



College of Basic Education Research
Journal

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**Investigating the Use of English Prepositions by Iraqi IT Students
Learning English as a Foreign Language**

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Article Information

Article history:

Received: October 25 ,2025

Reviewer: January 15, 2026

Accepted: January 15, 2026

Available online: June, 2026

Keywords:

Prepositions;

*Foreign Language; English
language teaching;*

*English for Technology purposes;
language needs;
needs analysis.*

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Abstract

While prepositions are limited in number and type, they are considered important since they act as markers to the structure of a sentence; they identify the relationships between persons, objects, and locations and between the elements of the sentence structure. However, many English learners find it difficult to determine or use the correct preposition. Thus, using incorrect preposition leads to changing the meaning and the context of a sentence. Following that, the current study aims to investigate student's use of prepositions. Based on that, a sample of 40 students at the third stage in the Department of Software Engineering at Information Technology College was selected randomly for the implementation of the test of the study. Students were asked to choose the correct preposition from four options to complete the sentence. Data were analyzed and the results indicated that most of Students are unaware of which preposition to use in a sentence. The study ended with conclusions and recommendations.

دراسة استخدام حروف الجر الإنكليزية من قبل طلاب تكنولوجيا المعلومات العراقيين الذين يتعلمون الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المستخلص

بينما تُعتبر حروف الجر محدودة من حيث العدد والنوع، إلا أنها تُعتبر مهمة لأنها تعمل كعلامات على بنية الجملة؛ حيث تحدد العلاقات بين الأشخاص والأشياء والمواقع، وكذلك بين عناصر بنية الجملة. ومع ذلك، يجد العديد من متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية صعوبة في تحديد أو استخدام حرف الجر الصحيح. وبالتالي، يؤدي استخدام حرف جر غير صحيح إلى تغيير المعنى وسياق الجملة. بناءً على ذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في استخدام الطلاب لحروف الجر. استنادًا إلى ذلك، تم اختيار عينة مكونة من 40 طالبًا في المرحلة الثالثة من قسم هندسة البرمجيات في كلية تكنولوجيا المعلومات بشكل عشوائي لتنفيذ اختبار الدراسة. طُلب من الطلاب اختيار حرف الجر الصحيح من بين أربع خيارات لإكمال الجملة. تم تحليل البيانات وأشارت النتائج إلى أن معظم الطلاب غير مدركين لأي حرف جر يجب استخدامه في الجملة. وانتهت الدراسة باستنتاجات وتوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حروف الجر؛ اللغة الأجنبية؛ تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية؛ اللغة الإنكليزية لأغراض التكنولوجيا؛ الاحتياجات اللغوية؛ تحليل الاحتياجات.

1. Introduction

Learning English requires more than acquiring the four fundamental skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It also involves understanding the structural components of the language to ensure accurate and effective communication. Grammar represents one of the core elements of linguistic competence, as it governs how words combine to form meaningful sentences. Among the essential grammatical categories are prepositions, which function as relational markers within sentence structure. Prepositions typically precede nouns or pronouns and indicate various types of relationships such as time, place, direction, cause, and abstract associations, including psychological or emotional states (Castro, 2013).

Despite their structural importance, prepositions present considerable difficulty for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Many students experience confusion when selecting the appropriate preposition, particularly because usage often depends on context rather than direct translation (Swan, 1988). Although prepositions are generally short in form, their semantic and syntactic roles are highly significant. As Mus (2012) observes, these seemingly minor words perform functions that are central to sentence clarity and cohesion.

Martinet (1985) explains that learners typically face two principal challenges when dealing with prepositions: first, determining whether a particular construction requires a preposition, and second, selecting the correct one when it is necessary. This dual difficulty contributes substantially to the high frequency of prepositional errors among EFL learners.

Accordingly, the present study is organized into two principal parts. The first part offers a theoretical framework that reviews relevant literature on English prepositions, including their definitions, classifications, functions, and the difficulties associated with their use. The second part presents the empirical component of the research, outlining the methodological procedures adopted for test administration and data collection, followed by statistical analysis, discussion of findings, and the formulation of conclusions and pedagogical recommendations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem of the current study is embodied in IT university students troublesome in using the appropriate preposition or difficulties in finding corresponding preposition of his native language that may not be correct in English. Therefore, the present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Is IT university students able to use the appropriate prepositions?
2. In which type of prepositions do IT university students frequently commit errors?

