ANALYSIS OF PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED BY GRADE 10 LEARNERS IN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN VHEMBE DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics

In the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, MEDIA STUDIES AND LINGUISTICS

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

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2025

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my parents, — my late father, C.W. Gayi, who always encouraged me to prioritise my education, and my mother, S. Gayi, who taught me that the pursuit of knowledge knows no age.

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DECLARATION

I, Evelyn Gayi, hereby declare that this dissertation for the Master of Arts in Linguistics degree, submitted to the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics at the University of Venda, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university and that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I convey my sincere gratitude to the following people:

- My main supervisor, Dr S.E. Madima, who played a major role in the development of this study. He worked tirelessly with me to complete this study and inspired me to formulate ideas in a scholarly manner and format this research. He even went an extra mile to make sure that I would register on time and would follow up every time on my research progress. I am greatly indebted to him because finishing this Master of Arts Degree in Linguistics resulted from his encouragement. Had it not been for him, I would have given up on the study, as I was already demotivated to continue.
- My co-supervisor, Prof E.K. Klu; for his unwavering support throughout the research; he always sent me material to ensure that I was fully supported and motivated me not to give up.
- My colleague and friend Dr T. Badugela, who inspired me to study.
- The late Dr B. Dube, who inspired me to multitask during studies.
- My late uncle R.E. Mhasvi Gayi who insisted that I must further my education at all costs.
- My husband, K. Mbwanda, father of my children, who always checked up on my progress and supported me financially, and
- My two children, Munashe C. Mbwanda, my firstborn, who would call always from abroad insisting and reminding me to finish my degree, and Zaine A. Mbwanda, my lastborn, for always waking me up to study even on weekends and sacrificing his health for takeaways so that I could finish this degree.

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. It focuses specifically on punctuation mark errors committed by Grade 10 learners in English First Additional Language within the context of transactional writing, which is common both at school level and beyond. There is a concern by teachers and researchers on how and why learners overlook punctuation. Although often overlooked, punctuation plays a crucial role in conveying meaning and ensuring that written texts are clear and understandable. The quality of written work is judged not only on its content but also on the correct use of punctuation—such as capital letters, commas, full stops, sentence construction and paragraph boundaries. The study is guided by the Pause and Effect Theory by Parkes, which posits that punctuation serves as a tool to enhance the understanding of a text and historically received considerable attention from those tasked with correcting manuscripts. A case study design was adopted, employing a qualitative research method with purposive sampling. The total population of the school is 561 learners, from which 51 Grade 10 learners' texts were purposively sampled. Of these, 20 written texts were randomly selected for detailed analysis in English First Additional Language and to give each individual potential participant an equal chance of participation. These twenty (20) essays texts were analysed using both quantitative and textual analysis to establish learners' competence in punctuation. The findings were then analysed thematically and statistically. Data were grouped according to themes; presented in tables and compared using percentages. The study found that learners commonly make punctuation errors in their essays. These included misplacement, omission, and unnecessary addition of punctuation marks. The study further revealed contributing factors to these errors: carelessness, writing in haste, confusion, lack of skill and knowledge in using punctuation, lack of motivation and practice, intra-lingual and inter-lingual influences, and most notably, inadequate teaching of punctuation rules by language teachers.

Key words: Competence, English First Additional Language, Essay, Private School, Punctuation Errors

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction and background to the study which focuses on the analysis of punctuation errors in English First Additional Language essay writing by Grade 10 learners at a private school. Writing is a form of indirect expression, and writers must find effective ways to covey their thoughts and emotions through words. To emphasise meaning or expression in writing, the writer uses punctuation in writing just like intonation in speaking. To succeed in writing, learners should master components of language, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation to create good sentences. The chapter also outlines the aim of the study, objectives and research questions applicable in this study. It further presents the significance of the study and presents the definitions of the key concepts. Finally, the chapter concludes by outlining the organisation of the study.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Effective written communication is a fundamental skill in academic and professional settings, and punctuation plays a crucial role in conveying meaning, clarity, and coherence in writing. Despite its importance, punctuation remains one of the most frequently misunderstood and misused aspects of English grammar, especially among learners of English as a First Additional Language in rural areas. Errors in punctuation can obscure meaning, create confusion, and significantly reduce the overall quality of written texts such as essays.

According to Fang (2021), academic writing is ubiquitous in school and beyond. This is the case with essay writing, which demands a high level of language proficiency, as it involves organising thoughts logically and expressing them clearly. Among the

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common challenges faced by learners in academic writing is the incorrect use of punctuation marks such as commas, periods, apostrophes, colons, and semicolons. These errors often reflect deeper issues related to students' grammatical knowledge, editing skills, and understanding of English writing conventions.

Control over academic writing gives students and scholars capital power and agency in knowledge building (Fang, 2021). Previous studies have highlighted a persistent pattern of punctuation misuse among students at various educational levels. Such findings suggest a gap in instructional approaches to teaching punctuation and students' awareness of its functions in written discourse. Understanding the nature and frequency of these errors is crucial for educators seeking to device more effective strategies aimed at enhancing students' writing proficiency.

This study sought to analyse punctuation errors in students' essay writing, with the aim of identifying the most common types of errors, exploring the possible causes, and suggesting pedagogical implications to enhance writing instruction. Punctuation mistakes significantly impact clarity by altering the intended meaning of sentences. For example, incorrect placement of commas or periods can lead readers to misunderstand the relationship between ideas or actions. This confusion can detract from the overall effectiveness of the writing, making it crucial to identify and correct these errors during proofreading. By examining these errors systematically, the research aimed to contribute to the broader efforts to improve academic writing skills and to inform curriculum development in language education.

This study was conducted at a private school called Amaria Combined School in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. In South Africa, learners in most private schools are generally perceived to be proficient in the English language. However, Amaria Combined School is situated in a rural area, specifically in Nzhelele village, where English is mostly spoken at school and hardly used outside of the school premises.

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In the South African education system, English is not only a subject but also the medium of instruction in most schools, especially from the intermediate phase onwards. For most Grade 10 learners, English is a second or even third language, and they often face challenges in mastering its grammatical conventions. One of the most persistent difficulties is the correct use of punctuation in essay writing, which is essential for clear and effective communication.

This study seeks to address this gap by systematically analysing the punctuation errors found in English essays written by Grade 10 learners at a private school. The aim is to identify the most frequent error types, explore their possible linguistic and pedagogical causes, and recommend strategies to support learners in developing more accurate and effective writing skills within a multilingual educational environment.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite years of formal instruction in English, many Grade 10 learners continue to struggle with the correct use of punctuation in their written work. These persistent errors hinder the clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of their communication. Misused or missing punctuation marks such as commas, periods, apostrophes, and quotation marks can change the intended meaning of sentences, leading to misunderstanding and a reduction in the overall quality of students' writing.

Numerous classroom observations and assessments have revealed that punctuation is one of the most frequently occurring problem areas in learners' writing. However, there is a lack of detailed analysis regarding the specific types and patterns of punctuation errors made by Grade 10 learners. Without this insight, it becomes difficult for teachers to address these issues effectively through targeted instruction and feedback.

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This study seeks to investigate and analyse the punctuation errors commonly found in the English essays of Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe district of Limpopo. It aims to identify the most frequent types of errors, explore potential causes such as limited grammatical knowledge or insufficient editing skills, and recommend strategies that could be employed in English First Additional Language classrooms.

1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The basis of the study was to analyse the writing competence of Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo. Writing is a means of producing, codifying, transmitting, evaluating, teaching and learning knowledge and ideology in academic disciplines. Being able to write academically is widely recognised as essential to disciplinary learning and critical for academic success. Fang (2021) only talks about presenting good writing, which gives power and knowledge to learners; however, some scholars assert that punctuation is equally important. Harris (2004) argues that punctuation is one of the important features of writing, and using punctuation is an important skill. The quality of written work is judged not only on its content or language but also on the correct use of punctuation—such as capital letters, commas, full stops, sentence and paragraph boundaries, among many others. Nuriyatnti and Yuliwanti (2017) found out that most learners (73%) in Pannekasan confuse or do not know how to use punctuation. Yungiting (2018), in research on students at the Budapest Institute, concluded that out of 53 students, only one was excellent in punctuation, 10 were good, 17 were fair, 13 were low, and 12 were categorised as failing.

Not many studies have been done on the writing competency of learners, and there are conflicting reports on why errors occur; hence, this study. This study aims to contribute to that body of knowledge by examining punctuation errors in high school learners' texts. It seeks to enhance understanding of the sources of these errors and provide insights that can inform teaching practices. The findings are expected to raise

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awareness among English language educators about common punctuation issues and how to address them effectively in the classroom. Furthermore, the study aims to assist the South African education system in gaining a clearer understanding of learners' punctuation challenges, thereby contributing to improved writing instruction at both high school level and beyond.

1.5 AIM OF STUDY

The aim of the study is to analyse the punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine punctuation marks used by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province
- To analyse the punctuation errors made by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province
- To establish the reasons why punctuation errors are made by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Which punctuation marks are used by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province?
- How are learners using punctuation marks in essay writing in Grade 10 at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province?
- What are the reasons for committing punctuation errors by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province?

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1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This study is significant for several reasons, particularly within the South African educational landscape, where English is often a second or third language for many learners. By analysing punctuation errors in the essay writing of Grade 10 learners, the research addresses a critical yet often overlooked aspect of language proficiency that directly impacts learners' academic success and communication skills.

Firstly, the study provides valuable insights into the common patterns and types of punctuation errors made by Grade 10 students. Understanding these patterns can help educators identify specific areas of weakness in learners' writing, which can be addressed through targeted teaching strategies and interventions.

Secondly, the findings may inform curriculum developers, textbook authors, and language policymakers. By highlighting gaps in learners' punctuation skills, the research may guide the integration of more focused grammar and writing instruction into the English curriculum, particularly in ways that are sensitive to learners' multilingual backgrounds.

Thirdly, the study contributes to the broader field of second language acquisition and language education in South Africa. It sheds light on the role of punctuation in academic writing and emphasises the importance of explicit instruction in writing conventions, especially for learners who do not use English as a home language.

Finally, the study may be of practical use to educators, helping them better understand the challenges their learners face in mastering written English. It may support the development of teaching materials and classroom activities that emphasise the correct use of punctuation, ultimately improving learners’ writing competence and confidence.

By addressing the specific issue of punctuation errors, this study supports the overarching goal of enhancing English language proficiency among South African high

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school learners, thereby promoting academic success and improved communication in both school and broader societal contexts.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study is specifically delimited to the analysis of punctuation errors found in English essay writing by Grade 10 learners. The scope is intentionally limited to focus on this particular level, as Grade 10 represents a critical stage in the South African secondary school curriculum where learners are expected to demonstrate increased proficiency in academic writing.

The study is further delimited to a selected private school at Nzhelele in Vhembe district of Limpopo Province rather than attempting to generalise findings to all Grade 10 learners across South Africa. Only essays written in English were examined, regardless of the learners' home languages. The study focuses solely on punctuation errors, such as the misuse or omission of commas, full stops, apostrophes, colons, semicolons, question marks, and quotation marks. Other aspects of writing, such as spelling, vocabulary, coherence, or grammatical structures unrelated to punctuation, were not the primary focus of analysis. Lastly, the study analysed essays written on a given topic, and only 20 learners took part in the study.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.10.1 Competence

Competence is the ability to do something well. Related words or phrases are 'accomplishment', 'accuracy' and 'to have a command of something' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Webster (2024) asserts that competence is the quality or state of being competent, such as the quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgement, skill or strength for a particular duty in a particular respect. It is also a

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knowledge that enables a person to understand a language. Synonyms are ‘ability’, ‘dependability’ or ‘capability’.

1.10.2 English First Additional Language

English First Additional Language refers to English taught to learners for whom it is not their first language. These learners are acquiring proficiency in English while also learning other subjects through the language (Sharples, 2021).

1.10.3 Essay

An essay is a short piece of writing on a particular subject, especially one done by students as part of the work for a course. It often expresses a personal view (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). An essay is non-fiction (realistic). An essay is a piece of composition that discusses a thing, a person, or a problem or an issue in a way that the writer demonstrates his/her knowledge by offering a new opinion, a solution, new suggestions or recommendations (Suthar, 2024). The essay, in a way, is an analytic, interpretative or critical literary composition and less systematic. It deals with its subject from a limited and often personal view. An essay is planned and paragraphed, and the results create either a good or bad impression on the examiner (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

1.10.4 Grade 10 learners

According to Collins English Dictionary (2014), Grade 10 is the tenth year of school, when students are 15 or 16 years old.

1.10.5 Private School

Webster (2018) asserts that a private school is established, conducted and primarily supported by a non-governmental organisation. The South Africa Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 established a national schooling system and recognised two categories of

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schools, namely public and independent. Public schools are state controlled, while independent schools are privately governed. Franklin (2013) adds that private schools must comply with state regulations, including registration requirements, accreditation with the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, Umalusi and the employment of educators who are registered with the South African Council for Educators (SACE). A private school receives state subsidies if it complies with state subsidy requirements. Furthermore, a private school charges fees. Shindlers Attorneys (2018) assert that private schools are established in terms of Section 29(8) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and are funded almost entirely by way of fees.

1.10.6 Punctuation

Punctuation in English is a group of marks that guide the reader through his/her eyes to the main units in the text, like the phrase, the sentence or the paragraph. It also shows the reader the kind of connection between units so that meaning can be arrived at (Muttalib, 2020). Punctuation marks are pauses or gestures used to clarify the meaning of our words (Abdulkhaliq, 2019). ‘They are signals to the reader that indicate pause, place emphasis, alter the function or show the relationship between the elements of the text’ (Jane, 2008:122). Punctuation marks consist of the full stop, comma, inverted commas, apostrophe, brackets, question mark, exclamation mark, hyphen and dash, among others (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

1.10.7 Punctuation errors

Punctuation errors are mistakes in the use of punctuation marks that can lead to confusion or misinterpretation of a sentence's meaning (Bryson, 2023). Punctuation errors are deviations from punctuation conventions (Turabian, 2013). This study analysed the use of punctuation marks such as the full stop, comma, inverted commas, apostrophe, brackets, question mark, exclamation mark, hyphen and dash, among others.

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1.11 ORGANISATION OF STUDY

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the introduction and background of the study. The chapter outlines the background of the study, the problem statement, the aim of the study, objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations of terms and the organisation of the study. It then ends with a summary of the chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature that relates to this study is reviewed. The chapter starts with Parkes's theory, which influenced the study. The literature review includes punctuation marks used by learners, punctuation errors and reasons why such errors are committed in learners' text writing.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The chapter presents the research design and methodology employed in the study. A case study design was adopted, and a mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyse data. The chapter outlines the target population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations that guided the process

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents and discusses data from texts sourced from the learners' work. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data, but it was presented quantitatively.

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CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The chapter discusses the findings showing the extent to which they answered the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the findings of the study, draws conclusions from the findings and offers recommendations for improving punctuation instruction and learner performance.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the problem and the background of the study in detail. The aim and objectives of the study, delimitations of the study, and definition of key terms, as well as the organisation of the study, were discussed in this chapter. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework and reviews related literature.

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CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews related literature. The review chapter starts by presenting the theoretical framework which informs the study. It then reviews literature on punctuation marks used by learners, punctuation errors made by learners and reasons why punctuation errors are made. According to Harmer (2004), language is very important in human life. It is used by people to communicate with one another to express feelings, thoughts, opinions and ideas. Writing is one of the language skills that learners have to master. One of the aspects of writing is punctuation. Punctuation correctly can make a good paragraph or essay. If capital letters, commas, full stops, sentence and paragraph boundaries and others are not used correctly, this can not only make a negative impression but also make it difficult to understand.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Pause and Effect Theory by Parkes (1978) states that punctuation is one of medieval contributions to literate civilisation. The theory supports this study in that it clarifies the type of punctuation marks used by writers. In this research, learners are expected to apply specific punctuation marks when writing texts. The theory provides answers on why and how punctuation marks must be used.

There were always corrections and conscious interpretations of texts, and why errors were committed, as is the basis of this study. In ancient times most scripts seem to have been written in ‘scriptura continua’, although among the very few surviving fragments of Latin manuscripts from the first century we find not only *apices* (points inserted into words) but also isolated examples of other signs which reappear later as marks of punctuation (Parkes, 1978).

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Punctuation was developed when it became necessary for people to acquire Latin as a learnt language, a situation in which aids to the reader became very important. It is often assumed that medieval punctuation was essentially bound up with pronunciation. Evidence to support this view can be found in medieval sources (Parkes, 1978). In the 6th century. Punctuation is a 'clear' 'pausing' in well-augmented pronunciation in the 9thCcentury. In addition, Hildemar wrote to Bishop Ursus of Benevento about the art of reading and emphasised the relationship between punctuation and accentuation (Parkes, 1978).

It is possible to overemphasise the relationship between Medieval punctuation and punctuation, particularly, according to Clemoss (1952), who seeks to relate the use of positive intonation patterns. A change in reading habits took place during the Middle Ages, a change which is reflected in changes in the appearances of books (Alexander & Gibson, 1976). Furthermore, other evidence indicates that punctuation of pauses was regarded primarily as an aid to the understanding of text. Jerome (cited by Alexander & Gibson, 1976) tells us that he introduced a system of laying out the text per 'cola et commata' into his translation for the convenience of readers to give a clearer understanding of the text.

