

Common Errors in Using Prepositions of Place and Time (At, On, In, For, From)

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to point out the mistakes of students in using common prepositions of place and time (at, in, on, for, from). The study tries to clarify the reasons behind these errors and to make clear view of their use. Third grade secondary school students were chosen as the sample of the study. A test was designed to obtain clear idea of students' problems in this respect. The test comprises various forms of questions whose answers are thought to be problematic for the test-takers.

The second tool used to investigate the learners problems when using prepositions is a questionnaire designed by the researcher to give more reliability to the results of the test. In other words it elicits the participants beliefs concerning the use of prepositions.

المستخلص:

يهدف البحث الى تأثير اخطاء الطلبة عند استعمالهم حروف الجر المشتركة في الزمان والمكان وهي (at, in, on, for, from)، تحاول الدراسة توضيح الاسباب الكامنة خلف هذه الاخطاء واعطاء رؤية واضحة لطريقة استعمالها. تم تصميم اختبار للحصول على فكرة واضحة عن مشاكل الطلبة بهذا الصدد، وتم اختيار طلبة السنة الدراسية الثالثة من المرحلة الثانوية كعينة للدراسة. تضمن الاختبار اشكال مختلفة من الاسئلة التي يعتقد ان اجاباتها تمثل اشكالية للمتقدمين. الاداة الثانية المستخدمة لتفصي مشاكل المتعلمين عند استخدام حروف الجر عند

تصميم الاختبار لاعطاء مزيد من الموثوقية لنتائج الاختبار، وبعبارة اخرى فانه يثير اعتقادات المشاركين بشأن استخدام حروف الجر.

1- Introduction

This study is an attempt to present a clear view of a grammatical area namely prepositions of place and time. This part of speech is one of the most commonly used in our daily life. Moreover, there are many problems encountered by students when using prepositions. Non-native learners may misuse these prepositions having no idea why they make such errors.

The main purposes of this study are the following:

- To discuss the use of prepositions.
- To shed light on the errors expected to be made by learners of English.
- Finding solutions and suggestions to overcome the problems.

2- Background of the study

English language has become one of the most important languages in the world. It's also one of the most widely spread languages. It is used in several ways in life.

Iraqi students study English as a foreign language, therefore, a great deal of emphasis is placed on teaching this language, it provides employment opportunities on a large scale, which probably another language makes the difference between English and native language.

Arab students who intend to study English face a lot of difficulties when learning English as a second language or misuse its grammatical systems.

Prepositions are an extremely important area of grammar in both English and Arabic. misusing prepositions may alter the meaning of sentence or make it ungrammatical. Learners often have problems with proposition specially when they have similar meanings.

This study exclusively investigates the five prepositions of place and time (at, in, on , for, from).

We used a test and a questionnaire to find out the possible results which will help us to know the reasons behind the errors the students always make. Prepositions are a constant cause of difficulties to the learners, especially preposition which have similar meaning.

3- Statement of the problem

Prepositions are a common cause of confusion for learners because each preposition has a number of different uses and this survey looks at the use of prepositions and the difficulties, they can present for learners when they use them for place and time like the same word for different area exactly for these words (at, in, on, for, from).

4 - Aims of the study

- ١- Identifying the use of preposition of place and time in English and Arabic.
- ٢- finding out the differences and similarities between the prepositions of time and place.
- ٣- Discussing and investigating the effect of the Arabic on making errors made in this field.

5- Hypotheses of the research

It is hypothesized that :

- ١- 3rd grade secondary students misuse the prepositions (at, in, on, from, for) because of the interference of LI.
- ٢- The learners weakness is responsible for learners inability to differentiate between prepositions.

6- Term definitions

* **Preposition** : The word that is normally used in front of nouns, pronouns, noun – phrase or gerund to express a relationship between persons, things, events, etc.

(Alexadr; 1988, 14)

7 - Prepositions

7-1 What are prepositions?

Prepositions are very frequent words and the most common English prepositions are simple. e.g.:

* They consist of one word. (Leech and Svartvik, 1995, P35)

* Where do they come in sentences ?

General Use :

1- Usually preposition occur immediately before noun form. To work on the beginning of phrase including noun. e.g.:

* At the cinema.

