

**EVALUATING PUNCTUATION MARKS MASTERY BY GRADE 12 NON-NATIVE
ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN THE
MOPANI EAST DISTRICT**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Addmore Ticharwa (Student Number #19020660), hereby declare that this thesis for the PhD (English) at the University of Venda, Department of English, Media Studies and Linguistics hereby submitted by me, has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university. I further declare that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference materials contained herein, have been duly acknowledged.

Signed 

Date: 07 April 2025

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

- God, Almighty. I thank God through Jesus, who enriches me in everything I do.
- My beloved wife, Ravei, for financial support and encouragement even during times of financial need.
- My children, Beaular Lillian, Plaxedes, Joseph, Jainos and Rutendo
- My beloved grandchildren, Nokutenda Chikwavira, Anenyasha Ticharwa and Zvikomborero Chikwavira; and
- My siblings, Edward, Jainos, Beaular, Michael, Johannes and Molly. May God bless you all.

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the use of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native English Home Language (EHL) respondents, focusing on six Independent High Schools in the Mopani East District. A mixed research approach combining quantitative and qualitative research was used because it strengthens the validity and the dependability of data. Purposive sampling was employed to sample respondents for quantitative data collection, as all 127 respondents participated. For the qualitative part, systematic random sampling was utilised to select respondents to obtain an unbiased representation of the total population. Therefore, the sample constituted 20% (26) of respondents enrolled in the 2023 academic year. For the quantitative part, the researcher mobilised a standardised test based on the punctuation of an anonymous and unpunctuated text to identify areas where respondents are competent or not. For the qualitative part, data were collected from the written essays to understand the respondents' use of punctuation marks. The study employed pragmatism, a combination of positivism and interpretive paradigms, to measure quantitative data and develop a holistic analysis of qualitative data to incorporate numerous relevant factors into the study. Quantitative data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 Software owing to its latest enhancements to improve data management. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis to clarify, refute, and substantiate the results from the written essays to prevent bias. The findings are envisaged to benefit English Home Language (EHL) respondents, teachers, and curriculum designers by enhancing the body of knowledge regarding the appropriate use of punctuation marks.

Keywords: English Home Language, Independent Schools, Public Schools, punctuation marks, punctuation errors

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CA	Curriculum Advisor
CAH	Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CASS	Continuous Assessment
CT	Communicative Theory
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EA	Error Analysis
EFL	English First Language
EHL	English Home Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FAL	First Additional Language
EFAL	English First Additional Language
FET	Further Education and Training
GIS	Geographic Information System
HL	Home Language
L2	Second Language
EHL	English Home Language
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
ELP	English Language Proficiency
SBA	School-Based Assessment
TL	Target Language

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Writing is a form of expression that uses symbols, and it is a vital skill that enables humans to express their ideas, desires and emotions (Alsawi, 2019). Writing skills are essential tools that individuals use daily to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs effectively (Klimova, 2012). It is a technique and strategy that helps individuals perform written tasks and activities. Individuals can present ideas and information using this skill, write emails and memoranda, draft books, and deliver essential instructions. Writing skills are necessary for education and any profession.

Through writing, individuals grasp their thoughts and put them into words. Some key components of writing are grammar, spelling and punctuation. Learning to write involves mastery of these components. The study focused on evaluating the mastery of the use of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native English Home Language respondents in the Mopani East District independent schools. The study was carried out in the context of writing.

1.2 Background to the Study

Learning English is an indispensable tool for gaining knowledge due to its importance in many fields as it has emerged as the world's lingua franca (Crystal, 2008; Graddol, 2003; Cook, 2005). English is the medium of much of the world's knowledge, especially in science and technology (Goldblatt & Perato, 1999). Proficiency in English contributes to access to employment opportunities, higher education, travelling widely, and even a better life (Fesi & Mncube, 2021). The government of South Africa is promoting its use as the language of business and industry (Nzimande & Pampallis, 2013). Though the local languages, as well as Afrikaans, are numerically dominant, they are minority languages in language political terms (Webb, 2002).

Although South Africa is perceived as a model of democracy in terms of its recognition of eleven official languages (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019), functionally, English is the primary language in the country, being almost the sole language of formal public

contexts, with African local languages being used almost only for low-level functions, such as personal interaction, cultural expression and religious practice. Solid English knowledge opens social and economic doors for South African respondents (Benard, 2010). In other words, proficiency in English is linked to socio-economic development since it significantly boosts one's employment opportunities.

In a democratic South Africa, English has increasingly become the preferred medium of instruction despite most South African respondents being mother tongue speakers of other languages (Harmes & Evans, 2017). Additionally, they posit that many respondents in urban areas are enrolled to take EHL, and especially inexperienced teachers expect them to have a language that respondents understand best, while the reality is that respondents come from diverse backgrounds. A single class comprises respondents with varying levels of English proficiency. This brings about a situation whereby some respondents battle to cope with learning activities while others perceive vocabulary and grammar as simple.

Language learning in schools involves proficiency in the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These are the pinnacles of English language grammar that can assist respondents in attaining communicative competence (Romrome & Mbato, 2023). Writing clearly and to the point is always the most challenging skill for people who intend to learn and master a Second Language (Mali, 2023). Additionally, it is an elaborate skill that requires enough literacy (Farahsani, Rini & Jaya, 2023) to avoid misinterpretation and misuse of the intended meaning. In this essence, Barr (2021) states that punctuation marks are essential in any writing as they are responsible for conveying a significant part of the meaning of a specific sentence. This shows that punctuation is a tool that allows writers to organise their thoughts and facilitate the sharing of ideas.

Punctuation marks are symbols used to differentiate elements of the sentence, embedded sentences, dependent sentences, and parenthetical sentences and to identify the sentence's emphasis, intonation and pauses (Sülükçüü & Kirboga, 2020). Punctuation is, therefore, the use of conventional signs and specific typographical devices to aid in the understanding of correct reading, both silently and aloud, of

handwritten and printed texts. Graiker (2022) postulates punctuation is an essential element of grammar and mechanics since it expresses the aspects of speech that are not represented by words. This indicates that messages might be distorted or inadequately communicated if punctuation is missing or erroneously used.

Punctuation errors affect grammar because the sentences cannot be constructed correctly (Farahsani et al., 2023). For instance, if commas and semicolons are missing, it would result in run-on sentences or fragments categorised as grammatical errors, for example, “running quickly down the street” is a sentence fragment because it does not have a subject. The two main functions of punctuation marks are to signal the end of one thought and let the reader know how to interpret the sentence (Sanguinetti, Bosco, Cassidy, Çetinoğlu, Cignarella, Lynn & Zeldes, 2023), signalling whether it is an emphatic statement or a question. Furthermore, punctuation also enhances clarity and readability in writing by indicating pauses, separating elements, and conveying specific tones of meanings, much like intonation in spoken language (Klimova, 2012). This means that punctuation errors can lead to a complete misunderstanding of the intended message and may frustrate the reader as they signal the structure of a text, telling the reader not only where one idea ends. Another begins, but also which idea is more important than the other and how it relates to the other ideas.

Punctuation marks facilitate the intelligibility of writing texts by using spacing, conventional symbols, and typographical devices to aid understanding of written and correct reading of handwritten and printed texts, silently and aloud. When reading a text, punctuation marks guide the reader like traffic signs (Sülükçü & Kırboğa, 2020) because they clarify written expression in the same way a craftsman employs tools and skills to produce a thing of beauty. Dural (2021) claims that ancient writing lacked phenomena such as stopping, pausing, raising, or lowering the tone, which clarified or changed the meaning of the sounds in ancient times.

Based on the difficulties in reading and comprehension of the manuscripts, the ways to overcome the challenges regarding the use of punctuation marks (Sanguinetti et al., 2023) were investigated, leading to the emergence of the implementation of punctuation marks (Sülükçü & Kırboğa, 2020). Punctuation and accurate reading of texts have been

of interest not only to Westerners but also to Muslims. Sinasi was the first author to use punctuation marks in Ottoman Turkish in 1859 in his work *Poet's Marriage* (Dural, 2021).

Salkova (2023) argues that punctuation marks were initially used to identify the points where the reader needed to pause. Atasoy (2010) postulates that in ancient times, the need to proofread the texts reproduced by copyists arose, and proofreaders called 'Diortotai' were used to edit the completed work. These individuals started to use punctuation marks. The apostrophe, for instance, arrived in England in the 1550s, and by the time Shakespeare began to write, appearing sporadically in plays, this demonstrates that it took time for the punctuation mark to be broadly accepted (Crystal, 2008). It is, therefore, self-evident that punctuation marks were not widely used in the past because they had not been invented.

That being the case, using an –s ending to show possession did not develop at the same rate as using mark elision (omission). Most possessives in the original texts have no apostrophe (Crystal, 2008). The exclamation mark and the question mark joined their ranks, attesting to a need for emotional emphasis and clarification of intonation (Barr, 2021). Exclamation marks were used in the 1590s and were confused with physical and editorial question marks (Crystal, 2008). The foregoing perception implies that punctuation marks facilitate the intelligibility of written texts by bringing clarity, coherence and cohesion to words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

Although punctuation marks ensure coherence and give form and beauty to language in the same way a craftsman employs his tools and skills to produce a thing of beauty, English second language (L2) speakers commit errors in using punctuation marks. Sülükçü and Kırboğa (2020) researched to determine the punctuation knowledge levels of Freshman Turkish language course respondents and found that they experienced difficulties using punctuation marks. Additionally, Handayani (2021) investigated types of 30 Indonesian respondents' errors in the use of punctuation marks at Lintasan Imajinasi Bahasa Mahasiswa (LIBAM) of Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Parepare and discovered that they had challenges in applying punctuation marks.

Furthermore, Mullina (2022) analysed the research papers written in Russian English by respondents aged 16-18 at Ogarev Mordovia State and discovered that respondents experienced difficulties using punctuation marks. Furthermore, Stanisiz, Drożdż and Kwapien (2023) studied the use of punctuation marks on a large corpus of world-famous and representative literary texts in seven major Western languages and found that they experienced challenges.

The literature reviewed shed light on important information on the genesis of punctuation marks. It expounded on the fact that the idea of using punctuation marks in writing was triggered by the lack of phenomena, such as stopping, pausing, and lowering the tone that caused difficulties in reading and comprehension of written texts, which culminated in the invention of symbols called punctuation marks (Dural, 2021). Debatably, in South Africa, research on punctuation marks has received little attention.

The educational context in South Africa demands that Grade 12 respondents be equipped with the ability to use punctuation marks so that they can be proficient enough to express themselves well by writing error-free essays, not only in the examinations but in their daily verbal interactions (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement, 2011). The Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents' performance in essay writing in the Mopani East District had been unsatisfactory because EHL results were recorded, and only 55% of the candidates who took the examination in 2017 (Mampane, 2018) scored marks higher than 50%.

This problem was apportioned to poor competence in English grammar. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) requires that language structures and conventions (LSC) are taught using the contextual approach as other language skills (Anggara, 2023) to avoid persistent error development in written forms. As the name suggests, the contextual approach to teaching English emphasises learning language in context rather than isolating grammar or vocabulary rules.

Home Language (HL) subject or syllabus is the language first acquired by respondents; however, many South African schools do not offer the HL of some of the enrolled respondents, but rather one or two languages are offered at the HL level (CAPS, 2011).

As a result, the labels 'HL' and 'First Additional Language (FAL)' refer to the proficiency levels at which the language is offered and do not describe the HL of the respondents. EHL, as a subject or syllabus, is designed for students whose HL is English or for students whose English language competence is at par with mother-tongue speakers (McGusker & Maithufi, 2024).

Given this scenario, the subject is characterised by topics, subject matter, skills and texts that enable students to master English and use it in many social contexts for many different purposes rather than teaching them basics only or communicative aspects of English. Additionally, McGusker and Maithufi postulate that in the EHL subject, English is mostly conceptualised as a tool for thought and communication but also conceptualised as a cultural or aesthetic means commonly shared among people to make better sense of the world they live in.

In South African rural areas, students do not have support structures to develop English language-related skills, thus putting them at a disadvantage. Most students have limited English language proficiency, and they also lack exposure to English mother tongue speakers, television and computers experienced by urban students (Tshotsho, 2013). Modipane (2018) asserts that ESL respondents in the Mopani district rarely come into contact with native English speakers.

Furthermore, Modipane (2018) contends that the only time the respondents are exposed to English is in the classroom. Therefore, the respondents are hardly exposed to the English language in rural areas. Masilo (2003) indicates that schools in rural areas in the Mopani district do not have reading facilities like libraries and reading materials. Additionally, Masilo (2003) argues that respondents are exposed to an environment that does not encourage English language learning as parents are illiterate and semi-literate.

Teachers themselves are noted as barriers; they are not proficient in English as they are not native speakers of English. Nel and Muller (2010) confirm this by explaining that South African respondents are challenged by teachers whose English proficiency is limited. The Department of Education (2008) also agrees that teachers are barriers to reading and writing in English. It declares that the problem lies with the teachers who are

not trained to teach essential reading and writing, as they do not know how to help struggling readers and writers.

There are two main categories of schools in the Republic of South Africa, which are public and independent schools located in both urban and rural areas. The South African Schools Act of 1996 established a national schooling system and recognised two categories of schools: Public and Independent schools. According to the Act, public schools are state-controlled and independent schools are privately owned and governed.

Hofmeyr and McCay (2010) posit that the 2001 research found that the quality of independent schools, in general, was better than that of public schools in key subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science. Hofmeyr and McCay (2010) also contend that private schools in South Africa have a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:16 respondents compared to state schools with average classes of 30 respondents. Respondents-to-educator ratios hint at the quality of education that independent schools offer since, generally, the lower the learner-to-educator ratio, the more individual contact an educator can provide for each learner (Department of Basic Education, 2002).

Du Toit (2005:35) found that independent schools in South Africa enjoyed a higher “average pass rate in matric examinations than public schools (68,9 versus 61,7%).” According to them, independent schools are free to choose their curriculum and examinations if they meet the standards prescribed by CAPS; they are required by the constitution and The South African School’s Act (SASA) to maintain standards that are not inferior to those at comparable public schools. They may exceed these standards by setting a reasonably higher threshold than those prescribed in policy. The study focused on the use of ten punctuation marks prescribed by CAPS for Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents, namely, capitals, commas, quotation marks, colons, semi-colons, apostrophes, hyphens, dashes, parenthesis, and ellipses.

Based on the EHL curriculum requirements, the study investigated using punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in the Mopani East District to improve English Home Language (EHL) pedagogy. Grade 12 was chosen because it represents an essential stage in the development of academic language proficiency as it is the final

year of formal high schooling before the respondents' progression to tertiary institutions, where the demands and complexity of the use of the English language increase (CAPS, 2021).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The findings from previous studies conducted in Pakistani, Indonesia, Russia, and Turkey, for example, regarding the use of punctuation marks by L2 respondents, indicated that numerous L2 respondents experienced difficulties using punctuation marks such as *commas, apostrophes, and capitalisation*. The Ministerial Task Team report on the 2019 National Senior Certificate using EHL Paper 3 essays revealed that respondents could not write coherent and cohesive paragraphs, adversely contributing to their failure for five consecutive years. In addition, the EHL Performance Trends (2018-2022) exposed the lack of foundational knowledge, particularly in grammatical elements such as punctuation, sentence structure, ambiguity, reported speech and other terminology. Most of the research on language proficiency focused on English FAL respondents, and the findings suggested that most respondents in South Africa were generally incompetent in using English grammar. However, there seems to be no relevant research on using punctuation marks by non-native English speakers studying English as an HL in SA. Hence, the study investigated the mastery of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools of the Mopani East District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Moreover, research studies in South Africa mainly focused on English as the First Additional Language (EFAL), not the English Home Language (EHL).

1.4 Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to evaluate the mastery of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent high schools in the Mopani East District.

1.5 Research Objectives

To attain the expressed aim, the following objectives were pursued:

- To identify punctuation marks frequently misused by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in Independent Schools in Mopani East District.
- To describe the usage of punctuation marks in essays written by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in Independent Schools in Mopani East District; and
- To assess the mastery of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District.

1.6. Research Questions

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What types of punctuation marks are frequently misused by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District?
- How do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District use punctuation marks?
- To what extent do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District master punctuation marks?

1.7. Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it may benefit EHL teachers, curriculum designers, and respondents by providing solutions to challenges encountered by non-native EHL respondents when learning punctuation marks. The insights gained are expected to improve pedagogy, especially the learning and teaching of punctuation marks. The respondents can identify errors in their use of punctuation and combat their recurrence. Moreover, the study may assist English classroom practitioners who are required to improve their teaching skills by better explaining the use of punctuation marks.

1.8 Definition of Key Concepts

In dealing with challenges in learning punctuation, it is imperative to clarify key concepts. This is particularly necessary as some linguistic terms might be challenging to understand. Among the key terms to be clarified are colon, ellipsis, and hyphen.

1.8.1 Colon

The colon (:) is a mark of punctuation used after a statement (such as an independent clause) or that introduces a quotation (Lutrin & Pincus 2007), an explanation, an example, or a series. Additionally, the colon usually appears between the chapters and the verse numbers in a Biblical citation (Genesis 1:1) and between numbers and or groups of numbers in expressions of time (3:00 a.m.) and ratios (1:5) (Buragohain, Punpeng, Jaratjarungkiat & Chaudhary, 2023). A colon is an excellent tool for introducing lists, quotations, translations, examples, explanations and the like in a clear and organised fashion (Tetzner, 2021).

1.8.2. Enclosing punctuation marks

There are two types of enclosing punctuation marks: brackets and quotation marks (Razzak & Hassan, 1986). The former can be square or rounded; the brackets enclose any grammatically unnecessary words in the sentence, yet they explain it (Leigh, 2013). This denotes that brackets enclose parts of a sentence that are not essential to the meaning, and quotation marks represent exact written or spoken language from an individual.

1.8.3. End punctuation marks

End punctuation marks comprise the period or full stop, the question mark, and the exclamation mark. All these marks mark the end of a sentence and, in most cases, precede a capital letter. (Hussein & Aziz, 2019) This connotes that end punctuation marks are symbols used to mark the end of sentences, helping the reader interpret the sentence in the way intended by the writer without brewing any confusion. Each punctuation mark carries its meaning and tells the reader how to interpret the sentence they have just finished reading.

1.8.4 Ellipses

The ellipses 'dot dot dot' is a grammatical term that is used to indicate an intentional omission of a sentence, word, or whole section from a text without changing its original meaning (Lutrin & Pincus 2007). Ellipses in linguistics refer to a construction whose

phonological form is missing relative to the form that construction should have considered the meaning it denotes (Szczegieliński, 2023). In a nutshell, an ellipsis comprises three evenly spaced full stops, and its use is to indicate the omission of words or suggest an incomplete thought.

1.8.5 Exclamation mark

The exclamation mark (!), known informally as a bang or a shriek, is used at the end of a sentence or a short phrase, which expresses powerful feelings (Tetzner, 2021). For example, “What a lovely view you have here!” It is a grammatical tool that expresses strong feelings or emphasis in written text (Ahmad, Shahid & Farhat, 2023).

1.8.6 Hyphen

A hyphen is a punctuation mark connecting words with a particular meaning, such as ‘self-eating’ (Buragohain et al., 2023). A hyphen is a punctuation mark used to indicate the omission of a common element when two or more similar compound terms appear close together, in which case the hyphen before the omitted element is followed by a space, as in ‘left-handed and right-handed’ (Tetzner, 2021).

1.8.7. Non-end punctuation marks

Non-end punctuation marks are signs or symbols used in various ways in the middle of sentences (Razzak & Al Hassan, 1986). Non-end punctuation marks include the comma, the semi-colon, the colon and the dash.

1.8.8. Paragraph

A paragraph is a group of sentences about a single topic, and together, the sentences of a paragraph explain the writer’s leading ideas (most crucial idea) about the topic in Encarta (2009). It is, therefore, a piece of writing that consists of one or more sentences, begins on a new and often identified line and contains a distinct idea of the words of the speaker. When writing a paragraph, rules of punctuation should be carefully considered.

As the foregoing indicates, a paragraph is a piece of well-constructed and punctuated writing with one main idea developed by different supportive ideas.

1.8.9 Orthography

Orthography refers to standardising writing systems, such as spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, emphasis, word breaks, and hyphenation. It refers to the rules for writing a language that includes the norms of punctuation, capitalisation, hyphenation, word breaks and emphasis (Denis-Noël, Colé, Bolger & Pattamadilok, 2023). An orthography is a concrete, language-specific instantiation of any writing system or the relationship between a script and its language.

1.8.10. Synthesis of the study

Given the foregoing, non-native Grade 12 EHL respondents need to equip themselves with adequate skills in using punctuation marks so they can express themselves intelligibly in writing, both in examinations and in their daily lives. The data solicited by the researcher from different sources indicate that high school English language respondents around the globe exhibit various problems with using punctuation marks. Hopefully, the solutions gained in this study may improve pedagogy in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, especially the learning and teaching of punctuation.

1.8.11. Organisation of the study

The study is divided into five chapters to analyse the use of punctuation marks in selected Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents' work in Independent Schools in Mopani East District, Limpopo Province.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Study

This chapter provided the background to the study and presented the statement of the problem, the aim of the study, and the specific objectives of the study. It also dealt with the significance of the study and the research questions. It discusses the importance of the study and definitions of key terms and ends with the study's configuration.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework underpinning Hymes' Communicative Competence Model, Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Pit Corder's Error Analysis theory. It also deals with interlanguage, fossilisation, and the primary sources of punctuation errors. Over and above, it examines, inter alia, pedagogical implications of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis coupled with the Error Analysis theory. The chapter ends with a summary of the theories discussed

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature, comprising the importance of grammar, its significance in learning English as a Second Language and a scholarly definition of punctuation. It also distils the functions of punctuation marks and findings on various punctuation synopses of the study errors. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature reviewed.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive description and explanation of the research methodology employed in this research study, the research setting, the target population, the sampling strategy, and the research instruments. It also focuses on the data analysis

process, validity and reliability, and ethical considerations that entail informed consent, the right to privacy and no harm to respondents.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Discussions

Chapter 5 chronicles the research findings and provides the discourse based on the data garnered through non-native EHL respondents' written compositions, coupled with the standardised test administered. It explains the quantitative data results using figures, pie charts, and tables, with a descriptive statistics analysis for comparison among sub-questions, punctuation mark errors and between male and female respondents. Furthermore, it also presents the study results of the qualitative research analysis of the errors that emerged from the compositions written by non-native EHL respondents. Over and above this chapter presents findings from studies conducted worldwide.

Chapter 6: Summary of the Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provides the synopsis and synthesis of the study and presents a summary of the research findings. It also concludes and makes recommendations for further research. The aim is to show how to improve non-native EHL respondents' competence in using punctuation marks based on realities concerning the types of errors identified in the Mopani East district, South Africa. The next chapter is the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter one examined, inter alia, the study's background, the study's aim, the research objectives, the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study. Chapter two focuses on the theoretical framework that embodies the cornerstone of the current research as it is underpinned by Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Stephen Pit Coder's (1957) Error Analysis (EA) approach, as well as the Communicative Competence (CC) Model, propounded by Dell Hymes (1966) and developed by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (1980).

2.2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THEORY

The term Communicative Competence (CC) was first used by Dell Hymes (1966) in his lecture delivered at a conference on developing the language of disadvantaged children. It was published as a paper entitled 'On Communicative Competence' in 1972 and republished in 2001. Ahmed, Thabit, Pawar and Sunil (2018) describe CC as an inclusive term that refers to processing the knowledge of the language and the skill to use the language in real-life situations to fulfil communicative needs. Hymes coined "communicative competence" in 1966 when reacting against the perceived deficiency of Noam Chomsky's contrast between performance and competence. Hymes dived into the ethnographic exploration of CC to address the abstract notion of competence (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). He discovered that people speak differently in unique situations, which is a fact most should accept as positive.

Savignon (1972) defined CC as the ability to function in a genuinely communicative setting. Furthermore, he postulates the ability to function in communicative settings. Similarly, Terrel and Krahen contend that CC uses language in social communications without grammatical analysis. Moreover, they argued that the primary goal of language learning should be the development of communicative skills. CC is the capacity to utilise language grammatically correctly in different and appropriate social settings and the functional parts of communication (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). In simple terms, they claim that CC refers to how effectively one can communicate with someone else.

Widdowson (1978) defined the concept in terms of usage and use, where 'usage' refers to one's knowledge of linguistic skills and 'use' refers to one's ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication. The term 'communicative competence' is both the knowledge of linguistic rules and the ability to use such knowledge effectively and appropriately in real-life situations to fulfil communicative goals. CC has the capacity to utilise the language grammatically correctly in different and appropriate social settings, and it focuses on properly using the linguistic system.

Canale and Swain (1980) developed the Model of CC, which consists of four distinct components: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. They developed this theory or model as there was and is still a need for communicative competence to synthesise an underlying system of knowledge and skills needed for communication (Canale & Swain, 1980). CC solely depends on a person's age, skill, set range, and overall intelligence, and it can vary from age to age and from person to person (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). It is important because it allows people of all different levels linguistically to speak to each other and allows for more positive interaction (Widdowson, 1978). For example, a teenager would likely talk differently to their grandfather than he would speak to a friend.

Strategic competence suggests that communicators can also overcome language gaps and modify messages about audience and purpose; it shows how fluent a speaker or writer is (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). Additionally, they posit that individuals know how to repair and sustain communication in case of communication breakdowns and how to keep the communication channel open. This competence comprises verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication (Amed, Thabit & Pawar, 2018).

These communication breakdowns may be due to insufficient linguistic or sociolinguistic competence. Communicators can paraphrase, use gestures, or explain unfamiliar words, and people can ask for clarification, repetition, and slower speech. Strategic competence is solving communication problems as they arise or overcoming difficulties when communication breakdowns occur (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995).

Canale and Swain (1980) posit that strategic competence refers to verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for miscommunication due to performance variables or insufficient competence. Strategic competence is relevant to both L1 and L2 since communication breakdowns occur and must be overcome not only in a foreign language but also in one's mother tongue (Chiessa, Azizov, Khan, Nazmutolinova & Tangirova, 2019).

Moreover, they aver that a lack of strategic competence may account for situations when students with a firm knowledge of grammar and a wide range of vocabulary get stuck and cannot carry out their communicative intent. On the other hand, some respondents can communicate with only one hundred words- they rely entirely on their strategic competence.

Sociolinguistic competence is described by Gray and Rangelova (2023) as the rules that control appropriate language, which include using terms of politeness and formality when required and understanding that one does not speak the same in all situations. For example, teachers talk differently to their friends than their elderly grandmothers. Sociolinguistic linguistic competence comprises sociocultural rules of language use (Ahmed et al., 2018).

Additionally, they postulate that knowledge is essential in social contexts since knowledge of social rules is critical for producing and understanding utterances appropriate to the context in which language is used. This component of CC is the ability to produce socio-linguistically appropriate utterances or functional aspects of language (illocutionary competence or about sending and receiving intended meanings) and sociolinguistic aspects (which deal with such considerations as politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and culturally related elements of language (Tuan, 2017). Although all four components form part of the basis for communicative competence, the study will be anchored by grammatical and discourse competencies.

Grammatical Competence is the ability to judge the appropriateness and correctness of a statement with definite reference to grammatical rules (Quines, 2023). Grammatical or linguistic competence entails the ability to create grammatically correct utterances,

concerned with mastery of the linguistic code (verbal or non-verbal), which includes vocabulary knowledge as well as knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, and orthographic rules (Gao, 2001). Amante and Andilab (2024) posit that grammatical competence, as Naom Chomsky first used it, is the prowess to master language rules (morphology and syntactic features), understand and interpret words and sentences, and communicate successfully. This competence enables the speaker to use the knowledge and skills needed to understand and express the literal meaning of utterances (Eghtesadi, 2017).

In addition, Díaz-Rico and Weed (2010) state that grammatical/linguistic competence focuses on command of the language code, including the rules of word and sentence formation, meanings, spelling, and pronunciation. Furthermore, Tuan (2017) adds that the goal is to acquire knowledge of and the ability to use grammatically correct and accurate forms of expression. Grammatical competence relates to understanding grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, including punctuation, spelling and pronunciation (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). Additionally, they postulate that this style of communicative competence is mainly used in schools. Grammatical competence is vital because it adds good impressions to the listener and speaker (Quines, 2023).

Discourse competence is a competence added by Canale that represents the ability to combine language structures and language functions in a coherent and cohesive text. Discourse competence is the ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances (Jelena, 2007). Canale and Swain (1983) describe discourse competence as mastery of rules determining how forms and meanings are combined to achieve a meaningful unity of spoken or written texts.

Discourse competence is the knowledge of patterns of organisation and cohesive devices that can be used to connect sentences; words, phrases, and sentences are organised to produce and comprehend conversation, articles, messages, and literature (Gray & Rangelova, 2023). Furthermore, they argue that individuals can speak, write, read, and listen to information of various types; they know how to build sentences, use them, and connect them in a communication setting.

Orrilos (1998) argues that the unity of a text is enabled by cohesion in form and coherence in meaning, while cohesion is achieved using cohesion devices such as pronouns, conjunctions, synonyms, parallel structures, and punctuation marks, which help to link individual sentences and utterances to a structural whole. Murcia et al. (1995) confirm that cohesion facilitates the means for achieving coherence, for instance, repetition, progression, consistency, and relevance of ideas, and enables the organisation of meaning to establish a logical relationship between groups of utterances. Therefore, discourse competence is adopted for the proposed study because punctuation marks and lexical and syntactic features play the role of discourse markers (Jelena, 2007).

Pedagogical Relevance of Communicative Competence

Communicative language teaching uses real-life situations that necessitate communication (Gulzhahan, Zhanat, Balabek & Zinagul, 2013). The teacher sets up a situation that students will likely encounter in real life. The approach is similar to the more general learning perspective, usually referred to as “learning by doing”, so it is learner-centred. Hence, there is a need to focus on communicative proficiency in language teaching, and communicative language teaching can fulfil this need (Hanak, 2003).

This approach grew out of theories that assume that the kind of English L2 respondents should learn is the kind they will need in the real world, real-life situations. In this vein, Malone, Mile and Bangkok (2012:33) believe Communicative Language Teaching is designed around the following set of classroom principles:

- (a) *An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.*
- (b) *The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.*
- (c) *Enhancing the learner’s own experience as a significant contributing element to classroom learning; and*
- (d) *An attempt to link classroom learning to real-life situations.*

Classroom activities typically have the following characteristics (Richards, 2006):

They seek to develop communicative competence by linking grammatical development to the ability to communicate. Hence, grammar is not taught in

isolation but often arises from communication tasks, creating a need for specific grammar items. Students might carry out a task and then reflect on some of the linguistic characteristics of their performance. They create the need for communication, interaction, and negotiation of meaning through activities such as problem-solving, information sharing and role play. They make use of content that connects to students' lives and interests.

Jacobs and Farrel (2003) see the shift toward CLT as marking a paradigm shift in the thinking of individuals about teachers, learning and teaching—the centre of attention shifts from the teacher to the learner. The approach is learner-centred. A CC approach suggests that when learning a language, a learner should have much exposure to the target language and many opportunities to practise or produce the language (Walt, 2018).

Respondents learn to read by doing a great deal of reading, and they learn to write by doing a lot of writing. CAPS (2011) emphasise the communicative function of language, where the distinction between meaning and form is blurred. The teaching of grammar in the language structures and Conventions section of the document includes grammar, which is approached from the perspective of CC.

In conclusion, the foregoing connotes that CLT involves developing language proficiency through interactions embedded in meaningful contexts. This teaching approach provides authentic learning opportunities beyond repetition and memorisation of grammatical patterns in isolation. It fosters a conducive environment for language learning, promoting interaction, creativity, and motivation among students, ultimately improving their speaking proficiency.

2.3. THE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS HYPOTHESIS

The concept of CAH was propounded as a linguistic theory by Robert Lado in his book *Linguistics across Cultures* in 1957. It is next to impossible to explain the Error Analysis theory clearly and adequately without delving into the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) since the former is the one that gave rise to the latter (Yilmaz & Demir, 2020).

Lado studied the process of language acquisition and tried to find ways of making the process simpler and more manageable (Tripath, 2018).

Lado (1957) contends that CAH predicts respondents' errors and degrees of difficulty brought about by the dissimilarities between the mother tongue and the L2. The CAH is a system of comparing two or more languages to describe their similarities and differences. According to CAH, the most effective materials for teaching an L2 are based on a scientific description of the language to be learnt (Al Khresheh, 2016). Given this, the CAH assumes that elements that are like the native language will be more straightforward to the learner and those that are different will be difficult; for example, contrastive analysis of Tshivenda and English would demonstrate that while the two languages share the same word order, in some instances, Tshivenda, unlike English – has a system of noun classes.

Wong and Dras (2010) claim that the CAH aims to predict difficulties experienced during the acquisition of an L2; it suggests that difficulties in acquiring an L2 are derived from the differences between the native language and the target language. Numerous studies of different language pairs have been carried out, mainly focusing on ESL respondents (Dušková, 1969; Warshawsky, 1974). The CAH contends that errors made by L2 respondents are mainly brought about by transfer from the habits of the mother tongue (Lado, 1957).

Lado (1957) postulates that individuals tend to transfer forms and meanings of the native language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and repeatedly when trying to grasp and understand the language practised by natives. In other words, Lado connoted that errors are a clear indication of the challenges that ESL respondents have with some forms of the target language, and this would be explained by the habits of the mother tongue that respondents transfer to the second language.

Contrastive analysis has often been done for practical/ pedagogical purposes, and the rationale has been to provide better descriptions and better teaching materials for language respondents (Johansson, 2008). Furthermore, he claims that the background

for CAH, as applied to language teaching, is the assumption that the native language plays a crucial role in learning a second language. According to Johansson, the basic ideas of the CAH are to describe and compare the mother tongue/ source language and the foreign language, predict points of difficulty and use results to improve teaching methods, techniques and materials.

Fries (1945: 9) maintains that “The most efficient materials are those that are based upon the scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner.” Richard and Schmidt (2010) state that CAH is based on three primary assumptions. First, the significant difficulties in learning another language occur due to the respondents’ native language interference. Second, such challenges can be predicted by conducting a contrastive analysis by comparing the two linguistic systems, the respondents’ native language and the target language. The third assumption is that teaching materials are prepared to minimise the effects of linguistic interference.

The assumptions describe language learning as habit formations that occur through imitation or reinforcement (Ellis, 1985). Linguists frequently critiqued or disputed the CAH because while they aimed to identify potential transfer errors or language respondents in L2, they fell short of accurately predicting errors produced by respondents in authentic learning situations (Whitman & Jackson, 1972). According to Abbas (1995), CAH’s fundamental weakness, which was often criticised, lies in its overwhelming inclination to one type of error: interference. As a reaction to this criticism, Error Analysis was suggested as an alternative.

Relevance of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis in the Teaching of Second Language

Zaki (2015) claims that CAH helps teachers predict patterns that are likely to cause problems in the learning of L2, patterns of difficulty and even the errors that the second language learner will produce, in addition to even predicting the power of mistakes and the time needed for them to be eliminated. Fries (1945) claimed that the materials used in teaching should be guided by a detailed description of the respondents’ native language. Although Corder (1974) did not support the influence of L1 on L2, he claimed

that similarities between L1 and L2 facilitate the incorporation of L2 items in the learner's built-in syllabus. A further contribution to pedagogy is the ability to predict and diagnose the learner's errors and guide test designs of shared L1 or those of ordinary language features.

CAH is beneficial in providing evaluation and research on the general comprehension of the languages to be compared (Sukirmiyadi, 2016). He claims that in line with teaching activities, a teacher who is to make a comparison between the source language and the target language will know the learning and teaching problems encountered by the students better, for example, by changing the teaching method, technique, media or the material which seem to be appropriate. Similar features between L1 can be neglected with more focus on the different features that are more problematic to the learner (Harris, 1968). For multiple-choice questions, for example, CAH can guide the teacher in designing the distractors since the best distractors are evoked using L1 (Harris, 1968). Testing is a crucial pillar in teaching a second language; CA enhances crafting highly valid tests because it helps the teacher decide what to test and how to test it (James, 1980).

Course design is another critical pillar in teaching a second language (Zaki, 2015). CAH was considered necessary for selecting the items to include in a course and the grading. CAH was required in terms of either the second or foreign teaching and learning process with consideration if the aspects of the two languages (the first and the second language) to be compared have the same characteristics; this would make it easy for the learner to learn the target language (Sikirmiyadi, 2018). On the other hand, if the linguistic aspects of being compared differ, they will make it more difficult for the respondents to grasp the second language.

2.4. THE ERROR ANALYSIS THEORY

The trailblazer of the Error Analysis Theory (EA) was the British linguist Stephen Pit Corder in the 1960s (Corder, 1967). Unlike the CAH theory, which is connected to the behaviourist learning theory, EA is associated with the mentalist theory (Hazarika, 2022). During the 1970s, the use of CAH began to decline, as research showed that many L2

errors varied from one development level to another (Ak-Sobhi, 2019). Exponents of the EA theory argued that the CAH was a weak hypothesis because it did not address L2 respondents' errors adequately, as it ties all the difficulties encountered to the mother tongue initiative and transfer from the mother tongue.

On the other hand, it was also seen by Corder and his colleagues, such as Al-Sobhi (2019), that there are errors in L2 learning that cannot be explained by the mother tongue initiative; for this reason, the CAH theory and EA approach were utilised in the definition and explanation of errors (Yilmaz & Demir, 2020). Corder propounded the theory and redirected attention from the perspective of language processing and acquisition errors. Crystal (2008) defines EA as a technique for systematically identifying and interpreting unacceptable forms produced by someone in learning a second language, using the principles and procedures provided by linguists. It is a research tool characterised by procedures for identifying, describing, and explaining L2 respondents' errors (Van Patten & Benati, 2010).

Hazarika (2022) posits that EA is a methodical way of examining errors made by ESL respondents. He further argues that errors are not necessarily detrimental; on the contrary, they are essential elements of learning a language; they may bring insights into the various processes of language development and a methodical strategy to identify, describe and explain respondents' errors. In this vein, Kansir (2012) avers that errors are an integral part of language learning, as the essential task of EA is to describe how learning occurs by examining the respondents' output, including the learner's correct and incorrect utterances. These may contain slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, false starts, and changes in thoughts, but sometimes can be attributed to gaps in their understanding of the target language.

James (2013) views error analysis as determining unsuccessful language's incidence, nature, causes, and consequences. Dede (1985) postulates that EA emerged as an alternative to the CAH; she opines that EA is a method that checks the assumptions of CAH linguists, provides solutions to its limitations to its problems and complements it. EA guides the teacher to review the teaching techniques and materials, evaluate the teaching process, and re-arrange the curriculum (Bolukbas, 2011). Hassin argues that

EA is carried out to determine how well a person knows language learning, like any learning activity, subsumes the commission of errors (Touchie, 1986).

Yulmaz and Demir (2020) postulate that EA is a tool that seeks to determine and analyse the mistakes of language respondents and the frequency of these mistakes. According to them, specific systems are reported to language teachers and textbook and material preparers in detail. In the 1960s, EA examined language samples of respondents, identified deviations from the standard linguistic code, and classified them into lapses, mistakes, and errors (Tripath, 2018). The purpose of error analysis was to collect, classify and explain mistakes because they provide information on the idiosyncratic dialect or underlying knowledge of the rules of the language being learned.

