A Comparative Study of Prepositional Errors in English among 10th Grade Students of Private and Public Schools in Punjab

Easha Ahsen[1], Prof. Dr. Ijaz Asghar[2], Prof. Dr. Hafiz Ahmad Bilal[3], Dr. Naveed Nawaz Ahmad[4]

[1] MPhil English (Linguistics), Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Email: eashaahsen41006@gmail.com

[2] Chairperson, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Email: ijaz.asghar@uos.edu.pk

[3] Higher Education Department, Punjab, Email: ahmadbilal.uos@gmail.com

[4] Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Corresponding Author's Email: naveed.nawaz@uos.edu.pk

Abstract

This study explores comparative investigation of prepositional errors in English among 10th Grade Students of public and private schools in Punjab. The main objective is to identify the common types of prepositional errors, explore their possible causes and examine the differences in frequency of errors between two school sectors. Corder's errors Analysis along with a mixed-method approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis have been employed. Data is being collected from written essay samples. The errors are being classified into omission, addition, substitution and misuse types. It is concluded that private school students make fewer prepositional errors because of greater exposure to English. The findings reveal the prepositional usage differences between private and public school sectors and provide some valuable strategies to enhance grammatical competence among students of secondary level.

Keywords: Prepositional Errors, Private and Public Schools, Corder's Error Analysis

Introduction

English has become the most widely used international language serving as a bridge of communication among people from different linguistic and cultural back ground. English serves its role more than communication as it is widely used in various fields like technology science, business and in this way English has made the world a global village (Rao,2019). In Pakistan, English plays an important role both as a second language as well as foreign language. It is also used as a compulsory subject from primary to higher education level. It is considered a key to professional and academic success. So, acquiring proficiency in English has become a necessary goal for students. However, many learners in Pakistan face difficulties in English grammar usage. Among these difficulties the use of prepositions remains one of the most problematic areas. Prepositions are small words but important words that show relationships of time, place, position in a sentence. English prepositions are one of the main challenges for L2 learners of English language because such areas are the problematic ones (Lindstromberg,2010, as cited in Wene & Putri ,2018). Their usage is often difficult for second language learners because the rules are not

---

always clear. They are also difficult to learn because their meanings and functions often differ from those in the learner's native languages such as Urdu and Punjabi. As a result, learners often make errors like omitting prepositions, adding unnecessary ones, or choosing incorrect ones. These errors can change the meanings of a sentence and also affect overall clarity. In Punjab, English is taught in both sectors private and Punjab schools but the exposure to English differ to a great extent. It is because private schools emphasize spoken English communication practices, while public schools rely on traditional as well as grammar translation methods. Pupils from public schools lack communication in English among fellows in classrooms as there are no communication strategies used in the classrooms and teachers do not focus on role-play techniques and presentations as well (Rasool et al., 2021). So, these are the differences that may affect how students use prepositions. So, through studying prepositional errors that students commit can help us to identify their root causes and also contribute to improving English Language teaching strategies. By investigating the commonly occurring prepositional errors, researchers can highlight the main underlying causes and such causes include influence of native languages and also lack grammatical mastery which become a base for pedagogical approaches and methodologies in English language learning classrooms (Setyaningrum & Fatmawaty, 2020). English grammar has been widely studied in Pakistan. Most research has focused on general grammatical errors rather than specific problems like prepositional usage. In Punjab, there is a clear difference between private and public schools in terms of teaching methods and exposure to English. Private school students usually communicate more in English, while public school students often depend on memorization and translation. These variations may lead to differences in how students use English prepositions. The lack of comparative search on this topic highlights a clear gap that this study intends to fill. To explore this issue, the present study adopts Corder's (1967) Error Analysis Framework, a well-known model in applied linguistics. Corder viewed learner errors as evidence of progress rather than failure as errors provide information about stages of acquisition. By analyzing errors, teachers and researchers can better understand the learning process and the causes behind such errors, therefore this research aims to compare prepositional errors made by 10th Grade Students from private and public schools in Punjab to identify learning difficulties and improve English Grammar teaching at the secondary level. The purpose of this study is to explore, investigate and compare the use of English prepositions among 10th Grade Students in private and public schools in Punjab.The main focus is to identify the common types of errors, explore their causes and also determine their frequency. By using Corder (1967) Errors Analysis Framework, this study examines how prepositional errors reflect the students learning process. By analyzing written samples from students, the study will classify errors into different types such as omission, addition to gain clear picture of learner's difficulties.

