

Punctuation Marks Errors in Paragraph Writing among EFL Saudi Students at Preparatory Year Unit, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in the KSA

AHMED MOHAMMAD AHMED ABDULLAH

*Preparatory Year Unit, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia
Ahmdoobdallh@gmail.com*

MOHAMMED ALI MOHAMMED IBRAHIM (corresponding author)

*Preparatory Year Unit, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia
Wadali664@gmail.com*

Abstract

The objectives of this article are to identify the popular punctuation mark errors among English foreign language (EFL) Saudi learners. The students who have studied medium English writing course at PYU, PSAU in the KSA in the year 2023-2024. Moreover, to discover how these errors have impacts on their paragraph writing performance and to identify the most famous punctuation errors and its significant indication to the learning. Based on the result, the students committed indentation errors, capitalization errors, comma errors, period errors and spacing errors. However, the most significant writing punctuation errors are the full stops which are 73.3%. as the highest among students' committed errors. They were followed by the comma errors, the spacing errors then the capitalization errors and the indentation errors that were founded as the lowest committed errors. Furthermore, the study has discovered that the sources of these errors are attributed to the interlingua errors (mother tongue interference) and the intralingua errors which refers to the errors of students' incorrect use of punctuation marks. The study therefore, recommends that the students should multiply their efforts to practice the punctuation marks rules efficiently, Also, modifications of the teaching strategies and inclusion of punctuation marks in the curriculum are crucial.

Keywords: Punctuation marks, Errors, Paragraph writing, Famous, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Writing has crucial role to play as a key in research and education. In this regard, punctuation marks are also significant because they are writing subskills. However, a concise definition of the punctuation marks is put by Cambridge Dictionary (2022) as: "Punctuation marks are symbols used in punctuation." The punctuation marks rules are utilized to show the meanings, dividing sentences, phrases and as writing cohesions.

However, EFL learners first- year students at Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz university encounter difficulties to use the punctuation marks in their paragraph' writings. Due to these difficulties the students have faced, they committed writing punctuation errors.

Furthermore, the study claims that the errors are attributed to the intralingua origins and the Interlingua origins (mother tongue). Therefore, mother tongue interference in turn is a tool that manufacture punctuation marks errors. This

fact is believed to be true among native and non-native learners as well because EFL learners who have already become a linguistic adult in their mother tongue by the time they start to learn the second language encounter similar learning difficulties to use English punctuation marks properly.

Interestingly, the study has also discovered that even some native learners at least at novice level of education have encountered similar punctuation marks learning difficulties when they utilize the punctuation marks rules in their writings. In this respect, Crystal (2016: P 82) has argued that " ' It didn't take long for nineteenth-century publishers to realize that punctuation presented children with difficulties"

Even though, the study has applied the criteria of the previous studies it at least endeavors to fill the hole of knowledge because it dedicates to analyze the famous paragraph writing punctuation errors in isolation and discarding other types of writing errors. Consequently, this study moves from generalization to specified diagnosis of the learning problem.

Purposes of the Study

1. To identify the famous writing punctuation marks errors that EFL Saudi learners in their first-year university level have committed in their paragraph writings.
2. To discover the sources of the famous writing punctuation marks errors that EFL Saudi learners have committed in their paragraphs.

Questions of the Study

- Q1. What are the famous writing punctuation marks errors that the students have committed in their paragraphs?
- Q2. What are the origins of the famous writing punctuation marks errors that the students have committed in their paragraphs?

Study Hypothesis

The study hypothesizes that EFL Saudi learners in the first-year university level have committed famous writing punctuation marks errors in their paragraphs. Moreover, it hypothesizes that the origins of these punctuation marks errors are ascribed to interlingua sources (mother tongue errors) and intralingua sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Merriam Webster dictionary argues that punctuation marks as symbols are utilized to clarify the semantic structure and divide the units of the sentence in the writing texts. In this regard, Kirkman (2015: P 11) states that, "the vital role part played by punctuation marks in the process of seeing and understanding what is written on a page".

As a matter of fact, writing and punctuation marks are overlapping and inseparable. In this respect, EFL learners who have produced unskilled paragraphs writing must have definitely committed the punctuation errors. Based on these learning difficulties, many researchers have intellectually addressed similar writing concerns that almost have encompassed the punctuation marks rules errors in their general study frame design.

Previous Studies

Christopher (2011) states that "a literature review is a summary of a set of related research papers". In this respect, this study has discovered some previous researches which are closely related to this study they are as below:

Altameemi (2019) argues that "successful writing needs many overlapping aspects such as organization, punctuation, capitalization". In this regard, the study is in consistent with this study. At the same, Awad (2012) states that, "writers should master different conventions of writing such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, and mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation". Thus, the study also has analyzed the writing mechanics therefore is in consistent with this study.