Brown (1980) avers that EA is an activity that seeks to identify, classify, interpret, or describe the errors by respondents in speaking or writing, and it is carried out to obtain common difficulties they face in speaking and writing the second language. Errors are a systematic deviation from a selected norm or target language standards (Ellis, 1997). Al-Musharraf and Alotaibi (2023) indicate that the EA approach is a process whereby L2 errors are studied and analysed to benefit respondents (Richard & Rodgers, 2021), alleviate language learning difficulties, examine the respondents' mastery of the target language by focusing on the errors that respondents commit (Zaki, 2015). EA is concerned with investigating the respondents' language use (Corder, 1967). Errors serve as a diagnosis for remedial grammar instruction and necessitate corrections and materials support to L2 learning.

Corder (1972: 56) identified a model for error analysis which includes the following stages:

- a) Collection of samples of learner language;
- b) Identification of errors;
- c) Description of errors; and
- d) Explanation/evaluation of causes of errors.

a) Collection of Samples for Learner Language

Collecting sufficient data is the first crucial stage for any EA study (Touchie, 1986); thus, the recorder's choice and decision about samples of respondents' spoken or written language for the analysis plays a crucial role in exploring the learner's language and provides an understanding of how language works. It decides what samples of learner language are to be used for analysis and how to collect them. The collection of insufficient or inaccurate data can have a significant effect on the results of the research.

b) Identification of Errors

The second step involves the identification of errors. The error identification is made by observing, analysing and classifying and is conducted to demonstrate a part of the learner's system that results in EA (Owu-Ewie & Williams, 2017). The researcher must learn how to classify the errors (Maruti, 2023). In this regard, there are overt and covert errors; overt errors entail clear and easy identification of mistakes such as the irregular morphological inflexion of verbs, as in 'They cried the whole day' and 'She put an apple into two pieces last night'. Conversely, covert errors are evident in context and happen in the superficially well-constructed sentences that distort the intended meaning in communication, for example, '*We're here for three weeks*' (meaning 'we're staying here for three weeks in total') while intending to mean 'We've been here for three weeks' (Teflpedia, 2023).

It is crucial to know the difference between a mistake and an error. An error is made when the deviation arises because of a lack of knowledge, while a mistake or slip occurs when respondents fail to perform to their competence in the target language; usually, a mistake or slip is immediately corrected by the learner (Vasquez, 2008). In identifying errors, the researcher compares the sentences produced by respondents with the correct sentences in the target language. If the sentences are judged incorrectly for the target language or are inappropriate for a particular context, they are categorised as errors.

c) Describing Errors

The third step describes errors committed by respondents, and it describes these errors grammatically. In this stage, the errors are labelled based on linguistic classification,

such as incorrect use of the colon, misuse of the exclamation mark and omission of the question mark. Describing learner errors involves comparing idiosyncratic pronouncements of the learner and reconstructing those utterances in the target language (Maruti, 2023). It is a means of identifying general ways respondents' utterances differ from target-language utterances.

All errors are described and classified in this step, such as grammatical, phonological, lexical, or morphological (Anggraini, 2014). The four major categories of errors proposed by Corder (1973) are omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The omission is known as the absence of an item that should occur in a well-formed utterance; addition is regarded as the appearance of an item that should not appear in a well-formed utterance; misinformation is the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure, and finally disordering is defined as the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance (Maruti, 2023).

d) Explanation of Errors

The fourth step concerns the explanation of errors committed by respondents. The purpose of the error explanation stages is to attempt to determine the causes of why the identified errors were made and, thus, indirectly show the strategies adopted by the learner in the process of learning (Maruti, 2023). It involves grammar and the lexis' comprehensibility, seriousness, and naturalness. Vásquez (2008) claims that it is a judgment process where global and local exist.

Global error is the error that affects overall sentence organisation in 'My house beautiful red', and local error is the error that affects single elements in a sentence, such as 'I want an error dog'. The sources of errors comprise overgeneralisation, incomplete application of rules, false concepts hypothesised, and ignorance of rule restriction. In evaluating errors, the researcher measures the comprehensibility of students' writing. The researcher can tell whether the included errors are global or local (Anggraini, 2014).

All the stages indicated by Corder (1967) were applied in the current study as data was collected from respondents, and the punctuations frequently used by respondents were identified, described and evaluated. Therefore, the EA approach was most relevant in

assisting the proposed research and answering all the research questions because it is a method used to document the errors that appear in learner language, determine whether they are systematic, and explain what caused them (Corder, 1967).

Pedagogical implications of Error Analysis Approach

Like any human learning, language learning involves committing errors (Touchie, 1986). Errors were once thought to be ‘flaws’ that had to be fixed, but Corder (1967) took a different approach when he claimed that those errors are significant in and of themselves. Corder (1967) asserts that systematically evaluating language respondents’ errors allows teachers to identify areas that need to be reinforced in the classroom. According to Sarkar and Dave (2022: 88),

Corder elaborated on three significant aspects of EA. Firstly, if a teacher undertakes systematic analysis, they (sic) can assess the learner's progress and derive what remains to be learned. Secondly, it provides the researcher with evidence of how language is learned or acquired and what strategies or procedures the respondents employ to discover the language. Thirdly, it becomes indispensable to the learner; errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses to learn.

In second language acquisition (SLA) theory and research, respondents' difficulties with the target language (TL) and their production of its features have been valuable data sources (Samad, 2022). In his book “*Error Analysis and Inter-language*”, Corder (1967) discussed the value of learner errors and their significance for teachers and researchers. Corder (1967) asserts that respondents’ errors provide evidence of the language system he is using. Moreover, learner difficulties are of value as they make teachers aware of these problematic areas. EA provides a deep insight into understanding the process of language learning (Jabeen & Shahbaz, 2015).

Furthermore, they state that EA helps teachers understand new ways of teaching by giving feedback on errors made by respondents. EA has a psycholinguistic importance as it can help respondents to identify in a requisite manner the specific and common language problems students have (Sarkar & Dave, 2022). He says that teachers can improvise their teaching techniques, determine learning objectives, and modify the

syllabus, which can help students minimise or overcome their learning problems (Sarkar & Dave, 2022).

Nurwaida (n.d.) concludes that three parties benefit from the study of L2 errors: 1) The teacher, as errors, can be used to assess respondents' progress. It can also guide the teacher in their preparation of teaching materials. 2) The researcher, as EA, can be used to provide evidence on how language is acquired and other factors that might contribute to language acquisition, and 3) The respondents, as it can be used as errors, can be used as a device to learn better.

Furthermore, Safitri (2020) postulates that analysing and evaluating linguistic errors in students' English writing has been an interesting attempt at second or foreign-language teaching and learning. EA enables the teacher to determine what the learner knows and does not know and ultimately allows the teacher to supply him with not just the information that his hypothesis is wrong but also, significantly, with the right sort of information or data for him to form an adequate concept of a rule in the target language (Corder, 1974). Surjowati (2023:11) listed the following benefits of EA:

- *Errors provide feedback; they inform the teacher about their teaching materials' effectiveness and techniques;*
- *They show him what parts of the syllabus he has adequately covered and those that need to be addressed;*
- *They enable him to decide whether to devote more time to the aspects he has covered. This is the day-to-day valve of errors in terms of broader planning and with new groups of respondents; and*
- *They provide information on designing a remedial syllabus or programme for re-teaching.*

Errors are not always bad but crucial to language learning (Jabeen, Kazemian & Shahbaz, 2015). Furthermore, they say that they may provide insights into the complicated language development processes and a systematic way of identifying, describing and explaining students' errors. This may also help better understand the second and foreign language acquisition process. Errors provide evidence of the student's current knowledge of the second language. Since mistakes are believed to

contain valuable information on the strategies people use to acquire a language, they can be used to develop learning materials to enhance the students' grammatical correctness in their written compositions (Caudilla, 2019).

Error identification serves three purposes. Firstly, it enables the teacher to determine how far the students have progressed toward their objectives and what they still need to learn. Secondly, it furnishes researchers with evidence on how language is learned and respondents' tactics in their language exploration. Thirdly, it is an essential tool for respondents to learn the language (Owu & Williams, 2017). Errors are valuable information for three beneficiaries.

Thirdly, it has substantially contributed to applied linguistics and language practitioners' theoretical awareness. It then draws teachers' attention to a variety of sources of respondents. Fourthly, it changes the status of a research project, a curriculum guide, and a learning stage indicator (Zou, 2022). EA is essential for teachers to improve the quality of teaching. By doing so, the teacher owns information to enhance the methodology, including syllabus, teaching material and teaching techniques (Agustinasari, Simanjuntak & Purwanto, 2022).

Significance of error analysis

Error analysis has been a fundamental aspect of research in second-language writing, offering valuable insights into the difficulties experienced by second-language respondents. They say that while early research focused on spoken errors by language respondents, there has been a notable shift towards analysing written errors in recent years. A learner's errors are significant in providing the researcher with evidence, such as how language is learned or acquired and what strategies or procedures the learner employs (Rong, 2019). According to Brown (2007), error analysis is the fact that respondents make errors and can be observed, analysed, and classified within the learner.

EA may be carried out to find out how well someone knows a language, how a person learns a language and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or preparing teaching materials. About (2009) claims that errors tell

the teacher how far the learner has progressed. Aboud explains how errors help both the teacher and the researcher. Aboud says errors reveal the respondents' weaknesses and help the teacher clarify weak points. Furthermore, they provide the researcher with evidence of how language is learnt or acquired and what strategies or procedures the learner uses to discover the target language.

EA helps both the teacher and the researcher develop an awareness of the origins of language errors and their impact on language teaching and learning (Mohideen, 2023). Mohideen says that errors across different genres may reveal genre-specific challenges faced by second-language writers, leading to the development of genre-based instruction. Chomsky (1998) confirms that errors are inevitable and a fundamental stage of learning. According to Jamil, Iqbal and Unmaima (2016), EA is considered very supportive in second language learning as it can disclose problematic areas of learning to teachers, textbook writers, and syllabus designers.

Another scholar, Hinnon (2014), also confirms that the EA approach is beneficial after her long study of literature related to the EA approach. She mentions that EA can help teachers prepare accurate and precise teachings suitable for their students. In short, EA is the study of language forms deviating from the standard of the target language, which furnishes the teacher with reliable information and helps design appropriate remedial teaching methods and activities (Wereesh, 1994). Because errors deal with internalised grammatical knowledge of the target language, Corder (1974) argued that EA should only concentrate on errors and should ignore mistakes

Distinguishing between an error and a mistake

From the perspective of Kusumawardhani (2017), an error is a variation from the grammar of a native speaker that reflects the interlingual proficiency of the respondents. Likewise, Brown (2007) defined an error as demonstrating the respondents' proficiency in the target language because it was a recognisable change in the grammatical features of a native speaker. In the same vein, Alanazi (2017) provides essential information by saying that an error is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of learning an L2. However, Phuket and Othman (2015) stated that errors used to be recognised as undesirable

problems which teachers tried to prevent. Errors are competence-based deviations that occur because of a lack of knowledge.

Mistakes, however, are performance-related and occur even though a learner knows (Nasaji, 2018) about the particular subject matter. Furthermore, Botley (2015) opines that errors are usually seen as unintentional, accidental slips resulting from simple laziness, forgetting and insufficiently internalised rules. He goes on to say that if a learner makes a mistake, they can correct it because of awareness of the rule that has been broken. In the same vein, Ferris (2011) defines errors as morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms that deviate from the rules of the target language, violating the expectations of literate adult native speakers.

Corder (1974) reminded linguists that errors are different from mistakes, even though these two terms are often used as if they are synonymous. He said errors, on the one hand, reflect deviations on the part of the learner from the grammatical rules of a native speaker and reflect the incomplete knowledge of the target language. On the other hand, mistakes reflect Chomsky's "performance" and unsystematic slips where a learner knows the correct grammatical system but fails to use it properly.

Erdogan (2013) argues that using linguistic items to show faulty or incomplete learning is an error. Furthermore, he says that it is a situation of wrong belief or conduct that indicates something inappropriate, and it occurs when language respondents do not understand the rules of L2. Giri (2010) postulates that errors are mistakes that happen regularly. For instance, if someone sometimes uses the correct form and sometimes the wrong one, it is a mistake. However, it is called an error if one always uses it correctly.

Errors occur repeatedly, and they are not recognisable by the respondents even if their attention is drawn to them (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob, 2021). According to Headboom (1979), errors are goofs or deviant productions; they are deviations from the syntactic structure of a native speaker. Dulay and Burt (1990) opine that individuals cannot learn without goofing. This implies that errors are an integral part of learning. The learning strategy adopted by the learner, which is either approved or disapproved, is shown through error-making. Brown (1982) argues that mistakes are performance errors

frequently made by both native speakers and L2 respondents. Mistakes include slips of the tongue and random ungrammatical formations, which can be corrected.

In conclusion, by examining respondents' language production, EA endeavours to uncover the dynamics of language acquisition, guiding language teachers in creating targeted instructional approaches. It seeks to illuminate language learning mechanisms by scrutinising respondents' output to improve learner performance. Unlike the CAH, EA recognises multiple error sources, including interlingual and intralingual errors. However, the CAH and the EA have been commonly recognised as branches of applied linguistics.

2.5. CAUSES OF ERRORS IN THE USE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

(a) *Inter-language*

Al-Sobhi (2019) postulates that the proponents of interlanguage claim that a learner produces a third language which differs from both L1 and L2, and this language has its features and, therefore, should be studied independently. The term interlanguage was first introduced by Selinger (1972) and (1974), who referred to it as systematic knowledge independent of L1 and L2 (Al-Khresheh, 2015). It reflects L2 respondents' attempts at building a linguistic system that progressively and gradually approaches the target language (Fauziati, 2011). Maniruzzaman (2007) clarifies the term by likening the learning of a language to a journey; he contends that to learn a second language, the learner takes a linguistic journey from his mother tongue to the target language and naturally constructs a personal linguistic system, which is termed "interlanguage", in the meantime.

Lu Jiang (1984) coined the term 'mediator language' to accurately define interlanguage. He defined mediator language as a language system created in second language learning due to the interference or influence of the relationship between the learner's native language and the target language. This individual system, termed interlanguage, is a single and unique one which is yet to conform to the target language norms and incorporates linguistic deficiencies or errors exhibiting the respondents' current linguistic level and implying what they need to acquire to reach a standard of the target language (Maniruzzaman, 2007).

Geng and Jin (2024) maintain that mediator language is created neither by the learner himself nor by the teacher but because of incorrect generalisations and interferences upon the rules of the target language made by the second language learner in the process of learning (Geng & Jin, 2024: n. p.)

In terms of phonetics, the mediated language is characterised by complex phonetic changes, complex changes in phonetic rhythm, and complex changes in tones; in terms of vocabulary, it is characterised by diversified word meanings and usages, morphological and lexical diversity; in terms of grammar, it is characterised (sic) by diversified syntactic structures; and in terms of script, it is characterised by diversified fonts. However, the mediating language is not fixed; it gradually approaches the correct form of the target language with learning development.

An interlanguage bears striking resemblances to both the L1 and the L2, and it functions as a relatively systematic transition from initial knowledge of a language to native proficiency during language acquisition. It is always regarded as an unstable set of language characteristics produced by respondents (Wang & Fan, 2020).

In a narrower sense, interlanguage refers to the intermediate status of the second language learner's system between their mother tongue and the target language; in a broader sense, it stands for the second language learner's present knowledge of the language the individual is learning (Spolsky, 1989). In a general sense, interlanguage is defined as "interim grammar constructed by second language respondents on their way to the target language" (McLaughlin, 1987: 60). Within the cognitive perspective, IL refers to the separateness of an L2 learner's system, a system which includes a structural status between the Native language (NL) and the target language (TL) (Brown, 1994).

Corder (1971) used the term 'idiosyncratic dialect' to connote that the learner's language is unique to a particular individual and that the rules of the learner's language are peculiar to that individual's language alone. In hypothesis testing, respondents slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer approximations to the system used. Before the term interlanguage gained its widespread popularity, several other

researchers used various alternative terms to refer to the same phenomenon, and these are “transitional competence”, “idiosyncratic dialect,” and “an approximative system” (Nemser, 1971). These terms were used to connote that the learner’s language is unique to a particular individual and that the rules of the learner’s language are distinct from that individual’s language alone.

In a nutshell, the foregoing connotes that IL is neither a system of the native language nor the target language but instead falls between the system of the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of respondents to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. By a gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, respondents slowly and tediously succeed in establishing closer approximations to the system used by native language speakers.

Relevance of the study of interlanguage EFAL Learning

The learner’s language can be analysed and investigated to select and sequence the syllabus’s contents or teaching/learning items (Manizziram, 2007). Additionally, he claims that by studying the learner’s IL, the teacher develops a clear concept of the nature of the learner’s interim language. This knowledge might help the teacher feel more confident and become more competent in discovering the learner’s errors and the causes of the mistakes and taking sufficient and suitable remedial measures to treat the errors properly.

Teachers can emphasise the importance of reinforcing the learner’s responses by rewarding and correcting non-target-like responses (Guo, 2022). Additionally, he postulates that making errors is part of language and error correction can help interlanguage development towards the TL; hence, adopting proper correction strategies is very important. Applying proper learning strategies is also effective in avoiding the occurrence of interlanguage. The universality of common characteristics of interlanguage may be considered in choosing and ordering the typical contents of the syllabus and adopting some common steps to treat them appropriately and adequately in a classroom situation (Adjemian, 1976).

(b) Interlingual Errors

The interlingual transfer is the negative transfer from the mother tongue that the learner uses in the TL itself (Sarrifudin & Arawua, 2019). This is a significant source of errors for all respondents. The beginning stages of learning an L2 are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer from the native language or interference (Brown, 2007). Richards (1974) maintains that interlingual errors result from mother-tongue interference. Brown (2007) asserts that interlingual mistakes occur when the learner incorrectly manipulates the linguistic system of the mother tongue to create new grammatical structures in the target language.

The mother tongue causes interlingual errors; respondents tend to copy every word or grammar rule of their native language into the target language (Anggraini, 2014). Language Error Analysis examines interlingual and intralingual errors stemming from specific teaching and learning strategies. (Richard, 1971). Richard (1974) states that transfer or 'interlingual' errors stem from native language disorders. Many interlingual and intralingual forms are made when students write or translate into foreign languages (Al-Halawani, 2018).

These forms break the established rules of English structure and thus are regarded as incorrect. It has been widely claimed that respondents use their native language structure when composing English sentences. Hence, it produces sentences that are incorrectly written in English. The disruption of the mother tongue in terms of form, system and law prevents students from acquiring the form of the system and law of the second language. According to Al Khresheh (2010:21), three interlingual errors are usually found in students' work:

- a) *Transfer error is caused by interference from the mother tongue. This occurs because respondents implement the rules of their native language to the target language.*
- b) *Mother tongue interference, in which errors are produced in the learner's attempt to find out the structure of the target language rather than transferring models of the first language*
- c) *In literal translation, errors happen because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression into the target language.*

Surjowati (2023) contends that intralingual errors are caused by the learner's lack of competence in the target language. He avers that these errors result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than from language transfer. In this vein, Richard (2015) postulates that interlingual mistakes occur when students have acquired limited knowledge of the target language. Intralingual errors, also described as developmental errors, occur during the second language learning process at a stage when the respondents have not acquired the language (Al Sobhi, 2019).

c) Fossilisation

In SLA, the concept of fossilisation is related to the IL theory that Selinger (1972) considers an essential phenomenon in SLA (Al-Khresheh, 2015). This phenomenon commonly observed while acquiring a foreign language signifies a barrier to further progress in language proficiency (Geng & Jin, 2024). They say interlanguage fossilisation refers to the stagnation of language learning progress, hindering further linguistic development in foreign language acquisition. Fossilisation comprises the recurrence of errors in a learner's speech or writing despite progress in other areas. Selinger (1972) notes that most L2 respondents, unlike their L1 counterparts, fail to reach target language competence. This implies they stop learning when their interlanguage still has rules or items different from the target language.

Littlewood (1974) stresses that fossilisation is likely to take place when a learner realises (subconsciously that the error does not hamper him in feeling the information gap (at the functional or social level). Selinger (1972) noted that fossilisation encompasses incorrect linguistic forms and correct linguistic expressions. Fossilisation underlies surface linguistic material, which speakers will tend to keep in their interlanguage (IL) productive performance, regardless of the learner's age or instruction in the target language.

Selinker and Lamendella (1978) redefined fossilisation as a permanent cessation of IL learning before the learner has attained TL norms at all levels of linguistic structure and all discourse domains despite the learner's positive ability, opportunity, and motivation to learn and acculturate into target society. There are many causes of

fossilisation, including both internal and external factors. One example of an internal factor is age. It is believed that when respondents reach a critical age, their brains lose plasticity. Hence, certain linguistic features cannot be acquired (Ellis, 1997).

According to Selinger (1996), fossilisation refers to the stage whereby a learner develops a discontinuance of inter-language learning, thus ceasing to create the inter-language permanently. Fossilisations are also described as those features which, though absent from the speech of respondents under normal circumstances, tend to reappear in their performances when they are forced to deal with rugged materials, when either anxious or in a highly relaxed state (Selinker, 1972).

The claim that is being advanced here is that it is next to impossible for an adult to be able to speak a second language perfectly enough that they are not distinguishable from native speakers of that language. When a learner's language appears to stagnate at a particular stage of learning, certain types of utterances in both pronunciation and grammar usage recur and become a permanent feature of a learner's speech in his forlorn attempt to gain more knowledge of the target language; this is referred to as fossilisation.

Gas and Schacter (1989) describe fossilisation as the "stopping of progress" as even learned structures by a teacher are usually futile. Selinger (1972: 15) states that fossilisation occurs at different stages of the language learning process. Furthermore, Birdsong (2004) maintains that on the IL continuum, only 5% of L2 respondents reach the end of their IL continuum successfully, while most do not. This connotes that the majority of the respondents cannot overcome fossilisation.

(d) Simplification

Mahmoud (2014) opines that respondents do not possess a complex system which can be simplified. Omissions and additions of some linguistic items at the level of spelling or punctuation marks are an ideal feature of this error type. Simplification is brought about by respondents' attempts to be creative by manufacturing their utterances in unusually simpler linguistic forms than those in the target language (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob, 2021). Brown (1994) asserts that this type of error is an

interlingual transfer error and contends that it manifests as soon as respondents acquire parts of the new system of the second language.

Brakeley and Rangelova (2023) postulate that simplification is a form of negative transfer. English as a second language (ESL) respondents reduce linguistic structures, resulting in grammatically incorrect sentences. The Zulu language, for instance, does not use the apostrophe to indicate possession. As a result, Zulu non-native English Home language respondents omit the apostrophe in sentences like, “Sipho’s book is on the table.

Siddhatan (2014) postulates that simplification reduces the linguistic difficulties of a text while still preserving the original meaning. He goes on to discuss that it is a process in which respondents reduce the lexical and syntactic complexity of a text and, at the same time, try to preserve the text by using shorter sentences, simpler structures, and more straightforward vocabulary.

Typical examples of simplification are baby talk and “foreigner talk,” which are sometimes used by native speakers of the language to simplify communication or make fun of foreigners (Ruschmann, 1980). Respondents often choose simple forms and constructions instead of more complex ones. An example of simplification might involve using the simple past tense instead of the present perfect tense. Simplification results from respondents’ attempts to be creative by producing their utterances in unusually simpler linguistic forms than those in the target language (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob, 2021).

e) Overgeneralisation

Overgeneralisation refers to the situation in which one form or rule of the language is overgeneralised over the other forms (). The extending of certain forms becomes the cause of errors in language learning (Jabeen, Kazemiam & Shaahbaz). It occurs when a learner extends the use of a grammatical rule beyond its accepted usage, for example, *meted* (Sobhi, 2019). This is using one form or construction to other contexts and extending its application to contexts where it does not apply (Surjowati, 2023). He avers that respondents use simplification and overgeralisation to reduce their linguistic

burden. Scovel (2021) asserts that overgeneralisation means that whenever respondents encounter a new rule or pattern in the target language, they assume that it operates without exception, for instance, “I hurted myself”.

Nordquist (2019) claims that in linguistics, overgeneralisation is most often used in language acquisition by respondents; for example, figuring out a grammatical rule and applying it generally is called generalisation. It involves creating a deviant structure due to a similar structure already existing in the first language; consequently, respondents will tend to keep certain linguistic items in their inter-language, which become fossilised and challenging to correct (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob, 2021).

Moreover, they note that overgeneralisation is caused by the extension of the rules of the target language to inappropriate contexts. In other words, the wrong application of language conventions results in overgeneralisation. For instance, the improper use of the apostrophe in contexts that do not admit it, for example, ‘There are many schools’ in Polokwane’ and ‘My sister knows’ the robber.’

According to Scovel (2001), overgeneralisation means that whenever respondents encounter a new rule or pattern in the target language, they assume it operates without exception. Overgeneralisation of the target language refers to the interlanguage cognition produced in expanding the TL rule. The premise of overgeneralisation is the similarity of suitable objects in the regulations, and the essence of overgeneralisation is a similar analogy (Brown, 2002). Additionally, he claims that once generalisation is excessive, errors will appear.

f) Avoidance

A learner can sometimes avoid making mistakes by replacing certain doubtful L2 words, idiomatic expressions, structures, and other aspects of language with other items with which he feels pretty confident (Schachter, 1974). By doing this, the learner can write, for example, a paragraph without a single error. However, Brown (2001) argues that the absence of errors does not necessarily reflect native-like competence.

g) Inadequate Learning

This error is usually caused by under-differentiation and incomplete learning. According to Touchie (1986), inadequate learning results from ignorance of rule restrictions, under-differentiation and incomplete learning. A typical example is the omission of the third person singular, as in: *He wants*.

h) Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Ignorance of rule restrictions results from respondents' lack of competence to abide by the rules or available structures in the target language (Azowa, 2023). It can be defined as a type of transfer caused by inappropriate use of the regulations that the respondents have mastered in a new context (James, 1998). He asserts that it occurs when respondents fail to observe the rules of the target language. In other words, it involves applying the rules the respondents have grasped before to new contexts where they do not apply. Ignorance of rule restrictions occurs when respondents fail to understand that the existing rule is restricted to a specific context and should not be used in other contexts (Al Sobhi, 2019).

i) Incomplete Application of Rules

These features are a result of poor development of the structure. Respondents tend to use one structure instead of another (Kelechi Nzerem). For example, '*Your school is Riverton*' instead of '*Is your school Riverton?*'

j) False Concept Hypothesised

False concept hypothesised refers to errors made by respondents who seem to have developed wrong hypotheses about the target language (Van & Duong, 2024). Touchie (1986) contends that erroneous assumptions from respondents can be brought about when, for example, they cannot distinguish regular and irregular superlative and comparative adjectives. Hypothesising false concepts arises when there exists in the mind of the language learner a poor understanding of a concept in the L2. Good examples are in the distinctive use of a possessive pronoun in place of he is, and the wrong use of is also used rather than: 'He is a boy'. "Is my own" is also used instead of "It is my own."

k) Overuse

Overuse occurs due to respondents' overdependence on certain grammatically acceptable forms, and they choose to use them instead of other known forms that might be available. Overuse can also occur when respondents eschew the production of inadequate structures (Ellis, 1997). For instance, respondents say: *Your book is colour what?* - When should the correct version be? *What is the colour of your book?*

l) Hypercorrection

Sometimes, the keen efforts of teachers to correct their respondents' errors induce the students to make errors on otherwise correct forms (Angraini, 2014). Stenson (1978) calls this type of error "induced error." Amara (2019) suggests that this is due to the methods and materials used in the teaching process; for instance, 'She cries as if the baby cries' instead of 'She cries like a baby.'

m) Performance Errors (Mistakes)

These errors are also known as non-systematic errors (Corder, 1974). They are due to psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, tiredness, slips of the tongue and many others. The learner can readily self-correct the mistakes (Amara, 2019).

o) Competence Errors

Amara (2019) postulates that competence errors seem to occur because of some ignorance of grammar rules. It is a systematic deviation made by respondents who have not yet mastered the rules of the second language. A learner cannot self-correct an error because it is a reflective product of their current stage of L2 development; for example, '*He can learns.*'

p) Omission Errors

It is an error characterised by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (Sobhi, 2019). Faisal Amir (2020) defines omission errors as errors that occur when students omit or erase parts of a sentence that should have a specific form of grammar. Due to the difficulty of producing certain linguistic forms, respondents may

omit them. Punctuation marks are also prone to omission, with question marks and full stops frequently omitted.

Omission of errors happens when the respondents still learn language forms or grammar that is supposed to be in sentences, but the respondents omit them (Faisal Amir, 2020). Furthermore, he opines that omission can be referred to as the missing of one or two items that must be part of a written sentence or an utterance. In other words, it occurs when a learner constructs a sentence or utterance devoid of an essential lexical or grammatical item, such as a punctuation mark.

q) Addition Errors

An addition error is an error that can be identified by the presence of an item which should not be part of a sentence (Faisal Amir, 2020).

r) Induced Errors

Amara (2019) claims that errors are induced by the methods and materials used in the teaching process. Such errors arise when teachers do not exhaustively explain a concept or use the rules without highlighting the exceptions involved (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob). If, for instance, the word “lie” is used in the context of a position of not standing or sitting, efforts should be made to identify the prepositions that most likely fit into their various uses; for example, ‘I am lying in bed’, and the dog is lying in the table. Note that the preposition used in the first sentence is appropriate, while the one used in the second sentence is inappropriate in the context. The use of ‘lying’ in the second sentence is an induced error arising from failure to identify exceptions to grammatical rules.

s) Global and Local Errors

Respondents’ errors are classified as global or local, with global errors causing hindrances in comprehension. Many local errors are more trivial, affecting only a single element of a sentence (Kraichoke, 2022). Global errors include content and organisational errors attributed to ELL’s inability to understand (Bates; Lane & Lange,

1993). Global errors can be perceived as synonymous with what Corder (1967) referred to as covertly idiosyncratic errors, and local errors are, on the other hand, synonymous with overtly idiosyncratic ones.

Although the latter violate rules within phrases and clauses, they do not result in miscommunication of messages as global does (Mhundwa, 2003). Burt and Kiparsky (1974) distinguish between local and global errors by positing that local errors do not hinder communication and understanding of the meaning of an utterance, while global errors, on the other hand, are more serious than local errors because global errors interfere with communication and disrupt meanings of utterances.

Local errors only affect a single element of a sentence but do not hamper the message from being comprehended (Xu-mei, 2007). This implies that global errors significantly affect the overall sentence organisation and distort the intelligibility of the sentence, thereby adversely hindering communication. Errors that affect a single element (constituents) in sentences and do not usually hinder communication significantly are called global errors.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Chapter Two focused on the theoretical framework forming this study's backbone. It examined the CAH, propounded by Robert Lado, the EA theory whose leading exponent was Pit Coder (1967) and the CC founded by Hymes and developed by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain. The next chapter focuses on the literature review.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter two examined the theoretical framework, which is the backbone of this study, underpinned by Lado's (1957) CAH, Pit Corder's (1967) EA approach and Hymes' (1972) CC model. Chapter three discusses selected literature relevant to the study, based on punctuation errors made by non-native English Home Language respondents in the Mopani East District Independent schools. The chapter also examines previous research on punctuation errors.

A literature review is the pivot on which the wheels of a research study rotate. It seeks to determine what is known about the research topic or area of study, how well this knowledge is established and where future research might be directed (Apuke, 2017). It helps to summarise and synthesise the ideas and arguments present in existing knowledge. A thorough or sophisticated literature review is the foundation and inspiration for substantial practical research (Boote & Beile, 2005). Gay and Mills (2012) posit that a literature review allows the researcher to identify gaps in the literature and provide a rationale for how the study contributes to the body of knowledge. In this study, the researcher decided to make a logical discussion of the item, namely, grammar, punctuation and writing.

3.2 DEFINITION OF GRAMMAR

Grammar can be defined as the science that ascertains the conventions of a language, examining its sound, form and sentence structure (Sozluk, 2009); the information of structural rules in the functioning of the language (Imer, 2007). Dari and Harida (2021) affirm that grammar structures language such that a sentence's meaning can be clear and precise. Language has both form and meaning when used as a medium of communication. Language forms can be broken down into components like words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and even discourse or text, with a higher degree of subdivision. Therefore, the foundational knowledge needed to learn a language effectively is grammar.

Mickan (2001) suggests that grammar analyses how sentences work in writing because writing is one of the skills people use to communicate ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Richards (2016) discloses that grammar is the system of rules used to create sentences, and it refers to the knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses and syntactic structures used to develop grammatically well-formed sentences in English; the rules for constructing grammatically correct sentences belong to sentence grammar. Nassaji and Fotos (2011) claim that grammatical competence is the speakers' knowledge of the forms and meanings that exist in grammar and theoretical understanding of how to use them.

According to Keck and Kim (2014:12), "... grammar is a system of rules which governs how words (and smaller morphemes) can be combined to form sentences" learning English (Chitondo, 2021). Grammar can also be defined as how a language manipulates and combines words to form more extended units of meaning (Chung & Pullum, 2015). In addition, Ur (2009) maintains that grammar is how a language functions and combines words to express certain types of meaning, some of which cannot be communicated satisfactorily by vocabulary alone. To acquire the four language macro skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, one must learn grammatical conventions and practice them until one gets used to them (Ahmed, Thabit, Pawar & Sanil, 2018).

These encompass the way ideas are categorised and related and the rationale of the utterances, such as statements, questions and requests. Grammar also refers to time relations, singular or plural differences and many other aspects of meaning. There are conventions regulating how words must be manipulated and organised to express these meanings so that a competent language speaker can apply these conventions to convey their chosen meaning effectively and acceptably (Vera & Sisco, 2018). They accomplish the tools to communicate the language system.

Algeo and Pyles (2010) postulate that grammar refers to everything in a language that can be stated in general rules, and lexis is everything unpredictable. Moreover, Kirkham (2010) summarises grammar, in its strictest sense, as the rules of language. However, how these rules are imagined and what these rules encompass can vary significantly from definition to definition.

Similarly, Richards (2016) posits that grammar is the system of rules used to create sentences. It denotes the knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses and syntactic structures used to develop grammatically well-formed sentences in English. The rule for constructing grammatically correct sentences belongs to sentence grammar (Vera & Sisco, 2018). Similarly, Burns (2009) contends that grammar fundamentally entails the systems and patterns people utilise to choose and combine words.

Grammar explains the forms and structure of words (called morphology) and how they are arranged in sentences called syntax (Macmillan, 2017). In other words, grammar provides the rules for the everyday use of spoken and written language so that people can easily understand each other.

3.3 IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR

Grammar is a vital facet that students must acquire to master, among other aspects of language (Agcam & Ozkan, 2016). Furthermore, errors in writing distort and hamper meaning, and correcting these errors is an essential requirement for successful learning of English (Chitondo, 2021). Grammar is important in writing because it helps the reader comprehend the language functions, and as a result, mastering grammar contributes significantly to writing (Sukesi, 2019). Additionally, he says the greater one's grammatical expertise, the better and higher one's expectations for academic writing achievements. Grammar may also express time relations, singular or plural distinctions and many other aspects of meaning.

There are rules which govern how words must be manipulated and organised to express these meanings, such as when a competent speaker of the language can apply these rules to convey their chosen meaning effectively and acceptably (Solikah, 2016). Wither (2015) argues that grammar rules enable respondents' thoughts to be expressed clearly. It also leads to the achievement of appropriate communicative goals (Zhang, 2015). However, if these rules are not applied, respondents may commit errors when applying rules about the rules of punctuation since it is an aspect of grammar.

A set of rules governs how units of meaning may be constructed in any language: one may say that a learner who knows grammar has mastered and can apply these rules to

express themselves in the language forms' acceptability (Chung & Pullum, 2015). Grammar also expresses time relations, singular or plural distinctions and many other aspects of meaning (Vera & Sioco, 2018). Furthermore, they postulate that there are rules which regulate how words should be manipulated and organised to articulate these meanings, for instance, when a competent speaker of the language can apply these rules to convey their chosen meaning effectively and acceptably

By studying grammar, speakers recognise the structure and regularity, the bedrock of language, and they accomplish the tools to communicate the language system. Algeo and Pyles (2010) postulate that grammar refers to everything in a language that can be stated in general rules, and lexis is everything unpredictable. Moreover, Kirkham (2010) summarises grammar, in its strictest sense, as the rules of language. However, how these rules are imagined and what these rules encompass can vary significantly from definition to definition.

In the same vein, Richards (2016) posits that grammar provides the rules used to create sentences and furnishes speakers and writers with the knowledge of parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses and syntactic structures used to develop grammatically well-formed sentences in English. The rules for constructing grammatically correct sentences belong to sentence grammar (Vera & Sisco, 2018). Teaching grammar aims to show how language works, and accurate grammar teaching guides respondents in correctly using the language (Alem, 2022).

Azar (2007:11) avers the significance of teaching grammar by saying, "One important aspect of grammar teaching is that it helps respondents discover the nature of language. Without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body expressions to communicate meaning. Grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric." Brown (1980) stated that grammar instruction through context positively affects respondents' competence in accurately using grammatical structures in language skills. It is always helpful for respondents to see how language works in sentences or paragraphs; therefore, teaching grammar in context will allow respondents to see how grammatical structures function in sentences.

Teaching grammar in context will help respondents acquire the language's nature, facilitating their understanding of the language (Alem, 2018). Hence, it is essential to carefully build complete, concrete, and logical sentences that precede the beginning of actual writing. Clarity and logic in writing begin with sentences (Willis, 1996). An accurate understanding of the language structures is key in foreign language acquisition, so teaching grammar is an essential aspect of foreign language instruction. There has always been a debate about the most effective way of teaching grammar (Alem, 2022).

Fithriani (2018) mentioned learning grammar can assist in setting the stage for the four language abilities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. There is no doubt that good grammar knowledge is inevitably essential in developing EFL communicative competence as it guides respondents to use the language appropriately both in written form and in oral language skills (Anh, Yen, Tho & Song, 2007). Writing aims to create sentences that are correct, complete and logical (Solikhah, 2017).

Strong grammar skills are needed to speak and write the language correctly and effectively (Demir & Erndogan, 2018). To establish precise sentences, grammar knowledge is essential. In another idea about why teaching grammar is important, Ellis (1997) writes: Grammar Teaching involves any instructional technique that draws respondents' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta-linguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalise it (Ellis, 2006). Hence, it is essential to carefully build complete, concrete, and logical sentences before beginning actual writing (Alem, 2022).

Grammatical complexity is intrinsic to a writer's ability to convey discourse and other skills at the suprasentential macro-level, and grammatical accuracy is a key skill in determining native and non-native academic writing ability (Romano, 2020). Mazgutova and Kormos (2015) postulate that grammatical complexity plays a meaningful role in assessing progress; it constitutes a crucial measure of academic writing success in contemporary higher education. In this regard, good writing requires good grammar and good organisation.

Clarity and logic in writing begin with sentences (Willis, 1996). Fithriani (2018) opines that learning grammar can assist in setting the stage for the four language abilities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Good grammar knowledge is essential in developing EFL communicative competence as it guides respondents to use the language appropriately, both in written form and in oral language skills—their conjugation (Erdem & Celik, 2011). Without teaching grammar, which enables students to discover the nature of the language through patterns that make what is said, read and heard comprehensible, the language will become a batch of words (Azar, 2007).