2- Often occur immediately after verb, adjective or noun. Ex:

* Arrive at. (v)

* Fond of. (adj)

* Interest in. (n)

3- When a preposition precedes a verb, which is always an (ing) form. e.g.:

* I'm afraid of crying.

What do they do ?

Time and place.

Some prepositions have a concrete meaning that we can show. These often define place and time prepositions.

Learners often see prepositions as a major problem because:

- Many choices have little or nothing to do with meaning; so, they are particularly difficult to remember. (Parrat, M, 2000, P 83)

7-2 Preposition meaning

A preposition describes the relationship between two or more things. It also expresses many other kinds of relationships. e.g.:

1- Purpose:

* He was in hurry to catch up the 7:30 train.

2- Result:

* Death from drawing in the river.

3- Questions and in relative and interrogative clauses. e.g.:

- What can I cut the bread with?
- This is the book I was telling you about.

Prepositions of place :

At

1- Is an expression of direction. e.g.:

* The bank at the end of the road.

2- The space. e.g.:

* I'm sitting at my desk.

3- We use (at) with the names of villages, towns and cities. e.g.:

* He was waiting at the bus stop.

4- We use (at) with some common phrases. e.g.:

* At the end of a corridor..

5- We use (at) when we refer to gathering of people. e.g.:

* At a conference.

6- We use (at) to suggest aggression. e.g.:

* Don't throw it at me.

7- We use (at) to show something that is at particular point. Often as a part of line.

* He is at the bus stop. (Note : the bus stop is one point in a line of bus stops).

In

1- We use (in) with buildings. e.g.:

* It was raining; so, we waited in the bus.

2- We use (in) with some common phrases. e.g.:

* In the lesson / in the book / in the newspaper.

* In the back / in front of the car.

3- We use (in) to express the positions. e.g.:

* The boy swims in the sea.

4- We also use (in) to express the movement. Specially in formal English.

e.g. :

* The manager came in the office.

* She is diving in the water.

5- We use (in) where we refer to the means we use to achieve something.

e.g. :

* Tell me in a few words what happened yesterday.

* She replied in a most offensive way.

6- We use (in) to show that something is enclosed or surrounded. e.g.:

* The dog is in the garden.

7- We use (in) for geographical areas such as cities and countries. e.g.:

* I live in London.

On

1- We use (on) with a surface or a line. e.g.:

* The pen on the table.

2- We use (on) for movement up or the vertical movement. e.g.:

* We get on the bus.

3- We use (on) for a certain side. e.g.:

* Being on a surface.

4- We also use (on) for house's floors.e.g.:

* My brother lives on the first floor.

5- We use (on) to designate nouns of streets, name or houses. e.g.:

* I live on oxford street.

6- We use (on) to show that position on a horizontal or vertical surface.

e.g.:

* The satellite dish is on the roof.

7- We also use (on) to show position on street, road, etc. **e.g.:**

* I used to live on Portland street.

Exceptions:

At	On	In
Point	Enclosed space	Surface
At the corner	On the wall	In the garden
At the bus stop	On the ceiling	In London
At the door	On the cover	In a box

From

1- We use (from) indicating.

* Distance or remoteness. **e.g.:** Sana'a is 250 KM from Ta'aiz.

* Receiving or sending. **e.g.:** I received a present from London.

2- We use (from) with reasons or motives. **e.g.:**

* Huge number of people in the world died from HIV everyday.

3- We use (from) with person or thing deprived. **e.g.:**

* The police took his gun from him.

4- We also use (from) to places, where we belong to or where we come from. **e.g.:**

* Do you come from Tokyo?