Since punctuation was primarily an aid to the understanding of the text, it received a good deal of attention from those who were responsible for correcting manuscripts. The importance of the corrector in a scriptorium, especially up to the 2nd half of the 12th century, must be emphasised (Parkes, 1978). Jerome, who was a corrector of that time, was a specialist reader whose activity reflects not only literacy but learning, and frequently his additions and corrections to the punctuation left by the original scribe indicate a conscious interpretation of the text according to a specific point of doctrine (Parkes, 1978; Parkes, 1978) suggests that, albeit tentatively, some of the ways in which punctuation was used as an aid to the elucidation of the prose text. In a way, marks were frequently placed at the end of a line only if it were the end of stanzas or verse paragraphs, but in manuscripts from the 13th century onwards, it

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became customary to place a paragraph mark in the margin at the beginning of a new stanza. Elaborate verse forms were often indicated to the reader by elaborate layouts.

Ferdinand de Saussure's 1959 'Course in Linguistics' considers language–la langue- a set of social rules. This understanding was improved by Noam Chomsky (1965), who corrected that the proper term is linguistic competence and rules based on an innate structure or mechanism. However, twenty-first-century scholars realised and argued that it was a mistake; there are no rules in language; language is only an organism (MacWhinney & O'Grady, 2015). The language problem, therefore, is a philosophical one and might never have a single solution; hence, research must be done (Austin, 2021).

Parkes' theory explains the origins and why punctuation is essential, giving language a set of rules on how a text should appear. Whether modern linguists deny it or not, language writing follows certain rules that must be considered, as in Parkes' theory. This theory was applied to this study because it proved that punctuation relies on a set of rules, and breaking those rules makes a written text difficult to read and understand. The study was finding out whether there are punctuation errors committed by learners through the punctuation rules as discovered by Parkes. The theory applies in today's academic field or arena of learning, hence this study.

Furthermore, the Parkes' theory is supported by linguists like Nunberg (1990), though done in an indirect way, which the researcher strongly agrees with. Nunberg (1990) challenges a widespread assumption that the linguistic structure of written languages is qualitatively identical to that of spoken language: 'It should no longer be necessary to defend the view that written language, is truly language, but it is surprising to learn of written-language category indicators that are realised by punctuation marks and other figural devices.' This shows that traditional approaches to these devices tend to describe the features of written language exclusively by analogy to those of spoken language, with the result that punctuation has been regarded as an unsystematic and

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deficient means for presenting spoken language. Although this was the case, analysed in its own terms; however, punctuation manifests a coherent linguistic subsystem of 'text grammar' that co-exists in writing with the system of lexical grammar that has been the traditional object of linguistic enquiry (Nunberg, 1990).

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is one of the skills in English that should be mastered by students. Writing is a means of communication and transmits idea/s to the reader (Nuriyanti & Yulianti, 2017). Graham and Perin (2007) assert that writing is a skill that draws the use of strategies such as planning, evaluating and revising text to accomplish a variety of goals, such as writing a report or expressing an opinion with the support of evidence. Therefore, to write correctly, the students should have good ability in the writing process so that the readers are interested in their writing and understand the message clearly.

One aspect which is added to the necessities of a man is communication. In oral communication, however, any thoughts that were not understood can go through asking for clarification and repeating phrases such as, 'Excuse me?' and the like. Though, in terms of clear use of language rules and systems, much is expected, as there is no way for clarification in this medium of communication (Martinez, 2018). This stance was highly supported by Khan (2024), who emphasises that when a speaker speaks, s/he pauses as many points as possible, raises the voice to emphasise a particular adept questioning tone to show that s/he is asking a question, which makes the speech clear. However, when a writer writes, s/he cannot do all such things, s/he just uses signs and symbols to show whether the sentence has been added, whether there is a short pause, whether s/he is introducing someone and such things. In the English language, these symbols and signs are known as punctuation marks for creative writing (Khan, 2024).

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Giniting (2018) states that punctuation is one of the most important aspects of written English and yet is one that is taken the most lightly. It is, in fact, the feature of writing that gives meaning to the written words, much like pauses and changes in tones of voice when speaking (Hamar, 2004). Writing is a common competence between the writer and readers. The writer must express his/her ideas with good writing to reach a goal of writing and to anticipate the reactions of the reader (Giniting, 2018).

Writing is an indirect expression, and writers should find a way to show their word expression. To emphasise meaning or expression in writing, the writer uses punctuation in writing just as intonation in speaking. To be successful in writing, learners should master components of language, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and punctuation to create good sentences (Harmer, 2004). Writing is a means of communication between the writer and the reader. It means that someone writes to communicate with his/her reader. Good writers use natural English phrases to make a paragraph easy to read, and it must be in good style (Banda & Amelia, 2020).

Most studies in the teaching of punctuation skills have failed to take into consideration the work which scientists have been doing over the past few decades with respect to the description's role in written language and the classification of punctuation symbols (Zais, 1963). We have punctuation in speech as well as in writing. In speech, the punctuation is composed of double junctures and double cross junctures plus complicated patterns of pitch and stress. Although in admission that 'speech punctuation' and 'written punctuation' are not exactly related; however, there is a good deal of connection which is worthwhile to observe (Roberts, 1956).

At schools, most examinations and assessments that learners do are mainly assessed through writing. It is probably because of this crucial role in assessment that writing has been considered the most important skill that learners require for their academic advancement. This implies that teachers have a part to play in helping learners acquire

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skills that will enable them to express their ideas clearly and effectively in writing (Khosa, 2021).

There are four integrated skills in English that support each other. The four skills are, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing becomes an important subject that must be taught to students because in writing, students can express their feelings, thoughts, ideas and opinions. There are some components that must be there in writing and one of them is the punctuation mark. Punctuation marks are the fundamental aspects of written communication, playing a pivotal role in conveying meaning, clarity and tone in written language (Martinez, 2018). Punctuation marks have been applied to avoid expressions from being misunderstood and to allow full comprehension of written language (Swebu & Mujiyalo, 2017). Punctuation marks are also defined as marks or signals used in writing to separate sentences and phrases, whether composing essays, emails or every other piece of writing, accurate usage of punctuation is important (Martinez, 2018).

The importance of punctuation marks is revealed as an ideal in understanding a piece of written English text as it is read and as a means of avoiding ambiguity in expressing meaning for communicating. Precisely to the reader what is meant by the words selected and put in sequence. A punctuation mark becomes a symbol that helps readers in expressing meaning in a sentence (Martinez, 2018).

Gezmis (2023) asserts that writing is a complex skill that requires various knowledge, such as orthographic, semantic, grammatical, syntactical, textual, spelling and punctuation, of course, the correct usage of grammar is very essential for writing. However, the correct usage of punctuation is also significant in writing because punctuation makes writing easily understandable for readers. It is a defect that writing courses do not contain the knowledge of punctuation. Since the students fall short of transmitting their ideas and using grammatical sentences, they make errors in using punctuation. Yet punctuation is crucial for successful writing (Gezmis, 2023).

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Errors are significant as well as they are inevitable during learning a language. Corder (1967) and Brown (2000) claim that errors of language by learners are important since they demonstrate the learners' knowledge. Therefore, examining language learners' errors is an indispensable part of teaching. If the sources of these errors are clearly understood, teachers can have an idea about how to treat these errors (Gezmis, 2023).

In the East Indies, Nuriyanti and Yulianti (2017), in qualitative research at a senior high school in Pannekasan, sought to find out the extent or ability to which students use punctuation marks. It was concluded that students of Class X could not use punctuation properly, 73% of them still confuse clearly and or did not know how to use punctuation. In another study, in Indonesia by Etinurwati (2016), the students' writing ability at Pardasuka of the 8th Grade SMNP 2 was done. The ability was still questionably low; the students did many mistakes using punctuation when writing a descriptive paragraph. No student was categorised as excellent, 11% were categorised as good, 57% as fair, and 32% as low. However, no student failed.

In Hungary, Ginting (2018) carried out descriptive qualitative research on how good the students of English Programme Education at FKIR UNIKA Medium were at using punctuation marks. The students' ability in using punctuation in descriptive writing was categorised as low, 55.5 %, it was because most of the students were unable to know the function of punctuation marks in writing a paragraph. Only one student, 2% was categorised as excellent, 10% as good, 32% were categorised as fair and 24% low and finally 23% were categorised as failed.

An analysis of learners' ability in using punctuation in a descriptive writing was done during the first semester of the Eighth Grade of SMPN 2 Pardusukka in Indonesia. Etunurwati (2016) found out that those learners' writing ability at SMNP 2 Pardusukka was still low. They committed many mistakes in punctuation when writing.

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Punctuation deserves attention since it shows the relationship between textual passages and helps to produce easily understandable and readable sentences which constitute building blocks of any consistent research text. Knowing punctuation rules can help avoid such fatal mistakes such as, *'Let's eat Grandma!'* (Yakhontova, 2020). The researcher noted that the ambiguity in that example has been influenced by lack of a mere comma.

Punctuation errors occur with omission or misuse of any one of the punctuation marks. Normally in some universities of Pakistan, students know the punctuation marks and their placement theoretically, but when it comes to their practical application, they use them inappropriately (Syed, Amin & Ishtaq, 2020). Nunberg (1985), in the linguistics of punctuation, states that the extensive literature on written language and writing, with few exceptions, has almost nothing to say about punctuation, from either theoretical or historical point of view. There is little reason to revise the observation that was made by Gleason in 1965 that no appreciable amount of research has ever been devoted to questions of punctuation. Indeed, there is very little descriptive data on how the English language, or any other, punctuation system is actually used. The researcher of his study thinks that more research needs to be done since Nunberg's stance is of the opinion that there is neglect in research of the linguistics of punctuation.

In South Africa, Banda (2017) studied challenges of teaching academic writing skills with limited exposure to English. It was found that lack of proficiency in English language also caused poor writing in general, not only in punctuation. The descriptive paragraphs they were given to write were riddled with errors. In South Africa, once more, research was done by Khosa (2021) on a case study of Grade 10 learners of Malamuele Circuit. Learners were committing errors in punctuation such as the omission of capital letters and commas.

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2.3.1 Punctuation marks used by learners

The purpose of punctuation is to enable a reader/s to interpret unambiguously the structure of one's writing. The absence of full stops, for example, to distinguish the sentences, is, in effect, an insult to the reader and conveys a message that the readers should work out for themselves (Jackson, 2005). Kane (2000) adds that all punctuation exists basically to help readers understand what one wishes to say. This means that punctuation is a sign that shows what appropriate expression is associated with the sentence that has been built by the writer.

Punctuation has 12 characters; they are capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, colons, semicolons, hyphens, quotation marks, brackets, dashes and apostrophes (McCaskill, 1990). Various punctuation marks perform four functions: they separate (full stops separate sentences) group or enclose (brackets enclose extraneous information). According to the CBSE Class 10 Grammar (2022), the grade 10 class must be able to use all types of the following punctuation marks cited by varying authors.

2.3.1.1 Capital letters

Capital letters are used for the first letter of a sentence. The capital letter should also be used when writing proper nouns, for example, names of people, *James Pieter and Mary Winter.* According to McCaskill (1990), the first-person pronoun, 'I' for example: *I agree with you.* It is also used for days of the week, months, special days and holidays, a special day like *Valentine's Day* uses capital letters at the beginning of the word films all use capital letters, for example: *White House, Italy, The Hollow and Because of You.* Names of public places, countries, languages, institutions, titles of books and people start with capital letters *(*McCaskill, 1990).

Furthermore, personal titles like doctor, professor and judge when referring to a specific person, capital letters are used, for example, *Professor Johnson*. However,

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McCaskill (1990) strongly advised against use of capital letters for these words when they refer only to an occupation. In addition, acronyms are almost always formed with capital letters, for example, *Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA).* In addition, Marion Field (2009), also emphasises the use of capital letters for titles but does not hint on acronyms. Instead, Marion (2009) emphasised that proper nouns and adjectives formed from proper nouns always start with capital letters for example: proper nouns; *America, England and Portugal change to – American, English and Portuguese*, respectively, but start with capital letters.

Days of the week and months of the year also start with capital letters, for example, *Sunday and June* respectively. Buildings and institutions start with a capital letter, for example, *Bristol University and British Museum.* Names of religions and their members also start with capital letters for example, *Christianity, Christian, Islam, Moslem/Muslim and Judaism, Jew.* Furthermore, sacred books start with a capital letter, for example, *Koran, Bible and Torah.* In addition, festivals' names start with capital letters, for example *Ramadan* (Field, 2009).

However, Harrison, Jakeman and Peterson (2016) added more uses of the capital letter to the above. Geographical features also use capital letters, for example, *River Thames or Mount Everest.* Countries, continents and plants start with capital letters, respectively, *South Africa, Asia and the Earth/Jupiter.* Places of study, organisations, departments, examinations and qualifications, government institutions, companies and brands all use capital letters, for example: *English Department, Applied Mathematics, House of Representatives, Amazon and finally Sony/Ford* respectively. Furthermore, abbreviations use capital letters for all letters, for example, *BBC, UN and UK* (Harrison, Jakarman & Peterson, 2016).

The first word in direct speech is capitalised, for example: *The teacher asked, 'Is anyone absent today?* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). Furthermore, historical periods, media works, articles and job titles all start with a capital letter, for example, *Middle Ages,*

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Titanic, Daily Telegraph and Head Teacher. However, above all, capital letters must never be used for ordinary nouns and for emphasising (Harrison, Jarkaman & Peters, 2016).

2.3.1.2 Full stop (.)

A full stop is a mark of separation, and it is used at the end of a sentence that is not a question or an exclamation (McCaskill, 1990). It also marks boundaries between two thoughts or ideas, for example: *He stopped. She stopped too.* A full stop is also used to end a statement and a request, for example, *I tell stories to him* (statement). *Tell me a story please (request).* After most abbreviations, full stops are used, for example, *Prof.H. Guton* (McCaskill, 1990).

Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynberg, Swanepoel, Wanton and Nonkwelo (2013) assert that a full stop ends a complete sentence and must be inserted at the end of that sentence, for example, *Phone me when you get my text message.* Furthermore, a full stop is also used at the end of an indirect question, *for example: I asked my friend if he knew about the latest applications for his phone.*

Furthermore, full stops are found after certain abbreviations, for example, *Prof. abbr. e.g. a.m p.m arr. dep*. However, with modern usage, the full stops are often omitted (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

2.3.1.3 Comma (,)

Mas'ud (2005) says that a comma separates a group of words. Use a comma between items in a series that is the one with more than two items. For example, *I'd like to visit, Spain, Italy, Austria and Germany.* This idea was supported by Lutrin and Pincus (2002) who also suggested that commas are used to separate words or phrases in a list, for example, *We bought book, pens, pencils and erasers for the school year.* However, they were quick to highlight that there is no comma before and or 'or'.

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According to Harrison, Jakeman and Peterson (2016), commas are also used to break up sentences so that they are clear and easy to follow, for example: The journalist who reported the Economist, Mary Scott, said she had received an intimidating call. One must use a comma after these words if they begin a sentence: However, Nevertheless, Therefore, Consequently, in addition, Instead, as a result, On the other hand, Furthermore, and Moreover, for example, instead, they caused them to deteriorate (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Mas'ud (2005) suggests that a comma must be used before direct quotes, for example, *she said, 'I do love you.'* In addition, a comma can be used after an introductory phrase, for example*: Since you asked, I will tell you/Unfortunately, we lost her address.*

A comma is used in sentences with more than two clauses, if one clause follows another, for example, *caused by a number of factors, the problem badly affected relations between them, which had previously been cordial.* However, a comma must not be used before a defining relative clause - that is, one that gives essential information without which the sentence would not make sense, for example, *there were many issues that caused relations between the two countries to become strained* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

When referring to a town, city, state or country, if you are referring to a place in it, a comma used, for example, *Pinetown, New Jersey / King's College, London.* A comma is also used when more than one adjective is used, particularly, if they are similar in meaning, for example, *The troubles in Northern Ireland were long, complex and painful.* A comma is also used with these words and phrases: of course, for example and namely: *The incident of course, led to retaliation. There were numerous bombings in Mainland Britain, for example in a pub in Birmingham. A new organisation was formed, namely the Provision IRA. One should also use a full stop after some abbreviation, for example, Prof., etc., Wed.* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

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Commas separate clauses, for example clauses with participles, for example, *Relations between two countries become strained, leading to open hostility.* In addition, in non-defining clauses relative clauses (which give additional information) a comma is used for example, *there was disagreement on several foreign- policy issues, which caused relations between the two countries to become strained* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynberg, Swanepol, Walton and Nonkwelo (2013) assert that a comma may perform different functions in a sentence. A comma is used in a list of nouns, verbs or adjectives. Examples, *I am saving for a tablet, earphones and a computer; My sister danced, sang and screamed; That is cleverest, funniest joke I ever heard.*

A comma is also used after a dependent clause, for example: *After we arrived home, we checked our email messages.* Use a comma before but when the main clauses have different subjects, for example, *He talked on his phone, but we carried on working.* Furthermore, use a pair of commas to separate information that can be left out in a sentence, for example, *Mr Samuel, the owner of the shop, gave me a discount* (Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynberg, Swanepol, Walton & Nonkwelo, 2013).

Commas indicate where one phrase where one phrase or ends and another begins, for example: Andre Agassi won his match, to the delight of the spectators. Additional information that could have been inserted in brackets or between dashes, may be separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma or commas for example: *She obtained an excellent result, a full house of seven distinctions! Mr Jenkins addressed the pupils and parents* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

We place commas before and after words such as however and nevertheless, for example: *She was, however, late for the appointment and this caused her to miss the interview.* Furthermore, introductory words or phrases are separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma or commas, for example, *Once again, I was ignored by a*

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panel of judges. However, commas must never be used between two main clauses, commonly known as comma splice error (Luttrin & Pincus, 2002).