The grammatical features of academic writing must fulfil a rhetorical function such as verbal complementation, nominalisation, use of definite and indefinite articles, relative clauses, tenses, subject-verb number agreement, and cohesive devices such as lexical repetition, referential pronouns, conjunctions, synonyms and substituted phrases (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Studying, knowing, and mastering the four essential English language acquisition (LSRW) skills can help anyone grab a better competitive edge. The English language gives respondents access to information, resources and research. Since many top academic journals are published in English, students and academicians need strong English writing skills (Sarkar & Dave, 2022). Hence, the use of punctuation marks is of great importance.

3.4. PUNCTUATION DEFINED

The word 'punctuation' is derived from the Latin *punctus*, which means 'point'; from the fifteenth century to the early eighteenth century, the subject was known in English as 'pointing' (Britannica, 1973). Punctuation is the use of conventional signs and specific typographical devices to aid in understanding handwritten and printed texts; in written texts, it is vital to disambiguate the meaning of sentences (Adekola & Lawal, 2017). It involves symbols such as full stops, commas, and brackets, which are used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and clarify meaning (Chitondo, 2021). Punctuation refers to marks that guide the reader through his eyes to the central units in the text, like the phrase, the sentence, or the paragraph (Jawad, 2020).

Geisa (2022) opines that punctuation uses signs to help readers understand and express written matter. He postulates that it includes capital letters, commas, indented first lines or paragraphs, spaces between words, and all the routine devices that help readers decipher prose quickly and accurately. Punctuation in English refers to marks that guide readers through their eyes to the central units in the text, like the phrase, the sentence, or the paragraph. It also indicates the connection between sentences so that the meaning will be understood without delay or confusion (Muttalib, 2020). Punctuation marks are formal elements that explicitly delimit and indicate the extra-relations in a written sentence (Moreno, Rodriquez-Gonzalo & Perea, 2022).

They are visible devices with different shapes contrived to present written texts in an understandable and easy-to-read form (Krahn, 2014). Punctuation is a system of symbols and graphic features used to protect the integrity of the sentence in the English writing system and make it visible (Krahn, 2014). As used in this study, punctuation refers to the symbols or conventional signs incorporated in English language writing to enhance intelligibility and clarify sentence meaning. Given the foregoing, punctuation can also be viewed as a system of symbols and graphic features used to safeguard the integrity and completeness of the sentence in the English writing system and make it discernible.

Chitondo (2021) posits that these are marks, such as the full stop, the comma, and brackets, used in writing to separate sentences and their elements and to clarify meaning. Some punctuation marks separate words and ideas; others group and keep together related ideas; still others set aside words for emphasis (Ellsworth, 1985.). Punctuation consists of cue marks for joining and separating words, phrases, clauses, and punctuation. In English, it is a group of marks that guide readers through their eyes to the central units in the text, like the phrase, the sentence, or the paragraph. It also shows him the connection between them so that meaning will be understood without delay or confusion (Muttalib, 2020).

3.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

One of the Basic English structures taught in school is proper punctuation usage. Harmer (2004) stated that he considered punctuation an essential feature of writing, and using

punctuation correctly is an important skill. According to Yakhontova (2020:17), correct punctuation is necessary because of the following functions:

1. *It indicates the beginning and end of textual units and connects them through the presence or absence of punctuation marks.*
2. *It is for emphasising and adding tone; as such, punctuation is one of the author's tools for conveying meaning and facilitating the reader's understanding of the text.*
3. *Its correct use is essential for research writing when the comprehension of ideas, complicated in itself, may be aggravated by defective punctuation.*

Punctuation is one of the building blocks of grammar, and it helps convey the precise meaning of a sentence and can even change the meaning, as in the well-known example (MacMillan, 2017):

A woman, without her man, is nothing.

A woman: without her, man is nothing.

Wati (2021) posits that punctuation is vital for effective paragraph writing. Kane (2000) postulates that the purpose of punctuation is to enable the reader to interpret the structure and, therefore, the meaning of writing unambiguously. Similarly, Mary (1998) says that punctuation is placed in texts to clarify meaning and make reading easier. Ginting (2018) claims that the various punctuation marks perform four functions: (1) they separate sentences (a full stop separates sentences), (2) group or enclose extraneous information (parenthesis enclose extraneous information), (3) connect (a hyphen connects a unit modifier), and (4) impart meaning (a question mark may make an otherwise declarative sentence interrogative). He goes on to say that the function of a punctuation mark is the basis for the rules governing its use and should be the basis for determining whether it is needed.

Punctuation can add expression to a sentence or completely change its meaning; this makes it as essential to teaching reading comprehension as it is to writing instruction. According to Geisa (2022: 45), the sentence below shows how punctuation can change the meaning of sentences:

Let's Eat Grandma.

The above sentence shows the danger of misusing punctuation marks. The correct comma placement would put Grandma in a more pleasant situation with the invitation, "Let's eat, Grandma". However, without the comma, the sentence is much more sinister: "Let's Eat Grandma." This and other similar examples help demonstrate to children the meaning that punctuation brings to sentences. A single word such as "No" can take on many meanings, thanks to punctuation, for instance:

A statement of fact: No.

An exclamation: No!

A question: No?

Correct punctuation gives the text clarity and precision; it allows the writer to stop, pause, or give emphasis to certain parts of a sentence, and it is also essential in reading, especially loud reading: it tells the reader where to pause, breathe, raise his voice and change it (Albajigni, 2023). Punctuation is an essential mechanism in textual macrostructure, providing the keys for correctly interpreting content and defining the discourse structure and meaning (Marcet, Moreno, Rodriquez-Gonzalo & Perea, 2022). Furthermore, punctuation marks indicate how to adapt to the tone of the voice and other important information.

Punctuation is to write, what notation is to music: it allows the eye to re-create the sounds the composition's author had in mind from the page. Both are necessary and exacting systems. Just as musicians know the crucial difference between a quarter and a half note, writers know the essential difference between a comma and a semicolon, between brackets and parentheses (Mulderig & Elsbree, 1990).

Punctuation marks play an important role in marking off sentences, clauses, phrases, and separate items; they further play a grammatical role in indicating the type of relationship between clauses (Muttalib, 2020). He says that by dividing the text into units based on meaning, punctuation in English facilitates reading comprehension. Similarly, by setting off the grammatical or logical units, punctuation marks help the reader's mind

(through his eyes) to distinguish these units and their relations. This connotes that using punctuation effectively allows the reader to focus on these complex ideas instead of being baffled by the meaning of each sentence or paragraph. In other words, punctuation marks expedite the readers' understanding by telling them where to pause, breathe, pitch or modulate their voices. Punctuation marks are an indispensable part of the meaning of written communication.

The misuse of punctuation marks adds to unorganised writing and confuses the readers; structure and coherence in every piece of writing are affected by punctuation marks (Gamaroff, 2000; Shaughnessy, 1977). When people converse vocally, they use voice intonation, hand gestures, and eye movement to articulate ideas. When they write, they use punctuation marks to tell the reader when to slow down, stop, or give emphasis.

So, learning punctuation is very important because it clarifies writing (Muttalib, 2020). Proper use of writing skills makes writing comprehensive for the reader. Snooks (2002) postulates that punctuation marks are significant in giving the language the intended meaning. He adds that using the wrong placement of such marks can change the sentence's meaning entirely and sometimes convert it to complete nonsense.

The reader gets the essence of the written text when mechanical accuracies have been appropriately used (Hyland & Hyland, 2019) as elements and to clarify meaning. Punctuation in writing is synonymous with what notation is to music: it allows the eye to re-create the sounds the composition's author had in mind from the page. Both are necessary and exacting systems. Just as musicians know the crucial difference between a quarter and a half note, writers know the essential difference between a comma and a semicolon, between brackets and parentheses. (Mulderig & Elsbree, 1990).

Halliday (1985:1-2) considers punctuation and spacing as "structure signals" of the written language that show how the substance of writing is organised. Durukan (2011) has stated that mechanical accuracies are the proper use of punctuation and spelling in writing. The competency of appropriate punctuation from a text and writing correct spellings of words enable a person to communicate effectively.

Most punctuation marks represent the pauses and stops speakers would use in speaking. Periods, question marks, exclamation points, semicolons, and colons are stop marks—the “red lights” of writing. Commas and dashes are pause marks—the “amber lights” that tell the reader to slow down momentarily (Krahn, 2014). Some punctuation marks separate words and ideas; others group and keep together related ideas; still others set aside words for special emphasis. (Ellsworth, 1985).

Notably, the correct use of punctuation marks is relevant not only from a linguistic perspective but also from reading comprehension; punctuation is an essential mechanism in textual macrostructure, providing the keys for correctly interpreting content and defining the discourse’s structure and meaning (Marcet & Moreno, 2022). Thus, using appropriate punctuation marks is a marker of good reading and writing skills.

3.6 TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

Four main categories of punctuation marks

Hussein and Aziz (2019) give four categories of punctuation marks: ending marks, non-ending marks, separating marks, and enclosing marks. They posit that the full stop, the question mark and the exclamation mark fall in the category of ending marks since they are used to end sentences, ideas or specific expressions within the paragraph. Examples of non-ending marks are the comma, the colon and the semi-colon, and such punctuation marks are used between sentences and/ or clauses to separate ideas or prepare for a new idea/idea. Brackets and quotation marks are classified as enclosing marks, and punctuation marks used within words or parts of words are called separating marks; typical examples are apostrophes and hyphens.

The full stop (Period)

A full stop (.) is “a period in American English and a full stop in British English” (Leech, 1989: 401). A full stop looks like a tiny circle or dot at the bottom of the written line and directly follows the preceding character without a space (Ellis, 1997). After a complete stop, the new sentence always begins with a capital letter (Salman, Estefan & Yaseen, 2017). A full stop is used to end statements or commands (Gunner, 2022). It is

traditionally called a whole point, and the word period refers to the entire sentence; a full stop marks the end of a complete declarative or imperative sentence (Tetzner, 2020).

Tetzner defines a declarative sentence as stating a fact, such as *Absolute power corrupts absolutely*. On the other hand, he describes a crucial sentence as a sentence that forms a command, as the following sentence does: *You must write your work neatly*. Carey (1960) remarks that capitals are used not only after a full stop but also after a comma when it precedes an opening quotation or direct speech.

Mahalla (2019) posits that a full stop can be used to end a sentence, to make abbreviations and for website addresses. A full stop is dissimilar to a dot in the sense that the former appears at the end of a sentence while the latter is used to abbreviate words (Graves & Hodge, 1947)

The following seven functions of the full stop are given by Ellis (1997: 10):

- a) *A full stop expresses the end of a sentence. It is one of the most used punctuation marks and the most common way to conclude a sentence.*
- b) *A full stop is also used to indicate that some information has been removed, such as letters in a word. In particular, full stops are often used in abbreviations, especially Latin ones, such as etc., i.e., et al.*
- c) *Full stops are also used for some initials when only the first letter of a word or name is present, such as in G.H. Well.*
- d) *Indirect questions are declarative sentences that talk about a question indirectly, such as describing or asking a question. Because they are technically declarative sentences (questions), they use a full stop instead of a question mark. The following sentence is an example: Nelson asked what the time was.*
- e) *Abbreviations for specific periods often use full stops, including abbreviated months (Jan., Dec.,) and days (Mon., Sat.)*
- f) *If a sentence ends with an abbreviation with a complete stop, do not add a full stop. The full stop in the acronym is sufficient. Have a look at the examples below.*

Incorrect

They bought sweets, bread, biscuits, etc.

Correct

They bought sweets, bread, biscuits, etc.

- g) *It is perfectly correct to put a comma, semi-colon or colon after a comma, as long as the full stop is used for an abbreviation. This is illustrated in the following example: Early Christians such as Simon Peter, Stephen, John, etc., were persecuted.*

In American English, full stops are placed inside quotation marks. However, in both British and Canadian English, full stops are placed outside the quotation marks (Arslan, 2023). According to Berens (2023), a full stop is the standard punctuation mark after or between many abbreviated phrases and words, for example, *five p.m., Prof Smith., Sgt. Jones, and George W. Bush.* He says that if a sentence ends with an abbreviation that usually has a complete stop, only one full stop must be used, never two together.

Suppose a writer uses the Harvard or APA referencing styles and wishes to include a citation at the end of the sentence. In that case, it must be included before the full stop. For example, *Before the colonial period, the Shona people were called “Vanyai”* (Elliot, 2 000). If it is a footnote referencing style, including OSCOLA, the citation should come after the full stop; for instance, proportional representation enables better representation of minority groups.

Hudsadas, Hiidayati and Humaira (2018) conducted an error analysis of errors in punctuation marks made by students in descriptive texts among second-year students of SMPN Wera in the academic year 2017/2018. The study found that one of the most dominant errors was the omission of the full stop. Twenty-six per cent of the respondents made errors when using the full stop. Omission of the full stop means that a complete thought ended without a full stop at the end of a complete thought. The absence of the full stop at the end of the sentences made them unclear and might even have brewed confusion.

Question Mark

A question mark is used when asking direct questions, so it must not be used after an indirect question (Estioko, 2020). It is a terminal punctuation mark that turns a sentence into a query (Nurhahidah, 2018). Furthermore, she states that it is used to express uncertainty. A question mark is also called an interrogative mark, a symbol signifying a question has ended (LaLone, Toups Dugas & Cormier, 2023). Moreover, he posits that a question mark is placed at the end of interrogative questions and sentences, and it starts with words like how, who, where, when, and what, although it may begin with other words in academic writing. Below are examples of questions in which question marks are used:

Where did you put my glasses?

Do you like playing football with your friends?

How old are you now?

In other words, a question mark is a punctuation mark used following a question in a sentence and functions as both an indicator of a question and a stop sign at the end of the sentence. Rizki, Suprpto and Admoko (2022) conducted a study to investigate the errors made by Tenth graders of SMK PGRI 1 Lampung Central Lampung using punctuation marks in their written narrative texts. The question mark was one of the most repeatedly committed errors in the students' writing.

Capitalisation

In ancient writings, all nouns were written with an initial capital. Still, nowadays, capitals are used with proper nouns and, in general, with names of places or adjectives derived from them, for example, the British army, the Shakespearean language, and the African race (Muttalib, 2020). The first word after the full stop must be capitalised, and the first word of a direct quotation should be capitalised if the quotation is a complete sentence (Wong, 2007). Lado (1957) affirms that in the Middle Ages manuscripts, it was customary for the first letter in a book or a chapter to be a vast and magnificently decorated one and

to mark all the others small. Since this letter is at the head of the manuscript, it was called a capital from the word 'caput', which means head.

All personal names, actual or fictitious, or substitutes for a name, animal or thing, as well as people's official or religious titles, should be capitalised (Wong, 2007). He also postulates that capitals are used for calendar items such as days of the week, months of the year and special days, but not for seasons. One minor complication is whether to use a capital letter to start the word following a colon. If the explanation after the colon contains more than one sentence, a capital should be used. If the words following the colon are a quotation, a capital letter must be used for the phrase preceded by the colon (Sinclair, 2023). Have a look at the following examples.

1. *Mediterranean cookery is considered healthy: It uses oil, fresh vegetables and fish. It often also includes a moderate amount of wine and avoids the use of butter*
2. *The advice the skills team gave on research proposals aims to be reassuring: Writing a research proposal is like any other form of writing.*

Names of institutions and government departments are proper nouns and require capitalisation. The following are typical examples: *University of Fort Hare, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Greater Giyani Municipality*. Capital letters are used at the beginning of names of organisations, titles, days of the week and months (Estioko, 2020). Capitalisation announces new sentences and the beginning of direct quotations (Nurhaidah, 2018). The main words in titles of books, films, or plays are written in capital letters, and the first word in direct speech is capitalised (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022).

In a study by Putri, Suhaimi and Erniyati (2024), which focused on capitalisation, punctuation and spelling, capitalisation errors were the most prevalent, totalling 60 instances, with a percentage of 52,17%. The study population was undergraduate students from the English department of IAIN Kerunci.

In short, capitalisation is used for proper names, titles of people, geographical names, organisations and events, proper adjectives, First words and the pronoun I, as well as calendar items and in first words of direct quotations.

The Comma (,)

The word *comma* comes from the transliteration of the Greek “komma”, which is related to “koptein”, meaning “a cutting”; hence, a part is cut off from the rest of the sentence (Carey, 1960). The comma is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence, and it is also used in letter writing after the salutation and closing. A comma separates words, phrases, or clauses in a series and is also used between two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (Gunner, 2022). He adds that it encloses an explanatory word or phrase inside a sentence.

Yakhontova (2020) maintains that the comma is used when a subordinate clause (less important clause) comes before the principal clause, as in the following example: *If you do not go, help me*. He also posits that a comma can also be used to separate phrases in apposition (describing the same person or thing mentioned earlier) from the rest of the sentence. The following is a typical example: *Mr Brown, the doctor, said he travelled to Canada*. The other use of the comma given by Yakhontova (2020:12) is that “the comma separates items in the same list, for example, *“She travelled to India, Japan and Taiwan.”*”

The comma separates words or phrases of three or more, and it is also used when a subordinate (less critical) clause comes before the principal clause, for instance: *If you do not go, help me*. The comma also separates phrases in apposition (describing the same Person or thing mentioned earlier) from the rest of the sentence; for example, *Mr Brown, the doctor, said that he travelled to Canada* (Mahalla, 2019). Furthermore, he says that it separates items in the same list. e.g., *She travelled to America, Canada, and Australia*.

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 (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022). Moreover, they posit that commas are placed before and after conjunctive adverbs such as *however* and *nevertheless*, not so common in everyday speech but frequently used in written prose.

Geoffery (2022) avers that the comma is used to separate parts of a sentence, and it includes ideas or elements inside the structure of a sentence, as in the following

example: *When he came home, the sun was shining*. Furthermore, he maintains that it can separate repetitive parts of a sentence, such as numbers, dates, or similar objects. The following is an example: I love movies such as “Pretty Woman”, “When Harry Met Sally” and “You Have Got Mail”. Over and above, he postulates that a comma is used after a greeting and at the end of a letter, before and after mentioning someone’s name. Adekola and Lawal (2017) postulate that a comma is used to show the separation of ideas or elements within the structure of a sentence, and he also concurs with Geoffrey (2022) by saying that it is also used in letter writing after the salutation and closing.

Commas are used to split up different parts of a sentence, and when used correctly, they bring clarity and flow to one’s writing; they are probably the most common piece of punctuation in English, which means that they are the most misused (Bryson, 2023). He gives proper and improper ways of using the comma. For instance, he contends that the comma can introduce sentences.

Additionally, *the project was delayed*. Furthermore, he avers that it can separate a non-restrictive clause; for example, Matilda, whose family is *unloved, escaped reality by reading*. Over and above, he postulates that a comma can join independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction; for example, *Starfish are not fish, so that’s a misnomer*.

Bryson (2023) also postulates that commas should not be used between a verb and its subject, as in the following sentence.

The protagonist is underdeveloped.

They must also not be used between compound predicates; for example, the following sentence is wrong.

A stack of pancakes and a lot of coffee make a delicious breakfast.

The other error that has to be avoided is a comma splice. *Two independent clauses should never be joined by a comma alone. This error is called a comma splice.*

1. *He did not take the easy way out; he is a man of principle.*
2. *The project ran over the deadline, data processing was expensive.*
3. *Model one was selected, it returns more accurate results.*

In each example above, the two parts of the sentence separated by a comma could be complete sentences. This means they are independent clauses. Each independent clause, having its subject and predicate, can stand alone as a full sentence. Hence, the misuse of the comma in this way disrupts sentence clarity and flow, as the comma alone is insufficient for adequately connecting two independent sentences (Kwiatkoski, 2024). She says that if using a semicolon or adding a conjunction feels too stuffy, make each independent clause a separate sentence. This way, the comma splice will be fixed.

In a nutshell, commas are used, inter alia, before conjunctions in compound sentences, items in a series, parenthetical expressions, introductory phrases and clauses, for clarity and to avoid confusion.

Apuhim, Arnaiz, Bayo-on, Deita, Jill, and Montecastro (2023) conducted a study on the use of punctuation errors in persuasive writing of ESL respondents. The respondents exhibited errors using four punctuation marks; the comma had the highest frequency among the four types of mistakes, obtaining 77,4 %. In 2020, Ali, Amin & Ishtiaq (2020) researched a comparative study of punctuation errors made by students from four different Pakistani universities.

The most recurring errors were comma, apostrophe and capitalisation errors. In a survey conducted by Apuhim et al. (2023) to determine the types of punctuation errors and the most frequently occurring punctuation errors in persuasive writing committed by ESL respondents in higher education in one of the state universities in Negros Occidental during the academic year 2022/2023. The results showed that the most frequently committed punctuation error was the misuse of the comma with 67,7%.

The semicolon

The semicolon was invented by Aldus Manitius, a printer, publisher and Italian humanist, in 1494, and readers and writers were happy to have a mark to signify a pause somewhat of length between a comma and a colon (Watson, 2019). Swan (2003) posits that a semicolon is “half a full stop” because they can always replace each other; sometimes, it is always better to use a semicolon than a full stop; this can join two related thoughts in one sentence and establish a link, as illustrated; means where sentences are

grammatically independent, but the meanings are closely connected. Geoffrey (2022) affirms that a semicolon is used when joining independent clauses, and he postulates that a semi-colon links extra independent parts of a sentence. He says the sentence will still be grammatical if a period is put between them. This will not be the case with the comma, where clauses depend on each other.

Adekola and Lawal (2017) describe a semicolon as a punctuation mark used to connect independent clauses that a period would show; for instance, *Kemi was hurt; he knew she only did it to upset him*. Similarly, Yakhontova (2020) defines a semi-colon as a punctuation mark that links two independent clauses or sentences; for example, *she is a good writer and has published several books*. The other function of a semi-colon is to join two related sentences with conjunctive adverbs and connect items in a list if there are already commas in the sentence (Ben–Almeida & Mahalla, 2019). The semicolon is a long pause that balances two equally important, related or parallel ideas, and it also indicates opposite ideas (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022); for example,

In summer, she swims; in winter, she skates.

They also claim that a semicolon joins two main clauses where there is no conjunction, and it may often be replaced by a full stop or by the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *so*, *for*, and *although*.

Common mistakes are made when using semicolons, as it is often misconceived that comma rules apply. However, semicolons are used much less than commas and have their own rules (Arslan, 2023). He postulates that the semicolon can connect two complete and related sentences to link related sentences where the second sentence starts with a conjunctive adverb and is in a list within a series. Yakontova (2020) postulates that respondents should replace the semi-colon with a comma in the sentence positions where it is highly desirable, namely after logical connectors introducing the second of the independent clauses in a sentence, for example:

The fourth group includes the species for which the control variant has zero resemblance; simultaneously, the storage of the seeds in liquid nitrogen stimulated the similarity.

The information gained from the foregoing is that semicolons are used, among other contexts, in compound sentences, with items in series that contain commas, and to join independent clauses. Katrina et al. (2023) conducted a study on punctuation errors in the persuasive writing of ESL respondents. The study aimed to determine the types of punctuation errors and the most frequently occurring punctuation errors in persuasive writing among ESL in higher education. The findings indicated that one of the errors exhibited by the respondents, in abundance, was the use of the semicolon.

The Colon

A colon, according to Kirkman (2006), is a punctuation mark used to indicate there is written material to follow, and the following might be a summary, a list, a complete sentence, a question or a quotation. Sinclair (2023) contends that colon is used in complicated lists and link closely related clauses. Furthermore, he says not all lists can be introduced by a colon, but the clause (a group of words containing a verb) that comes before the list must make sense on its own. The following is a typical example:

Students are expected to carry out various activities: attend activities, participate in tutorials, produce written work, meet deadlines for assignments and sit examinations.

Lutin and Pincus (2022: 11) define a colon as a punctuation that indicates that a list, an explanation or an idea is following, as in the following sentence:

I need to buy the following items: lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and carrots.

Lutrin and Pincus (2022) also aver that a colon introduces a quotation, and in script writing(dialogue), a colon follows the name of the interlocutor, as illustrated by the sentence below:

Mrs Brighton: Are you attending Isaac's wedding next Sunday?

Nickson: If I find a partner.

Adekola and Lawal (2017) postulate that a colon has two uses. It can be used after a word introducing a quotation, an explanation, an example, or a series. It is also often used after the salutation of a business letter. In the same vein, Yakhontova (2020) avers

that a colon indicates that what follows is an explanation of what precedes it. The following is an example: They have some news about the story: John's father has arrived. Moreover, they say it is also used to introduce a list of items, for example, "To travel, you need the following items: a passport, a visa, an application and the correct fee. "According to Geoffrey (2022), the colon can introduce a quotation, an explanation, an example or a series. For example:

It was up to her to take the following actions: graduate, find a job, and become a partner at her law firm.

Furthermore, he posits that a semi-colon can be put between independent clauses, like the case of the semi-colon, but here, the second part of the sentence explains the first. Have a look at the example below.

I did not want to go to Brazil: I already had plans to go to Italy with my husband.

The colon can also emphasise or single out one particular part of a sentence, as in the sentence below:

She was sure of one thing: her friends.

Given the foregoing, colons are used to introduce lists before long quotations, after the salutation of a business letter, and with specific numbers. In addition, they can be used to indicate that there is written material that follows, and the material might be a summary. Over and above, in script writing, a colon follows the name of an interlocutor.

Exclamation mark

Trask (2024) contends that the exclamation mark (!), known informally as a bang or a shriek, is used at the end of a sentence or a short phrase which expresses a strong feeling. Below are some examples:

What a lovely view you have here!

That's fantastic!

Jonny, don't touch that!

Help!

Good heavens!

According to Trask (2024), examples like those given above are pretty typical in writing that try to represent ordinary speech- for instance, in novels. Still, exclamation marks are usually out of place in formal writing and using them frequently will give a text a breathless, almost childish, quality. Generally, an exclamation mark (also called an exclamation point in the United States of America) expresses astonishment or surprise (Nurhaidah, 2018).

Yakhontova (2020) posits that an exclamation mark can also emphasise a sentence. Below is an example: There is a fly in my soup! (Snooks, 2000). In other words, exclamation marks show a statement's emotion or intensity. However, academic writing rarely uses exclamation marks. Instead, use vocabulary such as strong adverbs and adjectives to modify nouns and convey intensity.

Salomo (2023) analysed the use of punctuation errors in the writing of the seventh Graders at an upper primary school in the Oshana region. The study aimed to determine the challenges respondents face in using punctuation marks correctly during writing and the factors hindering the effective teaching and learning of punctuation marks in ESL in Grade 7. The study depicted that most upper primary school respondents struggled to use exclamation marks, quotation marks, commas and question marks.

Ellipses (...)

Ellipses, or “dot, dot, dot”, are punctuation consisting of three dots. (McGloin, 2023) Below is an example.

To be or not to be ...

McGloin (2023) also postulates that ellipses create a longer, less abrupt pause than other forms of punctuation, such as dashes, colons and semi-colons. Writers can use them to indicate hesitation, to imply that a speaker wants to avoid certain words or leave them unspoken, to build suspense and to represent omission in a quoted text. An ellipsis is used in writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words. It is used

within quotations to jump from one phrase to another, omitting unnecessary words that do not interfere with the meaning (Adekola & Lawal, 2017).

Furthermore, they say that students writing research papers quoting part of the text will often employ ellipses to avoid copying lengthy texts that are not needed. Lutrin & Pincus (2022: 12) posit that the three ellipsis dots indicate that a sentence is incomplete, or something has been omitted. The meaning can be deduced from the context of the sentence, as in the example below:

He walked to the edge of the cliff and...

(To be continued...)

You had better tidy your room or else...

In short, ellipses can be used for materials omitted from a quotation, and they are used to indicate less abrupt pauses and avoid copying unnecessary lengthy texts. Furthermore, they are used to indicate that a sentence is incomplete or that something has been omitted without compromising the meaning of the sentence.

Square Brackets, Braces and Parenthesis

Symbols like brackets, braces, and parenthesis include words that are further explanations.

Parentheses (Brackets) ()

Parentheses are curved marks around words or numbers to indicate that they are additional, separate or less important. They are used to set aside tangential or unnecessary information. Something written in parenthesis or brackets is usually an explanation, an aside or additional information (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022). The content that, it is often possible to use commas or dashes instead of brackets, as in the following illustrations:

The Chihuahua (the smallest dog in the world) can fit into a teacup.

The Chihuahua, the smallest dog in the world, can fit into a teacup.

The Chihuahua – the smallest dog in the world- can fit in a teacup.

According to Geoffrey (2022), “Parentheses are curved notations used to showcase thoughts or qualifying remarks. An essential point about parenthesis is that they can be replaced by commas without changing the meaning – in most cases. Below is an example:

Mary Stuart (whose maiden name was Lockhart) went to buy a bottle of milk

Parenthesis or brackets are often used to include extra or additional information in a sentence, for example,

The library (which was built in the seventeenth century) needs to be repaired.

Yakhontova, (2020) postulates that parenthesis gives additional but not essential information in a sentence; for example, *France, America, and Spanish (but not Chinese) may be studied here*. Round brackets or parentheses (singular is parenthesis), in the running of scholarly prose, are used to enclose parenthetical material set off by commas: I discovered that *(much to my chagrin) I was being paid half of what other nurses were earning* (Tetsner, 2021). The most critical information gained from the foregoing is that parentheses enclose additional information.

Square brackets

Square brackets are notations mainly used for technical explanations or to clarify meaning, and the critical part about brackets is that if the information is removed, the sentence will still make sense (Geoffrey, 2022). In the same vein, Yakhontova (2020) posits that square brackets are used for clarification to help the reader understand the sentence, for example, “She drove 60 [miles per hour] on the highway to town.” Square brackets are used in American English for parenthetical material already enclosed in parentheses.

Still, their more common use in both British and American English is to enclose material that an author adds to a quotation, whether to make the quotation work in their prose or to correct, comment on, transfer or otherwise explain aspects of the quotation: “The book has been called the library in pravo [small] because its contents are both numerous and

diverse (Tetzner, 2021). When an article is enclosed in square brackets [], it indicates that it is in a non-English language (Miner, 2022).

Angle brackets

Angle brackets, known as chevrons, are frequently used in Mathematics and quantum physics. Still, unlike curly brackets, they may be encountered when reading outside those disciplines, though not frequently (Jason, 2024). They are defined as a form of < or > used to enclose words or figures to separate them from their context (Mcleod, 2022). Angle brackets are used frequently in comic books to denote someone speaking, and double brackets are sometimes used instead of quotation marks (Jason, 2022). Furthermore, he states that they are also used in computer-mediated communication to indicate an action or status, for example:

<< Waves >>

<< Offline >>

Angle brackets are rarely used in English but often appear in Mathematics equations, computer programming, or to indicate foreign speech. Angle brackets may also occur in linguistics; for example, the English word /cat/ is spelt < cat >. Sometimes, although not often, angle brackets are used to indicate internal thought, for example:

Todd handed me a flower. “Smelt it” I took a sniff. “It’s nice” < What a disgusting stench! >

Quotation Marks (“ ”)

Quotation marks enclose words quoted from another source, direct discourse, or words requiring differentiation from the surrounding text (Nurhaidah, 2018). Quotation marks are used for different purposes in language; one signals that something has to be interpreted ironically, as in the utterance, what a “nice” day—said on a rainy day (Schlechtweg & Hartl, 2021). Quotation marks are punctuation marks that make quotations or citations in a sentence and appear in double quotation and single quotation mark form (Gunner, 2022).

Additionally, she states that quotation marks set off quotes, show dialogue, and can even add a sarcastic tone to writing. Also known as inverted commas, speech marks, or just quotes, quotation marks always appear in pairs (Hall, 2015). Moreover, she posits that there is never a time when one quotation mark is used without the other. The following are examples of quotation marks in sentences.

“How do you do,” said the stranger.

I have never heard the song “Blowin’ in the Wind before.”

Benjamin Franklin once said: “There never was a good war and a bad peace.”

The foregoing connotes that the most crucial function of quotation marks is that they set off a speaker’s exact words and are also used for titles of stories, plays, short poems, essays, songs and book chapters. In addition, they show dialogue. In a study to analyse punctuation errors made by tenth graders of SMK PGRI 1 Punggur Central Lampung, with ESL respondents, the erroneous use of quotation marks and the full stop had the highest frequency.

The forward Slash

A forward slash is a punctuation mark used to express alternatives, represent the word, and separate locations on a route (with the meaning ‘and’). The slash (/) means ‘or’ and expresses alternatives. In most instances, no spaces appear around the slash in such situations. Still, if one or both options are a compound, particularly an unhyphenated compound, spaces may be helpful: ‘World war / First World War’ but ‘mother-in-law/father-in-law.’ (Tetzner, 2023).

The following phrase represents the words “and” a *Jekyll / Hyde personality*. This is rare, and as a rule, such cases are better with the word “and” instead of the slash. Typical examples in which it is used to separate locations on a route (with the meaning ‘and’) are *the South Africa/ Namibian border* or *Tsawwassen/ Swartz Bay ferry crossing* and *red/ green colour blind*. It is used primarily if either or both elements contain more than one word. No spaces are used around the slash.

A forward slash is also used when specifying a year that extends over more than one calendar year, for instance, '2011/12' It is also beneficial when punctuating all numeral dates, as in, 13/09/59. (Tetzner, 2023) He also says it can be used for punctuating abbreviations and indicating ratios. In acronyms, it can be used as in the following examples: *n/a* (meaning 'care of' and '24/7' for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. *It can be used for \$125/day or miles/ hour when indicating ratio.* The forward slash should be placed directly between two words without spacing before or after (White, 2021).

Furthermore, he says that forward slashes are also used in phonetics to indicate differences between how letters are pronounced. They indicate a phoneme by placing a letter or a group of letters between two slashes to demonstrate a sound-based (phonemic pronunciation) pronunciation. For example, /k/ is a phoneme, which refers to the sound 'k' in **kite**, the sound of the 'c' in **cat** and the last syllable of the word **antique**.

The primary use of the forward slash, according to the foregoing, has several uses, including punctuating abbreviations in phonetics to indicate how letters are pronounced and to indicate phonemes to show the sound-based pronunciation.

Backslashes (\) and vertical slashes (|)

Backslashes are rarely used in writing, though it is a good idea to know what they mean if one comes across them. The backslash is used mainly in computer coding and can perform numerous functions in computer code, varying in meaning based on the programming language (White, 2021). For example, it can indicate the end of a line of code, stand for a decimal exponent, or be paired with an alphanumeric character to execute specific commands.

The Dash

There are two types of dashes: the en dash and the m dash. The 'en' dash is approximately the length of the letter n, and the em dash is the length of the letter m. This implies that both dashes get their names from their lengths. The shorter 'en' dash (-) marks range and with the meaning in phrases like the Dover - Calais crossing. The longer 'em' dash (–) separates extra information or marks a break in a sentence. The

‘en’ dash is sometimes the same as the em dash, especially in UK English; in this case, it takes space on either side (Luo, 2023).

Weber (2022) affirms ‘the above notion by saying that a dash signals an interruption, a pause, or a slight break in a sentence, and it draws attention and adds emphasis to a sentence. No space must be used on either side of the punctuation mark when using dashes. La Jeunesse (2023) maintains that ‘en’ dashes are longer than hyphens but shorter than em dashes. He says they also have the fewest uses and are primarily used in ranges of numbers, for instance, 5.00 - 6.00 p.m. or 50 – 70 guests. Furthermore, he says that an ‘em’ dash is the longest of the dashes, and in general, it causes the reader to stop in their tracks. A single ‘em’ dash at the end of a clause draws attention to what follows it, For example:

Anna dug around in the drawer until she found what she was looking for – an ornate old key.

In the sentence above, the ‘em’ dash forces the reader to stop before discovering what Anna is looking for, emphasising the importance of the key. A dash serves a similar purpose to a comma, colon or semicolon; it separates parts of a sentence and forces the reader to pause (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022), as in the example:

There is more to school than a syllabus-life skills, friendships and sportsmanship are gained along the way.

Moreover, they posit that the dash can be used in the same way as commas and brackets to give additional information. It also separates a comment or afterthought from the rest of the sentence. Over and above, it creates a dramatic pause, leading to a climax or anti-climax.

Hyphen

A hyphen (-) is a punctuation mark that links two words that form a compound word (Nurhaidah, 2018). Hyphens are also used when compound numbers are written out as words: *thirty-six* and *seventy-four* (Tetzner, 2021). He adds that a hyphen is also used in a double-barreled name of a single individual (the scholar’s last name is Kerby-Fulton),

but for compound nouns and adjectives derived from two names, an ‘en’ (–) rule is appropriate (the Mann-Whitney Test; in adjectives of this sort, a hyphen can be (and often is) used instead of the en rule (Marxist – Leninist) and a hyphen should always be used when the first element cannot stand alone, as in ‘Sino-Japanese.’

A hyphen links prefixes to words or links two words to form compound words (Lutrin & Pincus, 2022). Furthermore, they postulate that a hyphen is inserted if a prefix ends in a vowel and the word joined to the prefix begins with the same vowel to facilitate spelling and pronunciation. Words not completed on one line are linked to the following line with a hyphen. Applebee et al. (2019) claim that hyphens can also be used in fractions used as adjectives, for instance:

My cup is one-third full

In simple terms, a hyphen is a punctuation mark used to join words and to separate syllables of a single word, and the use of hyphens is called hyphenation. It is used in compound adjectives before nouns, in compound words with prefixes, in compound numbers and when dividing words at the end of a line.

Braces

Braces ({ }), also called curly brackets, provide yet another option for enclosing data and are used in various ways in specific programming languages (Coffee, 2024). He also postulates that they are also used in Mathematical and other specialised writing and are not interchangeable with parenthesis or brackets. Braces are punctuation marks that set off information from the rest of the sentence and appear in pairs, similar to parentheses (another type of bracket) (Gunner, 2022). She claims they resemble a blend of parentheses and square brackets with a little point in the middle. Braces enclose Mathematical equations, music chords, computer programming commands or lists of equal choices in formal writing, as in the following examples:

She highlighted six numbers {2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12} on the ruler she made.

Choose a colour {red, white, blue, blue, pink}.

Which ice cream topping is your favourite {chocolate source, sprinkles, caramel, cherries}?

Gordon (2016) postulates that braces have specialised uses in Mathematics. They are used to enclose the third level of nested equations when parentheses or brackets have already been used for the first two levels.

The Apostrophe

Adekola (2017) opines that an apostrophe indicates the omission of a letter or letters from a word, the possessive case or the plurals of lower-case letters. Look at the following examples: omission of letters as in *Nat'l* for the word *national*; possessive case like *Kemi's bag*; and plurals for lower case letters – *The students were told to mind their p's and q's*. In addition to the uses mentioned above, Yakhontova (2020: 23) gives some of the uses of the apostrophe, indicating that it is always included when telling the time, for instance, *"It is eight o'clock*: short form for eight 'of the clock'.

Furthermore, he points out that its other function is to show that letters are missing in words, for example, *"I'm"* – I am. In a nutshell, the apostrophe indicates contraction or shows possession (ownership). Two words are often joined for formality, and one or more letters are omitted. The apostrophe shows where these letters are removed (Lutrin and Pincus, 2022), for instance:

We've been = We have been.

