



Analyzing Prepositional Errors in Analytical Exposition Texts of Indonesian EFL Vocational Students

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01	<i>This study analyzed prepositional errors in texts written by 26 eleventh-grade TKJ students at Vocational High School. Using a descriptive qualitative design, Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy classified errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Data comprised students' texts on the topic 'Smartphones Should Be Allowed in Class' and semi-structured interviews with five students selected from low, medium, and high error levels to explain possible causes. Results showed 98 errors: 92 misformation errors (93.88%) and 6 addition errors (6.12%), while omission and misordering were absent. Misformation dominance indicates that students knew prepositions were needed but struggled to select contextually and collocationally appropriate forms, especially on the internet, focus on, depend on, related to, and impact on. Interviews indicated direct Indonesian translation and confusion over English collocations. The findings suggest contextual, genre-based preposition teaching supported by model texts, collocation practice, and corrective feedback.</i>
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1. Introduction

English has become an essential language in education because it enables students to access academic information, communicate across contexts, and prepare for professional demands in a globalized environment. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, students are expected to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, writing is often considered one of the most complex because it requires students to organize ideas, apply appropriate grammar, and produce coherent meaning in written texts (Hyland, 2019). For vocational high school students, writing is also important because it supports practical and professional communication, including explaining technical information, justifying decisions, and presenting arguments in English.

One grammatical element that strongly influences writing clarity is the preposition. Prepositions connect words and ideas by indicating relationships of place, time, direction, cause, reference, and abstract relation. Although prepositions are small grammatical items, they are difficult for EFL learners because their uses are context-dependent, idiomatic, and not always directly equivalent across languages (Swan, 2021; Alwan, 2023). Corpus-oriented and collocation-based studies also show that prepositions are frequent in academic discourse but remain problematic because learners often select them through literal translation rather than through contextual patterns of use (Biber et al., 2021; Boonraksa & Naisena, 2022; Sun & Park, 2023).

The problem becomes more significant in analytical exposition texts. Analytical exposition is an argumentative genre that requires students to present a thesis, support it with logical arguments, and restate their position. In this genre, prepositions help express relationships between claims, evidence, reasons, and consequences. Expressions such as *impact on*, *related to*, *focus on*, *depend on*, and *responsible for* are not merely grammatical forms; they help construct coherence and precision in argumentation. Therefore, errors in preposition use may reduce both grammatical accuracy and the persuasiveness of students' arguments (Nurlatifah & Yusuf, 2022; Hermayanti & Gunawan, 2024).

This study is grounded in Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Error Analysis views learners' errors as evidence of language development rather than as simple failure, because errors reflect how learners build and test their internal understanding of the target language (Corder, as cited in Benyo, 2025). Surface Strategy Taxonomy classifies errors according to how learners alter the surface structure of language, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (Dulay et al., as cited in Esmalde, 2020). In the present study, this taxonomy is applied specifically to prepositional errors so that the analysis can identify whether students omit required prepositions, add unnecessary ones, select incorrect forms, or place them in inappropriate order.

Previous studies have shown that prepositional errors frequently occur in EFL writing. Muhassin and Octavia (2021) found that EFL learners made errors in

prepositions of time and place, with misinformation as a common type. Astuti (2023) also reported that misinformation dominated prepositional errors in vocational school writing. Other studies indicate that prepositional errors are commonly influenced by interlingual interference from the first language and intralingual interference within the target language system (Rida & Rohmana, 2023; Budiharto & Rokhmawati, 2023). However, many previous studies have investigated grammatical errors in general, focused on different genres, or involved different educational levels. Consequently, prepositional errors have often been treated as a minor part of broader grammatical error analysis rather than as the central focus of investigation.

A specific gap remains in the analysis of prepositional errors in analytical exposition texts written by vocational high school students, especially students of the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program. This context is important because TKJ students are expected to use English not only for academic purposes but also for workplace-related communication, such as explaining technical processes, presenting reasons, and justifying problem-solving decisions. In this situation, accurate prepositions support the clarity of technical and argumentative information. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in connecting prepositional accuracy, genre-based argumentative writing, and the vocational EFL context.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of prepositional errors are made by eleventh-grade TKJ students at Vocational High School in their analytical exposition texts?
2. What is the most frequent type of prepositional error found in the students' writing?
3. What possible factors contribute to the occurrence of these prepositional errors?

