

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

Writing is considered one of the most important skills in language learning. Students particularly at university level are required to do a lot of writing. Good writing skills are essential to their success, whether they are writing reports, preparing research papers, or essays. According to (Al Khuli 1989) Punctuation marks are very important in dealing with as well as speaking. They help achieve the exact meaning. Without punctuation the written material will look rambling and fragmented. Whenever we speak, we punctuate with frequent pauses. The main idea of the study is that it investigates the difficulties in using punctuation marks and their role in achieving effective writing. The study will be conducted via using a questionnaire to show the problematic area in using punctuation marks in writing by university students at Sudan University, college of languages

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Writing is commonly a difficult activity for most people, including native speakers. However, few people can actually master writing skills. Writing is difficult for native and non–native learners,

because writers must balance multiple issues such as content organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, spelling and mechanic.

In the same token, using punctuation marks properly is also considered difficult skill to achieve. Punctuation marks are in certain contexts misleading and create problems to the non-native students.

Some students find it difficult to guess the meaning expressed by these marks. An investigation into the difficulties of punctuation marks is expected to help both learners and teachers of English as a foreign language.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study is important in the sense that it handles a very crucial issue in language learning which is punctuation marks. It is one of the grammatical elements that help in learning the second language without which writing process will be meaningless. The study's importance is clear in the fact that such a study enables the students to overcome the difficulties that face them in writing, because it clarifies the problematic areas and finds solutions to such problems.

1.3 Question of the Study

1- To what extent are EFL university students aware of the most frequently used punctuation marks?

2- What types of punctuations marks that EFL students find most difficult?

3- What are the students' attitudes towards using punctuation marks?

1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The researcher poses the following hypotheses:

1. Most of EFL university students are unaware of the use of punctuation marks
2. Students have positive attitude towards punctuation marks when dealing with writing
3. The types of punctuation marks which the learners find difficult are [?] [,] [;] and [:]

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study highlights important of punctuation marks in writing and to what extents students are aware of them. In other words, the study aims at identifying the most difficult punctuation marks that encounter second year university students and the attitudes of those students towards punctuation marks. Finally the study will recommend the teachers to use some strategies and techniques to teach these mechanics.

1.6: Method of the Study

The study investigates the difficulties in using punctuation marks. To achieve the goals of the research, the students are given a test and a questionnaire for the teachers that investigate their attitude towards punctuation marks.

1 . 7 Limits of the Study

The study is limited to the problems of using punctuation marks among university students and the ways in which this process affects the writing process at Sudan University of Science and Technology in the academic year 2018.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature about the punctuation marks such as full stop, comma, semicolon...etc. It also presents previous studies on punctuation marks.

2.1 Definition of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks are defined by Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics as "the use of graphic marks such as commas, semicolons, dashes and periods to clarify meaning in written sentences or to represent spoken sentences in writing. (Richard 2002: p.434)

2.1.1 The Purpose of Punctuation Marks

In English, the fundamental purpose of punctuation marks is to divide sentences into their component parts. Therefore, to a great extent, the rules of punctuation follow those developed for sentence and phrase structures. It is possible to think of punctuation marks as sentence and phrase dividers or partitions that most often adhere to boundaries of sentence and phrase slots. A small number of punctuation rules depend on the meaning of sentences elements (e.g., restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses), and the semantic purposes of

punctuation are usually the hardest for L2 writers to use correctly.(
Lyons 1992: 301)

An academic text written without using them can appear ungrammatical no matter how well it adheres to the rules of the English sentence structure. In all languages, punctuation rules are largely based on convention; for this reason, they may seem somewhat random and haphazard to L2 writers who were not exposed to them from the time they began reading. One of the outcomes of this view can be L2 writers' tendency to ignore punctuation rules altogether, with the exception of capitalization and periods, on which most writing teachers insist. (Thompson 1994: 13)

2.1.2 Types of punctuation marks

Punctuation marks are very important in dealing with writing as well as speaking. Without punctuation, the written material will look rambling and fragmented whenever we speak, we punctuate with frequent pauses.