I didn't know = I did not know.

Similarly, Tetzner (2021) posits that the apostrophe can be used in indefinite and personal pronouns such as '*one*' and '*anyone*' and '*everything*': One must follow *one's* instincts, or it could be *anyone's* apartment. He also postulates that it can be used with singular acronyms and initialisations: *WHO's* policies with WHO standing for World Health Organisation or *MLA's* style with MLA standing for a 'Modern Language Association. Tetzner also avers that the apostrophe can be used in singular dates: '*2013's* warmest day and '*2001's* memorable disaster. He also points out plural nouns that do not end with an 's', such as '*women's* clothing' and '*children's* playground.

LaLone et al. (2023) say an apostrophe can also be used to contract or shorten words, such as *can't* for *cannot* and *haven't* for *have not*. This case shows that some words have been removed to shorten the word. This connotes that the most common contractions comprise modals, auxiliaries or verbs attached to other words and apostrophes, generally used to show that some letters have been omitted when words are joined together. For example, the words you can join with *are*. *You + are = you're*. The apostrophe takes the place of the removed words. An apostrophe must always face left, not right, even at the beginning of the contraction like *'twas*.

Yakontova (2020) contends that one more area of punctuation errors is that of the apostrophe; the most typical mistake relates to the use of the apostrophe with possessive forms of proper names in the simultaneous application of the apostrophe and the definite article (*as in the Mendelson's syndrome*) It is important to note that contractions must not be used in formal writing. Possessive pronouns such as *ours*, *yours* and *theirs*, abbreviations and plural dates do not take apostrophes, for example:

Possessive Pronouns

This is ours, yours, theirs

Abbreviations

All the VIPs- PMs, CEOs, and MDs – were there.

Plural dates

The 1960s and 1970s produced some of the best music.

In a nutshell, apostrophes are used to form possessives of pronouns and indefinite pronouns, for omitted letters in contractions or numbers in dates, and to form plurals of letters and numbers.

Arimbi (2021) conducted a study to determine the functions of apostrophes used in students' theses and to identify the quality of students' understanding of using apostrophes. From the calculation, the percentage of errors was 25%, indicating that the quality of students' understanding of the use of apostrophes was high. It can be

concluded that respondents understood the uses of the apostrophe well. Ali et al. (2020) explored the different types of punctuation errors students make in their writing. The reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by students from two universities, with one set belonging to backward areas and the other set to well-developed areas.

The universities selected from the backward areas were Kohat State University of Science and Technology, University of Malakand, Shaheed Benazir, Bhutto University, Sheringal University and Khushal Khan Khattak, and the universities selected from developed areas were the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, University of Sargodha and Gomal University. The errors exhibited by most respondents were related to the apostrophe, comma and capitalisation.

Italics

Italics were first inspired by cursive writing, and later, they were used for efficiency and to save printing costs over time; that has changed, and now italics have evolved to acquire different shapes (Keung, 2024). Moreover, she defines them as punctuation marks or typographical symbols highlighting important words. For this function, it has to be used sparingly- too much emphasis means to mean that nothing stands out. Italics are mainly used for titles of books, plays, magazines, films, and television (TV) series names of ships (Applebee, Bermudez, Blau, Caplan, Elbow, HyndsLanger & Marshall, 2019). Lutrin and Pincus (2022:12) define italics as “punctuation marks or symbols used to highlight and emphasise certain words or phrases, such as titles and foreign words, and with the ease of computer editing, inserting italics has become very popular. Have a look at the following italicised sentences:

The sound of music is one of the best-loved films.

A hurricane is a wind of extreme; a tornado is a violent tropical thunderstorm.

Italic font is frequently used on titles of various kinds. When capitalisation is kept to a minimum (with only a single capital at the beginning of a title, for instance), italicisation is essential for indicating which words make up a title (Tetzner, 2021). Italics can also introduce new terms and foreign words (Keung, 2024). Furthermore, she posits that

when a foreign word has become so familiar, it has its own dictionary definition in a language. However, there is no need to italicise it. In fiction, italics are often used to convey a character's inner monologue (Tetzner, 2021) Italics can also be used in prefaces to distinguish quotations within paragraphs of texts and comments (Keung, 2024) Depending on the referencing style required, italics can be used to mark the titles of books and other monographs and reports in full biographical references recorded in reference lists, footnotes and endnotes, as well as the titles of journals and, in certain cases, theses, dissertations and websites (Tetzner, 2021)

Punctuation in Poetry

It is essential to note that different genres use punctuation marks differently (Roultlestone, 2023). In poetry, the use of punctuation marks and structural patterns can significantly impact a poem's meaning and tone (Parker, 2023). Furthermore, he posits that poets intentionally use these elements to achieve specific purposes in their writing; for example, a poet might use a dash instead of a comma to create uncertainty or hesitation in a line of poetry.

A dash can create a sudden break in thought, adding a sense of urgency or emphasis to the following word (Rodríguez-Díaz, 2024). En dashes connect; em dashes break, and both add drama, emphasis, appositives or signal abrupt shifts (Parker, 2023). Em dashes are a great choice when one needs a comma with more drama but is not ready for a full stop; the em dash can put more emphasis (Voutiritsas, 2021).

Semi-colons can be tricky in genres, especially in poetry; they are a great tool to use when two ideas are being joined to make the reader take a brief pause between them (Rodríguez-Díaz, 2024). They can also create a *cesura*, or an extended pause (Voutiritsas, 2021). The semicolon is used to connect two independent clauses in a verse (linking two verses):

Life is a slaver; it has no pity

Or

Man is killing himself;

His hands strangle Mother Earth

The em dash is a little complicated as it is used within a verse or at the end to indicate a break in thought or verse structure; introduce a phrase added for emphasis, definition or explanation; separate two clauses (like the semicolon) (Kukogho, 2017).

The hyphen is the same symbol as the dash and is used in creating compound words, particularly modifiers before nouns, names or syllables of words. Below are some examples:

Life is a power-hungry slaver

Treating the six –year old –girl

Like a hell-doomed grandpa.

Commas function in poetry as brief pauses within lines to aid the reader's comprehension and create continuity or list separation in poetry (Parker, 2023). The comma, in poetry, is used to show a separation of ideas or elements within the verse. In a poem, you can also use it to eliminate excess words, for example:

The sun, rain, and road flogged him to death

The phrase "and the" is eliminated 'twice. The comma is also used to separate two or more complete, complete independent clauses in verse:

Life is a slaver,

Life is a beast

Or

He came, he saw, he conquered

But life took his debt, his loan (Kukogho, 2017)

Commas can be the following flexible punctuation marks because line breaks help create natural pauses in poems; many poets will forgo the comma altogether (Voutiritsas, 2021). However, commas can still be used incredibly to indicate a slight pause within a line.

Given the foregoing, elements such as commas, periods, dashes, and even semicolons are essential because, just like in prose or notification, they tell the reader where to breathe and take a break from one idea to the next. They act as nonverbal tools of poetic expression. A form of artistic choice, the poet's choice of punctuation is central to our understanding of poetic meaning because of its ability to influence prosody.

Question marks are often used in poetry to set off dialogue or to indicate the title. In the study conducted by Rodriguez (2024), the question mark is used to indicate a direct question at the end of a verse, and when it is read, the reader asks himself the question and pauses:

Is life a joke?

Those who live know

Does it not make you cry? (Kukogho, 2017)

A question mark can also be used to indicate a question (sometimes rhetorical) as well as give the reader a chance to take a breath, as illustrated below (Tate, 2022):

Would you like to throw a stone at me?

Who can sing The House of the Sun?

Who shall frame its dreadful art?

Exclamation marks inject excitement; they emphasise emotions, pivotal moments, and urgency in poems (Paker, 2023). Exclamation marks and question marks are pretty specific use cases, and while exclamation marks are some of the least used punctuation marks, there are plenty of odes that sprinkle in generously (Voutiritsas, 2021). The exclamation mark is also used to express sudden outcry, excitement and finality.

A full stop comes at the end of a sentence and is usually followed by a capital letter marking the beginning of a new sentence. In poetry, a complete stop at the end of a line is called an end stop. The full stop indicates an end to the thought/ sentence and verse; after an abbreviation, the reader will most likely stop to think about what has been read so far. In poetry, the most frequent full stops can help a fiction work that feels long and

confusing, while fewer question marks and exclamation marks can make an academic paper more professional (Roulstone, 2023). A poet may also drop the end-line punctuation to realise the process of enjambment or incomplete syntax to induce a tension-building effect, for instance:

She finds herself craving for something.

More than she could ever imagine

When enjambment is used, the reader continues reading without pausing because the same idea continues in the following line (Tate, 2022). Furthermore, he postulates that modern poets may choose not to use punctuation marks at all (Kukogho, 2017); content where there is no punctuation at the end of the line and/or the idea expressed in the verse is continued in the next.

In poetry, quotation marks are used to separate the part of a verse directly spoken by a persona in the poem or quote attributed to another source and presented word to word (Kikogho, 2017). They are often used in poetry to set off dialogue or to indicate the title of the work (The use of punctuation marks and structural patterns in poetry can have a significant impact on the meaning and tone of a text; poets use these elements in creative and intentional ways to achieve specific purposes in their writing (Rodríguez-Díaz, 2024). For example, a poet might use a dash instead of a comma to create uncertainty or hesitation in a line of poetry. Modern poets can decide not to use punctuation at all.

The traditional rule in grammar in poetry requires capitalising the first word in each line (in addition to proper nouns). While plenty of successful poets follow this rule, there are plenty who break it- especially in contemporary poetry (Voutiritsas, 2021). Similarly, he postulates that a capital letter may indicate the start of a new sentence or idea or can signify importance when applied to a particular noun or pronoun. Meanwhile, the absence of capitalisation can create a more relaxed or subdued tone.

Punctuation helps to establish rhythm in poetry, and a poet can use it to create a smooth flow of words or a jarring effect (For example, using enjambment) (Goldman & Maynard, 2024). In this vein, he also maintains that if the poet is conveying a mystery or drawing out tension, they may not punctuate the end of the line or stanza. If they want the finality

of something, they will use a full stop to have a more significant impact in an unsuspected place, such as in the middle of a sentence. Sometimes, a punctuation mark may come within a line, and when this happens, it is called a caesura (Kukogho, 2017), as depicted in the example below:

Once again, on running

track (enjambment)

For all the watching world to see? [end stopped]

Tate (2022) posits that a caesura is created when a line has a punctuation mark, causing a pause in the middle of the line.

The ellipses mark represents the omitted part of a sentence (sometimes a word) and indicates a transition (Tate, 2022). This mysterious mark is used to show an omission of letters or words (especially in a quote) that does not interfere with the meaning, and it can also show a time-lapse (Kukogho, 2017)

Life dealt me a big blow.

Stole my heart, my wealth ...

Now, I am a corpse walking.

Or

I am the way...life

The son of the man said.

Given the foregoing, elements such as commas, periods, dashes, and semicolons act as non-verbal tools of poetic expression. A form of artistic choice, the poet's choice of punctuation is central to understanding poetic meaning because of its ability to influence prosody.

Using punctuation in dialogue

Punctuation is one of the most important aspects of writing a story; writers must master this skill to make their dialogue sound natural, straightforward, and easy to read

(Chaudhary, 2023). Furthermore, he contends that without proper punctuation, dialogue can be confusing. Quotation marks in dialogues encapsulate and distinguish characters' spoken words. They contribute to the visual clarity of direct speech, aiding readers in navigating and understanding dialogue (Pollard, 2017). It is important to remember that punctuation marks, such as commas, full stops and question marks, are used in dialogue to signal the end of a sentence or a pause in speech and every time a different character speaks, a new paragraph should be created, and the first word should be capitalised (Chaudhary, 2023), as illustrated below:

“Hello,” Jane said.

‘Hi,” replied John.

The above examples show how to punctuate dialogue between two characters correctly. Notice the use of the comma after the spoken sentence and how the tags (said and replied) are separated from the spoken sentence.

A dash indicates an interruption in dialogue, whether within or at the end of a speech. The characters interrupt themselves as their thoughts change quickly or make hasty additions to their statements (Eshelman, 2015). Dashes are also used when characters are interrupted by other characters. Elements such as commas, dashes, and even semi-colons are essential because, like in prose or notification, they tell the reader where to breathe and take a break from one idea to the next (Maxwell, 2024). Colons can introduce a quotation or a speaker's words, indicating that what follows is a direct quote (Browne & King, 2004). In this vein, they add that using colons effectively in dialogue can enhance clarity, create drama, and emphasise the spoken words. In addition to that, a colon can make a dramatic pause before a crucial or surprising statement.

3.7 RESEARCH STUDIES ON PUNCTUATION ERRORS

Oktavian, Syafitiri and Seli (2022) examined punctuation errors committed by tenth-grade students at MAN 2 Lubuklinggau, in writing descriptive compositions. They reported that the omission of punctuation marks was the most frequent error committed by the research respondents. In the same vein, Gezmis (2023) conducted a study to

analyse punctuation errors that the students made in academic writing in English. The most dominant error was comma abuse, with a percentage of 85%. Sülükçüü (2020) researched the punctuation levels of first-year college Turkish language course students whose home language was Turkish. The study findings demonstrated that students made several errors in using all punctuation marks. The full stop was the only punctuation mark that was used correctly by the majority of students. The most frequent error was the dash.

Laili (2018) analysed punctuation errors committed by second-semester students in the Department of English, University of Mahamadiyah, Surakarta. The study focused on investigating the use of 11 punctuation marks that were frequently misused and described the errors made by the students. The findings showed that students made three types of errors: omission (67%), misinformation (25%), and addition (5%). The most dominant error was the error of omission.

Nurhaida (2018) analysed students' difficulties using punctuation marks in the eighth semester at the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAN) Palopo. The results showed that the total number of errors made by the students was 552, and the dominant error was the misuse of the comma, which comprised 172 errors or 31,16%. Some of the students misused commas in direct quotations. The other errors were the omission of capital letters in quotations and confusion using the apostrophe. Rahman (2022) conducted an analytic study of punctuation errors committed by Kurdish English Foreign Language respondents at Salahadin University. The results indicated the use of the full stop, the comma, the colon and the semicolon.

Gezmis (2023: 12) claims that "one most common mistake relates to inserting a comma before a relative clause which begins with *that*, as in the following example: *We consider side effects, that are characteristic of stimulating agents.*" He attributes such wrong use of the comma to the transfer of native syntactic and punctuation patterns. Gezmis (2023: 14) says, "another mark which may cause some problems is the semicolon and its use is currently viewed as a matter of personal choice and style rather than correctness.

At the same time, non-Anglophone authors tend to replace it with a comma in the sentence positions where it is highly desirable, namely after logical connectors introducing the second of the independent clauses in a sentence, for example, *The fourth group includes the species for which the control variant has zero resemblance, at the same time, the storage of the seeds in liquid nitrogen stimulated the similarity.*” This example shows that the semicolon is weaker than a comma but more substantial than a period; overall, it connects closely related clauses.

Nasrudin (2015) researched errors made by Grade 11 respondents of SMA Fatahillah. The study aimed to investigate respondents’ punctuation errors in narrative writing. The research findings depicted that the most typical errors that the respondents made were misuse of the full stop, comma, semi-colon, apostrophe and question mark. Alamin and Ahmed (2012) investigated syntactical and punctuation errors in a similar study. They were analysing the technical writing of university students at Taif University. The examination and homework assignments analysed illustrated that capitalisation, the use of the comma and the semi-colon were the most salient errors. Not putting full stops at the end of sentences was another dominant error made by the respondents.

Ali et al. (2020) conducted a study to explore the types of errors made by students in their writing and the difference in the frequency of punctuation errors made by students from two different sets of universities. The study used a mixed methods research design. A test and an interview were used as data collection instruments. The students were asked to take a punctuation test to identify punctuation errors. A probe was made into possible reasons behind the punctuation errors by interviewing the students. The study revealed the most frequent comma, apostrophe and capitalisation errors.

The analysis of the interviews showed that lack of practice, teaching punctuation marks out of context, and lack of corrective feedback were the primary reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors. In a research carried out by Nasrudin (2015), which aimed to establish punctuation errors committed by the findings, the most common mistakes which most students made were the use of the full stop, the comma, the semi-colon, the apostrophe, and the question mark.

Arslan (2023) indicates that commas are frequently overused, and the rules for commas are universally unclear. Arslan outlines the following situations in which it is correct to use the comma, such as in dates, addresses, titles, and numbers; between clauses that are connected with conjunctions; after introductory clauses; sentences that cannot stand alone or do not have direct reference to the main clause; sentence parts with subject-verb agreement; non-essential references to a noun; after directly addressing someone by name and lists of series.

Apuhim et al. (2023) conducted a study to determine the types of punctuation errors and the most frequently occurring punctuation errors in persuasive writing committed by ESL respondents in higher education. The errors were identified according to the punctuation rules by Straus et al. and classified according to the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay et al.: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The results revealed that omission obtained the highest frequency among the four types of errors, and the comma and the semicolon were the most frequent punctuation errors they committed, receiving 67% and 77%, respectively.

In another study, Salomo (2023) analysed punctuation mark errors in the writing of 7th Graders of an upper primary school in Oshana region, Namibia. The study aimed to discover the challenges respondents face in using punctuation marks correctly and other factors hindering the effective teaching of punctuation in ESL. The study also explored possible ways to improve the teaching and learning of punctuation marks. The study revealed that most upper primary school respondents struggled correctly with using exclamation marks, quotation marks, commas, and question marks in writing.

Samhom and Abdallah (2016) conducted a study to investigate the common punctuation errors made by secondary school students in writing. The study found that the standard errors among the students are in the use of the full stop, the incorrect use of the comma and the erroneous use of quotation marks. In the same vein, Al Zayed carried out a study to determine the difficulties faced by ninth graders in writing, and the study mainly focused on punctuation and spelling. The study found that punctuation errors comprised 60% of the total number of mistakes made by the respondents. Additionally, the findings indicated that no additional strategies could enhance the respondents' skills and

knowledge of punctuation marks or help instructors avoid and minimise the recurrence of spelling and punctuation errors in learning.

In a study carried out by Sain (2022) to analyse young adult Instagram users' punctuation errors, the respondents made 10 types of errors, which were the exclamation mark, capitalisation, the full stop, the comma, the apostrophe, the question mark, ellipses, the hyphen, the colon and the semicolon. The most salient error was using capital letters, followed by the full stop and comma. Halik and Jayasundara (2019) studied the obstacles to the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.). Ordinary-level students of T/Mu/Al-Hilal Central College, Mutur, in using punctuation marks in writing. The results showed that most respondents lacked previous knowledge of punctuation marks, except the full stop, capitalisation and the question mark.

Pratiwi and Ramalin (2022) analysed the use of punctuation marks by Grade 11 students of SMAN 14 Kabupaten Tangerang. They concluded that the Grade 11 students had difficulties in using punctuation marks. The study's results showed that the respondents' most salient punctuation errors were in the omission of punctuation marks. Omission errors alone constituted 91 % of the mistakes.

Challay and Jones (2019) described the common errors respondents commit when using capitalisation in written text. The main objective was to categorise and determine the extent to which errors are committed by junior secondary school respondents in the Bo municipality, Sierra Leone. The study revealed that respondents had generally not grasped the conventions involved in using capital letters. The prominent errors were proper nouns, beginnings of sentences, poor background of letter shapes, over-generalisation, and not capitalising a word in the closing of a letter.

Poudel (2010) studied using punctuation marks in guided and essay writing. The study's main objective was to determine the punctuation marks students used while writing essays. Out of the eleven punctuation marks used, eight were erroneously used by the respondents. The attendees exhibited the highest errors in commas and full stops. The two punctuation marks were the most commonly used in the respondents' essays.

3.8 DEFINITION OF WRITING

Writing is a productive skill used for communication (Pae, 2019). It is considered one of the four challenging English language skills to learn (Hidayati, 2024). Furthermore, he postulates that it is the process of organising and arranging thoughts to create a well throughout the document. It is a combination of skills like cohesion, coherence, correct use of grammar, proper selection and use of vocabulary, punctuating the text correctly, and correct spelling (Ortega, 2013). When someone sits down to write, they should already have a plan and thoughts about what and how they want to write (Asmara, 2021). Writing is a system of graphic symbols that can convey any thought (DeFrancis, 1989: 5). Writing is the art of transmitting ideas, feelings and experiences to readers (Hidayati, 2024).

Writing can be viewed as a forum for communication between writers and readers. Maulana (2022) asserts that writing is an attempt to communicate ideas, making it a skill-based activity requiring students to utilise their knowledge, reasoning, and critical thinking skills. According to Hidayati (2024), writing is an essential ability for students to learn, in addition to speaking, listening and reading, because it is a vital aspect of communication. It is a system of less permanent marks used to represent an utterance so that it can be recovered exactly without the intervention of the utterer (Daniels, 1996). Punctuation marks are pauses and gestures used to clarify the meanings of words (Yakontova, 2020).

This implies that it is a skill that punctuation marks are signals used to guide the reader through the text and make comprehension easier without consulting the writer of the text. It is a skill that draws on sub-skills and processes such as handwriting and spelling, rich knowledge of vocabulary, mastery of the conventions of punctuation, capitalisation, word usage, and grammar and the use of strategies such as planning, evaluating, and revising text (Suliman, Ben–Almeida & Mahalla, 2019).

Writing can be defined why putting it because it is not part of the study as the use of graphic marks to represent specific linguistic utterances (Rogers, 2005). It uses a barrage of symbols, but not all are punctuation marks. Only those symbols that have a

linguistic function in a text or which have some influence on the other linguistic features in writing are considered punctuation marks; these include the following: commas, semicolons, colons, periods, question marks, exclamation marks, hyphen, dash, parenthesis, brackets, apostrophe, diacriticals, capitals, bold, underlining, italics, ellipses, and space (Krahn, 2014).

Writing is a medium of human communication representing language and emotion with signs and symbols; in most languages, writing complements speech or spoken language (Geisa, 2022). In other words, writing is how individuals convey ideas, concepts, desires, likes, hates and emotions using written signs and symbols. It is a system of arranging ideas into words, phrases, and clauses so that the writing can be read and the content can be understood (Johnson, Wilson & Roscoe, 2017).

Writing can be conceived as an imagined conversation/interaction or the meaning construction between the assumed writer and the intended reader/audience (Bazerman, 1988; Hyland, 2008; Johns, 1986). This way, writing is the skill of arranging words to form sentences and paragraphs in larger units to communicate thoughts to others (White, 1986). Writing is speech in visible form so that any reader instructed in its conventions can reconstruct the vocal messages. (Coe, 1992) Writing is a productive skill in written communication.

According to Byrne (1979: 1), "Writing involves encoding a message of some kind: that is, thoughts are translated into language." It is making up correct sentences and transmitting them through the visual medium as marks on paper (Na Phuket, 2015). He further considers writing as an activity of developing a discussion, transferring information of various kinds from the writer's world knowledge to that of the reader, and those linguistic rules facilitate the transference. However, mere linguistic rules are insufficient to do this, so knowledge of their use is needed.

In Khaniya's (2005: 148) words: "Writing is not seen just as one of the language skills to be learned, but as an effective way for a learner to generate words, sentences and even chunks to discourse". In the context of the present study and view of the foregoing, writing refers to expressing ideas, thoughts, desires and emotions using hand-written or

printed symbols. Durukan (2011) has stated that mechanical accuracies are the proper use of punctuation and spelling in writing. The competency of appropriate punctuation from a text and writing correct spellings of words enables a person to communicate effectively.

3.9 IMPORTANCE OF WRITING

By writing, writers convey their thoughts, ideas, concepts, or feelings to others through scientific works, articles, reviews, appreciation and criticism of art, drama, scripts, poetry, short stories, or novels (Munfadrila, 2022). Nowadays, written language has an important social and educational function, and its status is highly prestigious (Urbanova & Aukland, 2002). Writing has been instrumental in preserving history, maintaining culture, and disseminating knowledge through the media of legal systems (Geisa, 2022). Writing is critical because it is used extensively in higher education and the workplace. Students who do not know how to express themselves in writing cannot communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or anyone else (Walsh, 2010).

Writing enables people to pass their communication not only with contemporaries but also with the coming ages (Hidayat, Fitriyanini, Evilyuwati & Septiwana, 2022). Efficient writing is an essential prerequisite for success in today's world, and creating ability writing skills is among the most valuable contributions teachers can make to their students' future (Altamimi, 2018). Writing, thus, plays a crucial role in language learning. Writing is a way of conveying ideas to others in written form.

By writing, writers express their thoughts, ideas, concepts, or feelings to others, either through scientific works, articles, reviews, appreciation, and criticism of art, drama, scripts, poetry, short stories or novels; writing is one of the four language macro skills (Teng, 2021). Writing is a medium of communication that represents language and emotional signs and symbols. In most languages, writing complements speech or spoken language (Geisha, 2022).

Writing is a crucial component of language performance. English writing in both educational and professional settings is increasingly important in countries with non-native speakers of English (Leki, 2001). success, enabling practical expression of ideas,

thoughts and information (Barzani & Baiz, 2024). Furthermore, they postulate that writing competence encompasses more than word arrangement; it extends to organising ideas, utilising proper grammar, and conveying meaning clearly. However, L2 respondents often battle challenges and problems in writing skills (Azawo, 2023).

Competence in writing is an indispensable skill crucial for both academics and professionals. Most university students are required to write a variety of genres, including business writing, summaries, internship reports, and research proposals. EFL respondents often find that writing is a difficult task. One reason is that good writing requires a text, well punctuated, with the complexity of syntax and morphology, a wide range of vocabulary, and a good command of conventional forms and the means of signalling the relation of the texts (Cumming, 2001).

With all these details, foreign language students find English writing to be a difficult assignment, and it is impossible not to make errors in writing (Phuket, 2015). Writing is constructed by putting sentences in sequence, one after another, and should be understandable. The sentence's meaning should flow from one sentence to the next, clearly and concisely carrying the argument or point of view forward (Phuket, 2020).

Nowadays, written language has an essential social and educational function and status as a high social prestige (Urbanova & Oakland, 2002). Writing is critical because it is extensively used in higher education and the workplace, so if students do not know how to express themselves in writing, they cannot communicate well with professors, employers, peers, or just about anyone else (Walsh, 2010). The result of writing is called the text, and the recipient is called the reader. The reason for writing is legion, for instance, publication, storytelling, correspondence, record keeping and diary (Geisa, 2022). Furthermore, he says that writing has been instrumental in keeping history, maintaining culture, and disseminating knowledge through the media and legal systems. Writing ability is intrinsically linked to grammar skills (Romano, 2020).

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

In summary, the literature reviewed is a clear testimony that grammar and punctuation texts are key aspects of English. In writing, grammar and punctuation errors are rampant

in ESLs' written texts. The substantial language samples utilised in most of the research projects help validate the results of the studies, as the research respondents are likely to be representative of the populations from which they are taken. Among non-native EHL respondents, the findings indicated in most research projects that the most common punctuation errors were omission, misinformation and addition. The most dominant error was the error of omission. One of the significant causes of punctuation errors among ESL students is interlingual transfer, which refers to the negative influence of the native language on learning the target language. This is brought about by the discrepancies between the learner's native language and the target language.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored, inter alia, grammar, the primary sources of punctuation errors, types of punctuation errors and the significance of punctuation errors in writing. All the areas focused on were appropriate to the current study and have furnished the discussions of key ideas on the topic. The next chapter focuses on the research methodology used in conducting the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH PARADIGM, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research paradigm, research design, research methodology, population and sampling procedures, research setting, test development, data collection procedure, data analysis, measurement of quality control, and ethical considerations.

4.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research paradigm is the framework into which the theories and practices of the researchers' discipline fit to create the research plan. A research paradigm is a comprehensive belief system, worldview, or framework that guides research and practice in a field (Willis, 2007). Ulz (2023) postulates that research paradigms are the beliefs and assumptions that structure research. It guides the researcher through the inquiry process, including selecting a research problem, formulating research questions, and identifying the nature and types of reality, knowledge, methodology, and value of the research activity (Khatri, 2020). The research paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, transformativism, and pragmatism (Krauss, 2005).

Positivism is a paradigm that relies on measurement and reason, and knowledge is revealed from a neutral and measurable or quantifiable observation of activity, action, or reaction (Krauss, 2005; Khatri, 2020). Positivism uses a hypothesis to accept or reject the causality between variables (Bailey, 2011) and uses mainly quantitative methods to verify its hypothesis (Healy & Perry, 2000). Interpretivism is a key approach in social sciences that emphasises understanding phenomena through the subjective meanings and interpretations individuals attribute to their experiences rather than seeking objective, quantifiable truths (Healy & Perry, 2000). Constructivism is a paradigm that is actively constructed by individuals through their experiences and interactions rather than passively received (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). It emphasises understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations people attach to their experiences, often using qualitative research methods like interviews and case studies (Healy & Perry, 2000). Transformative is a framework that prioritises social justice and addresses power imbalances by placing the experiences of marginalised communities and linking

research findings to actions aimed at mitigating disparities (Grover, 2015; Irshaidat, 2019).

Pragmatism is the paradigm that enables a researcher to develop a holistic analysis to incorporate numerous relevant factors into the study thoroughly and used for quantitative research (Alharahshah & Pius, 2020). Pragmatism allows researchers to leverage the strength of quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand the phenomena. It is also a philosophical approach to research that supports the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, recognising that the best approach depends on the research question and the context, aiming for practical and actionable knowledge (Wynn & Williams, 2012). The study, therefore, employed the pragmatism paradigm because the researcher used a quantitative survey to gather data, followed by the qualitative research approach to obtain in-depth knowledge using themes. Pragmatism was a convenient paradigm in this study because it emphasised the importance of quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the use of punctuation marks.

4.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the plan or structure of an investigation used to obtain answers to research questions. It is the conceptual blueprint, strategies and methods employed to research and reach valid and reliable results (Drew, 2023). It entails the preparation of an action plan, which constitutes the outline of the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Kanday & Khanam, 2023). The research design refers to the overall strategy chosen to integrate the different components of the study coherently and logically, ensuring that the research problem is adequately addressed.

A descriptive research design was employed for quantitative research design because it allowed researchers to accurately describe and document the characteristics, behaviours, or attitudes of a population or phenomenon. On the other hand, a case study was used because it examined identifiable problems. This study used a case study to investigate the use of punctuation marks by Grade 12 EHL respondents in their natural settings.

4.4. RESEARCH APPROACH

Research methodology is the detailed procedures or techniques for identifying, selecting, processing, and analysing information about a topic. Neff (2023) claims that research methodology explains how a researcher intends to conduct research. Research methodology is the approach to resolving problems thoroughly (Mishrat, 2011). The envisaged study adopted a mixed research methodology and a descriptive research design to realise its objectives. A mixed method approach offers a few benefits to approaching complex research issues, enabling the researcher to integrate positivism and pragmatism philosophical frameworks (Fetters, 2016).

Research methodology is the primary principle that guides a research project, and it becomes the general approach to researching a given topic; it determines what research method the researcher will use (Cresswell, 2012; Dawson, 2019). Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a research problem. According to Dawson (2019), a research methodology is different from a research method because research methods are tools that the researcher uses to gather data

A research approach can be defined as the procedures of research that encompass the steps from broad assumptions to data collection, analysis and interpretation (Grover, 2015). It is a plan and procedure that consists of the steps of broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation; it is essentially divided into two categories, which are the approach of data collection and the approach of data analysis (Chetty & Friedman, 2016). A research approach is a plan of action that provides direction to carry out a research study, systematically and effectively (Mohajan, 2017; Taberdoost, 2022). It is a plan and procedure for research that spans the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

This study adopted a mixed methods research approach embracing both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This research study applied mixed methods design in a sequential explanatory manner (Quantitative approach followed by qualitative approach) whereby qualitative and quantitative methods were used to study the same phenomena, from data collection to analysis. The explanatory sequential mixed methods

are considered sequential because the initial quantitative data results are explained further with the qualitative data, and the qualitative phase follows the initial quantitative phase.

Cresswell (2003) defines mixed methods as the collection or analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which data is collected concurrently and sequentially, is given priority, and involves integrating data at one or more stages in the research process. Mixed methods employ a combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches based on the purpose of the study and the nature of the research question, aiming to provide a better understanding of the subject (Taberdoost, 2022). In a mixed method design, the quantitative method involves research techniques that gather and dissect numerical data that is measurable (Maxwell, 2013), whereas, the qualitative method approach seeks to understand people's views, interpretation of their experiences and the construction of their world (Merriam, 2009).

Quantitative research method is research used to gather information dealing with numbers and anything measurable (Mungungu, 2015). She describes quantitative research as any research that uses procedures that gather data in numerical form; more broadly, the term usually implies a research approach that aims at causal explanations of phenomena through the identification of variables which can be made based on experimental investigation (Emvula, 2020; Piccoli, 2019). A quantitative research method was employed in this study because it allowed the researchers to obtain numerical and statistical data. This method produces results that are easily summarised, compared and generalised (Kabir, 2016). The study opted for quantitative methods to produce results that are quantifiable and measurable for them to be summarised.

Qualitative research is a non-numerical examination and interpretation of observation to discover meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2016; Queros, Faria & Almeqeida 2017). Qualitative methodology aims to produce in-depth and illustrative information to understand the various dimensions of the problem under analysis. A salient advantage of qualitative data methods is that they produce rich descriptive data that must be interpreted by identifying themes and categories leading to findings that can

contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use; this aligns with this study (Mason, 2006).

4.5. POPULATION AND SAMPLING

4.5.1. Population

A population is the entire group that the researcher intends to conclude about. Lam, Riordan, Simonsson, Davidson and Goldberg (2023) estimate that population entails a group of individuals with one or more characteristics that interest a researcher. Zickar and Keith (2023) claim that population entails the set of all items from which data is garnered, and a subset of that population is a sample. Shukia (2020) postulates that a population refers to the set or group of all the units on which the research findings are applied. Therefore, the population is a set of all characteristics under study for which research findings are generalised. Six independent high schools comprising 127 Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents offer EHL as a subject and use it as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) in the Mopani East District.

4.5.2. Sample and sampling procedures

A sample is a smaller representative subset of the population. When conducting a study, the population refers to the complete set of individuals or items under observation. When measuring, testing or evaluating a larger group, a sample is a smaller group used to conclude from (Hossan, Zuran & Juharuddin, 2023). Sampling is a process that allows researchers to use a small group from a larger population to make observations and determinations.

Lam et al. (2023) assert that sampling involves selecting a sub-group of a population of interest that the researcher plans to study to generalise the target population. Sampling procedures are the steps to be followed when sampling the study respondents (Zickar & Keith, 2023). They include identifying the parameters to be measured, the range of possible values, and the required resolution, designing a sampling scheme that details how and when samples can be taken, selecting sample sizes, designing data storage formats, and assigning roles and responsibilities.

Slukia (2020) postulates that an ideal sample's sample size must be proportionally proportional to the number of units in the population. Furthermore, he contends that the units selected in the sample must represent all the characteristics of the different population units. Slukia (2020) also says that sample units must be chosen relatively without any bias. This means that all the population units must have an equal chance of being selected for the sample. Over and above, the sample should be such that it can save the researcher time, energy and money, and the sample units must be within the researcher's reach.

The researcher employed purposive sampling for quantitative data collection, involving 127 respondents. This method was chosen because it allows for the selection of individuals who are particularly knowledgeable or relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that the data gathered is focused and specific to the study's needs. For qualitative data collection, systematic random sampling was used to select a sample representing 20% of the total population from each school, resulting in 26 respondents. This method was chosen to ensure a structured and unbiased selection process where the population was selected based on the system of intervals in a numbered population. They were given numbers 1 to 5, and those who read out number 4 were included in the qualitative sample of 26. Learners' pseudonyms were randomly arranged from 1-27 and every fifth learners was selected.

4.6. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Research instruments refer to measurement tools for assessing and evaluating study subjects. Weyers, König, Santagata, Scheiner and Kaiser (2023) indicate that research instruments include questionnaires, interviews, tests, and surveys employed by researchers to measure variables in research studies. In the current study, three research instruments were used. Respondents were asked to write compositions on 'A wedding party I attended' for qualitative data collection.

For this study, a questionnaire and a standardised test were utilised to gather quantitative data. The researcher calculated the proportion of errors for each category and represented them graphically and using pie charts. For qualitative data, document

analysis in the written compositions was utilised. The teacher marked the essays and coded the errors that emerged from the respondents' essays. Three instruments were used to gather quantitative data: a questionnaire, a standardised test, and a memorandum. The questionnaire was used to collect biographical data. A standardised test was used to mobilise data on punctuation errors committed by non-native EHL in independent schools in the Mopani East District.

4.7 DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEST

The rationale of the standardised test and memorandum was to evaluate the use of punctuation marks by non-native Grade 12 EHL respondents. The test was adapted from Ngwaru (2004) and developed into a standardised punctuation test. The test addressed different types of punctuation errors. The researcher ensured that the test met the following criteria specified in the Government Gazette (2017), as follows:

- Tasks are aligned to CAPS;
- Assessment tasks and tools are valid, fair and practical;
- The assessment must be free from bias;
- The language of the assessment task is in keeping with the language level of the respondents for which it is designed; and
- The cognitive levels at which the assessment tasks are pitched are consistent with the requirements stipulated in the CAPS.

The standardised test for moderation was given to subject advisors in the Mopani East District. Subject advisors are qualified personnel responsible for moderating School Assessments (SBA) across all schools in the district. (Government Gazette, 2017). Moderation of tasks is a quality assurance activity performed to uphold principles of assessment such as fairness, reliability, and validity (Paboo, 2011).

4.8 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a preliminary trial run of the primary research to be conducted in advance. It is conducted on a small-scale basis to ascertain the feasibility of the proposed more extensive study (Simkusi, 2023). It is a small study that tests research protocols, data

collection instruments, sample recruitment strategies, and other research techniques in preparation for a more extensive study (Hassan, 2006). The purpose of undertaking a pilot study is to identify and eliminate potential areas of challenges regarding the suitability of the instrument and give a chance to make corrective changes before collecting the data (Morin, 2023). A feasibility study was conducted on 21 respondents using the quantitative approach and 5 respondents using the qualitative approach to test the reliability and suitability of the research instruments.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involves systematically gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, enabling the researcher to answer stated research questions. According to Whang, Roh, Song and Lee (2023), data collection is also used to test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes.

4.9.1 *Quantitative Data Collection*

A standardised test was administered to collect quantitative data. A standardised test is a test that is administered and scored in a consistent or standard manner (Robert, 2020). It is designed to permit reliable comparison of outcomes across all test takers because everyone is taking the same test (Claiborne, 2014). In this study, a standardised punctuation text written in English was administered to the respondents. It includes punctuation marks prescribed in the CAPS 2021 document.

Hein, Weinstein and Foard (2006) contend that standardised research instruments in the form of a test and a memo enable the researcher to interpret the numbers, give them a voice and make explanatory generalisations about the population in question. Tests and memoranda also permit the researcher to compare across studies and with different populations (Corvette, Sullivan & de Jong, 2008). The text was distributed to the respondents, who were asked to edit it, paying attention to punctuation marks. The other reason for choosing a standardised test and a memorandum was that respondents are familiar with tests and examinations, and they are constantly tested in this way by their teachers (Weinstein et al., 2006).

