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**The Effect of Punctuation on Writing Proficiency: Learners' Incorrect Use
of the Comma and Period**

Case study: LMD second year students of English, Guelma University

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master Degree in Anglophone Language, Literatures and
Civilizations**

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DEDICATION

To my mother, the source of my strength, confidence, and ambition

To my family

To my friend Bouguigueba Achwak

To all my teachers, especially Abdaoui Monya

To all those who know me

And to anyone who believes in

“When there is a will there is a way”

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Abstract

This research aims at presenting the importance of punctuation in writing, especially the comma and the full stop. It shows how the effective use of punctuation marks; more precisely the right use of the comma and the period helps in conveying the exact meaning and preventing ambiguity. To attain such aim, we hypothesize that if the students were made aware of the adequate use of punctuation marks, especially the ones of our interests, with intensive practice they would enhance the quality of their writing. To investigate this research hypothesis, two data collection procedures were used. First, the teachers' questionnaire that was distributed to seven Written Expression teachers from the department of English at Guelma University, and the students' questionnaire that was addressed to forty students of second year LMD from the department of English at Guelma University. The teachers' questionnaire aimed at pointing out their opinions about both students' writing performance and practice of the comma and the period. The students' questionnaire aimed at examining the students' awareness of the comma and the full stop. Second, the test aimed at evaluating the students' use of the comma and the period. The findings of the students' questionnaire showed that they were made aware of punctuation especially: the comma and the period. In contrast, the production task and the teachers' questionnaire revealed that the students had lack of awareness concerning the use of these punctuation marks. On the basis of these results, some recommendations and suggestions are proposed that will help in the improvement of writing proficiency through the use of punctuation techniques.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching

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General introduction

Writing is a process made up of skills, strategies and approaches that writers use in order to produce a good writing. The arrangement of words into phrases, clauses and sentences requires the use of correct grammar and punctuation that have a direct effect on the meaning.

While vocabulary, spelling and grammar play an important role in writing, punctuation is critical and attention should be turned toward it. Full stop and comma are among the punctuation marks that need to be highly respected because they have a great impact on students' writing and they are salient in conveying a particular meaning rather than another.

1. Literature review

Punctuation is a topic that received a high attention among scholars. The issue of punctuation is discussed by Trask (1997) in his book which is considered as a guide to the use of all punctuation marks like: the full stop, the question mark, the exclamation mark, the comma, the colon and the semicolon. It tackles the issue of punctuation of essays and letters as well.

Stilman (1997) writes that punctuation marks, as any other mechanics, have two serviceable functions. First, they define how the different elements of a sentence are related to each other. Second, they ensure the decoding of an understandable message.

Doran (1998) discusses the important role that is played by punctuation marks in understanding the meaning of the sentence or the text. The results that Doran reached from his research confirm the idea that punctuation facilitates the process of grasping the meaning of written discourses.

Goldbord (2006) declares that punctuation is an aspect of communication rather than an afterthought. It stands outside of words and affects all aspects of writing: clarity, simplicity, and preciseness.

The current dissertation is entitled «The effect of punctuation on writing proficiency: Learners' incorrect use of the comma and the period». It is different from the already mentioned researches in the way that it focuses on the issue of punctuation and its effect on writing especially the comma and the period among second year students of the department of English -Guelma University-. It, also, stresses the impact of students' awareness of punctuation on their writing.

2. The Statement of the problem

Despite the essential role that punctuation plays in inferring the intended meaning, the comma and the full stop are either used interchangeably or totally ignored by students. This can be expressed in terms of students' lack of knowledge and practice. The comma and the period are one such area where students seem to struggle. Accordingly, teachers have to make their students aware of their several practices and learn where and where not to put them.

3. The Aim of the study

This research paper aims at identifying the difficulties that students may meet while dealing with punctuation marks in their essays and paragraphs. More precisely, it focuses on the students' use of the comma and the full stop. It attempts to find out whether the teaching and the practice altogether may improve the students' knowledge about the adequate use of punctuation, especially the comma and the period, and this would help them improve their writing proficiency.

4. The research questions

In order to explore such issue, many questions should be asked at the beginning of the study:

1. Are second year students aware of the use of punctuation marks generally and the comma and the period specifically?
2. Does the misuse of the comma and full stop affect the meaning of the writing?
3. How to improve the students' knowledge about the use of punctuation marks precisely the comma and the period?

5. The hypothesis

On the light of the pre-mentioned research questions, the hypothesis is stated as follows: If the students were made aware of the adequate use of punctuation, especially the comma and the period, including intensive practice, they would enhance the quality of their writing.

6. The research methodology

To investigate the effect of punctuation namely the comma and the period on students' writing, the method used in this research study can be considered as both quantitative and qualitative. To reach the aim of the study, we rely on two data collection tools. The first tool is the questionnaire which will be addressed to forty second year students of English at Guelma University. To go deeper in the issue, another questionnaire will be addressed to seven teachers of Witten Expression in the same department. The reason for using questionnaires as the first phase of the study is to gather data from the whole population, students and teachers. The second tool is a test which aims at assessing the students' use of the comma and the full stop.

7. The structure of the research

This study consists of three chapters. The first two chapters are theoretical ones. They deal with the process of writing and punctuation in general. The last chapter is practical and is devoted to the analysis of the students and the teachers' questionnaire as well as to the analysis of students' test. The research ends up with a general conclusion preceded by the recommendations and the pedagogical implications.

The first chapter provides the theoretical underpinnings of the writing skill. It starts with the definition, the nature and the importance of writing. Next, it moves to the discussion of the writing process and its stages: planning, drafting, and revising. Moreover, it highlights the characteristics of good writing. It ends up with the writing skill and its relation with other skills: reading, speaking and grammar.

The second chapter tackles the issue of punctuation in general, and the comma and the period in specific. It covers the definition of punctuation and the effective role it plays in teaching the writing skill. Then, it sheds light on punctuation marks; starting by the comma, which includes the comma rules and the comma functions. Then, it explores the role of the wrong placement of the comma in cases of ambiguity. Next, it tackles the cases where the comma and the period are used interchangeably. Finally, it clarifies the effect of punctuation on writing proficiency.

The third chapter is concerned with the practical part of the study. In this part, data will be collected from both the questionnaires and the test. Results will be analyzed and discussed. Whereas, the first section will be concerned with an analysis of the questionnaires, the second one is devoted to the tests' analysis. On the basis of this analysis, some recommendations and suggestions will be introduced.

CHAPTER ONE: A GENERAL SURVEY AT THE WRITING SKILL

Introduction

Writing is one of the four skills that facilitate the process of foreign language learning. But, it is a difficult skill that requires mastering various techniques at once in order to create an effective piece of writing and successful communication. The effective writing can be reached through practice and respect of the writing mechanisms and stages like: prewriting, drafting then revising.

1.1. What is writing?

Writing is a productive skill that enables the learners to express their thinking into letters. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1996, p. 2123) defines it as 'the activity of writing or the skill of producing linear sequences of graphemes in time'. Similarly, Aristotle states that "written words are symbols of words spoken" (as cited in Coulmas, 2003, p. 2). Accordingly, writing can be defined as the act of recording the oral language through written symbols.

Writing, however, is far from being a matter of transcribing language into symbols. Writing is not as simple as it seems to be "writing is clearly much more than the production of graphic symbols, just as speech is more than the production of sounds" (Byrne, 1979, p. 01). That is to say, the graphic symbols have to be arranged in certain ways and certain conventions to form words, and the latter are coordinated with respect to specific rules to form sentences. We produce a sequence of sentences sorted in a particular order and linked together in certain manners.

Rivers and Temperley (1978) arguing that writing is a mean of interaction, point out "To write so that one is really communicating a message isolated in place and time, is an art that

requires consciously directed effort and deliberate choice in language.” (p. 263). So, writing is not only a skill which helps us to communicate, but also, an art that involves different abilities.

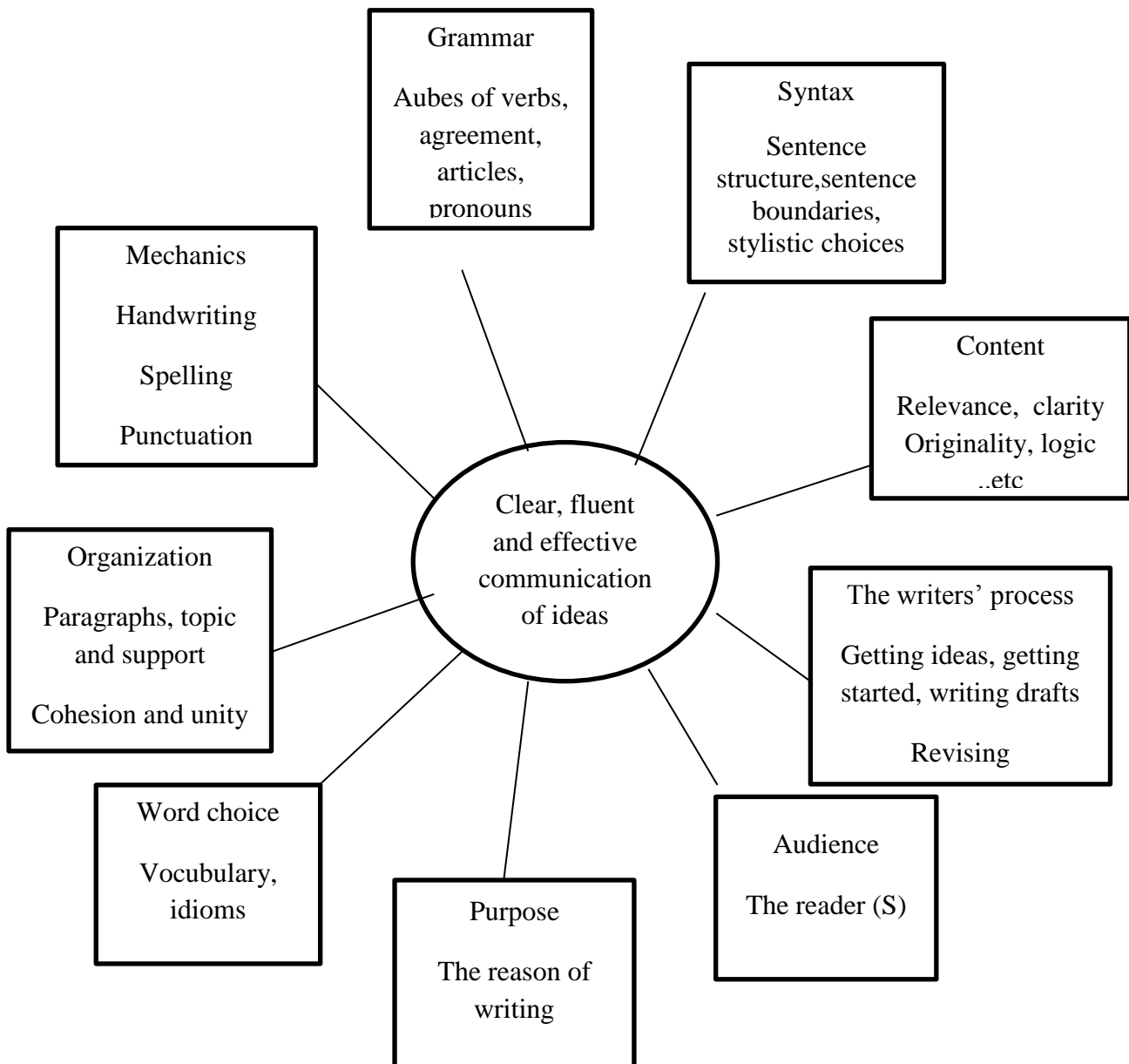
1.1.1. The nature of writing

Writing is much more than just putting words on paper. It is a series of forward and backward steps as writers think, reflect, revise, detour, start over, and repeat earlier steps (Nemouchi, 2008, pp.17-18). Thus, it is the most complicated language skill. It requires writers who have a grammatical and syntactical knowledge in addition to other mechanisms.