The most familiar punctuation mark is period. And it should appear at the end of every sentence. This is except when question marker exclamation point is used. There are many other marks that can be used in writing such as the comma, the semi-colon, the colon etc.

The above-mentioned marks are sometimes confusing to the students when dealing with writing. If the students don't use the intended punctuations marks, the meaning might deviate, and thus misunderstanding takes place.

Buchanan (2003) states that using and understanding punctuation marks such as commas, semicolon, apostrophes, colons, dashes ...etc is essential for learner to clearly and effectively communicate their ideas in writing.

The researcher listed a number of punctuation marks below to clarify the topic:

2.1.2.1 Full stop

Periods, question marks and exclamation points are known as end punctuation because they occur at the end of sentences.(ibid)

Uses of full stop or period:

A full stop is used at the end of statement, a mild command, or an indirect question.

A journey of thousand miles must begin with a single step.

- Mild command

Put a gram of boulders into everything you do.

- Indirect question

Sara wanted to know if their single sold over a million copies.

This is stated by Buchanan '2003'.

A full stop is also used with most abbreviations such as

Mr, Ms, B, A, Ph, D, Dr, U.S, and so on.

It is also put after shortened words.

Capt. Jones for captain Jones'

When an abbreviation comes at the end of a sentence do not add another period

We will arrive at 10 pm.

However, we do not use period in acronyms 'new words made up of the first letters or first few letters of series of word

NATO, UPS, OSHA, AIDS.

2.1.2.2 Commas

When a coordinating conjunction 'and, but, or, so, nor, or yet' links independent clauses, a comma is usually placed before the conjunction.(Turabian, 1973)

Put a comma before the main clause to separate a clause.

If he comes again, I'll ask him.

The same pattern when a sentence begins with --ing.

Going out of the house, I met your friend.

According to Troika (1999) the comma is used to clarify meaning of a sentence.

Of the gymnastic team's twenty, five were injured.

Comma is also used to separate coordinate adjectives (two or more adjectives that equally modify a noun.)

The huge, restless crowd waited for the concert to begin. [Change, restless modify crowd].

A comma may also be used to mark an emission of warder words made clear by the context.

In spring and fall there is hiking here; in summer, sailing; in winter, skiing.

However, the comma is not used after the last adjective.

A tall, slender, grace, girl suddenly appeared.

It is also be used between items in a series if and or is used between them.

The highly colorful house was painted pink, and green, yellow, and red. (ibid)

2.1.2.3 Semicolon

A Semicolon is used between closely related independent clauses when they are clearly related in meaning. We can choose to spa rate them with a semicolon instead of a period (Troika, 1999).

This is my husband's second marriage; it's first for me. Anther uses with items in a series that are using or contain commas. When a sentence contains a series of long phrase or clause or ones that contain commas, separate the items with semicolon after an

introductory phrase or between a dependent clause and an independent clause, when used transitionally between the clauses of compound sentences, the words hence, then, so, however, indeed, thus and yet are considered adverb, not conjunctions, and should therefore be preceded by semicolons.

2.1.2.4 Colon

A colon is used to set off a quotation introduced by an independent clause:

Nana said that she didn't require as special place to do her writing: 'all I need was a table and type writer'.

A colon is also used : 'between the hour and the minute, between the minute and the second, between chapter and verse of the Bible, and after the opening of a formal letter:

A colon is also used to a list an independent clause. The clause before a list often includes the words as follows or the following:

Lacrosse players need the following attributes: strength, preference, and courage.

2.1.2.5 Question mark

A direct question asks a question and ends with a question mark.

A question mark, comma, period and exclamation point are not combined them together:

She asked, 'how are you?'

It is also used in parentheses:

When a date or number is unknown or doubtful, we can use this mark '?' to indicate being unsure of the exact date.

