

## **King Faisal university Students Problems in Using Preposition of Time (in, on, at)**

**Nadia Rebhi Husni Hasan**

**English Department at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia**

### **Abstract**

There is a problem with students using prepositions of time and they commit mistakes in their speaking, writing and exam preparation. Despite the fact that prepositions of time are simple to use, they take a lot of marks in the exams. The researcher gives English 101 students at King Faisal University a preposition time test in the third semester. In this study, the researcher will show the most common problems when it comes to preposition of time, as well as why nonnative students commit these mistakes.

**Keywords:** preposition of time, interference, idiomatic expressions, lack of exposure to natural English.

## 1.Introduction

English language learners (EFL) must acquire four fundamental English skills. Correct writing and fluent communication in English are skills that are currently in great demand due to globalization and the rising usage of English in education, communication, business, and entertainment. Saudi EFL learners experience problems with the use of correct prepositions because some of them don't exist in their first language(L1), which is Arabic. There are many reasons for the misuse of prepositions, one of which is the lack of practices them in curricula. Furthermore, many prepositions don't have rules governing their use, while others have different functions, which led to problems with using them correctly.

Preposition of time are important because they help to indicate when an action or event occurred. They provide information about the duration, frequency, and timing of an action or event. Without prepositions of time, it would be difficult to understand the sequence of events in a sentence or paragraph. For example, consider the following sentence: "I will meet you at the park". This sentence doesn't provide any information about when the meeting will take place. However, if we add a preposition of time, such as " I will meet you at the park at 3 pm," we now know exactly when the meeting will occur.

Prepositions of time also help to clarify any confusion that may raise from using ambiguous phrases like "yesterday", "tomorrow", or " next week". For instance, if someone says " I will see you tomorrow", it is unclear whether they mean the next day or some other day in the future. However, if they say " I will see you tomorrow at 10 am," there is no ambiguity.

In summary, prepositions of time are essential for providing clarity and precision in communication. They help to avoid confusion and ensure that everyone understands when an action or event occurred

## **2.Statement of the problem**

A preposition relates the noun or pronoun following it to another word in the sentence. Since prepositions have different meanings, therefore, using a particular preposition affects the way other words in a sentence relate to one another. A preposition is never used by itself in a sentence, it always a part of prepositional phrase. Fatikids (2002:83) states that one of the problems of misuse of prepositions is that foreign students confuse their meaning by using one preposition instead of another.

Preposition of time can be difficult for non-native English speakers to employ while speaking or writing in the language, and they often lose marks in tests as a result and they dislike the use of the preposition of time.

## **3. Research questions**

- 1.What are the students' prepositional time errors?
2. Why do Saudi students make these errors?
3. How can we help students comprehend the preposition of time better

## **4.Objectives of the study**

The major goal of this study is to concentrate on the challenges that third-semester business department students at King Faisal University confront when learning prepositions of time (in, on, at).

Additionally, we will discuss the reasons why learners make errors with the preposition of time, including insufficient practice time and translating from their native tongue.

### **5. Significance of the study**

This study is significant because it reveals the errors that students make when using prepositions of time and offers some teaching methods for prepositions of time.

This study also demonstrates the significance of the preposition of time for understanding spoken and written language and how students will need it in their future employment. This study also explores the causes of Saudi students' difficulties with preposition of time.

### **6. Review of related literature**

Sarah ,S. (2021) did study on the difficulties college students have using prepositions of time. The study was conducted at Zawia University with English second semester students as a sample. In this study, 40 students—15 men and 25 women—took part. A test on preposition of time that had 20 questions was administered by the researcher. The study produced various recommendations and fixes to assist students in employing prepositions of time correctly and frequently for improved learning.

Ibrahim, A. (2020) studied how difficult it was for EFL students to use proper English prepositions. Ten students from the faculty of sciences and arts, levels 7 and 8, participated in the study. The primary research tool was a written test that was used to collect data using the descriptive statistical method. The outcomes of the quantitative analysis of the data were as follows. Students in Saudi Arabia had

difficulty using the proper prepositions. In their regular communications as well as their writing assignments, students ran into the same issue.

Diane, S. (2019) conducted a research on an analysis of students' errors in using preposition "in, on, at" at junior high school Pembangunan Bagan Batu Rokan Hilir. This research was aimed at obtain the proportion (frequency and the percentage) of types of students' errors in using preposition "in, on, at" on their writing descriptive text production. In addition, the researcher also wanted to investigate the most common errors that the students commit in using preposition "in, on, at" on their writing descriptive text production. Therefore, the objective of this research was to investigate the types of students' errors in using preposition "in, on, at" at the seventh grade of junior high school Pembangunan Bagan Batu and to find out the students' most common errors in using preposition "in, on, at" at junior high school Pembangunan Bagan Batu. This research was descriptive quantitative research. The researcher used simple random sampling. There were 30 samples from 200 respondents. to collect the data, the researcher used writing test to find out the types of students' errors in using preposition "in, on, at". Based on data analysis, the researcher found the total amounts of errors made by students were 213 errors. In which 13,15% errors in omission ,32,39% errors in insertion,54,46% errors in selection of incorrect. Then, the most common errors made by the students was selection of incorrect with 54,46%.