On the other hand, the researcher found out that there are also don'ts when it comes to the uses of commas. A comma must not be used with a clause beginning 'that', for example: '*The exam results indicated, that the children where improving' (x).* Do not use a comma between a subject and its verb, for example: *'Teachers with many years of experience, were beginning to leave the profession' (x*). A comma cannot be used between two subjects linked by 'and', for example: *The professor, and his colleagues carried out important research' (x)* (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.1.4 Question mark (?)

The question mark is used to terminate a direct question (Kane, 2003), for example: *What is your name?* Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynburg, Swanepoel Walton and Nonkwelo (2013) agree that a question mark is used at the end of a question but add that it is also used at the end of a rhetoric question, for example*: What does this team think it is doing?* However, the authors strongly advised against using a question mark at the end of an indirect question, for example: *She asked me if I had read the news.* This must end with a full stop not a question mark. Furthermore, using many exclamation marks is a sign of bad text writing. Rhetorical questions also end in question marks. A good example is: *Why do we need education?* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

2.3.1.5 Exclamation mark (!)

Mas'ud (2005) asserts that an exclamation mark is set within a sentence to stress the preceding word or phrase. It can be a signal of surprise or emotion, for example: *That's fantastic!* The exclamation mark can also work as a command, for example: *Don't do it!*

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According to Lutrin and Pincus (2017) exclamation marks follow exclamations or interjections (interruptions). Exclamation marks are used to accentuate and strengthen the tone of a statement. They are often introduced by the verbs: yelled, shouted, exclaimed and commanded. They are also used after sentences, phrases or words containing emotions such as anger, fear, happiness, anxiety, shock and misery. The following are examples of how an exclamation mark is used. *Ouch! I am so scared! The lieutenant yelled, 'Attention!', 'I'm pertrified!' whispered the frightened woman* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2017). This assertion was also highly supported by Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynberg, Swanepol, Walton and Nonkwelo (2013) who emphasised that an exclamation mark is used at the end of a sentence to show a strong emotion, for example: *What a terrible story this is on the front page!* However, they were quick to add that the exclamation mark can be used in the middle of the sentence, for example: *No! I will not pay that rip-off price for a magazine.*

2.3.1.6 Colon (:)

Some learners and students avoid using the colons (:) or semicolons (;) because they are not sure how to use them correctly or appropriately. These punctuation marks are useful and important features in academic writing (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016). In modern writing, the most common function of the colon is to introduce a specification (McCaskill, 1990). It can be used to signal that something like a list or extra information follows. For example: *There are many kinds of guitars: acoustic, electric, Spanish or bass guitar*. Colons are used before a list, for example: *A report highlighted three main causes of crime in inner city: high unemployment, poor housing and family breakdown* (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016)

In addition, a colon indicates that a list, an explanation or an idea is following, for example, I need to buy the following items: lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots. Furthermore, a colon introduces a quotation, for example: *J.F. Kennedy's famous words are: Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your*

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country' (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). A colon is used before a quotation for example: *The report concluded as follows: 'Solving the problems of the inner city is not simply a question of money'.* Colons also come before an explanation, for example: *The report raised one serious question: how could these problems be addressed to improve the quality of life of those in the inner city.* However, it is strongly advised not to use a colon when reporting someone' words for example, there are experts who said that: housing is the most important issue (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

In script writing, according to Lurin & Pincus (2002), in a dialogue, a colon follows the speaker's words for example:

Mrs Brown: Are you going to the Debutante Ball?

Cathy: If I find a partner.

2.3.1.7 Semicolon (;)

A semicolon indicates that the main thrust of a sentence continues but it is temporarily halted (Mas'ud, 2005). If coordinate clauses are not joined by a coordinate, they must be joined by a semi-colon for example: *The work in the office was quite simple; she had to merely answer the phone* (Mas'ud, 2005).

The semicolon is a long pause that balances two equally important, related or parallel ideas for example: *She went by train; she would have flown.* It also indicates opposite ideas (antithesis), for example: *In summer, she swims; in winter she skates.* A semicolon joins two main clauses where there is no conjunction, for example: *She worked hard for the examinations; she had nothing to fear.* However, it must be noted that a semicolon may often be replaced by a full stop or by the conjunctions *and, but, so, for and although* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

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Semicolons are used between long phrases or sentences with lists, for example, A government report highlighted three main causes of crime in the inner city: *There had been a considerable rise in unemployment; a significant number of people were living in poor housing conditions; and family breakdown was a major factor in levels of youth crime* (Harrison, Jakeman& Peterson, 2016). The same punctuation mark is used to separate two complete sentences where the second one continues a point made in the first, for example, *The report concluded that solving the problems of the inner city was simply a question of providing money for initiatives; any such solutions would also require a major change.* However, a semi-colon must never replace a comma (Harrison, Jakeman& Peterson 2016).

2.3.1.8 Hyphen (-)

A hyphen is used to join two or more words, for example, *user-friendly* (Hammar, 2004). Words may also be hyphenated at the ends of lines, for example, *be- cause.* A hyphen (-) has no space before or after it as compared to a dash, for example, semi-detached. One should use a hyphen between parts of an adjective formed from two or complete words, for example, *middle-aged user-friendly customer-driven.* Furthermore, a hyphen is used after certain prefixes, for example, *semi-, ex-, counter- , e-, and self-: semi-detached ex-colleague counter-productive e-commerce self-conscious.* One must take note that, however, over time, hyphens have been dropped from words like semicircle and countermeasure. A hyphen can also be used with words with co-, for example, *co-author and co-founder.* However, hyphens are not used after most prefixes like, *underestimate and multimillion dollar* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Lutrin and Pincus (2002) also stress that a hyphen links prefixes to words, or links two words to form compound words for example, *anti-dandruff shampoo, pre-school, well-deserved and life-threatening.* A hyphen also helps to differentiate meanings, for

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example: *She had to re-make the garment*; and the remark of *'Gone with the Wind' is most enjoyable.*

The researcher of this study had to try and understand the difference between 're-make' and 'remake'. She noted that the former is a verb, and the latter is a noun. To facilitate spelling and pronunciation, a hyphen is inserted if a prefix ends in a vowel and the word joined to the prefix begins with the same vowel, for example, *co-opt, re-examine and no-one* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2016).

One can use a hyphen for words consisting of a number and another word: a three-stage process. In addition, a hyphen is used for an age, used as an adjective, for example: *A 40-year-old man, but 40 years old is written without a hyphen* (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016). A hyphen is used in phrases beginning with 'well' and with certain other phrases, only if they are used before a noun, for example, *state-of-the-art-equipment, up-to-date information, well-planned courses, long-term solutions.* However, there is no hyphen in: *The equipment is state of the art / Keep up to date with all the latest information. A club that is well known for its friendliness / A plan that might work in long term.* (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

Furthermore, a hyphen is used when writing numbers between 21 and 99 and fractions in words, for example, *seventy-five, two-thirds.* A hyphen is also used for surnames consisting of the worldwide web, *Tim Berners-Lee* (but note that some families or individuals have chosen to drop the hyphen) (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.1.9 Dash (–)

*A d*ash is different from a hyphen. It is used to separate an idea from the rest of the sentence, for example, *If you want to succeed – really succeed – you must study hard* (Nurhayat, 2017). A dash (–) has a space before and after it for example: *It worked - but only for a short time* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

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Lutrin and Pincus (2002) were more elaborate on the dash. The dash is slightly longer than a hyphen and serves a similar purpose to a comma, colon or a semi-colon. A dash separates parts of a sentence and forces us to pause, for example, *There's more to school than a syllabus – life skills, friendships and sportsmanship, gained along the way.* To give additional information, the dash can be used in the same way as commas or brackets, for example: *Next week we are going to Port Elizabeth - the Windy City*.

One can use a dash at the end of a sentence to add a thought or comment on what has just been said, for example: *Strict dietary guidelines for the playing squad transformed their fitness levels – to astonishing degree.* In addition, a dash can also be used at the end of a sentence to summarise or conclude what has gone before. The following is an example, *Team moral performance in matches and the fans were all transformed by this new mental approach among the players – in shorty, it improved everything.* NOTE, you could use a semi-colon instead of a dash in that example. (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.1.10 Brackets ()

Brackets, or parenthesis, must come in pairs, (in other words, one at the beginning and one at the end). Brackets should be used for cross references for example; *This is also important regarding fitness condition* (see also Section 3). (Harrison, Jakamam & Peterson, 2016). When something is written in parenthesis or brackets, it is usually an explanation, an aside or some additional information, for example: *The Chihuahua (the smallest dog in the world) can fit into a teacup.* However, it is often possible to use commas or dashes instead of brackets, for example: *The Chihuahua, the smallest dog in the world can fit into a teacup OR The Chihuahua – the smallest dog in the world – can fit into a teacup* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

Brackets are used for sources of information, such as authors, researchers, books, reports, etc., particularly if you are quoting from them, and for year: for example, *one*

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study found out that fitness was' not the major factor in successful performance' (Gregory; 2004; Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

Around numbers or letters for separate points, brackets are used, for example, *They won, not because they were the better team but because (a) they had prepared better than their opponents and (b) they were more focused during the game.* However, of importance to NOTE is: one should not do this for more than two or at most three points. For a longer list, use semi-colons (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

Brackets are used at the end of a sentence to add information that is not essential, for example, *Results improved a great deal (though there were occasional defeats).* brackets can also be used in a whole sentence that adds extra but not essential information, for example: *All these studies indicated that diet and lifestyle were as important as skill and fitness with regard to differences in results for the very top players (This was not the case for average players, but our focus is on top players.)* NOTE the full stop that ends the full sentence must come before the second bracket (Harrisson, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.1.11 Quotation marks (Inverted commas) (' ') / (" ")

Inverted commas can be single ('') or double (""). When used for quoting actual words used by people in speech or written material, they are also called quotation marks or speech marks. Academic writing often involves the use of inverted commas particularly when incorporating people's words to our own writing, for example: *In their report, the researchers stated: 'Whether or not people in generally are happy about it, the truth is that society is changing forever.'* NOTE: Notice the use of a capital letter at the beginning of the quotation and a full stop at the end of it, both inside the inverted commas because the quotation is a full sentence (Harrison, Jakaman & Peterson, 2016).

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Use two sets of inverted commas if you put the speaker or writer in the middle of a quotation: ‘‘Our findings will have far reaching consequences on the policymaker’, ‘the researchers stated in their report, ‘as they suggest that current thinking and assumption is based on false assumptions’’. Notice the position of the commas before the inverted comma for the first part of the quotation, and before the first inverted comma for the second part of the quotation (Harrisson, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Quotation marks are used to indicate direct speech, for example, *Mr Thompson said, ‘There will be no homework over this weekend’.* Quotation marks are also used to quote someone else’s words, for example, *Martin Luther King said, ‘I have a dream!’* to excuse oneself for using slang or foreign words, one uses quotation marks, for example, *Our new station wagon is used for ’schlepping’ the soccer team.* In addition, quotation marks are used to indicate metaphoric usage, for example, *I am the ‘baby’ of the family.* All punctuation must fall within the inverted commas: *‘Open the windows! It’s stifling in here.’* (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

There are still many other uses of inverted commas. They can be used for a term that may not be generally known, used or understood, for example: *The researchers used an ‘extremes filtering’ method to allocate the results of the survey. This involved removing people with the highest and lowest people from their calculations.* Furthermore, the title of a book, report, magazine, film, painting etc. are courted, for example, *The researchers published their report, ‘Changing Demographics: A Guide for Policy Makers’ in the journal ‘Social Indicators’*. However, note that both titles could be in italics, without inverted commas (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Quotation marks/inverted commas can be used to indicate that you believe that something is true, for example: *This kind of research is regarded as ‘challenging the status quo’ but it often has no impact on policymakers.* In addition, inverted commas highlight a word or phrase to be focused on which already has been mentioned in the

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place, for example, *They make much of the potential impact of their report but what exactly is this 'impact' likely to be?* (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

Above all, the researcher took note that, the use of quotation marks or inverted commas follow some rules. If one is using single inverted commas throughout his/her work use double inverted commas for any quotation within and vice versa for example: the researcher stated: *'We regard many current assumptions, especially those regarding what are commonly called 'disadvantaged people', as both faulty and unhelpful.'* The researcher stated: *'We regard many current assumptions, especially those regarding what are commonly called 'disadvantaged people' as both faulty and unhelpful.'* However, there are no strict rules about whether one should use single or double inverted commas but one should be consistent throughout the text. (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.1.12 Apostrophe (')

The functions of the apostrophe are to indicate possession and contractions. Use the apostrophe to show possession, for example: *This is Marko's book.* Use the apostrophe with contractions, for example: *She's a great teacher (*Nurhayat, 2017).

The apostrophe indicates contraction or shows possession (ownership). We often join two words for informality and in the process, one or more letters are omitted. The apostrophe shows where these letters have been removed. Here are some examples: *We've been here = We have been here, and I didn't know = I did not know.* However, contractions should not be used in formal writing. The apostrophe is like a souvenir of a holiday. When we look at photographs, postcards or key rings, we are reminded that the holiday is 'gone but not forgotten'. Words that contain apostrophes tell us that the letters are 'gone but not forgotten' (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002).

The following table shows some common contractions that have been necessitated by the apostrophe.

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Table 2.1: Common Contractions (Lutrin & Pincus. 2002:13)

I +	*I+ am* *= I am*	*I + have* *= I've*	*I + had* *= I'd*	*I + shall* *= I'll*
You +	*you + are* *= you are*	*you + have* *= you've*	*you + had* *= you'd*	*you + will* *= you'll*
We +	*we + are* *= we're*	*we + have* *= we've*	*we + had* *we'd*	*we + shall* *= we'll*
They +	*they + are* *= they're*	*they + have* *= they've*	*they + had* *= they'd*	*they + will* *= they'll*
+ Not	*have + not* *= haven't*	*must + not* *= mustn't*	*could + not* *= couldn't*	*would + not* *= wouldn't*
+ Not	*can + not* *= can't*	*will + not* *won't*	*do + not* *= don't*	
+ have	*would + have* *= would've*	*should + have* *= should've*		

Courtesy of Lutrin and Pincus (2002)

Use an apostrophe and -s ('s) when something belongs to, relates to or is done by someone or something, after the name, for example, *Barack Obama's presidency.* Also use an apostrophe after a singular noun: *the Government's policies/popularity mistakes.* After a singular noun ending with -s, put an apostrophe as follows: *Keynes's theories, his boss's economic theories.* For plural nouns that do not end with s then it will be like: *people's opinions.* However, it must be noted that we use an apostrophe (but not -s) after plurals that end with -s, for example, *politicians' reactions/girls' and boys' ideas (*Harrisson, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016).

On the other hand, there are some numbers or words that one should never attach an apostrophe. When dealing with numbers, do not use an apostrophe, for example with decades, the 1980s. Also, one must not use an apostrophe with any other number for

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example age: when he was in his 40s (forties for plural). Furthermore, one must not use an apostrophe for plurals, for example, *CDs for sale*. It is also advisable, never to use an apostrophe with the following possessive words: hers, ours and theirs. (Harrison, Jakemam & Peterson, 2016).

2.3.2 Purpose of punctuation

Kane (2000) states that all punctuation exists basically to help readers understand what one wishes to say. Jackson (2005) says that the purpose of punctuation in academic work is to enable readers to interpret unambiguously the structure and therefore the meaning of one's writing.

The various punctuation marks used in writing perform four functions: they separate sentences (full stop), group or enclose (parenthesis) extraneous information, connect (a hyphen) a unit modifier and imparts a meaning. The function of a punctuation mark is the basis for use and should be the basis for determining whether it is needed (Gingiting, 2018). Punctuation is not only essential aspect of writing but also reading as incorrect punctuation can hinder meaning. English as a Foreign language or English as a Second Language learners often encounter difficulties using punctuation and it affects meaning (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshaad, Abdul & Halik, 2025).

As is known, individuals use verbal and written expression for communication. Writing is one of the most important instruments that individuals use to communicate with another person and transfer important information to future generations. There are certain signs utilized to facilitate and improve the comprehension of texts and signs, and these are called the punctuation marks. Punctuation marks are used to differentiate elements of the sentence, embedded sentences and to identify the emphasis, intonation and pauses in as sentence (Suluku & Kirboga, 2020). When reading an article, punctuation marks guide the reader like traffic signs (Hengingermen, 2007). We utilise punctuation to clarify the written expression using commas, semicolons and many other punctuation errors (Baron, 2001).

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Punctuation marks are of great importance to comprehend the meaning of an expression; therefore, these marks should be instructed well, and the students should use these marks correctly. However, even after completing the high school and passing the university admission exam, students make several punctuation mistakes in writing. If they make mistakes when using punctuation marks, these should be investigated (Suluku & Kirboga, 2020).

English has been the language of administration law, business, administration, law, business, education, international relations and others in most of the countries around the globe. English language is spoken as a first language (L1), second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) by over two billion (2 000 000 000) people all over the world. To produce meaningful and coherent writing and using punctuation correctly is an important skill. If punctuation marks are not properly used, the readers may have difficulties in using correct punctuations in appropriate place in writing. In Sri Lanka, for example, according to schools English as Second Language (ESL) curriculum, writing is one of the significant components in the textbook. However, most of the students make punctuation errors in their writing. (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad & Abdul Halik, 2025). Although learners are good at writing, they face problems in using appropriate punctuations marks in their writing (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad & Abdul Halik, 2025).