Her mother born in 1871 and died in 1990 (?) (Troika, 1999).?

2.1.2.6 Exclamation Mark

After exclamatory words-words that express strong, shocking, or surprising feeling, put an exclamation mark.

Do not leave me! / Oh, no!

He yelled, 'happy birth day, betty!'

When to turn an ordinary statement into an exclamation one by adding an exclamation point and to increase emphasis by adding more than one exclamation point do not put it. (Buchanan 2003)

Great job!

2.1.2.7 Apostrophes

Is used to a possession and missing letters as in a short forms used in conversation (Allen, 1976)

Tom's game – he won't come.

An apostrophe is added when nouns and indefinite pronouns do not end with 's' , add apostrophe to show possession:

I will receive my bachelor's degree.

[Bachelor is singular nouns not ending in 's'].

An indefinite pronoun refers to nonspecific person or things e.g. [any, few, someone and no one].

The last word in singular compound words and phrases:

The government has to balance its budget. (Troika, 1999).

Add 's' to only the last words in jointer group nouns to show possession:

Ali and Ahmed's horses are well trained.

To from the plural of n abbreviation or a number don't use an apostrophe.

1920s, not 1920's.

When a singular nouns ends in 's' , add 's' to show possession.

Chris's drug prevention program is highly effective.

2.1.2.8 Dash

Dash is used to emphasize material that is not essential to the meaning of a sentence such as definitions, appositive, contrast and so on. Dash is used to prevent misreading non essential material that contains commas.

It is also used to mark sudden interruption such as correction, hesitation, or sudden changes in thought. E-g I would like a cup of coffee- no make it a cup of tea- cream and sugar (ibid).

2.1.2.9 Quotation marks

Troika (1999) states that uses of quotation marks are used for quotations within quotations. In a short quotation, use single quotation marks in place of the double ones, the double quotation marks are used to show in the original. They are also used for dialogue and for short quotations of poetry; a quotations of poetry is short if it is no more than the lines of the poem. Use double quotation marks to enclose the material n short propose quotation. Another use of quotation when you are quoting someone's exact word- whether written or spoken- put quotation marks in front and after the quotation:

'I'll see you in the morning'. The bus driver said. (ibid)

It is also used for words used in special senses or for special purpose. Sometimes the writer encloses word or phrases meant ironically or in some other non-literal way (Troika, 1999).

2.1.2.10 Capitalization

Capitalize the pronoun and the first letter in a sentence. Also capitalize the first letters of first word of quoted sentence but not a quoted phrase. Capitalization is not used in the first word following a colon if it does not begin a complete sentence. (Buchanan, 2003). Capitalizing listed items when the items in run-in list are complete sentences, capitalize the first letter or each item.

Also capitalize proper nouns (the name of specific people, place and things). Mexico, Rome. Also capitalize proper adjectives (Buchanan, 2003). Capitalize specific geographical names, but not general ones. When they denote particular geographical regions capitalize east, west, north and south but not when they indicate directions.

When used as part of a proper name, capitalize lists of persons, but generally not when used alone. When uses the word god is refer to the gods of ancient mythology do not capitalize the word god for example, the name goddess of tension and strife is discard (Buchanan, 2003).

2.2 Writing Skills Problems

The writing skill difficulties are one of the most significant problems that affect not only native English speakers, but also hundreds of students that are learning English as a second or foreign language around the world. The fact that the latter do not have interest in the writing process leads them to be weak writers. Or have low scores in their courses, increase the errors in their homework, write run-on sentences and create incoherent paragraphs due to the incorrect use of punctuation marks. (ibid)

Many students have learned in high school to camouflage their lack of reading and writing skills, so it is often difficult for teachers to

identify their weaknesses until students hand in papers or take exams. Then writing deficiencies are obvious. For this reason, it is important to say that academic writing involves many requirements that students must put into practice to avoid difficulties and complications at the moment of writing paragraphs or essays. (ibid)

Besides, not only self-strategies influence students' performance, but also the effectiveness of the methods and techniques that teachers apply in their English writing courses. Each method is useful with some students but fails with others, so writing needs to persist and teachers must take into account other strategies if they want their students to develop effective writing skills. Therefore, students and teachers must work together as a team. If students want to improve their writing skills, only in this way they will have good results and they will notice the difference in their writings.