5- (from) can be used with other prepositions we connect to. Then, in our project because research will expand, so we will mention here that (from) is often used with (to) when we speak about place. e.g.:

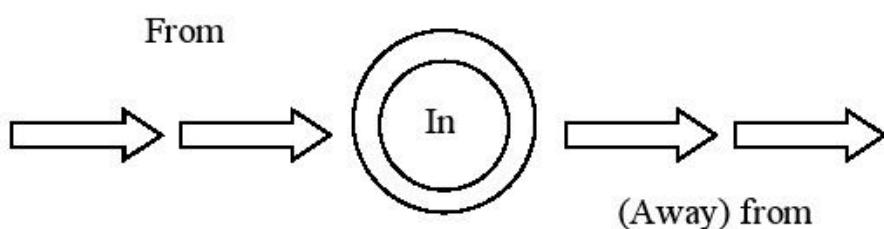
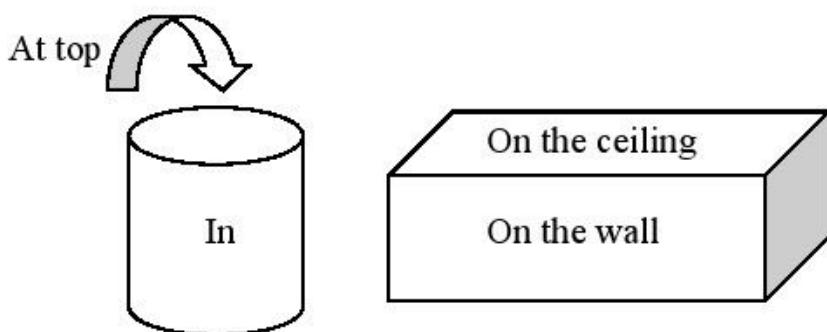
* They traveled from Sana'a to Yemen.

For

1- We use (for) to indicate:

- * Purpose and intended goals. e.g.: She left for home.
- * Substitution. e.g.: He worked for his sick mother.
- * Duration of time. e.g.: Ahmed spoke for two hours.
- * Movement. e.g.: She plays tennis for her country.
- * Price. e.g.: Ten dollars for a hat.
- * Cause. e.g.: He cried for joy.

Prepositions and Location:



Prepositions of Time

They are used to clarify what time an event happened or will happen. Time prepositions are used nouns and pronouns. They usually come before nouns or pronouns but never come before verbs.

At

1- It is used for a “point of time: chiefly with o’clock time as (at) in expression like “at noon, at 8 o’clock”. e.g. :

* He always gets up at six o’clock.

2- It is used for holiday period idiomatically like “at the weekend, at Easter, at Christmas”. e.g.:

* he never works at the weekend.

3- It can be used also for the periods which are relived, as “at breakfast, at moment, at instance, at dinner, at lunch, at night”. e.g.:

* The plane will take off at down.

4- We use (at) when refer to gathering of people. e.g.:

* At the party.

5- (at) is also used to complete address. e.g.:

* I live at 22 orchard road, London, England.

6- it can be used in the following expressions at the beginning of (OF) at the right exact “at sometime, at a time, at present, at once, at the age of,... etc”. e.g.:

* I used to swim in the sea at the age of 15.

1- We use (in) with months, years, countries,...etc; that will be a period of time, such as :

- a) In the evening, in December, in 1999, in the winter.
- b) In the twentieth Century.
- c) In the past, in the future, next month.

e.g.:

* I woke up in the night.

2- We use (in) in time for something that soon enough to be done. **e.g.:**

* I've sent Jill her birthday present. I hope it arrives in time.

3- We use (in the end) when we say what the final result of situation was.

e.g.:

* We had a lot of problems with our car. In the end, we sold it and bought another one.

* He got mad and more angry. In the end, he just walked out of the room.

4- We use (in) for the time it takes to complete something. **e.g.:**

* Could you walk thirty miles in a day.

5- (in) is also used for a future time measured from the time of speaking.

e.g.:

* Your photos will be ready in an hour. (an hour from now).

On

1- We use (on) with day and dates. **e.g.:**

* She goes shopping on Friday.

2- We use (on) with birthdays. **e.g.:**

* My mother gave me a present on my birthday.

Exceptions

At	On	In
A specific time	Day and date	Period of time, time, years, months, seasons
At 2:00 PM	On my birthday	In a few days

For

1- We use (for) a period of time to say how long something goes on, such as (for six years, for two hours, for a week). e.g.

* I have lived in this house for six years.

* We watched TV for two hours last night.

2- We use (for) to say how long something has been happening. e.g.

* I have been waiting here for 8 o'clock.

3- We use (for) with any other form of nouns. e.g.

* I have been riding my bicycle for 2 hours.

4- We use (for) with a present participle or past perfect tense for an action which stands up to the time of speaking. e.g.