1.2 Hypotheses

The present study hypothesizes that:

1. IT university students expected to find difficulties in using appropriate prepositions.
2. Errors in preposition of connection are expected to be most frequently committed by IT university students

1.3 Aims of the Study

The aims of the current study are:

1. Defining prepositions and identifying its types, difficulties and function.
2. Investigating the use of prepositions by IT university students.
3. Exploring in which type of preposition do IT university students frequently commit errors.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The scope of the current study is confined to examining the use of English prepositions among university students specializing in Information Technology. The investigation specifically focuses on three categories of prepositions: those

expressing time, place, and connection. Moreover, the study is restricted to a randomly selected sample of 40 third-year students enrolled in the Software Engineering Department at the IT University College.

2. Definition of Prepositions

In traditional grammar, prepositions are categorized as a distinct part of speech. However, unlike lexical categories such as nouns and verbs, prepositions belong to a relatively closed class of words that do not take inflectional endings and primarily function to express syntactic relationships within sentence structure (Frank, 1972, p. 163). Their main role is relational rather than descriptive, as they connect elements within a clause and clarify how these elements are grammatically and semantically linked.

Similarly, Yates (1999, p. 5) defines a preposition as a word that precedes a noun or pronoun in order to indicate its relationship to another component in the sentence. From a morphological perspective, Shehata (2003, p. 214) notes that the term *preposition* itself consists of two parts, “pre” and “position,” reflecting its placement before the word it governs.

Walker (1982, p. 123) emphasizes the relational function of prepositions, explaining that they link nouns or pronouns—specifically the object of the preposition—to other sentence elements. In the same vein, Cowan (1983, p. 281) describes prepositions as words or groups of words that signal the connection between their objects and other parts of the sentence. Collectively, these definitions highlight the structural and relational importance of prepositions in English grammar.

Prepositions have been described in traditional grammar as words placed before a noun or pronoun to clarify the relationship between the entity it denotes and other elements in the sentence (Wren & Martin, 1999, as cited in Hassan, 2016, p. 106). This relational function underscores their importance in establishing meaning within sentence structure. Stageberg (1981, p. 169) further explains that common prepositions such as *at*, *on*, *in*, *of*, and *to* are typically followed by a noun phrase or pronoun, which functions as the object of the preposition.

In addition to single-word forms, English includes multi-word or complex prepositions such as *in front of*, *next to*, and *instead of*. These elements serve to connect nouns, pronouns, or phrases to other parts of the sentence, thereby contributing to syntactic cohesion. Although certain general rules can guide their use, many prepositions occur within fixed or idiomatic expressions, particularly in combination with specific verbs. In such cases, accurate usage often depends on learning the entire phrase as a lexical unit rather than interpreting the preposition in isolation.

3. The Function of Prepositions

Prepositions occupy a central position in sentence construction, as they clarify the relationships between different elements within a clause. Without prepositions, sentences may become ambiguous or semantically incomplete. Their primary function is to express relational meaning, particularly between a noun or pronoun and other components of the sentence, such as verbs, adjectives, or additional nouns.

In certain contexts, some words that function as prepositions may also serve as subordinating conjunctions, including forms such as *after*, *before*, *since*, *until*, and *as*. When used as subordinators, these elements are followed by a subject and a verb, thereby introducing a subordinate clause. However, when functioning as prepositions, they are followed by a noun phrase and establish a relationship between that noun phrase and another part of the sentence.

Overall, the functions of prepositions can be categorized according to the types of relationships they express within sentence structure.

a) Correlating a noun with another noun: Prepositions may link one noun to another to express a specific relationship. For example: *She has talked to her sister in the room.*

b) Correlating a verb with another verb: Prepositions can connect verbs within a sentence to indicate manner or spatial/temporal relation. For example: *My aunt likes to sleep on the floor.*

c) Correlating a noun with an adjective: In some structures, prepositions link nouns to adjectives to complete the meaning. For example: *The man is very successful in his business.*

d) Correlating a participle with a noun: Prepositions may connect participial forms with nouns to express a grammatical relationship. For example: *They are frustrated about the problem.*

e) Correlating a verb participle with a noun: Prepositions can also accompany participial verb forms to clarify spatial or relational meaning. For example: *They stand near the car.*

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) further explain that prepositional phrases perform a variety of syntactic functions within sentence structure. They may function as adverbials—including adjuncts, subjuncts, disjuncts, and conjuncts—thereby providing additional information about circumstances such as time, place, manner, or condition. In addition, prepositional phrases can serve as post-modifiers within noun phrases or act as complements to verbs and adjectives.