Research Objectives:
The key objectives of the study are: -
  (i)   To identify the most common types of prepositional errors made by students.
  (ii) To compare frequency, patterns and nature of errors between public and private school students.
  (iii) To investigate the possible reasons lying behind these prepositional errors.
This study is crucial because prepositions play a vital role to improve our grammatical accuracy. The findings will help the teachers, linguistics, and curriculum designers and this research also contributes to enhancing student's accuracy, fluency and confidence in using English prepositions.

Literature Review:

The main problem in mastering English prepositions represents a central challenge while acquiring second language acquisition. This difficulty I addressed for learners whose first language (L1), such as Urdu and Punjabi possess grammatical system that is different from the overall structures of English including semantic and syntactic structures. It is cited that students lack the understanding of different types of meanings and structures and their contextual usage and it remains a central challenge for L2 learners (Al-Bawaleez &Abdullah, 2023). A minimal research has been done to address prepositional errors to diagnose their causes and explore the pedagogical implications for teaching English as a Second Language. This literature reviews includes the existing literature focusing on comparison educational contexts and this review contributes to empirical and theoretical framework for the present study. For this purpose, it conducts a comparative investigation of prepositional errors among 10th Grade Students in private and public Students in Punjab. The classification of errors is a central domain of this research. It is followed by establishing error analysis frameworks including Dulay's taxonomy, a strong consensus exists between researchers on the primary categories of these errors and it is studied by Bilal et al. (2013) in Sargodha, Pakistan. By reviewing their studies, there are four main types of errors. These errors are omission, substitution, addition and misordering. Omission means omitting the required preposition, substitution means using the incorrect preposition, addition means unnecessary usage of preposition and misordering means placing the incorrect preposition. Omission and substitution are most commonly occurring errors. The semantic complexity coupled with idiomatic usage plays a prevalent role in creating cognitive load for learners that may lead to frequent errors in both written and spoken production (Tulabut et al., 2018). Prepositional errors are mainly lexical and omission errors disrupts the main intended meaning of a sentence whereas substitution errors equally affect the sentence meaning and may lead to learner frustration (Wairimu & Ngugi,2021). Role of first language (L1) interference is playing a main and dominating role in understanding the etiology of these errors. There are some evidences and such evidences include the foundation work done by Bilal et al. (2013) and also the research done in Persian contexts by (Oyinloye et al., 2019). These studies believe that native language is a main contributing factor that plays an important role in negative transferring. Influence of first language L1 contributes in the negative transferring of linguistic structures and it also leads to the possibility of errors occurrence in L2 and it remains a main hurdle in accurate prepositional usage (Masood et al.,2020).

In a specific context of Punjab, there are structural differences between L1 (Urdu/Punjabi) and L2 English prepositional systems. It may result that learner may directly use rules of L1 onto L2. In such cases, substitution and omission errors happen. For example, In Urdu, there is an absence of equivalent English preposition and it may cause wrong usage and confusion. So, literature reviews highlights that just emphasize placed on L1 transfer gives an incomplete explanation. So, the errors originating from the internal complexities of the target language also hold equal importance. These are the intralingual errors. This indicates that interlanguage is shaped by the dynamics cross linguistic influences the internal cognitive processes. It is cited that the errors originating from the intralingual, meaning the internal complexities of the target language are of equal importance as they include polysemy that may cause hurdles in English prepositional usage (Riaz et al.,2015). Socio-educational context is the main variable that plays an important role in shaping this learning process. As it is the distinction between the private and public sectors. This comparative investigation of error analysis between public and private schools is relevant to Pakistani context and there is also a notable gap in existing research. As the literature review highlights a trend that public school's students show a higher frequency of prepositional errors compared to private school students (Bilal et al., 2013). This is due to several factors that may include degree of language exposure, teaching methodologies. Private school sectors focus on mainly communicative language teaching (CLT).and English medium instructions are given in these