* He has worked for a year.

From

1- We use (from) in two points from period, such as

a) From Monday to Wednesday.

b) From Monday until Wednesday. e.g.

* He goes to school from Monday to Wednesday.

2- We use (from) to show the time when something starts or started. e.g.

* Peter's on holiday from next Friday.

3- We also use (from) with other preposition like (to). e.g

* The students take their lessons from eight to ten.

8 - Methodology

This section deals with an explanation of the steps followed in conducting this research. The method of this research is descriptive. It shows the problems that third grade secondary students face in using the prepositions of place and time which have similar meaning.

We try to find out the reasons behind these problems and give suitable solutions by using:

A- A test.

B- Closed - ended questionnaire.

In the light of the information that was collected, we suggested a number of recommendations to curriculum designers, teachers, and students.

8-1 Procedures

* We collected information about the topic from books and designed a test including items on prepositions of place and time which have similar meaning.

* We collected the responses of students to the test and developed a closed- ended questionnaire.

* We distributed the closed - ended questionnaire to a chosen sample of the 3rd grade students.

* We have analyzed and discussed each statement according to the reason

* We have collected the responses and calculated the percentage for each statement.

8-2 Data collection instrument

The method used in this research is the survey method. So the instrument for collecting data includes:

A- A test (consists of 20 questions).

B- Closed - ended questionnaire (consists of 12 statements). They were distributed to the third grade students.

8-3 Population and sample

We selected twenty three students randomly in Al-Maamoon secondary school for girls to fulfill our test.

9 - Results of Discussion

we discuss the findings of the questionnaire. These findings are going to be used in previous sections in order to answer the questions of the research.

9-1 Results and Discussions of the Test

1- " I will meet you at six o'clock".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	48	2
Percentage	96 %	4 %

The first item has been answered since the majority of sample (96%) has translated this sentences correctly.

It wasn't answered correctly by (4%) of the sample. This might be caused by lacking knowledge.

٢- "At the end of the street there is a path heading to the river".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	12	38
Percentage	24 %	76 %

Most of the students have chosen the wrong answer because the majority of the sample is ascribed to the mother tongue interference when the preposition in Arabic (ala / equivalent) to (at) in English.

3- “The course begins in January”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	44	6
Percentage	88 %	12 %

The preposition has been chosen correctly, that's because the sample has translated this point properly.

I Point out that all the indications of (in) are available in Arabic preposition (FI) – (adverbiality).

4- “ He still comes to see me from time to time”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	47	3
Percentage	94 %	6 %

Most of the students have chosen the right answer (94%). This preposition (from) is also likely to be misinterpreted by (6%) of the sample. This might be caused by lacking of information about the preposition.

5- "She was born in Baghdad and still lives in Baghdad".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	12	38
Percentage	24 %	76 %

In this sentence we have two prepositions and (38%) of the sample chose for the first part. The reason may be the misusing of the sample. So, it wasn't answered correctly by (76 %) of the sample.

6- "They lived in the north of England".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	3	47
Percentage	6 %	94 %

7- "She is from London".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	15	35
Percentage	30 %	70 %

It is assumed that most of the sample would translate this point correctly. But this wasn't chosen correctly. The reason might be attributed to the lack of rule for using a certain preposition.

8- "My children are at school".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	14	36
Percentage	25 %	75 %

It was assumed that most of the sample would translate this point correctly. But, this wasn't true since (75 %) of the sample hasn't chosen correctly for this point. It might be caused by interference of the L1.

9- "Children are playing in the street".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	16	34
Percentage	35 %	65 %

The percentage is (65%) of sample didn't choose it correctly. In support of this point, I noticed that in preposition of place matches the Arabic preposition (FI) – Alzarfiya (adverbiality).

10- "The application must be handed in December".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	3	46
Percentage	6 %	94 %

The sample has chosen this point of preposition wrongly (94%). This is caused by the interference structure of the target languages like Arabic and English. This might be caused by lack of knowledge.

11- "He goes to London from the first of May to third of June".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	5	45
Percentage	10 %	90 %

The preposition here has been chosen wrongly since (90%) of the sample chose it wrongly. This was caused by the interference of the mother tongue. In support of this point, I noticed that the preposition (from) matches the Arabic preposition (min – from) (adverbiality). It might be caused by lack of competence.