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The design was selected because the study aimed to describe linguistic phenomena naturally based on students' written production rather than to test a hypothesis. The analysis was grounded in Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which classifies errors into omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering (Dulay et al., as cited in Esmalde, 2020). A descriptive qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study examined the forms, patterns, and possible causes of prepositional errors in a specific educational context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 3 Gorontalo. The participants were 26 eleventh-grade students of the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program in class XI TKJ 1. All students were included as the primary source of written data through total sampling. To support the interpretation of the written data, five students were selected purposively for semi-structured interviews. The selected interviewees represented different levels of error occurrence: one student

with a low error rate, two students with a medium error rate, and two students with a high error rate. Purposive selection was used because the interview data were intended to explain the error patterns found in the documents (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The primary data were students' analytical exposition texts on the topic 'Smartphones Should Be Allowed in Class'. Students were asked to write texts of approximately 100-150 words based on the writing instruction given by the researcher. The collected texts were coded to protect students' identities. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with five selected students to explore possible causes of prepositional errors, particularly interlingual and intralingual interference. The interview questions focused on students' translation habits, their understanding of differences between Indonesian and English prepositions, their confusion in choosing prepositions, their tendency to use the same preposition in different contexts, and their strategies when they were uncertain. The interview data were recorded and transcribed to support the interpretation of the findings.

Data analysis followed the qualitative model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In data condensation, the researcher read the texts repeatedly, identified phrases containing prepositions, marked the incorrect forms, and classified each error based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy. In data display, the classified errors were presented in tables and supported with narrative descriptions. The frequency and percentage of each error type were calculated descriptively to show dominant patterns. Interview data were analyzed thematically by grouping responses into interlingual interference, intralingual interference, and uncertainty in preposition selection.

To improve methodological transparency, the study used a clear coding protocol. An error was categorized as omission when a required preposition was absent, addition when an unnecessary preposition appeared, misformation when an inappropriate preposition was selected, and misordering when the placement of a preposition or prepositional phrase was unacceptable. Ambiguous cases were resolved by considering sentence context, intended meaning, and target-like English usage. The researcher also rechecked the classified data against the operational definitions of the four categories and compared document analysis with interview findings as a form of triangulation. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining permission to collect data at the school, coding students' identities, and using the data only for research purposes.

3. Result

3.1 Types and Frequency of Prepositional Errors

The analysis of 26 analytical exposition texts revealed a total of 98 prepositional errors. Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the errors were classified into misformation, addition, misordering, and omission. However, only

two types of errors were found in the data, namely misformation and addition. Misordering and omission did not appear in the students' writing.

Table 1. Distribution of Prepositional Errors Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	92	93.88%
Addition	6	6.12%
Misordering	0	0%
Omission	0	0%

Table 1 shows that misformation was the most dominant type of error, with 92 occurrences or 93.88% of the total errors. Addition appeared six times or 6.12%. The absence of omission and misordering indicates that the students generally recognized the need and position of prepositions, but they had difficulty selecting the appropriate preposition or determining whether a preposition was necessary after particular verbs.

The errors were also examined in relation to types of prepositions. The findings showed that students' errors appeared mainly in prepositions of place and abstract relations. No errors were found in prepositions of time and direction. The concentration of errors in place and abstract prepositions suggests that students had difficulty not only with spatial expressions such as on the internet and in the classroom but also with collocational and conceptual expressions such as focus on, depend on, related to, impact on, responsible for, and contribution to.

Table 2. Recurrent Patterns and Selected Examples of Students' Prepositional Errors

No.	Pattern	Incorrect Phrase	Correction	Interpretation
1	Place preposition	in the internet	on the internet	Confusion between in and on in digital-space expressions
2	Place preposition	at classroom	in the classroom	Inappropriate point/place distinction
3	Verb-preposition collocation	focus to the lesson	focus on the lesson	Incorrect collocation after focus
4	Verb-preposition collocation	depend with technology	depend on technology	Literal transfer from Indonesian dengan

5	Adjective-preposition collocation	related learning	with	related learning	to	Incorrect collocation after related
6	Noun-preposition collocation	positive impact students	for	positive impact students	on	Incorrect abstract relation after impact
7	Purpose marker	for help them		to help them		Confusion between for and to before verbs
8	Addition after transitive verb	understand about lesson	the	understand the lesson		Unnecessary preposition after understand
9	Addition after transitive verb	respect the teacher	with	respect teacher	the	Unnecessary preposition after respect
10	Adjective-preposition collocation	responsible using smartphones	in	responsible for using smartphones		Incorrect collocation after responsible
11	Noun-preposition collocation	contribution for students learning		contribution to students' learning		Incorrect abstract relation after contribution
12	Verb-preposition collocation	disagree about this idea		disagree with this idea		Incorrect collocation after disagree