private sectors rathar than in public sectors. while public schools rely on traditional grammar translation methods and focus on memorization and cramming over contextualizations, there is insufficient opportunity for students to learn and use correct patterns of prepositions (Akbar et al., 2023; Sana et al., 2025). So through literature review, we can control confounding variables like curriculum design and socioeconomic factors. Another dimension that holds an important place in learner variability is gender. Gender is the main variable and in Pakistan, there are some studies as by Saher (2019) and Saeed et al. (2015) report that female students commit more prepositional errors than male learners. These studies are based on undergraduate learners and secondary students.but this is not universal. While some studies like (Bilal et al., 2013) suggest that there is no statistically gender based differences. These studies suggest that gender alone may not be a reliable predictor of grammatical accurate as the changes may be influenced by different intervening variables such as confidence, motivation factors, Intellectual levels, class room participation patterns sociocultural context and these variables remain understudy in the context of Punjab's secondary schools (Sana et al., 2025)

The findings from the previous research emphasize that isolated grammatical rules from meaningful context are ineffective because there is a need for more explicit and teaching strategies (Bilal et al., 2013). The suggested strategies include the use of contrastive analysis to represent the main differences between the L1 (Urdu/Punjabi) and L2 (English) and providing a dedicated practice on high frequency and confusing prepositions especially those related to time and place. Many researchers emphasize the communicative and student centered approach that help students to practice grammar through authentic language use rather than cramming or memorization. Some studies also focus on incorporating English songs in the classroom to enhance student's interest, motivation. (Roxas et al., 2024). Although a major gap remains that some studies stop at recommending such empirical approaches as it highlights a disconnected theoretical suggestions and practical applications. In conclusion, the reviewed literature provides a complete understanding of prepositional errors explains the main prepositional types, their causes and also the interlingual and intralingual factors contributing to prepositional errors. It also showcases the impact of educational context and demographic factors such as gender. This literature review reveals a gap that is the focused, empirical, and comparative investigation that employs corder's error analysis framework to compare prepositional errors between public and private schools in Punjab.Through this approach, this study will not only fill a knowledgeable gap but also produce practical, actionable, data-based insights that can inform the more valuable, effective English language teaching strategies at the secondary level.

Research Methodology

This study follows a comparative research design by employing mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate prepositional errors among 10th-grade students of public and private schools in Punjab.The purpose is to identify common types of prepositional errors, determine their causes, and to compare how frequently these errors occur across the two school sectors. A sample of 100 students will be collected, consisting of 50 students from public schools and 50 students from private schools through random sampling technique. Data will be collected from students through a written task that encourages natural use of English grammar particularly prepositions and students will be asked to write essays. Quantitative analysis will show the frequency analysis and Qualitative analysis will highlight possible interlingual and intralingual causes. The findings will provide comparative insights into how these differences of prepositional errors among both sectors affect language learning and provide pedagogical recommendations for improving English grammar at secondary level.

Data Analysis
This section presents the analysis of data collected following the mixed-method approach as outlined in the research methodology and the data from the essay samples of 100 students (50 from public schools and 50 from private schools) was analyzed through the lens of Corder's Error Analysis. This analysis is structured in two phases: a quantitative analysis showing the frequency and types of errors and a qualitative analysis exploring the causes behind these errors.

Quantitative Overview
The initial quantitative analysis revealed a divergence in grammatical accuracy between two educational sectors which are private and public institutes confirming the hypothesis of this study. From 100 essays samples, a total of 684 errors in preposition usage were identified, documented, classified and categorized. Moreover, the distribution of these errors was uneven as students from public schools were responsible for 438 errors, averaging 8.76 errors per pupil whereas students from private schools made 246 prepositional errors averaging 4.93 errors per individual. This highlights that public school students committed 78% more errors than private school students. This difference in frequency highlights the greater exposure to English in private institutions as hypothesized in the abstract. These errors were classified into four categories: Omission, Addition, Substitution, and Misordering.

Analysis of Prevalent Error Types
Omission
Omission was the most common, frequent and the dominant error in public school essays (49.1%). There was an absence of a necessary preposition in sentences like "I will see you Monday". This suggests a lack of awareness of where a preposition is required in a sentence and it also signals the underdevelopment of grammatical rules among the students.