2.3.3 Punctuation errors and writing ability

Hammer (2004) states that being able to write is vital for speakers of foreign language as much as for everyone using their own first languages. It means that writing is an important skill because it is also the basic skill for students to communicate with others in written form. Martin (1994) supports this stance by adding that the writing process transfers ideas into written form which is understandable. The students should understand the generic structure and language features of the text. The students should pay attention to content, organisation, vocabulary, language and mechanism

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when writing a text. Writing is a skill which should be mastered as well. As the writer, s/he should know how to develop a paragraph into good composition, and this includes punctuation (Hammar, 2004).

Poorly punctuated writing can make up for frustrated and annoyed readers who will be less sympathetic in appreciating the context of what one is writing, so punctuation is important (Jackson, 2005). Nurhrayat (2017) asserts that basically the problems which are found among students in writing skills are spacing between words, capitalisation to indicate sentence beginnings, and using inverted commas and proper nouns.

There are many errors that are committed in the process of writing. Some learners do not use capital letters correctly. In addition, comma must not be used with a clause beginning with 'that' for example: *The exam results indicated that children were improving*. There must also be no comma before 'that' (Harrison, Jakaman & Peterson, 2016). There is a danger zone of misusing capital letters for ordinary nouns that cannot be regarded as proper nouns. In addition, capital letters must not be used to emphasise a point as one may in informal writing, as an email to a friend (Harrison, Jakaman & Peterson, 2016).

Apostrophes are also often misused*, for example who's is not the same as 'whose'.* In addition, the word theirs is often written with an apostrophe, which is incorrect (Harrison, Jackman & Peterson, 2016). Scott (2014) asserts that it is always best to check one's common punctuation errors and take note of errors that are committed by learners too in school and beyond. Scott (2014) categorised them as follows:

- Extraneous apostrophes - these are put where they do not belong for example, *'five dollar's'*. In these cases, for a plural form one must just add 's' without an apostrophe and for possessive form add an apostrophe for example: *That is my wife's car'* ' (Scott, 2014).
- Unnecessary quotation marks – the use of the single or double quotation marks when nothing is being quoted. An example is, '*We offer 'the best in town'*. When

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not quoting something, one must avoid single or double quotation marks. If one needs to emphasise a specific part of a message, they must use bold or italicised font (Scott, 2014).

- Missing commas – without commas, sentences can become run-on blocks of text without any breaks. A good example is: *I went to the store but they were closed so I went home.* This would have been avoided by speaking the sentence loudly and taking note of any breaks in speech and insert a comma where one pauses or change gears within a sentence (Scott, 2014).
- Too many commas – just the opposite of missing commas, it is possible to include an excessive number of commas in one sentence for example, *I went to the store, but they were closed, so I got into my car, turned my radio on, backed out, and went home.* While there is no set rule for how many commas constitutes too many, your eye is the best judge of overuse. If one feels s/he has too many commas in a sentence, consider replacing a comma with a period (full stop) to create separate sentences (Scott, 2014).
- Excess exclamation – some make mistakes of inserting too many exclamations, when too many exclamations are done in a body of work, the reader is overwhelmed and devalues each individual mark. An example: *Our products are the best! They really work! Get yours today.* One should be tasteful with exclamation points and save them for big points and the ends of paragraphs, leaving the reader on a high note (Scott, 2014).
- It's versus its – the problem: It's all too easy to misuse the word because the rules are different, for example, *I don't know who its going to help more, you or me. Look into it' eyes.* One must remember that 'it's' is short for 'it is or it has', where the apostrophe designates a contraction and is not possessive. However, although it can be confusing, the word 'its' as in, 'The dog lost its bone', is possessive even though it does not contain an apostrophe. A simple test is to see if one can substitute the word with 'it is' or 'I has'. If so 'it's is correct. If not, then 'its' is probably correct (Scott, 2014).

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- The oxford commas – lack of consistent method can be infuriating for grammar pros and casual readers alike. The oxford comma, which is the comma before the final item in a list is standard British writing. In the United States of America, it has become common place to skip the comma especially in journalism but the debate about which is right continues. Example with oxford comma is: *'My favourite foods are pizza spaghetti, and steak'.* Example without an oxford comma is, *'My favourite foods are pizza, spaghetti and steak'.* There is no right or wrong when it comes to the oxford comma. It is a matter of preference (Scott, 2014). However, the researcher found that learners in South Africa, though learning British English, they are supposed to use the United States comma.
- Hyphen (-) versus dash (–) – the problem is using these marks interchangeably which is not correct. A hyphen must only be used to combine two words and a dash for additional information in a sentence. A hyphen is a small line and a dash is larger. One should use a dash (Scott, 2014).
- Semi-colons versus colons – semi-colons are often misused, particularly where a colon should be used, for example one must avoid, 'I brought three things: a toothbrush, a blanket, and a pillow. A good example, *I am glad to be going on vacation; I need the rest from work.* One must use a comma it s/he wants to separate two distinct thoughts, consider a period instead to break the thought into two separate sentences (Scott, 2014).
- Quotation mark placement – Sentence-ending punctuation marks often go outside of quotation marks rather than inside, which is where they belong. An example to avoid is: 'I had a great day at work'! A good example is: '*What time is it?'* The punctuation is part of the text one is quoting, so the punctuation goes inside the quotation marks (Scott, 2014).

Yassin, Ababer and Samhon (2016) used a descriptive analytical method to test the ability of Nyala Locality secondary school learners in punctuation. Tests and retests were used for the reliability measurement. The results revealed that the common errors among the students were the use of the comma in place of the full stop. The

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wrong uses of the quotation marks were more difficult among the entire marks, besides the misuse of the other punctuation marks.

Ullah, Khan and Ahmad (2018) selected Grade 10 participants from different schools in Peshawar District. Participants were selected through probability sampling from different schools. An essay writing test was conducted on learners studying Grade 10. This corpus of 150 essays was evaluated and a total of 1633 errors were pinpointed. Among them were 384 errors of pluralisation, and comma errors were 108, among other errors.

A case study of the eleventh grade was carried out at SMA Fatahillah in Jakarta by Nasrudin (2015). The objectives of the research were to find the kinds of errors and the causes of errors in punctuation marks by the eleventh grade. The population sample was 60, but the researcher sampled 20 learners using the qualitative method in descriptive analysis. The research findings showed that the most common error which most students made was the full stop, 44.3%, comma 44.6, apostrophe 63 % and question mark 0%.

Pratiwi and Ramalia (2017) carried out an analysis of students' punctuation in writing recount text. The aim was to investigate the types of errors in punctuation and the dominant error in punctuation, using the descriptive qualitative method. Thirty-two (32) students in the eleventh grade, participated in a recount text. There were 88 errors, amounting to 91.67 % in omission, 3 or 3.12 errors in addition and 5 or 5.21 errors in misinformation. Dominant errors were the period (full stop) with 53.1 % errors that is 51 errors made by the 11th grade learners of SMAN 14, Kabutapen Tangareng. It was concluded that the 11th grade learners have a diffculty using punctuation.

Of interest to note, an error analysis of using punctuation made by students in descriptive text in the 2nd year at SMPN 3 WERA was done by Husaida, Hidayati and Humaira (2018). This was interesting since most cited sources, by the researcher, were mostly done in high school. The purpose of the study was to find out errors in

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using punctuation in a descriptive text. The mixed qualitative method was used, and purposive sampling was done. The researchers took 21 students as a sample from class. In collecting the data, this study used observation and writing test as the research instrument. The study found out that there were many errors committed in punctuation and tabulated the information as follows:

Table 2.1:

NUMBER	PUNTUATION ERRORS	FREQUENCY OF ERRORS MADE BY 21 STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE
1.	Period	11	26 %
2.	Comma	15	36%
3.	Addition	4	10%
4.	Omission	12	28%
	Total	**42**	**100 %**

(Husaida, Hidiyati & Humaria, 2018)

In the table above: Formula = P= F/N x 100%, in which P is for percentage and student mastery, F is frequency in students' score, N is the total errors of respondents/ students (Gass & Selinka 2018:3).

In cases of omission, for example, omission of the period/full stop meant that a complete thought of a sentence ended without a full stop, making the sentence unclear. At times, there were additions of punctuation marks that were not supposed to be there, like the presence of the comma that should not appear in the sentence and often made a different meaning to the sentence itself (Husaida, Hidiyati & Humaria, 2018).

Similar research, but this time on a wider scale of eight universities, was done in Pakistan, where 200 final-year bachelor students of English participated. The study aimed at exploring the different types of punctuation errors made by students in their

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writings and the reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by students from different sets of universities, with one set belonging to backward areas and the other set belonging to well-developed areas (Syed, Amim & Ishtaq, 2020).

Syed, Amim and Ishtaq (2020), in their study, used Corder's 1975 Error Analysis Approach. The study also used a mixed-methods research design; the sample included a total of 200 students out of which 25 were selected from each university using the random simple sampling technique. Tests and interviews were used as instruments for data collection; students were made to take a punctuation test. The study revealed that the most frequent punctuation errors were errors related to the comma, apostrophe and capitalisation. The comma is the most frequently used; hence, often misused. Its frequency was higher than other punctuation marks. An apostrophe is used for indicating possession, and it is also used for indicating contraction. In all the universities, the students were having problems with these two marks.

Sayid, Amin and Ishtaq (2020) concentrated their study on eight universities; as previously stated, four universities were selected from the rural areas and the other four universities were from the urban areas of Pakistan. The universities selected from the rural areas were KUST, SBBU, UoM and KKKUK, and those from the urban areas were NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI. The study explored that there are differences in the frequency of punctuation errors from these universities. The students from rural universities made more errors as compared to the universities in urban areas. The research showed that 55% of the mistakes were committed by students from the four rural universities as compared to the four urban universities, which had 45%.

Aziz (2019) aimed to survey punctuation errors made by students at university level while writing paragraphs. A total of 2.5% of the students could not use the capital letter properly; small letters were used at the beginning of sentences. Some students even

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used small letters. Full stop errors were committed and contributed to 22% among other errors. Some full stops were misused or omitted. Comma errors were 21%. However, only one student used the dash but correctly (means of communication – having a mobile).

Another research was done by Sibanda (2014) on an analysis of language attribution in universities in South Africa. The study, though, was not focusing on punctuation only, but also on grammar use. Absence of punctuation marks where they are needed and the use of punctuation marks in the wrong positions were evident. The full stop was the most misplaced punctuation in instances where parentheses were used at the end of a citation, either to indicate the page reference or the source details. In such instances, the full stop was put just after the last letter of the citation instead of at the end of the bracketed information. Another punctuation challenge was the use of a mark where it was not warranted, as 'Hirsch (2003) suggests that, for learners to understand, it stemmed from the overgeneralisation where the assumption is that a comma should separate the writer from the ideas, even in paraphrases.

A study was conducted to determine the types of punctuation errors in persuasive writing committed by English Language students in higher education by Apuhis, Arruiz, Bayon and Deita (2023). The descriptive-qualitative design was employed. The study participants were eighteen (18) third year students of Bachelor of Arts in the English Language in one of the state universities in Negwes Occidental. The data source is the independently composed persuasive essays with a provided topic. The errors were identified according to the rules of punctuation by Strauss. The results revealed that omission obtained the highest frequency, and comma was the most frequent error with 67.7% and 77% respectively. The most frequent punctuation error in higher education, then, was the comma, however, several errors were also found in the use of the period/full stop, semi-colon, apostrophe and exclamation mark. No errors were found in the use of both the question mark and the quotation marks.

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Gezmis (2023) did research on punctuation errors in writing in English at Kirikkale University. Second language research supports the idea that errors supply evidence about the learner's level in the target language. The findings revealed that the frequency of punctuation errors in inter-lingual are higher than intra-lingual with a percentage of 66.7%. Inter-lingual errors are higher than intra-lingual errors. This is because the students used to think in their first language system, when they used punctuation marks in writing English. There were also some students who used a comma before a conjunction or after a conjunction instead of using it only before a conjunction since the overgeneralised the rule. This is an intra-lingual error with a frequency of 5.96%. For this usage, the difference between inter-lingual and intra-lingual error is large and the students are thought to have committed more errors in punctuation due to their native language. A comma is not used to separate the parts of a compound sentence in Turkish. Also, some students applied this rule when they wrote English and did not use a comma in English too which shows an inter-lingual error with a frequency of 2.55%. in the light of the analysis the most descriptive error in writing. The result is like Awad's (2012) who found the most frequent error as the comma.

Still in Turkey, another study was done on the punctuation knowledge levels of Freshmen College by Suluku and Kirboga (2020). The study was conducted to determine the use of punctuation marks by Freshmen Language course students whose mother language is Turkish. The study is qualitative where descriptive techniques were used. The study group included 204 students (157 female and 57 male students). An anonymous short story text that did not include any punctuation marks was used as the data collection instrument. The text included 47 punctuation marks, 12 periods (full stops), 1 question mark, 1 exclamation, 3 quotation marks, 5 double periods, 1 semi-colon and 6 dashes was selected, the text was reviewed by language experts. The text was rewritten in lowercase letters and all punctuation marks removed.

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The manuscript was then distributed to the students and were asked to edit the text based on essay rules. The edited texts by students were collected at the end of one hour. The study findings demonstrated that students made several mistakes in all punctuation marks. One type of error was the use incorrect punctuation mark and the other was to use a punctuation mark where it was not needed. The period (full stop) however, was the only punctuation mark used correctly by most of the students. When using the dash, 98.34% of the students made mistakes. However, there was no significant error difference between the correct use of punctuation mark based on gender. The students made mistakes mostly in complex sentences and sentences that lack a clear clue about the punctuation marks. Student used correct punctuation marks in simple sentences that included clear clues about what was required (Suluku & Kirboga, 2020).

An analysis of punctuation errors among English as a second language (ESL) in the Srilankan context was done by Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad. Abdul and Halik (2025). The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. A sample of 35 students, Grade 11, was selected from a population of 85 using simple random sampling. Data were collected using a punctuation test, classroom observations and interviews. Quantitative data provided insights into the types and frequency of error, while qualitative data explored students' perspectives and challenges. Findings revealed that students struggle with punctuation marks such as commas, apostrophes and quotation marks.

In other instances, sheer ignorance is manifested when using punctuation for example, included having two full stops on the form et al. (Sibanda, 2014) According to Caufield (2022) 'et al.' is written as two words, with 'al' always followed by a full stop. The full stop is an indication that the term is an abbreviation. Furthermore, Sibanda (2014), discovered that the comma was notoriously absent in errors of omission especially where 'however' was used. All this manifested sheer ignorance.

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Sufiyani (2016) did an analysis of students' error in applying punctuation marks in writing paragraph. A case study of first year students of English at University of Mataram was done. The aim of the study was to find out problems that students have in applying punctuation mark and factors that cause the problems. From a population of 80 students in English Department, using purposive sampling, 27 students participated using two kinds of instruments, test and interview using the descriptive quantity methods. Unlike the other dominant errors in the above-mentioned research, like the full stop, comma and apostrophe, Sufiyani asserts (2016) that the dominant error that was found in the research done was the dash with errors totalling to 13.32 %. However, while not all punctuation marks cause problems in research writing, some appear rather to be rather troublesome particularly the comma. Yankonitova (2020) carried research on Punctuation Mistakes in the English Writing of Non-Anglophone Researchers. One of the most common mistakes found was inserting a comma before a relative clause which begins with that as in 'We consider side effects that…' Such was wrong use of the comma.

One more area of punctuation mistake was that of the apostrophe use. This important mark denotes possession. Due to the linguistic phenomenon of homophony (when certain words have similar pronunciation but different spelling) non-indigenous researchers often confuse its and the contracted form of it iis (it's). The following excerpt from a research article illustrates this rather common mistake: 'This technique has several important advantages. The main motivation for it's use is as follows…' Also, some researchers are unaware of the apostrophe use with two or more proper names and put these marks as in Watson's and Crick's model, although the first apostrophe is unnecessary (Yankonitova, 2020).

The slash (/), which is used much more rarely than any other punctuation mark, caused problems. Its main function consists of genuine alternatives. The following example demonstrates, sometimes researchers are not sufficiently aware of this role of the slash. Furthermore, experiments are required for the identification of all the

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components / metabolites. In this instance, use of ‘or’ is preferable as the juxtaposed notions are not alternatives, however, on the other hand certainly there are punctuation marks which generate fewer problems, mostly due to their limited use for example, the question mark and the exclamation mark (Yankinitova, 2020).

Ramaoka Chauke and Mothlaka (2024) studied grammatical errors made by Grade 10 learners in English Descriptive essays in Grade 10, in Limpopo. grade 10 learners were purposively sampled in a qualitative research approach. Results of the study revealed that the participants committed grammatical errors that were categorised as sentence fragments, verb tense errors, concord errors, the use of contractions in punctuation, sentence initial conjunction and inappropriate use of personal pronouns. Although the research was mainly on grammar, still punctuation errors were picked up on contraction which then muddled grammar.

In Limpopo again, research was conducted by Maphefo, Mailula and Ngoepe (2022) on errors in the English essays of rural English Language learners. Essays of 40 Grade 10 learners were analysed. It was found out that there were no cohesive devices, was omission of articles a’ and ‘the’. In one other, schools, there were 11 paragraphing errors, 13 adverb errors, 14 verb errors, 15 determiner errors and 18-word order errors. The number of spelling errors was high with 24, tense errors were 29. However, punctuation errors were the highest of all with 66. In the second school punctuation errors were 42, pronoun had 11, spelling 12, paragraphing 15 and verb tense errors were 18. In school number 3, 8 errors involved informal language uses, grammar had 11, adjective 12, 14 verb errors, tense errors were 20, spelling 22 and punctuation had 46 errors. Finaly, in school number 4, 3 uses of informal language were noted, grammar had 11, adjective 12, 14 verb errors, tense errors were 20, spelling 22 and punctuation had the highest, with 46 errors.

