositional errors are common. For instance, a student whose native language does not use prepositions as distinct grammatical units may overgeneralize or misuse prepositions in English. Fossilization often occurs due to inadequate feedback or reinforcement in academic and clinical environments.

ii. Error Analysis Theory

Corder's (1967) error analysis theory focuses on identifying and understanding the errors learners make as a window into their learning processes. Errors are not merely signs of failure but provide evidence of how learners internalize and process the rules of a second language.

For nursing students, analyzing errors in prepositional usage can reveal patterns influenced by their linguistic background, such as omitting prepositions (He waits the doctor instead of He waits for the doctor) or substituting incorrect ones (She operates in the patient instead of She operates on the patient). These errors offer clues to underlying difficulties, which can guide targeted interventions.

iii. Transfer Theory

Language transfer refers to the influence of a learner's L1 on the acquisition of an L2. This transfer can be positive (facilitating learning) or negative (causing errors). Odlin (1989) highlights that prepositions are particularly prone to negative transfer because their usage varies widely across languages.

In Nigeria, the diverse linguistic backgrounds of nursing students mean that prepositional errors may stem from different sources. For instance, a Hausa-speaking student might omit prepositions that are implied in Hausa but explicit in English, while a Yoruba-speaking student might use prepositions incorrectly due to differences in syntax.

2. Communicative Competence Model

Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, which expands the definition of language proficiency beyond grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Canale and Swain (1980) further refined this model, emphasizing the following components:

Grammatical Competence: Mastery of the linguistic code, including syntax, morphology, and prepositions.

Sociolinguistic Competence: The ability to use language appropriately in different contexts. For nursing students, this includes understanding how prepositions function in medical discourse.

Discourse Competence: The ability to produce coherent and cohesive communication. Misuse of prepositions can disrupt coherence, leading to misunderstandings in clinical settings.

Strategic Competence: The ability to overcome communication challenges through strategies like paraphrasing or clarification.

For peri-operative nursing students, communicative competence is crucial for effective interactions with patients, colleagues, and supervisors. Misuse of prepositions affects not only grammatical competence but also the clarity and appropriateness of communication in professional contexts.

3. Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning. According to this theory, learners acquire language through meaningful interactions within their social and cultural contexts. This framework is particularly relevant for nursing students, who learn language not only in classrooms but also through clinical practice, peer discussions, and mentorship.

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the importance of scaffolding, where learners are supported by more knowledgeable individuals to perform tasks beyond their current capabilities. For JUTH nursing students, scaffolding can take the form of language workshops, peer tutoring, or supervision by linguistically competent mentors.

4. Relevance to Nursing Education

The application of these theories in the context of peri-operative nursing education is critical for addressing prepositional challenges:

- Interlanguage theory emphasizes the need for feedback mechanisms to prevent fossilization of errors.
- Error analysis theory informs the design of diagnostic assessments to identify common prepositional errors.
- Transfer theory highlights the importance of addressing mother-tongue interference through contrastive analysis.
- Communicative competence model provides a holistic framework for integrating language skills into nursing curricula.

- Sociocultural theory underscores the value of interactive and context-driven learning strategies in clinical environments.

By combining insights from these theories, this study seeks to understand and address the specific challenges faced by peri-operative nursing students at JUTH, ultimately improving their linguistic competence and professional communication.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context

This study aims to investigate the challenges of preposition usage among peri-operative nursing students at Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH). To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The quantitative methods were used to identify patterns and frequency of prepositional errors, while the qualitative methods explored the underlying causes and contextual factors influencing these errors. This approach ensures both breadth and depth in the analysis.

3.2 Participants

The target population for this study comprised peri-operative nursing students at JUTH, with a total of 100 students selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across all members of the classes. The sample included 60 students from the first set and 40 from the second set. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be enrolled as peri-operative nursing students at JUTH, be willing to participate, and have the ability to communicate in English.