12- “I wonder if you could get it done on Monday”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	12	4
Percentage	92 %	8 %

The sample would translate this preposition properly. Because (92%) the majority of sample choose it properly.

I believe that when indicating periods of time which is exactly equivalent to the Arabic preposition (fi) this point wasn't properly translated by (4%) of the sample due to lack of information.

13- “She was studying at Oxford, but she lives in Baghdad”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	5 / 36	45 / 14
Percentage	10 % / 85 %	90 % / 15 %

Here the sample fulfilled it correctly in the first part and a lot of them made a mistake in the second part. They chose the incorrect preposition in the second part. This might be caused by the interference of the L1.

14- “he left school at fifteen”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	5	45
Percentage	5 %	95 %

The statement has been answered since the majority of the sample (95 %) has translated this sentence incorrectly. The statement has been answered wrongly.

15- “Traveling from London to Rome”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	25	25
Percentage	50 %	50 %

It wasn't correctly answered by (50%) of the sample due to lack of knowledge.

16- “Paris is on the river Seine”.

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	35	15
Percentage	75 %	25 %

The preposition has been translated correctly by the sample since (75%) of the sample answer correct. We use (on) for surface places. It wasn't correctly answered by (25%). This is due to the lack of knowledge.

17- "I was born on the 20th of March".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	11	39
Percentage	22 %	78 %

It was excepted that the answer would be correct. but the sample was answered wrongly. It might be the interference of the mother tongue.

18- "We have had no rain for three months".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	46	4
Percentage	92 %	8 %

The preposition has been chosen properly because (92%) of the sample chose it. It wasn't correctly by (8 %) this might be caused by the lack of knowledge.

19- "At two o'clock, I will ring for your phone".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	45	5
Percentage	90 %	10 %

The sample would translate this preposition properly. (90%) of the sample chose it properly.

I believe that when indicating periods of time (fi) equals (ala).

20- "I have waited if you could go away in a week".

Scale	Correct use	Incorrect use
Frequency	5	45
Percentage	10 %	90

The preposition here has been chosen wrongly since (90%) of the sample choose it incorrectly. This was caused by the interference of mother tongue. In support of this point, I noticed that the preposition (from) matches the Arabic preposition

9-2 Questionnaire results

The study will also discuss the findings of the questionnaire. These findings either approve the research hypotheses or reject them.

Results and discussions of the questionnaire

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
Prepositions (at, in, on, for, from) bear many meanings according to the contexts	75	5	15

This statement assumed that most of the sample would translate it correctly they find problems when they use preposition, but they fulfilled it correctly.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
You did not practice it in the class or out the class.	17	66	17

This statement was chosen by the sample. No rated (66%) they might be confused by L1. It was chosen by (17%) as yes they might lack knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
The rule given in your book are not always very clear.	67	12	21

This statement is given (67) yes this meant that students can translate it good so the result was that yes have knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
You sometimes cannot differentiate between the prepositions above time you practice them.	60	16	18

This statement was chosen by the sample correctly because (60) of them chose (yes) the problems of the teaching that students do, and it was chosen as no by (16) and sometimes by (18) of the sample. It will be lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
The more you practice them the more you be correct using them.	79	9	18

This statement has been chosen correctly by (79) this is a assumptions that the sample treat it correctly and it was chosen as no by (9) and sometimes by (18) of the sample, it will be lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
You always know when you could use the preposition in your writings.	79	9	18

This statement was expected that most of the sample would translate it correctly. They chose (yes) by (79), but the sample chose (7) as no this might be caused by the lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
Prepositions are taught at the beginning of the sentence.	66	14	25

This statement was assumed that most of the sample would translate it correctly, because they chose (yes) by (66) and by (14) of sample as (no) and sometimes (25). This might be attributed to the lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
Are you studying the prepositions for the sake of the exam ?	30	30	40

Here the statement was expected that most of the sample would translated it because there is equalization in the answers by the sample chose (30) yes, and no (30) and sometimes (40).