4.9.2 Qualitative Data Collection

For qualitative data, respondents wrote a descriptive essay whose title was already indicated earlier in the text. Compositions were adopted as a data gathering instrument because they are manageable, stable, and non-reactive data sources. This means they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence (Mali, 2023). The essays of between 200 and 250 words were written under the researcher's close supervision. All the respondents were given adequate time to complete the writing task to ensure that rich data was collected.

Documents are described by Compte and Preisle (2013) as artefact materials such as writing, which tell researchers about the inner nature of everyday events and can explain unusual and extraordinary events in human life. In other words, the documents are pre-written texts that have not been produced by the researcher but by the respondents (Ndlovu, 2019). In the context of this study, the documents were readily available in Grade 12 EHL essays to be interpreted and evaluated by the researcher to collect information on the use of punctuation marks. The 26 selected respondents wrote a composition on the topic "A Wedding Party I Attended". The errors committed by the respondents were categorised, coded and separated to identify their types. The errors were then arranged according to themes.

4.10 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a technique that interprets data using analytical and logical reasoning to determine patterns, relationships, or trends (Whang et al., 2023). In this study, the test scripts written by the respondents were collected and marked. The researcher classified the different uses of punctuation marks as correct and incorrect. The researcher calculated the proportion of errors for each category of errors and presented them graphically.

The researcher used descriptive statistics to analyse data. Classifications based on statistical analysis were made. Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version (SPSS) Version 28.0 was used to analyse data, as it brings accurate results from the use of punctuation marks. In qualitative research, document analysis supports the ideas and

evidence gathered from written essays to help the researcher's claims. Qualitative analysis was used to garner data from respondents' written compositions.

Document analysis is a research tool that can be used systematically to analyse written, verbal, or written documentation (Wilson, 2017). It was utilised to establish the presence of certain words or concepts within a text or set of texts (Colorado State University). The analysis of texts entails coding content into themes, like focus groups or interview scripts. Written texts come in numerous and varied types, and these include agendas, handbooks, and students' scripts (O'Leary, 2014).

Colorado State University (2016) contends that the definition of texts incorporates books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines, articles, historical documents and speeches. This implies that any occurrence of written communication language can be referred to as a text; hence, it can be used as a tool for document analysis. As a data-gathering technique, document analysis is both efficient and effective since the texts are manageable, stable and non-reactive data sources; this connotes that they can be read and reviewed a plethora of times and remain unaltered by the researcher's influence (Bowen, 2009).

The researcher employed document analysis to evaluate narrative compositions as a data-gathering instrument since they are manageable, stable, and non-reactive data sources. The 26 research respondents wrote a narrative composition on the topic "A Wedding Party I Attended". The researcher then classified, coded, and separated errors to identify their types and arranged them according to themes. Corder's (1974) five steps in EA research were utilised to analyse data.

4.11 MEASURES OF QUALITY CONTROL OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quality control measures entail measurements used to analyse and evaluate the quality of the different processes involved in a project against the standards of the organisation or the requirements specified during the project management planning. Dimech, Vincini, Plebani, Lippi, Nichols and Sonntag (2023) estimate that quality control measures ensure proper protocols are followed throughout data management.

4.11.1 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure (Babie, 2014). The test developed in the present study was moderated by EHL subject advisors to enhance its validity. Validity is the extent to which any measuring instrument measures what it is meant to measure (Thatcher, 2010). To enhance validity, the University Higher Degree Committee (UHDC) reviewed and verified the interpretation of the questions in the questionnaire and observation checklist before conducting the study. In the present study, the research instruments were used accurately and precisely for their intended purposes.

4.11.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the instrument in quantitative research. It is the extent to which measurements are repeatable on different occasions, under various conditions, theoretically with alternative instruments which measure the construct or skill (de Vos & Fouché, 2005). To determine its reliability, the test was tested twice on Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in Independent Schools in the Mopani District, who are non-research respondents. To enhance reliability, 25 respondents who were not part of the study group but shared similar characteristics answered a questionnaire that was provided.

4.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness is the extent to which a study is worth paying attention to and how the findings can be trusted and accurately express the respondents' experiences in the survey (Shufutinsky, 2020). The trustworthiness of qualitative data depends on the rigour of the research design, the credibility of the data sources and the transparency of the data collection and analysis process (Thatcher, 2010). Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness and enhance qualitative data regarding respondents' written essays. Several measures for trustworthiness were catered for.

4.12.1 Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the extent to which the findings and interpretations of a study are valid, trustworthy, and believable (Shufutinsky, 2020). It is essential to ensure the quality and rigour of qualitative research. Credibility focuses on establishing confidence in the truthfulness and accuracy of the data and the analysis and conclusions drawn from the study (Loh, 2013). The researcher shared the findings with respondents to enhance credibility and sought their feedback to confirm or clarify their views and experiences.

4.12.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied or generalised to other contexts or settings beyond the specific study (Zohrabi, 2013). It concerns whether the findings hold or are relevant in different situations or populations. Transferability recognises that while qualitative research findings may not be statistically generalisable to a larger population, they can still provide insight, knowledge and understanding that can be relevant and applicable in similar contexts. The researcher reflected on the respondents' biases, assumptions, and perspectives to enhance transferability, influencing the research process and findings.

4.12.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability, consistency and reliability of the research process and findings (Bengtsson, 2016). It focuses on establishing the trustworthiness and repeatability of the study, ensuring that the research can be conducted consistently and reliably and that the findings are consistent and can be replicated. A detailed description of the research design was provided to enhance dependability, including the aim, research questions, data collection methods and data analysis procedures.

4.12.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings, interpretations, and conclusions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It relates to how data collection and analysis are grounded in the respondents' perspectives and experiences

rather than influenced by the researcher's biases, values, or preconceptions. The researcher critically reflected on the respondents' assumptions and values affecting the research process and interpretations to enhance it. By acknowledging and addressing subjectivity, the potential for bias was minimised.

4.13 RESEARCH SETTING

Berends and Boerema (2007) and Parmaxi (2023) postulate that the research setting is where the data are collected. They further state that the research setting can be seen as the physical, social and cultural site where the researcher conducts the study. The study was conducted in six Mopani District, Limpopo province independent schools. The racial make-up of the population is 98% black Africans, 0,1% coloured, 0,2% Asiatic and 1,2% white and the majority of the people speak Xitsonga and Sepedi (Northern Sotho) (The Mopani District Municipality, 2013/2014).

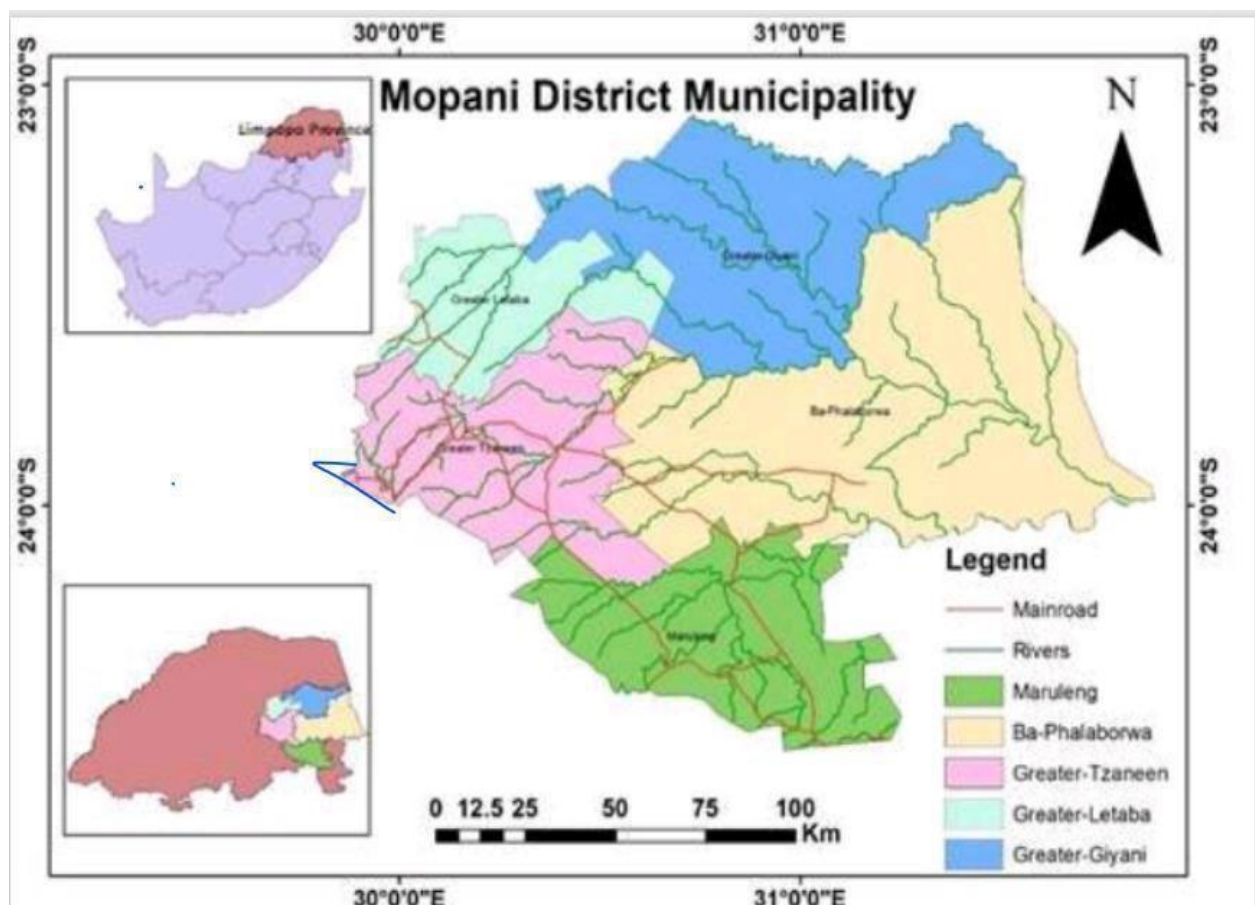


Figure 4.1: Districts and Municipalities of Limpopo Province (Sithole, 2019)

Figure 4.1 above shows the various districts and municipalities of Limpopo Province, which consists of five districts: Capricorn, Mopani, Sekhukhune, Vhembe, and Waterberg. The study was conducted in the eastern part of the Mopani District, in two Municipalities, Greater Giyani and Ba-Phalaborwa (blue and peach).

The language of instruction in the selected schools is English. Most teachers are foreign nationals from Zimbabwe and Ghana who cannot speak the predominant African languages in the Provinces (Xitsonga and Sepedi). English is the language of instruction from Grades 8 to 12. Xitsonga and Sepedi are offered as subjects from Grades 8 to 12. Although the schools are relatively well-resourced, they do not have libraries, and respondents do not have laptops.

4.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are a set of principles that guide research designs and practices. According to Bhandari (2023), the purpose of using ethical consideration in a study is to protect the rights of research respondents, enhance research validity and maintain scientific or academic integrity. Babbie (2001) postulates that ethics is a matter associated with morality, and ethical guidelines serve as standards that form the basis for the research to evaluate one's conduct. They are norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Smith, Williams-Jones, Master, Larivière, Sugimoto, Paul-Hus & Resnik, 2020).

4.14.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is the voluntary agreement regarding the role a person played in a research study after they are fully informed; this agreement shows that they are willing to participate voluntarily after having a complete understanding of what the study entails, including the duration, risks and benefits (Skidmore & Kowalczyk, 2023). Informed consent is a precondition for autonomous decision-making. It is the key ethical issue in a research study (Khanday, 2023). The respondents were, for instance, informed about the aim and significance of the study, as well as the benefits of their participation. This connotes that the researcher clarified the research's purpose so that the respondents understand what the research entails.

The respondents were assured that the research data would only be utilised for the stated purposes of the study. Bless and Hugon-Smith (2010) postulate that respondents have to be assured that the research data will only be used for the stated purposes of the research. A detailed consent form outlining the study's topic, aims and objectives was given to respondents. The consent form for respondents, except those who spoke foreign languages like Gujirati, was written in the respondents' language.

Before collecting data, the research proposal was sent to the Higher Degrees Committee for approval. Also, it was sent to the Research Offices at the University of Venda to get an Ethical Clearance Certificate. After an ethical clearance letter was granted, the researcher submitted it to the schools where data were to be collected to gain access to

the site. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principals, circuit manager, Department of Education in Limpopo Province, and parents of the respondents under 16 during the investigation.

4.14.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Poor anonymity and confidentiality strategies by a researcher not only develop unprecedented and preceded harm to respondents but also impact the overall critical appraisal of the research outcomes (Kang & Hwang, 2023). Quality research is assessed on the levels of lack of bias and favouritism which can be effectively achieved when anonymity and confidentiality standards are used in research; nowhere significantly necessary (Avidan, Loannidis & Mashhour, 2019). Therefore, understanding and applying anonymity and confidentiality in research is key to credible research.

Flemming and Zegwaard (2018) contend that it is paramount to keep the identity of research respondents confidential or anonymous; the assurance extends beyond protecting their names to avoid using self-identifying statements and information. In this study, the names of the schools or respondents were used. Instead, numbers were used to identify them. Confidentiality was also assured by protecting all data gathered and not making it available to outsiders where it might have embarrassing or damaging consequences. All the complicated data were stored in a locked cabinet and would be destroyed upon completion of the analysis. All electronic data were stored in a computer requiring password access.

4.14.3 Voluntary Participation

Briggs (2019) postulates that voluntary participation is an essential ethical ingredient and respondents should freely choose whether they should participate in research or not, in any way, big or small. Therefore, respondents were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. The respondents were clearly informed of their right to participate voluntarily without coercion or deception. They were not forced to participate in the research project to rest assured that data collection sessions involved only individuals who were genuinely willing to partake and offer data freely.

Voluntary participation means that all research subjects are free to choose to participate without pressure or coercion (Bandari, 2024). Additionally, he contends that all respondents should be able to withdraw from, or leave, the study at any point without feeling an obligation to continue; the respondents do not need to provide reasons for leaving the study. In other words, any participation in any research study is completely voluntary and respondents are free to decline to participate for any reason; they may also stop participating at any time or refuse to answer any individual questions even after signing the consent form.

4.14.4 No Harm to Respondents

Knight (2022) contends that researchers must ensure that respondents are not harmed. Harm to respondents includes physical, psychological, or exposure to embarrassment. In this study, respondents were never placed under any kind of harm. Potential sources of risk or harm to respondents should, as far as possible, be identified and mitigated when the study is being designed; risk may arise in any study, either at the time of data collection or afterwards (Knight, 2022). She goes on to say that sometimes this is unexpected, for instance, when data collection becomes more dangerous due to civil unrest or under COVID-19 restrictions.

Educational researchers have a moral obligation to avoid harming their respondents whilst carrying out research, but it does not necessarily mean that they can describe the nature of what this harm might be or how it can be recognised and so avoided. Nonetheless, it is important that researchers adequately prepare to minimise its potentially harmful effects (Buchanan & Warwick, 2021). The researcher assured the respondents that their participation in the research would not cause them any physical discomfort, humiliation or emotional stress.

4.15 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth discussion of the research paradigm, design, and methodology adopted for the study. It outlined the approach used to collect and analyse data, as well as the population under study and the sampling procedures. The chapter further highlighted the methods employed in selecting the respondents, including the

rationale behind the choice of purposive sampling for quantitative data collection and systematic random sampling for qualitative data collection. Additionally, this chapter discussed data collection techniques, the data analysis process, the measures taken to ensure quality control, and the ethical considerations observed throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presented the research design, methodology, data collection and research techniques, which serve as the backbone of the current study. This chapter presents the results of the quantitative phase, followed by the findings from the qualitative approach. Finally, the integration of both findings is discussed, and a concluding part concludes the chapter. The data were solicited and processed in response to the research problems furnished in Chapter 1. Quantitative data was obtained from respondents who wrote a standardised punctuation test. Additionally, qualitative data were garnered from 26 Grade 12 respondents who wrote descriptive compositions. The researcher reviewed both the written compositions and the standardised test in line with the research questions indicated below:

- What types of punctuation marks are frequently misused by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools of the Mopani East District?
- How do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools of the Mopani East District use punctuation marks?
- To what extent do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools of the Mopani East District master punctuation marks?

Quantitative results are distilled employing descriptive statistics, frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts. Quantitative data collected from the standardised test were analysed, recorded and categorised. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses were informed by the framework advanced by Corder (1972), which is based on the four steps in analysing errors:

- Collection of samples of learner language;
- Identification of errors;
- Description of errors; and
- Explanation/evaluation of causes of errors.

5.2. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative research approach facilitates explicit observations, enabling straightforward data aggregation, comparison and summarisation. It empowers the researcher to employ statistical tools and techniques, from fundamental descriptive statistics to cutting-edge mathematical modelling. After the researcher had administered the standardised test, he marked the respondents' scripts and the errors were categorised and subjected to in-depth analysis. Error frequencies were calculated for each category, and category-wise comparisons were made using tabular and graphical summaries.

Results from the data collected are reported in frequency tables and bar graphs, providing a comprehensive overview of the error distribution. The data utilised an unpunctuated lowercase text that research respondents punctuated according to the eleven major punctuation marks specified in the CAPS document. In addition, remedial actions required to alleviate the errors for each punctuation category and to minimise their recurrences were suggested.

The data is presented below in the form of frequency tables and bar graphs showing the frequency of wrong responses for every error category. The data is shown in tables and bar graphs which are explained and interpreted; the causes of the errors are then established. In addition, remedial actions required to alleviate the errors for each adjective category and to minimise their recurrence are suggested.

To commence the presentation of the results, firstly, the biographical information of the respondents is presented using tables; pie charts and bar graphs, as well as tables, were then used to present the errors committed by respondents.

5.2.1 RESPONDENTS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (QUANTITATIVE)

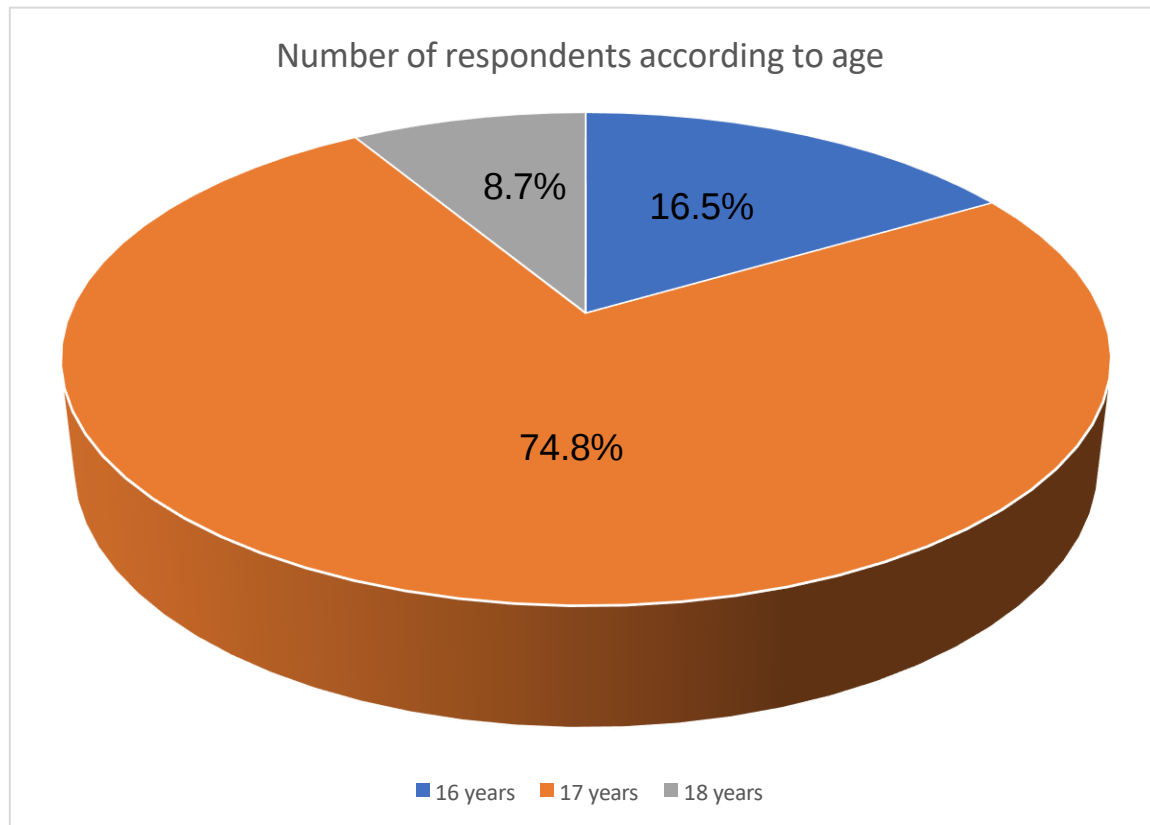


Figure 5.2.1.1: Ages of respondents

The above pie chart shows that the respondents' ages were predominantly 17 years old (95), with smaller groups of 16 year-year olds (21) and 18-year-olds (11). Understanding the age distribution helps identify specific learning needs and abilities.

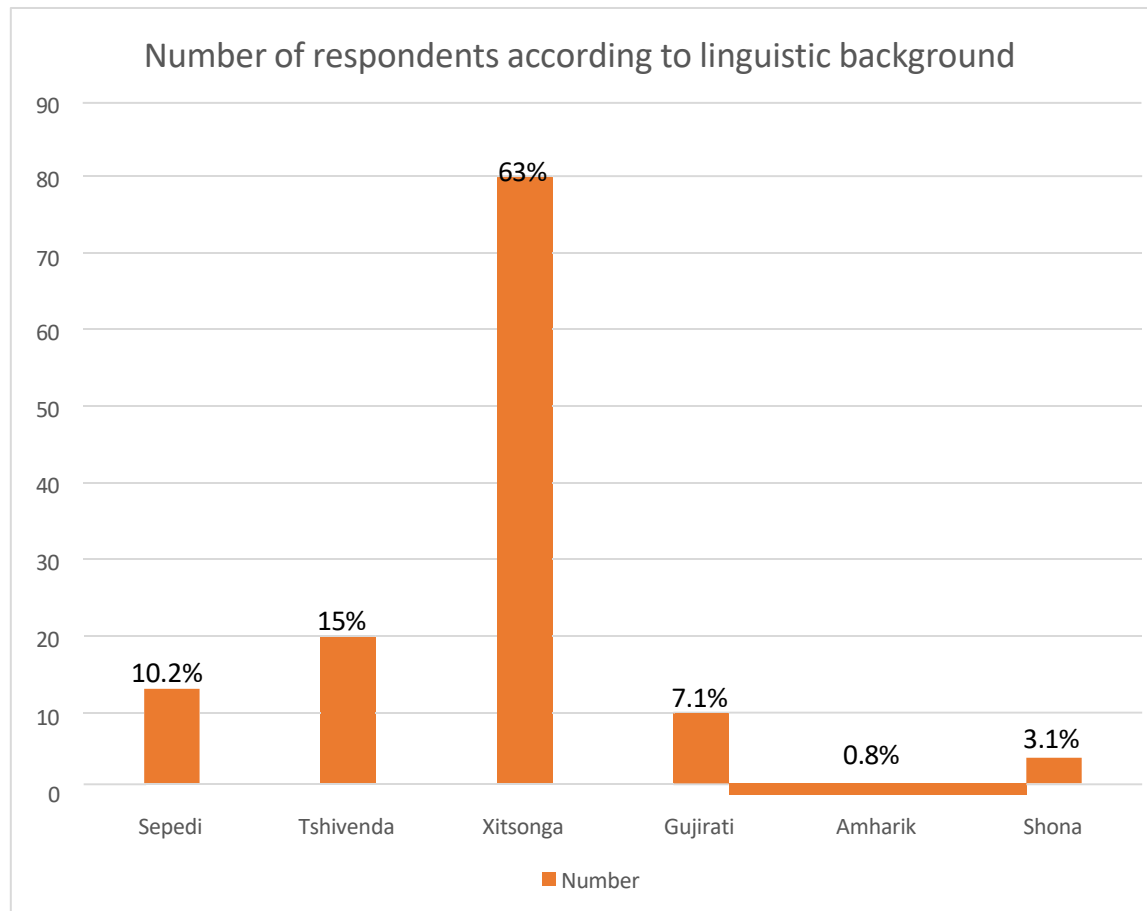


Figure 5.2.1.2: Respondents according to linguistic backgrounds

The above chart shows that the study's demographic breakdown reveals a diverse linguistic landscape in the Mopani East District, with a clear predominance of Xitsonga speakers. Out of the 127 respondents¹ (0,8%) spoke Amharic, 80(63%) spoke Xitsonga, 9(7%) spoke Gujarati, 13(10,2%) spoke Sepedi, 19(15%) spoke Tshivenda and 4(3,1%) spoke ChiShona. The district's linguistic diversity is evident, with six languages represented, with Xitsonga speakers comprising nearly two-thirds of the sample, indicating the language's widespread use in the Mopani East District. Sepedi and Tshivenda speakers constitute significant minority groups. The implication is that the respondents are not native speakers of English. Therefore, they are influenced by their home languages.

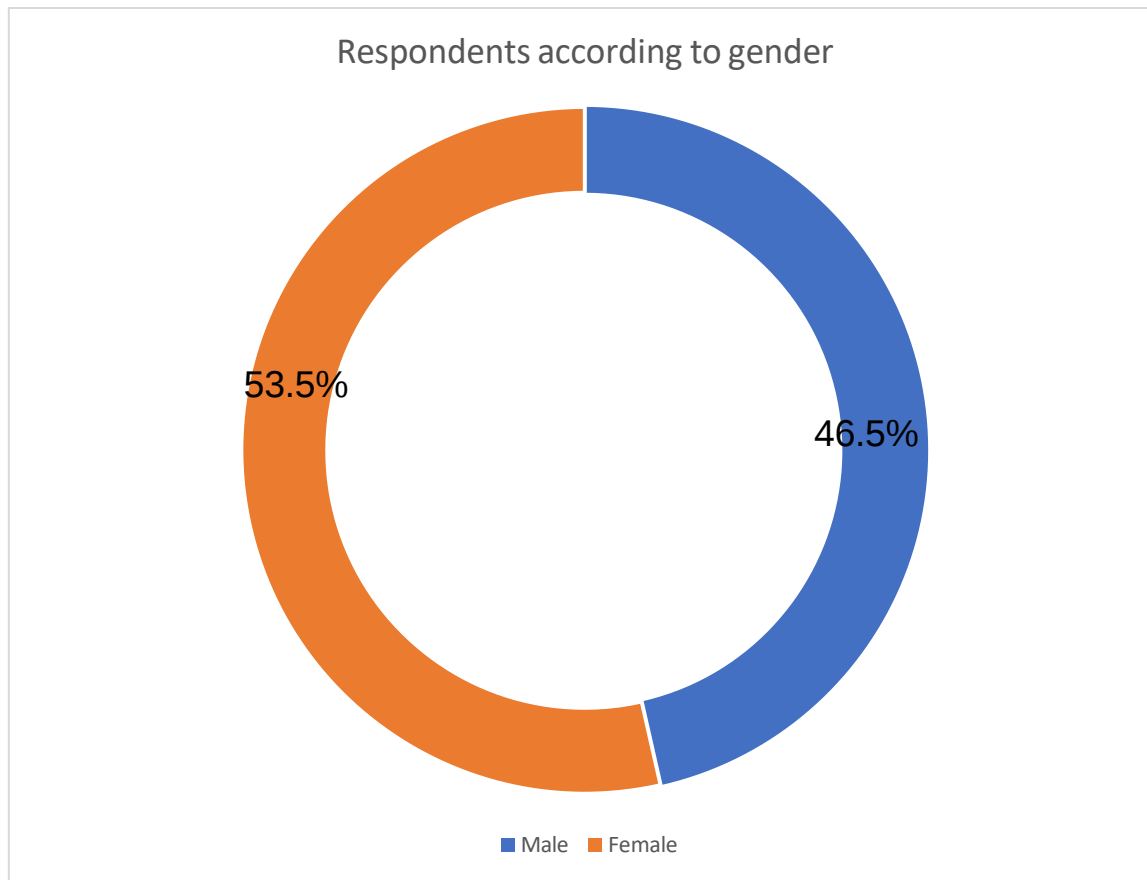


Figure 5.2.1.3: Respondents according to gender

The respondent demographics reveal a near-even split, with approximately 46,5% male and 53. 5% female. This implies that the results of this study can be generalised to both males and females as the gender distribution is relatively balanced.

5.2.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA ON THE USE OF PUNCTUATION MARKS

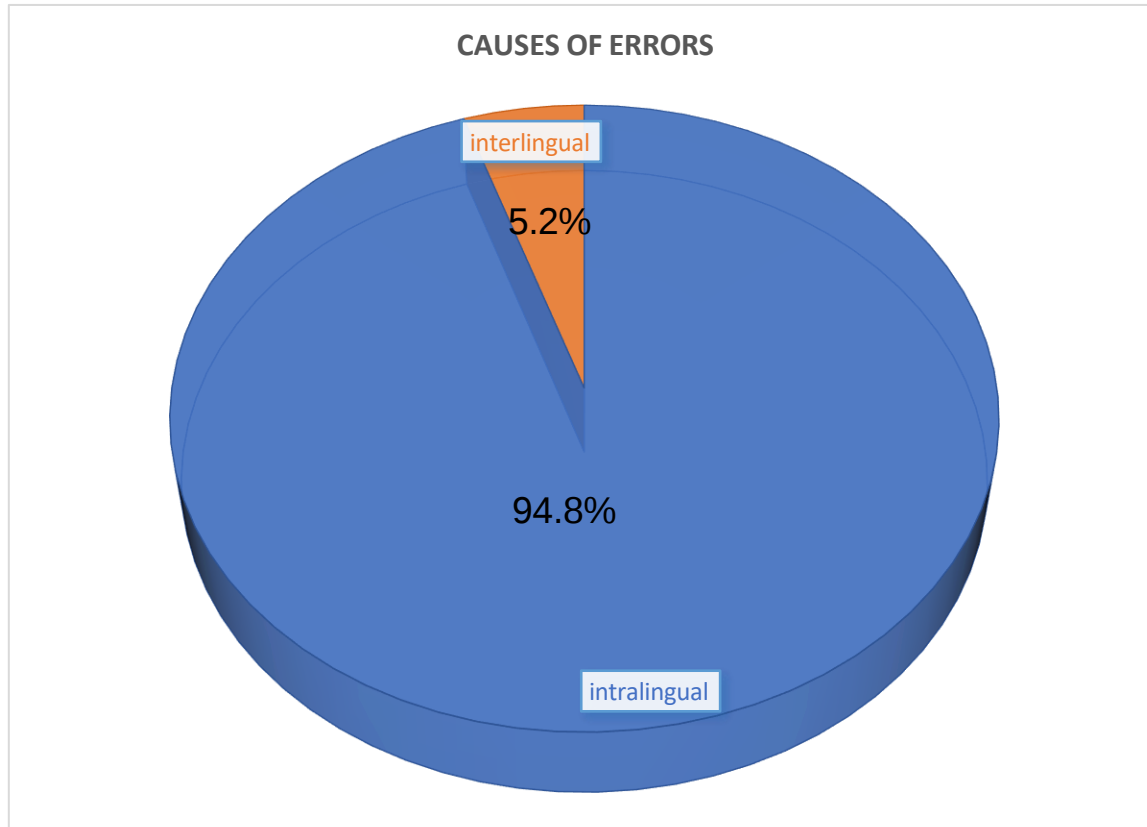


Figure 5.2.2.1: Causes of errors

The graph above shows that most of the errors made by the respondents were intralingual (94, 8%), which means that they are attributed to the interference of the target language. They occurred when respondents were applying incorrect punctuation rules within their target language. Factors contributing to intralingual punctuation errors were over-generalisation, false analogies and rule misapplication, which refers to misunderstanding or misapplying punctuation rules (Lado, 1957). This could be brought about by inadequate punctuation instruction, insufficient practice or reinforcement, as well as confusing or inconsistent teaching materials.

The few interlingual errors shown in the graph could result from word order differences between languages. The finding is in line with Lado's (1970) CAH theory, such errors occur when respondents transfer punctuation rules or patterns of their native language to English. The error could also be attributed to the absence of some English punctuation

rules in the respondents' native languages. A case in point is using the apostrophe to show possession, which is non-existent in the respondents' native languages, for instance, in Xitsonga and Tshivenda, but only in their written compositions.

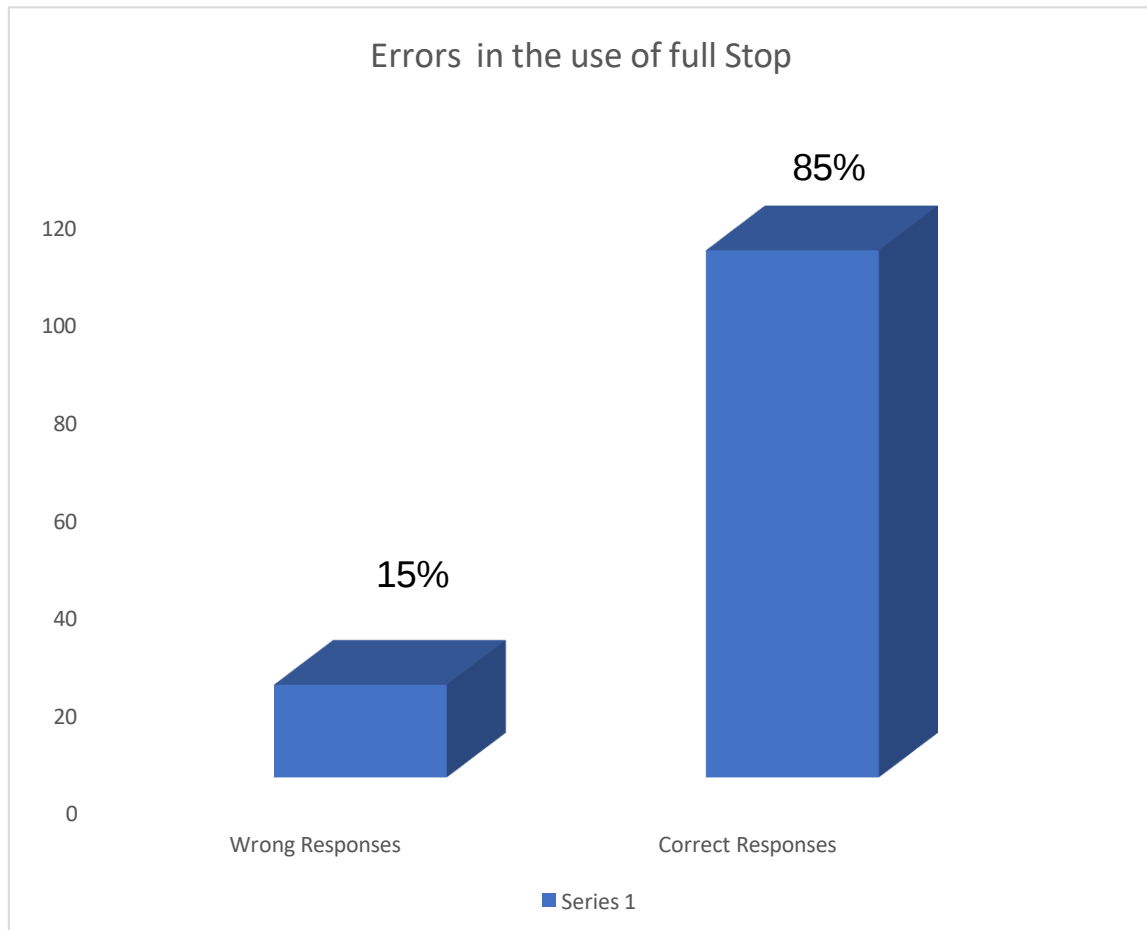


Figure 5.2.2.2 Errors in the use of full stop

Punctuate the sentence: noah is an intelligent boy i do not know why he failed

Figure 5.2.2.2 presents a question on the use of the full stop. The findings are that most respondents had the competence to use punctuation marks (85%). Only 15% omitted the full stop between the two given sentences or used the comma to separate the dependent clauses. These findings align with Gezmis (2023), which was aimed at

analysing punctuation errors. The study found that the full stop was the only punctuation mark that was used correctly by the majority of respondents.

Despite the success of the 85%, there is still a problem with the 15% who grapple with its use. These assume that one of the two clauses they separated with the comma was a dependent clause, which caused them to separate the two independent clauses (complete sentences) with commas, creating a comma splice, a linguistic error. Each independent clause having its subject and predicate can stand alone as a complete sentence, so the misuse of the comma in this way disrupts sentence clarity and flow, as the comma alone is insufficient for adequately connecting two independent sentences (Kwiatkoski, 2024).

The error could be attributed to simplification, which is brought about when respondents fail to distinguish between dependent and independent clauses of the target language. Some respondents could not clearly define the boundaries of the two clauses, perhaps due to confusion with coordinating clauses. As explained under the CAH, this is because of the discrepancies between the construction of independent clauses of the respondents' native languages and those of the target language. Some respondents made intrasentential misplacements at the full stop. In other words, they inserted the full stop before the end of the sentences. One of the respondents punctuated the sentences as shown below:

I do not know why he failed.

As depicted by the couple of sentences above, intrasentential misplacement caused the second sentence to be incomplete and unintelligible. The finding is congruent with Cordeiro's (1998) research study that analysed errors in period placement by Grade eight respondents. The study revealed that the respondents made intrasentential misplacements of the full stop at both syntactic and semantic boundaries. This error could be a result of the unclear understanding of sentence structure, and respondents might be unaware of the fact that a full stop is used after a complete idea has been fully

stated and the final word is complete, or perhaps it could be a result of carelessness on the part of the respondents. The punctuation of incomplete sentences, done by some respondents, resulted in sentence fragments that can be confusing or unclear such as ‘dressed in their best clothes.’

A few respondents punctuated the second sentence (above) with a question mark. They mistook the punishment for a question because the sentence contains the question word “why.” The sentence is an indirect question, and a question mark is used when asking direct questions, so it must not be used after an indirect question (Estioko, 2020). It is a terminal punctuation mark that turns a sentence into a query (Nurhahidah, 2018). Furthermore, she states that it is used to express uncertainty.