Byrne (1979) explains that writing is a difficult activity because it is neither a natural nor a spontaneous activity. Therefore, Psychological, linguistic and cognitive factors are three main obstacles that make writing a sophisticated process for both language learners and native speakers (as cited in Ouskourt, 2008, p. 15).

Raimes deduces that writing isn't an easy task to do. In fact, the writer should take into consideration: content, organization, grammar, syntax, mechanisms, word choice, audience, purpose and the writing steps. As a result, it is relatively difficult to master all these components concurrently. To support this idea, he illustrates the components of writing in the following figure (1983, p.6).

Figure 1.1: Producing a piece of writing (Raimes, 1983, p. 6)



Ouskourt (2008, p. 14) says that this ability or means of communication is neither innate which the child born with, nor natural process; it requires more practice to be learnt. Moreover, writing is directly linked to people's roles in society. Tribble (1996, p. 12) emphasizes that learning to write is not just a question of developing a set of mechanical, "orthographic" skills but also it involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations.

1.1.2. The importance of writing

Writing is very important in the individuals' educational as well as professional life; for example, when someone searches for a job the first step is to submit a CV. It helps in transferring history, traditions, and social customs from one generation to another. This skill, also, helps many translators to achieve their works in an easy way. As a result, numerous linguists, educators and scholars tackled the importance of writing in different fields of life in their works.

Yagelski (2015) states that writing is an important mean of comprehension and participation in the world around us. It is, also, a tool that makes sense to our experiences and shares them with others. Writing, therefore, is vehicle and powerful means of communication that serves the process of social interaction and learning which in turn have the capacity to change us (p. xxiv).

Many linguists and scholars value writing and list its importance in EFL classes. In this respect, writing has been seen as only a support system for learning grammar and vocabulary rather than a skill in its own. Also, they acknowledge the importance of writing as a vital skill for speakers of a foreign language as well as for everyone using his/her first language (Harmer, 2004). So, writing is crucial skill for foreign language learners and native speakers.

Lado (1983, p. 248) sees writing as an active tool in foreign language learning in terms of the ability of manipulating structures, vocabulary and their conventional representations. Therefore, it plays significant role in FLT and it helps the students to produce correct sentences.

Hyland (2003, p. 67) supports the dynamic role that writing plays in the learning of English as a foreign Language for many reasons. First, it aids learners simplifying their

thinking as well as their comprehension, providing them with the most effective techniques of academic writing for generating, ordering, drafting and editing the piece of writing. Second, it increases their grammatical competence and consciousness in written expression.

According to Benjamin (2013), writing helps people as well as students to become smarter and wiser. Through the writing skill, the students will be able to put their thoughts on papers, to connect the new knowledge to the already existing one and to learn new vocabulary. It, also, helps the teachers to assess students' understanding (p. 165).

1.2. The Learner Centered Process Approach to the teaching of writing

In recent times, the view of writing as a process has been given more importance (Harmer, 2004). Writing process links this ability to the thinking process and puts emphasis on how to produce and link ideas. It gives more importance to students' training in order to become ingenious writers (Hyland, 2003). The main concern of this approach is to teach the learners the four stages which are: planning, drafting, and revising (Bouyakoub, 2011, p. 43). Consequently, writing process is how to translate ideas into written text. It starts with an idea and the need to develop it, communicate it to an audience, and preserve it.

Starkey emphasizes the importance of the writing process in achieving a good piece of writing. He says "Essay writing is rarely that tortuous. But it is important to recognize that in order to do it well, you must commit yourself to a process" (2004, p. 14). He adds that having a great essay does not come from the first writing, and the writer's aim is to know how to do this task and not to come up with a finished writing.

Brown and Hood (1989, p. 06) maintain that the writing process depends on: the reader, the purpose behind writing, the content; what the writer will discuss in his/her piece of writing, and the situation; where you are, how much time you have and how you feel.

1.2.1. Writing stages

The stages of writing as process differ from one linguist to another. According to Brown and Hood (1989) the writing process passes through three main phases: preparing, drafting, and revising (p. 06).

1.2.1.1. Preparing

Lipson (2005) calls this stage “planning”, while Murry (1980) names it “Prewriting”.

At preparing stage, the writer searches for information and brainstorms ideas. Other prewriting activities involve drawing, talking, thinking, reading, listening to tapes and records, discussing, role playing, interviewing, problem-solving, decision making and conducting library research. Parson says that “research shows that students who are encouraged to engage in an array of prewriting experiences have greater chance for writing achievement than those enjoined to "get to work" on their writing without this kind of preparation” (1985, p. 105). It gives the learners an opportunity to have a better writing.

It is stated that Einstein said that to have a great research, all you need is a paper, a pencil, and a waste basket (Chesterman & Williams, 2002, p. 14). This means that what is important in the writing process is to be prepared to write whatever comes to mind.

Lipson (2005) states that a proper thesis starts with correct planning. So, it is the first stage in the writing process in which one can make a plan, form a thesis, and organize the main ideas and the details that support the thesis (p. 123- 124).

Stark (2003, p. 45) claims that at this stage an outline is the best helpful strategy. It is considered as a guidance and a direction that makes the writer well organized. However, an

outline is not necessary, it is informal and not final so that the writer can add new ideas or delete others.

1.2.1.2. Drafting

Drafting is the second stage after prewriting where the learners are expected to produce different drafts about the topic. Brown and Hood claim that the drafting stage is the real beginning of writing. More importantly, in this stage the writer doesn't pay attention to grammar, punctuation and spelling (1989, p. 14). Therefore, the mechanisms of writing are less important while prewriting.

Trimmer (1995) illustrates that in drafting stage the writer defines whether the previous stage (planning) is efficient to produce an appropriate writing or not. Generally, the first draft is never the final product. It is "only a very preliminary attempt at producing a sustained piece of writing" (p. 54).

Mckensi and Tomkins argue that the aim behind the drafting stage is to improve students' knowledge and the content of the composition. Also, they write rapidly, they often use created spelling, and they don't emphasis on punctuation, capitalization and other mechanical conventions. Accordingly, drafting stage boosts them to determine what they need to mention (p. 204).

Sundem and Piekiewicz (2006), state that the most effective acts that reinforce students in the drafting stage is to write, write and write without putting into consideration the mechanisms of writing. Moreover, drafting can be shaped in the form of written text as well as drawings, plans, diagrams, charts and labels for a poster (p. 20).

1.2.1.3. Revising

The revising stage is a helpful strategy in the writing process. While revising, the writer should make sure that his/her content is stated clearly and appropriately for his reader. Further, he may make some changes, add new elements, delete some others, and so on. Moreover, time and attention are necessary toward this stage, for example, if someone comes to send a message quickly via Facebook to his friend, he won't care a lot about punctuation. Yet, he wants his message to make sense. So, this implies that he should put emphasis on punctuation to make his message meaningful (Brown & Hood, 1989, p. 20).

Taylor (1981, p. 7) gives more attention to revising stage. He writes, "Revision ... is that crucial point in the process when discovery and organization come together, when writers refine and recast what they have written and shape it into coherent written statement." As a result, it is an important step in the process approach.

1.3. Traits of good writing

The writers' purpose is to transmit the message perfectly to the reader. In order to achieve such goal, one should put into consideration various techniques and mechanisms which are linked to both the form and the content of writing (Bouyakoub, 2011, p. 135).

1.3.1. The form

It is one of the essential components of writing. Unlike speaking, writing needs writers who use a stricter and more formal method for getting their message across.

1.3.1.1. Features related to the form

1.3.1.1.1. Mechanisms

Mechanism refers to different instructions that have to be followed while writing and it plays a vital role in the writing process. It makes the writing systematic and consistent in all academic sectors. It includes: presentation, handwriting, indentation and punctuation.

1.3.1.1.1.1. Presentation

Presentation is one of the mechanics of writing. Sundem and Pikiwicz express the significance of this mechanic in writing saying that “Strong presentation refers to the format in which the writing or the paper is presented. An appealing presentation is highlighted by layouts, graphics and neatness; and readers are immediately drawn to give the piece a close look” (2006, p. 11). So, if the writer succeeds in his presentation, he will attract the readers’ attention towards his product text.

1.3.1.1.1.2. Handwriting

It is one of the basic forms of writing skill because if the writer doesn’t have good handwriting skill; he will spend more time focusing on the mechanisms of writing rather than on the content of the written piece.

1.3.1.1.1.3. Indentation

Indentation is another component that makes writing clear. Edward and Shewan (1998, p. 43) claim that “indentation is the offsetting of the first line of a paragraph a specified distance to the right of the left margin”. The first line of the paragraph is usually intended five spaces. So, indentation is one of the important mechanics that has an effect on the form as well as on writing.

1.3.1.1.1.4. Punctuation

Punctuation's objectives are to present clarity in the writing as well as to facilitate reading. Full stops, commas and others serve the function of punctuation. Accordingly, writers must take into account all these punctuation marks while writing their research. To support this idea, Bouyakoub clarifies that in order to be an efficient writer, one should master punctuation correctly and consistency (2011, p. 59).

1.3.2. Content

1.3.2.1. Features related to the content

1.3.2.1.1. Word choice

Nickelsen (2001) defines word choice as the use of specific and accurate words that facilitate the process of communication between the writer and the reader (p. 6). Furthermore, denotation, (literal meaning of the word) and connotation, (the implied meaning of the word) are two important aspects that should be respected while selecting the words.

1.3.2.1.2. Clarity

It is an important aspect in writing that should be taken into consideration by the writer. Galko (2001, p. 103), claims that in order to keep writing clear, there are three main strategies:

1. be precise and concise
2. Avoid using the passive voice since the active voice makes sentences more simple, short and easier to understand.
3. Try to use well-known words rather than unfamiliar ones such as: acronyms, abbreviations and jargon that can block the understanding of the reader.

1.3.2.1.3. Coherence

It is considered as another essential element in writing that may have an effect on the written production either negatively or positively. It means linking and organizing the information for facilitating the readers' comprehension. Marry and Huhges (2008) claim that a good writer is the one "who sticks his ideas together as links in a chain, each link connecting the one before it with the one after. If any links are missing in a chain, the connections become unclear and the argument structure breaks down" (p. 45).

1.3.2.1.4. Cohesion:

It determines the unity of the written piece. Cohesive markers are another technical name of rhetorical devices included in the different uses of cohesion. These devices can be logical, grammatical or lexical. They have positive effect on the text; for instance, various sentences and their parts are managed and related by these devices which seem like linguistic signals that aid the process of reading (Bouyakoub, 2011, p. 67).