Nevertheless, not all prepositional phrases exhibit the full range of these syntactic roles. For example, phrases introduced by prepositions such as *for* and *to*, particularly when expressing time, place, or movement, may be restricted in their functional distribution within the sentence (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973).

4. Difficulties of English Prepositions

The difficulties learners encounter when using English prepositions stem from several linguistic factors. One major source of complexity is their polysemous nature. Polysemy refers to the semantic property whereby a single lexical item carries multiple related meanings that vary according to context (Koffi, 2010, p. 299). Since many English prepositions express a range of meanings depending on usage, learners often struggle to determine the most appropriate interpretation in a given situation. This contextual variability frequently results in confusion and misuse (Koffi, 2010).

Another contributing factor relates to phonological characteristics. Lam (2009) observes that prepositions are typically short, often monosyllabic forms, which makes them less perceptible in connected or rapid speech. As a result, learners may experience difficulty recognizing and accurately processing prepositions in spoken English.

Many English prepositions are short and consist of one syllable such as *on*, *to*, and *for*. Therefore, language learners may face difficulties in identifying prepositions when they occur in rapid and natural speech (Lakoff, 1978). The use and function of prepositions differ from one language to another, and these differences often lead to negative syntactic transfer from the mother tongue to the target language.

Lakoff (1978) explains that prepositions usually carry a limited number of related literal meanings. Some of these meanings, especially the prototypical meaning, are extended metaphorically to produce additional related senses that remain connected to the core meaning. This semantic extension clarifies why a single preposition can be used in different contexts with related interpretations.

In the same context, Diab (1998, as cited in Khayal, 2011) states that prepositions represent a major challenge for Arab learners of English because several prepositions may share similar functions despite differences in usage. For example, the prepositions “on” and “at” can appear in similar structures but with different meanings, such as *a duty at night* and *a program on TV*, which often causes confusion among learners.

However, when students lack certainty about the appropriate preposition or its correct placement within a specific phrase, they tend to depend on perceived equivalents in their native language. This frequently results in a direct or literal translation of the preposition from Arabic into English, which may lead to incorrect usage.

5. Types of Prepositions

According to Frank (1972: 164), prepositions are grouped into three main categories: time, place, and connection. Each category is explained in detail in the subsequent sub-sections.

5.1 Prepositions of Time

Prepositions related to time can be classified into three main groups. The first group includes prepositions that refer to a specific point in time such as *in*, *at*, and *on*. The second group consists of prepositions that express a duration or extended period of time, including *for*, *by*, *from–to*, *since*, *during*, *within*, and *in*. The third group comprises prepositions that indicate a sequence or order of time, such as *before* and *after*.

These prepositions function to specify temporal relations and clarify the timing and sequence of events. Other examples of time-related prepositions include *at*, *on*, *after*, *before*, *behind*, *since*, *from*, *during*, *until*, and *with*, depending on the contextual usage.

You can call me at ten o'clock.

The preposition at is used to indicate a specific point in time.

I like drinking coffee in the morning.

The preposition in refers to a general period of time.

The task should be submitted before May 2nd.

The preposition before expresses a temporal relationship indicating a deadline or time limit prior to a specific date.

5.2 Preposition of Place

Prepositions of place are used to indicate the position or location of nouns. They clarify the spatial relationship that describes where a person or object is

located. In most cases, these prepositions appear before the noun they govern. According to Frank (1972: 165–166), prepositions of place can be divided into three main types.

(1) Prepositions that express a specific point in space include *in*, *on*, and *at*. The preposition *in* refers to something located within a bounded or enclosed area, as in the example *Hang your coat in the closet*, which indicates containment within a defined space. Similarly, *inside* emphasizes the notion of containment, as illustrated in *There was no one inside the house*.

The preposition *on* denotes a position on a surface, indicating contact with or support by that surface. For example, *Put the dishes on the table* means that the dishes are placed on top of the table's surface.

The preposition *at* refers to a general location or point without specifying spatial boundaries. It indicates presence in a place, as in *He is at school*. It is also used when referring to specific addresses that include street numbers, for example, *He lives at 200 Park Avenue*.