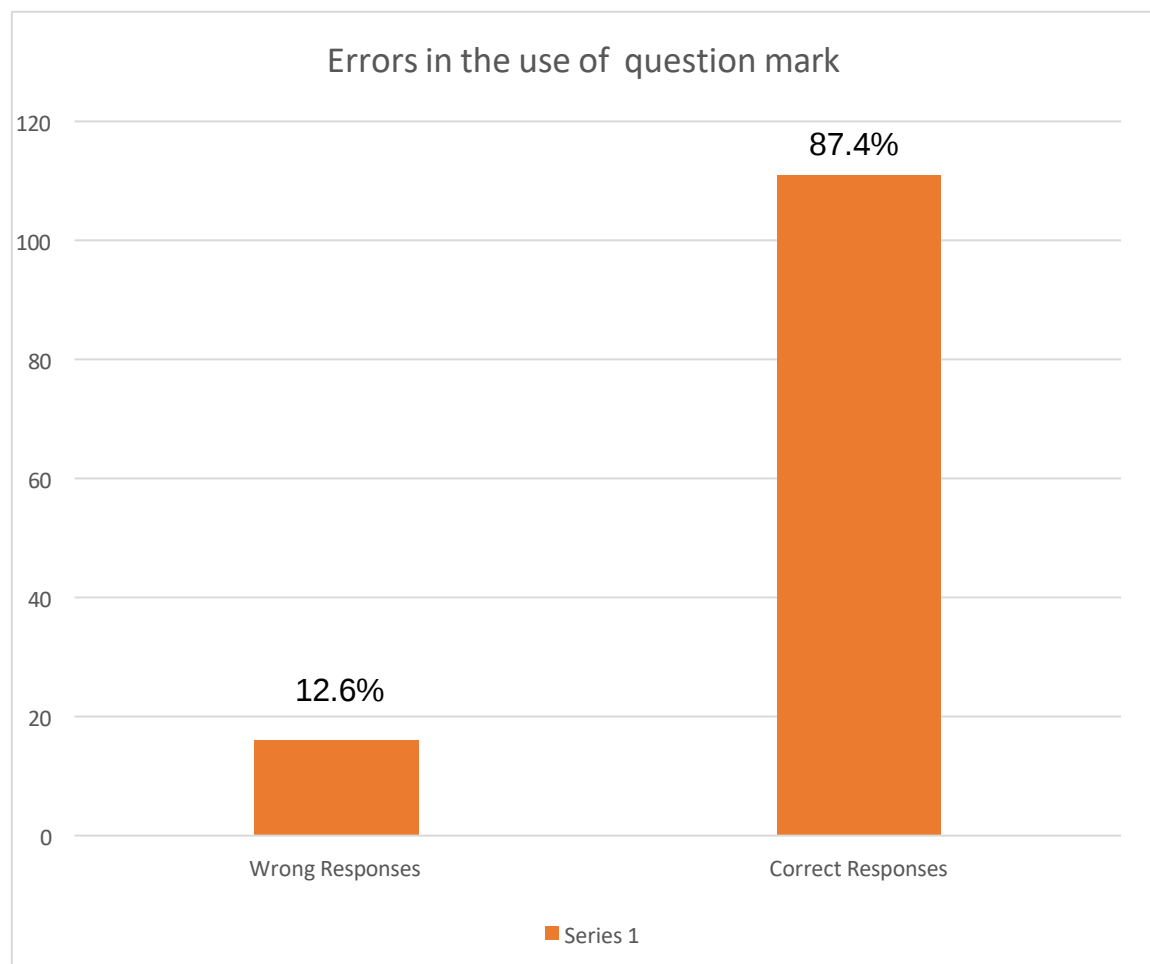


Figure 5.2.2.3 Errors in the use of question mark

Punctuate the sentence: do you know why the teacher punished Thomas

Figure 5.2.2.3 focuses on a question and the use of the question mark or interrogative mark. The findings are that 87.4% of the respondents had the competence to punctuate the sentence correctly. 12.6% could not use the question mark to punctuate the sentence. The respondents were erroneously putting full stops at the end of the sentence, indicating that they might have confused the direct question with an indirect one.

Salomo (2023) analysed the use of punctuation errors in the writing of the seventh Graders at an upper primary school in the Oshana region. The findings of this research project align with Salomo's findings in the sense that some of the respondents in this study exhibited problems in using the question mark. Grade 12, non-native EHL respondents still exhibit errors in the use of the question mark, as evidenced by the findings in this study. Sometimes, they also erroneously omitted it at the end of interrogative sentences. The error could cause an unclear understanding of the question structure due to reliance on the mother tongue. This error could also be attributed to carelessness caused by a lack of revision and proofreading to iron out slips in the pen. Ashraf (2016) affirms this by pointing out that punctuation errors are equally caused by a lack of practice on punctuation marks, lack of teaching of punctuation marks within a broad context, lack of checking of punctuation errors, lack of editing and proof-reading as well as consecutive feedback on punctuation errors.

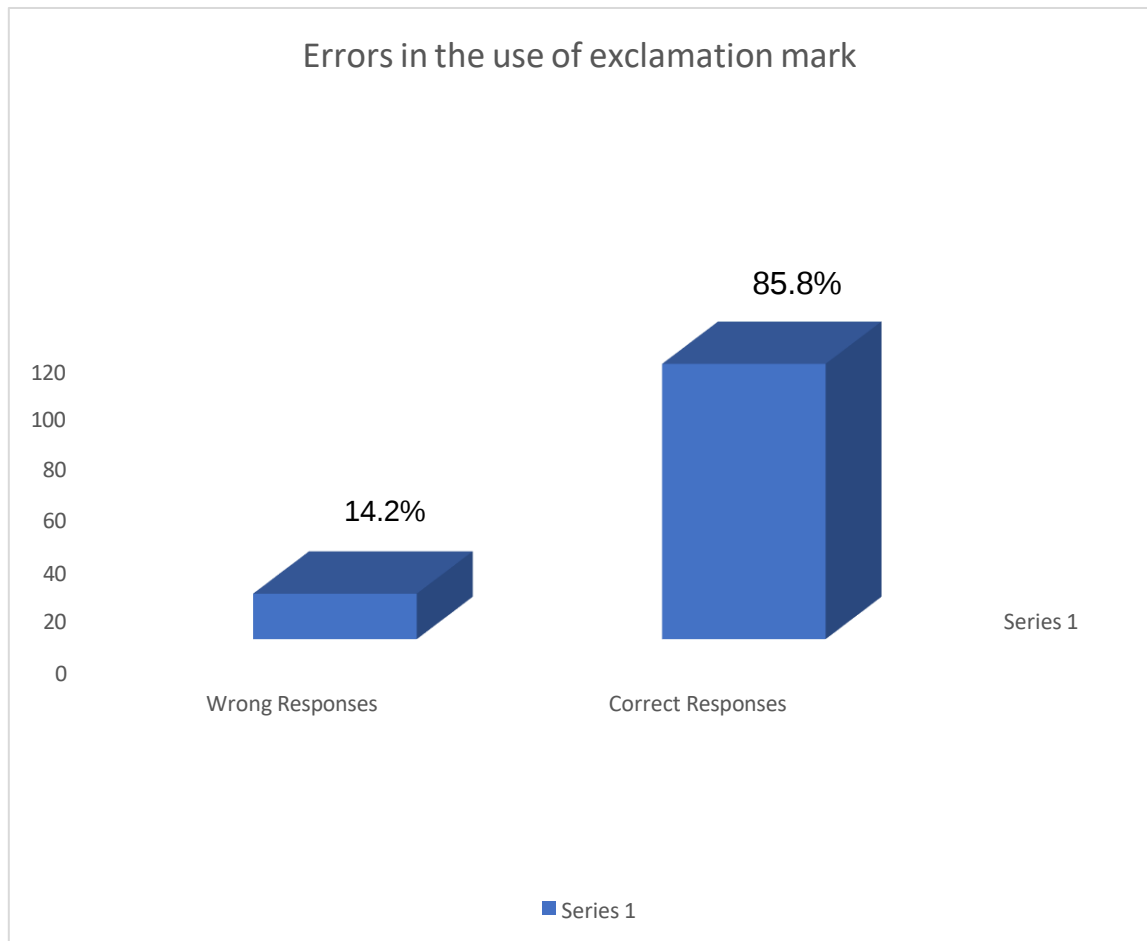


Figure 5.2.2.4 Errors in the use of exclamation mark

Punctuate the sentence: what a beautiful day for a hikes

The graph above displays the result of the question addressing using the exclamation mark. Most respondents (85, 8%) responded correctly to the question by ending the sentence with an exclamation mark. A minority of respondents (14, 2%) punctuated the sentence with a question mark, which was a clear indication that they mistook the explanatory sentence for a question. This is because at face value, the sentence looks like a question because of the use of the word “what” which is sometimes used to introduce questions. Though small, the number of respondents who lack the competence to use the exclamation mark is worrisome and should not be disregarded.

A few respondents ended the exclamation with a complete stop, the most used punctuation mark. This error could be attributed to the fact that the respondents were

unaware that the sentence was an expression of surprise. The response appears to lack awareness that an exclamation mark shows surprise or emphasis, a full stop indicates a pause and a question mark indicates to the reader that the author has asked them something. The above sentence expresses surprise, and it must end with an exclamation mark, the respondents' lack of this awareness brews confusion between exclamatory sentences and interrogative sentences. This error could be attributed to the respondents' unclear understanding of the purpose of the sentences.

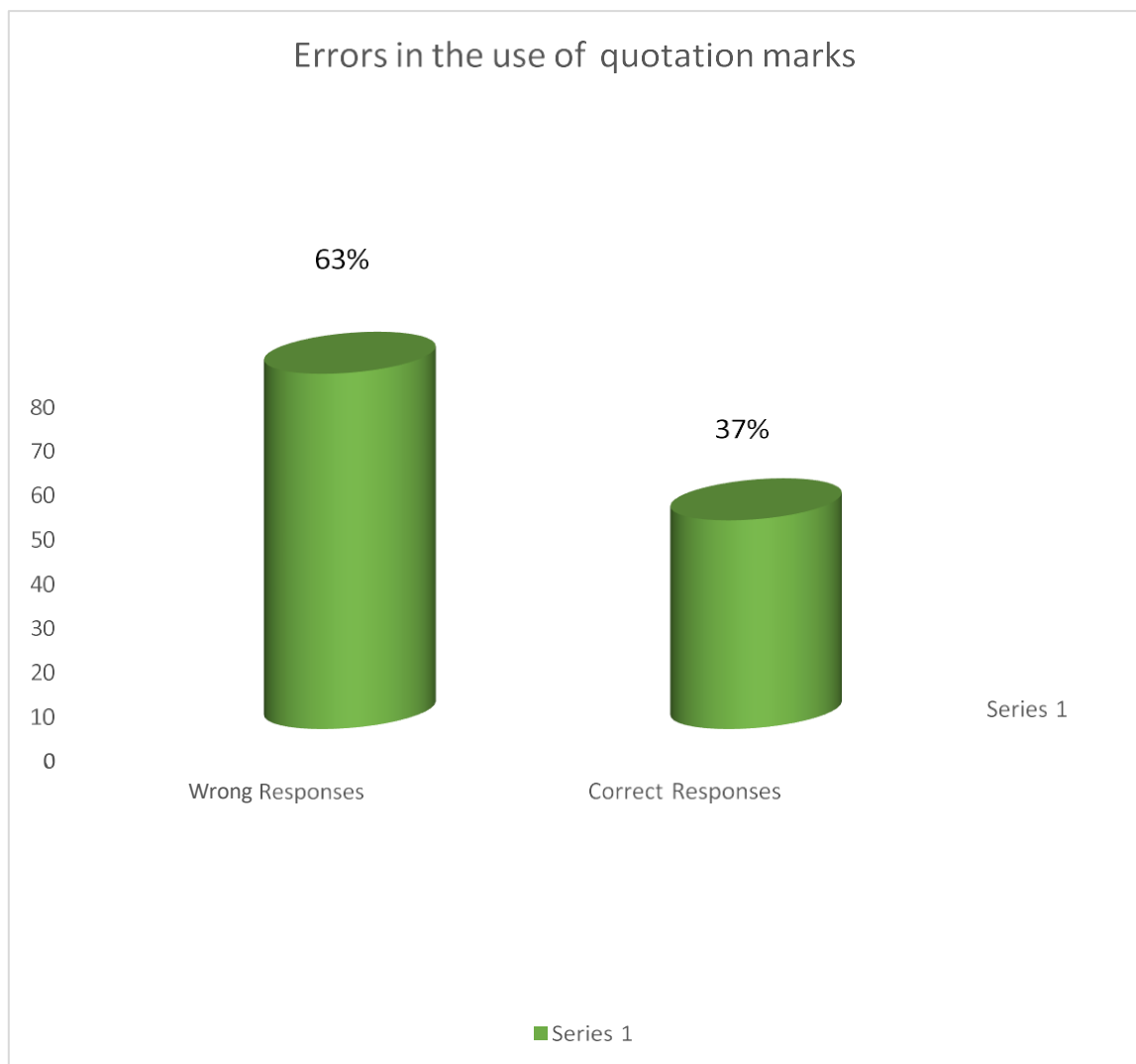


Figure 5.2.2.5: Errors in the use of quotation marks

Punctuate the sentence: he said I'll be there at five

The graph above addresses the question on quotation marks. Most respondents (63%) lacked the competence to punctuate the sentence using quotation marks. Out of the 127 respondents, 63% were incompetent in the use of punctuation marks. This is in line with Nurhaidah's (2018) study, which revealed that students could not use quotation marks in sentences whose meanings they did not understand. In addition to that, they could not distinguish between a quote and a typical sentence.

They capitalised the word "he" and put a full stop at the end of the sentence, which was clear testimony that they could not distinguish between a quote and a simple statement. As a consequence, they omitted both the comma and the inverted commas. This could have been caused by overgeneralisation of the full stop, which implies that this is an intralingual or developmental error. Some respondents incorrectly placed quotation marks by enclosing the phrase "He said" with inverted commas, which connotes that they could not distinguish between the speaker's actual words and the reporter's. The error might have occurred due to a lack of understanding of direct speech and quotation mark rules.

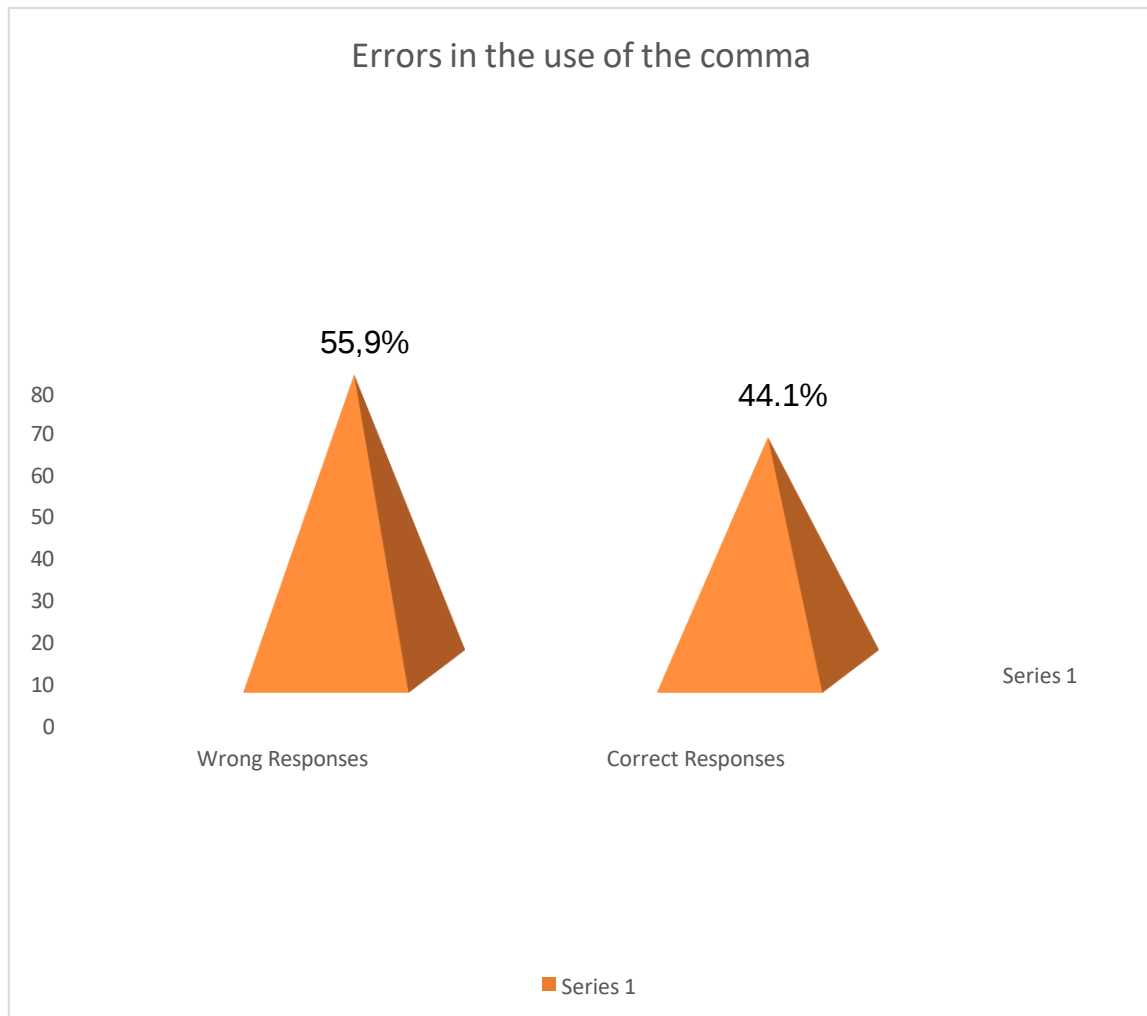


Figure 5.2.2.6: Errors in the use of the comma

Punctuate the sentence: The sweets buns and biscuits which we bought were equally shared among the athletes

The graph above depicts the results of the question addressing the use of the comma. It shows that most respondents (55.9%) lacked the competence to use the comma while the other (44.1) of the respondents successfully completed the task. Some respondents omitted the commas to separate the list of given items. Nineteen (19) respondents, amounting to (15%), inserted full stops after the word “bought” in the sentence, while 51 respondents, constituting 40%, did not put a comma between the words “sweets” and “buns”. The sentence above is a great example of a complex sentence that requires careful punctuation. The respondents could not punctuate the sentence due to a lack of

comma separation, meaning they failed to separate items in the list as expected by the researcher.

Respondents misused commas around subordinate clauses. Consequently, they omitted commas around the non-essential clause, "which we bought." This error could have been caused by ignorance of rule restrictions. A lack of understanding of comma functions could cause it. Such an error can also result from difficulty processing complex sentence structures. It can also result from inadequate knowledge of punctuation rules. This error is interlingual or developmental. The current study's findings are consistent with Rahman's (2022) research highlighting the comma as a particularly problematic punctuation mark.

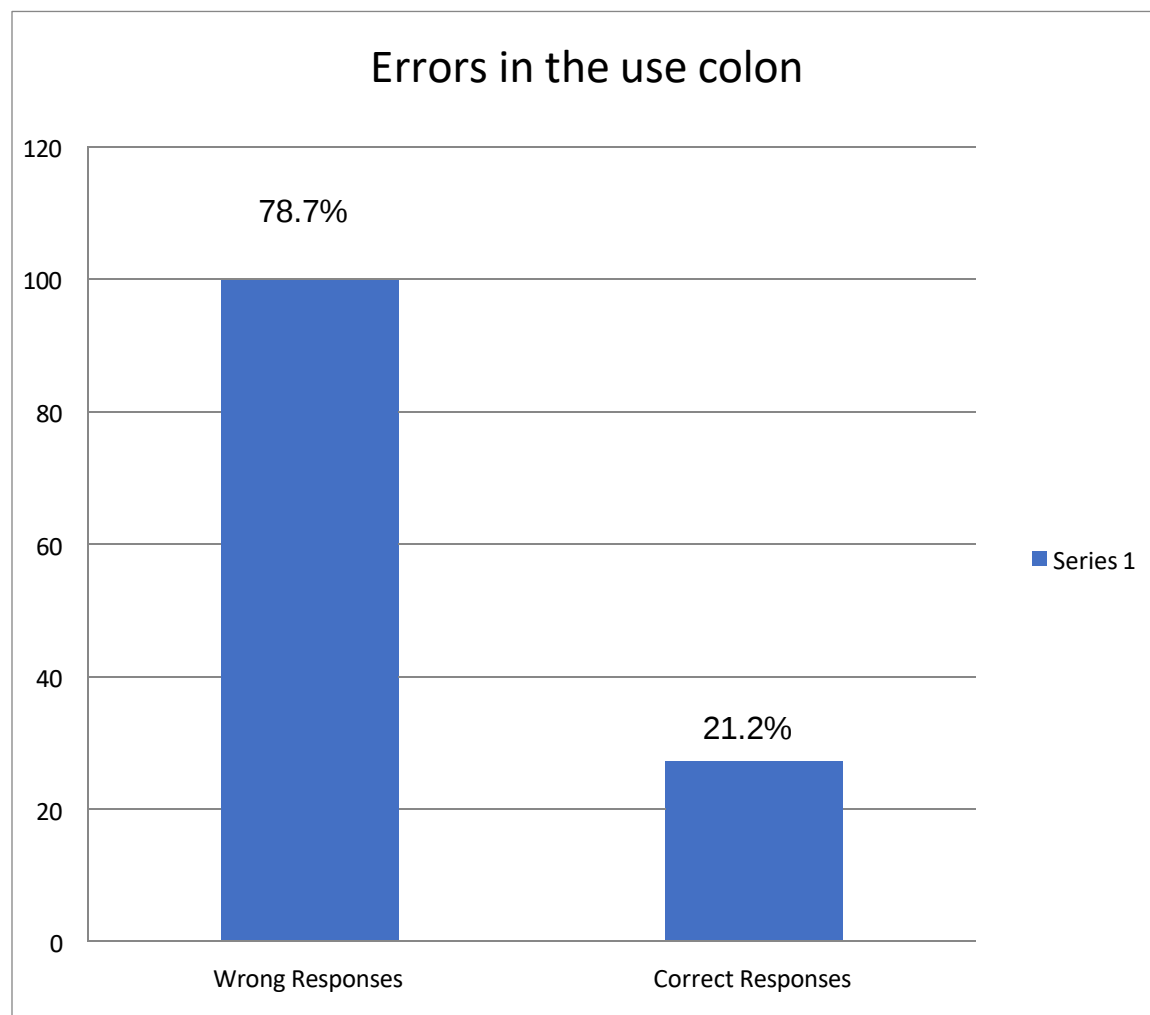


Figure 5.2.2.7: Errors in the use of colon

Punctuate the sentence: I have three favourite cities Paris, Rome, and Barcelona.

The graph above deals with the question of the use of colons. The graph shows that (78%) of respondents lacked the competence to use the colon, and (21.2%) had the competence to use it. Most respondents who punctuated the sentence wrongly used commas instead of colons. This error could be attributed to inadequate learning which is usually a result of ignorance of rule restrictions, since the error might have resulted from overgeneralisation of the use of the comma, resulting in some of the respondents erroneously using commas instead of colons. Ignorance of rule restrictions is a type of transfer caused by using the rules that have been mastered in new contexts inappropriately (James, 1998). This is an example of an intralingual or developmental linguistic error, which is an error made by a respondent as he progresses through the process of language learning.

In this question, the research respondents erroneously applied the rule to separate clauses and used it to introduce the list of cities. The error could be a result of a limited understanding of colon usage and rules. The error could be attributed to a lack of knowledge of how to use the colon to introduce a list or enumeration. Some respondents also omitted commas to separate the names of the cities, which was caused by a lack of clarity about the use of commas to separate the cities. The error in the sentence *I have three favourite cities Paris, Rome, and Barcelona* instead of *I have three favourite cities: Paris, Rome, and Barcelona* could also have been caused by inadequate practice and limited exposure to similar sentence structures.

This study's results align with Yakhontova's (2020), Rahman's (2022) and Sinclair's (2023) findings, which identified the colon as one of the most challenging punctuation marks.

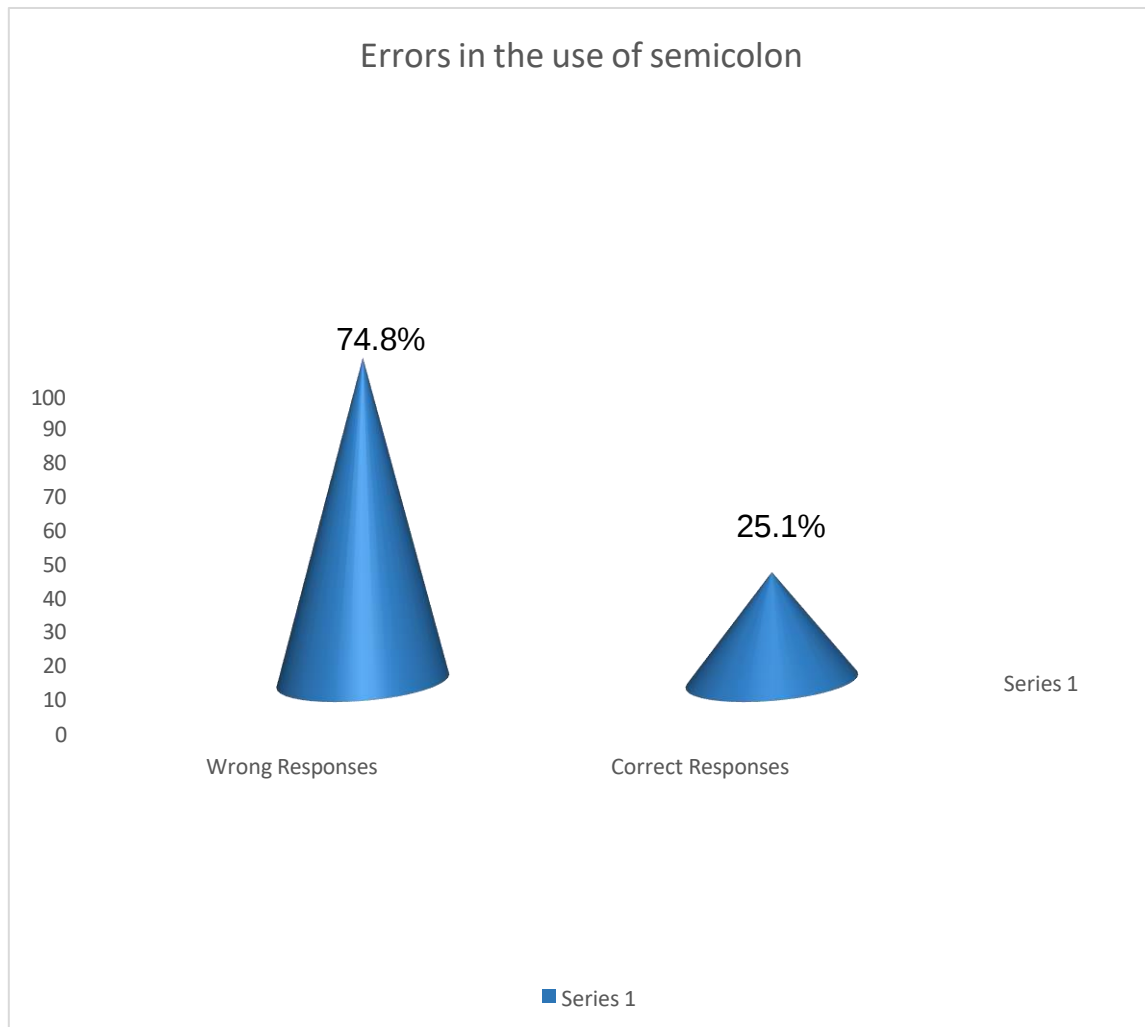


Figure 5.2.2.8: Errors in the use of semicolon

Use the semicolon to punctuate the following sentence.

The company has offices in New York London and Tokyo its headquarters are in London

As illustrated in the graph above, respondents struggled significantly with the semicolon usage question. The resemblance between the comma and the semicolon led most respondents to incorrectly substitute the comma for semicolons. Some of the respondents just omitted the semicolon, which is clear evidence that they have difficulty distinguishing between dependent and independent clauses. The results align with Almin and Ahmed (2012), Arslan (2023) and Katrina et al. (2023) which showed that the semicolon was one of the challenging punctuation marks.

One of the uses of a semicolon is to separate two independent clauses (complete sentences) that are closely related. A few respondents erroneously used semicolons to separate the list of cities. This kind of error is an intralingual error, which occurs when respondents misapply punctuation rules within their target language, often due to overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restrictions or insufficient practice (James, 1998; Arslan, 2023); Katrina et al. (2023).

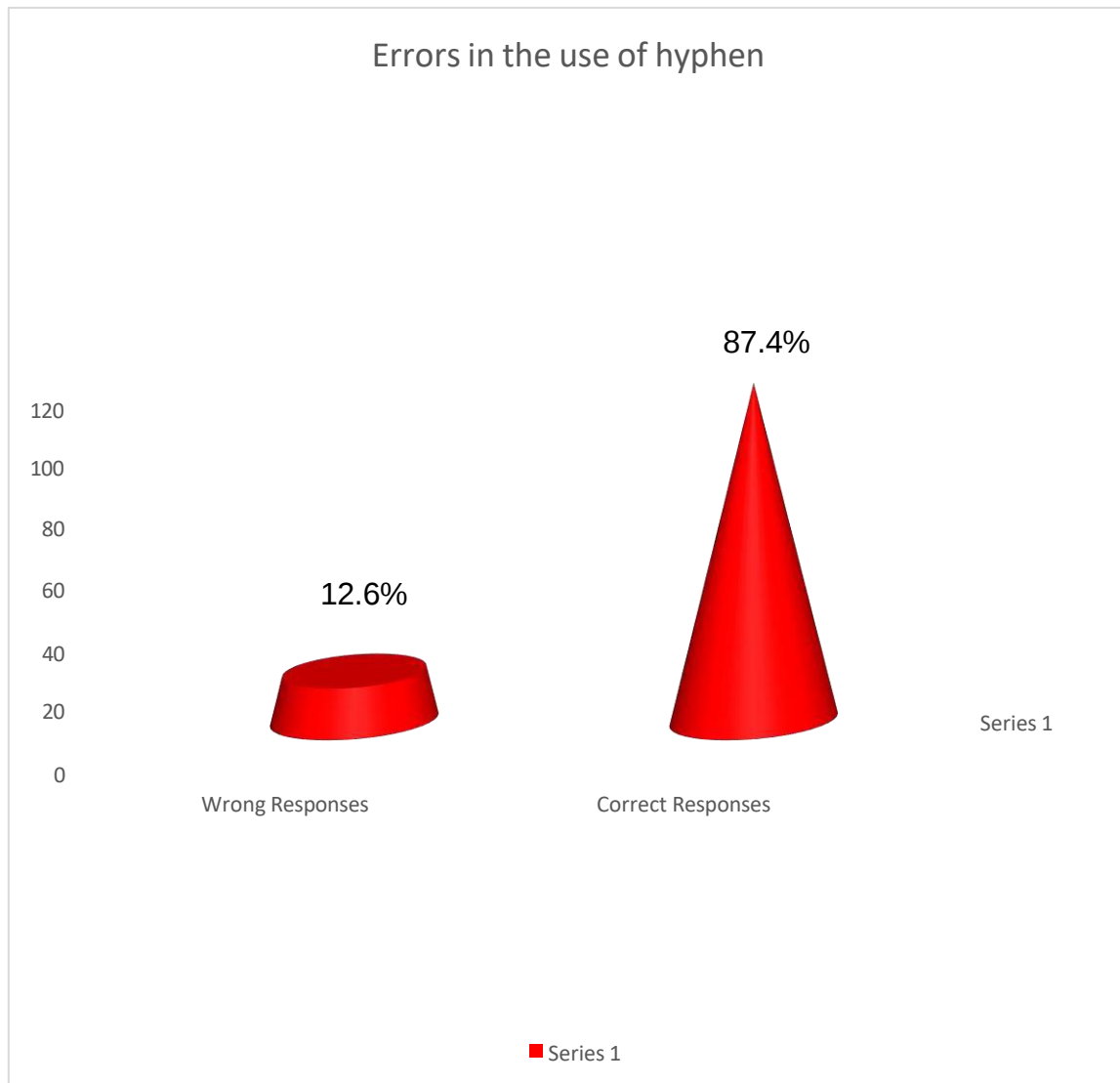


Figure 5.2.2.9: Errors in the use of hyphen

Punctuate the sentence: the fulltime job offer included health benefits

The graph above summarises the respondents' responses to the question that deals with the use of hyphens. The majority 110 of respondents amounting to 87.4%) used hyphens proficiently. However, the remaining respondents (12,6%) who lack the competence to use hyphens correctly are still a cause for concern. The results align with Gezmis' (2023) study, which found that most of the students were competent in using the hyphen. Most respondents who lack hyphen skills omit the hyphen in the word "full-time."

The error could be attributed to the fact that some respondents cannot distinguish between closed compounds like "toothbrush", open compounds such as "post office", and hyphenated compounds like "full-time." The respondents' confusion could result from the fact that they are not hyphenated when a noun precedes words, like full-time and well-known. They are only hyphenated when they precede a noun. Have a look at the examples below. In other words, such words are only hyphenated when used as adjectives.

Peter is a full-time actor.

She works full-time as a software engineer.

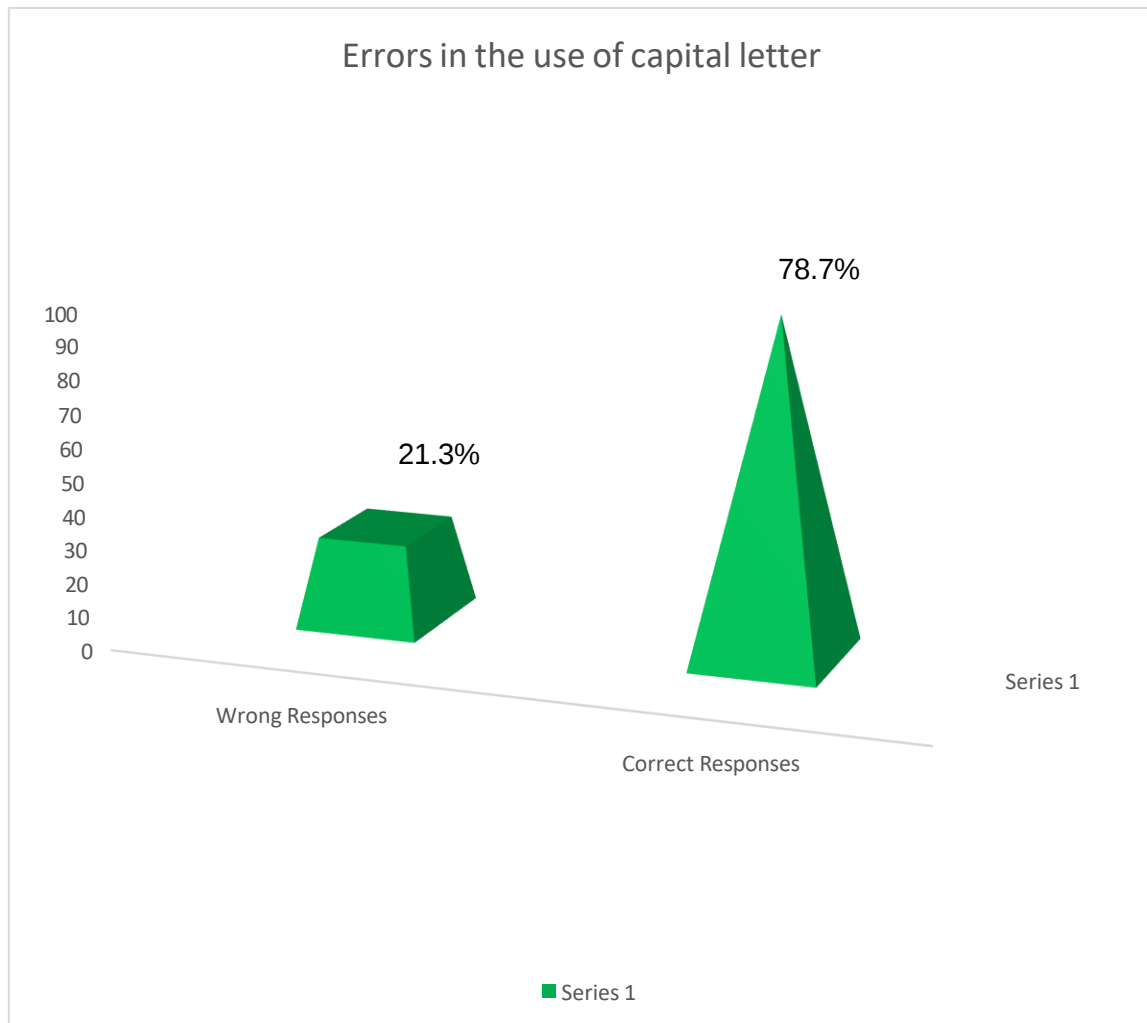


Figure 5.2.2.10: Errors in the use of capital letter

Punctuate the sentence: pedro is a portuguese novelist he will visit our university tomorrow.

The graph in Figure 5.2.2.10 above visually shows respondents' responses to the question based on the use of the capital letter. It recorded 100 respondents amounting to 78.7% correct responses compared to 21,3% incorrect. The area where errors were prominent was the capitalisation of proper adjectives. The few respondents who gave wrong responses omitted capital letters and inappropriate adjectives. Proper adjectives should be capitalised regardless of where they appear in a sentence because they are produced from proper nouns. This is an instance where an inadequate grasp of grammar affects the ability to use punctuation marks because this error is brought about by

respondents' unclear understanding of types of adjectives. The research respondents could not distinguish between proper adjectives and common adjectives. Respondents generally did not understand the rules involved in the use of capital letters. This finding concurs with Challay and Jones' (2019) research study, which found that the most dominant error committed by ESL respondents was the omission of capital letters in proper adjectives.

There were instances where respondents did not capitalise the first words in sentences. The errors might be performance errors attributed to the carelessness of the respondents when they rush through their work. This finding aligns with Saragih's (2019) research, which found that carelessness was one of the causes of respondents' errors.

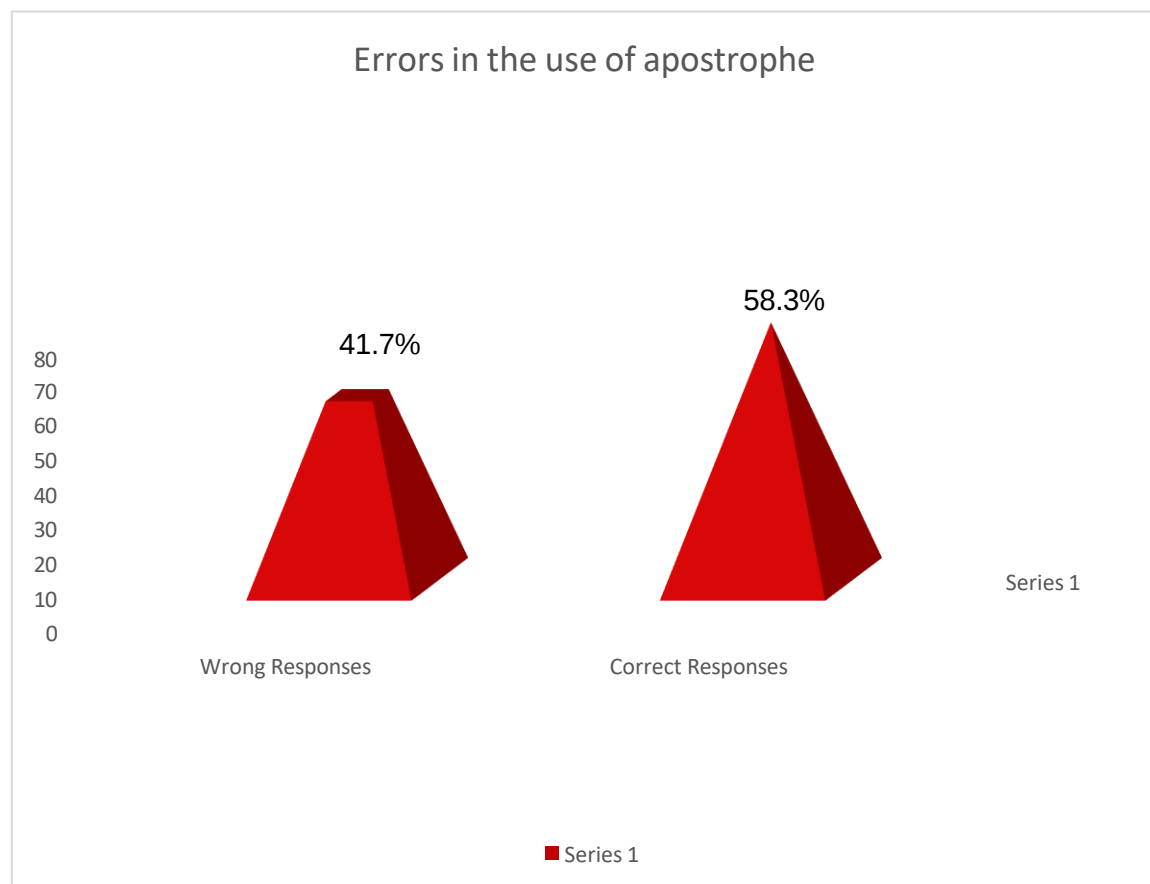


Figure 5.2.2.11: Errors in the use of the apostrophe

*Punctuate the sentence: *dont forget to take the teachers book its on the table.*

Figure 5.2.2.11 above provides a summary of respondent responses regarding the use of the apostrophe. Most respondents (58, 3%) demonstrated competence in using the punctuation mark. However, the data revealed a notable deficiency in apostrophe competence among a subset of respondents. Many respondents placed the apostrophe after the letter “s” in the word teachers. This could be a result of confusion between the singular and plural possessive forms, which are “father’s” versus “fathers” The possessive plural form “fathers” is used when the writer refers to many fathers who own or possess something. The singular possessive form “father’s” suggests that the father referred to is one.