1.4. Writing skill and its relation to other skills

Writing isn't a skill that is taught in isolation as a separate module, rather, it is related to systematic knowledge of the four skills. So, teaching writing requires connection with other various skills (Bouyakoub, 2011, p. 50).

1.4.1. Writing and reading

Krashen (1984) realizes that motivation to read is the source of an effective writing. That is to say, writing is influenced by reading since it enhances students' academic learning through enriching their vocabulary as well as their knowledge.

White (1981) proves that writing as a skill requires the proficiency of reading. But, writer reads before he writes. He illustrates that "any communicative writing course must contain a large component of reading comprehension of practice, that is, for writer as reader" (p. 101).

Reading in the classroom is understood as the appropriate input for the acquisition of writing skills because it is generally assumed that reading passages will somehow function as primary models for which writing skills can be learned or at least inferred (Kroll, 1990, p. 88).

Murcia argues that through reading one can have an idea about the different exemplifications of English language texts. This will enhance their consciousness in English language writing (2001, p. 224).

Bouyakoub (2011, p. 50) explains that from antiquity reading and writing are seemed to be as literacy skills which complete each other. To support this, Kern (2000, pp. 16-17) refers to seven points that show the similarities between them:

Interpretation: in which the writer, from one hand, tries to comprehend the world in his own words, and the reader, on the other hand, tries to understand the writer's interpretation of the world.

Collaboration: although writers write for themselves, audience also has the chance to read the writers' works. On the other hand, readers use their experience and knowledge during their reading to get the writer's exact message. Thus, there is indirect collaboration between both readers and writers.

Convention: both reading and writing ruled by cultural conventions which differ from one reader/ writer to another.

Cultural knowledge: reading and writing have relation with particular systems of attitudes, beliefs, customs, ideas and values.

Problem solving: reading and writing indicates the connection between words and the other units of text as well as between texts and the fact or unreal worlds.

Reflection and self-reflection: readers and writers give more importance to language and its relation to the world and themselves.

Language use: knowing about language use in both written and spoken situations to produce a discourse.

Although writing and reading are different skills, they are fundamental to build forms and functions of language. They are similar processes; they include cognitive abilities to make meaning. Moreover, reading is an important tool that is used for evaluating written products in which the teacher can highlight the students' needs.

1.4.2. Writing and speaking

Unlike listening and reading which are passive skills, writing and speaking are productive skills. But, they vary in many aspects.

Vygotsky (1962, p. 98) notes that “written speech is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning”. That is to say, there is a difference between the acquisition of writing and the acquisition of speaking, as stated by Grabe and Kaplan, “writing abilities are not naturally acquired; they must be culturally (rather than biologically) transmitted in every assisting environments” (1996, p. 6).

Brookes, Grundy (1990), Harris (1993), and Harmer (2004) highlight the various features of both writing and speaking. They are summarized in three main points:

Situation: writers unlike speakers have indirect contact with readers, so, paralinguistic features (intonation, gestures...etc) are replaced by grammatical and stylistic techniques, such as: punctuation (exclamation marks, question marks...etc). However, the speaker can get immediate feedback that helps him to convey the right message. Hence, successful communication in writing requires a lot of efforts.

Grammatical choices: writing is characterized by the use of longer sentences. However, speakers, in speaking, most of times don't use complete sentences, but they only use words and phrases like in the following example:

Speech

Writing

Biscuit?

Would you like a biscuit?

(Harmer, 2004, p. 6).

Lexical density: unlike speaking, writing has more content words than grammatical words. Halliday (1990, p. 62) shares the idea that "Relative to each other, written language is dense, spoken language is sparse". Speaking, thus, have more grammatical words than content words; for example, contracted forms and tag questions.

Yet, writers tend to use writing in an informal way, like in tools of social interaction (facebook, mobiles..etc), like "J4f" stands for "just for fun" (Crystal, 2001, p. 85). So, the relationship between speaking and writing is very important.

1.4.3. Writing and grammar

There is a strong relationship between grammar and writing. Clark clarifies that the writing skill is somehow linked to the grammar, for instance, students' poor writing is most of the time related to the lack of the grammatical knowledge. Besides, parents try to improve their students' writing proficiency by increasing their level in grammar that is considered as the basic form of writing proficiency (Clark, 2003, p. 313).

Different studies suggest that teaching grammar is necessary for other skills because it has positive effects on other skills like: writing. As a result, writing cannot be mastered

without grammar that is considered as one of the crucial components of writing (Fabri, 2009, p. 120).

Conclusion

This chapter clarifies the concept of writing by exploring its nature and its importance. Furthermore, the process of writing is made up of three stages that are essential to produce an effective, coherent and correct piece of writing. The first stage is prewriting which is the beginning of the work; the following stage is drafting in which the writer puts the plan into practice; then, revising through which the writer evaluates his work and corrects the errors. Each one of these stages is necessary for the next one in order to make a successful writing. At the end, it explores the qualities of good writing as well as the relationship between writing and the other language skills, namely, speaking and reading.

CHAPTER TWO: COMMA AND FULL STOP IN USE

Introduction

Correct grammar, vocabulary and the right spelling are three of the important elements that create an effective writing, but above all punctuation plays a strong part in any piece of writing. Punctuation marks are seen as road signs that provide the signals for the reader to have a better understanding. Interestingly, the comma and the period that are largely used by learners have specific rules and functions.

2.1. What is punctuation?

The origin of the word “punctuation” is derived from the Latin word “punctum” meaning “point”. Punctuation marks used in a sentence point to the meanings given by its words, giving meaning of what otherwise can be a string of sounds. Accordingly, punctuation means to simplify a piece of writing and divide it into meaningful sequences (clauses and phrases, sentences and paragraphs). In other words, all punctuation marks, which are used in writing such as: the comma and the period, are used to indicate the various meanings specified by the words of a sentence where these marks are placed. It is similar to using pauses, intonation, gestures and changes of expressions while speaking (Stilman, 1997, p.p. 53-54).

Ganeri (2013) states that punctuation is a set of marks and signs that takes part in writing. The use of it facilitates the readers’ comprehension (p. 05). In the same vein, Lauchman (2010) defines punctuation as an important code in any kind of written pieces since it has the power of conveying the exact message as well as it tries to pay attention in text to different stops, pauses, intonation of speech. That is to say, punctuation is a very important concept in writing that should be appreciated by both the reader and the writer (p. 17).

2.2. The importance of punctuation in teaching the writing skill

Punctuation, according to many linguists and scholars, plays a vital role in teaching the writing skill. Brown and Hood illustrate that punctuation is very important. It supports the reader's comprehension. It, also, links between the prior writing and the newly one. More importantly, they state that to be a good writer one should know the common characteristics of punctuation (1989, p. 34). That is to say, any misuse of any punctuation marks can have a negative effect on the writing skill. Thus, punctuation is the base of an appropriate writing and attention should be drawn towards it.

Stilman (1997) states that punctuation marks have two major functions: First, they introduce the manner in which several elements of a given sentence are connected with one another; as a consequence of this, they confirm obvious and simple communication. Second, they help to stabilize the writing tone. The first function is quite mechanical and may obviously be learned; whereas, the second one shows the difference between the skilled writer and the unskilled one (p. 53).

Ganeri (2013) considers punctuation as a vital tool that used in writing to break up words and sentences. It makes writing clearer and easier to be understood. Furthermore, any change in the sounds or words can change the meaning in speaking. However, in writing punctuation helps to do this job (p. p. 6-7).

McCaskill states that punctuation plays a fundamental role in writing; he says: "punctuation is placed in text to make meaning clear and to make reading easier". He claims that the different punctuation marks achieve four functions: First, they play the role of separation such as: the full stop which separates sentences. Second, they group or enclose, like: parentheses enclose extraneous information. Third, they connect for example: a hyphen connects a unit modifier, and they convey meaning, like: a

question mark which may transform a declarative sentence into an interrogative one. Thus, on the basis of these functions the writer can determine his use of these various punctuation marks (1998, p. 44).

Kane (2000) clarifies that punctuation is a very significant tool in writing because its main purpose is to support the sentence structure as well as to help the readers' understanding (pp. 379-380). To support this idea, Truss says that, "Proper punctuation is both the sign and the cause of clear thinking" (p. 202). Consequently, punctuation marks are the basic unit of better understanding of course if the writers use them correctly.

Woods (2006) shows his attention towards punctuation, he announces that the correct use of punctuation has another goal as a good grammar (p. viii). Furthermore, it plays the role of the guider because it directs and attracts the reader to the writer's real message far from any pressure (p. ix). He gives a crucial example that shows the power of punctuation which is about Jefferson's struggle about the power of the apostrophe in changing the meaning "its" and "it's" that mentioned in the constitution:

Each little symbol gets its meaning from an agreement between readers and writers. Educated people today have decided that the possession shown by the word *its* may be turned into a contraction with the addition of an apostrophe *it's*. Thus, *its* and *it's* have different meanings. Had the standard been decided otherwise, *it's* might have fulfilled both functions.

As a result, any punctuation mark plays a significant job in the text so that we need to use it in appropriately to avoid any misunderstanding.

Kirkman (2006, p. 14) mentions that punctuation has a vital role because the written piece without it seems meaningless as well as the readers will have a negative

image about the writer. Therefore, the writer will lose his credibility for being thoughtless for his punctuation. Unpunctuated text, thus, may lead to unsuccessful communication. More interestingly, punctuation plays two dominant roles: First, grammatical role that makes connection between parts of the text, for example:

- Take no action as the camera operates automatically...

(The as ... group tells us when)

- Take no action, as the camera operates automatically...

(The as ... group tells us why)

Actually, these two statements are the same, but their meanings depend on the absence or presence of the comma. The second function is rhetorical which is about the power of punctuation marks that create significance of words such as the previous example when the comma is absent, “as” signifies the meaning of “time”, in contrast in the second statement when the comma takes part there, “as “implies the meaning of the “cause”. The comma expresses the emphasis or tone we want give to the word or word group (p. 05).

Soter (2013) deduces that since punctuation is the core of writing, teachers need to provide their students with dictation which is an effective way for increasing student’s proficiency in using punctuation. In addition to that, students need to improve their punctuation knowledge and usage through intensive practice (pp. 80-81).

Halliday (1989, pp. 33-34) sheds light on the essential role of punctuation marks in teaching the writing skill. He claims that punctuation plays two main services: First, it teaches the learners how to achieve coherence in writing by separating the statements with full stops or series of lists by commas. Second, it identifies the language functions such as the use of exclamation mark to express an exclamation

and the use of apostrophe for a genitive. He suggests that these functions can be divided into three main ones:

Boundary- marking: plays the role of division between the units of grammar (sentences, clauses, phrases and words) like, the full stop to make stronger boundaries and the comma to make weaker boundaries.

Status marking: shows the speech functions of sentences (statement, question, exclamation or quotation). The full stop, for instance, identifies a statement, the question mark a question, and a number of speech functions including commands, suggestions, offers, exclamations, calls and greetings.

Relation markers: make a relation between the units of a sentence. They consist of: the hyphen, the dash, parentheses, and the apostrophe.

