



## العقبات التي تواجه الطلاب عند استخدام حروف جر اللغة الإنجليزية

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### الملخص :

تناولت الورقة العوائق التي يواجهها الطلاب في استخدام حروف الجر في اللغة الانجليزية، لغرض استكشاف مستويات الصعوبة والعوائق التي يواجهها الطلاب في استخدام حروف الجر باللغة الانجليزية، تعد أيضا محاولة لايجاد حلول لهذه العقبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في هذا الاستخدام.

اعتمدت الورقة علي منهجية وصفية لمراجعة ومعالجة هذه العقبات، باستخدام اداتين لجمع البيانات هما :

اختبار الطلاب و استبيان المعلم، والذي تم إجراؤه لاستكشاف العوائق والعقبات التي تحول دون استخدام حروف الجر في اللغة الانجليزية من قبل طلاب السنة الأولى ، وتتكون العينة المستهدفة من 30 طالب و 10 اساتذة من قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة الزاوية ، كلية التربية بالزاوية.

حيث أظهرت نتائج الدراسة ما يلي:

\*- يواجه الطلاب عقبات في الاستخدام الصحيح لحروف الجر.  
\*- عدم توفر ممارسات كافية لتعلم حروف الجر قبل استخدامها من قبل معلمي اللغة الانجليزية.

\*- إن العلاقة بين استخدام حروف الجر وافعال الجمل الفعلية يصعب علي الطلاب فهمها من خلال تخمين معانيها واستخدامها بشكل صحيح.

لذلك أوصت الدراسة بتشجيع الطلاب علي استخدام حروف الجر بمزيد من الممارسة، التي ستساعدهم في التغلب علي الصعوبات والعقبات المرتبطة بها، كما أوصت بتعلم حروف الجر من خلال سياقات قوية ليسهل علي الطلاب معرفة معانيها واستخدامها بالشكل الأمثل والصحيح.

# Obstacles Encountered by EFL Students in Using English prepositions

By:

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## Abstract

This paper considered the barriers faced by students in the use of prepositions in English. The purpose of this research is to explore the extent to which students find it difficult to use and guess the meaning of prepositions in English. It is also an attempt to find solutions to these obstacles that students face in their use.

This paper used a descriptive methodology to review and address these issues. The researcher used two data-gathering tools: the student 'test and teacher' questionnaire, which was conducted to explore barriers to the use of prepositions in English by first-year students. The survey sample consists of 30 students and 10 teachers from the English Department of the University of Zawia, Faculty of Education, Zawia.

The results of the study demonstrated the following:

- Students struggle with obstacles in the correct use of prepositions.
- The results showed that English-language teachers do not provide sufficient practice to improve pre-position learning and instruction.
- It asserted that the relationship between the use of prepositions and phrasal verbs is difficult for students to understand in order to guess their meanings or use them correctly.

It is therefore recommended that students be encouraged to use prepositions with more practice, which will assist them in overcoming the associated difficulties. He also recommended that prepositions be learned through strong contexts to make it easy for students to sense its meaning and use them correctly.

### 1. Introduction:

Studying pre-positions is not an easy task for ESL or foreign students because of their many alternatives and the polysomic character of their meanings. This is because pre-positions are a major challenge for English language learners. Teachers should develop efficient teaching methods. In such cases, English language teachers should take effective and serious steps



to apply sophisticated methodologies to overcome them easily and provide a genuine understanding among heterogeneous language learning groups.

Without question, people use the language to communicate in a different situation, using certain aspects of the language. It plays an exceptional role in the sending and reception of messages. Prepositions of any language play a very important role in the delivery of our message. Students of English as a foreign language face many difficulties in using English preposition in all aspects of language usage in particular (writing, speaking). The role of the use of the English preposition is more important in oral and written expression, views and ideas, thus productive skill. It reflects what students know about the use of the English preposition and how to learn it at the same time. Using English prepositions cannot be separated from the other important aspects of the English language, the prepositions (at, in, on, behind, beside, Between...) are problematic for the students of the Zawia University Faculty of Education.

The investigator in this research tries to identify, to study the reasons for this problem. In Arabic, certain students of society speak like this in Libyan universities, the learner faces many problems in the use of the English preposition. The Arabian preposition is different than the English preposition using.

### **1. 1 Statement of the problem:**

It is clear that prepositions seem to be easy and accordingly students give less attention to them, although some prepositions are difficult and problematic and they cause some problems for the students in using English prepositions. The researcher will try to study and identify the real reasons and causes behind the problems of using the English preposition that students face when learning English.

### **1.2 Objectives of the study**

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating the main problems faced by the students in using English prepositions.
- 2- Investigating the reasons behind these difficulties.

3- Finding out solutions to ease them.