(2) Prepositions that express a position higher or lower than a reference point include specific spatial relations. The prepositions *over* and *above* indicate a higher position. *Over* generally refers to something positioned higher than a point, often implying coverage or movement across a space, as in *The plane flew over the mountains*. In contrast, *above* refers to a position directly higher than a point without necessarily implying contact, as in *He lives on the floor above us*. However, the distinction between *over* and *above* is not always strictly maintained in usage.

On the other hand, there are four prepositions that express a position lower than a reference point: *below*, *beneath*, *underneath*, and *under*. The preposition *under* generally indicates a lower position in relation to something else, as in *A subway runs under this street*. *Underneath* emphasizes close proximity below something, often suggesting concealment, as in *He swept the dirt underneath the rug*. The preposition *below* refers to a position directly lower than a point, as in

He lives on the floor below us. Although *under* and *below* may convey similar meanings, their distinction is not consistently observed in all contexts.

(3) Prepositions that express proximity or neighboring relations to a point include *next to*, *near*, *alongside*, *opposite*, *between*, *beside*, and related forms. The preposition *near* conveys a general sense of closeness, as in *He lives near the university*. The prepositions *by* and *close to* are often used as synonyms in certain contexts, with *close to* indicating a stronger degree of proximity.

The preposition *next to* implies immediate adjacency with no space or object between the two entities, as in *The theater is right next to the post office*. *Alongside* refers to entities positioned adjacent to each other in a parallel or aligned arrangement, particularly when objects or persons are considered side by side, for example, *The tug pulled up alongside the tanker*. The preposition *beside* indicates placement on either side of a person or object that has two sides, as in *He sat beside his wife during the party*.

The preposition *between* is used to describe a position situated on both sides of two persons or objects, as in *He sat between his two sons*. When positioning involves more than two persons or objects surrounding a point, the preposition *among* is used, for example, *He sat among all his grandchildren*. Finally, *opposite* denotes a position directly facing another person or object, as in *The museum is just opposite the post office*.

(4) Prepositions that express movement from one place to another are used to indicate directional movement in relation to a specific reference point. These prepositions describe the transition or transfer of position, such as *to*, *from*, *toward*, *around*, and *through* (Hotben, 2007: 104). They function to clarify the spatial direction and movement between locations.

Example:

- *The bird flew through the open window.*
- *He always walks to school from his home.*
- *The pilgrims headed toward Mecca.*
- *The ship sailed around the island.*

Prepositions of connection indicate the relationship between actions and elements within a sentence. They function as linking words that connect nouns, pronouns, or phrases with other components of the sentence to clarify meaning and grammatical relationships. Prepositions of manner, which are sometimes included under this category, explain how an action is performed or how a particular event occurs. Common examples include *with*, *by*, and *on*.

Among the most frequently used prepositions of manner are *with* and *by*. The preposition *by* is typically used to express the manner or means through which an action is carried out. It is often followed by a gerund (verb + -ing) or a noun. In contrast, *with* is used to indicate the instrument, tool, or object employed to accomplish an action and is generally followed by a noun. Additionally, *by* can refer to the mode of transportation used for travel, as in the example: *She came to the party by car*, where the preposition specifies the means of transport.

The following table presents these types of prepositions along with their usage for further clarification.

5.3 Prepositions of Connections

Table (1) Types of Prepositions

| Prepositions – Place (Location and Direction) | Usage | Example |
|--|---|--|
| in | when something is in a place, it is inside it (enclosed within limits) | 1. in class/in Victoria 2. in the book 3. in the car/in a taxi 4. You look serious in this photo. |
| at | located at a specific place (a point) for events place where you are to do something typical (watch a movie, study, work) | at the library at a concert/at a party at the cinema/at school/at work |
| on | being on a surface (not enclosed) for a certain side (left, right) for a floor in a building for public transport for television, radio | I left the keys on the table. Go down this hall to the end, turn right, and it's the third door on your left. My apartment is on the fourth floor. I forgot my phone on the bus. You can hear my brother on the radio. |
| to | moving toward a specific place (the goal or end point of movement) | Every morning, I take the bus to campus. |