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2.3.4 Reasons why punctuation errors are made

Many researchers attempted to provide reasons on why errors are made in punctuation. After their study on secondary school learners' punctuation, Abdall, Ababer and Samhon (2016), revealed that the significant errors among students were due to insufficient exercises and lack of practice. Unpunctuated texts or sentences were a result of insufficient explanation to all types of punctuation marks and their functions. However, Corder (1981) attributes error in punctuation to students omitting punctuation marks due to poor ability, carelessness and lapse of memory.

Ullah, Khan & Ahmad (2018) found that 45 % of the teachers believed that punctuation errors take place in learners' writing because the learners themselves consider it unimportant. On the other hand, 39 % of the teachers attributed the punctuation errors to poor teaching, while 16% think that learners' poor performance is due to learners confusing one marker with the other. Furthermore, the errors were caused by the mother tongue of the learner however, on giving that assertion, the researchers were not specific on how a mother tongue can influence punctuation.

In his research of punctuation errors made by eleventh grade learners, Nasrudin (2015) found out that learners did not know the limitations and the role of structure and context. Learners' error in learning foreign language is a part of learning process because it is impossible for learners to learn English Language without making some errors. Students commonly struggle with punctuation marks such as commas, apostrophes, quotation marks, often due to confusion about their correct placement and a lack of the rules governing their use. These challenges were most evident in their writing where frequent errors were made in sentence structuring particularly with commas and full stops (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad & Abdul Halik, 2025).

In addition, the students' difficulties were largely attributed to insufficient practice and limited exposure to punctuation in meaningful contexts. M any students admitted that they rarely practised writing in English outside the classroom and this lack of

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consistent practise contributed to their inability to use punctuation marks accurately. Their responses indicated that traditional teaching methods which focused mainly on memorising punctuation rules, did not adequately address the practical application of punctuation in writing. Students expressed a preference for more interactive active-based learning that would allow them to practise punctuation in real-world contexts. They also suggested that using contextual examples would enhance their understanding of punctuation (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad & Halik, 2025).

The written texts suggested the findings from interviews and observations. A significant percentage of students scored between 6 and10 marks, indicating a moderate understanding but a large portion fell short in accurately identifying and using punctuation marks. This suggests that while some foundational knowledge exists, there is a noticeable gap in their practical ability to apply punctuation rules effectively. The most challenging punctuation marks such as apostrophes and ellipsis were identified by students as areas where they lack familiarity and practise. These marks were rarely and used correctly, underscoring the need for more focused instruction, familiarity and practice opportunities in these areas (Sujan, Raheema, Arshad & Halik, 2025).

Suluku and Kirboga (2020), in their study, found out that the students made mistakes mostly in complex sentences that lack a clear clue about the punctuation marks. Students used correct punctuation marks in simple sentences that included clear clues about the required punctuation. In other words, students are not trained or evaluated based on the texts they write, multiple choice questions, where the points that require punctuation marks are indicated by parenthesis are utilised. This restricts the punctuation marks to remain at the knowledge level, leading to students' mistakes in open ended questions where cases require creativity (Suluku & Kirboga, 2020).

Although, students used punctuation marks in the manuscripts they edited, they used a very few correctly. This finding demonstrated that students had incomplete or

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incorrect knowledge on punctuation marks and their functions. Furthermore, another general problem was the comprehension of compound sentences with a comma emphasising their lack of knowledge. Punctuation marks are directly associated with the meaning of the text. Therefore, individuals who cannot comprehend the text are not expected to use correct punctuation marks. Moreover, the students did not learn knowledge on punctuation marks that should be learned during primary and secondary education and cannot use the punctuation marks required (Suluku & Kirboga, 2025).

Pratiwi and Ramalia (2017) say that as a universal language, English is used for communication for communication between countries and we are expanded to use it effectively. However, Marcia and Elite (Pratiwi & Ramalia, 2017), argue that writing is the hardest skill to master, to be learned more effectively as compared to speaking and listening. Learners must reflect more in writing than when speaking, however they also have to understand grammatical structure and punctuation.

When communicating on social media, platforms, obsession is mainly with conveying the message in as few words as possible without worrying over the grammatical integrity and compliance to sentences. Moreover, of interesting to note by the researcher of this study, punctuation becomes redundant and obsolete since social media communities can decipher meaning from poorly punctuated sentences with relative ease. Teachers and language practitioners were urged to dedicate time and effort towards improving learners' writing skill and proficiency in English as a First Additional Language (FAL) Curriculum (Ramaoka, Chauke & Mathlaka, 2024).

In Indonesia, English is the first foreign language. English generally has been learned by the students since they are in the basic level of education. When students learn English, they focus on mastering four language skills namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. All the skills are improved in the process of teaching and learning English. Unfortunately, although it has been taught for many years, the

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achievement of the learners is still poor. In the process of teaching and learning English writing ability is the most difficult and complicated language skill to be learned almost by the students in every level of education. English is considered a difficult subject for Indonesian students because English is completely different from Indonesian language. They are different in the system of pronunciation vocabulary and grammar (Intani, Banda & Amelia, 2020). Grammar errors also influence punctuation of texts.

The above stance was strongly supported by Apuhis, Arraiz Ba yon-on and Deita (2023) who assert that; considering that the results built upon the present and the related studies conducted in countries where the English Language is their second language, however subject to a comprehensive investigation, these suggest that these errors made within the target language. Furthermore, for example, in Philippines the Filipino language does not have punctuation marks as part of their mother tongue, that learners can use as referent. It interferes in the process of learning the second language, for instance, the omission of commas which were present in most of the errors in their study. In most of the errors identified, in the study, they signify that the participants view comma as a mark to signal a pause in their sentence when read aloud and not as a part of the sentence structure and meaning making. These are evident in their omission of the comma between two independent clauses connected by a conjunction, in introducing or interrupting direct quotations, the Oxford, and the opposite commas, which are some of the significant errors the participants committed (Apuhis, Arraiz, Bayon-on & Deita, 2023).

Additionally, it can also be implied that the participants know the correct usage of certain punctuation marks but still commit such errors due extraneous hinders, which can involve extraneous factors affecting their writing performance such as carelessness and lack of attention, interest and motivation to write, not by lack of knowledge. However, it cannot be denied that the teachings of punctuation marks are not given as much importance as grammar does to second language learners of the

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English Language and could be a pertinent factor in understanding and addressing these errors in the use of punctuation marks even on English Language learners in higher education (Apuhis, Arraiz, Bayon-on, & Delta, 2023).

Furthermore, as with both question and quotation marks having no identified errors, it could be inferred that the participants have substantial knowledge about their functions, especially since they only have a few distinctive functions that were taught from the primary stages of the participants' acquisition or learning development of the English Language as their second language. In sum errors are common in this course of learning a second language and the approach of error analysis could aid both teachers and learners in designing strategies to improve their teaching methods and learners' understanding of a subject involving second-language acquisitions (Apuhis, Arraiz, Ba yon-on & Delta, 2023).

Gezmiz (2023), greatly supports that idea of mother language interference in punctuation. The difference between inter lingual errors is large and the students are thought to have committed more errors in using a comma for independent sentences because of their home/ mother language. A comma is not used to separate parts of a compound sentence in Turkish Language, for example, so some students applied this rule when they wrote English Language and did not use a comma in English too which shows an inter-lingual error with a frequency of 2.55% (Gezmiz, 2023).

Furthermore, most errors in punctuation in the study by Gezimiz (2023) were attributed to inter-lingual errors. The mother language of the students plays a vital role in their usage of punctuation since it can positively or negatively influence the learning procedure. Interference errors are limited on punctuation, and punctuation should be taught explicitly. The study also suggests that both differences and similarities between students' mother language and target language should be pointed out in teaching punctuation, especially comma. It is also indicative that students' errors in using a comma are not only caused by their mother / first language but also their target

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language. The students' incorrect use of comma reveals that learners overgeneralise the rule or have failure to learn conditions under which rules are applied. Therefore, special interest should be taken to those incorrect usages such as using a comma before some expressions or after 'that' in a noun clause. The whole usage of punctuation marks should be explained, exemplified and practised in detail (Gezmiz, 2023).

Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad, Abdul Halik (2025) found that students struggle with punctuation marks such as commas, apostrophes and quotation marks Observations during classroom teaching revealed a lack of fundamental knowledge of punctuation with similar challenges across English as a Second Language (ESL) in Sri Lanka including advanced learners' traditional methods focused on memorising rules were more effective. The study recommends incorporating interactive activities, contextual examples and regular practice into the curriculum along with encouraging writing beyond the classroom and offering constructive feedback to improve students' punctuation proficiency and overall punctuation proficiency and overall writing skills (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad, Halik, 2025).

The above stance was strongly supported by Farrah, Zahida and Zaru (2016) who allege that students in general attributed the causes to punctuation and capitalisation errors to mostly to two factors namely inter-lingual, first language interference (L1 interference) and inter-lingual (development or lack of competence). This was also supported by Brown (2000, 224) who asserts that errors in punctuation might be attributed to inter-lingual (L1 interference) and intra-lingual that is developmental or lack of competence. In the same study Farah, Sulamin, Zahida & Zaru, (2016) believe that most of these errors made are intra-lingual than inter-lingual. For example, the most frequent error is capitalisation which is attributed to first language (L1) interference on the second language (L2).

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The researcher of this study found a rare, intriguing finding by these researchers that; it is true that Arabic Language does not make a distinction between uppercase and lower-case characters. However, this is not the only source of capitalisation errors owing to capitalisation. Some common nouns, like, ‘president, head and company which are used in the texts as common nouns were written as proper nouns, starting with capital letters. This indicates that although learners have studied various writing and grammar courses, they have not mastered the rules of capitalisation in English during their years of study probably due to inadequate teaching techniques, lack of linguistic input provided for the learners or insufficient practise (Farrah, Salamin, Zahida & Zaru, 2016).

According to Farrah, Salamin, Zahida and Zaru (2016), the comma ranks as second most frequent error followed by the period (full stop) in the third place. Even though part of linguistic knowledge of the learner is to know where a sentence begins and where it ends, the above punctuation marks were substituted one in place of the other by the other learners. Moreover, this substitution might be because Arabic and English Language differ in terms of sentence construction and what constitutes a sentence construction and what constitutes a statement is acceptable; however, in English, a statement ends with full stop. This may cause a negative transfer stimulating Arab learners of English to use commas instead of full stops. (Farrah, Salamin, Zahida & Zaru, 2016)

Both English Language and Arabic Language share the property of having these two marks, the comma and the full stop but with some differences in usage. For instance, the comma is used in both languages to separate phrases and clauses but in Arabic, lexical insertion (wa) may replace the comma, which means either a comma or a lexical word may be used. The period (full stop) is also used in both languages, which shows more flexibility in using these punctuation marks in Arabic. This leads to the assumption that the main source of errors is again, intra-lingual rather than inter-lingual since the underlying structure of both languages is approximately the same

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(Chomsky, 1965). Therefore, the errors may be attributed to lack of linguistic competence related to non-linguistic factors affecting the adequate development of such as inappropriate teaching strategies, unqualified teachers, lack of motivation and ill-designed materials. However, most of the comma errors occurred because of misusing, omitting and substituting the comma for a semi-colon or a period (full stop) (Farrah, Salamin, Zahida & Zaru, 2016).

Three principles guide writing mechanics: the convention that a sentence should start with a capital letter and conclude with a full stop. Furthermore, usage and grammar also form part of the principles that provide language structures (Kane, 2000). The researcher feels that a lack of punctuation muddles work, and learners are not being taught enough to master the punctuation of English language. Lack of mastery was also attributed to punctuation errors by students. Husada, Hidayati and Humaria (2018) said that it was important for students to master punctuation.

Sahid, Amim and Ishtaq (2020) interviewed students at different universities on why they make errors in punctuation. Students at Kohat University of Science and Technology highlighted a lack of practise in using punctuation marks. The students of Malakaland reported that the use of punctuation marks is not taught to them and not checked by lectures. They also added that their focus is learning of the spoken language not written one that is why they were weak in punctuation. Students of Khushal Khan Khattak University reported that they do not focus on their punctuation marks when they use them. They said that they are not taught the use of punctuation in their schools and colleges and now they are not taught it in university as well that leads them to make mistakes. Students at National University of Modern Languages, said that they do not face much problem in the use of punctuation marks and are good at them. The few errors that they made in the test were due to lack of attention and the multiple functions of a single punctuation mark in different places. They also highlighted that there was error corrective feedback from their instructors which was very useful. Students from University of Sargodha said that the punctuation marks

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were not taught to them in context to which they were unable to memorise them. Gomal university students blamed lack of error feedback after corrections. The International Islamic University students attributed errors of punctuation to lack of reading in general, the more one reads the more one will be able to use punctuation. They also said that text messaging and social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp have destroyed their writing, especially the use of punctuation marks (Sayid, Amin & Ishtaq, 2020).

Furthermore, the students of KKKUK and KUST universities said that their schooling had a big impact on their punctuation errors. Besides, these students said that they had got education in government schools where they were not asked to focus on punctuation. They received education in Urdu medium schools and colleges; hence, not good in English. On the other hand, students from NUML and IIUI had their education in English medium schools; that is why they were good in English and specifically at the use of punctuation. The students of KUST, UoM, SBBU and KKKUK are Pashto speakers, and English is a foreign language to them. First, they acquire their mother tongue and after this they learn Urdu, which is their national language, after which they learn English. When they learn English, both languages, Urdu and Pashto, interfere. On the other hand, students from NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI are almost Urdu speakers, and only one language interferes, Urdu; hence, the latter make fewer mistakes in punctuation than the former. Therefore, normally, in some universities of Pakistan, knowing punctuation marks is theoretical, but when it comes to theoretical application, they use them inappropriately and incorrectly (Sayid, Amin & Ishtaq, 2020).

Sufiyani (2016) says that in the interview done on 27 students of the English Department at the University of Mataram, there was evidence that students' errors were due to lack of accurate punctuation placement and knowledge about the use of the punctuation. Another cause of errors in punctuation was that some forgot to put

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the full stop at the end of sentences or did not use commas to separate phrases. They were focused on the structure of grammar.

Yankonitova (2020) uniquely analysed, not learners or students this time, but punctuation mistakes in the English writing of non-Anglophone researchers. Punctuation mistakes of non-Anglophone often remain unnoticed and unaddressed by researchers themselves, peer reviewers, journal editors and English language instructors. This complicates the current situation in punctuation, with often overlooked mistakes.

In addition, punctuation is often viewed as a less important subject when compared to other areas of writing difficulties, such as organisation of scientific ideas, choice of persuasion strategies, text grammar and appropriate style. There is, furthermore, a wide variation in the use of punctuation even by indigenous English speakers due to insufficient attention to its main rules in language classes. Moreover, with the unprecedented growth of non-indigenous English speakers, certain deviations from language style and punctuation seem to become more accepted. In fact, some top journals have switched to flexible instructions, displaying greater tolerance of minor language inconsistencies in the writing of Anglophone researchers (Yankintova, 2020).

2.3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter reviewed related literature on the punctuation marks used by learners, errors made by learners and why such errors are committed. The literature review revealed that there are punctuation marks that are more commonly used by learners than others. It was revealed that punctuation errors are not new in the academic arena; they go beyond the school level, up to university. Furthermore, the literature revealed various reasons why punctuation errors are committed by learners. Finally, the literature revealed that most studies on the analysis of punctuation errors have not

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investigated Grade 10 learners specifically at private schools, hence the value of this study. The next chapter presents the research methodology applied in this study.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used to address the research questions. It explains the case study design and the use of a mixed-methods approach. This chapter also discusses the sampling method and sample size, data collection strategies and data analysis techniques. The final section of the chapter addresses the ethical considerations that guided the conduct of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design explains how information is gathered. According to De Vos (2001), research design is the overall strategy that the researcher chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby ensuring that one addresses the problem (Trochim, 2006). It constitutes the blueprint for the collection and analysis of data, and the research problem determines the type of design one should choose.

In this study, a case study research design was used. A case study is an in-depth study of a research problem (Yin, 2003). It is often used to narrow a broad field of research and is useful when not so much is known about an issue or phenomenon and the subject is the ‘case’ (Yin, 2003). A case study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, and it allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon within its real-life context and is perfect for the social sciences (Mills, 2010).

There are four types of case studies, namely illustrative, exploratory, cumulative and critical instances. An illustrative case study is primarily descriptive and aims to explain a situation or event and provides an existing solution (Mills, 2010). An exploratory case

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study/pilot case study is a condensed study performed before implementing a large-scale investigation (Mills, 2010). In a cumulative case study, information collected from different sources at different times is summarised. The objective is to analyse previously collected information to generalise past investigations. The last case study, which is the Critical Instances Case Study, determines causes and effects (Yin, 2003).

In this study, the researcher used the illustrative case study to analyse the writing competence of Grade 10 learners in the English Language. This type of study was appropriate for the study, as the researcher aimed to provide detailed explanation of a particular instance of written language, specifically how punctuation is applied by high school learners. The case study design was also suitable because the researcher focused on a single context: a private school, making it ideal for in-depth exploration and analysis.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research method. McLeod (2019) states that qualitative research is the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting non-numerical data. It can be used to understand how an individual subjectively perceives and gives meaning to their social reality. Data can be collected using in-depth interviews, documents and focus groups. Among the various types of research, the researcher used the case study model of qualitative research. Qualitative research is characterised by its aim to understand aspects of social life, and by its use of methods that typically generate words rather than numbers as data for analysis. According to Paton and Cochrun (2002), qualitative data collection may include performance tasks, personality measures, questionnaires and content analysis.