Substitution
This was the principle challenge for private school students (52%) and also remained a significant issue for public school pupils (40.6). It shows that the private school students are more aware that a preposition is needed, often they select the wrong one as in the example," He was standing in the bus stop", as it signals the elusiveness of semantic and collocational rules of preposition.

Addition and Misordering
These were lower, infrequent and consistent across both sectors. Addition errors like "She entered into the room", are universally challenging and such errors are more related to the complexity of phrasal verbs and idiomatic structures in English.

Qualitative Investigation
A qualitative Investigation into the errors guided by corder's framework was conducted to determine the origin, explore the causes, classified as interlingual (L1 interference) and intralingual (complexities within English)

Interlingual Transfer
The influence of Urdu and Punjabi was a significant factor, particularly evident in substitution and omission errors.

Omission due to Structural Differences
The syntactic structure of Urdu/Punjabi, where relational words such as (harf-e-jar) functions as postpositions, which leads to omission errors. For example: In Urdu, the phrase "Kamray mein"

(room in) does not directly map onto English syntax that may result in sentences like "She is home", omitting at.

Substitution due to Semantic Transfer
Such errors arose from one to many relationships between L1 and L2 prepositions. The Urdu/Punjabi preposition "par" covering meanings of on, at and upon caused such errors like "My Keys are at the table" (for on).

Intralingual Transfer
A number of errors originated from the intricate complexities within English were also prevalent across both groups.

Overgeneralizations
Students often applied a rule beyond its appropriate context as there is an example as learners overgeneralized to "on the morning" instead of the correct "in the morning". It highlights an imperfect process.

Confusion of similar prepositions
The distinction between prepositions of time and place (on, in, at) were a persistent source of substitution errors. The common mistake "I have been living here since three years" indicates a failure to internalize the specific rule as "since" references a point in time, whereas "for" denotes a span of time.

Phrasal Verb
The phrasal verb usage was a multifaceted challenge as errors related to phrasal verbs (e.g: look after, deal with) were most common. This indicates a difficulty of mastering these idiomatic and multiword verbs for L2 learners.

Key Findings
This research investigates the differences in English prepositional usage among students of both private and public school sectors in Punjab. This study makes a comparison of how well students use English prepositions like on, in, at, among etc. This research is based on Corder's Error Analysis framework. It investigates 100 student's sample essays and makes conclusions. It explores the types of errors, their frequency and the underlying causes behind them. There are total 684 prepositional errors made by students and out of 684 errors, 438 errors were committed by public school students and 246 mistakes were committed by private school students. This means that students from public school sector made more mistakes. These conclusions support the hypothesis that private school students perform better as they get a better exposure to English and have a better command on grammar. It also shows that each sector has faced specific learning problems. Students from both sectors committed types of mistakes. Omission errors were the most common errors committed by public school students. They often form such sentences which lack a necessary preposition. It highlights the learning gap in their understanding of using appropriate preposition. One of the reasons of such learning gap is that students mainly focus on traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, substitution errors were the main problematic errors made by private school students. It is because of the difficulty that students have confusions about the usage of specific appropriate prepositions. Both school sectors also made other prepositional errors such as addition and disordering errors. The main root causes behind such prepositional errors include influence of mother tongue and confusions within English. Sometimes, students directly translate from their native languages (Urdu/ Punjabi). It may result in substitution errors.

Moreover, sometimes students overgeneralize a rule and it happens when students face difficulty while using phrasal verbs. To sum up, this research shows a learning gap in understanding the accurate use of English prepositions. It also highlights the differences of how student from both sectors in Punjab use prepositions and it also provides valuable strategies for curriculum designers and teachers to focus on student's grammar.

Future Recommendations
There are several future recommendations for teachers, policy makers and curriculum designers based on the findings of this research. And these suggestions can help them to minimise prepositional errors among students of both sectors in Punjab. The leaning materials including text books which are prepared by curriculum designers should focus on the prepositions which students misuse. Such learning materials also include fruitful exercises that compare the differences between mother tongue languages and English prepositional system. Furthermore, public school sectors should improve and update teacher training programs. This study shows that teachers are currently focusing on grammar translation methods. Instead of just relying on traditional methods, teachers should focus on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), interactive methods as well as modern task- based learning approaches. Both sectors should conduct workshops for teachers and such activities would help them to learn the accurate use of English prepositions in real-life situations. Students from different sectors committed different types of errors as public school students made Omission errors. So, teachers should help them on building the basic grammar awareness. And private school students struggle with substitution errors. So, the teachers should help then to deal with word partnerships (Collocations). There is a need of more research in this area. Future research could use longitudinal approach to observe students over a longer period and then make conclusion. The future studies should also consider other factors like socio-economic background, student's motivation and aptitude level, parent's income and education.