3.3 Procedures

Data collection was carried out through several methods. Firstly, participants completed a written test designed to assess their knowledge and use of prepositions in English. The test included multiple-choice questions on prepositional usage, sentence completion tasks requiring the correct use of prepositions, and short paragraphs where students had to identify and correct prepositional errors. Additionally, a structured survey was administered to collect demographic information and data on students' linguistic backgrounds, prior exposure to English, and perceptions of their challenges with prepositions.

Further data collection involved semi-structured interviews with a subset of 20 students and 5 lecturers. These interviews explored students' experiences with learning English prepositions, the role of mother-tongue interference, and lecturers' perspectives on the grammatical challenges faced by their students. Moreover, students' communication during clinical practice sessions was observed to assess the real-life implications of prepositional errors in professional contexts. This included observing how students gave verbal instructions, documented patient records, and interacted with colleagues.

The data collected was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data from the written tests and surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Frequency distributions were used to identify the most common prepositional errors, while chi-square tests examined correlations between linguistic background and error patterns. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used to analyze data from interviews and observations. Recurring themes were identified, such as mother-tongue interference, inadequate prior instruction, and the impact of clinical contexts on language use.

The mixed-methods approach adopted in this study ensures that it captures both the quantitative prevalence and qualitative context of prepositional challenges. By combining these methods, the study provides a robust foundation for interpreting findings and making recommendations. Ultimately, the insights gained from this research aim to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by peri-operative nursing students in using prepositions correctly and to inform strategies for improving their English language proficiency.

4. Results

The findings of this study cover three main areas: (1) prevalence and types of errors, (2) factors contributing to errors, and (3) implications of these errors in clinical and academic settings. A closer examination of the data reveals that prepositional errors are a significant concern among peri-operative nursing students at JUTH.

A quantitative analysis of the written tests administered to these students uncovered a high prevalence of prepositional errors, suggesting that this is a pervasive issue that warrants attention. The substantial number of errors documented in this study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address this problem, as prepositional accuracy is crucial for effective communication in nursing practice. Inaccurate use of prepositions can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and potentially, compromised patient care.

Furthermore, understanding the types of prepositional errors that are most common among peri-operative nursing students can inform the development of tailored pedagogical strategies to address these specific challenges. By exploring the root causes of these errors and their implications in clinical and academic settings, this study aims to contribute to the improvement of nursing education and practice at JUTH.

The written tests revealed a high prevalence of prepositional errors among peri-operative nursing students at JUTH.

Table 1.

Summary of the frequency and types of errors observed

Error Type	Frequency (%)	Examples
Omission of prepositions	35%	"She waited the doctor" instead of "She waited for the doctor"
Substitution of prepositions	40%	"She operated in the patient" instead of "She operated on the patient"
Addition of unnecessary prepositions	15%	"He entered into the room" instead of "He entered the room"
Incorrect preposition choice	10%	"He is good in surgery" instead of "He is good at surgery"

The study's findings on the prevalence and types of prepositional errors among peri-operative nursing students at JUTH reveal a concerning trend. A quantitative analysis of written tests administered to these students uncovered a high prevalence of prepositional errors, suggesting that this is a pervasive issue that warrants attention. The substantial number of errors documented in this study underscores the need for targeted interventions to address this problem, as prepositional accuracy is crucial for effective communication in nursing practice.

One of the most frequently encountered challenges in English language acquisition is the correct use of prepositions, particularly concerning time and location. Students often grapple with the distinctions between "at," "on," and "in" when expressing temporal and spatial references. For instance, a common error might be saying, "The surgery was done in 9:00 a.m." instead of the correct form, "The surgery was done at 9:00 a.m." This misapplication indicates a broader misunderstanding of time prepositions, where "at" is conventionally used for specific points in time while "in" is reserved for longer durations or periods. Similarly, errors related to directional prepositions such as "to," "into," "onto," and "toward" also arise frequently. Students often struggle with fixed phrases and idiomatic expressions that require specific prepositions, highlighting a lack of familiarity with the nuances of English idiomatic usage.