Abdullah, N. (2014) conducted a research on positioning of time usage mistakes. The researcher employs a qualitative descriptive methodology in this study. The researcher describes the many types of errors and where they came from. The methods for conducting this study's error analysis were as follows. The first step is

to gather a sample of language learners in order to offer the information discovered after 19 students took a test that included a preposition of time.

Error identification is the second step. Based on the area that was tested, the researcher pinpoints the errors. The third step, called "description of errors," entails describing student-made error forms. The following step is error explanation, which details the causes of errors. The final step is error evaluation, which assesses student errors. According to the study's findings, SMP YMJ Ciutat second grade pupils made 151 mistakes when utilizing the preposition of time. With 151 errors out of 380 items, the researcher categorizes the sort of error that happened in misinformation. Another finding is the categorization of error sources into two groups. Overgeneralization and disregard for role limitations are those.

Nizar, W. (2010) conducted a study on the proficiency of English time prepositions among Iraqi EFL college students. During the academic year (2009–2010), fourth-year students at the College of Basic Education/Diyala University were evaluated on their proficiency in using English time prepositions. The objective of the study is to construct a 20-item exam. The results of the study show that inappropriate preposition use is a serious learning problem. Due to their inability to precisely explain an object's relationship to its environment, the results demonstrate that Iraqi EFL college students lack awareness of proper preposition usage.

## **7. Difficulty of Preposition of Time**

Why are prepositions of time so challenging for Saudi students?

## **L1 Interference**

L1 interference is a major factor in the difficulty of learning prepositions. Various . languages have various numbers of prepositions since not all languages are created equal. Because of this, prepositions in English frequently lack a direct equivalent in the learners' original language. For instance, in Arabic, the prepositions used in the phrases "in the afternoon," "on Tuesday," and "at 12 o'clock" are different from those used in English. Prepositions are challenging to learn because they lack a direct equivalent in the learner's native tongue. Additionally, prepositions in English have a variety of uses and meanings. For instance, there are more than 22 alternative interpretations for the preposition "of" in English. It can be very challenging for English language learners to choose the appropriate preposition to employ in any given context because different languages also conceive time and space relationships differently.

## **Idiomatic expressions**

Prepositions of time are often used in idiomatic expressions that don't follow standard grammar rules. For example, we say "at night " instead of " in the night". These expressions can be difficult to learn and remember.

## **Lack of exposure to natural English**

Nonnative students may not have had enough exposure to natural English usage of prepositions of time in their daily lives or in their English classes. This can make it harder for them to internalize the correct usage and patterns.

## Exceptions

There are many exceptions and special cases that can make it difficult to remember which preposition to use in a particular context.

## 8.Methodology

### 8.1 Participants

Participants were third-semester King Faisal University business department students. They were 100 female students.

## 9.Methods of Data Collection

### 9.1 Test

A test on preposition of time was created by the researcher and has 20 questions. Three options (in, on, and at) are provided for each question's response. One point was given for each accurate response. The three prepositions of time (in, on, and at) are included in the test since they are the ones that are most frequently used in writing assignments and everyday speech. Furthermore, students always learn these three prepositions of time (in, on, and at) when they study English.

Questions		Frequency	Percent	
1.I usually wake up-----6 o'clock in the morning.	Q1	Incorrect	22	22%
		Correct	78	78%
2.We have a meeting -----Monday afternoon.	Q2	Incorrect	43	43%
		Correct	57	57%
3.People go to the beach----	Q3	Incorrect	28	28%



summer.		Correct	72	72%
4. I have lunch-----the afternoon.	Q4	Incorrect	55	55%
		Correct	45	45%
5.Munira will graduate from university----- July.	Q5	Incorrect	58	58%
		Correct	42	42%
6. Are you going to do anything special ----- your birthday?	Q6	Incorrect	69	69%
		Correct	31	31%
7.People celebrate ----- New Year's Day.	Q7	Incorrect	68	68%
		Correct	32	32%
8. My birthday is ----- the 19th of June.	Q8	Incorrect	74	74%
		Correct	26	26%
9. I went to Italy ----- 2018.	Q9	Incorrect	64	64%
		Correct	36	36%
10. The weather is cold ---- --- winter.	Q10	Incorrect	42	42%
		Correct	58	58%
11. I go shopping ----- Friday.	Q11	Incorrect	61	61%
		Correct	39	39%
12.We usually have lunch - --noon.	Q12	Incorrect	42	42%
		Correct	58	58%