Conclusion
This research set out to compare the types, frequency and underlying causes behind such errors made by 10th Grade Students in private and public schools in Punjab. This study employed a Corder's Error Analysis framework. The findings provide the differences in grammatical precision between the two sectors. The evidence of such difference is the number of mistakes that public school pupil committed 78% more errors than private school pupils. The main difference lies because private school students are more exposed to English and private schools use modern teaching methods. The research also presents the causes behind such errors as there are two main causes. First is the influence of the native language and second is the difficulty of using grammar rules within English. To sum up, this research comes to a point that learning is strongly affected and shaped by different factors such as teaching environment, methods and exposure to English. It is crucial to fix these prepositional problems that will help the students to communicate better and gain more opportunities in academic journey.

References
Al-Bawaleez, M. M., & Abdullah, A. T. H. (2023). *Difficulties in using prepositions in the English language correctly among EFL students at Jordanian universities. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,* 19(3), 1–11. http://www.jlls.org

Astute, W., Rahmawati, D., & Sari, R. (2023). *An analysis of students' errors in using English prepositions.*

Bilal, H. A., Tariq, A. R., & Abbas, M. (2013). *Errors in the use of English prepositions: A study of first-year college students in Pakistan.*

_____

Corder, S. P. (1967). *The significance of learners' errors. International Review of Applied Linguistics,* 5(4), 161–170.

Javed, T., Sana, N., & Khan, R. (2025). *A comparative study of English grammar errors between public and private school students in Punjab.*

Masood, M. H., Shafi, S., Rahim, M. Y., & Darwesh, M. A. (2020). *Interference of L1 (Urdu) in L2 (English) in Pakistan: Teaching English as a Second Language. International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 9(5), 110-118. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.9n.5p.110

Oyinloye, G. O., Rezaei, S., & Kafipour, R. (2019). *Error analysis of English prepositions among Persian EFL learners.*

Rao, P. S. (2019). *The role of English as a global language.* Research Journal of English (RJOE), 4(1), 65–79. https://www.rjoe.org.in/

Rasool, I., Khan, F., & Naqvi, R. Z. (2021). *Language practices of English language teachers at secondary level: A comparative study of public and private schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 5(2), 178–192. https://doi.org/10.47205/pllhr.2021(5-II)1.15

Riaz, W., Akram, A., Khan, A. B., Mansoor, H. S., Chaudhary, S. I., & Shafqat, M. (2015). *Errors in the usage of preposition in translation from English to Urdu language at secondary level. Annals of Education,* 1(1), 18–23. http://www.crsdindia.com/aoe.html

Roxas, E. C., Santos, M. J., & De Vera, P. R. (2024). *Using English songs to enhance grammar and motivation among ESL learners.*

Saeed, A., Khalid, R., & Malik, S. (2015). *Gender-based differences in grammatical proficiency and accuracy among Pakistani ESL learners.*

Saher, F. (2019). *Gender variation in prepositional errors among undergraduate English students or learners in Pakistan.*

Setyaningrum, R. R., & Fatmawaty, R. (2020). *The prepositional errors in students' writing.* Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP, 7(1), 41–50. https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v7i1.2627

Tulabut, M. C., Fernandez, R., & Ramos, L. (2018). *Semantic and syntactic challenges in prepositional usage among ESL learners.*

Wairimu, R., & Ngugi, B. N. (2021). *An Analysis of Prepositional Related Errors in English Composition of Upper Primary Learners in Kieni East Sub County in Nyeri County. International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences,* 6(5), 49–63. https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.65.9

Wene, I. W., & Putri, A. R. D. (2018). *Challenges in implementing prepositions of time, place and direction for first semester students of English Language Education Study Program at Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta. ELTR Journal,* 2(2), 80–90. https://doi.org/10.37147/eltr.v2i2.97