Due to the requirements that academic writing demands to students when delivering an English essay for example, it was necessary to carry out an investigation, showing whether or not students had strong difficulties for writing paragraphs, essays and researches

Maxwell (1975) stated that “poor writers seem to be getting poorer in those skills that are specific to written communication, but seldom called for in conversation: that are acquired largely through

broad reading and considerable rewriting; that are most seldom taught, and when taught who have little use for written communication.”

The continuing drop in average scores on college entrance examinations provides additional evidence of the pervasiveness of the problems. The composition researcher R. Lloyd-Jones (1976) argues that the media have decided poor writing is news and that there is no crisis. He continues by saying, “*A crisis is a good turning point; perhaps our need for good writing has increased, so our inadequacies are more poignant. Still our disease about writing is probably chronic rather than acute.*”

Good writing requires practice and adequate feedback, which many high school teachers have de-emphasized. In fact, students may substitute such electives as journalism, speech and drama for the traditional high school composition and literature courses. When given an option, students who must need writing practice choose subjects that do not require writing. In addition, students are rarely able to assess the quality of their own writing; they are usually not taught how to evaluate their work and are unaware of the criteria teachers use in grading it. (ibid)

Miles (1975) expresses the position that teaching writing is responsibility of each faculty member. He says, “We know that good

writing, like good thinking, cannot be taught ‘once and for all’ it is not a simple skill like swimming; indeed even a swimmer can be coached to get better and better”. Thinking is one of the most complex abilities, and writing is an evidence of it. So students need help with writing at many stages from third grade to eighth, to tenth to high school, to college and beyond and from subject to subject. Whenever a new stage of thought and a new subject matter comes along, the accumulated abilities of the students need conscious thoroughgoing adapting to the new material and maturity.

On the other hand, there are many problems that students present at the moment of writing. The individual with writing difficulties may have one or more of the following problems:

2.2.1 Poor handwriting/ writing illegibly

A student does not follow lines on a paper, he / she writes too small or too large or writes too light or too hard. However, he may mistakenly use pencil grip incorrectly. Some students may write letters or numbers backwards or upside down or mix capital and lower case letters inappropriately.

2.2.2 Poor spelling skills

There are many skills to follow to develop poor spelling. First a student should spell phonetically and cannot remember patterns. He / she

should spell words differently in the same document and reverses letters in spelling

2.2.3 Difficulty with copying or completing work on a printed page

There are many difficulties that face students in writing such as difficulty copying from board, difficulty copying from a book or other printed material, difficulty filling out forms and finally difficulty completing fill-in blank worksheets

2.2.4 Difficulty taking notes from oral presentations

The students are faced by many difficulties in taking notes such as being unable to write homework assignments correctly or writing is too slow to get lecture points on a paper. This is because they reverse or ignore numbers.

2.2.5 May have problems with grammar, syntax and organization

Some students may have problem in writing as how to demonstrates inconsistent memory for sentence mechanics (e.g. lack of punctuation and capitalization) , persistent problems with sentence structure (sentences may be incomplete or syntax may be incorrect or disassociated) or they cannot write in a well-organized paragraph (Topic sentence and supporting sentences)

2.3 Previous Studies

McCaskill (1998) has conducted a research on Grammar, Punctuation, and Capitalization in Langley Research Center in Hampton Virginia. In this research he discussed the types of punctuation marks, uses and the problems arise by punctuation in writing skills. It is a prolonged study that consists more the hundred pages. It involves grammar and punctuation marks. However, there are other similar studies carried by non – native students in Sudan.