Research and interviews with students have revealed that a significant source of prepositional errors stems from mother-tongue interference. In many Nigerian languages, such as Hausa and Yoruba, prepositions can be implied rather than explicitly stated. This linguistic structure often leads to omission errors in English sentence construction, as students might subconsciously translate their native grammar into English. Furthermore, students from diverse linguistic backgrounds may inadvertently substitute prepositions due to different syntactic rules. The influence of Nigerian Pidgin, especially prevalent in regions such as Plateau State, further complicates the prepositional landscape. Nigerian Pidgin simplifies language constructions and often omits prepositions entirely, resulting in fossilized errors that indicate a deeply rooted misunderstanding of standard prepositional use.

Inadequate prior instruction and limited context-specific practice also contribute to prepositional errors. Surveys conducted among students indicated a concerning trend: approximately 75% reported having limited exposure to explicit grammar instruction during their primary and secondary education. Many students highlighted that the teaching of prepositions was often relegated to the background, with insufficient emphasis placed during

their English classes. This lack of foundational knowledge creates substantial gaps that make it difficult for learners to master the correct usage of prepositions in English. Moreover, observations of students' learning environments revealed a significant deficiency in opportunities for context-specific practice of prepositional usage, especially in clinical and academic settings.

The implications of prepositional errors are far-reaching. Errors in prepositional usage can substantially undermine students' academic performance, as prepositional mistakes can confuse meaning and lead to misinterpretation in written assignments, essays, and examination responses. In clinical communication, imprecise preposition use can create ambiguity, potentially leading to delays and complications in patient care. Inaccuracies in documentation can have serious implications for patient records, affecting patient management and departmental operations. Furthermore, the impact of linguistic inaccuracies, particularly in prepositional usage, carries significant implications in healthcare settings, especially in peri-operative contexts, potentially jeopardizing patient safety. Therefore, it is essential to address prepositional errors through targeted interventions, including explicit grammar instruction and context-specific practice, to enhance the communication skills of peri-operative nursing students and ensure effective and safe patient care.

4.1 Summary of Key Findings

High Prevalence of Errors: Prepositional errors were identified in 90% of student responses, with substitution and omission being the most frequent.

Contributing Factors: Mother-tongue interference, Pidgin English influence, and inadequate grammar instruction were the primary causes.

Negative Impacts: Errors affected academic performance, clinical communication, and, in some cases, patient safety.

5. Discussion

The discussion delves into the implications of the findings, comparing them to existing literature, exploring the root causes of prepositional errors, and proposing solutions to address these challenges. It also highlights how these challenges affect peri-operative nursing education and professional practice.

i.   Prevalence and Patterns of Errors

The study revealed a high prevalence of prepositional errors, with substitution and omission being the most frequent types. This finding aligns with previous studies by Babalola and Olatunji (2022), who observed similar trends among Nigerian students. The unique contribution of this study lies in its focus on peri-operative nursing students, whose professional communication demands higher linguistic precision.

Substitution and Omission Errors

The frequent substitution of prepositions (in for on, at for in) and omission errors reflect the influence of mother-tongue structures. Nigerian languages, including Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, often lack direct equivalents for English prepositions or use them differently. For example:

Hausa: Na shiga gida translates to "I entered house," omitting the preposition into.

Yoruba: Mo wa inu yara translates to "I am inside room," where inu serves as both a locative marker and preposition.

The omission of prepositions in these native constructions results in fossilized errors when learners translate directly into English.