On top of that, EFL learner's Saudi student's deviations from the punctuation marks norms in their paragraphs writing are due to the following factors: Initially, the students' lack of knowledge of the punctuation marks. In this issue, a study that is raised by Saleem (2024) when he argues that "EFL learners face many difficulties and constantly make errors in mechanics (Shanorra et al., 2021) due to a lack of understanding of mechanics".

Moreover, the incorrect usage of punctuation marks. EFL Saudi learners who have already punctuated their writing performance incorrectly had a deviation from the semantic norms. Hence, they committed punctuation errors. (Saleem :2024) argues that "EFL learners face various challenges when writing, including mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. If the mechanics are incorrect, understanding a text can be difficult, and the meaning can be distorted".

The punctuation marks learning difficulties that have occurred due to the linguistics' factors. These errors types are attributed to intralinguas origins. In this sense, Salamin (2016) states that "learners encounter punctuation problems as there are no universal punctuation rules."

Furthermore, a study that has been raised by Asad (2024) states "the findings of the present case study indicates that EFL learners were highly affected by the negative transfer of their mother tongue" or interlanguage errors as interior factors within the language. These errors have occurred because of the mother tongue interference (MTI) ". Similarly, EFL learners have committed such punctuation errors accordingly.

Consequently, this study also has discovered that some punctuation rules errors that EFL Saudi learners' failure to use properly appeared in ambiguous writing texts. Although, managing correctly punctuation marks requires better knowledge of its rules and better writing competence the two things that some EFL Saudi learners are incapable to obtain them well. Hence, resemblance learning constraints have driven the students to commit more punctuation marks errors.

Even though, the origins of the famous punctuation marks errors of paragraphs writing are ascribed to both interlingua origins and intralingua origins, this study has mentioned only the famous punctuation marks which are actually utilized by the EFL Saudi learners. These are punctuation errors are: indentation of paragraphs writing first letters, capitalization usage, the period, the comma and the spacing.

Apart from that, Crystal (2016) emphasizes the significance of some punctuation marks as he states: "Some punctuation marks are more important than others" Therefore those above-mentioned types of the punctuation marks are obviously significant at least in this study because the targeted EFL Saudi students have only

employed them irrespective of the other types of punctuation marks that are absolutely of great significance writing subskills.

Study Significance

This study troubleshoots EFL Saudi student's actual knowledge of writing punctuation marks rules and their actual application of the rules in their writing performance. To siege the actual punctuation marks is crucial to insight remedies of errors of mechanics. Therefore, this study urges for more practice in punctuation marks usage in order to avoid falling in the errors. In addition, to address the instructional practices for potential of improvements. Furtherly, to understand and pinpoints the areas of weaknesses of punctuation marks students" utilization that can pave the way to the real improvements.

Research Design Methodology

The descriptive analytical methodology has employed in this study to describe and analyze the famous writing punctuation marks errors that students have committed in their paragraphs. The data are collected from respondents of a questionnaire that is carried in the first semester in the year 2023-2024. The objectives of this process are to enable the research to prove the raised hypothesis and to answer the accompanied research questions.

Furthermore, systematic random sampling technique has also employed to select the desired sampling size out of the population. Thus, the systematic random sampling has used because sampling frame is available in the form of a list of students.

Data Collection Tools

Taherdoost, (2022: P 8) states that "A questionnaire is an important instrument in a research study. Therefore, a questionnaire has carried among the instructors and, a 5-Point Likert scale is employed to gain results the from the participants when the questionnaire was prepared, it was given to experienced instructors for review and evaluation. This step was taken to guarantee that the questionnaire was positively and accurately match the research questions and the situations of the targets. Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was 0.70. In this respect the validity is checked through expert instructors that have great deal of experience in researching.

Then, the obtained data from the questionnaire have been analyzed by SPSS program in order to achieve the statistical information as the means and the standard deviation. Moreover, charts are presented to illustrate the findings.

Participants & Procedures:

The participants of this study are 20 instructors that have incorporated to teach the writing syllabus to the EFL students, first-year university. level They are nominated as targets of the study. Hence, they have taught the writing English course in the first semester and teaching Q: Skills for Success, Special Edition, Level 2 Reading and Writing.

The participants of the research are chosen via the systematic random sampling approach and the participants are non-native since they are speakers of Arabic language. By using the random number an element of randomness has secured to pick up the unit. The procedures have started by using random numbers from the list

of the students' names the sample interval (k) has presented by dividing the population size (N) by the sample size (n) then the interval is applied until the required samples are gained.