One of these previous studies is the one that is conducted in Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Education . Manazil Hassan (2005) carried out a study on punctuation marks to the first year students. She uses the methodology of testing. In that she gives the students a test on punctuation to determine the areas of difficulty in using these marks.

The study manifests that Sudanese Students face difficulty in using punctuation marks due to the lack of background knowledge in the types and uses of punctuation marks.

A third study is carried out by (Amin Abdurrahman Kajar 2005) at Al Neelain University, faculty of Arts, English language Department. His study is conducted on the fourth year students, whose ages range from 22 – 30 including the regular and mature

students. The majority of them fail to perform well in the test given to them. The study shows the weakness of the students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the display of the research methodology. It illustrates the method adopted by the researcher in carrying out this study, describes the populations, the size, the sample and the method of choosing it. It also displays the tools of data collection and the tools of data analysis.

3.1 The Method

First, it is important to show and identify the environment in which such study is carried out. This study is carried out in Sudan University, college of languages. This study is carried out on thirty students from the second year at the Department of English Language participated in this study. The researcher adopted the analytical approach via using a questionnaire and a test. The students' ages range from (18 – 22) both males and females. The students are selected because they have finished their writing courses prescribed in this college, of which punctuation marks are one of their components.

3.2 Tools of data collection

The data is reflected in the questionnaire that consists of a number of statements that investigate the Teachers' attitudes towards punctuation marks. In the second part of the test, the subjects were provided with [10]

sentences and were asked to punctuate them. Each sentence lacks the punctuation mark to give the correct meaning. The students are given the choices at the top page to use in the squares provided in the sentences to give the intended meaning. The subject population is chosen randomly to verify the statement of the research.

3.3 Procedure

The researcher uses the descriptive analytical approach to analyze the statement of the problem via using SPSS method of analysis to reach a judgment about the topic under discussion. That is to say, the SPSS way of analysis will include tables and charts that could give the exact results.

3.4 The Test

The test of this study is intended to collect the data concerning the use of punctuation marks. It consists of (10) sentences to be punctuated by the students. Each sentence seeks to prove the presence of problem mentioned in the first chapter of this study.

3.5 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of (10) items submitted to the staff of teachers at Sudan University of Science and Technology, college of languages. These items are based on the first and the second hypotheses to verify the statement of the problem.

3.6 Validity of the Study

The questionnaire and the test's validity are achieved by the fact that all the marks used in this test discuss the topic in a thorough way. That is to say, all the statement and the paragraph shed light on the aspects of the topic. This makes the test valid, that is to say suitable for discussing such a topic and helps the study being conducted and verified.

3.7 Reliability of the Study

The test and the questionnaire are given to different other groups to test their reliability. The results gained and the scores are proved to be similar to the scores achieved by this intended samples, so one could say that, the reliability of these methods of data collection is fulfilled.

3.8 Summary

This chapter sheds light on the methodology through which the study is conducted alongside with the procedure and the data upon which the study is designed to achieve its goals and verify the statement of the problem.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4. 0: Introduction:

In this part of the study, the researcher discusses the results of the test given to the students as well as the responses of the university students to the questionnaire. This is to show the extents to which non – native students find difficulty in dealing with punctuation marks. The test consists of ten sentences to be punctuated properly to give meaning and the questionnaire consists of ten statements concerning the use of punctuation marks and the attitude of the students towards such marks in writing.

4.1 Analysis of the Tables

To begin with, the researcher discusses each part separately: Part (A) contains (10) sentences which need to be punctuated by the students. The table below shows the percentages of the students' performance in these questions. The test is given to the students punctuate the sentences correctly. The analysis of the test is clarified below in the tables.