A qualitative research method is an approach that seeks to understand human behaviour, experiences, and social phenomena by exploring participants' perspectives in depth. It focuses on descriptive data—such as words, observations, and meanings—rather than numerical data. The method typically involves tools like

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interviews, open-ended questionnaires, classroom observations, and analysis of written texts. In this study, qualitative research involved the analysis of learners' written essay texts. The primary source of data was the learners' essays, which were examined for recurring punctuation errors—such as the misuse of full stops, commas, apostrophes, and other punctuation marks

When analysing punctuation errors in Grade 10 learners' English writing, a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore not just what errors are made, but why they occur, how learners understand punctuation rules, and the contextual factors (such as teaching methods, learners' language background, or exposure to English) that contribute to such errors. The benefit of using a qualitative method in this study was that it helped the researcher to capture the contextual and linguistic background influencing punctuation use. It also allowed for a holistic understanding of the issue rather than just quantifying errors. However, using qualitative methods had limitations such as subjective data that may not be generalised, analysis that was time-consuming and required careful interpretation, and room for bias that could have influenced the researcher's interpretation.

Using a qualitative research method to analyse punctuation errors among Grade 10 learners allowed for an in-depth understanding of both the nature and the underlying causes of these errors. This approach supports the development of targeted teaching strategies and contributes to improving writing instruction in English as a First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms, particularly within the South African context.

3.4 POPULATION

According to Salking (2010), population refers to the group of entities from which a researcher seeks to draw inferences. In this study, the population comprised 40 independent schools in the Vhembe West District, located in Limpopo Province (Education Statistics Basic Education, 2015).

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One private school was drawn from the research population of 40 independent schools. The private school had 550 learners from Grade R to 12. This is an independent school in the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. From a population of 510 learners, 51 Grade 10 learners are purposively sampled. However, 20 Grade 10 class learners were purposively sampled and wrote an essay test. Therefore, 20 learners' essays were drawn from a population of 550 learners, which is the group of individuals having one or more characteristics of interest (Asiamah, Mensah & Ofeng-Abanjeh, 2017).

3.5 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

One private school was chosen from the population of 40 schools in Vhembe West District as a case study. The school was chosen because it is known to the researcher and is her workplace, making it easily accessible to her. Non-probability sampling is used to select essays for the study from 51 learners in Grade 10. Only 20 learners were then randomly sampled, using probability sampling and wrote 20 essays for analysis. From the whole population of 510 learners at a private school, only those doing Grade 10, 51 learners' essays were purposively considered. However from the 51 Grade 10 learners the researcher had to employ simple random sampling in order to give an equal chance of participating to each learner. The researcher wrote names of all 50 learners on strips of paper, folded an put them in a box, shook the box and then pick out names till they were 20. The 20 learners wrote essays after being sampled randomly.

Taherdoost (2016) categorises sampling into two types, namely probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is a technique in which a sample from a larger population is chosen using random selection, and everyone has an equal chance of getting selected (Taherdoost, 2016). One can employ statistical techniques when dealing with probability sampling. Unlike probability sampling, non-probability sampling uses non-randomised methods to draw the sample. Non-probability

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sampling tends to focus on small samples and to examine real-life phenomena and does not make statistical inferences in relation to population (Taherdoost, 2016). It is often associated with case study research design and qualitative research (Yin, 2003). In this study, non-probability sampling is used to select the participants. However, in this research, for credibility the researcher had to use both sampling types for credibility. While qualitative research studies often include non-random sampling, simple random sampling can be conducted when it is important to select a random set of participants from a large population, in which everyone has the same chance of being selected (Ayton, Tsindos & Berkkovic 2020).

Purposive sampling, a sub-type of non-probability sampling, involves deliberately selecting units that are expected to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other sources (Maxwell, 1996). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select South African Grade 10 learners from the entire population. This sampling method was appropriate for this study because the researcher believed that these learners could provide valuable insights, as they are expected to have mastered the art of writing in preparation for matric. Moreover, purposive sampling was suitable for this context since the Grade 10 class at the selected school is relatively stable, with few new admissions during the academic year.

Initially, the researcher had planned to carry out a study on all secondary school learners from Grade 8 to12. However, this was hindered by the fact that admissions in the private school's Grades 8 and 9 happen throughout the whole year and therefore are unstable. This means that new learners can be added at any time of the year. Any potential learner who applies to the school is admitted. The admission of new learners throughout the year means that the newcomers bring different results since the teachers are not the same and most would be coming from public schools, yet the research centres on a private school.

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The researcher did not opt for Grades 11 and 12 due to their intensive academic schedules, as learners in these grades are typically engaged in preparations for the matric examination. The researcher did not opt for Grades 11 and 12 due to their intensive academic schedules, as learners in these grades are typically engaged in preparations for the Matric Examination. Given that, the school itself was not willing to offer those classes for research. The Grade 10 class was chosen because of its easy accessibility of learners and that it is quite stable since admission of new learners is very minimal and well scrutinised before admitting any new learners. Moreover, unlike Grades 8 and 9, which experience high levels of learner turnover, Grade 10 does not attract many new admissions, thus offering a more stable and suitable sample for research. All 51 learners had to be given equal chances to participate in the research. Although this is a qualitative research the researcher had to use simple random sample which is under probability sampling, according to Thomas (2020) each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected because it uses randomisation and lowers the risk of research bias and selection bias. One chooses the sample at random by 'drawing names from a hat' or using a computer programme that will simulate the action (Thomas, 2020). The researcher took the class list with the names of the learners. The names were written on strips of paper that were then folded. The box was shaken thoroughly till all names were well-jumbled up, then 20 names were chosen out through shaking the box at intervals. All that was done to avoid bias in the research. One and the same narrative essay topic was administered to 20 Grade 10 learners. An essay must be written in strictly formal language, and this applies to punctuation too. The essay was written individually and as a test.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

According to Frey, Botan and Krepes (1999), textual analysis is the method researchers use to describe and interpret the characters of a text. The purpose is to describe the content, structure and functions of messages in a text. MkCee (2001)

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asserts that textual analysis is a research methodology that entails attention to the written language.

In this study, the researcher gave the same narrative essay topic to 20 Grade 10 learners at a private school. The researcher employed the use of linguistic taxonomy. Linguistic taxonomy is based on the procedure of selecting linguistic units from a text and studying their features in terms of sequence and distribution (Encyclopedia, 1979). In essence, the essays were marked by the researcher and then analysed for the types of punctuation marks used, the learners' level of proficiency in applying them, and the reasons behind the errors committed. This analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of punctuation competence among the learners.

The collection of data was carried out through the administration of a test to 20 Grade 10 learners. The data collection was guided by the objectives of the study. For instance, the researcher analysed the punctuation of the 20 written texts of learners. This involved studying the conventions of punctuating the English language, such as the following 12 characters: capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, semi-colon, hyphen, quotation marks, brackets, dash and lastly but not least, the apostrophe. The researcher determined the punctuation marks used by Grade 10 learners. This then overlapped into establishing how punctuation marks determine the errors. The researcher was on the lookout for errors committed, if any, and why such errors were committed.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analysed using both thematic content and basic statistical procedures. When using thematic content analysis, the researcher identified patterns and themes from the learners' errors (e.g., confusion between a comma and a full stop). Errors were categorised into types such as omission, addition, and substitution, and were analysed

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qualitatively to explore their possible causes (e.g., lack of understanding, L1 interference).

Thematic content analysis depends heavily on the researcher's analytic and integrative skills and personal knowledge of the social context where data are collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly, Maguire and Delchant (2015), define thematic analysis as the method of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative research to uncover themes in textual data. The researcher identified themes that were evident from written essays, which were then grouped and analysed to produce a report both inductively and deductively to generate meaningful insights into the learners' use of punctuation.

Braun and Clarke's (2006: 41) six-phrase framework was used to guide the thematic analysis process as detailed below:

Step 1: Familiarisation with data

The researcher transcribed the data, converting all learners' written texts into a readable format. The texts were read multiple times, and initial notes were made to identify key ideas. This process was repeated for each learner's essay until the researcher became thoroughly familiar with the content.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

At this stage, the data were systematically organised into meaningful units (Braun & Clark, 2007). The researcher coded data into meaningful texts like passages, quotations and single words. This step focused on developing themes and is the most basic level of analysis.

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Step 3: Searching for themes

Themes were identified based on recurring patterns that captured significant aspects of the data in relation (Maguire & Delhunt, 2017). In this phase, descriptive themes were developed to reflect trends and patterns related to learners' punctuation use and errors.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

The fourth phase dealt with reviewing themes, modifying and developing preliminary themes identified in the previous phase. The themes were modified to check if they made sense and if those themes were supported by data. In this phase, the researcher also checked if there was coherence and that the themes were not overlapping.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This stage involved further refinement and naming of themes to reflect their core meanings (Braun & Clark, 2006: 42). In this phase of the research, four major themes were identified. These themes were punctuation marks mostly used by learners, punctuation marks rarely used, punctuation errors made by learners during writing and why such errors were made.

Step 6: Producing the report

In this phase, the report of the study was compiled both qualitatively and quantitatively. The report drew up conclusions and came up with recommendations based on the findings of the study. In this research stage, data was then thematically and statistically analysed and then quantified using tables and percentages.

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3.8 QUALITY MEASURES

Reliability and validity were ensured to avoid bias as much as possible, like having preconceived results of research which influence the way written texts are analysed. Pannuci and Wilkins (2010) assert that bias can be avoided through validation and prolonged involvement. Bhattercherjee (2012) describes reliability as the degree of consistency in the measure of a construct; that is, to measure if the results would be the same if the measured phenomenon were not changing. The researcher tried in every possible way to avoid bias by being consistent in the process of analysing the written texts of learners. The researcher also got involved and gave herself time to validate data.

3.9 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study refers to a pre-test of a particular instrument and could be conducted in qualitative or mixed-methods research. (Janghorban, Roudsarri & Taghipour, 2014). A pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study conducted before the main research project. It helps the researcher test and refine the research design, tools, procedures, and methods to identify and fix any potential problems. It acts like a trial run to ensure that everything in the main study will work as planned.

The pilot study provided an opportunity to practise how to administer the data collection instrument. A pilot study in this study involved a selected small group of Grade 9 learners to write essays. The researcher tested the process of collecting, coding, and analysing punctuation errors. Based on the results, the data collection tool and strategies were adjusted before launching the full study. The researcher benefited from the pilot study by minimising errors and improving the quality and reliability of the final data. A pilot study was an essential step in this study since it ensured that the main study was well-planned, practical, and likely to succeed, especially in qualitative research where tools and participant responses can vary widely.

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3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.10.1 Permission to conduct research

Saunders and Lewis (2012) argue that ethical considerations must be specified as one of the most important parts of the research, and clear strategies for addressing ethics must be adopted by researchers. Prior to the commencement of research, the researcher's proposal was submitted to the Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics at the University of Venda for approval. From the department, it served at the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and finally, at the University of Venda's Higher Degrees Committee. The researcher then obtained permission from the principal of the private school concerned.

3.10.2 Informed consent

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and they were requested to sign the consent form before the researcher could collect data. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), full consent should be obtained from the participants prior to the study. The principle of informed consent involves researchers providing participants with sufficient information and assurances about taking part in the research. It is considered unethical to collect information without the knowledge of participants with sufficient information and assurances about taking part in the research. It is considered unethical to collect information without the knowledge of the participants. Grade 10 learners are still minors. Both the learners and their parents' signatures were requested as evidence that they understood what they had been requested to do and that they had also given consent to participate in the study.

3.10.3 Voluntary participation

Bryman and Bell (2007) assert that voluntary participation of respondents is important and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wish

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to do so. There should be no coercion. Participants in this study were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any stage.

3.10.4 Right for protection of subjects

Saunders Lewis and Thornhill (2012) indicate that when the researcher collects data from respondents, there is a need to examine carefully whether their involvement will harm them in any way. If there is a possibility of them feeling discomfort or anxiety, the researcher should make the risk minimal. In this study, the letter of consent clearly stated that participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. It was also explained that their names would not be mentioned in the study, which is exactly what was done by the researcher of this study.

3.10.2 Confidentiality and privacy

Research must uphold the principles of confidentiality and privacy. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), protecting participants' privacy, ensuring an adequate level of confidentiality and maintaining anonymity are essential ethical responsibilities in research. In this study, the researcher strictly adhered to these principles. The names of participants were not disclosed at any stage of the research. Participants were asked to sign letters of consent, and it was clearly explained to them that confidentiality would be protected throughout the study. No learner's name appeared in any part of the study, instead, participants were identified by numbers whenever reference to individual responses was necessary.

3.10.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the research design and methodology, along with the research procedures employed in the study. It also outlined the area of the study, population and sampling techniques, data collection instruments and data analysis methods. Furthermore, the chapter addressed key ethical considerations including informed

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consent, voluntary participation, rights for protection, confidentiality and privacy. The next chapter presents the collected data and its analysis.

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CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study derived from participants' written texts in the form of essays. The data collected aimed answers to the main research question, which was to analyse punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo, South Africa. Textual and statistical analysis were conducted on 20 narrative essays written by participating learners. The data are presented both thematically and statistically. Specifically, themes that emerged from the study are discussed, and relevant statistical information is provided to support the themes. The names of the participants are not mentioned in the study to ensure confidentiality. The themes that emerged from the study are as follows: punctuation marks used by learners; errors committed by learners in capitalisation of letters, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, quotation marks and apostrophe; omission of punctuation marks; punctuation marks not commonly used, such as the semi-colon, hyphen dash and brackets; and finally, reasons why learners commit errors in punctuation. All data were presented thematically and statistically based on themes, mentioned above, that emerged from the data. The chapter presents findings of the study, guided by the research questions.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Data are presented thematically and statistically to provide a clearer interpretation. the analysis is based on themes that emerged during the textual analysis of learners' essays. The textual analysis revealed that learners frequently made punctuation errors, often overlooking the standard of rules of punctuation in their written work. The researcher had an objective, among others, of finding punctuation marks used by learners in Grade 10. The commonly used punctuation marks included the capital

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letter, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, quotation mark, and apostrophe. Punctuation marks that were rarely used, and, as a result, had fewer associated errors, were the semicolon, hyphen, dash, and brackets

Table 4.1 below summarises the total number of punctuation errors made by the research participants. A zero (0) indicates the learner made no errors with a particular punctuation mark, while a dash (-) signifies that the punctuation mark was not used at all. The table also highlights punctuation marks that were commonly used by learners, those that were less frequently used and those that were rarely used. To maintain confidentiality, learners are represented by numbers instead of names. As explained above, the table presents the actual number of errors for each punctuation mark: 0 means no error was made, and – indicates that the specific punctuation mark was not used by the learner.

Table 4.1: Errors committed in punctuation

	CAPITAL LETTER	FULL STOP	COMMA	QUESTION MARK	EXCLAMATION MARK	COLON	SEMI-COLON	HYPHEN	DASH	BRACKETS	QUOTATION MARKS	APOSTROPHE
LEARNER												
		.	,	?	!	:	;	-	_	()	“”	’
1	3	6	2	1	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
2	2	0	2	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	1	2
3	37	3	2	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
4	0	2	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
5	4	0	2	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
6	2	2	1	_	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
7	3	1	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	1

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8	14	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
9	3	1	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
10	4	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
11	3	0	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
12	4	1	2	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
13	1	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
14	25	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
15	10	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
16	1	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
17	12	0	1	_	_	1	_	_	_	_	4	_
18	5	3	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	3	_
19	11	4	2	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	3
20	15	0	0	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	1
						_	_	_	_	_	_	_
TOTAL	**159**	**23**	**17**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**8**	**7**

To enhance the clarity and interpretive value of the data, it was necessary to present it in terms of percentage frequencies. The table below provides a more meaningful representation than the previous one by showing both the frequency and percentage of punctuation errors committed by learners. In Table 4.2 below, the following formula was used to calculate the percentages: P = F/N x100 %, where P represents the percentage (indicating student mastery), F is the frequency of errors made by learners, and N is the total number of errors recorded among all participants (Gass & Selinka 2018;3).

Table 4.2: Frequencies and percentages of punctuation errors committed

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NUMBER	PUNCTUATION ERRORS	FREQUENCY OF ERRORS MADE BY 20 LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE %
1.	Capital letter	159	72.9
2	Full stop	23	10.6
3.	Comma	17	7.8
4.	Question mark	1	0.5
5.	Exclamation mark	2	1.0
6.	Colon	1	0.5
7.	Quotation mark	8	3.7
8.	Apostrophe	7	3.2
9.	Semi-colon	0	0
10	Hyphen	0	0
11	Dash	0	0
12	Brackets	0	0
	TOTAL	**218**	**100 %**

Despite presenting data statistically, data were also presented thematically to give clarity on frequencies and why such happened. The textual analysis revealed that many learners made many errors in punctuation. Of the 20 learners, there is one learner only who made one mistake. The other 19 were making varying mistakes. The standard usage of punctuation in the English language was overlooked.

Before identifying errors committed by learners and the reasons, the researcher discovered that there are some punctuation marks commonly used by learners and others rarely used. From the test texts analysed, the researcher discovered that learners use mostly the capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, quotation marks and the apostrophe. The less common or rarely used punctuation marks by learners were the semi-colon, hyphen, dash and brackets.