The above mentioned main functions of punctuation in English as a writing system can be presented as follows:

Table 2.1: Functions of punctuation in the English writing system

(Adapted from a functional description by Halliday, 1989, p. 35)

FUNCTION	GRAMMATICAL UNITS	SPECIFIC UNITS	NAME	MARK	
BOUNDARY MARKERS	GRAMMATICAL UNITS	Word	Space	#	
		Phrase	Comma	,	
		Clause	Closing	Semicolon	;
			Opening	Colon	:
		Sentences		full stop	.
STATUS MARKERS	SPEECH FUNCTION	Exchange	Statement Question	Full stop Question mark	
		Other functions	Command Offer, suggestion, call, exclamation	Exclamation mark	

			, greeting		
	Projection	Quotation citation	First order Or meaning	Single quat	‘ ‘
			Second order	Double quat	“ “
RELATIVE MARKERS	Any unit	Apposition		Dash	–
		Digression		Parenthesis	()
	Compound word	Linkage		Hyphen	-
	Possessive, negative	Omission		Apostrophe	‘

Punctuation, also, helps researchers to select the exact final intonation in writing such as “well,” the comma, here, represents a rising or a comma intonation. Whereas, “nice day.” the period indicates a falling or a period intonation (Sidnell & Stiver, 2013, p. 62).

Hence, through the use of punctuation in writing, students can learn different aspects of writing such as: coherence, cohesion, sentence structure, intonation ...etc.

2.3. Punctuation marks:

Punctuation marks are symbols that are used to aid the clarity and comprehension of written language. Among the commonly used punctuation signs, the full stop and the comma will be discussed in details.

2.3. 1. The full stop rules and functions

Trask (1997) points out that the period is one of the problematic punctuation marks. It is used to mark the end of a complete idea or a sentence (p. 5). Butterworth (1999) states that the full stop is the smallest sign, however, it has an important

function. Its name differs from one country to another, while the Americans labeled it the period, according to British conventions it is a full stop. These two labels are used interchangeably in this study. More importantly, it is an absolute necessity for any sentence either it is short or long sentence. It plays a significant role in making the written piece meaningful (p. 06). Learners might remark that the full stop should be put directly after the final word of the sentence so that there is no white space (Trask, 1997, p. 6).

In order to show the period function in the paragraph, Field (2009) illustrates a passage that is written in two different ways. In the first one, the period is thoroughly ignored. In the second paragraph, yet, a kind of awareness is directed towards this punctuation mark that is correctly added.

My name is Marion Field I'm a freelance writer and I write articles for various magazines I live near several motorways so I can easily drive around the country to do my research the airport is also near me I love travelling and I've visited many different parts of the world this gives me the opportunity to write travel articles I enjoy taking photographs.

There are no full stops in the above passage, so it would be very difficult to read it. Then, the same passage is rewritten, but with respect of full stops as follows:

My name is Marion Field. I'm a freelance writer and I write articles for various magazines. I live near several motorways so I can easily drive around the country to do my research. The airport is also near me. I love travelling and I've visited many different parts of the world. This gives me the opportunity to write travel articles. I enjoy taking photographs.

The first passage makes little sense, unlike the second one that is divided into numerous sentences that are meaningful. Thus, the period plays a crucial role whereby

both the reader and the writer tend to achieve “clarity” that is considered as the source of successful writing (p. 32).

2.3.2 The comma rules and functions

Trask (1997) points out that the comma is one of the common punctuation marks, which is regularly used incorrectly. Its complexity lies in its rules that differ from one use to another, they are: the listing comma and the joining comma, the gapping comma, and bracketing commas. Further, the white space comes at all times after the comma rather than before it.

2.3.2.1. The listing comma

It can be replaced by the word *and* or *or*. It has two distinctive uses. First, it occurs whenever there is a list (three or more words, phrases or even complete sentences are joined by the words *and* or *or*), Trask calls this construction an x, y and z list:

E.g.

1. The three Musketeers Athos, Porthos and Aramos.
2. Hungarian is spoken in Hungary, in western Rumania, in northern Serbia and in parts of Austria and Slovakia.
3. You can fly to Bombay via Moscow, via Athens or via Cairo.
4. We spent our evenings chatting in the cafes, watching the sun set over the harbour, stuffing ourselves with the local crabs and getting pleasantly sloshed on retsina.

As a remark, the commas in the aforementioned examples can be substituted by the word *and* or *or*. However, they will form unskillful sentences.

1. The three Musketeers Athos and Pathos and Aramos.

2. Hungarian is spoken in Hungary and in western Rumania, in northern Serbia and in parts of Austria and Slovakia.

3. You can fly to Bombay via Moscow or via Athens or via Cairo.

3. We spent our evenings chatting in the cafes and watching the sun set over the harbour and stuffing ourselves with the local crabs and getting pleasantly sloshed on retsina.

So, when there are three or more complete sentences the listing comma will take a part there such as:

Lisa speaks French, Juliet speaks Italian and I speak Spanish.

°Lisa speaks French, Juliet speaks Italian.

Accordingly, there is a difference between these two sentences in which the second one is contained only two clauses so that the comma must be removed.

Unlike the American comma rules in which the comma is frequently put before the word and or *or*, the British comma rules is infrequently putted.

E.g.

My favorite opera composers are Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, and Gilbert and Sullivan.

Look at this example, when the comma occurs before the word *and* the meaning will be clear i.e. the reader will understand that Verdi, Puccini, Mozart are one group and Gilbert and Sullivan are another group who work together. Thus, the additional comma closes the real meaning to the reader. So, its ignorance may lead to misunderstanding such as:

My favorite opera composers are Verdi, Puccini, Mozart and Gilbert and Sullivan.

Hence, with the absence of the comma before the word *and* the reader will have wrong idea i.e. he will deduce that all the musicians are one group. Moreover, the listing comma has another use. It occurs in the list of modifiers which all modify the same thing. In this case, there is no *and*, however, the comma can be substituted by *and*.

E.g.

1. This is a provocative, disturbing book.
2. Her long and, dark, glossy hair fascinated me.

Now, the comma will exchange by *and*:

1. This is a provocative and disturbing book.
2. Her long and dark and glossy hair fascinated me.

Consequently, these modifications do not change the meaning. Nevertheless, there are other different examples in which the presence of the comma may lead to misunderstanding. Trask (1997, p. 16) illustrates this in the following examples:

1. She gave me an antique, ivory box.
2. I prefer Australian, red wines to all others.

Now, the comma replaced by the word *and*:

- ° She gave me an antique and ivory box.
- ° I prefer Australian and red wines to all others.

The listing comma must be removed in these examples since there are no kinds of lists as well as it is impossible to put the word *and* like the first examples. Hence, the aim of the difference between the first and the second examples are that the modifiers in the second examples do not qualify the same thing, for instance, the word ivory qualifies box, but antique modifies ivory box not just box and the same thing with the second example in which the word Australian qualifies both the red wines not just

wines. So, these examples do not modify the same thing unlike the first examples in which the modifiers qualify the same thing (Trask, 1997, pp. 13-16).

2.3.2.2. The joining comma

Unlike the listing comma, the joining comma takes place even when there are two complete sentences into one sentence. But, these two complete sentences must contain one of the following connectors: *and*, *or*, *but*, *while* and *yet* that should be preceded by a comma, for instance:

1. Norway has applied to join the EC, and Sweden is expected to do the same.
2. You must hand in your essay by Friday, or you will receive a mark of zero.
3. Britain has long been isolated in Europe, but now she is beginning to find allies.
4. Billions of dollars have been hurled into the Star Wars projects, yet to have nothing to show for this colossal expenditure.
5. A dropped goal counts three points in rugby union, while in rugby league it only counts one point.

Accordingly, putting the comma without having one of those connectors, it will be wrong. In fact, it is one of the common punctuation errors encountered by learners as illustrated in the following examples:

1. Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries, its annual income is only \$80 per person.
2. The British are notoriously bad at learning foreign languages, the Dutch are famously good at it.

There are two solutions to avoid such errors like adding one of the connectors or replacing the comma by a semi-colon (Trask, 1997, pp. 17-18).

2.3.2.3. The gapping comma:

The gapping comma occurs in the sentence in case of repetition of words such as:

Some Norwegians wanted to base their national language on the speech of the capital city; others, on the speech of the rural countryside.

So, it shows that the words *wanted to base their national language* which might have been repeated, have instead been omitted. Without comma, the sentence will be longer such as:

Some Norwegians wanted to base their national language on the speech of the capital city; others wanted to base it on the speech of the rural countryside.

To clarify better this, here are extra examples that contain both the listing comma and gapping comma:

Italy is famous for her composers and musicians, France, for her chefs and philosophers, and Poland, for her mathematics and logicians.

Gapping commas are not obligatory; learners can leave them if the sentence is clear without them. Trask (1997, pp. 19-20) exemplifies gapping commas as follows:

Italy is famous for her composers and musicians, France for her chefs and philosophers, and Poland for her mathematics and logicians.

2.3.2.4. Bracketing commas (isolating commas):

They are frequently used in pairs to clarify that the words between commas are weak interruption of the sentence that do not destroy the meaning. Like in the following example:

Karima, too, didn't go to Annaba.

These sentences will be meaningful even if the bracketing commas are omitted like:

Karima too didn't go to Annaba

However, there are some sentences in which the omission of bracketing commas may make the sentences meaningless because *next to this door* is part of the sentence not an interruption in this sentence, provided by Trask (1997, p. 24):

Look, next to this door, is my house

Trask, also, illustrates the bracketing commas as follows:

The people of Cornwall, who depend upon fishing for their livelihood, are up in arms over the new EC quotes (Trask, p. 25).

The following phrase: “*who depend upon fishing for their livelihood*” is just an important information not an interruption so that there is no bracketing commas because in the original sentence which means that only few people of Cornwall who used to fish for their livelihood not all the people of Cornwall.

2.3.2.5. Other uses of the comma

2.3.2.5.1. Using comma after introductory words

The comma must be used after introductory words like, hence, so, thus ...etc. Additionally, when the comma used after an introductory word, a new an independent clause will be introduced.

E.g.

Therefore, it just won't be possible to finish building the opera house in time for the first act.

(Stilman, 1997, p. 67)

2.3.2.5.2. Using comma before questions

A comma preceded the following expressions: do you?, don't you?, isn't it?, won't you?. These are usually used in dialogue. Field (2009, p. 36) illustrates this as follows:

E.g. You will come to the play, won't you?

2.3.2.5.3. Using comma before names

The comma, also, must be put when addressing a person by name. This would, generally, be used in dialogue:

E.g. Do be quiet, Sarah.

John, where are you?

(Field, 2009, p. 36)

2.3.2.5.4. Using comma in direct speech

The comma can be used in order to do the separation between the direct speech and the rest of the sentence of course if there is no question mark or an exclamation mark such as: “I will go”, she said.

2.4. The wrong placement of the comma

Another common error concerning the comma occurs when the presence or lack of it leads to ambiguity, and thus leads to misunderstanding. This means that the writer should be consistent in his ideas, whether the comma is needed or not. This example will explain the power of the comma in changing the meaning:

Original text: A woman without her man is nothing.

Punctuated text 1: A woman, without her man, is nothing

Punctuated text 2: A woman, without her, man is nothing.

(Lentz, 2002, p.130)

The first sentence: means that a woman is nothing without man (patriarchal society) man is superior and woman can't resist without man.

The second sentence: means that man is nothing without a woman (feminist point of view).

2.5. Cases where the comma and the full stop are used interchangeably and their effects on the meaning

Field (2009, p. 33) advises the writer to be more aware of the use of the comma and the period. Here is an example where the comma is placed in the place of the full stop:

She entered the library, it was crowded with people, she didn't know any of them and she wished she'd stayed at home, she felt so lonely.