Table (4 -1):Percentages of the students' Performance in the first part of the test:

No of students	Item	Incorrect frequency	Percentage	Correct frequency	Percentage	Total
30 students	1) Capit + (!)	17	56.7%	13	43.3%	100%
	2) Capit + (,) + (.)	18	60%	12	40%	100%
	3) Capit + (:)+ (,) + (.)	20	66.7%	10	33.3%	100%
	4) Capit + (.)	15	50%	15	50%	100%
	5) Capit+ (,) + (.)	16	53.3%	14	46.7%	100%
Total	5	86	285.7%	65	214.3%	500%

Table (4.1) shows that the percentage of the incorrect answers is 56.7% and 43.3% of correct answers in the first sentence. 60% incorrect and 40% correct for the 2nd sentence. 66.7% incorrect and 33.3% correct answers for the 3rd sentence. the fourth sentence has 50% incorrect and 50% correct. The fifth sentence has 53.3% as incorrect and 46.7% as correct choices.

Table (4 - 2):Frequency of students Performance in Punctuation Marks

No of students	Item	Incorrect frequency	Percentage	Correct frequency	Percentage	Total
30 students	6) Capit + (:) + (,) + (.)	18	60%	12	40%	100%
	7) Capit + (,) + (.)	17	56.7%	13	43.3%	100%
	8) Capit + (!)	21	70%	9	30%	100%
	9) Capit + (,) + (.)	18	60%	12	40%	100%
	10) Capit + (.)	19	63.3%	11	36.7%	100%
Total	5	93	310%	57	190%	500%

Table (4.2) shows that the percentage of the incorrect answers is 60% and 40% of correct answers in the sixth sentence. 56.7% incorrect and 43.3% correct for the seventh sentence. 70% incorrect and 30% correct answers for the eighth sentence. The ninth sentence has 60% incorrect and 40% correct. The last sentence has 63.3% as incorrect and 36.7% as correct choices.

The second part of this analysis contains the questionnaire that consists of (10) statements as presented in the tables below that show the percentages of the respondents.

First, it is important to present the first five statements to the reader to link them with the results in the table below:

- 1) The majority of students are unaware of using punctuation marks
- 2) Using punctuation marks in writing constitutes difficulties to non- native Sudanese students
- 3) Most of the writing tasks of the students lack correct punctuations
- 4) Students have positive attitude towards using punctuation marks
- 5) Some of the marks like the semi – colon and the colon are confusing to the students

Table (4 - 3): Students attitudes Towards Punctuation Marks

Item	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	29%	40%	10%	11%	10%	100%
2	22%	34%	5%	30%	9%	100%
3	55%	12%	3%	22%	8%	100%
4	13%	4%	7%	49%	27%	100%
5	40 %	38%	2%	14%	6%	100%
Total	159 %	128%	27%	126%	60%	500%

Table (4.3) shows 69% responds positively and 21% negatively to the first statement. 10% are neutral. The second statement shows 56% positive, 39% negative and 5% neutral. The third statement reflects 67% agree,

30% disagree and 3% neutral. The fourth statement shows 17% agree, 76% disagree and 7% neutral. While the last statement shows 78% agree and strongly agree, 20% disagree and 2% neutral.

The second part of the questionnaire also consists of five statement below:

- 1) Punctuation marks are easy to use in writing
- 2) Students have positive attitudes towards punctuation marks
- 3) Some students find difficulties in using punctuations
- 4) Question mark and exclamation mark are confusing
- 5) Learners' writing is not coherent due to the absence of punctuation marks

Table (4 - 4): Students attitudes Towards Punctuation Marks

Item	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
6	20%	12%	3%	40%	25 %	100%
7	13%	12%	5%	33%	37 %	100%
8	40%	20%	4%	22%	14 %	100%
9	44%	13%	3%	22%	18%	100%
10	55%	17%	7%	9%	12%	100%
Total	172%	74%	22%	126%	106%	500%

Table (4.4) shows 32% responds positively and 65% negatively to the sixth statement. 3% of the subjects are neutral. The seventh statement

shows 25% positive, 70% negative and 5% neutral. The eighth statement reflects 60% agree, 36% disagree and 4% neutral. The ninth statement shows 57% agree, 40% disagree and 3% neutral. While the last statement shows 72% agree and strongly agree, 21% disagree and 7% neutral.