Table 2 provides a richer view of the error patterns. Misformation was not limited to one lexical item but appeared repeatedly in digital-space expressions, argument-related noun phrases, and verb- or adjective-preposition collocations. Addition errors were fewer, but they show that some students inserted prepositions after transitive verbs that do not require them.

3.2 Variation Across Students and Error Concentration

The errors were distributed across all 26 students, but the number of errors varied from one to seven errors per text. The average number of prepositional errors was 3.77 errors per text. Because all students were asked to write within the same short range of approximately 100-150 words, this average provides a descriptive indication of text-level error concentration. However, it should not be

interpreted as a fully normalized error density per 100 words because complete word counts for each text were not calculated in the original dataset.

Table 3. Distribution of Errors Across Students

Error Level	Criterion	Number of Students	Total Errors
Low	1-2 errors per text	5	9 (9.18%)
Medium	3-4 errors per text	15	53 (54.08%)
High	5-7 errors per text	6	36 (36.73%)
Total	-	26	98 (100%)

Table 3 indicates that most students were in the medium group, producing three to four prepositional errors per text. Six students produced five to seven errors and contributed more than one-third of the total errors. This pattern suggests that prepositional difficulty was not isolated to only a few learners; rather, it was a shared problem with different levels of intensity.

3.3 Interview Findings

The interview data supported the written findings. Several students stated that they often began writing in Indonesian and then translated their ideas into English. This habit contributed to direct translation and inappropriate preposition choices. For instance, students tended to translate the Indonesian word *dengan* as *with* in many contexts, even when English required another preposition or no preposition at all. This explains errors such as *depend with technology* and *related with learning*.

Students also reported confusion in distinguishing English prepositions with similar Indonesian meanings. One student stated that *for* and *to* were confusing because both could mean *untuk*. Other students mentioned confusion in choosing among *in*, *on*, and *at*. These responses indicate that students' errors were influenced by both interlingual interference from Indonesian and intralingual interference related to incomplete understanding of English prepositional rules and collocations.

4. Discussion

4.1 Misformation as the Dominant Error

The findings show that misformation was the dominant error type in students' analytical exposition texts. In Surface Strategy Taxonomy, misformation occurs when learners use an incorrect form even though the linguistic element is required. In this study, students often used prepositions that were grammatically or collocationally inappropriate, such as *related with learning*, *depend with technology*, *focus to the lesson*, and *positive impact for students*. These forms suggest that the students were aware that a preposition was needed but were

unable to select the correct one.

This finding aligns with previous studies showing that misinformation is a frequent prepositional error in EFL writing (Muhassin & Octavia, 2021; Astuti, 2023). The result also supports the view that English prepositions are difficult because they are highly contextual and often depend on fixed collocations. For example, *impact* conventionally takes on in the expression *impact on* students' learning, while *related* is commonly followed by *to*. Such patterns cannot always be predicted through translation or general grammatical rules.

The dominance of misinformation can be explained through intralingual interference. Students overgeneralized familiar prepositions or selected prepositions based on partial understanding of meaning. Their confusion between *for* and *to*, or *among* *in*, *on*, and *at*, illustrates how similar meanings may lead to incorrect choices. This problem is especially visible in analytical exposition texts because students need to express abstract relationships between ideas, such as *cause*, *effect*, *purpose*, *reference*, and *argument*.

Interlingual interference also contributed to misinformation. The interview data showed that many students translated their ideas from Indonesian into English. Since Indonesian prepositions such as *di*, *ke*, *dari*, and *dengan* are more flexible and do not always match English prepositional patterns, direct translation may lead to incorrect English forms. Similar problems have been reported in studies of Indonesian and other EFL learners, where first-language transfer and limited exposure to authentic preposition use affect the accuracy of students' writing (Budiharto & Rokhmawati, 2023; Al-Bawaleez & Abdullah, 2023).