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Most learners made various errors, one way or the other, in capitalisation. This punctuation had the most mistakes made. One learner only did not make any mistake in capitalisation; all the learners made mistakes, one way or the other. The errors included the omission of inserting capital letters at the beginning of paragraphs or sentences. Another mistake noted was to start the word ‘because’ with a capital letter, which must serve as a conjunction that joins sentences into one.

In many instances, the word ‘I’ was written as a small letter, ‘i’. In another text, all ‘I’s were wrong, but in the other text, some mixed them up, some were wrong and some were correct. One learner wrote an exclamation mark, twice in the essay instead of ‘I’. Substitution of ‘I’ with an exclamation mark is wrong. In another text, the word ‘I’ was being written correctly but taking the size of a smaller letter ‘i’, though written without a dot at the top. The researcher also found that a learner made errors of writing ‘L’ instead of ‘I’. The capital letter I was misused once in the word ‘important’. The conventional rules of language were not observed since they demand the word to be written as a capital letter.

The researcher also found that some letters of the alphabet were being written willy-nilly/haphazardly. Letters like ‘Pp, Ss, Ff, Kk, Mm, Cc, Jj, and Yy’ were being misused in the texts. They were appearing as capital letters where they should be small letters, for example, words like, ‘family see and people.’ In most cases, they were written like that in the middle of words or sentences; therefore, creating muddled work. This error of confusing capital letters and small letters made some start proper nouns with small letters, for example, the pronouns ‘February’ and ‘March’, yet months of the year start with capital letters.

Furthermore, some learners had a problem with writing proper nouns. Some proper nouns started with small letters; for example, words like ‘Environmental Centre’ and ‘Life Science’ started with small letters. In another instance, a learner made an error by writing the word autumn, starting with a capital letter. In a way, the word ‘autumn’

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was made a proper noun when it is not one since it started with a capital letter in the middle of the sentence. The researcher found out that the punctuation using capital letters had the highest number of mistakes, 159, which is 72.9%.

Some learners had a problem with using the full stop. The researcher found that some omitted full stops at the end of sentences. One of the errors made by some learners was inserting full stops where they were not needed, they were misused, for instance, by putting a full stop after the question mark and after the exclamation mark. In another instance, the full stop was inserted haphazardly before the word ‘because’, which is very wrong. After quoting words, the full stop must be inserted inside the closing inverted commas, yet some learners made errors by inserting it outside. Some learners did not bother to put full stops at the end of quotations. In some cases, the researcher found full stops inserted among sentences, not at the end. Learners also made the error of inserting a full stop before the word ‘but’ forcing the word to start a new sentence. A total number of 23 mistakes were detected; that is, 10.6%.

A comma is a very important punctuation mark since it allows the reader to pause and makes the text understandable. Most learners omitted the comma when a reader is supposed to pause. For instance, ‘So we had no choice but to book at a hotel nearby and had to go back home the next day, which left me sad and disappointed.’ The sentence is too long, and there was supposed to be a pause in the form of a comma after the word ‘day’, and before the word ‘which’. The researcher also found that some learners put a comma before ‘but’ and ‘and’. There were also errors when quoting words; learners made a mistake of not inserting a comma before quotations after the word ‘said’. Another learner inserted a comma wrongly instead of inserting a full stop. The following explains better, ‘I could still remember that day in my life like it was yesterday; it was on the 5th of September 2023, the day I have been so disappointed in my life.’ The comma after the word yesterday was supposed to be a full stop, not a comma, because the learner was starting a new idea that only supports the sentence,

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causing the sentence to be muddled. There were 17 errors made in comma use, that is, 10.6%.

The textual analysis also revealed some errors made when using the question mark and the exclamation mark, though they were very few. In one instance a learner inserted an exclamation mark then put a full stop after committing an error of double punctuation. The same learner also did the same type of error by inserting a full stop after an exclamation mark. There were some omissions made when learners opted for a full stop instead of inserting an exclamation mark, especially when describing a surprise or a disappointment, for instance, the sentence that said, 'I have never been so disappointed in my life.' If the sentence had ended with an exclamation mark, it would have made the description more vivid than it is with a full stop. There was 1 error only on the question mark, which was 0.5%. On the other hand, the exclamation mark had 2 errors that contributed to 1%.

Just like the question mark and the exclamation mark, the colon was not used much by learners. A learner intended to quote words after inserting a colon but never quoted the words. This made the colon useless, muddling the work. It was used as the following: '…my friend said, Must have R500.' This error made the sentence meaningless.

Most learners who opted to quote words of someone in their texts using quotation marks made noticeable errors. Some statements were quotations, but the quotation marks were omitted. For example, 'My father said don't….' There were no opening inverted commas on 'Don't', and the end of the statement did not have closing inverted commas. There was an instance where reported speech was quoted, indicating misuse of the quotation marks. In one of the serious errors, on closing inverted commas, one was facing the left side correctly, but one was even facing the wrong direction, the right side, like this: '...my friend' .Furthermore, in another extreme case,

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the learner was quoting some proper nouns, for instance, a hotel called ‘Impilo’, and the errors made in the quotation amounted to 8, that is, 3.7%.

The last, but not least, among the punctuation marks that learner made was the apostrophe. There were errors of omitting the apostrophe when a word has a possessive; for example, a learner wrote ‘my cousins name’ instead of ‘my cousin’s name’. Another learner misused the apostrophe by inserting it in the plural for sister, which is sisters. Although contractions are not allowed in essays, some learners turn a blind eye and still use them. In another instance, the researcher found out that the word ‘don’t’ had no apostrophe. Furthermore, another error that was found during the text analysis was for the word ‘its’; the word is not supposed to have an apostrophe unless it is used as a possessive. In total, there were 7 errors made in using the apostrophe, which is 3.2%.

This study also found that the learners used 8 of the expected 12 punctuation marks which are the capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, quotation marks and the apostrophe. The rarely used punctuation marks were the semicolon, hyphen, dash and brackets.

After analysing the texts written by the learners and identifying the common punctuation marks they used along with the associated errors committed, the researcher examined both the quantitative and qualitative data to uncover the underlying reasons for these punctuation errors. The study revealed that learners write in haste; for instance, some sentences are properly punctuated while others lack proper punctuation, even within the same paragraph. This inconsistency raises concerns about learner’s understanding and application of rules. A single learner might use a punctuation mark correctly in one instance but misuse the same mark elsewhere. Notably, there was a lack of consistency in the use of full stops, with frequent omissions observed. Overall, the findings suggest that learners tend to disregard the conventional rules of punctuation, resulting in writing that lacks clarity

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and coherence. The errors also point to a degree of carelessness during the writing process.

An essay or text must be well edited, but there was no proof of editing in all 20 texts edited. It seems learners are concerned with finishing a text without considering polishing it up. If ever they edit punctuation, then it is being undermined and, in the event, overriding excellent writing. To them, punctuation is not that important. Neither the teachers nor the learners are prioritising punctuation.

The high frequency of capitalisation errors suggests that Grade 10 learners have not yet fully grasped the rules governing capitalisation. While some errors may be attributed to carelessness, the findings indicate that many learners undermine the importance of punctuation in written communication. Notably, these errors were observed even among high-performing in English, highlighting that the issue is not solely linked to academic performance. This issue of punctuation errors then extends to the language itself. For most learners at the private school, English is not their home language. Therefore, the difficulties in correctly punctuating English texts can be traced back to their linguistic backgrounds and limited exposure to standard English usage. Furthermore, English is a difficult language to master and is too conventional. One must master the rules, and the rules are not so obvious. This makes the language difficult to punctuate. The researcher found that knowing a language means one knows when and where to punctuate it to make sense. For a learner to be competent in punctuation, one must be competent in the English language itself. The English language is learnt mostly at school as a second language, and learners are still mastering the rules to be able to write competently.

The English language consists of four interlinked skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. A learner must be able to listen for pauses and speak well with pauses, that is, punctuation. Listening and speaking are then extended to reading and writing. When one is reading, one must stress some words, change tone or pause with the

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assistance of punctuation. This knowledge must then be enough to be extended to writing. Learners who are not competent enough to speak and read well might find it difficult to punctuate. However, in some instances, despite a learner being fluent in speaking the English language, they still cannot write properly. Teachers are not integrating the four skills well. Teaching the English language starts with listening, followed by speaking, reading, and finally writing.

Another reason why learners committed errors in punctuation was a lack of knowledge of the rules of punctuation. It seems secondary school teachers do not create time to specifically teach learners about punctuation if they learnt about it in primary school. The assumption is creating more errors. Correcting learners' essays is not enough; a teacher must also give feedback and directly making it a lesson when teaching text writing. This means there is not enough teaching in punctuation at the secondary level.

In South Africa, the curriculum for teaching English as a First Additional Language annual teaching plan mostly focuses on four papers that consist of oral listening, speaking and reading; comprehension; summary; advertisement, cartoon; grammar; and transactional writing. Although somehow all these aspects are cordial when it comes to teaching and learning punctuation, somehow punctuation is being neglected, as evidenced by the numerous errors that were committed. Punctuation errors were caused by neglect from both the teachers and learners. Teachers in secondary school assume that the area of punctuation would have been treated in primary school, which does not seem to be the case; they then end up focusing on the final product and neglect teaching punctuation. The focus becomes finishing the syllabus of the grade, which is always the case for Grades 10 to 11.

It is important to note that learners rarely used punctuation marks such as the semi-colon, hyphen, dash and brackets. This limited usage is likely due to a lack of knowledge and instruction on how to use these common punctuation marks. Learners are often taught only the basic punctuation marks, such as the full stop, comma,

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question mark, and exclamation mark. As a result, they are more familiar with these and tend to overlook or avoid using the more advanced marks. This gap in punctuation usage can be traced back to primary school, where teachers tend to prioritise the most frequently used punctuation marks in daily writing tasks, while paying little attention to marks like the semi-colon, hyphen, dash, and brackets. Consequently, learners enter higher grades with limited exposure to and understanding of the full range of punctuation tools available in English writing.

Parkes (1978) emphasised that punctuation is primarily an aid to the understanding of the text, which received a great deal of attention from those who were responsible for correcting manuscripts. Parkes' theory, The Pause and Effect Theory explains the origins and why punctuation is essential, giving language a set of rules on how a text should appear. Whether modern linguists deny it or not language writing follows certain rules that must be considered (Parkes 1978). Inspired by that theory the researcher analysed learners' texts as per set of prescribed rules of punctuation.

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter presented findings of the study using both quantitative and thematic approaches. The researcher presented the data that shows punctuation marks that learners make use of and errors that learners commit when punctuating. There is evidence that learners frequently make punctuation errors, with the most common being related to the use of capital letters, which was found to have a significant number of errors. The chapter went on to present why errors are committed in punctuation. The chapter further revealed that errors are committed due to writing in haste, carelessness, lack of editing, English being an additional language, and lack of teaching of punctuation rules by the language teachers.

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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. The discussion of findings is guided by the research questions. The findings in the English First Additional Language essays written by Grade 10 learners revealed several key findings that provide insight into the challenges students face in mastering written English. The most frequent punctuation errors observed were the misuse or omission of commas, full stops, and apostrophes, followed by the incorrect or inconsistent use of quotation marks, question marks, and capitalisation related to punctuation. These patterns highlight a general lack of awareness or understanding of punctuation rules, as well as inconsistent application of those rules even when they are known. For purposes of confidentiality, names of participants were not mentioned in this study.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The researcher discusses the research findings presented in the previous chapter. The study was guided by the following research questions:

- Which punctuation marks are used by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province?
- How are learners using punctuation marks in essay writing in Grade 10 at the private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province?

What are the reasons for the punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province? The discussion is structured around these research questions to provide a coherent and systematic interpretation of the findings.

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5.1.1 Punctuation marks used by learners (Research Question 1)

The first question sought to find out which punctuation marks are used by learners. The study revealed the punctuation marks that are used by learners. The study found out that the punctuation marks commonly used by the learners were the capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, quotation marks (inverted commas), and brackets. The rarely used punctuation marks were the semicolon, hyphen, dash and brackets. These types of punctuation marks used by Grade 10 learners and all other learners in school were supported by McCaskill (1990), who states that punctuation has 12 characters. These characters are capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon, semi-colon, hyphen, quotation marks, brackets, dash and the apostrophe. These varying punctuation marks perform four functions: they separate sentences or group information. According to the CBSE Class 10 Grammar (2022), students in Grade 10 are required to be proficient in using all 12 types of punctuation marks mentioned.

Parkes (1978) in his theory, The Pause and Effect Theory, highlights that, some rules must be adhered to when punctuating and also states some of the ways in which punctuation was used as an aid to the elucidation of a text. Parkes' theory explains the origins and why punctuation text was used. The theory applies in today's academic field of punctuation hence this study.

The functions of the punctuation marks used by learners were clarified by many authors, and those functions assisted the researcher in analysing the punctuation marks used by learners. Knowledge of the functions of each punctuation mark, gained from various researchers, of course, contributed to the study greatly because the researcher knew what punctuation marks learners use and how they must be used. The researcher found that some punctuation marks were more commonly used than the expected 12.

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The researcher of this study found that the commonly used punctuation marks were the capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, quotation marks, colon and the apostrophe. The rarely used marks were the semicolon, hyphen, dash and brackets.

Capital letters are used at the beginning of sentences and when writing pronouns, titles (McCaskill, 1990), acronyms (Field, 2009), and in the first letter of a quotation (Harrison, Jarkaman & Peterson). The full stop is used to separate sentences and mark boundaries (McCaskill, 1990) and it is also used for certain abbreviations (Lutrin & Pincua, 2002). The comma, however, separates groups of words and items (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002), it breaks up sentences or clauses (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016) and is used after logical connectors like 'however' (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). A question mark is used to terminate a question (Kane, 2003), and rhetorical questions also end in question marks (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). An exclamation mark, however, signals surprise or emotion (Chetty, de Vos, Ridge, Steynberg, Swanepol & Nonkwelo, 2013). A colon indicates a list or is used in a dialogue (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002) and can also be used before a quotation (Harrison, Jakeman & Peterson, 2016). On the other hand, a semicolon is used to temporarily halt a sentence (Mas'ud, 2005), between long sentences, or sentences with lists (Harrison, Jakerman & Peterson, 2016). A hyphen is used to join two or more words (Hammar, 2004), links prefixes to words or is used in phrases beginning with well (Harrison, Jakerman & Peterson, 2016). A dash is different from a hyphen and has spaces after a word and before the next and is slightly longer than a hyphen. A dash separates parts of a sentence and forces us to pause (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). Brackets, or parentheses, must come in pairs and are used for cross-referencing, providing extra information or explaining something further (Lutrin & Pincus). However, quotation marks that can be single or double are used for quoting actual words used by people or written material. (Harrison, Jakerman & Peterson, 2016). Last but not least, under punctuation too is an apostrophe which is used to indicate contraction or possession (Lutrin & Pincus, 2002). All these are the same punctuation marks that are used by learners in this study.

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The study found that although there are 12 characters of punctuation, it is not an obvious case that learners would use all punctuation marks. Some punctuation marks are less commonly used depending on the essay type and a lack of proper knowledge on how to use them. In this study, Grade 10 learners mostly used the capital letter, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, quotation marks, colon and the apostrophe. This, however, does not undermine the remaining four. After identifying the punctuation marks that Grade 10 learners use, the researcher went on to analyse how the learners use punctuation marks in their writing.

5.1.2 How learners use punctuation marks in writing (Research Question 2)

The second research question sought to find out how learners use punctuation marks in essay writing. Some of the errors that that researcher considered during the textual analysis were omission, misusing and the addition of punctuation marks where they are not necessary. The researcher found many of these errors committed in punctuation. According to Hamar (2004), writing is a skill which should be mastered as well. A writer should know how to develop a paragraph into good composition, and this includes punctuation. Poorly punctuated writing can make up for frustrated and annoyed readers who will be less sympathetic in appreciating the context of what one is writing, so punctuation is important (Jackson, 2005).

There are many errors that were made in the process of writing. In this study capital letters were often misused or added to where they were not supposed to be; some learners did not use capital letters correctly. There was a danger zone of misusing capital letters for ordinary nouns that cannot be regarded as proper nouns. In addition, capital letters which must not be used to emphasise a point are often used as such.

Apostrophes are often misused; for example, ‘who’s’ is not the same as ‘whose’ (Harrison, Jakerman & Peterson, 2016). In this study, many errors were found in punctuation, especially with the word ‘I’, omission of capital letters at the beginning of sentences and misuse or addition of capital letters where they are not supposed to be.

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With the apostrophe, the words were not ‘who’s’ and ‘whose’, but errors were found in words like ‘its/it’s’.

The researcher of this study found errors of misplacement or omission of the comma. In a test and retest at Nyala Locality Secondary School, in punctuation, results revealed that the common errors among the students were the use of the comma in place of the full stop. The wrong uses of the quotation marks were many among the entire group since learners found them too difficult, besides the misuse of the comma (Yassin, Ababer & Samhon, 2016). In this study the researcher also found the comma and the full stop mixed up. There was also the misplacement and wrong use of the quotation marks.

Husaida, Himayati and Humaria (2018) assert that errors were found mostly in the omission of commas and full stops. The same also was happening in this study. Gezmiz (2023) also found errors in the way the comma was used, be it either misuse or omission as was happening in this study.