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
You face difficulties in using these prepositions because of the big similarity between them in use.	69	20	21

This statement was chosen by (69) so, they could translate the meaning of it. But (20) really face problem in the similarity, and (21) sometimes. This might be caused by the lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
The similarity in the meaning of prepositions above is reason for your misusing.	21	20	69

The statement was chose by (69) sometimes, of the samples since they face another problems of teaching and the similarity, and (21) yes and no (20) this might be caused by the lack of knowledge.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometime
You usually use the dictionary to help you in using them correctly.	80	6	96

This statement was chose by (80) yes and by (6) of sample as no and sometimes (96). This might be caused by the lack of knowledge.

10 – Conclusion and Finding, Recommendations and Suggestions

10-1 Conclusions and Findings :

❖ Conclusions:

The study displays the reasons for the errors of the misusing of prepositions and the similarity between English and Arabic prepositions of time and place in the use (at, in, on, for, from) as common prepositions in English.

Students use from 7th grade to 12th grade in the school also that there are differences between English and Arabic prepositions of time and place limited in these words (at, in, on, for, from). The 12th grade student will face difficulties and make errors in using English prepositions of time and place. Sometimes because they are similar in the meaning or they have not rules to limit usage.

❖ Findings :

At the end of our work we found some reasons behind the errors that students always do in their use for prepositions :

1. There is significant difference between errors made by the students due to mother tongue interference and these made by other learning problems.
2. More errors were attributable to interference from Arabic to other teaching problems.
3. The mother tongue interference.
4. The structure of the target language.
5. Prepositions do not have rules in using.
6. The similarity is a reason also.
7. Other problems are related to teaching and its techniques.

10-2 Recommendations and Suggestions:

These recommendations are suggested in the hope that they will be taken into consideration for at least reducing the occurrence of the errors as well as creating better curriculum in the fields of teaching and methodology.

The recommendations were put in the light of analysis and discussion, they are as follows:

1. Prepositions should be taught as representing the relationship in time.
2. Curriculum need to use private and different situations to encourage students to use them.
3. Teachers should give students chance to write or speak weekly about any topic by using preposition and then give feedback.
4. Teachers need to ask students to use them as obligation.

5. There must be intensive use of the language.
6. Students also need to make use of these prepositions in their speaking, writing and reading.
7. Students need to use these items in their daily situations.
8. Teachers need to explain and clarify these items to students as much as they can by using pictures.

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Appendix (1)**Copy of Test**

Dear Students;

The main purpose of this task is to test your ability in using of prepositions (at, on, in, for, from). please chose the most appropriate.

Fill in with the best preposition :

at - in - on - for - from

1. I will meet you six o'clock.
2. The end of the street, there is a path leading to the river.
3. The course begins January.
4. He still comes to see me time to time.
5. She was born Sana' and she's lives Sana'.
6. they live the north of England.
7. She is London.
8. Children are playing the street.
9. He goes to London the first of may to the third of June.
10. I wonder if you could get it done Sunday.
11. She was studying Khawlan, but she lives Sana'.
12. the application must be handed December.
13. Ali left school fifteen.
14. Travelling London to Rome.
15. Paris is The river Seine.
16. We have had no rain three months.
17. I was born 20th of march.

18. two o'clock I will ring your phone.

19. I waited if you could go away A week.

20. She sleep the bed.

Appendix (2)

Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to get your opinions concerning the problems that third grade students at secondary school face in using prepositions of time and place (at – in – on – for – from).

Read each statement and tick the suitable answer :

No	Statement	Yes	No	Sometimes
1	Prepositions (at – in – on – for – from) bear many meanings according to the context.			
2	You did not practice it in the class or out the class.			
3	The influence of your mother tongue affects negatively in the use of prepositions.			
4	The rule give in your book are not always very clear.			
5	You sometimes cannot differentiate between the prepositions above time you practice them.			
6	The more you practice them the more you be correct using them.			
7	You always know when you could use the preposition in your writings.			
8	Prepositions are taught at the beginning of the sentence.			
9	Are you studying the prepositions (at – in – on – for – from) for the sake of the exam ?			
10	You face difficulties in using these prepositions because of the big similarity between them in use.			
11	The similarity in the meaning of prepositions above is reason for your misusing.			
12	You usually use the dictionary to help you in using them correctly.			