4.2 Addition Errors and the Absence of Omission and Misordering

Although addition errors were less frequent, they reveal an important pattern in students' writing. Addition occurred when students inserted unnecessary prepositions, such as *understand about* the lesson and *respect with* the teacher. In these cases, the verbs *understand* and *respect* do not require prepositions before their objects. These errors indicate that students were uncertain about whether certain English verbs should be followed by a preposition.

Addition errors can be interpreted as evidence of overgeneralization. Students may assume that English verbs need a preposition to connect with an object because they often encounter prepositional phrases in English. This assumption leads them to add prepositions even when the sentence structure does not require one. The interview data confirmed this uncertainty, as students admitted that they sometimes guessed or used a familiar preposition when they were unsure.

The absence of omission and misordering is also meaningful. It suggests that students generally understood where prepositions should be placed in English sentences and did not usually delete required prepositions. Their main difficulty was not word order or deletion, but selection and overuse. Therefore, classroom

instruction should prioritize contextual preposition use, verb-preposition and adjective-preposition collocations, and feedback on unnecessary prepositions.

4.3 Genre Influence and Vocational Context

The errors found in this study are closely related to the communicative demands of analytical exposition texts. This genre requires students to build arguments logically and clearly. Prepositions in this genre are not only grammatical markers but also discourse tools that help connect ideas, specify relationships, and strengthen the precision of arguments. When students write positive impact for students instead of positive impact on students, the meaning remains partly understandable, but the text becomes less accurate and less academically acceptable.

The genre-related difficulty appears especially in abstract prepositions and collocations. Analytical exposition writing requires students to express relationships such as cause, effect, purpose, and evaluation. These functions often depend on conventional phrases such as effect on, reason for, related to, based on, and responsible for. Therefore, errors in these phrases show that students' prepositional problems are connected to how they construct argumentative meaning, not merely to isolated grammar rules. This supports the argument that grammar instruction should be integrated with genre-based writing practice (Nurlatifah & Yusuf, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2024).

In the vocational high school context, this issue has practical significance. TKJ students are expected to communicate technical and professional information in English. They may need to explain processes, discuss technology, present arguments, or justify decisions. Accurate preposition use is therefore important for both academic writing and future workplace communication. The findings imply that grammar teaching in vocational schools should be integrated with meaningful writing practice, model texts, and technical or vocationally relevant topics.

4.4 Theoretical and Pedagogical Contributions

Theoretically, this study contributes to Error Analysis research by showing how Surface Strategy Taxonomy can be used not only to classify surface-level errors but also to reveal genre-sensitive and context-sensitive patterns of difficulty. The findings show that misinformation in analytical exposition writing is strongly related to collocational and abstract prepositional relations. Thus, the study extends previous research by connecting the form of error, the function of prepositions, and the communicative purpose of argumentative writing in vocational education.

Pedagogically, the findings suggest that prepositions should not be taught only through memorized lists of in, on, at, to, for, and with. Teachers need to provide contextual examples from analytical exposition texts, especially phrases commonly used to express arguments, effects, reasons, and relationships. Model texts can help students notice conventional prepositional patterns, while collocation exercises

and corrective feedback can help them revise inaccurate forms. For vocational students, writing tasks should also include topics related to technology and professional communication so that grammar practice becomes meaningful and relevant.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that eleventh-grade TKJ students at SMK Negeri 3 Gorontalo still experienced difficulties in using English prepositions in analytical exposition writing. Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy, two types of errors were found: misformation and addition. Misformation was the most dominant type, with 92 errors or 93.88% of the total 98 errors, while addition appeared six times or 6.12%. Omission and misordering were not found.

The findings indicate that students' main problem was selecting appropriate prepositions and avoiding unnecessary prepositions. The errors occurred mainly in prepositions of place and abstract relations, particularly in collocational expressions such as on the internet, focus on, depend on, related to, impact on, responsible for, and contribution to. Interview data showed that the errors were influenced by interlingual interference, especially direct translation from Indonesian, and intralingual interference, including overgeneralization and confusion among prepositions with similar meanings.

The study is limited to 26 students from one vocational school and focuses only on prepositional errors in analytical exposition texts. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all EFL learners. Future studies may involve larger samples, different vocational programs, other text genres, or a normalized error-density analysis based on the number of words produced. Teachers are encouraged to teach prepositions through contextual examples, genre-based writing tasks, collocation practice, model texts, and corrective feedback so that students can improve grammatical accuracy and produce clearer argumentative writing.

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