13.The store is closed----- ---Christmas Day.	Q13	Incorrect	47	47%
		Correct	53	53%
14.She was born ----- 1995.	Q14	Incorrect	37	37%
		Correct	63	63%
15. She will travel ----- the 3rd of April.	Q15	Incorrect	79	79%
		Correct	21	21%
16. I go to the beach ----- --- Autumn.	Q16	Incorrect	35	35%
		Correct	65	65%
17. My father sleeps----- the morning.	Q17	Incorrect	69	69%
		Correct	31	31%
18. I have English class---- Sunday.	Q18	Incorrect	59	59%
		Correct	41	41%
19. He eats pizza -----the evening.	Q19	Incorrect	78	78%
		Correct	22	20%
20.My busy period is ----- ---November.	Q20	Incorrect	48	48.0
		Correct	52	52.0

Table 1: Test Results

### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	1.78	.416
Q2	1.57	.498
Q3	1.72	.451
Q4	1.45	.500
Q5	1.42	.496
Q6	1.31	.465
Q7	1.32	.469
Q8	1.26	.441
Q9	1.36	.482
Q10	1.58	.496
Q11	1.39	.490
Q12	1.58	.496
Q13	1.53	.502
Q14	1.63	.485
Q15	1.21	.409
Q16	1.65	.479
Q17	1.31	.465
Q18	1.41	.494
Q19	1.22	.416
Q20	1.52	.502

Table 2: Descriptive Statistic Result

- Chi-Square Test:

	Chi-Square(a)	Df	Asymp. Sig.	Decision (Compare with 0.05)
Q1	31.36	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q2	1.96	1.00	.162	There are insignificant differences
Q3	19.36	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q4	1.00	1.00	.317	There are insignificant differences
Q5	2.56	1.00	.110	There are insignificant differences
Q6	14.44	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q7	12.96	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q8	23.04	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q9	7.84	1.00	.005	There are significant differences
Q10	2.56	1.00	.110	There are insignificant differences
Q11	4.84	1.00	.028	There are significant differences
Q12	2.56	1.00	.110	There are insignificant differences
Q13	.36	1.00	.549	There are insignificant differences
Q14	6.76	1.00	.009	There are significant differences
Q15	33.64	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q16	9.00	1.00	.003	There are significant differences
Q17	14.44	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q18	3.24	1.00	.072	There are insignificant differences
Q19	31.36	1.00	.000	There are significant differences
Q20	.16	1.00	.689	There are insignificant differences

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 50.0.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test Results

## 10. Discussion of results

In question number 1, 22 students provided incorrect responses for the preposition (at), while 78 students provided accurate responses. This is because "o'clock" is a common word for time in everyday speech. Students correctly answer question number 2 (57) whereas (43) students incorrectly respond. Student responses to question number 18 are (59) incorrect and (41) correct. This indicates that students struggle with using the preposition of time (on), however question number two's answer is more accurate than question number eighteen, despite the fact that both of these questions (2 & 18) follow the same rule about using (on) for days of the week. Question 3 received 28 wrong responses, while 72 right responses were received. Students incorrectly respond to question number 10 with (42) and (58) answer correct. In response to question number 16, 65 students correctly answered while 35 students incorrectly did so. The preposition of time (in) is used to discuss about seasons in questions 3, 16, and 10. According to the findings, students had no trouble employing the preposition of time (in) for seasons. In question number 4, students correctly answer (45) while (55) students incorrectly answer. (69) students incorrectly answered question number 17, whereas (31) individuals correctly did so. In response to question number 19, (78) students gave incorrect answers, while (22) gave the right ones. This indicates that students struggle to use the preposition of time (in) for different times of the day. The rule that applies to questions 4, 17, and 19 is that we must employ the preposition of time (in) for the parts of the day. In response to question number 5, (58) students gave wrong answers, while (42) gave the right ones. In response to question number 20, (48) students gave incorrect answers while (52) gave accurate ones. Despite having performed better on question number 20 than question number 5, this indicates that students struggle with employing the preposition of time (in) with the 12 months. Many students, in