| Prepositions - Time | Usage | Example |
|---------------------|---|--|
| in | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. months/seasons 2. years 3. time of day 4. centuries and historical periods 5. after a certain period of time | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. in August/in the summer 2. in 1985 3. in the evening 4. in the 19th century 5. Mystic Market closes in two hours. |
| at | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. time of days 2. noon, night, and midnight 3. names of mealtime 4. age | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. at 2:30 2. at night 3. at breakfast 4. I learned how to use a computer at 12. |
| on | days of the week | on Friday |
| since | from a period of time up to the present (when it started) | I have been a student since 2004. |
| for | how long a period of time has been | I have been a student here for 2 years. |
| from...to... | the beginning and end of a period of time | My appointment is from 13:30 to 14:00. |
| until | a period of time up to a specific point in time | I cannot go dancing until I finish reading this chapter. |
| by | in the sense of "at the latest" due date | <p>You must return your book by April 21st.</p> <p>My essay is due by the end of the week.</p> |
| from | for the origin or starting point | <p>I used carrots from my garden.</p> <p>I received a suspicious email from my bank.</p> <p>I will be on vacation from July 31 for a week.</p> |
| towards | movement in direction of something | I suddenly saw a dog running towards me. |
| across | movement from one side to another | <p>There is a coffee shop across the street.</p> <p>I swam across the lake.</p> |
| through | movement from one side to another but "in something" | <p>I entered the room through an open window.</p> <p>You have to go through the kitchen to get to the bathroom.</p> |
| between | a place "in the middle" of two or more separate people or things | <p>I was standing between my friend and his parents.</p> <p>The gap between the rich and poor keeps growing.</p> |
| among | a place "surrounded" by more than two people or things together as a group (in the sense of "included in") | <p>France is among the countries of Western Europe.</p> <p>Among the advantages of exercising regularly are lower risks of depression and a better quality of life.</p> |

| Prepositions – Connection | Usage | Example |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| of | between two noun phrases to show that the first belongs to or is part of the second to say how people are related | The keyboard of my computer is pink. Richard is the son of Audrey/He is a good friend of mine. |
| with | Between two noun phrases when the second is a particular feature of the first to say that people or things are together for the specific thing used to perform an action | I spilled coffee on the computer with a pink keyboard. I think Sarah is studying with Tara/I went to a workshop with my friend. My roommate killed a spider with a book. |
| by | when we want to describe an action in a more general way | My roommate saved my live by killing the spider. |
| about | For topics (in the sense of "with regard to/concerned with") | She was the author of many books about the history of ancient Egypt. |
| for | with a purpose/giving a reason (associated with an action; shortened form of "for the purpose of") | The concept of class is important for understanding how society works. Theories about strategies for linking nouns and verbs |
| from | the origin, cause or agent of something | The meaning is often hard to guess from the individual words. |
| | | |
| in | inclusion, location or position within a time period or limits | You can see this in works by contemporary authors. |
| on | the basis for something | Many engineers proceed on the assumption that the digital age is unique. |
| of | belonging to, relating to, or connected with describe a relation/causation the origin, cause, motive or reason of something | The results of the investigation are still relevant. The root of the problem is the absence of any evidence supporting our thesis. Henderson discovered that the king died of poisoning by analyzing blood samples. |
| by | describe a direct cause or agent | According to folklore, he was killed by strangulation by the Mad King when he protested the new tax. |

6. Previous Studies

Several studies have examined the use of prepositions in English. Among these studies is the research conducted by Abu Humeid (2013), which aimed to identify and analyze the errors committed by Iraqi EFL university students in using prepositions, as well as to determine the underlying causes of these errors. The researcher designed a diagnostic test and administered it to a sample of 50 third-year Iraqi EFL university students. The results revealed that most students experienced difficulties in recognizing and producing prepositions and were not fully aware of their functional usage.

Another study entitled “*The Difficulties Encountered by ESP Students in Using English Prepositions of Time (On – At – In)*” by Abdelrazig Abdelghani Mahil Ibrahim investigated the problems faced by ESP students in using prepositions of time and explored the reasons behind these difficulties. The study adopted descriptive, analytical, and quasi-experimental methods. The sample consisted of 40 students at Pusha Academy during the first semester of the academic year 2017–2018. Data were collected through a test and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings indicated that most students encountered significant difficulties in using prepositions of time correctly.

The present study examines IT university students’ use of selected prepositions of time, place, and connection. The following sections outline the practical procedures and steps adopted to achieve this objective.