The correct version is:

She entered the library. It was crowded with people. She didn't know any of them and she wished she'd stayed at home. She felt so lonely.

The writer must be aware of the uses of both the comma and the full stop because any misuse or ignorance can affect the whole meaning of the sentences. The comma has a specific role in making sense; therefore, it cannot be placed by the period which is used to separate sentences. In fact, the period contains a complete sense on its own and well-structured (Field, 2009, p. 33).

2.6. The impact of punctuation on writing

Trask (1997, p.1) supports the idea that punctuation has a positive or negative effect on writing; this depends on the writers' use. He considers it as one piece of written English. For him, incorrect punctuation makes writing complex for the target reader whose main purpose is to get better understanding. In other words, a wrongly used punctuation leads to ambiguity and misunderstanding. Moreover, He argues that speaking as a skill requires different techniques to convey the message; writing as another skill, also, needs various mechanics such as: good punctuation (p. 2).

King (2004) emphasizes that punctuation is the most essential aspect in writing, especially when compared to spelling. It has different effects on the text; correspondingly, he recommends that “now spelling is one of the decencies of life, like the proper use of knives and forks. But if you are getting your commas and full stops wrong, it means that you are not getting your thoughts right and your mind is muddled.”(p. 01). This is really true since punctuation plays the role of transferring the exact meaning to the reader. In addition, any misuse or ignorance of a punctuation mark will change the writer's message. That is to say, using punctuation marks is not only a matter of showing intelligence in using them, but also making the piece of writing meaningful, like in the following example that is mis-punctuated (Butterworth, 1999, pp. 4-5):

Chapter one jade come back Sam yelled his voice was lost in the noise of the river tumbling under the bridge if you could called those two narrow planks and wobbly rail a bridge there was a large sign warning people that is wasn't save danger it said but same clown of a sister was already half way across what should Sam do he had to choices to go after her or run back to the camp-site and tell their mam and dad they had told Jade and Sam not to play near the river then he heard the loud splash that made his mind up for him.

The correct version:

Chapter one

“Jade, come back!” Sam yelled.

His voice was lost in the noise of the river, tumbling under the bridge - if you could called those two narrow planks and wobbly rail a “bridge”. There was a large sign warning people that it wasn't safe. DANGER, it said; but Sam's clown of a sister, was already half- way across.

What should Sam do? He had to choices: to go after her, or run back to the camp-site and tell their mam and dad. (They had told jade and Sam not to play near the river) Then he heard the loud splash that made his mind up for him.

Accordingly, the readers' understanding of the meaning of the text in the first paragraph is somehow complex in contrast to the second paragraph in which the readers' comprehension is so easy. He will notice that there is a difference between the two written pieces in which the second is worth of punctuation unlike the first one. So, proper punctuation makes the meaning clear as well as facilitates the reader's comprehension. Therefore, it gives life to the written words.

Consequently, punctuation can be a problem for both the students and the teacher (Smith, 1994, p. 158). Accordingly, the learners face difficulty in using them effectively. Teachers face difficulty when they are correcting the student's poor punctuation in their writing.

Conclusion

Punctuation is the core of the written piece. The comma and the period are the most problematic punctuation marks. They play a critical role in understanding the correct meaning. Each one of them has a meaning in the sentence and the meaning differs from that of the other mark. If learners ignore or overuse them, the piece of writing will lose its basic sense which is in its turn leads to unsuccessful communication.

THE SITUATION ANALYSIS:

CHAPTER THREE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the information gathered from two sources of data: the production task (a paragraph writing) and the teachers and the students' questionnaires. To make the explanation clear, tables and graphics are used to represent the results of the questionnaires and the test. They are followed by an interpretation of the results. Finally, the main results drawn from this analysis are summarized in to show to what extent the questions raised by this research work have been answered and to make a link between the research hypothesis and the outcomes of the analysis.

3.1. Data collection procedures

This research work is designed to investigate the effect of punctuation, namely the comma and the period on writing proficiency of second year students of English, at Guelma university (2015-2016). To reach this aim, two data collection tools were used. First, two questionnaires were given to both the teachers and the students. Second, a test was carried out for students to check their knowledge and use of punctuation.

Thus, there are two types of data analysis: the qualitative and quantitative analysis. The former used to analyse and interpret the answers of both the questionnaires and the test. This procedure, also, allowed the researcher to measure data. According to Schmied (1993), a stage of qualitative research is considered as the basic form of the quantitative method since the researcher can not count the statistics of the linguistic phenomenon without identifying it (as cited in Bouyakoub 2011, p. 131).

3.1.1. The questionnaire

3.1.1.1. The students' questionnaire

3.1.1.1.1. Population and sampling

We have randomly selected a sample of forty students from the Department of English at Guelma University. We have chosen two groups.

3.1.1.1.2. The pilot study

The questionnaire is a retrospective instrument which allows the researcher to determine people' attitudes and beliefs about what they want and what they believe they will do or have done . Also, it allows the researcher to have direct contact with the respondents (S. K. Mangal & S. Mangal, 2013, p. 352).

The researcher used two questionnaires in order to reach his/her aim: the students and teachers' questionnaires. In fact, five students took part in the piloting of the students' questionnaire. Depending on their reaction, the researcher modified some complex terms in order to suit the students' level. Concerning teachers' questionnaire, two teachers participated in the piloting of this tool of research. According to their feedback the researcher omitted some questions and added new ones.

3.1.1.1.3. Description of the students' questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to collect data concerning the sample's background about punctuation, especially about the comma and the period. It consists of eighteen questions with four types: open, closed, mixed and graded questions.

3.1.1.1.4. Analysis of the students' questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of eighteen items that divide into three sections as follows:

Section one: Background knowledge

Question one: How long have you been studying English?

Table 3.1.1: Students' experience in learning English

Years of studying	Number	Percentage
11 years	01	2,5 %
9 years	34	85%
7 years	02	5%
10 years	03	7,5%
Total	40	100%

It is indicated in table (1) above that only one student (2. 5 %) has been studying English for 11 years. In addition, there are just two students (5%) who have been studying English for 7 years. Besides, three (7.5%) of them have been studying English for 10 years. However, the majority of them (85%) have been studying it for nine years.

Question two: Is it your choice to study English?

Table 3.1.2: Students' choice of English

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	34	85%
No	06	15%
Total	40	100%

The majority (85%) of the sample opted for “yes”. But, only (15%) of them chose “no”. Accordingly, most of the students were motivated to study English as a foreign language.

Section two: Students' attitudes towards punctuation

Question three: How would you classify the following four skills in terms of importance?

Table 3.1.3: Students' classification of the four skills

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Listening	07	17,5%
Speaking	05	12,5%
Reading	19	47,5%
Writing	04	10%
Equally important	04	10%
No answer	01	2,5%
Total	40	100%

(47.5%) of students considered reading skill as the most important skill in contrast to writing skill in which only (10%) of them chose it. In addition, (12.5%) of them opted speaking skill and (17.5%) selected the listening skill rather than writing skill. Consequently, most of the students gave more importance to reading, listening and speaking more than writing. This indicates that writing skill is neglected by most of the students.

Question four: Which of the following skills you prefer to use?

Table 3.1.4: Students' favourite type of the four language skills

Skill	Number	Percentage
Speaking	22	55%
Writing	18	45%
Total	40	100%

The results revealed that more than half of the students (55%) preferred to use speaking skill. In contrast, just (45%) of them selected writing skill. So, the majority of them gave more importance to speaking rather than writing.

Question five: How often do you practice writing?

Table 3.1.5: Students' practice of writing skill

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Every day	09	22,5%
Some times	27	67,5%
Not at all	04	10%
Total	40	100%

The majority (67,5%) of the sample chose sometimes, while (22,5%) of them selected every day. However, the rest (10%) never practice it. Thus, most of the respondents write either frequently or sometimes which indicates the importance of writing skill in learning the foreign language.

Question six: Do you find difficulties when writing in English?

Table 3.1.6: Students' opinion about facing problems while writing

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	33	82,5%
No	07	17,5%
Total	40	100%

(82,5%) of students faced difficulties while they write. Whereas, only (17,5%) of them didn't face any problem. Therefore, the greatest numbers of the students encountered problems while writing which implies the complexity of this skill.

Question seven: If “yes” are those difficulties due to inadequate mastery of:

Table 3.1.7: Students’ causes of difficulty

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Vocabulary	10	25%
Grammar	13	32,5%
Punctuation	01	2,5%
Spelling	01	2,5%
Others	00	00
Grammar and spelling	02	05%
Vocabulary and punctuation	03	07,5%
Vocabulary and grammar	01	2,5%
Grammar and punctuation	06	15%
Grammar and others (translation from Arabic to English).	01	2,5%
No answer	02	05%
Total	40	100%

The results obtained from the above table revealed that students encountered difficulties in all areas. The most problematic and difficult area to deal with while writing is grammar (32,5%) followed by the choice of suitable vocabulary (25%). However, punctuation and spelling (2,5%) seemed to be the easiest which the students effortlessly dealt with. Consequently, students’ main focus is on the structure and on vocabulary rather than meaning and content.

Question eight: Classify the following mechanism of writing from the most important to the least:

Table 3.1.8: Students' classification of the writing' mechanism

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Indentation	08	20%
Presentation	09	22,5%
Handwriting	12	30%
Punctuation	09	22,5%
No answer	02	05%
Total	40	100%

Among the respondents there were respondents (30%) who chose handwriting. Then, punctuation and presentation have the same rate (22, 5%). But, only (20%) of them opted for indentation. In addition, (05%) of the students didn't even answer. Hence, the majority of the students chose handwriting, punctuation and presentation.

Question nine: How often do you make self-assessment about using punctuation marks, especially the full stop and the comma in your writing?

Table 3.1.9: Students' self-assessments in using full stops and commas

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Always	09	22,5%
Usually	11	27,5%
Often	06	15%
Some times	11	27,5%
Rarely	00	00%
Never	01	2,5%
No answer	02	05%
Total	40	100%

As table (09) shows, there were (27, 5%) of the students who chose usually and sometimes and (22,5%) of them selected always. Only six students (15%) chose “often“. (2, 5%) of the respondents never make self-assessments. As a result, the majority of the students (78%) made self-assessments of both the period and the comma. This implies that they were made aware of the use of these punctuation marks.

Section three: The impact of punctuation on writing proficiency

Question ten: Do you think that learning the rules of these two punctuation marks is enough to achieve good writing?

Table 3.1.10: Students’ opinion about the rules of the comma and the period

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	25	62.5%
No	14	35%
No answer	01	2,5%
Total	40	100%

(62%) of the students thought that learning the rules of these two punctuation marks is sufficient to realize good writing against (35%) who did not think so. Only one (2,5%) student didn’t even answer this question. According to these percentages, the majority of students agree that learning only the theoretical part can improve their writing.

Question eleven: Do you think that extensive practice has a positive effect on your writing?

Table 3.1.11: Students’ opinion about the use of the comma and the period

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	40	100%
No	00	00%
Total	40	100%

Although the majority of the students claimed that learning only the theoretical part of the comma and the period is enough to realize an appropriate piece of writing. Now, all of them (100%) thought that more practical courses of the comma and the period rules will better influence their writing. Thus, the results obtained from this table revealed that all the students were made aware of the importance of applying the rules of both the comma and the full stop.