Challenges with Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions, such as responsible for and good at, posed significant difficulties. These phrases require memorization as they do not follow consistent rules. This challenge is well-documented in SLA literature (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2021),

which emphasizes the importance of exposure and practice in mastering idiomatic prepositions.

ii. Factors Contributing to Errors

Mother-Tongue Interference

The influence of students' native languages is a significant factor in prepositional errors. Odlin's (1989) transfer theory supports this finding, explaining that learners transfer linguistic structures from their L1 to L2, leading to errors when the languages have differing grammatical systems. For peri-operative nursing students at JUTH, this linguistic interference is compounded by limited exposure to Standard English outside academic settings. For example:

- Students from rural areas may predominantly speak their native language or Nigerian Pidgin, which simplifies or omits prepositions.
- Urban students, while more exposed to English, may still exhibit errors due to inconsistencies in their foundational grammar instruction.

Influence of Nigerian Pidgin

Nigerian Pidgin serves as a lingua franca for many students but lacks the grammatical complexity of Standard English. Pidgin often reduces prepositional phrases, such as for house instead of in the house. This simplification can lead to fossilized errors when students attempt to construct Standard English sentences.

Inadequate Grammar Instruction

The findings confirm that gaps in prior grammar instruction are a critical factor. As highlighted by Babalola and Olatunji (2022), English instruction in many Nigerian schools focuses more on vocabulary and reading comprehension than on grammar. Prepositions, often regarded as minor elements, receive minimal attention.

Limited Context-Specific Practice

Nursing education at JUTH, like in many institutions, prioritizes medical terminology over linguistic accuracy. As a result, students lack opportunities to practice prepositional usage in relevant clinical scenarios. This finding is consistent with Ajiboye and Adelakun's (2021) study, which noted that professional contexts often neglect foundational language skills.

iii. Implications of Prepositional Errors

Academic Performance

Prepositional errors negatively impacted students' academic writing, leading to unclear expressions and lower grades. For instance, the sentence "The patient was prepared on surgery" fails to convey the intended meaning due to incorrect prepositional usage. These issues mirror findings from Adegbite (2020), who reported similar challenges among Nigerian undergraduates.

Clinical Communication

The real-world implications of prepositional errors are particularly concerning in peri-operative contexts, where clear communication is vital. Errors such as Place the instrument in the tray instead of on the tray were observed during clinical practice, causing confusion and delays. These findings align with the World Health Organization's (2023) report, which identifies communication errors as a leading cause of adverse events in healthcare.

Patient Safety

The potential for patient harm due to miscommunication underscores the urgency of addressing linguistic challenges. For example, incorrect prepositions in verbal or written instructions during surgery can lead to errors in patient positioning, medication administration, or instrument handling.

iv. Strategies for Improvement

Grammar-Focused Instruction

The study underscores the need for explicit grammar instruction tailored to nursing contexts. Teaching prepositions through practical examples, such as role-playing clinical scenarios, can help students internalize correct usage. Larsen-Freeman (2021) emphasizes that grammar lessons must be contextualized to real-life situations to enhance retention.

Incorporating Technology

Technology-assisted learning, such as grammar apps and virtual simulations, can provide personalized feedback and practice opportunities. Ajayi and Bello (2023) found that students using apps like Grammarly showed significant improvement in prepositional accuracy.

Contrastive Analysis

Lecturers can use contrastive analysis to highlight differences between students' native languages and English, addressing specific areas prone to errors. For example, comparing Hausa or Yoruba sentence structures with English can clarify the role of prepositions.

Professional Language Workshops

JUTH should integrate professional English workshops into its nursing curriculum. These workshops can focus on improving prepositional usage in both written and verbal communication, with activities such as:
a. Medical role-playing scenarios.
b. Peer reviews of clinical documentation.
c. Simulations of patient interactions.

Mentorship and Scaffolding

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory highlights the importance of scaffolding in language learning. Pairing students with mentors who are proficient in English can provide real-time feedback and correction during clinical practice.

i. Contributions to Literature and Practice

This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the intersection of linguistic challenges and professional training in nursing education. It underscores the importance of integrating language instruction into specialized training programmes, particularly in multilingual contexts like Nigeria. By addressing prepositional errors, JUTH can enhance not only students' academic and professional performance but also the quality of patient care delivered in its facilities.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the challenges peri-operative nursing students at Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) face in mastering English prepositions. It has shown that these difficulties are deeply rooted in linguistic, educational, and contextual factors, and they significantly impact students' academic performance, clinical communication, and, ultimately, patient safety.