7. Methodology

The procedural steps of sampling and test conducting of the present study are explained in detail in the following sections:

7.1 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study included all the 3rd year Software Engineering Department students at Information Technology College. In addition, the sample of the study included (40) out of (50) students chosen

randomly from the 3rd year students in the Software Engineering Department students at Information Technology College.

7.2 The Test

The test of the research was conducted on the basis of MCQ, multiple choice questions. The test included 15 sentences; each 5 sentences were on specific type of preposition. The first five sentences were prepositions of time, from 5-10 were prepositions of place, and from 11-15 were prepositions of connection. Moreover, each of these sentences has a missing preposition where students required choosing the correct preposition from 4 options.

Before applying the test, it was sent to jury members to check its validity in measuring students' ability to use prepositions. Modification and remarks of jury members were taken as the test being valid and reliable in measuring students' ability to use prepositions.

7.3 Procedures

After the approval of the jury members for applying the test, it was conducted and applied inside the classroom and participants were directed and instructed to answer all questions of the test.

The test lasted for 45 minutes under supervision and without help between participants. After that, answers were calculated and compared with the typical answers to analyze them statistically.

8. Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data statistically, results indicated inefficiency of students in using preposition in most of the test items. These results are shown in the following table.

Table (2) Results of the Test

| No. | Items | No. and % of Correct Answers | | No. and % of Wrong Answers | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Prepositions of Time | | | | | |
| 1. | You must be careful <i>in</i> the future. | 28 | 70% | 12 | 30% |
| 2. | My birthday is <i>on</i> the first of June. | 10 | 25% | 30 | 75% |
| 3. | He has been ill <i>since</i> last Tuesday. | 19 | 47.50% | 21 | 52.50% |
| 4. | He usually takes a walk <i>at</i> noon. | 14 | 35% | 26 | 65% |
| 5. | You must return the book <i>by</i> April 21st. | 1 | 2.50% | 39 | 97.50% |
| Total | | 72 | 36% | 128 | 64% |
| Prepositions of Place | | | | | |
| 6. | Emma stayed <i>at</i> The Tourist Hotel. | 7 | 17.50% | 33 | 82.50% |
| 7. | Divide the sweets <i>among</i> the three boys. | 6 | 15% | 34 | 85% |
| 8. | It is a secret <i>between</i> you and me. | 20 | 50% | 20 | 50% |
| 9. | When the sun sets it goes <i>below</i> the horizon. | 7 | 17.50% | 33 | 82.50% |
| 10 | I looked outside <i>through</i> the window. | 18 | 45% | 22 | 55% |
| Total | | 58 | 29% | 142 | 71% |

| No. | Items | No. and % of Correct Answers | | No. and % of Wrong Answers | |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Prepositions of Connection | | | | | |
| 11. | Running is healthy <i>as well as</i> making you feel good. | 18 | 45% | 22 | 55% |
| 12. | There is a coffee shop <i>across</i> the street. | 8 | 20% | 32 | 80% |
| 13. | The man <i>with</i> the iron heart. | 9 | 22.50% | 31 | 77.50% |
| 14. | He is a boy <i>of</i> 15. | 4 | 10% | 36 | 90% |
| 15. | He cares <i>about</i> his classes. | 13 | 32.50% | 27 | 67.50% |
| Total | | 52 | 26% | 148 | 74% |

The results shown in the previous table are as follows:

Highest percentage of students' correct answers were on prepositions of time 36% compared to prepositions of place 29%, and prepositions of connection 26%, although they are all considered a mark of low proficiency level since they are much lower than 50%. For example, 28 out of 40 participants answered correctly for sentence (1) which is almost half of the participants, while only 1 out of 40 knew the correct answer for sentence (5).

the percentage of the incorrect answers for prepositions of connection were at least level 74% compared to prepositions of time 64%, and prepositions of place 71%. This informs that EFL students are unable to use prepositions correctly which supports the first hypothesis of the study. Moreover, it is found that AI learners commit errors in prepositions of connection more frequently that means the second hypothesis of the study is proved and verified.