Question twelve: Does your Written Expression teacher correct your punctuation?

Table 3.1.12: Teacher' feedback

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	32	80%
No	08	20%
Total	40	100%

The outcomes gained from table (12) revealed that (80%) of the respondents said that their Written Expression teachers correct their punctuation, while (20%) of them state no. So, the majority of the students announced that their Written Expression teacher provided them with feedback concerning their punctuation. That is to say, their teachers play a salient role in raising the learners' consciousness towards punctuation.

Question thirteen: If "yes", do you take the correction into consideration to avoid the errors later?

Table 3.1.13: Students' reaction towards teachers' correction

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	33	82,5%
No	04	10%
No answer	03	7,5%
Total	40	100%

The majority of the respondents (82,5%) took the teacher's correction into consideration; yet the remaining students (10%) responded by no, and (7,5%) of them didn't answer this question. So, teachers' feedback for most of the students is an opportunity to foster their use of punctuation.

Question fourteen: Do you agree that the comma and the period are serviceable to convey the intended meaning in writing?

Table 3.1.14: Students' attitudes towards the importance of the comma and period in relation to meaning.

Alternatives	Number	Percentages
Totally agree	23	57,5%
Partially agree	07	17,5%
Agree	08	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	01	2,5%
Disagree	00	00%
Totally disagree	00	00%
No answer	01	2,5%
Total	40	100%

More than half (57,5%) of the respondents totally agreed that the comma and the period are so important in conveying the intended meaning. Only, (17,5%) of them chose partially agreed. In addition, (20%) of them opted agree, while only one student selected neither agree nor disagree and one didn't answer this question. Accordingly, the majority of the students selected totally agree, partially agree and agree. That is to say, most of them were conscious of the vital role that these two punctuation marks play in the written piece.

Question fifteen: What do you think about your level in writing?

Table 3.1.15: Students' appreciation of their level in writing

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Good	04	10%
Medium	32	80%
Bad	02	05%
I don't know	02	05%
Total	40	100%

Concerning students' level of writing, the majority of them (80%) claimed that it is medium. Then, (10%) of the respondents argued that it is "good". In contrast, only two students have chosen "bad", while the rest (05%) have no idea about their level of writing. Consequently, the greatest numbers of students considered their level in writing as a medium. This implies the complexity of the writing skill.

Question sixteen: What is an effective writing? (Students can tick more than one answer)

Table 3.1.16: Students' opinion about effective writing

Alternatives	Number	Percentage
Informative ideas	07	17,5%
Correct grammar	15	37,5%
Effective punctuation	04	10%
Precise vocabulary	02	05%
Precise and correct grammar	03	07,5%
Correct grammar and effective punctuation	02	05%
All of them	07	17,5%
Total	40	100%

Effective writing, according to the students of our sample was correct grammar with a rate of (37,5%). Informative ideas had the rate of (17, 5%). However, only (10%) of them opted effective punctuation and (05%) of them selected precise vocabulary. In addition to other

compound choices such as: correct grammar and precise vocabulary with a rate of (07,5%), (05%) of students chose correct grammar and effective punctuation and (17,5) of them selected all the alternatives. Accordingly, most of the students thought that correct grammar is the basic of any good written product so that they gave little importance to punctuation and the other aspects. This indicates that most of them have wrong idea about the basics of an effective writing.

Question seventeen: Are you made aware of the comma and the period by your teachers?

Table 3.1.17: Students’ opinion about their teachers’ role to make them aware of the importance of the comma and period

Options	Number	Percentage
Yes	24	60%
No	13	32,5%
No answer	03	7,5%
Total	40	100%

(60%) of the respondents answered that they were made aware of the comma and the period by their teachers. However, (32,5%) of the them didn’t receive any advice from their teachers concerning the importance of these two punctuation marks. In addition, (7,5%) of our sample didn’t even respond to this question. According to these percentages, the majority of the students were made aware of the significant role of the comma and the full stop by their teachers.

How?

Out of twenty four students who claimed that their teachers made them aware of the importance of the comma and the period, they mentioned the methods that she/he used to do this:

(25%) of them didn't explain how. But, three of them announced that they were made aware of the importance of the comma and the period through practicing different examples and activities. Only (2,5%) of them were made aware of the importance of these two punctuation marks through correcting their activities then providing them negative or positive reinforcement i.e. either adding (+) or mines (-). (15%) of the students declared that their teacher highlights them in the correction for avoiding them later on. (10%) said that their teacher used to give them the rules then ask them to practice and after that s/he provides them with an immediate feedback.

Question eighteen: If you want to make suggestions or comments (about punctuation), please write in the space below.

Table 3.1.18: Students' suggestions about punctuation

Comments	Number	Parentage
Those who commented	12	30%
no comments	28	70%
Total	40	100%

(05%) of the respondents suggested that the teachers should include this crucial lesson in the curriculum of Written Expression to learn it effectively. Whereas (02,5%) of them declared that they need stable rules of punctuation. (02,5%) of the respondents proposed that punctuation alone can't achieve good writing, also grammar and structure have an important role too. (02, 5%) of them suggested an improvement of the methods used for teaching punctuation, while (15%) of students highlighted the main functions that punctuation plays. (02,5%) of them stated that punctuation is for professionals and they were not.

3.2. The teachers' questionnaire

3.2.1. Description of the teachers' questionnaire:

The researcher designed a questionnaire for seven Written Expression teachers from the Department of English -Guelma University-, to gather information about their attitudes towards students' practice of the comma and the period. The questionnaire, also, aims at discovering how teachers assessed second-year university students' writing proficiency. Furthermore, it sought to obtain information about teachers' viewpoints concerning the strategies that can help the students improve their use of these two punctuation marks in their writing.

3.2.2. Analysis of the teachers' questionnaire

Question one: Specify your qualification, please.

Table 3.2.1: Teachers' qualification

Qualification	Number of teachers	Percentage
a.Licence / B.A	00	00%
b.Magister / M.A	07	100%
c.Doctorat /Ph.D	00	00%

All the teachers had magister degree in English language studies, while none of them had License/ B.A or Doctorat/ Ph.D. This means that they tended to be qualified teachers who could deal with students' achievements and particularly students' writing proficiency.

Question two: You work at the English Department as:

Table 3.2.2: Teachers' teaching situation at the University

Situation	Number of teachers	Percentage
Part-time teacher	00	00%
Permanent teacher	07	100%
Total	07	100%

(100%) of the respondents answered that they work as fulltime teachers, while none of them chose part-time teacher. That is to say, they devote all their time in teaching at the university and offer their efforts in improving their student’s proficiency. They allocate more time to specific content areas that are more strongly related to students’ achievements.

Question three: The level(s) you are /have been teaching:

Table 3.3.3: Teachers’ level of teaching

Levels	Number of teachers	Percentage
First + Second	1	14, 28%
First+ Second +Third	2	28, 57%
First + Second +Master one	2	28, 57%
First+ Second +Third + Master 01	1	14, 28%
All of them	1	14, 28%
Total	7	100%

Results from (Table 03) show that all the teachers had an experience with different levels. (14, 28%) represents one teacher who taught first and second, and first, second, third and master one. But, the majority (28, 57%) of teachers have taught first, second and third years. Likewise, others have taught first, second, third and master one. In general, all the teachers taught various levels. This implies that they have considerable knowledge about EFL classes.

Question four: How long have you been teaching English at the university?

Table 3.3.4: Teachers’ years of teaching experience

Years of teaching experience	Number of teachers	Percentage
3 years	1	14 , 28%
4 years	00	00%
5 years	1	14, 28%
6 years	2	28, 57%
7 years	2	28, 57%
8 years	1	14, 28%
Total	7	100%

Through their answers, all the teachers are experienced in teaching English at the university level. Their teaching experience varies between 3 to 8 years. (14, 28%) represents those teachers who had a teaching experience of 3 years and similarly 5 years' experience. None of them selected four years. (28, 57%) stands for those teachers who had a teaching experience of 6 years and similarly 7 years experience. Finally, (14, 28%) represents one teacher who had a teaching experience of 8 years. Accordingly, we can say that the majority of the respondents were experienced teachers in the field.

Question five: How long have you been teaching Written Expression?

Table 3.2.5: Teachers' experience with the module of Written Expression

Years of teaching Written Expression	Number of teachers	Percentage
2 years	4	57,14%
3 years	2	28, 57%
5 years	1	14, 28%
Total	07	100%

(table 05) revealed that all the teachers had an experience of 2 to 5 years in teaching the module of Written Expression. (57, 14%) represents those teachers who taught this module for 2 years. (28, 57%) corresponds to the teachers who taught this module for 3 years. (14, 28%) of them taught this module for 5 years. So, all the teachers had an experience with Written Expression module.

Question six: Do you like teaching written expression? Why?

Table 3.2.6: Teachers' appreciation of the Written Expression module

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes	07	100%
No	00	00%
Total	07	100%

All the participants (100%) agreed that they like teaching Written Expression

Justification:

Teachers have different reasons behind their teaching of the Written Expression module:

- One teacher stated that Written Expression is an opportunity where the learners can reinforce their language proficiency.
- Another claimed that it is helpful for other modules of study.
- Two teachers said that it is important to fulfil communicative purposes and diagnose the students' writing obstacles.
- One of them argued that it provides learners with different practicalities about the writing skill.
- Another teacher said that it is a complicated task so that it is a challenge for him.

Question seven: One of the important elements of the writing skill is the correct punctuation.

Do you include this vital element in your curricula?

Table 3.2.7: Teachers' opinions about punctuation as a vital element

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes	07	100%
No	00	00%
Total	07	100%

All the teachers (100%) include punctuation in their curricula. So, punctuation is an absolute necessity for achieving an appropriate writing.

Question eight: Does punctuation practice improve writing?

Table 3.2.8: Teachers' opinions about punctuation practice in relation to writing

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes	07	100%
No	00	00%
Total	07	100%

As shown in the table above, all the respondents agreed that the use of punctuation in writing can boost students' writing proficiency. This signifies teachers' awareness toward this essential mechanic of writing.

How?

The majority of the respondents suggested that intensive practice makes students' writing meaningful and helps them to organize their ideas through: providing accuracy and preciseness to the written piece and helping in the achievement of coherence and cohesion. Accordingly, these signs are considered as the core of any written piece.

Question nine: To what extent is the use of full stop and comma useful in writing?

Table 3.2.9: Teachers' appreciation of the use of the comma and the period

The use of the comma and the period	Numbers of teachers	Percentage
Extremely useful	07	100%
Useful	00	00%
Somehow useful	00	00%
Normal	00	00%
Somehow useless	00	00%
Useless	00	00%
Extremely useless	00	00%

The results obtained from the table above reveal that all the teachers (100%) opted for extremely useful. Thus, we can deduce that both the comma and the period are serviceable for enhancing students' writing proficiency.

Question ten: Do you think that teaching the students only the theoretical part of the comma and the period is enough? Why?

Table 3.2.10: Teachers' viewpoints about teaching students only the theoretical part

Option	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes	00	00%
No	07	100%
Total	07	100%

From the statistics that is shown in the table above, we notice that all the teachers (100%) disagreed that teaching students only the theoretical part of the comma and the period is sufficient to achieve better understanding. Therefore, teaching the learners only theoretical part can lead to inadequate and unsuccessful learning.