A few respondents omitted the apostrophe in the word “its.” The respondents confused the pronoun “its” with the contraction “It’s”, which is the short form of the word “It is.” This is in line with Ali et al. (2020), who indicated that many respondents lacked the competence to use the pronoun “its”. They constantly confused it with the contraction “it’s”. The cause of this could be simplification since Mamoud (2014) opines that the omission of linguistic items at the level of spelling or punctuation marks is an ideal feature of simplification. Southern African languages such as Xitsonga, Sepedi and Tshivenda do not use apostrophes to indicate possession. As a result, non-native EHL respondents of Southern Africa tend to omit the apostrophe in sentences like, “Sipho’s book is on the table.”

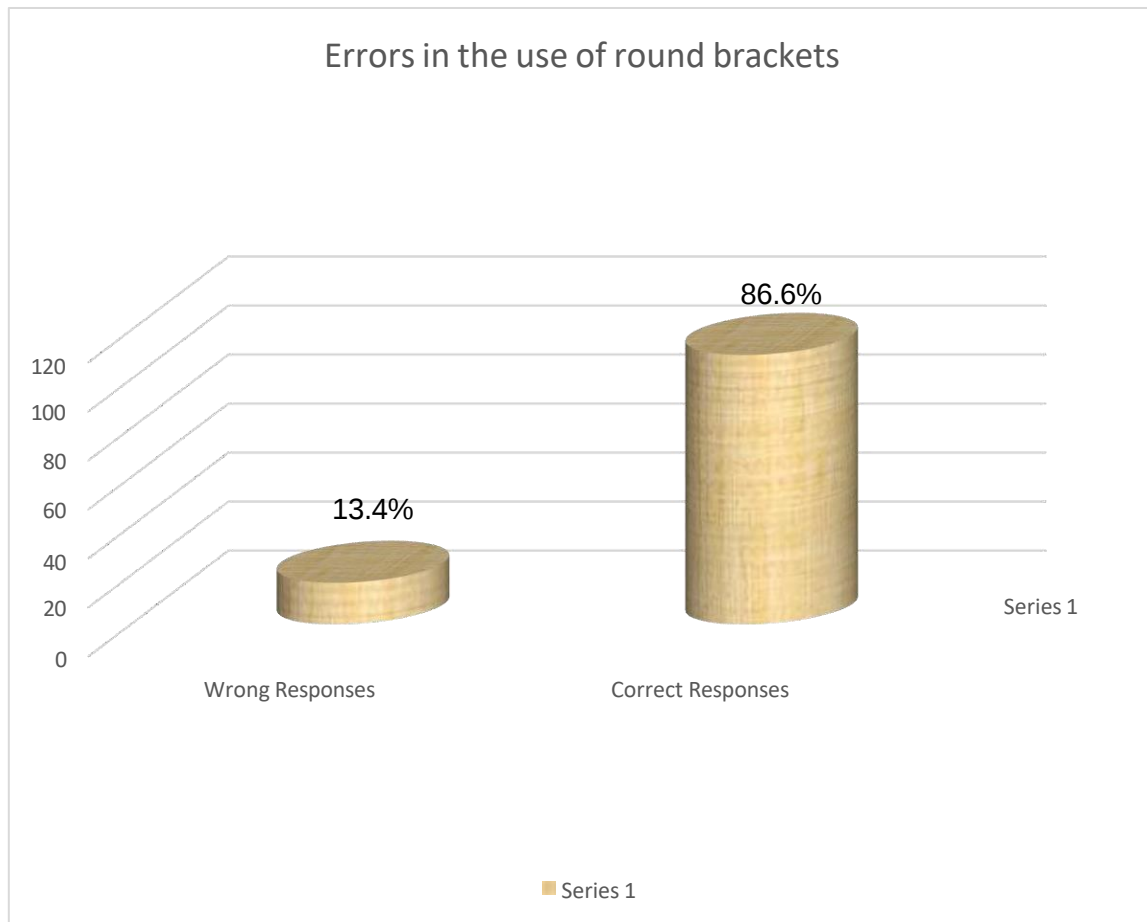


Figure 5.2.2.12: Errors in the use of round brackets

Use round brackets to punctuate the following sentence.

The city population 500 000 hosts several cultural festivals annually

The figure above illustrates that a few of the respondents (13,4%) in the current study struggled with using round brackets, while a substantial number 110 respondents amounting to 86.6%) demonstrated adequate understanding of using round brackets. Most of the respondents who unsuccessfully completed the above task either omitted or misplaced the brackets. There were also cases of attendees who left out the closing bracket.

The errors could be attributed to a limited understanding of the use of round brackets. They could also be attributed to difficulty with sentence structure and clarity. The

respondents appeared to be unaware that round brackets are primarily used to indicate non-essential information as well as to provide additional information, explanations or translations. The correctly punctuated version of the sentence above would be as follows:

The city population (500) hosts several cultural festivals annually.

Although most of the respondents successfully punctuated the sentence, the small minority that failed indicated a need for improved bracket usage skills among Grade 12 and FET respondents in general.

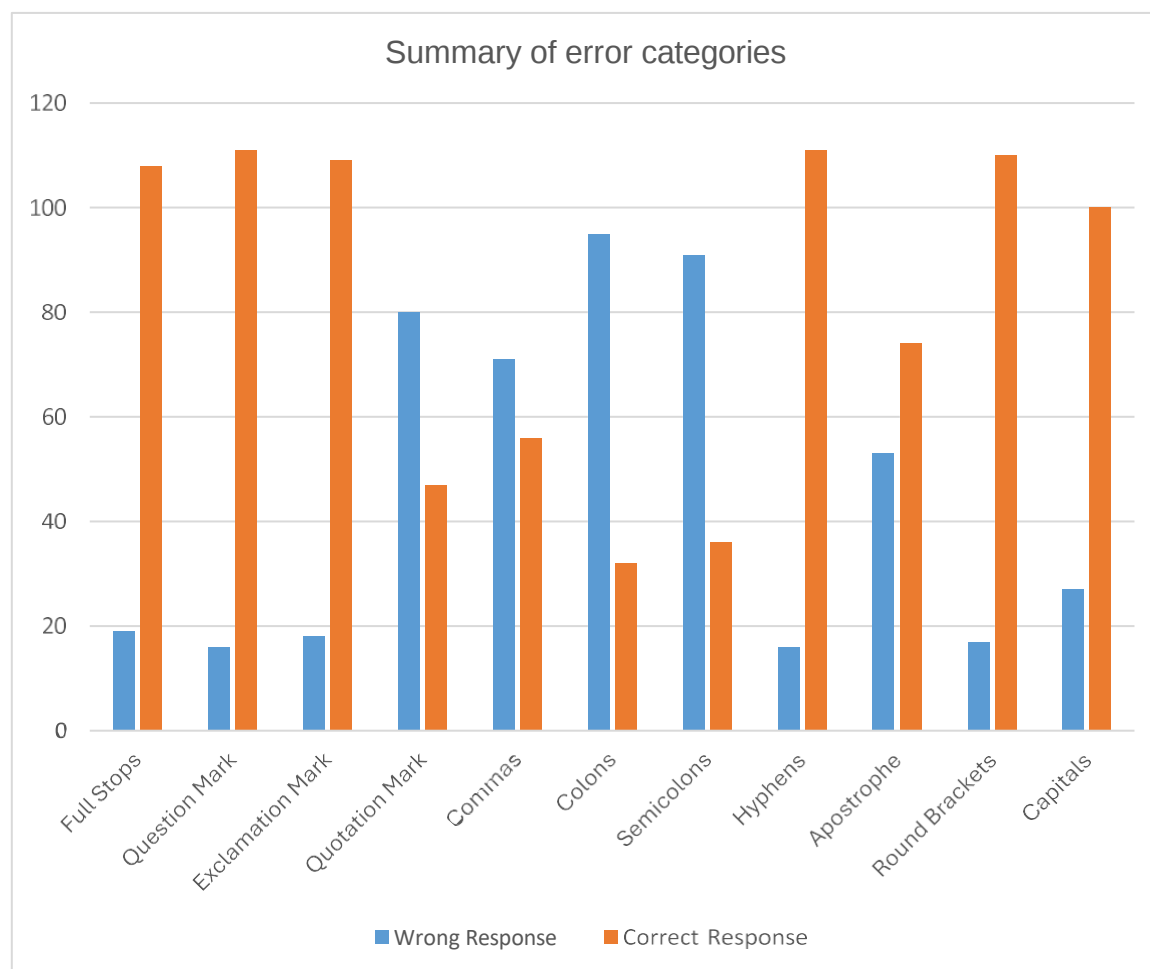


Figure 5.2.2.13: Summary of error categories

The above figure summarises the findings of this project. The study's findings indicated that colons, semicolons, quotation marks, and commas were the top four most frequently

misused punctuation marks. In contrast, hyphens, round brackets and question marks were used with the most excellent precision. The errors in the graph above stemmed from interlingual and intralingual transfer, with intralingual transfer being the primary cause. Respondents demonstrated the highest error rate in utilising non-ending marks, followed by enclosing marks and then separating marks. The following tables present the errors exhibited in difficult sentences from the standardised test.

Table 5.1: Use of the comma

Function	Sentence to be punctuated	Frequency of errors as percentages	
		Correct Answers	Wrong Answers
1. Separating independent clauses joined by a conjunction.	I went to the shops and I bought maize meal	44 (36, 5%)	83 (65, 35%)
2. Separating items in a list.	I bought oranges bananas and mealies	100 (78, 74%)	27 (21, 26%)
3. Using the comma after an introductory phrase	After dinner we watched a movie.	99 (78%)	28 (22%)
4. Using commas in dates	I was born on July 4 2004	115 (90, 55%)	12 (9,45%)

5. Writing addresses of places	My address is House number 32 Phillip Chatikobo Westview Masvingo	75 (59%)	52 (40, 94%)
6. Separating appositives by renaming a noun	My brother a doctor works at the hospital	31 (24,41%)	96 (75.59%)
7. Setting of a non-essential phrase using the comma	My aunt who works at the University of Venda is visiting tomorrow.	30 (23,62%)	97 (76,38%)

The tables above analysed the respondents' responses to questions, assessing their understanding of and applying commas and semicolons in this study. Respondents were asked to punctuate seven sentences using the comma. The interpretation of the findings for each question is given hereunder:

1. Separating independent clauses joined by a conjunction

I went to the shops and I bought maize meal

Most respondents lacked the competence to use the comma and failed to punctuate the above sentence. The main aim of the question was to test the respondents' ability to separate two independent clauses joined by a comma. Some of the respondents used semicolons instead of commas to punctuate the sentences. These respondents might have thought that the comma and the semicolon could be used interchangeably as pointed out by Yakhontova (2020) and (Gunner, 2022). There were also cases of respondents who omitted the comma. In other words, they left the sentences unpunctuated.

This error could be attributed to unclear sentence structure knowledge and difficulty identifying independent clauses. It could also be attributed to confusion between coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. Their limited understanding of comma functions could also have affected the respondents. These findings are congruent with Poudel's (2010) study on the use of punctuation marks in guided and essay writing, which found that respondents committed numerous errors in the use of commas. The correct punctuated version of the above sentence should have been the following:

I went to the shops, and I bought maize meal.

2. Separating items in a list

I bought oranges bananas and mealies

Most of the respondents (78.74%), exhibited competence in punctuating the above sentence, whose objective was to test the attendees' ability to use commas to separate items in a list. A small minority of the respondents unsuccessfully completed the task. Again, some respondents used semicolons instead of commas to punctuate sentences. The omission of the comma also featured prominently in this question. A few respondents inserted the comma after the conjunction "and," which suggests that the respondents lacked a clear understanding of comma functions. This error could be attributed to a lack of exposure to authentic materials. This is congruent with Poudel's (2010), Yakhontova's (2020) and (Gunner's, 2022) study, which found that the most salient errors were in using the comma. The correct version of the punctuated sentence should have been the following:

I have bought oranges, bananas and mealies.

3. Using the comma after an introductory phrase

After dinner we watched a movie

The above sentence aimed to test the respondents' competence in using the comma after an introductory phrase. A significant majority of the respondents completed the task successfully. They were able to use the comma to indicate that the reader should pause. The few respondents who lacked the competence to punctuate the sentence

demonstrated a lack of understanding of comma functions due to insufficient practice with comma usage. They appeared to have difficulty with phrase identification. A few respondents inserted the comma after the word “we” in the above sentence, which was a clear indication that they lacked a clear understanding of the rules governing the use of the comma. The correctly punctuated sentence should have been as follows:

After dinner, we watched a movie.

4. Setting off a non-essential phrase using commas

My aunt who works at the University of Venda is visiting tomorrow.

The aim of the above question was to test the attendees’ ability to set off non-essential information using commas. Most respondents only used a single comma to punctuate the sentence, which is a clear testimony that they cannot set off non-essential information using commas. They inserted the comma after the word “Venda.” This could be due to the respondents’ limited understanding of comma functions and confusion between essential and non-essential phrases. This error could also result from the respondents’ insufficient practice with complex sentences and overreliance on simple sentence structures. The error could also result from the respondents’ confusion between essential and non-essential phrases and clauses. Below is the correct version of the punctuated sentence.

My aunt, who works at the University of Venda, is visiting tomorrow.

The two commas signal that the enclosed phrase is optional and can be removed without affecting the sentence’s overall meaning. Other respondents demonstrated inconsistent comma placements in various ways. A case in point is the comma insertion after the word “visiting,” which some did. Some of the respondents inserted the comma after the word “works”.

5. Using the comma in dates

I was born on July 4 2004

The above question tested the respondents' ability to use the comma in dates. Most of the respondents were competent enough to punctuate the above sentence. Few respondents demonstrated inadequate comma placements. Such respondents placed commas before/after incorrect words or phrases. Instead of inserting the comma between the date and the year, some respondents put it immediately after the word "born." The respondents' difficulty with syntax could have caused this error. It could also be caused by respondents' limited understanding of comma functions. The correct version of the punctuated sentence should have been as follows:

I was born on July 4, 2004.

6. Separating appositives by renaming a noun

My brother a doctor works at the hospital

The purpose of the above question was to test the respondents' competence in using the comma to separate appositives by renaming a noun. A significant majority of the respondents lacked the competence to punctuate the sentence. Many of the respondents inserted only one comma, which they inserted after the word "brother." This was clear testimony that the attendees lacked a clear understanding of punctuation conventions. It could also be attributed to a lack of sufficient practice and reinforcement. The correct version of the punctuated sentence should have been as follows:

My brother, a doctor, works at the hospital.

7. Using comma in writing addresses of places

My physical address is House number 15984 Phillip Chatikobo Street Westview Masvingo

The rationale of the question above was to test the respondents' ability to use commas to write addresses. The bulk of the respondents succeeded in punctuating the sentence correctly. However, a significant percentage (40.94%), of the respondents who lacked the competence to follow standard comma placement conventions were worrisome because they desperately needed the necessary punctuation skills to communicate effectively in writing. The few respondents who incorrectly inserted commas were either

inserting them after the word “address” or were leaving out at least one of the commas in the sentence. It was self-evident that the respondents did not understand the above-mentioned comma functions. The correct version of the punctuated sentence should have been the following:

My physical address is house number 15984, Phillip Chatikobo Street, Westview, Masvingo.

Table 5.2: Use of the semicolon

Function	Sentence to be punctuated	Frequency of Errors as percentages	
		Correct Answers	Wrong Answers
1. Using the semicolon before conjunctives	The yapping dog were right on her heels however she made it into the house before it caught her.	47 (36.01%)	80 (62, 99%)
2. Using colons in a serial list	I have visited many cities including Luanda Angola Beira Mozambique and Kimberly South Africa	13 (10, 04%)	114 (89, 76)

3. Using the semicolon to separate coordinate clauses	I studied all night and I felt prepared for the examination	41 (32, 28%)	86 (66, 72%)
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1. Using semicolons before conjunctive adjectives

The yapping dog was right on her heels however she made it into the house before it caught her.

The question above assessed respondents' ability to correctly utilise semicolons preceding conjunctive adverbs, serving as transitional punctuation. Respondents exhibited widespread difficulty in tackling this question. The respondents' failure to deal with the question could be attributed to a lack of understanding of semicolon functions or conjunctive adjectives, which causes them to struggle to balance multiple syntactic elements. Some respondents applied comma rules to semi-colons due to the resemblance between them. The correctly punctuated sentence should read as follows:

The yapping dog was right on her heels; however, she made it into the house before it caught her.

The respondents who failed to complete the above task (62.99%), lacked the knowledge that semicolons precede conjunctive adverbs, so instead of placing the semicolons before the conjunctive adverbs, they inserted commas.

2. Using semicolons in a serial list

I have visited many cities including Luanda Angola Beira Mozambique and Kimberley South Africa

The above question sought to test the respondents' competence in separating items in a list when using commas, which can be confusing. It aims to determine the respondents'

ability to separate items in complex lists or separate items that already contain commas to improve clarity. The bulk of the respondents displayed inadequate mastery of the concept assessed. Most of the respondents used commas to separate all the names of the places mentioned in the sentence. Below is the punctuated sentence that featured prominently in respondents' responses:

I have visited many cities including Luanda, Angola, Beira, Mozambique and Kimberley, South Africa.

The above errors could be attributed to a lack of familiarity with semicolons or limited knowledge about the cities and countries mentioned in the sentence. For respondents to punctuate the sentence correctly, they should at least know that the above-mentioned nouns are names of cities and countries. The errors could also have been brought about by insufficient exposure to lists. The sentence's correct punctuation configuration is displayed below:

I have visited many cities, including Luanda, Angola; Beira, Mozambique; and Kimberley, South Africa.

Respondents created their own way of punctuating the sentence, which aligns with Selinger's Interlanguage theory (1972). He opines that ESL respondents may apply their own language system, blending native and target language features.

3. Using the semicolon to separate coordinate clauses

I studied all night and I felt prepared for the examination

The above question sought to test the respondents' competence in using semicolons to separate coordinate clauses. Of the respondents 66,72% exhibited errors in the punctuation of the above sentence due to their confusion about semicolons with commas because, at face value, semicolons and commas look similar. A considerable number of respondents substituted semicolons with commas. A few respondents placed the comma after the word "prepared". This could also be attributed to an insufficient understanding of punctuation rules, resulting in the overgeneralisation of commas in sentences, which require using semicolons. Overgeneralisation can result from either inadequate learning

or fossilisation (Selinger, 1972). The correct version of the above sentence should be as follows:

I studied all night; and I felt prepared for the examinations.

It is important to note that in the above sentence, the semicolon and the conjunction “and”, are used to separate the two coordinate clauses. Some respondents erroneously placed the comma after the word “and,” which indicates that they had difficulty grasping punctuation rules.

Table 5.3: Colon

Function	Sentence to be punctuated	Frequency of Errors as percentages	
		Correct Answers	Wrong Answers
1. Emphasising a quotation or phrase	The motto of the company is quality is our priority	72 (56, 69%)	55 (43, 31%)
2. Title or subtitle differentiation	We dramatised the play King Nzinga a strong advocacy of emancipation and liberation	11 (8,66)	116 (91,34)
3. Indicating hours and minutes	The king died at 835	118 (92, 91%)	9 (7, 08%)
4. Separating independent clauses when the second	The researchers found a significant correlation countries with higher literacy	12 (9.45)	115 (90, 5%)

illustrates the first	rates have lower poverty levels		
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1. Emphasising a quotation or phrase

The motto of the company is quality is our priority.

The above question was meant to determine the respondents' ability to use the colon to emphasise a quotation or phrase. Most respondents demonstrated proficiency in punctuating the sentence, whereas a minority (43,31%) encountered difficulties. The respondents who failed the activity exhibited difficulty understanding colon functions, especially distinguishing between colons and semicolons. Most of them used commas instead of semicolons to punctuate the sentence. Furthermore, they did not capitalise the word "quality." The correct version of the punctuated sentence is as follows:

The motto of the company is: Quality is our priority.

2. Title and subtitle differentiation

We dramatized the play We Shall Sing for the Fatherland a strong advocacy for emancipation and liberation

The above question was a diagnostic tool to gauge respondents' mastery of the use of the colon in distinguishing primary and secondary headings. The results indicate that the bulk of the respondents punctuated the sentence incorrectly. Most of them used commas and semi-colons to separate the title from the subtitle, which has been brought about by challenges with sentence structure, clause relationships and emphasis, and difficulty understanding colon functions, especially distinguishing between colons and semicolons. The proper punctuation of the sentence is illustrated below.

We dramatised the play, "We shall sing for the fatherland: A strong advocacy for emancipation and liberation."

Many respondents did not capitalise the letter “A” before the word “strong” This could be caused by too few opportunities to apply colon skills in written exercises and overemphasis on spoken, neglecting written communication (Gunner, 2022).

3. Indicating hours and minutes

The king died at 835

The above question investigated respondents’ understanding of the use of the colon in separating hours and minutes. A statistically significant majority of the respondents demonstrated sentence punctuation competence, contrasting with a smaller yet notable group who struggled with the skill. The respondents who did not succeed in punctuating the sentence were either putting dashes or dots between hours and minutes. Some of the respondents omitted the colon. The errors could be attributed to insufficient instruction on time notation conventions and cognitive processing challenges with numerical formats. The correct version of the punctuated sentence should be as follows:

The king died at 8:35.

4. Separating independent clauses when the second clause illustrates the first.

The researchers found a significant correlation countries with higher literacy rates have lower poverty levels

This question assessed respondents to showcase their expertise in using colons to separate independent clauses when the second clause illustrates the first or when the clauses have a cause-and-effect relationship. Most 114 respondents amounting to 90.5%, unsuccessfully completed the task, while a small minority demonstrated proficiency in punctuating the sentence. Most of the respondents separated the clauses using a comma. The correct sentence should have read:

The researchers found a significant correlation: Countries with higher literacy rates have lower poverty levels

The respondents’ failure to carry out the task successfully could be attributed to challenges identifying independent clauses or difficulty understanding colon functions

due to limited familiarity with using the colon. This could be attributed to the attendees' misunderstanding or misapplication of target language rules, leading to errors. Respondents could also struggle with complex sentence formation and clause relationships, mirroring natural language challenges. In other words, this error is attributed to intralingual transfer, so it is a developmental error under Corder's (1967) definition of interlingual errors because the respondents are still in the process of learning English grammar.

5.3. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data analysis, employing thematic techniques, yielded rich insights into respondents' compositions, uncovering punctuation strategies, strengths and weaknesses to inform instructional practices. After the respondents' written compositions had been marked, the researcher utilised a comprehensive error identification process and categorisation with the assistance of two highly qualified teachers from two of the selected schools.

The researcher trained the two teachers in identifying and categorising errors before the commencement of the final categorisation process. An analysis of each respondent's written report indicated several punctuation errors. Eleven categories of errors emerged from the data: omission of capital letters, overuse of capital letters, omission of full stops, overuse of full stops, omission of commas, wrong use of commas, comma splice, omission of apostrophes, addition of the apostrophe, omission of exclamation marks and overuse of exclamation marks.

Based on the findings from qualitative data, it is self-evident that non-native EHL respondents in the Mopani East District commit interlingual and intralingual errors, as illustrated by the summary of the categories of errors in the table below. Examples of the interlingual and intralingual errors made by the research respondents are presented separately in the tables below.

In qualitative research, data analysis involves working on information in order to uncover patterns and trends in data sets; data interpretation involves explaining those patterns and trends. After scrutinising the respondents' errors, the researcher noted that almost

all the persistent errors made by the research respondents were brought about by interlingual transfer. The causes of the errors presented in the table below are discussed.

INTRALINGUAL ERRORS

Table 5.4. Key for errors made in respondents' written compositions

Capitalisation	
OC	Omission of capital letters
AC	Addition of capital letters
Full stops	
OF	Omission of full stops
AF	Addition of full stops
Comma	
OC _o	Omission of the comma
CS	Comma splice
AC	Addition of the comma
Apostrophe	
OAp	Omission of apostrophes
A Ap	Addition of apostrophe
WUA	Wrong use of apostrophe
Exclamation mark	
AEM	Addition of exclamation mark
OEM	Omission of exclamation mark

Quotation mark	
WUQM	Wrong use of quotation marks

Table 5.5: Intralingual errors from respondents' compositions

CATEGORY	ERROR MADE	TARGET SENTENCE
OC	On 6 june 2023, i attended a wedding party at riverside.	On 6 june 2023, I attended a wedding party at Riverside.
	the bride was juliet maluleke.	The bride was Juliet Maluleke.
	The announcer was mr D Maluleke	The announcer was Mr D. Maluleke
AC	Relatives donated Money in turns.	Relatives donated money in turns
OCO	The groom's father delivered a speech but he did not donate anything.	The groom's father delivered a speech, but he did not donate anything.

MCO	Bishop Mayimele a well known clergyman attended the wedding After the bride and bridegroom had kissed they were blessed by Bishop Monyai Invited guests ate, fish, fried chicken, roasted beef and sausages Many invited guests had arrived, most of them were dressed in their best clothes.	Bishop Mayimele a well-known clergyman attended the wedding. After the bride and bridegroom had kissed, they were blessed by Bishop Monyai. Invited guests ate fish, fried chicken, roasted beef and sausages. Many invited guests had arrived. Most of them were dressed in their best clothes.
OF WUF	I attended a wedding party at Buffalo Range I attended a very interesting party. At Fig tree.	I attended a wedding party at Buffalo Range. I attended a very interesting party at Figtree.
OQ	It was a happy day, wasn't it.	It was a happy day, wasn't it?

WOCOM	Do you take Esther to be your wife What a happy celebration?	Do you take Esther to be your wife? What a happy celebration!
OA WOA	The engagement was held at the brides Silver City home. Three girls' were dancing	The engagement was held at the bride's Silver City Home. Three girls were dancing.
OQM WUQM	Both of them said I do he pastor's last word to the groom was you may kiss the bride "The Pastor said " now I bless you	Both of them said, "I do." The pastor's last word to the groom was, "You may kiss the bride" The pastor said, "Now I bless you."

5.5.1. Omission of capital letters

The respondents exhibited problems with the use of capital letters. Some respondents did not capitalise the word Church in words like "Full Gospel Church", so they wrote it as "Full Gospel church." It is arguable that the word "School" in this phrase is part of the name, so it functions as a proper noun. Many of them did not begin some of their sentences with capital letters. There are some respondents who did not capitalise the month of the year; for example, one of the respondents wrote,

"The party was held in september 2010"

Months of the year, days of the week, and holidays should always be capitalised because they are proper nouns. There were also respondents who did not capitalise on holidays such as *Christmas* and *New Year* as well as days of the week such as *Friday* and *Monday*. The respondents' failure to use capital letters is a clear indication that although the respondents have mastered many grammatical conventions, they have not adequately grasped the use and importance of capital letters. The findings are consistent with those reported by Saini in 2022. The study found that the respondents lacked the competence to use capital letters. Below are some examples plucked from the respondents' compositions:

*The wording party was held on **monday**, **may** 27, 2024. It was held on **christmas** day.*

The other error that featured prominently was the use of the small letter "I"; for instance, one of the respondents wrote, "It was on 3 June 2022 when I was invited to a wedding party". An "I" by itself refers to a person, so it must be capitalised, but it does not need to be capitalised in every sentence "I" should never stand on its own uncapitalised. The 'I' should also be capitalised when it is in a contraction with other words, for example, "I'll attend a wedding party in Riverton" Many of the Respondents generated erroneous sentences like the following:

*It was on Friday, 12 June 2022, when **i** was invited to a wedding party in Malamulele.*
*My sister and **i** were invited to a party in Sikhunyane village.*

Capitalising the days of the week, months of the year and the letter 'I' gives them more visual emphasis and highlights their importance as distinct entities. This draws the reader to the specific words. Maintaining consistent capitalisation patterns and day names helps create a more visually organised and easy-to-read written language. It reduces ambiguity and makes the text more straightforward for the reader. The impression gained is that some of the respondents have not grasped the concept of capitalisation adequately.

5.5.2 Addition of capital letters

Some of the respondents capitalised common nouns such as “pastor”, “bride”, and “party”, which was perhaps an indication that the respondents could not distinguish between proper nouns and common nouns. Another reason for the commission of this error might be a lack of practice on the part of the respondents. Some of the research respondents capitalised letters to elevate words' importance. This random use of capital letters to make a word stand out has no basis in English grammar. Below is an example of one of the errors made by one of the respondents.

“I was invited to a wedding party at Josefa village.” Some of the respondents also exhibited errors in using capital letters by capitalising seasons of the year, such as winter and summer, as well as times of the day, such as morning and afternoon. Some examples of sentences made by the research respondents are the following:

*It was on a hot **Summer** day*

*I arrived at the party in the **Afternoon***

It seems that some of the respondents have not yet mastered capitalisation conventions. Others seem to use capital letters (upper case letters) for everything that feels important to them. Months of the year and days of the week must be capitalised because they are proper nouns and seasons of the year must not be capitalised unless they are the first words in sentences or in titles, and in cases where they are being personified, as in poetry.

5.5.3 Omission of full-stops

The majority of the respondents omitted full stops in their written texts. The results align with Sülükçüü's (2022) results, which found that full stops are mainly used at the end of declarative and imperative sentences. A full stop marks a longer pause than a comma and a semicolon. It marks the end of a thought and the beginning of another. A full stop should be used once a full idea has been expressed. They are only used to end sentences, which are statements, not questions or exclamations. The cause of this error could be ascribed to the fact that some of the respondents are not conversant with what

constitutes a sentence. Run-on sentences consist of at least two independent clauses that are connected to form one sentence without proper punctuation. Hereunder is an example of an error that was made by one of the respondents:

Most of the invited guests had arrived the bride and bridegroom were dressed in their best clothes.

The aforementioned sentence shows that a number of respondents combined two sentences due to the inability to use full stops, resulting in the creation of a run-on sentence. Perhaps some of the respondents do not value the importance of full stops. A number of the research respondents did not use them enough. There is an assumption that long sentences are more academic than short ones. Full stops must be used appropriately because they allow the reader to pause, take a breath and process the information before moving on. In other words, they show the reader how information is broken up. Without full stops, it becomes difficult to identify where one sentence ends and another sentence begins

5.5.4 Wrong use of full stops

Several respondents used full stops where commas should go, creating fragment sentences. For example, one of the research respondents wrote the following sentence:

When all the invited guests had arrived. Pastor Mayimele opened with a solemn prayer.

The respondent was trying to say:

When all the invited guests had arrived, Pastor Mayimele opened with a solemn prayer.

Sentence fragments resulting from the erroneous use of full stops are difficult to decipher, and consequently, they cause the text to be unintelligible. In a couple of sentences above, the first sentence does not express a complete thought, so it cannot stand on its own. Sentence fragments are a big liability in written texts as they only confuse the reader or make one's writing choppy. Instead of presenting a complete thought clearly, a sentence fragment can leave readers with inadequate information and create a lack of clarity in writing.

One of the easiest ways to fix a sentence fragment is to remove the full stop between the fragment and the main clause to generate a complete sentence which adequately fills the information gap. In other words, sentence fragments brought about by misappropriation of full-stop sentences disrupt the flow of ideas and confuse the reader. The results align with Rahman's (2022) study, which revealed that most of the respondents were vexed using the full stop.

5.5.5 Omission of the comma

A considerable number of respondents exhibited errors in the use of the comma. Many of the respondents omitted commas. The findings are congruent with Poudel's (2010) study, which found that the highest number of errors were made in using the comma. Below is one of the sentences in which the comma was omitted.

After the brtide and bridegroom had kissed Pastor Mayimele blessed them.

In the sentence above, the respondent omitted the comma that was supposed to be inserted after the introductory clause. The comma that is preceded by an introductory clause tells the readers that the introductory clause has ended and that the main part of the sentence is about to begin. The correct version of the above erroneous sentence is as follows.

After the bride and bridegroom had kissed, Pastor Mayimele blessed them.

A comma must always be used after an introductory clause or phrase unless the independent clause comes first. However, a comma should not be used when a verb immediately follows an introductory element. A comma is also sometimes optional after specific prepositional phrases. The three ways of using an introductory comma are after an interjection, after a subordinate clause, and after a direct address.

A significant number of research respondents overused commas. Excessive use of commas causes information to become choppy and disconnected, confusing the reader. Hereunder is one of the sentences taken from one of the respondents' compositions:

Invited guests ate, fish, fried chicken, roasted beef and sausages.

In the above sentence, the comma has been overused. A comma should not be used before the first and after the last word in a series, In the sentence above, a comma has been used before the first word in the series. It has been used after the word “fish.” There is no limit as to how many commas one can use in a sentence. However, one needs to know how to use commas in appropriate places. The real problem is not the number of commas per se, but whether they are being used properly. The correct version of the above sentence is as follows:

Invited guests ate fish, fried chicken, roasted beef and chicken.

The comma splice

A comma splice, comma blunder or comma fault occurs when two independent clauses or sentences are incorrectly joined with a comma, resulting in the words on each side of the comma forming their own sentence. A considerable number of respondents exhibited this kind of error. The sentence below was constructed by one of the respondents.

Many invited guests had arrived, most of them were dressed in their best clothes.

A comma cannot be used to connect independent clauses. A semicolon or conjunction should be used instead. Some of the conjunctions that can be used in place of the comma are *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *so*, and *yet*. A comma splice is considered a grammatical error because it may affect the clarity and flow of the sentence and, in some instances, of the text in its entirety. To fix a comma splice, use a semicolon, a full stop or add a conjunction. A comma splice also occurs when the writer uses conjunctive adverbs like “however”, “nevertheless,” furthermore” and “moreover”- and forgets to add proper punctuation marks. Comma splices should be avoided because readers would not be able to tell where one thought ends, and where the other one begins.

Unnecessary commas

In some instances, commas were used arbitrarily. In other words, they were used unnecessarily. One of the respondents made the following sentence in her essay:

A closing prayer, was given by Bishop Bopape.

The comma in the above sentence was unnecessary. Unnecessary commas were a common grammatical error in the respondents' compositions, and they occurred in a variety of sentence constructions. Knowing when to use the comma includes knowing when not to use them. The correct version of the above sentence would be the following:

A closing prayer was given by Bishop Bopape.

The Oxford comma

A few respondents used the Oxford comma inconsistently. They were not aware of the fact that it should be used consistently or not at all. One of the respondents made the following sentences:

People ate rice, fish, beef, and mutton.

Relatives donated beds, wardrobes, stoves and televisions

The serial comma (Oxford or Harvard comma) is a term that describes the use of the comma before a conjunction in a list of three or four items, for example, the comma before "and" in "pancakes, scrambled eggs and bacon." The name comes from the fact that it is used in a series. It is called the Oxford comma because it is recommended by Oxford University Press.

It is the comma used before the final conjunction in a list of three or more items. When writing a list, writers naturally include commas to separate each item, but an Oxford comma is used when a comma is inserted before "and". The Oxford comma is optional- it is not a grammatical error to leave it out or to include it. It is advisable to use the Oxford comma consistently if one opts to use it. It is ungrammatical to use the Oxford comma if the list only contains two items unless it is to stop confusion. The Oxford comma must also not be used if the list already has conjunctions.

Omission of quotation marks

In some of the sentences generated by the respondents, quotation marks were missing around spoken words. The findings are consistent with those reported by Solomo (2023),

who noted that the most frequent errors were in the use of quotation marks. Here under is a sentence constructed by one of the respondents.

The groom said I promise to love and cherish you forever.

Quotation marks distinguish spoken words from surrounding text, ensuring clear understanding. They indicate direct speech, separating it from indirect speech or narrative. They also verify that spoken words are reproduced exactly as spoken. The omission of quotation marks can distort information in several ways. Dialogue or quoted text may blend with the surrounding narrative, causing confusion. It may also make it unclear who said or wrote the quoted text, potentially misattributing ideas or statements. Sometimes, omitting quotation marks may alter sentence structure, potentially changing the intended meaning. Using quotation marks consistently and verifying quotes for accuracy is always advisable. The above quote should have been punctuated as follows:

The groom said, "I promise to love and cherish you forever."

In the above sentence, there are quotation marks around the exact words uttered by the speaker, and the words are separated from the narrative or indirect speech by a comma. Direct quotes must always be enclosed in double quotation marks. All full stops and commas must be inside the quotation marks.

Overuse of quotation marks

A few respondents overused quotation marks, which was distracting to the reader and it made their compositions appear cluttered and interrupted the smooth flow of their arguments. In a narrative composition, it is advisable to use quotation marks sparingly. Too many quotations in composition tend to create boredom and develop the notion that the writer has no ideas of his or her own. Quotations should be kept short and only be used when a paraphrase would not capture the meaning or reflect the writer's specific choice of words.

Wrong use of quotation marks

The bridegroom said "he would love and long for the bride till he died"

In the above sentence, quotation marks were placed incorrectly, and there is a lack of comma separation. The sentence incorrectly uses quotation marks to set off an indirect quotation from the sentence where no quotation marks are needed. The sentence indirectly tells the reader that the bridegroom would love and long for the bride till he dies. Misusing quotation marks can lead to unintended meanings or confusion on the part of the reader. Here the passage inside the quotes does not reproduce the bride's exact words. There are two ways of fixing the above error. The first one is to drop the quotes:

The bridegroom said he would love and long for the bride till he died.

The second one would be to rewrite the sentence so that the bridegroom's exact words:

The bridegroom said, "I will love you and long for you till I die."

Both of the above are correct since only the bridegroom's words are enclosed in quotes. A quotation is set off by quotation marks and nothing else. A sentence containing a quotation is punctuated exactly like any other sentence apart from the addition of quotation marks.