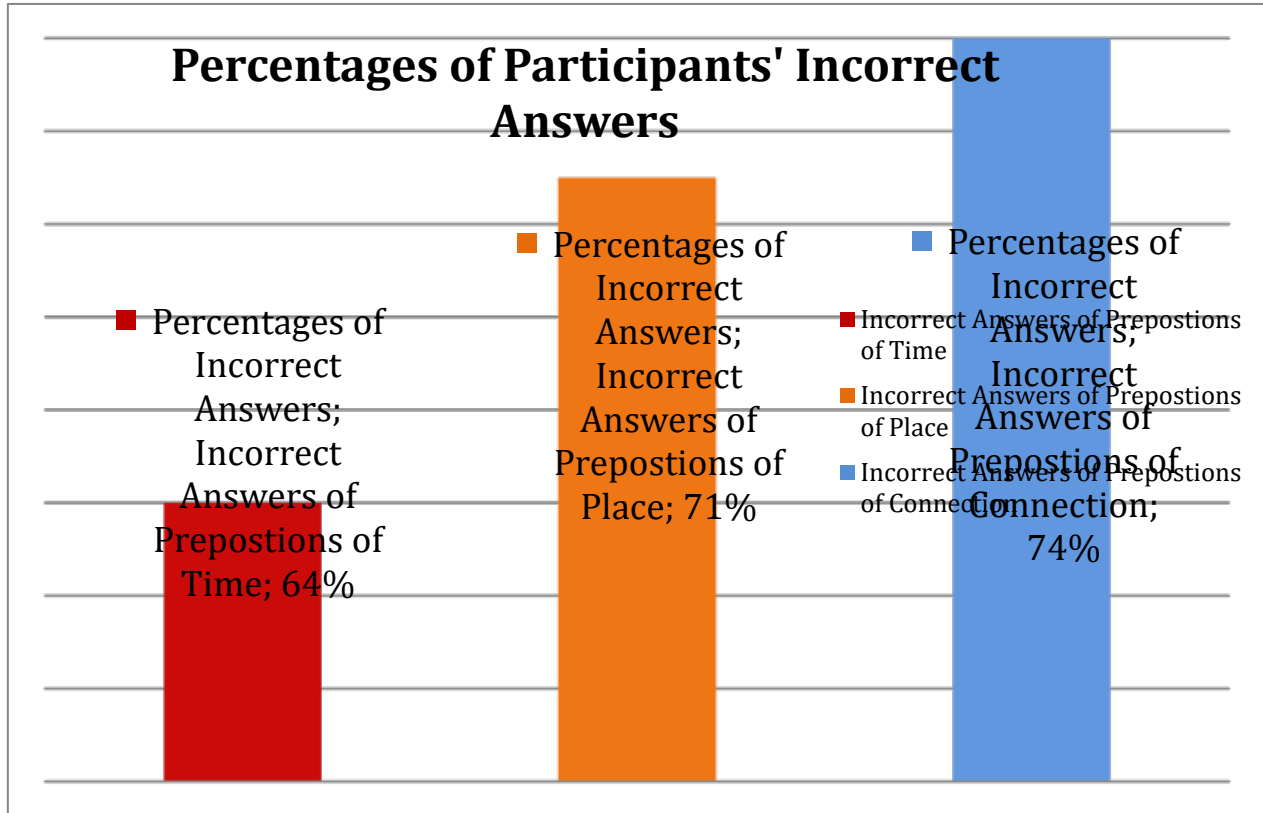


Figure (1) Percentages of Participants' Incorrect Answers

9. Conclusions

In the light of the deep theoretical research and the results obtained of current study, it is concluded that this grammatical area, prepositions, is an important grammatical area that varies in types and functions and that it is neglected in language teaching and learning.

Moreover, the findings revealed that most of the students face difficulties in using prepositions. For example, they misused prepositions according to their native language i.e. Arabic. It is concluded that learning English prepositions by university students, whose encounter difficulties in using EFL prepositions. This is due to difference between Arabic and English prepositions.

10. Recommendations

Based on the findings the study offers the following recommendations:

1. Curriculum designers are encouraged to give greater attention to the inclusion and systematic presentation of prepositions when developing and designing English syllabuses.
2. Teachers of English as a second/foreign language are advised to focus on prepositions, increase their awareness of common difficulties, and provide clear explanations to help learners overcome recurring problems in their usage.
3. Teachers should provide students with intensive and varied practice activities that target the correct use of prepositions in different contexts.
4. Students are encouraged to pay greater attention to learning English in general and to the accurate use of prepositions in particular.
5. Teachers should implement effective and appropriate teaching strategies and instructional techniques to enhance students' understanding and correct application of prepositions.

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