Results

In this section the study has shown the results of the questionnaire under the title: "Investigating Paragraph's Writing Punctuation Errors Among EFL Learners ' Saudi Students. (A Case Study of Group 6 Students PYU at PSAU, KSA)".

The questionnaire is composed of 12 statements divided into three sections. Likert 5-point scale was used to show responses of the participants. In scoring participant's answers, five points were given to Strongly Agree (SA), four points were given to Agree (A), three points were given to Undecided (UD), two points were given to Disagree (D) and one point was given to Strongly Disagree (SD). The weights were shown in table 4.1 below.

Table 1: Weights of Responses on Likert Scale

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Weight	5	4	3	2	1

Section 1

Table 2: Punctuation marks usage.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard deviation
1. Punctuation marks aren't important in the writing.	3	2	0	1	9	3	3.535534
	20%	13.3%	0%	6.7%	60%		
2. Punctuation marks clarify the meaning of the sentences in the writing.	10	4	0	0	1	3	4.242641
	66.7%	26.7%	0%	0%	6.7%		
3. Punctuation marks pinpoint pauses and emphasis in the writing.	7	8	0	0	0	3	4.123106
	46.7%	53.3%	0%	0%	0%		
Total	20	14	0	1	10		
	44.4%	31.1%	0%	2.22%	22.22		

Based on the statement 1 in section 1, 10 (66.7%) responses out of 15 responses strongly disagree or disagree that punctuation marks aren't very essential in paragraph writing, with an overall mean of 3 indicating mostly positive responses. Moreover, as stated in by statement 2 that punctuation marks clarify meaning of writing is highly responded positively with 93.3% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3. With a mention of statement 3, indicates that 100% responded agree or strongly agree with a positive mean of 3.

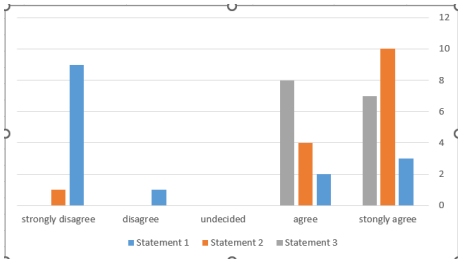


Figure 1: The importance of punctuation marks

Section 2

Table two: Teachers' perceptions on teaching punctuation marks.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard deviation
4. Instructors aren't satisfied of punctuation marks teaching strategies of.	3 20%	5 33.3%	4 26.7%	3 20%	0 0%	3	1.870829
5. Teachers teach the punctuation marks theoretically.	1 6.7%	7 46.7%	1 6.7%	5 33.3%	1 6.7%	3	2.828427
6. It needs devoted time to teach the punctuation marks effectively.	7 46.7%	5 33.3%	2 13.3%	1 6.7%	0 0%	3	2.915476
Total	11 24.4%	17 37.7%	7 15.5%	9 20.0%	1 2.2%		

According to statement 3 in section 2, 8 (53.3%) responses out of 15 responses strongly agree or agree that teachers are not satisfied with techniques used in teaching punctuation marks, with an overall mean of 3 indicating mostly positive responses. Moreover, as stated in by statement 5 that the teachers teach punctuation marks theoretically is -to some extent- responded positively with 53.4% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3. With a mention of statement 6, indicates that 80% responded agree or strongly agree with a positive mean of 3.

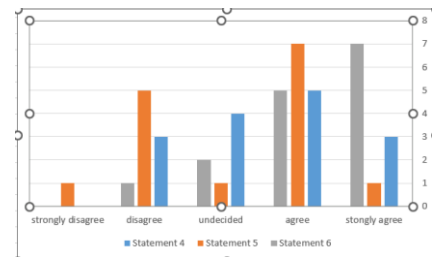


Figure 2: Teachers' perceptions of teaching punctuation marks.