The challenges of prepositions among peri-operative nursing students at JUTH reflect a complex interplay of linguistic, educational, and contextual factors. Addressing these challenges is critical for improving students' academic performance, enhancing their clinical communication skills, and ensuring patient safety. By implementing targeted interventions, such as curriculum reforms, mentorship programs, and technology-assisted learning, JUTH can equip its nursing students with the linguistic competence needed to excel in their professional roles.

This study calls for greater attention to the role of language in professional education, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings. Future research should explore the effectiveness of specific interventions in improving students' mastery of prepositions and other aspects of grammar, thereby contributing to the broader goal of producing competent and confident healthcare professionals.

The study makes the following recommendations for improvement:

Curriculum Reforms

Explicit Grammar Instruction: Nursing curricula should include modules on English grammar, with a specific focus on prepositions, tailored to the context of medical communication.

Language Workshops: Regular workshops on professional English can help students practice correct prepositional usage in clinical scenarios.

Use of Technology

Grammar learning apps, virtual simulations, and online resources can provide students with personalized practice and feedback.

Mentorship Programmes

Pairing students with mentors who are proficient in English can provide real-time feedback during clinical practice, helping students internalize correct prepositional usage.

Contrastive Analysis

Lecturers can use contrastive analysis to address language-specific challenges, helping students understand how English prepositions differ from their native language structures.

Continuous Assessment and Feedback

Incorporating regular assessments of students' written and verbal communication skills, with a focus on prepositions, can help identify and address errors early.

References

Ajiboye, T. O., & Adelakun, S. T. (2021). The role of grammar in professional language use in healthcare education: A study of nursing students in Nigeria. *Journal of Language and Professional Development,* 15(2), 124-138.

Ajayi, A. T., & Bello, S. A. (2023). The impact of language learning apps on the grammatical proficiency of Nigerian undergraduates: A case study of peri-operative nursing students. *Nigerian Educational Review*, 22(4), 58-72.

Akhtar, S., & Rizwan, M. (2017). An analysis of preposition (idiomatic phrases, prepositional phrases and zero prepositions) detection errors in the writing of graduate ESL learners of Pakistan. *Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics*

Al-Bawaleez, M. and Abdullah, A. (2023) Analysing preposition errors made by Jordanian University Students. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, **11**, 96-111. https://doi.org/10.4234/jss.2023.1110007

Babalola, I. O., & Olatunji, I. (2022). A study of prepositional errors in the written English of Nigerian university students. *Nigerian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 18(1), 50-68.

Cabuk, S. (2009). The use of preposition in second language acquisition process. Middle East Technical University. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.632.9192&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Celce-Murcia, M., & Larsen-Freeman, D. (2021). The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course (3rd ed.). *National Geographic Learning.*

Chen, A. (2022). The effects of writing strategy instruction on EFL learners' writing development. *English Language Teaching,* 15, 29-37. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v15n3p29

Imelda, W. & Arima R. D. P. (2018). Challenges in implementing prepositions of time, place and direction for first semester students of English Language Education Study Program At Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta . *English Language Teaching and Research Journal* http://apspbi.or.id/eltr English Language Education Study Program Association, Indonesia.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2021). Techniques and principles in language teaching (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lindstromberg, S. (2010). English prepositions explained (revised ed.). Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing Company.

Odlin, T. (1989). Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning. Cambridge University Press.

Saravan. J. (2014). The use of English prepositions: An empirical study. VV College of Engineering. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279166438_The_Use_of_English_Prepositions_An_Empirical_Study

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Harvard University Press.

World Health Organization. (2023). Communication in healthcare: Improving patient safety through effective communication. World Health Organization. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/publications.