Justification:

All the respondents argued that teaching the learners only theoretical part is not enough since students learn only through practice. According to teachers, practice is an important tool that helps them to check students understanding. Also, it is an effective way of memorization. So, through applying the rules of the comma and the period students can fully grasp them and use them appropriately all the time.

Question eleven: When you correct the students’ writing, do you take into consideration punctuation?

Table 3.2.11: Teacher’s criteria of correction in writing

Options	Number of teachers	Percentage
Yes	07	100%
No	00	00%
Total	07	100%

All the participants (100%) agreed that while they correct their students’ writing, they take punctuation into consideration. This implies that the correspondents were aware of the power of punctuation in making the learners’ writing more meaningful.

Question twelve: Is the writing level of Second year students:

Table 3.2.12: Teachers’ viewpoints about their students’ writing proficiency level

Students’ writing proficiency level	Number of teachers	Percentage
Very good	00	00%
Good	00	00%
Average	07	100%
Bad	00	00%
Total	00	100%

This question aims at evaluating second-year students writing performance. It seems that all the teachers estimated their second year students' writing proficiency as average. This indicates the complexity of the writing skill.

Question thirteen: How could you describe your students' level in using the comma and the full stop in their writing?

Table 3.2.13: Teachers' viewpoints about their students' level in using the comma and the full stop

Students' writing proficiency level	Number of teachers	Percentage
Very good	00	00%
Good	00	00%
Average	03	42,85%
Bad	04	57,14%
Total	00	100%

More than half of the respondents (57, 14%) argued that their learners' level in applying the rules of the comma and the period is "bad"; while (42, 85%) of the teachers stated that learners' level is "average". Surprisingly, none of the respondents selected "good" or "very good". This implies that there is a lack of students' awareness towards these vital signs of writing.

Question fourteen: If your answer is 'bad', what do you think the reason is?

Teachers provided the following reasons to identify the causes behind students' bad use of the comma and the period rules:

1. Students are not seriously concerned with that crucial feature of writing. They don't care about punctuation marks, thinking that they are just formal features.
2. They use them interchangeably.
3. Hesitation of the use.

4. Lack of attention in which they only want to fulfil their writing without focusing on how to use comma or period.

As a result, from teachers' justifications, we deduce that students' weak level of using both the comma and the full stop is due to the lack of attention and awareness towards these punctuation marks.

Question fifteen: What are the most common writing problems you noticed in your students' writing compositions? (Teachers can tick more than one answer)

Table 3.2.14: Teachers' viewpoints about their students' writing difficulties

Students' weaknesses	Number of teachers	Percentage
Grammar and punctuation	02	28, 57%
Grammar and poor organization of ideas	01	14,28%
Grammar, punctuation and poor organization and others (comma splice and run-on sentences).	01	14,28%
All of them	03	42,85%
Total	07	100%

The difficulties all respondents noticed in second-year students' writing are manifold. First, (28, 57%) of them revealed that second-year learners face problems with the adequate use of both punctuation and grammar. Second, another teacher (14,28%) selected grammar and poor organization of ideas. In addition to that, the same percentage represents a teacher who opted for comma splice and run-on sentences as other problems that may decrease learners' writing proficiency level. Finally, three teachers argued (42,85%) that students face problems related to all those mechanics of writing. Thus, punctuation is not the only difficulty students face while they write, but learners' weaknesses are varied and different. Consequently, this affects the quality of the learners' writing.

Question sixteen: What are the best solutions that may make the students aware of the use of the comma and full stop while writing?

Table 3.2.15: The main solutions that may minimize students' writing problems

Solutions	Numbers of teachers	Percentage
Practice, practice, practice	01	14,28%
Respecting the writing' stages (drafting, editing and revising)	01	14,28%
Practice and reading	01	14,28%
Putting mines	01	14,28%
Teacher' correction and teaching the writing rules	01	14,28%
Including punctuation in the WE program of the first- year	01	14,28%
No answer	01	14,28%
Total	07	100%

The correspondents provided various solutions. First, students must practice all the time either at home or in the class. Second, the application of the writing' stages help the students to pay attention to these two punctuation marks. Third, in addition to practice, reading is another source that creates an efficient writer who uses the comma and the period correctly. Fourth, teachers' kind of evaluation may raise the students' awareness towards these punctuation marks. Fifth, asking students to apply the writing rules, then, provides them with an immediate feedback. Finally, Second-year students should study the lesson of punctuation in the module of Written Expression. However, only one teacher didn't respond to this question. Hence, teachers mentioned manifold strategies that may enhance students' awareness towards the use of these two important signs and to diagnose their learning problems.

Question seventeen: How can students reach writing proficiency?

Table 3.2.16: Strategies to enrich students' writing proficiency

Strategies	Number of teachers	Percentage
Reading + intensive writing' practice	02	28, 57%
Reading + practice + checking grammar books	01	14,28%
reading, teachers correction and intensive writing	01	14,28%
Improving all skills: grammar, punctuation, vocabulary...etc	01	14,28%
Be sure about writing' stages	01	14,28%
Motivation to write	01	14,28%
Total	07	100%

From the results obtained, we notice that (28, 57%) of the respondents selected reading and intensive practice as the main strategies that can foster learners' writing proficiency. One teacher added another strategy which is checking grammar rules. Another respondent stated that respecting writing' stages is the base of an effective writing. (14, 28%) of them said that teachers' correction can have a positive effect on students' writing skill. Finally, one teacher stated that students' motivation to write can open the door for all these solutions so that "when there is a will there is a way". Thus, reading and intensive writing are the major strategies that affect positively students' writing proficiency.

Question eighteen: Could you please add your comments about the impact of punctuation on writing proficiency?

All the teachers' comments highlight the central role that punctuation plays in writing:

1. One teacher stated that punctuation marks are more than just signs; they are a source of understanding the ideas.
2. Three teachers claimed that punctuation is a vital aspect in writing. It helps them to establish their ideas. However, it's incorrect use lead to appear drawbacks on meaning.

3. Another one argued that it is the basic of any piece of writing.
4. Others said that punctuation is good when we make transition to show time order, for instance, write first, (comma). Then, next.

3.3. The test

3.3.1. Description of the test

This section is concerned with the analysis of the students' production task in order to see whether they respect the correct use of the comma and the full stop in their writing or not. The researcher did not intervene to ask students directly to write the paragraphs. But, their Written Expression teacher asked them to write down the paragraphs. The researcher designed the test which is about second year students' dreams in the future.

3.3.2. Administration of the test

The test was taken by forty students from two different groups (one and two) of second year level. Forty students were randomly selected. They were asked to write the paragraph separately. In addition, the teacher didn't mention that the students' productions are to be analysed and taken into consideration in our research, to make students work spontaneously.

3.3.3. Analysis of the students' production task

Table 19: The use of the period and comma

The use of	Correctly use d	Wrongly used	Total ignorance	%
The period	30%	32,5%	37,5%	100%
The comma	12,5%	67,5%	20%	100%

3.3.3.1. The period

Concerning students' use of the period, there are only (30%) of the students who used it correctly, while (32, 5%) of them misused it either by exchanging it with the comma or putting it in wrong places, for example: before the word "and". Unfortunately, it is totally

ignored by most of the students (37, 5%). Accordingly, the students' accurate use of the period takes the lowest rate. This means only few students were made aware of this crucial sign in contrast to others who used it incorrectly or ignore it at all. Here are some examples of students' ignorance and misuse of the full stop:

My future dream is to have good average to pass these years in order to finish my study with a high average and to get a diploma, and I want to be a teacher of English in the middle **school. in order** to get or salary to realize my dreams for example I want to have a car, a house...etc

Whereas, some of the participants used the full stop interchangeably with the comma such as: **hence. I** love driving car

3.3.3.2. The comma

Depending on the table nineteen, more than half of the students used the comma incorrectly, either they used it interchangeably with the period or put it in the unsuitable place like: before "because". Besides to its misuse, it was ignored at all by others (20%). Nevertheless, there were only few students (12, 5%) who respected it. So, the majority of the students misused it which means that there is lack of awareness towards the use of the commas. For instance there were some students who used it interchangeably with the period like: I want to be always a **doctor, so,** when I pass my baccalaureate exam I didn't realize that dream.

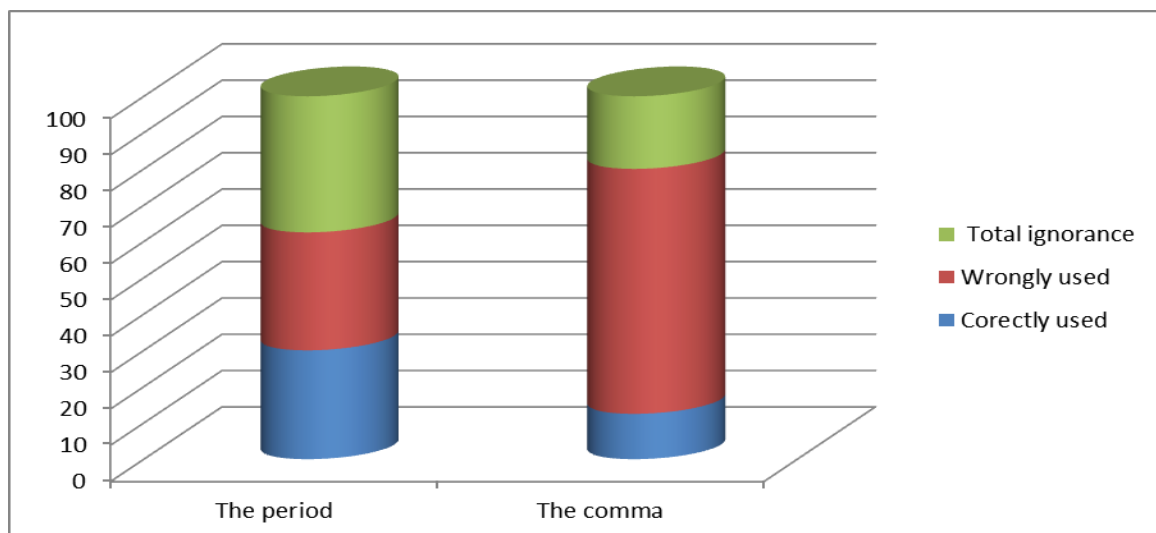
In addition, some of the test' takers ignored the comma after introductory words for example: **So when** I passed my baccalaureate. Whereas, others ignored the use of the joining comma before the following connectors: or, and, but, while and yet.