4.2 Discussion

It is clear from the tables that most of the students have difficulty in using punctuation marks especially semi colon, colon, exclamation mark as well as capitalization. The first table shows that 56.7% of the students used the capitalization and the exclamation mark incorrectly. This reflects in part, the weakness of the students to use this mark correctly and they cannot capitalize the letters especially at the beginning of the sentences. In the second question, 60% of the students find difficulty in using the [,] and the full stop correctly.

It could also be noticed that in the cases of [:] and [;] the students are unable to differentiate between these marks , nor they know how to use them. In that 66.7% of the students fail to place the [:] in the third sentence. Whereas, 50% of the participants fail to use the full stop and they could not capitalize. This may be due to the lack of knowledge of grammar rules concerning punctuation marks. It really constitutes a difficulty to the students who perform the test.

This in turn affects their writing skills. However, not all punctuation marks are problematic, because it is observed that there is a partial success in the case of the question mark.

However, in the fifth sentence, which includes the [full stop, coma as well as capitalization], one might say that, in early years of study, the students learning English as a foreign language are taught to begin the sentence with a capital letter and end with a period. This makes their task in answering such questions easier. On the other hand, the other punctuation marks in this part constitute real problems to the students according to their performance in the test given to them. This may be due to the lack of practicing using these punctuation marks.

It could be said that, the lack of knowledge with the facts mentioned in this part, reflects the weakness of the majority of the students to fail in such a test because of the lack of information in one hand, and of their being non – native learners of English. Even in Arabic it is difficult to use these marks. So, the students need to understand and memorize the rules concerning punctuation marks to be able to improve their writing skills.

In the second table (4.2) 60% of the students are find difficulties in using the [,] [.] and the [:] correctly as well as being unable to capitalize the sixth sentence correctly. Also, 56.7% of the students give incorrect answer which deals with using [,] [.] and the capitalization. The full stop

and the exclamation mark also cause 70% to give incorrect answer in the eighth sentence.

In the ninth sentence, the same thing is applicable to the full stop, coma and the capitalization in which 60% of the subjects give incorrect answer and also in the last sentence 63.3 give incorrect answer.

The last part consists a questionnaire that contains [10] items and two tables with five items in each to show the extents to which students reject or accept certain ideas about punctuation marks. The first statement explains that fifteen 69% of the respondents confess the difficulty to using punctuation marks. However, the rest of the respondents who perform badly in the previous parts ignore the dimensions of such questionnaire because they responded that [disagree – strongly disagree or neutral]. The second and third questions show the same findings.

The fourth question emphasizes the statement of the problem which highlights the attitude of the students in that 76% of the subjects respond negatively or they disagree with the statement that says that students have positive attitude towards punctuation mark.

In the last table (4.4), it could be said that, the sixth statement only 22% of the respondents agree to this statement, but 65% negatively respond, in that they considered using these marks is not an easy task and it is problematic.

The 8th and the 9th statement state that punctuation in terms of using, in that some students find difficulty in using these marks. This is agreed upon by 60% of the respondents, and the 9th statement is also agreed upon by 63% in that the confusion is made by some marks

However, the last statement is dealt in a way that reflects the important of these marks in writing skills in that 72% of the respondents agree and strongly agree to the effects of the incorrect use of punctuation in writing.

To conclude, the test and questionnaire presented to the students partially get to the point of the research by showing the extents to which the English language learners are knowledgeable or ignorant of the grammar rules of English, especially punctuation marks.

4.3 Testing the Hypotheses

It could be said the fact that, the analysis and discussion made in the above section verify the hypotheses of this study in that "Punctuation marks constitute difficulties to non –native Sudanese university students" and this hypothesis matches the fact that is based on the percentages of both the test and the questionnaire.

The analysis also shows that the second hypothesis which stated that " Most of EFL university students are unaware of the use of punctuation marks" is also proved to be true due to the high number of the incorrect

answers in the test and the agreeing of the respondents that most of the students are unaware of the using of punctuation marks.