### **3.1- Questions about the study**

1- What are the main problems encountered by the students in using prepositions?

2-To what extends interference of the mother tongue influence in using the English preposition?

3- What solutions can be made to solve these difficulties?

### **1.4. Significance of the study:**

Prepositions are very important for learning English and enhancing students' productive and receptive skills. The significance of the study may be of great value to teachers of English at universities to give preposition much time, planners of the English syllabus to choose the best ways to improve using prepositions.

### **1.5 Limitation of the study:**

This study will be limited to investigating the difficulties faced by the students in using English prepositions. This study conducted at Zawia University, Faculty of Education, English department, first-year students.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definitions of Prepositions**

Preposition is a function word that typically combines with a noun phrase to form a phrase which usually expresses a modification or predication. It is a word that shows relationships between words in the sentence. In 1999, Yates claimed in his book that the word 'preposition' has a straightforward definition: a word placed before a noun or pronoun to define its relationship with another word in the sentence.

### **2.2 Collocations of Prepositions**

As for collocations of prepositions, Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) believe that collocational competence can influence EFL learners' overall language ability. Collocations play a powerful role in the performance of EFL learners. Given that the use of collocations was strongly correlated with the linguistic competence of LFS learners, collocations should be considered as an



important factor in determining their overall competence. To collocate, prepositions commonly used with an adjective, a noun, or a verb. If students are not learning collocation as a piece, but as separate words, they will probably attempt to use the L1 equivalent of preposition. Considering that, the purpose of this study is to find out how successful Turkish EFL students are in the use of prepositions, and how much impact Turkish has on their errors, the following research questions were formed.

1. How capable are the students using the correct preposition?
2. What is the percentage of errors caused by mother tongue interference?
3. What is the percentage of errors caused by mother tongue interference in terms of error forms?
4. What is the percentage of errors caused by mother tongue interference in terms of word forms the prepositions are used to?

### **2.3 Causes of difficulties with prepositions**

Using prepositions is challenging not only for EFL speakers but also for other ESL (English as a Second Language) speakers. "Preposition usage is one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar to master." (Chodorow et al., 2007: 25). One of the most likely reasons is the very nature of preposition. Prepositions are usually mono-morphemic words that belong to the closed class of lexical items i.e. items that cannot be derived from other words. Prepositions are also non-inflecting which means that they do not have different forms (e.g. Case and gender) like verbs or nouns for instance.

ESL learners usually have difficulties with prepositions because there are not so many prepositions in English, as in other languages and students try to make an unnecessary distinction. In addition, many usages are not related to the original meaning of that preposition and it can be confusing as learners are often led by the word meaning (Parrott, 2000). For instance, some prepositions are polysemous words, which are not closely related. (E.g., She was running on the path by (near) the river/ It will be done by (before Saturday).

The most common cause of difficulties is that many prepositions perform several complex syntactic roles. Unlike other words, prepositions have

several syntactic functions and this can be demanding for learners. In prepositional phrases, prepositions can govern a noun or a verb (e.g. at home, at listening), follow a verb (e.g. depend on), follow a noun (e.g. interest in) or an adjective (E.g. Keen on), surround a complement (e.g. from now on) or be in the middle of two words (e.g. the word for word). What can also be confusing is that prepositions can sometimes be short words (e.g. on, in, at), long words or phrases (e.g. according to, despite, in terms of) or even participles (e.g. regarding, concerning) (ibid, 2000).

On the other hand, difficulties occur because prepositions perform complex semantic roles. It is not rare in English to have prepositions with similar meanings (e.g. in, inside, into) whereas a learner's native language might not have so many prepositions with similar meanings (e.g. in and into is the same preposition in u). Moreover, certain verbs, nouns, and adjectives that have similar meanings use different prepositions (e.g. fond of / keen on). What also causes difficulty is that the same verbs in a learner's native language and English sometimes require different prepositions.

In English, ESL learners may find confusing the fact that some verbs require prepositions and their synonyms do not (e.g. talk about/ discuss). In addition, different parts of speech of the same word sometimes use different prepositions (e.g. dependent on, dependence from). Finally, some prepositions are combined with other words to express different meanings (e.g. in phrasal verbs).

Other causes of difficulties are different usages of prepositions in formal and informal language. For instance, certain prepositions are only used in a formal or academic context (e.g. notwithstanding). Furthermore, geographical and social background influences the usage of prepositions. For example, in Australia preposition is used with the noun the weekend, whereas in Britain as is used with the noun the weekend. In Britain, the working class would use the expression to go up to town, whereas the middle class uses the expression to go into town (Parrott, 2000).

### **3. Methodology**

This paper used a descriptive methodology to review and address these issues. The researcher selects the questionnaire for English teachers and



a test for students, which are considered a reliable and valid means of data collection.