Overuse of the question mark

Some of the respondents exhibited errors in the use of the question marks. The error that featured prominently was the overuse of the question mark. The finding aligns with Salomo's (2023) study, which found that many of the respondents were vexed by the use of question marks. Some respondents used question marks at the end of indirect questions; for instance, some of the respondents constructed the following sentences:

The Director of ceremony asked what the bride's favourite song was?

The best man wanted to know if the groom made a good husband?

The question mark should only be used at the end of direct questions, and no question marks are needed in direct questions in which the speaker's exact words are repeated. Only a full stop should be used since the whole sentence is a statement. Even in instances where the words who do, where or what is used in indirect questions, a

question mark must not be used. Below are the corrected versions of the above sentences:

The Director of ceremony asked what the bride's favourite song was.

The best man wanted to know if the groom made a good husband.

Alternatively, the sentences can be corrected by changing the sentences to direct speech, as follows:

The Director of ceremony asked, "What is the bride's favourite song?"

The best man wanted to know, "Does the groom make a good husband?"

In the above sentences question marks have been appropriately used because the actual words uttered by the interlocutors have been used. The above sentences are not embedded in statements. It must also be noted that commands also do not use question marks. One key point to remember is that in indirect questions, the word order at the end of the indirect question resembles that of the declarative sentence. Hence the final four words of the indirect question are the same as the opening of a full declarative answer. In direct questions containing is/are, the verb (is) or (was) comes after the subject. For instance, in the first indirect question above, the auxiliary verb (was) comes after the word "song." Remember the word order is the same as the positive sentence.

Omission of question marks

A substantial number of respondents omitted question marks in some of their sentences, especially in rhetoric questions. The following questions are some of the questions constructed by some of the respondents.

Can love be more beautifully displayed.

What more could a couple ask for in their union.

The first question was generated to emphasise the blissful atmosphere in the wording, but instead of ending it with a question mark, the respondent used a full stop. The second sentence was meant to highlight the couple's happiness but a full stop, instead of a comma, was used to mark the end of the question. Rhetoric questions are mainly used

for emphasis or effect, and because they are questions, they must end with a question mark even though they do not require an answer.

Punctuation of such questions tends to confuse respondents because they do not require an answer, and they are often philosophical or thought-provoking, and sometimes they can be ironic or sarcastic. This error might be brought about by respondents' unfamiliarity with rhetorical questions.

Some of the respondents used full stops at the end of questions because they could not distinguish between questions and simple statements. Others have difficulties recognising question structures, as in the examples above. Some forgot to put full stops because they just rushed through their work, and their work lacked proofreading, as evidenced by the abundance of careless mistakes in their work. Some of the respondents used question marks where they were supposed to use exclamation marks, for instance, the following sentences are from the respondents' compositions:

What a beautiful bride?

What a wonderful couple?

The respondents used question marks because they got confused by the fact that, in most cases, the word what is used to introduce questions. This is the reason why it falls among the words that are called question words. Respondents tend to use question marks in place of exclamation marks in statements with emphasis. They used question marks instead of exclamation marks for strong declarations. Respondents also used question marks erroneously for expressions of emotional outbursts. Exclamatory sentences typically start with the exclamatory pronouns "what" or "how" to emphasise an antecedent noun, as in the second sentence above. Exclamatory sentences usually end with exclamation marks, never with question marks. Exclamatory marks use this specific punctuation mark to emphasise emotion.

Wrong use of the semicolon

Some of the respondents used semicolons instead of commas. For instance, they used semicolons before conjunctions. Hereunder are some of the sentences from the respondents' compositions:

The church choir rose to the stage; and sang a beautiful hymn.

Invited guests ate different types of food; such as chicken and chips

Respondents tend to think that the comma and the semicolon can be used interchangeably. due to confusion between semicolon and comma functions and visual similarity can also brew confusion. Some respondents have difficulty distinguishing independent and dependent clauses and have insufficient practice with complex sentences. Others have an unclear understanding of coordinate or subordinate clauses. In the first sentence above, the respondent used the semicolon before conjunction, and in the second sentence, there is an incorrect separation of the list. The correct versions of the sentences above are as follows:

The church choir rose to the stage, and sang a beautiful hymn

Invited guests ate different types of food, such as chips and chips.

A semicolon must never be used between dependent clauses or incomplete sentences but a comma can function correctly between a dependent clause and an independent one. Commas and semicolons have different grammatical functions. Commas are primarily used to separate items in a list, join independent clauses with coordinating conjunctions, and set off non-essential information. Semicolons are used to connect two independent clauses that are closely related to each other in thought or category. Semicolons are somewhat stronger than a comma but not quite as divisible as a full stop. Whenever a semicolon is used to unite two or more ideas, in a single sentence, those ideas are established as having equal rank or position.

Wrong use of the colon

A substantial number of respondents erroneously used the colon. Hereunder are examples of sentences in which the colon was erroneously used in sentences:

Some of the invited guests were: Michael Dube, Elson Maluleke and Bishop Monyai.

The food eaten at the party included: rice, fish, pizza and beef

A colon is nearly always preceded by a complete sentence; what follows the colon may or may not be a complete sentence, and it may be a mere list or even a single word. A colon is not normally followed by a capital letter in British English usage, though American usage prefers to use a capital letter. A colon should not separate a noun from its verb, a verb from its object, or a subject from its predicate. It can never be used to separate independent clauses; a colon cannot be used in place of the semicolon.

Omission of the colon

In some instances, the respondents omitted colons where they were supposed to use them. Below are some of the sentences generated by some of the respondents.

The wedding party consisted of the following members the bride and groom, best man, maid of honour, flower girl, and ring bearer.

The wedding ceremony included a variety of dishes beef, chicken, fish, and vegetarian options.

It was self-evident that some of the respondents were unfamiliar with rules regarding the use of the colon. There were respondents who proved to have an unclear understanding of list introductions. In some cases, it was noted that the omission of the colon was caused by limited language proficiency, which caused the respondents to fail to identify situations requiring the use of colons as well as to use colons in complex sentences. A colon is used to introduce words, phrases, lists of items, explanations, and elaborations. It can also be used to introduce a quotation. A colon must be introduced by an independent clause: a fully formed thought that could stand as a sentence on its own. Below are corrected versions of the sentences above:

The wording party consisted of the following members: the bride and groom, best man, maid of honour, flower girl, and ring bearer.

The wording party included a variety of dishes: beef, chicken, fish, and vegetarian options.

Omission of hyphens

There were also instances of respondents who omitted hyphens where they were supposed to use them. Respondents tended to omit hyphens in compound adjectives and compound nouns and they erroneously used spaces instead of hyphens.

*The groom was a **full time** lecturer at the University of Pretoria.*

*The groom's **self portrait** was displayed at the reception.*

Below are the correct versions of the above sentences:

*The groom was a **full-time** lecturer at the University of Pretoria.*

*The groom's **self-portrait** was displayed at the reception.*

Hyphens should always be used to connect words that form a single noun and also in compound adjectives. A hyphen is a punctuation mark used to connect two or more words (or parts of words) to show that they form one unit of sense. Some of the respondents omitted hyphens in compound words in numerical expressions. The following sentence was taken from one of the respondents' compositions.

Bishop Mudau donated twenty five thousand rands

Respondents' failure to punctuate numerical expressions might be caused by the fact that they have difficulty identifying compound words in numerical expressions. There were also cases of respondents who erroneously omitted hyphens with prefixes in compound words. A sentence generated by one of the research respondents is given hereunder:

*The **nonprofit** organisation hosted the wedding reception.*

*The **postceremony** celebration was lively*

The correct versions of the above sentences are given below:

The non-profit organisation hosted the wedding reception.

The post-ceremony celebration was lively.

Hyphens are of great value in the English language since they are punctuation marks used to connect words that work together to express a compound meaning or modify a following word. A series of two or more words linked by hyphens is called a hyphenated compound. Compound words that are commonly hyphenated include compound adjectives and compound numbers but can also include compound nouns and compound adverbs as follows:

Overuse of hyphens

The ceremony took place at a beautifully-decorated Cathedral.

The reception was held at a nearby-guesthouse.

Unnecessary hyphens should be avoided because they can confuse the reader, making it difficult to understand the text and it disrupts the flow of the text. Incorrect compound formation can incorrectly link words, distorting their meaning. Erroneously hyphenating adverbs and adjectives must be avoided because it may create visual clutter, brew confusion and undermine the writer's authority. The above sentences can be rectified and written as follows.

The ceremony took place at a beautifully decorated Cathedral.

The reception was held at a nearby guesthouse.

Adverbial phrases must not be hyphenated because they are not compound words and hyphens are meant for compound words, not phrases. "Beautifully decorated" is an adverbial phrase since "beautifully" is an adverb modifying the verb "decorated," indicating the way something is decorated. In general, hyphens are omitted when an adverb modifies a verb, whether attributively or predicatively, but they can be used when adjectives precede nouns.

Wrong use of round brackets (parenthesis)

Some of the research respondents used round brackets instead of commas. Have a look at the sentence below, which was made by one of the respondents. They appeared to confuse comma and parenthesis functions or perhaps as a safe choice when unsure about comma usage as in the following examples:

Muxe (and his wife) were invited to the wedding party.

The party was held at Giyani Comprehensive Primary School (on the 6th of May)

Parenthesis is used to enclose additional, non-essential information to clarify, explain, or add a side note in a sentence, and they resemble two curved vertical lines. When a written phrase is put in parentheses it may indicate a remark that is added to a sentence, often to provide an explanation or extra information that is separated from the main part of the sentence by commas, brackets or dashes. The sentences below are the corrected versions of the sentence above:

Muxe, and his wife, were invited to the wedding party.

The party was held at Giyani Comprehensive Primary School, on the 6th of May.

Parentheses only enclose non-essential information, which means that the sentences would still make sense if the parenthetical aside were removed. Parenthetical asides interrupt the text to offer an explanation, digression or afterthought. In proper grammar, parentheses are always used in pairs. When used in sentences, parentheses typically come before a comma and not after, as in the sentences below, which were generated by some of the research respondents:

The bride's bossom friend (gave a heartfelt speech), and brought tears to the eyes of many.

The wedding ceremony was held at 4.00 pm, (and the reception followed)

The newly weds exchanged vows, (sealing their love with a kiss)

The impression gained from the above sentences is that the respondents have the notion that parentheses emphasise information because the information enclosed in brackets

in both sentences is essential. The reader may also be tempted to think that the respondents think that parentheses separate clauses better than commas. The respondents might also be thinking that parentheses are interchangeable with commas. Respondents also seem to confuse essential and non-essential clauses. The above sentences can be rectified, and their correct versions can be as follows:

The wedding ceremony was held at 4.00pm, and the reception followed.

The newly weds exchanged vows, sealing their love with a kiss.

Parenthesis must always be used correctly because they are meant to deemphasise information that does not fit naturally into the flow of the text.

Omission of the exclamation mark

A number of respondents omitted exclamation marks after exclamatory sentences and used full stops instead of exclamation marks. The finding is consistent with that of Salomo (2023) who reported that one of the most frequent errors made by respondents was in the use of exclamation marks. Below are some of the sentences which the respondents constructed:

What an incredible wedding reception.

Congratulations to the wedding couple.

The above sentences were supposed to end with exclamation marks instead of full stops. Hereunder are their corrected versions:

What an incredible reception!

Congratulations to the wedding couple!

The exclamation mark or point conveys emotion and excitement and its mere presence can transform a sentence, imbuing it with energy, intensity or urgency, as expressed by the above couple of sentences. Common contexts requiring exclamation marks are exclamatory sentences, strong emotions, congratulations and imperatives (commands or instructions). Some of the respondents, though few, used too many exclamation marks in their compositions. Overusing exclamation marks can come across as insincere or

artificial, and the tone can be overly dramatic and sensational. Exclamation marks must be reserved for genuine emphasis and must be used only when necessary.

There were also respondents who exhibited confusion by using more than one exclamation mark to end a single sentence. Have a look at the sentence below that was generated by one of the respondents:

The music was incredible!!!

The correct version of the above sentence is given below.

The music was incredible!

Ending sentences with more than one exclamation mark can be acceptable in informal writing, for example, in social media or text messages, but in formal writing, it is inappropriate. Overusing exclamation marks dilutes their effectiveness in conveying emphasis, so in formal writing, like the compositions written by the research respondents, single exclamation marks suffice.

INTERLINGUAL ERRORS

Table 5.6 Interlingual errors

CATEGORY	ERROR MADE	CORRECTED VERSION
Combining exclamation marks and question marks	What a beautiful bride!?	What a beautiful bride!
O Ap	The bridegrooms ring	The bridegroom's ring.
A Ap	Relatives' donated money	Relatives donated money.
O Hy.	A well known pastor	A well-known pastor

There were also instances of research respondents who ended sentences with more than one punctuation mark, for example, a question mark and an exclamation mark. The

combination of a question mark and an exclamation mark is called an interrobang or interabang. And it is an exclamation mark superimposed on a question mark. An interrobang is a nonstandard punctuation mark that can be used when a question is asked but not in formal writing. One of the research respondents made the sentence below:

What a beautiful bride!?

The above sentence is not an interrobang but an exclamatory sentence that must end with an exclamation mark only, as it expresses a strong feeling.

Omission of apostrophe

A significant number of respondents omitted the apostrophe in exclamatory sentences, for example in the sentence below that was in one of the research respondents' compositions.

Then it was the brides turn.

An apostrophe was supposed to be inserted between the letter "e" and the letter "s" in the word bride. The corrected version of the above sentence is given hereunder:

Then, it was the bride's turn.

The above error is interlingual because local languages in the Mopani East District do not have the possessive apostrophe, and non-native EHL respondents are unfamiliar with English possessive apostrophe rules. Other research respondents exhibited errors in the punctuation of plural nouns. They inserted an apostrophe after the plural inflexion; for example, it was unnecessarily used in the sentence below.

Relatives' donated money in turns.

The findings align with Ali's et al. (2020) study, which reported that one of the most frequent errors was using the apostrophe. The above sentence indicates that ESL respondents are unfamiliar with English plural rules as they differ significantly from their mother tongue. Because of the vast difference between English plural conventions and

those of their native languages, ESL respondents tend to generalise the use of the apostrophe placement in plural nouns:

Apostrophes in plural abbreviations

Respondents also exhibited errors in the use of plural abbreviations. Some of the respondents punctuated the abbreviations with apostrophes. The sentence below was constructed by one of the respondents:

The wedding party had many VIPs in attendance

The apostrophe in the word VIPs above is incorrect and unnecessary. The research respondents exhibited the above difficulty because the dominant local languages spoken in the Mopani East District (Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Sepedi) have unique characteristics that contribute to the limited use of abbreviations. Their sound systems and syllable structures make abbreviations challenging to pronounce or distinguish. The above sentence can be rectified, and its correct form is given below:

The wedding party had many VIPs

Omitting hyphens in compound words

The research respondents' failure to hyphenate compound words might have been brought about by the fact that hyphenation rules differ significantly between English and their native languages, and compound words' word order differs between languages. This implies that the error of this nature was interlingual. Below is a sentence which was made by one of the respondents:

A well-known singer was hired to entertain the audience

In the sentence above, "well known" must be hyphenated and therefore be written as "well-known". The respondents omitted hyphens in such words due to native language influence.

The above presentation of the findings on punctuation errors provides clear evidence that non-native EHL respondents exhibit inconsistencies in their application of punctuation marks, contrary to CAPS expectations. In other words, the impression

gained from qualitative data gathered is that respondents experience difficulties effectively using punctuation marks, as outlined in the FET English HL CAPS (2011) document. Most of the errors committed by the respondents stemmed from internal language struggles rather than interlingual influences. The most significant error patterns were observed in colon, semicolon and comma usage, with commas posing the most critical challenge.

5.4. CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 has provided an overview of the research findings, employing tables and figures to facilitate clear and concise data interpretation. In-depth analyses and interpretations have been offered to contextualise and elucidate the research findings. The research findings were integrated with existing knowledge, aligning with and building upon other scholars' perspectives in the literature review and the theoretical framework. Connections and discrepancies between the study findings and existing literature were thoroughly examined, explained and contextualised, with underlying reasons and supporting details provided. The next chapter focuses on the overview of the study, conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 offered an exposition and an analysis of the research results and findings including their significance. The thesis ends with this chapter, which provides an integrative overview, summarises the principal findings, presents conclusions, addresses limitations and proposes avenues for future research. The thesis aimed to evaluate the mastery of punctuation marks by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent high schools in the Mopani East District. The thesis was built upon three primary objectives outlined in the subsequent paragraphs. Ultimately, the research results and findings presented in Chapter 5 inform evidence-based approaches to mitigating punctuation errors and enhancing learner proficiency. Chapter 3 of the thesis presents a detailed literature review, highlighting respondents' deficiencies in punctuation usage. Chapter 5 reports results that shed light on and address the following research questions:

- What types of punctuation marks are frequently misused by Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District?
- How do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District use punctuation marks?
- To what extent do Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents in independent schools in Mopani East District master punctuation marks?

6.2. INTEGRATION OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative analysis revealed a notable absence of complex punctuation marks, such as colons, semicolons, round brackets, ellipses and braces, in the written compositions of respondents. The analysis revealed inaccuracies in applying seven key punctuation marks: commas, full stops, exclamation marks, question marks, quotation marks, apostrophes and capitalisation. Errors were most pronounced in the application of commas, quotation marks and full stops. Quantitative analysis was conducted to investigate the deployment of 11 specified punctuation marks, as delineated in the CAPS

document and summarised in Chapter 1 of this study. The most striking errors occurred in quotation marks, colons, and semi-colons, corroborating the overall pattern of difficulty with commas and quotation mark usage, which were consistently identified in qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

6.3. OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE STUDY

The investigation clearly states its aim and specific objectives, providing a crucial foundation. The study aimed to evaluate the use of punctuation marks by non-native EHL respondents in the Mopani District, Limpopo Province. The research study was triggered by Grade 12 respondents' failure to write coherent and cohesive paragraphs, contributing to their inability in five consecutive years.

Chapter 1 presented inter alia a comprehensive introduction to the research, highlighting the vital role of the English language, effective writing and accurate punctuation. Additionally, it dealt with the background of the study that provided an in-depth development of punctuation and its marks, tracing their historical origins. Furthermore, it presented a preliminary review of existing literature, contextualised English language education in South Africa, clearly explained the significance of the study and defined the research problem. Moreover, the chapter elucidated the lingua-cultural and pedagogical challenges confronting non-native English respondents, specifically those arising from extra-linguistic factors (cultural displacement) and insufficient instructional support. For clarity and precision, the background section also provided explicit definitions of crucial concepts and terminology.

Chapter 2 presented the theoretical framework for the study, drawing on Lado's CAH, Corder's EA and Hymes' CC theory. It provided an in-depth examination of the tripartite structure of CC, which comprises grammatical competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. The chapter identified inter-language, fossilisation, simplification, over-generalisation and other factors as sources of punctuation errors. Furthermore, Corder's taxonomic framework for error analysis, which encompasses four sequential stages, was also discussed.

Chapter 3 offered a comprehensive literature review encompassing the vital role of grammar in English language learning, punctuation mark classification and utilisation, and an examination of existing research and findings about punctuation mark usage, identifying gaps for further investigation.

Chapter 4 described the research methodology, offering insight into the study's design. Additionally, it articulated the study's research approach, research setting, population size, sampling method, research instruments, development of the standardised test, data collection methods, data analysis process, validity and reliability, and the pilot study. The investigation prioritised ethical integrity, incorporating essential principles of research ethics: informed consent, respondent anonymity, confidentiality and non-maleficence (not harm). The study employed a collaborative analytical approach wherein a professional statistician handled the quantitative data (standardised test and questionnaire), and the researcher conducted the quantitative analysis (respondents' composition scripts)

Chapter 5 articulated the research outcomes, derived from a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative data from standardised testing and qualitative data from written compositions submitted by a sample of EHL respondents. Furthermore, the chapter expounded on the quantitative research outcomes, employing data visualisation techniques, including tables and figures, to enhance the intelligibility and accessibility of findings.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistics analysis results were reported to facilitate a comparative examination of the utilisation of complex punctuation marks – specifically commas, colons, and semicolons- across various sub-questions. The study's document analysis methodology yielded qualitative findings on respondents' written compositions, facilitating an in-depth examination of linguistic, thematic and stylistic aspects. Finally, the study integrated the qualitative and quantitative research findings, yielding a holistic and nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon.

Chapter 6 provides a succinct overview of the research investigation, encapsulating the principal findings, conclusions, and limitations. Furthermore, it proposes

recommendations for future studies to enhance Grade 12 EHL respondents' proficiency in punctuation mark usage, informed by the error patterns identified in this research. The chapter also outlines evidence-based strategies to address punctuation errors, providing educators and stakeholders with practical solutions to improve EHL respondents' punctuation skills.

Key findings and conclusions emerged from this study. The chapter synthesises the main findings based on the data gathered from respondents from the five sampled independent secondary schools in the Mopani East District. As such, the objectives were reviewed to determine the extent to which they were accomplished. Thus, continuous investigation into punctuation mark content and learner application is warranted in both theoretical and empirical research frameworks.

The primary research objective was to investigate the efficacy of strategies for improving punctuation competence among non-native Grade 12 EHL respondents to inform pedagogical practices and enhance learner outcomes. This study seeks to strengthen punctuation competence as an integral aspect of comprehensive Grammatical Competence, aligning with Chomsky's (1962) notion of linguistic competence and Hymes's (1972) CC framework to enrich teaching and learning outcomes. The subsequent section presents a comprehensive summary of the study's outcomes that led to the findings and recommendations.

6.4 CONCLUSION

The research questions were addressed through thematic analysis and data visualisation, incorporating graphs, pie charts and tables. According to quantitative analysis, errors involving the colon, semicolon, quotation marks and comma accounted for the highest frequency of errors. The qualitative analysis revealed that respondents rarely use complex punctuation marks, including ellipses, colons, semicolons and dashes.

6.3.1. INTERLINGUAL ERRORS

For both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, most of the errors committed were brought about by interlingual interference. The influence of the mother tongue causes interlingual errors. Respondents in this research made numerous interlingual errors due to the influence of the mother tongue. This might have been caused by the fact that most respondents are only exposed to English at school. The study was conducted in a rural environment where respondents are historically disadvantaged. At home, they rarely communicate in English. Hence, they lack basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Teachers should help them acquire CALP to have adequate communicative competence to understand and use grammatical rules in text creation.

6.3.2. INTRALINGUAL ERRORS

Many of the errors non-native EHL respondents make can be attributed to intralingual interference. Less than 205 of the mistakes made by respondents of this research were caused by intralingual interference. The analysis of data in the previous chapter testifies to this fact.

As mentioned in the last chapter, analysis of errors made by the respondents is essential to the language teacher, as they furnish teachers with significant information indicating the respondents' progress. They help teachers focus on the types of errors to be focused upon. The results of this study compare very well with research studies in the literature review. This finding indicated that intra and interlingual interferences caused the respondents' errors in learning.

6.4. SUMMARY

This study has highlighted the significant impact of punctuation proficiency on the acquisition and instruction of EHL in the Mopani East District. The study employed a mixed research approach (detailed in Chapter 4) to investigate the proficiency of Grade 12 respondents in using punctuation marks in EHL. The study aligns with Corder's EA framework, as discussed in Chapter 2, to align with its research objectives.

The research results, derived from quantitative and qualitative analyses, revealed that respondents exhibited intra and interlingual errors, with intralingual errors being more frequent. Interlingual errors occur when respondents transfer features, rules or structures from their native language (L1) or another language they know to the target language being learned. This transfer can result in incorrect language use. Interlingual errors are also known as language interference or cross-lingual influence.

Intralingual errors, on the other hand, occur when a language learner makes a mistake within the target language itself without any influence from their native language or another language. These errors are often due to a lack of understanding or incorrect application of the target language rules, grammar, or vocabulary. The respondents' home languages do not use apostrophes, which led to errors in using apostrophes in English. This was a classic case of interlingual interference, where the respondents' native language influences their use of the target language (English).

The qualitative research found that respondents rarely or never used complex punctuation marks, especially the colon (:) and the semicolon (;) and quotation marks. This suggests that the respondents may not fully understand the functions or usage of these punctuation marks or have had sufficient practice using them in their writing.

This was congruent with the quantitative research results, which indicated that errors in colon, semicolon and quotation mark usage were the most prominent among respondents. For example, in using the semicolon, the most challenging sentence to be punctuated by the respondents was "I have visited many cities including Luanda Angola Beira Mozambique and Kimberly South Africa. "Respondents were asked to punctuate the sentence using commas, colons and quotation marks, where suitable. Most (89, 76%) students were incompetent in using the semicolon. The study's findings align with Nasrudin's, which also identified the semicolon as a punctuation mark frequently misused.

Besides, using the colon also challenged the respondents as most respondents misused it in sentences. The most vexing sentence to be punctuated by the respondents read, "We dramatised the play We shall Sing for the Fatherland, a strong advocacy for

emancipation and liberation. The majority (91, 34%) lacked the competence to punctuate the sentence using colons. This study's findings resonate with Rahman, highlighting the semicolon's propensity for error.

The comma is one of the most versatile punctuation marks in English. The study found that it is a punctuation mark with multiple functions, boasting seven distinct uses. The results of this study indicate that it is among the most vexing punctuation marks. The most challenging question in the use of the comma was the following:

My brother, a doctor, works at the hospital

Most (90, 55%) respondents unsuccessfully punctuated the sentence. This investigation's results enforce Poudel's results that commas are commonly misused.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching and curriculum development

1. Integrate explicit punctuation instruction into the English language curriculum for Grade 12 non-native EHL respondents.
2. Develop and implement targeted punctuation workshops and tutorial.
3. Encourage teachers to use authentic materials and contextualised examples to teach punctuation.
4. Provide ongoing feedback and support for respondents struggling with struggling with punctuation.

Curriculum Development

1. Review and revise the current English language curriculum to ensure adequate coverage of punctuation skills.
2. Incorporate punctuation-specific learning objectives and outcomes.
3. Develop punctuation-focused assessment tools.

Materials and resources

1. Create punctuation guides and resources tailored to Grade 12 ESL respondents' needs.

2. Utilise digital tools and multimedia resources to supplement punctuation instruction
3. Develop punctuation practice exercises and quizzes.

Assessment and evaluation

1. Develop standardisation punctuation assessment for Grade 12 ESL respondents.
2. Conduct regular progress monitoring and feedback.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of punctuation instruction.

Professional Development

1. Offer teachers professional development opportunities to enhance punctuation instruction skills.
2. Provide resources and support for teachers to stay updated on best practices.
3. Encourage collaboration among teachers to share effective punctuation teaching strategies.

Future Research

1. Investigate the impact of technology-enhanced punctuation instruction on Grade 12 ESL respondents.
2. Explore the relationship between punctuation skills and overall academic achievement.
3. Conduct longitudinal studies on punctuation development in ESL respondents.

Policy and implementation

1. Establish punctuation instruction as a priority in English language education policy.
2. Allocate resources to support punctuation instruction and material development.
3. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of punctuation instruction.

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ANNEXURE A: GANTT CHART FOR PROPOSED DURATION OF RESEARCH

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRI	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	
2023												
Proposal develop												
Ment												
Submission and Presentation of the proposal to the Department.												
Submission and approval of the proposal to the Faculty's higher degrees committee												

Corrections from the School												
Application for Ethical Clearance												
2024												
Work on Chapter 2												
Request for permission to collect data												
Data collection												
Presentation and discussion of study results.												
Write up												
Submission of first draft												
Proof reading/language Editing												
2025												
Submission												
Oral Defence												

Graduation												
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ANNEXURE B: ESTIMATED BUDGET

Item	Amount
Consumables	
16 Gig USB device	R3 500.00
External hard drive	R 6 000.00
Data bundles	R5 000.00
Wi-Fi Router	R4 000.00
Stationary	R3 000.00
Travelling expenses	
4 Trips to sampled schools to request for permission to conduct research @ R30 ..00 per litre to travel 180km	R6 000.00
4 Trips to sampled schools to collect consent forms @ R30. .00 per liter to travel 100km	R6 000.00
5 Trips to sampled schools to collect data @ R30.00 per litre.	R9 500.00
2 Trips to Makhado for final thesis binding and collection, 120km	R6 000.00
1 trip to Makado to write-up	R2 500.00
Spiral copies	R2 500.00
Binding @ 250 X 6	R2 000.00
Typist	R2 000.00
Professional editor	R7 000.00
Trips to the university for consultation @ R800 per trip	R10 000.00
TOTAL	R75 000

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Mr A Ticharwa

STUDENT NO:

19020660

PROJECT TITLE: Evaluating punctuation marks mastery by grade 12 non-native English home language learners in independent schools of Mopani East District.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/24/EMS/15/1207**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof MN Lomboni	UNIVEN, EnQish, Media Studies and Linguistics	Supervisor
Dr FT Nephawe	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Cc-Supervisors
Mr A Tichorwa	UNIVEN, English, Media Studies and Linguistics	Investigator - Student

Type: Doctoral Research

Risk: *Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment (Category 2)*

Approval Period: July 2024 - July 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 if otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.

Within 48 hours 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 those changes at the REC. Would there be deviation 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:

Require 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.

Now institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions. All necessary

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: July 2024

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

Signature:.....

ANNEXURE D: LETTER TO PARENT

House Number 1382

Section F Giyani, 0826

30 July 2024

Dear Parent/ Guardian

RE: PERMISSION TO COLLECT RESEARCH DATA FROM YOUR CHILD

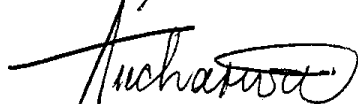
I am writing to request permission to gather data from your child. I am studying for a Doctor of Philosophy in English at the University of Venda.

The title of my research study is **Evaluating Punctuation Marks Mastery by Grade 12 Non-Native English Home Language Respondents in Independent Schools in the Mopani East District. If permission is granted, the study will take place at Khanyisa Education Centre** in one of the classrooms, and it will take no longer than three hours. Student respondents will write a descriptive composition, and a fifty-item standardised test based on the correct use of adjectives. The information in the research will be kept confidential. The data will be made available only to the researcher. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link your child to the research. Your child will be given a consent form to be signed by you.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

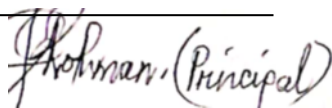
Addmore Ticharwa



Email: addmoretichagwa@gmail.com

Cc Pof. M.N. Lambani

Approved



(Principal)

ANNEXURE E: LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

House Number 1382

Section F

Giyani, 0826

30 July 2024

The Principal

Khanyisa Education Centre

P.O Box

Giyani, 0826

Dear Sir/ Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT YOUR SCHOOL

I request permission to conduct a research study at your institution with Grade 12 English Home Language Respondents enrolled for the 2024 academic year. I am currently studying for the Master of Arts in English Language Teaching at the University of Venda, and I am writing my thesis titled **Evaluating Punctuation Marks Mastery by Grade 12 Non-Native English Home Language Respondents in Independent Schools in the Mopani East District**. If permission is granted, the study will take place at Khanyisa. The school management will allow me to recruit respondents from your school to anonymously write a descriptive composition of two and a half to three pages. They will also write a fifty-item standardised test based on adjectives. Selected respondents will be given a consent form to be signed by their parents or guardians (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher.

If permission is granted, student respondents will write both the test and the composition in the classroom on the school site, and the test will take no longer than two hours. The results of the study will remain confidential and anonymous.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully,


Addmore Ticharwa

email: addmoretichagwa@gmail.com

cc Prof. M.N. Lambani (Supervisor)

Approved by:

Date: _____

Print your name, title, signature and date here

ANNEXURE F: RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH TOPIC: **Evaluating Punctuation Marks Mastery by Grade 12 Non-Native English Home Language Respondents in Independent Schools in the Mopani East District**

POSITION: Doctor of Philosophy in English Language Teaching student at the University of Venda. My contact address:

Orchid Primary School

P.O Box 664

Giyani, 0826

CELL: 0631047159,

addmoretichagwa@gmail.com

I have read and clearly understood the information, and I understand that participation in the study by respondents is voluntary. I, therefore, grant my child permission to participate in the research study.

RESPONDENT 1

STUDENT NUMBER: 19020660

CC PROF. M.N. LAMBANI (SUPERVISOR)

NAME OF PARENT

DATE

SIGNATURE



STUDENT

DATE

SIGNATURE


ANNEXURE G: REPLY FROM PRINCIPAL

Addmore Ticharwa

House Number 1382F

Giyani

0826

Dear Sir/ Madam

Request for Permission to Conduct a Research at Orchid Primary School, South Africa

I am writing this letter concerning the above subject.

You are hereby informed that your request to conduct a research study titled, “: **Evaluating Punctuation Marks Mastery by Grade 12 Non-Native English Home Language Respondents in Independent Schools in the Mopani East District** has been granted. We appreciate your commitment to ensuring the confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation of the respondents. Ensure that the data collection process does not disrupt teaching and learning in the school.

Wishing you the best in your study,

Kind regards

J. Ruthann (Principal)



ANNEXURE H: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONDENTS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Grade _____
4. What is your father's native language? _____

5. What is your mother's native language? _____
6. Which language is the most dominant in your community?

7. Which language are you most comfortable with, when communicating?

8. What is your language of instruction? _____
9. What is your English teacher's native language?

10. Which language do most of your subject teachers speak?

11. What is the most dominant language in your class?

ANNEXURE I: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Standardised Punctuation Test for Non-native E H L respondents

1. Semicolon

Use the semicolon to punctuate the following sentence.

The company has offices in New York London and Tokyo its headquarters are in London

2. Round brackets

Use round brackets to punctuate the following sentence.

The city, population 500 000 hosts several cultural festivals annually

3. The comma

The sweets buns and biscuits which we bought were equally shared among the athletes

4. Full stop

noah was an intelligent boy i do not know why he failed

5. Capitalisation

pedro is a portugues novelist. he will visit our university tomorrow.

6. Colon

I have three favourite cities Paris France Rome Italy and Barcelona Spain

7. Exclamation mark

What a beautiful day for a hike

8. Quotation marks

He said I'll be there at five

9. Question mark

do you know why the teacher punished thomas

10. Hyphen

the full time job offer included health benefits

11. Aposrophe

dont forget to take the teachers book its on the table

ANNEXURE J: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT FOR QUALITATIVE DATA

Write a composition (450- 500 words) on the topic “A Wedding Party I Attended”

ANNEXURE K: ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR ESSAY – NON-NATIVE ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE

Criteria		Exceptional	Skilful	Moderate	Elementary	Inadequate
CONTENT & ORGANISING Response (ideas) Organisation of ideas for writing; Coherence of response; Clarity and focus	Upper level	28–30 -Outstanding/Striking response beyond normal expectations -Intelligent, thought-provoking and mature ideas -Exceptionally well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	22–24 -Very well-crafted response -Fully relevant and interesting ideas with evidence of maturity -Very well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	16–18 -Satisfactory response -Ideas are reasonably coherent and convincing -Reasonably organised and coherent, including introduction, body and conclusion/ending	10–12 -Inconsistently coherent response -Unclear ideas and unoriginal -Little evidence of organisation and coherence	4–6 -Totally irrelevant response -Confused and unfocused ideas -Vague and repetitive -Unorganised and incoherent
	Lower level	25–27 -Excellent response but lacks the exceptionally striking qualities of the outstanding essay -Mature and intelligent ideas -Skilfully organised and coherent (connected), including	19–21 -Well-crafted response -Relevant and interesting ideas -Well organised and coherent (connected), including introduction,	13–15 -Satisfactory response but some lapses in clarity -Ideas are fairly coherent and convincing -Some degree of organisation and coherence, including	7–9 -Largely irrelevant response -Ideas tend to be disconnected and confusing -Hardly any evidence of	0–3 -No attempt to respond to topic -Completely irrelevant and inappropriate -Unfocused and muddled

MARKS	UPPER level	introduction, body and conclusion/ending	body and conclusion	introduction, body and conclusion	organisation and coherence	
		14-13	11-12	8-9	5-6	0-3
LANGUAGE, STYLE & STRUCTURE		- Tone, register, style and vocabulary highly appropriate to purpose, audience and context - Language confident, exceptionally impressive - Compelling and rhetorically effective in tone - Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling - Very skilfully crafted	- Tone, register, style and vocabulary very appropriate to purpose, audience and context - Language is effective and a consistently appropriate tone is used - Largely error-free in grammar and spelling - Very well crafted	- Tone, register, style and vocabulary appropriate to purpose, audience and context - Appropriate use of language to convey meaning - Tone is appropriate - Rhetorical devices used to enhance content	- Tone, register, style and vocabulary not appropriate to purpose, audience and context - Very basic use of language - Tone and diction are inappropriate - Very limited vocabulary	- Language incomprehensible - Tone, register, style and vocabulary inappropriate to purpose, audience and context - Vocabulary limitations extreme as make comprehension impossible
	Lower level	13	10	7	4	
MARKS		- Language excellent and rhetorically effective in tone - Virtually error-free in grammar and spelling - Skilfully crafted	- Language engaging and generally effective - Appropriate and effective tone - Few errors in grammar and spelling	- Adequate use of language with some inconsistencies - Tone generally appropriate and limited use of rhetorical devices	- Inadequate use of language - Little or no variety in sentence	

					-Exceptionally limited vocabulary	
STRUCTURE		5	-Well crafted 4	3	2	0–1
ures of graph lopment sentence truction RKS		-Excellent development of topic -Exceptional detail - Sentences, paragraphs exceptionally well-constructed	-Logical development of details -Coherent -Sentences, paragraphs logical, varied	-Relevant details developed - Sentences, paragraphs well-constructed -Essay still makes sense	-Some valid points -Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay still makes some sense	-Necessary points lacking Sentences and paragraphs faulty -Essay sense

ANNEXURE L: LETTER OF LANGUAGE EDITING

kufazano@gmail.com

+27631434276

12 January 2025

To whom it may concern,

RE: CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

This serves to confirm that I have copy-edited a dissertation written by Addmore Ticharwa (Student Number: 19020660) titled **EVALUATING PUNCTUATION MARKS MASTERY BY GRADE 12 NON-NATIVE ENGLISH HOME LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN MOPANI EAST DISTRICT**

The scope of my editing comprised:

- Spelling
- Tense
- Vocabulary
- Punctuation
- Word usage
- Language and sentence structure

If you need any further details, kindly contact me on the details provided above.

Yours faithfully



Kufakunesu Zano

Dr Kufakunesu Zano, PhD (English). A member of the South African Translators' Institute, **Ref 1000686**

ANNEXURE M: TURNITIN REPORT

ADDMORE TICHARWA: EVALUATING PUNCTUATION MARKS MASTERY BY GRADE 12 NON-NATIVE ENGLISH LEARNERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS OF MOPANI EAST DISTRICT

ORIGINALITY REPORT

13%	8%	5%	7%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	repository.radenintan.ac.id Internet Source	<1%
2	Submitted to Universicorp Universi S.A. Blue Hill College Student Paper	<1%
3	Submitted to Notre Dame of Marbel University Student Paper	<1%
4	libguides.hull.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
5	Submitted to Pathways School, Noida Student Paper	<1%
6	Submitted to Albany State University Student Paper	<1%
7	Submitted to University of Hull Student Paper	<1%