Even in the last hypothesis, it could be said that, the weak performance in the test prove the hypothesis "Students have positive attitude towards punctuation marks when dealing with writing".

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is based on the discussion on the fourth chapter. It consists of the main findings of the study, the conclusion, recommendations and the suggestions for further studies in the same area of the present study.

5.1 Findings

In connection to the statement of this study, the researcher found out the following results:

- 1) Most of EFL learners at the university find difficulty in using punctuation marks correctly.
- 2) The students also confuse the punctuation marks especially [; - : - ! and ,] this is due to the fact that the exclamation mark and the colon as well as the semi – colon functions slightly similar to each other.
- 3) Capitalization is to some extents constitutes partial difficulty to the students.
- 4) Good writing depends on punctuation marks either in writing or in speaking. Meaning depends on punctuation marks.

5.2 Conclusion

The study discusses the difficulty in using punctuation marks by EFL learners at Sudan University of Science and Technology – college of languages. The investigation of the problem of using the punctuation marks in writing skills is intended to develop the learners writing skills.

A test and a questionnaire have been used to collect the data about how punctuation marks are used by students. The descriptive and analytical approach have been adopted by the researcher in carrying out this study.

It is appeared that using punctuation marks is problematic and it needs a careful and talented teachers to help the students overcome the difficulties of using such marks. Writing is one of the four important skills that could help communicating ideas correctly if performed in a good way and perfectly.

However, the unawareness of the students with such marks may lead to fragmented writings and thus communication will fail. So, the intention of such researchers is to create a cornerstone of writing skills among the university students.

5.3 Recommendations

On the light of the previous discussion, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

- 1) Students should pay more attention to this important element of writing skills.
- 2) Teachers should give more emphasis to teaching punctuation marks and encourage students to perform well that is through giving more practice in the field of English Grammar, especially punctuation marks.
- 3) A more detailed investigation into the use and difficulty of punctuation marks may yield in more significant results that can be generalized.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Studies

There should be modern researches about the grammatical structure concerning writing skills. Also students should study concentrate on the reference entitled " Introduction to Language" by Victoria Fromkin, Robert Rodman, and Nina Hyams. Especially, the tenth edition for further language mastering.

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Sudan University of Science and Technology

College of Graduate Studies

English department

Subject: Investigating the Difficulties of Using Punctuation Marks in
Writing of EFL Learners

Grade

Gender: *Male* *Female*

The statements are part of Master Degree in linguistics. Tick [√] in front of the column below to help collecting the data about this topic.

Statements	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1) The majority of students are unaware of using punctuation marks					
2) Using punctuation marks in writing constitutes difficulties to non- native Sudanese students					
3) Most of the writing tasks of the students lack correct punctuations					
4) Incorrect punctuation marks affect meaning					
5) Some of the marks like the semi – colon and the colon are confusing to the students					

Statements	Agree	Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
6. Punctuation marks are easy to use in writing					
7. Students have positive attitudes towards punctuation marks					
8. Some students find difficulties in using punctuations					
9. Question mark and exclamation mark are confusing					
10. Learners' writing is not coherent due to the absence of punctuation marks					

Punctuation Marks Test for the Students

Hypothesis (3) Punctuation marks constitute difficulties to non –native
Sudanese university students

Supply the missing punctuation mark:

[?] [!] [.] [,] [:] [;] [-] ["...."]

- 1) what a day I had
- 2) i don't know anyone who cannot control his anger
- 3) the meal consists of the following bread salad beans and fish
- 4) mary why were you late yesterday
- 5) if you want to ask a question raise your hand
- 6) the book dealt with three major problems drugs addiction damage
caused by fires and pollution of the air
- 7) we had visited rome paris naples and london but not the canals
- 8) dear madam
- 9) when I entered the room the heat causes my glasses to be covered
with fog
- 10) he paid me 1 9 9 7 5 3 dollars