Section 3

Table 3: Students' awareness of using the punctuation marks.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard deviation
7. The students always indent the first sentence.	1 6.7%	3 20%	3 20%	6 40%	2 13.3%	3	1.870829
8.The students never capitalize their sentences.	1 6.7%	8 53.3%	2 13.3%	4 26.7%	0 0%	3	3.162278
9. The students always end their sentences with full stops.	0 0%	3 20%	1 6.7%	11 73.3%	0 0%	3	4.636809
10. The students use the comma marks correctly.	1 6.7%	4 26.7%	0 0%	10 66.7%	0 0%	3	4.242641
11.The students always keep proper spaces between the words in the sentences.	0 0%	2 13.3%	4 26.7%	9 60%	0 0%	3	3.741657
12.The students always use th question marks properly.	0 0%	3 20%	3 20%	8 53.3%	1 6.7%	3	3.082207
Total	3 3.3%	23 25.5%	13 14.4%	48 53.3%	3 3.3%		

In statement 7 in section 3, 4 (26.7%) responses out of 15 responses agree or strongly agree that the students always indent the first sentences of the paragraph, with an overall mean of 3 indicating mostly negative responses. Moreover, as stated in by statement 8 that the students never capitalize the first letter of each sentence properly, it is responded positively with 60% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3. With a mention of statement 9, indicates that 20% responded agree or strongly agree with a negative mean of 3. In statement 10 it is clear that 5% agree or strongly agree that the students might use commas correctly, with a reasonable mean of 3. About statement 11, the students always keep proper spaces between words in the sentences, and it has a percentage of 13.3% with a mean of 3 which indicates weak influence of used strategies. In statement 12 in section 3, about 60.0% responses disagree or strongly disagree that the students always use question marks properly with an overall mean of 3 and a slightly high standard deviation of 3.082207 indicating slightly negative responses.

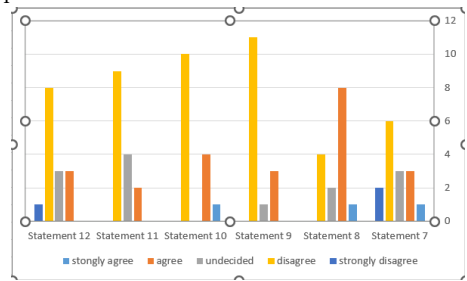


Figure 3: Students' awareness of using punctuation marks.

Discussion:

The study addresses the punctuation marks errors concerns as crucial sub- writing skill in the paragraph level. It attempts to investigates the errors in the students' paragraphs writing performance that are committed by EFL, Saudi students in the first-year university level.

Based on the result of the study, it has proved that the students have committed famous writing punctuation errors in their paragraphs' performance. These errors are: Indention errors, capitalization errors, comma errors, period errors and spacing errors Moreover, significantly, the result has shown that the periods have recorded as the highest of the committed errors. They were followed by the comma errors, the spacing errors then the capitalization errors and the indention errors that have recorded as the lowest committed errors.

The findings are in consistent with the first hypothesis of the study which says that: EFL learners' Saudi students in the first-year university level, at Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz university have committed famous paragraph writing punctuation errors in their paragraph writing.

Consequently, the results have showed also the influence of students' mother tongue (interlingua) and because Arabic language punctuation rules are difference from that of English punctuation rules. Therefore, the students have committed the errors.

However, the origins of these punctuation marks errors are attributed to interlingua sources of errors. This fact also is in consistent with the second hypothesis of this study and proves it as it claims that the origins of the famous punctuation errors that

students have committed in their paragraphs' writing are attributed to interlingua and intralingua errors.

In this regard, Intralingua sources are other important types of punctuation errors EFL students have committed. Thus, Intralingua errors origins have resulted as the errors which are produced by students' incorrect use of the punctuation rules in the second language. The second study hypothesis claims that: the origins of the punctuation marks errors that students have committed in their paragraph writing are interlingua sources as well. In this regard, is in consistent with the second hypothesis of this study and proves it.

Finally, the strategies of and techniques of teaching punctuation marks in the paragraph writing should witness enough modifications to encourage the students to achieve more practice. This act should be followed by extensive drills.

CONCLUSION:

This study has identified the famous punctuation marks errors that students have committed at the paragraph-level where 20 instructors that has chosen randomly. They have successfully responded to the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to obtain enough data to prove the hypothesis. Instructors whose perceptions of the issues of punctuation errors are crucial. They are all have instructed medium learning course in writing for the first-year university students at Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz University in the year 2023-2024.

Moreover, the result f of the findings has shown that EFL Saudi students' have committed famous writing punctuation errors in their paragraphs. The significant errors are the full stops that were appeared as the highest in percentage. Interestingly, the indention errors have appeared as the lowest errors in percentage (see table 3). However, this study believes that the students have to increase their learning efforts to practice the punctuation rules. Also, extensive drills in full stops and comma types of marks. Instructors' efforts to assure teaching centered instruction method on these weak learning areas. Also, intellectuals and instructors need to employ more effective instruction strategies to address the problem.