Scott (2014) categorised errors committed as follows: extraneous apostrophes, unnecessary quotation marks, missing commas or too many commas, excess exclamation, it’s versus its mix-up, Oxford commas and lack of consistency, hyphen versus dash being used interchangeably, misuse of colons and semi-colons and finally quotation mark placement, for example, sentence ending punctuation going outside quotation marks. These errors tally with what was found in this study on omission, misplacement of marks and others, except that there were no errors on the semicolon, hyphen and dash.

It is evident that Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo commit punctuation errors, especially in punctuation. However, there are other errors committed, such as the omission, extraneous or misplacement of the comma, full stop, question mark, colon, quotation marks and the apostrophe. The capitalisation is a problem for learners in Grade 10.

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After discussion on errors that learners commit in punctuation, the researcher went on to discuss the reasons why learners commit errors in punctuation.

5.1.3 Reasons for committing punctuation errors (Research Question 3)

The third question sought to find out the reasons for committing punctuation errors. Some of the reasons that the researcher had considered were carelessness, lack of editing, lack of knowledge of the rules governing the punctuation marks, traditional teaching methods, lack of competence in the English language, among others. The findings are like Corder (1981), who attributes punctuation errors to students omitting punctuation marks due to poor ability, carelessness and lapse of memory.

The capital letter had the highest number of errors committed. The researcher found that this was because of carelessness and undermining the importance of capital letters. Learners write in haste; this was revealed by no uniformity in capital letter use, getting it correct in one instance and then getting it wrong in another. In addition, the same that happened to the capital letter also happened to the full stop. Furthermore, learners do not have the necessary skill to punctuate. Ullah Khan and Ahmad (2018) assert that teachers believe that punctuation errors are a result of carelessness and that learners themselves consider punctuation unimportant. Teachers believe that punctuation errors take place in learners' writing because the learners themselves consider it unimportant, although they also attribute errors to poor teaching.

The researcher of this study also found that despite learners knowing how to use punctuation, learners still went on to commit punctuation errors due to carelessness and lack of enough attention to punctuation. This is like Apuh, Arraiz, Bayon-on and Delta (2023) whose findings indicate that participants know the correct usage of certain punctuation marks but still commit such errors due to extraneous hindrances such as carelessness, lack of attention, lack of interest and motivation to write, although the blame on inadequate teaching cannot be set aside.

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Learners, in this study made various punctuation errors when using, the capital letter, full stop, full stop, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, colon quotation mark and apostrophe, as depicted in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1: Percentage of punctuation errors committed by the research participants

NUMBER	PUNCTUATION ERRORS	FREQUNENCY OF ERRORS MADE BY 20 LEARNERS	PERCENTAGE %
1.	Capital letter	159	72. 9
2	Full stop	23	10. 6
3.	Comma	17	7.8
4.	Question mark	1	0.5
5.	Exclamation mark	2	1.0
6.	Colon	1	0.5
7	Quotation mark	8	3.7
8	Apostrophe	7	3.2
	TOTAL	218	100%

Grade 10 learners committed a significant number of punctuation errors as indicated in Table 5.1 above. The use of punctuation was frequently overlooked, and learners often portrayed confusion either by omitting necessary punctuation marks such as the question mark or by inserting punctuation marks inappropriately. Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad and Abdul Halik (2015) observe that students commonly struggle with punctuation marks such as commas, apostrophes, and quotation marks due to confusion about their correct placement and a lack of the rules governing their use. These challenges are evident in their writing.

The researcher found that many learners lack a solid understanding of the necessary rules governing punctuation. One contributing factor is that teachers often do not

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allocate sufficient time to explicitly teach punctuation, instead prioritising fluency and general English proficiency. This seems to be a reality in secondary schools. In his research on punctuation errors of 11th grade learners, Nasrudin (2015) found that learners did not know the limitations and the role of structure and context. In addition, students' difficulties are largely attributed to insufficient practice and limited exposure to punctuation in meaningful contexts. Many students admit that they rarely practised writing in English outside the classroom, and a lack of consistent practice contributed to their inability to use punctuation marks accurately. Students also expressed worry about traditional methods of teaching but prefer the more interactive, active-based learning (Sujan, Raheema, Nowzath, Arshad & Abdul Halik, 2025).

Learners use fewer punctuation marks like the colon and semicolon, and hash and dash; they avoid them because they do not know how to use them. Secondary teachers assume they have been taught in primary school; however, they teach the more common punctuation marks, like the full stop and comma.

The Further Education and Teaching (FET) curriculum in South Africa focuses more on paper components like transactional writing, comprehension, summary, advertisement, cartoon, grammar and literature. Teachers focus more on this, neglecting punctuation. Focus is centred more on teaching the three papers and finishing the lessons. Although transactional writing involves punctuation and learners' essays are corrected for any punctuation, emphasis on punctuation and specific lessons are not provided. This is evidenced by the lack of care and a lack of editing portrayed by participants. Abdull, Aber and Samhon (2016) revealed that significant errors among learners were due to insufficient excuses and a lack of practice.

Learners at the private school learn English as a first additional language to their home language. This means learners are able to comprehend language in their mother tongue more than in the way they comprehend English. According to Intani, Banda and Amelia (2020), listening and reading are receptive skills, while speaking and

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writing are productive skills. All of the skills are improved in the process of teaching and learning English. Unfortunately, although the language has been taught for many years, the achievement is still poor. In the process of teaching and learning English, writing ability is the most complicated skill to be learnt by the students at every level of education because there are different systems of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar of different languages, and this influences punctuation. Grammar errors influence punctuation.

Pauses or where punctuation may be indicated differ with languages, and in this study, this might be one of the reasons why learners committed errors in punctuation. Apuhis, Arraiz Ba yon-on and Deita (2023) assert that results obtained in countries where English is their second language; however, subject to a comprehensive investigation, most errors are committed in the second language, and at times, the grammar rules on punctuation of the first language encroach into the second language. Gezmiz (2023) adds that punctuation errors are attributed to inter-lingual errors; it is clear that the mother language of learners plays a vital role in their situation in learners' usage of punctuation since it can positively or negatively influence the learning procedure. However, Farah, Sulumin, Zahida and Zaru (2016) believe that most of these errors are intra-lingual rather than inter-lingual, for example, the most frequent error, which is attached to first language (L1) interference on the second language (L2). Arabs mostly use commas instead of full stops, and this influences punctuation in English negatively.

Furthermore, the researcher of this study also discovered that shortened writing emanating from social media use is tolerant of punctuation or overrides punctuation, and learners mix it up with formal writing. Yankintova (2020) asserts that there is unprecedented growth of non-indigenous English language speakers; certain deviations from language style and punctuation seem to be more accepted. In fact, some top journals have switched to flexible instructions, displaying greater intolerance of minor language inconsistencies, for example, in the writing of Anglophone

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researchers. However, while the impact of social media cannot be dismissed, it should not be viewed as the sole cause of learners' punctuation errors in this study.

5.1.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter discussed the findings of the chapter both thematically and statistically. Findings show that learners commonly use some punctuation marks over others, and learners commit punctuation errors in their written work. There is great evidence that shows that errors are committed in punctuation, especially in full stop use, commas and many others. Possible errors were analysed and attributed to confusion, writing in haste, lack of editing skills, ignoring editing, carelessness, lack of motivation, learners' backgrounds, incompetence, failure to adhere to rules, inadequate teaching and intra-lingual versus inter-lingual effects. Learners are being promoted to higher grades without punctuation errors addressed and tolerance of mistakes on the part of teachers. Learners lack focus on punctuation and consider it unimportant. This is made worse by the English language teachers who do not motivate learners and give time to punctuation. The next chapter provides a summary of findings and recommendations.

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the findings of the study, draws conclusions from the findings and then makes recommendations based on the conclusions. Therefore, the chapter is organised into three headings, namely, the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

6.2 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The researcher established that Grade 10 learners in the selected private school made many noticeable errors in punctuation. The errors made were evident in the use of capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, colons, quotation marks and apostrophes. The study also found that the eight mentioned punctuation marks were the commonly used in writing essay texts by the learners, and the less commonly and therefore rarely used punctuation marks were semicolons, hyphens, dashes and the brackets. The study also explained various errors of misuse, misplacement, omission and addition of punctuation marks unnecessarily, which muddled work. Finally, the study managed to find the root causes of committing errors by learners when using punctuation marks.

The investigation pertained to an analysis of punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners in a selected private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa. The aim was to analyse the punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that there are commonly used punctuation marks and the less common ones. However, there is a considerable

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amount of evidence that learners commit errors in punctuation when writing texts or essays. Learners in Grade 10 commonly use eight punctuation marks which are capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, colons, inverted commas and apostrophes. The less common and rarely used punctuation marks were semicolons, hyphens, dashes and brackets. It is always assumed that learners commit errors in punctuation, and the assumption was proved to be true in this study. Learners commit various errors like omission of punctuation marks, addition of unnecessary punctuation marks and misplacement of punctuation marks. The study also found the reasons behind committing those punctuation errors. Learners write in haste and do not bother to punctuate. They undermine punctuation and consider it unimportant. They tend to worry about the unfinished product; however, ironically or rather paradoxically, it is a half-done product since it would be muddled with errors, making it difficult for the reader to read and decipher meaning from it. Learners confuse punctuation marks and, at times, end up misplacing them. Lack of skill and lack of knowledge itself contribute to punctuation errors. It was also discovered that the English language is conventional itself and is a difficult language with controversial and contradictory rules that are difficult to master.

The study found that learners care less about punctuation which results in making caress mistakes when writing. Learners ignore proof-reading and editing of work. Among all the 20 scripts that were written by participants, there was no evidence of double-checking of work. Instead, they wrote in haste and submitted without double-checking their work.

When learners are not competent enough in the English language, they tend to make a lot of grammatical mistakes. The incompetence in language would then intrude on punctuation, which ends up riddled with errors. The issue of learning English as an additional or foreign language contributes to learners' inability to use punctuation properly in written texts. Rules of punctuation are not obvious if they are to be used across different languages, in this case, from the home language to the second

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language. Furthermore, there is no adequate teaching of punctuation and feedback from the teachers. Teachers, just like the learners, tend to neglect and put less focus on punctuation. Secondary teachers assume that the area of punctuation would have been treated in primary schools, which is not always the case. It seems and presumes that the primary school teachers of English language are too tolerant when assessing punctuation. There is no thorough assessment and plan when dealing with punctuation. These errors overlap into high school and beyond.

The evidence of errors commonly associated with punctuation in the learners' written texts affirms the researcher's conclusion that, in the case of these learners, punctuation errors are committed. Lack of skill to punctuate, lack of knowledge, confusion, inadequate teaching and less feedback all contributed to the reasons why errors are committed. Above all, learners' language backgrounds influence the way they punctuate their texts. Findings corroborate the assumptions that learners commit errors carelessly and overgeneralise the rules of punctuation, this being exacerbated by a lack of knowledge and a lack of proper teaching when punctuating their texts, which muddles written work, making it difficult to understand for the reader.

The study set out to analyse punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province in South Africa. The overall conclusion is that learners commit errors of punctuation when writing texts. There are many factors which influence the committing of those errors in punctuation. It is important for teachers to realise and address those factors to reduce punctuation errors and improve learners' writing accuracy. While the study has provided valuable insights, it is acknowledged that a larger sample size would be necessary to draw more generalisable and conclusive findings regarding the nature and extent of punctuation errors among similar learner populations.

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6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed: Given the clear evidence that learners at the selected private school punctuation errors, in punctuation, the researcher recommends that teachers should explore deeper sources beyond carelessness. These errors could emanate from lack of skill, lack of knowledge, intra-lingual or inter-lingual and lack of motivation. Teachers should examine their own practices before blaming learners of carelessness, this could be emanating from their traditional teaching methodologies as compared to the modern teaching methods which are learner centred.

- Capitalisation emerged as a significant area of difficulty for learners. This issue should be addressed with deliberate and sustained focus to ensure learners internalise the rules and apply them correctly.

- To improve learners' transactional writing skills, punctuation should be taught in conjunction with transactional writing. Clear and effective communication depends on accurate punctuation, and integrating the two areas may help reinforce correct usage across various writing tasks.

- To address the long-term problem of punctuation errors, the researcher recommends that the problem of punctuation should be addressed from primary school to avoid mistakes being carried to higher grades and beyond. Punctuation errors are supposed to be reduced in primary school; they should not feature at secondary school level.
- It is recommended that secondary school teachers ought to stop assuming that punctuation is thoroughly taught in primary school and just teach it as they are teaching them for the first time.

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- The researcher recommends that learners should be given regular exercises in punctuation and feedback so that they can learn to correct their own written texts.
- The researcher also recommends that more studies be carried out to ascertain without a doubt that learners commit errors in punctuation in their written texts. A major limitation to of this study is that the sample was very small and it was confined to a single grade in one school. A much bigger study with a larger sample, would bring out findings that can be generalised to a larger population.

6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the conclusion of the study and offered recommendations based on the findings. The study revealed that Grade 10 learners at the selected private school made numerous noticeable punctuation errors. These errors were particularly evident in the use of the capital letters, full stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, colons, quotation marks and apostrophes. While these marks were commonly used in learners' essay writing, others, such as semicolons, hyphens, dashes and brackets, were rarely used. The study also revealed various types of punctuation errors, including of misuse, misplacement, omission, and the unnecessary addition of punctuation marks, which often disrupted the clarity and coherence of learners' writing. Furthermore, the research uncovered several underlying causes of these errors, such as a lack of knowledge, insufficient instruction, and external influences like informal writing styles. In conclusion, this chapter has outlined several practical recommendations aimed at addressing the punctuation challenges faced by Grade 10 learners, with the goal of improving their overall writing proficiency.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Ms E Gayi

STUDENT NO:
18001369

PROJECT TITLE: An analysis of punctuation errors committed by grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe district of Limpopo province.

ETHICAL CLEARENCE NO: FHSSE/23/EMS/17/0702

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr SE Madima	English, media studies, and linguistics	Supervisor
Ms E Gayi	English, media studies, and linguistics	Investigator – Student

Type: **Masters Research**
Risk: **Straightforward research without ethical problems (Category 1)**
Approval Period: **February 2024 – February 2025**

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately.
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions A it necessary

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: January 2024

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: ...Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro.....

Signature:.....

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2024 -02- 07
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

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APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PO Box 237
Dzanani
0955
22 November 2024

The Principal
Amaria Combined School
PO Box 873
Nzhelele
0993

Dear Sir

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I, Evelyn Gayi, am a currently registered student studying towards Master of Arts in Linguistics at the University of Venda Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education under the supervision of Dr E Madima and Prof E Klu. My research topic is An Analysis of Punctuation Errors Committed by Grade 10 Learners at a Private School in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

I would need to collect data from learners' written texts. Every effort will be made to avoid disruptions to the daily functioning of the school. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be maintained at all levels of the research project.

I am hopeful that my request will be considered favourably.

Thank you.

……..

Evelyn Gayi – Student No: 19023421

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APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION FROM AMARIA COMBINED SCHOOL VHEMBE DISTRICT

AMARIA COMBINED SCHOOL
P.O Box 873 Nzhelele 0993
Tel/ Cell: 0155184156/0794873882
FaxNo : 0866544707
Email : amaria.combinedschool@gmail.com
Emis. No 993304101
Reg. No : 3010049
Centre No:7051291

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above matter bears reference:
2. You are hereby informed that your application to conduct a research on the topic: **An Analysis of Punctuation Errors Committed by Grade 10 Learners at a Private School in Vhembe District in Limpopo**, has been granted.
3. We are pleased to learn of your commitment to adhere to research ethics, particularly, those relating to confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity of participants.
4. Wishing you the best in your academic endeavours.

THE PRINCIPAL

22/11/23
DATE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AMARIA COMBINED SCHOOL
2023 -11- 22
BOX 873 NZHELELE 0993
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Scanned with CamScanner

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APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

I hereby confirm that my child has voluntarily agreed to participate in the research project conducted by Gayi E from the University of Venda. I understand that the project is designed to gather information on the topic, 'An analysis of punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 learners at a private school in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.'

1. I understand that my child will not be paid for being a participant.
2. My child may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
3. The written texts will be used in research.
4. Uses and records will follow standard data use policies.
5. I have read and understood the explanation provided to me, I voluntarily agree to let my child participate in this study.

Parent/ Guardian's Signature……Date……

Researcher's Signature……Date……

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APPENDIX E: EDITING LETTER

Office No. 06
Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics
University of Venda
P/Bag X 5050
Thohoyandou
0950

21 June 2025

To Whom It May Concern

This serves to confirm that I proof-read and edited the dissertation titled "Analysis of Punctuation Errors Committed by Grade 10 Learners in English First Additional Language at a Private School in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province" by Gayi Evelyn, Student No:19023421.

Regards



Vincent N. Demana (PhD)

University of Venda
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A quality driven, financially sustainable, rural-based comprehensive university

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APPENDIX F: ESSAY TEST GRADE 10

AMARIA COMBINED SCHOOL

ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE PAPER 3

GRADE 10

DATE: 22 NOVEMBER 2023

TOTAL MARK: 50

TIME: 1HOUR 30 MINUTES

ESSAY WRITING TEST

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read the given essay topic below.
2. Write an essay of between 200 and 250 words in length, of the given topic.
3. Start with a plan
4. Write neatly and legibly
5. Edit and proof-read your essay before submission.

ESSAY TOPIC

I have never been so embarrassed in my life. (50)

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APPENDIX G:

ANALYSIS OF PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED BY GRADE 10 LEARNERS IN ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AT A PRIVATE SCHOOL IN VHEMBE DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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