### **3.1 Sample of the study**

The participants of the study are the first-year students who study English as a main subject besides other courses at the University of Zawia, Faculty of Education, and English department. The second type of participant EFL teachers of English at the University of Zawia, Faculty of Education, English department. The sample investigated in this study is composed of 30 students and 10 teachers.

### **3.2 Instruments**

The researcher used two main instruments of data collection. The first tool was a test that was given to the students to investigate the obstacles encountered by the students in using English prepositions; the test contains multiple-choice questions.

The second instrument was a questionnaire conducted for teachers of English. It consists of semi-structured questions to investigate the main problems faced by the students in using English prepositions and the causes behind these issues.

## **4. Data analysis**

By analyzing the data, the researcher explains the statistical approach that was applied to the data analysis technique to analyze the results obtained. For data analysis, the investigator used the Spearman-Brown method to analyze the results of the tools in this study. The researcher published the findings for discussion in this section.

### **4.1 Students' Test**

The students were given multi-choices questions to find the correct answer in using prepositions.

The results of these items are as follows:

1- We are very proud .....this company.

for- at - in -of - about

This result, shows that the students' results in using the correct answer. Only four students got the right answer that is (18 %) out of 30 students getting the right answer.

2-Philip waited .....her at the movie theatre.

in --at -on -for - of

The results of this item indicate that eight students got the right answer out of thirty students, which is (26 %).

3-What are you talking .....

At -in -on about

As can be seen, the results above indicate that five out of thirty participants got the right answer (16 %).

4- The old man suffered .....a heart attack.

Of - for -on from

Based on the result of this item, only three participants got the right answer (10 %).

5-Many of us eat .....fork and spoon.

about - at of - with

As the results of this item, (7) students (23%) got the right answer.

6-My parents got married..... the 1970s.

On in - for of

In this result, (12) students gained the right answer, which is (40%).

6- I am very bad .....mathematics.

This result shows that five students out of thirty answered correctly (16 %).

7-You have to pay .....the tickets on the day you order.

By -on -in -for - with

Based on the result of this item, only three participants got the right answer (10 %).





8- This book was written .....Mark Twain.

At - by -in of

This item, eleven students out of thirty answered correctly, that (36 %).

9-She always looks .....herself in the mirror.

At --on - about to

As the results of this item, (8) students (26%) got the right answer.

10-We had to climb slowly .....the hill.

On in at -- for

In this result, (17) students got the right answer (56 %).

#### **4.2 Teachers' Questionnaire**

The researcher conducted a questionnaire for teachers of English who work in the English Department at the college.

Ten participants participated in this study. Most of the questions answered clearly, since each teacher knew the main goals of the study, which related to the difficulties encountered by the students in using English prepositions.

As the results of the teachers 'questionnaire show that the majority of them assured that the students face difficulties in using English prepositions, five of them confessed that they do not give more practice while teaching them.

Six participants confirmed that the propositions are complex ones; there is a similarity among them, especially the usage of one preposition, which can be used in many ways. In this case, most of the students get confused to use them.

#### **4.3 Results and Discussion**

This document examined the obstacles encountered by students in the use of prepositions in English. Based on the students' results in the test and the results of the teachers 'questionnaires, all of the results came in favor of the study's objectives and questions which are mentioned before that the

students face difficulties in using English prepositions whether to use them or the nature of the complexity of prepositions make the students confused.

The results also ensured that these impediments, due to lack of practice, that their teachers do not give them, confront the majority of students. It is also observed that students are not able to guess the significance of prepositions when they are used in many ways.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper investigated the difficulties encountered by the students in using prepositions in English that has been successfully carried out using the first-year students at the University of Zawia, Faculty of Education, English Department, Zawia. The study used the descriptive method that consisted of two main instruments in obtaining the results.

The findings of the study are as follows:

- 1- Students face many difficulties in using pre-positions in English.
- 2- The results showed that English-language teachers do not provide adequate practice for the improvement and teaching of English prepositions.
- 3- It proved that the nature of the complexity of the prepositions confused the students to use them correctly, particularly, when they use one preposition for more than one user in the sentence or a context.
- 4- It asserted that the relationship between the use of prepositions and phrasal verbs is difficult, which prevents students from guessing their meaning or using them correctly.
- 5- It is also note that the interference of the mother tongue in the use of prepositions has clouded the students in obtaining the correct answer.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The researcher recommends that:

1. 1. Encourage students to use prepositions with more practice to assist them in communicating effectively in English.
2. English prepositions should be taught through strong contexts to become easier for students to guess its significance, because of its nature for further use.
3. English teachers need to give students much practice by using prepositions and phrasal verbs.



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