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has illustrated the punctuation marks errors causes and the sources of the errors that have driven EFL Saudi student's learners to commit the punctuation errors in their paragraphs' writing performance. The study is of great importance to the teachers and the instructors as well because it makes them aware of such learning difficulties so they need to modify their instruction strategies and keep focusing in order to heal the specific weak areas of punctuation marks usage as learning difficulties that face the students. Interestingly, the study has proved quite obviously the significant influence of students' mother tongue, or interlingua errors in the causes of the errors. Also, it illustrates the difference between Arabic punctuation rules and English punctuation for the educators to find the appropriate solution.

Therefore, the study encourages the teachers to gain experience in the serious issues of the writing learning difficulties as punctuation marks. When the survey has analyzed the punctuation errors, it indicates that intellectuals can specify easily the weaknesses outputs. Apart from that, the punctuation errors that EFL Saudi learners

have committed the study can provide targeted instruction assistance to improve the punctuation marks syllabus. Fortunately, this study recommends further studies that are relative to the students' worries about the other types of punctuation marks errors and the educators should endeavor carrying immediate researching with insight diagnosis.

LIMITATION:

The study is limited to EFL Saudi student's learners in the first university level in the year (2023-2024). They have recently joined first year at Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz University, Fair 20 instructors who have involved in teaching the writing skill in the first semester are selected randomly as participants. The participants have positively responded to the questionnaire raised by the study and their perceptions are significant to this study because it shed lights on the problem as experts in the field.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the colleagues in the English department at Prince Sattam bin Abdul-Aziz University. Grateful is also due to the students in the writing course. Gratitude is due to the dean of the college as well and to the head of the English department.

REFERENCES

1. Alamin, H&Ahmed, S. (2012) Syntactical and Punctuation Errors of University Students. Taif university. Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education. Vol. 5, No. 5; May 201, ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750
2. Altameemi & Daradkeh (2019) Common Paragraph Writing Errors, Theory and Practice in language Studies. Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 178-187, February 2019 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0902.07>
3. Asad, M (2024) Mechanical Errors in Students English writing Foretell printing publishing. Issue No. 48, January 2024 ISSN: Print 2229-6557, Online 2394-9244
4. Christopher & Cheon, (2011) Asia Pacific Conference Literature review writing. Emerald group publishing limited
5. Corder, S.P. (1967). The Significance of Learners' Errors. International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 5, 161-170.
6. Crystal, D. (2016) Making Appoint. Story of English Punctuation, Macmillan PressPublishers.
7. Kirkman, J. (2006) Advice on Punctuation section for Scientific Technical writing. Taylor & Francis Publishers. London &New York.
8. Ladico, M (2006), Methods in Educational approach, Jossey Bass Publishers. U.S.A
9. Raba, A (2012) The Most Common Punctuation Errors. Journal of Research. v. J. Res (Humanities). Vol. 26(1), 201 Casagrande, J. (2014) The Best Punctuation Book. Publishing Group, a division of Random House LLC, a Penguin Random House Company, New York.
10. Rong, D (2019) 019 Conference on Arts, Management, Education and Innovation (ICAMEI 2019) and-Intralingua Transfer—Two-Rong/dfe7a12288c8ef68530a221854e9bb4e91f35f35
11. Salamin.A., Farrah, M., Zahida, R., & Zaru, N. (2016). An investigation into punctuation and capitalization errors made by Hebron University EFL students. Al Azhar University Research Journal Gaza (Humanities), 18(2),
12. Taherdoost, H. (2022). Designing A questionnaire for research. Asian Journal Managerial Science. The Research Publication Journal of Managerial Science ISSN: 2249-6300 Vol.11 No.1, 2022, pp.8-16 © The Research Publication, www.trp.org.in DOI:

BIOGRAPHY



Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed Abdullah was born in Gezira, Sudan in 1966. He obtained a Bachelor in English language & Geography; from faculty of Arts, university, Khartoum, Sudan, in 1989. He was awarded MA in English Language Teaching (ELT); from Nile Valley University, Atbara, Sudan, in 2008. He was awarded PhD in English Language Teaching (ELT); from Gazira University, Sudan, in 2021. He has been teaching English language at different levels throughout middle east, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, as well as some universities since 2021. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor at the Preparatory Year Deanship, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia. His current research interests include ELT and teaching Literature.



Mohamed Ali Mohamed Ibrahim was born in Gezira State, central Sudan in 1982. He obtained his Bachelor Degree in English Language & Literature in 2003, College of Education, Juba University, Khartoum, Sudan. He was awarded TEFL Diploma from Sudan Center for Languages in 2007. He was also awarded MA degree in ELT from Sudan University of Science and Technology in 2016. He has been teaching English courses at Preparatory Year Deanship, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al Kharj, Saudi Arabia since 2020. His current research interests include ELT, teaching.