my experience as an English language teacher, are not familiar with the English calendar. Answers to question number 6 from (69) students answered incorrect and (31) answered correct. (68) students incorrectly answered question number 7, whereas (32) individuals correctly did so. This indicates that when the preposition of time (on) is employed for special days, students still struggle with it. In response to question number 13, (47) students answered incorrect and (53) answered correct. While questions 13, 6, and 7 all follow the same rule regarding the use of the preposition of time (on) for special days, question number 13 yields a better answer than questions numbers 6 and 7. The students' familiarity with the word "Christmas" is the reason behind this. In response to question number 8, (26 students) correctly answered, whereas (74) incorrectly. Students still struggle with question number 15, as (79) give incorrect answers while (21) give correct ones. This indicates that when students utilize the preposition of time (on) in a day+month, they have a problem doing so. In response to question number 9, 36 students correctly answered while 64 students incorrectly did so. In response to question number 14, (63), not (37), students correctly respond. This indicates that when students utilize the preposition of time (on) in a day+month, they have a problem doing so. In response to question number 9, 36 students correctly answered while 64 students incorrectly did so. In response to question number 14, (63), not (37), students correctly respond. This indicates that when students employ the preposition of time (in) for year, they have an issue with it. This implies that students respond at random because questions 9 and 14 follow the same preposition of time (in) rule when discussing the year.

When it comes to question number 11 (61) students give incorrect answers and (39) give correct answers. When it comes to question number 18, (59) students get it

incorrect while (41) get it right. This finding indicates that students struggle when using the preposition of time (on) with the days of the week. In response to question number 12, (42) students choose the word "night" as the erroneous preposition of time, while (58) students choose the appropriate response. This finding demonstrates that students rely more on memorization of the word than on connecting it to a rule or a situation.

The results reveals that EFL college students are not aware of using prepositions correctly due to the lack of understanding the relationship of an object to its environment, or its place in a proper phrase. Thus, basic preposition use begs an understanding of what these relationships are, may be the reasons behind the inability of answering correctly.

## **11.Conclusion**

The findings indicate that Saudi students struggle with preposition of time due to a lack of practice. Preposition of time demands effort and repetition, just like any other part of language learning. Additionally, because Arabic and English grammar are different, it may be difficult for Saudi students to comprehend and employ the preposition of time in English. In summary, some foreign language students find preposition of time difficult because they require a lot of memorization and attention to detail.

## **12.Recommendations**

- 1.The researcher offers EFL teachers techniques to help students better understand the preposition of time and encourage them to use it. For instance, employing charts, diagrams, and visual aids like "pictures" to assist students grasp the idea of time prepositions. Offer practice tasks, games, and other activities to the class. Asking questions and giving the students chances to practice will encourage their participation. For example, the following are some teaching tips and classroom games and activities with "at, in,on" preposition of time: preposition of time station, preposition of time tennis, preposition of time brainstorming games, prepositions of time pelmanism and snap, preposition of time hangman, preposition of time things in common prepositions of time closer and closer guessing game, prepositions of time sentence completion guessing game ,prepositions of time answer me ,preposition of time lining up game ,prepositions of time lying games and prepositions of time projects. This means teachers should be more active and creative in teaching, more techniques.
- 2.Providing remedial instruction for students who struggle to understand the preposition of time.
- 3.Inform students of their exam blunders and invite them to incorporate those errors into fresh sentences.
- 4.Curriculum designers need more attention about teaching prepositions in their textbooks and curriculums.
5. The study suggests that EFL teachers teach English prepositions as a system rather than merely a random assortment of disconnected terms.



6.The research also give an opportunity to the future researchers to review further about this research with the function and usefulness of different prepositions, in other word the future researchers can take other examples of preposition of time to find out how the errors are, what types of errors are, what the common errors are or what factors that influence the students' errors in the use of those prepositions.

7.Students should be more active in studying preposition of time in, on, at.

## References

1. Abdelrazig, M. (2017) The difficulties Encounter (ESP) Students in Using English Prepositions of Time .Posha Academy, Saudi Arabia.
2. Dian ,S.(2019) An Analysis of Students' Errors in Using Preposition " in,on,at" at junior High School Pembangunan Began Batu Rokan Hilir
3. Fatikids, T.(2002) Common Mistakes in English. Person Education limited.
4. Ibrahim, A. (2021) Difficulties in Using Correct English Prepositions among EFL Students. Albaha University, Saudi Arabia.
5. Sara, S. (2021) Problems Encountered by University Students in Using Prepositions of Time. Zawia University, Libya.
6. Natalia, Difficulties of using Prepositions of Time towards EFL Learners' Communication Skill. Ciputra University, Indonesia.
7. Nizar, W. (2010) Evaluating Iraqi EFL college Students' Performance in Using English Prepositions. Diyala University, Iraq.
8. Ogerta, K. (2012) Difficulties that EFL Teachers Face While They Teach Preposition of Time. Albania, Greece and Kosovo.