3.3.4. General discussion of the results

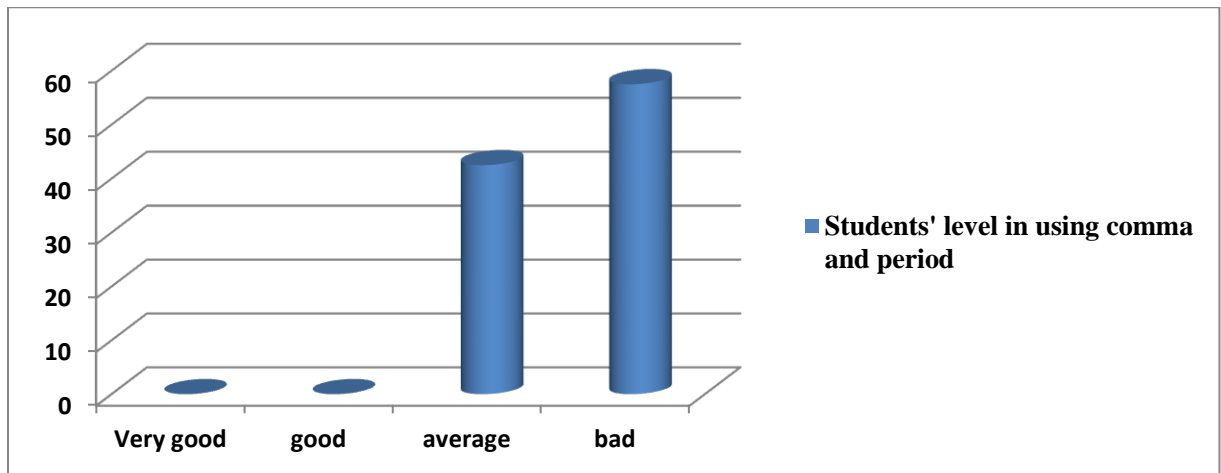
Based on the results obtained from the students' questionnaire and the ones gained from the test, we can say that there is a contradiction between what students said about writing and punctuation; precisely the comma and the period, and their performance in the test. The results obtained from the questionnaire (Table 3.1.5) demonstrated that only few (10%) students never practice writing. This can be interpreted by the students' low appreciation of the writing skill. Furthermore, most of the test' takers neglected the importance of punctuation to cope with the difficulties they encountered while writing. Accordingly, (25%) of them thought that punctuation is the easiest aspect of writing (table 3.1.7).

Furthermore, (table 3.1.9) indicates that (55%) of the students were either frequently did self-assessment or sometimes. In addition, the majority of them (95 %) declared that the comma and the period are so important in conveying the intended meaning. More than half of the sample (60%) stated that they were made aware of the use of these marks by their teacher (table 3.1.17). The results obtained from the (table 3.1.13) showing that great number (82, 5%) of students took their teachers' feedback into consideration. Through the following three graphics, one can notice the difference between the results gained from the both the two questionnaires and test:

Graph 3.3.1: The use of the comma and the full stop (the test)

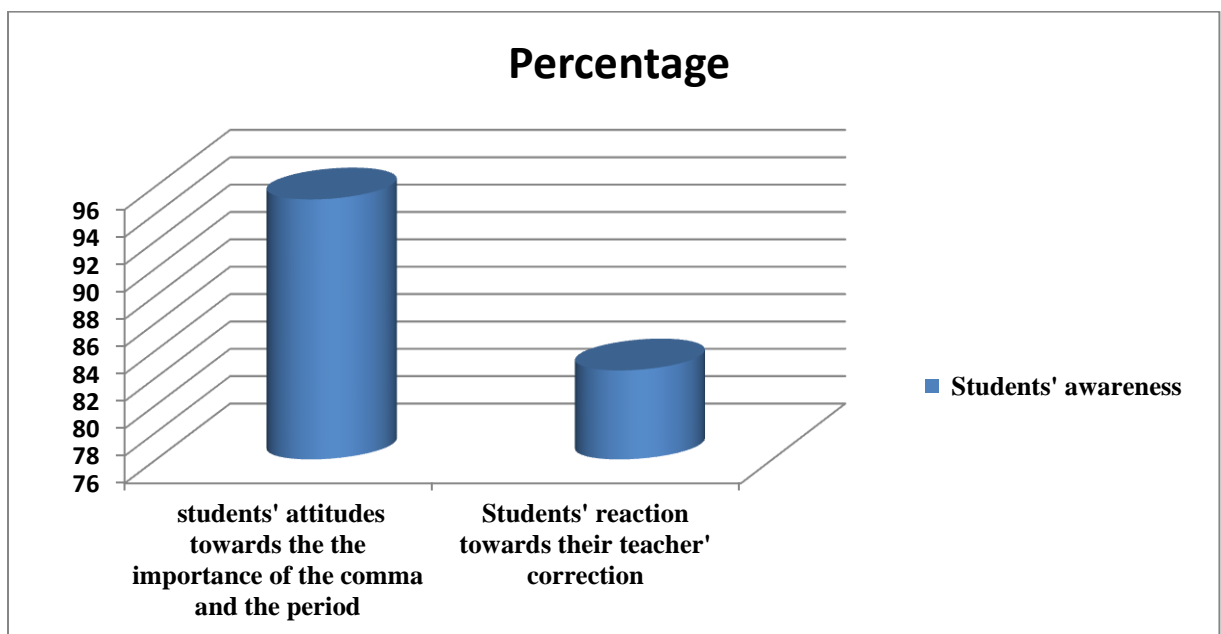


Graph 3.2.1: Teachers' attitudes about students' level in using the comma and the full stop



Consequently, comparing these results with the ones gained from the students' questionnaire, we can deduce that there is a contradiction. On one hand, students said that they are motivated and frequently use punctuation. On the other hand, they do not seem to do so. More importantly, the results obtained from students' paragraphs revealed that there is lack of awareness in using the comma and the full stop.

Graph 3.1.1: Students' attitudes towards the importance of the comma and the period in relation to meaning.



Moreover, there is contradiction between results obtained from both the students and teachers' questionnaire. Although, (95 %) of students agreed that these two punctuation marks play a crucial role in writing (table 3.1.14), and (82, 5%) of them said they took into consideration the teacher' correction (table 3.1.13). The teachers' questionnaire (graph 3.2.1) revealed that more than half of students (57.14) had a bad level in using the comma and the period (table 3.2.13). This means that practically speaking students are not aware at all of the correct use of the comma and the full stop.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that what students said in the questionnaire is contradicted with their performance in the test and with their teachers' attitudes. According to the results obtained in the questionnaire, students were made aware of the importance of punctuation, particularly the comma and the period; in conveying the exact meaning. Yet, this awareness is absent in their piece of writings. So, what students said was not what they did. This lack of awareness in their writings needs more practice in order to enhance their writing proficiency.

GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, different aspects of the writing skill are explored in order to highlight the problem of punctuation, especially the full stop and the comma, and its effects on second year students' writing proficiency at Guelma University. The purpose behind this research is to raise students' awareness towards these important marks.

This study is divided into three basic chapters; two theoretical chapters and a practical one. The first chapter dealt with a general over view of the writing skill: its definition, nature, importance. Thereafter, it presented the different stages of writing; planning, drafting, and revising. It, also, highlighted the characteristics of an effective writing and the relation of this skill with other language skills, namely reading and speaking. Whereas, the second chapter explored the use of punctuation, specifically the comma and the period. It included: the definition of punctuation and its crucial role in writing, putting emphasis on the rules and the functions of the two abovementioned punctuation marks.

Concerning the practical part, two tools of data collection were used, questionnaires and a test. First, two questionnaires were administered; one was addressed to the second year students of English in the department of English at the University of Guelma -08 Mai 1945-, the other was designed for their Written Expression teachers, for the academic year 2015-2016. Second, the test was used to explore students' punctuation knowledge and use specifically the ones of our interest. It investigated the students' paragraphs that were written individually.

The results obtained from the questionnaire showed that the students were made aware of the importance of punctuation, more precisely the comma and the full stop, as the most serviceable and troublesome marks in writing. However, this result is contradicted by their

performance in the test. Moreover, the results obtained from the test revealed that students lacked awareness towards these two crucial signs.

Nevertheless, the test of our research work answered our question. That is to say, punctuation has an effective role in writing. Correspondingly, the findings gained from the test takers confirmed our hypothesis that teachers had to make their students aware of the punctuation marks in order to improve their written productions.

Based on the findings of this study, we suggest the following recommendations:

1. The module of Grammar and Written Expression should include the course of punctuation especially the ones that causes trouble for the students like: the comma and the full stop and the comma and the semicolon in their program me because it is linked to both modules. This collaboration will increase students' consciousness towards punctuation marks.
2. The Written Expression sessions should be extended to three or four sessions per week in order to explore different aspects of writing well.
3. Teachers should explain well the lesson of punctuation then followed it by an intensive practice: in class and at home for gaining better results as well as successful communication for example: ask them to write three or more essays per month.

In sum, teachers should always advise their students to pay attention to punctuation marks specifically the comma and the period, and to pursue their students to apply them in their work for the sake of better achievements. Students should recognize the importance of these marks which have a significant role in advancing their level of writing.

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APPENDIX I

Students' Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims at finding out learners' views about the writing skill and the effect of punctuation on writing especially the comma and the period. You are kindly asked to tick (x) the appreciate answer or make a full statement when necessary. We thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Section one: Background knowledge

1- How long have you been studying English?

.....

2- Is it your choice to study English?

.....

Section two: students ' attitudes towards punctuation

3-How would you classify the following four skills in terms of importance?

a-Listening b-Speaking c-Reading d-Writing

4-Which of the following skills you prefer to use?

a-Speaking

b-Writing

5-How often do you practise writing?

a. Everyday

b. Sometimes

c. Not at all

6-Do you find difficulties when writing in English?

a. Yes

b. No

7:-If “yes, are those difficulties due to your inadequate mastery of:

- a. Vocabulary
- b. Grammar
- c. Punctuation
- d. spelling
- e. Other, please specify...

8-Classify the following mechanism of writing from the most important to the least:

- Indentation
- Presentation
- Handwriting
- Punctuation

9-How often do you make self-assesement about using punctuation marks, especially the full stop and comma in your writing?

Always	
Usually	
Often	
Sometimes	
Rarely	
Never	

Section Three: the impact of punctuation on writing proficiency

10- Do you think that learning the rules of these two punctuation marks is enough to achieve good writing?

Yes

No

11-Do you think that more practice has a positive effect on your writing?

Yes

No

12- Does your Written Expression teacher correct your punctuation?

Yes

No

13- If yes, do you take the correction into consideration to avoid the errors later?

Yes

No

14- Do you agree that the comma and the period are serviceable to convey the intended meaning in writing?

Totally agree	
Partially agree	
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Parcialy disagree	
Disagree	
Totally disagree	

15-what do you think about your level in writing?

- a- Good
- b- Medium
- c- Bad
- d- I do not know

16-Effective writing, in your opinion, is:

- Informative ideas
- Correct grammar
- Effective punctuation
- Precise vocabulary

17- Are you made aware of the importance of the comma and the period by your teachers?

How?

18- If you want to make suggestions or comments (about punctuation), please write in the space below.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you a lot for your cooperation and help

APPENDIX II

The Teachers' Questionnaire

This questionnaire is addressed to second year teachers of written expression from the department of English –Guelma-. It is administered by BOUREGBA Karima for the requirement of the fulfillment of the Master's Degree. The goal is to investigate the teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching the rules of punctuation and whether they give their students the chance to practice these rules or not.

You are kindly invited to answer the following questions by ticking the appropriate answer and providing full answers when necessary. We will be thankful for your collaboration.

Section one: Background information:

1- Specify your qualification please.

a- Licence / B.A

b- Magister / M.A

c- Doctorat / Ph.D

2- You work at the English Department as:

a- Part-time teacher

b- Permanent teacher

3- The level(s) you are /have been teaching:

First year

Second year

Third year

Master one

Master two

4- How long have you been teaching English at the university?

.....

5- How long have you been teaching written expression?

.....

6- Do you like teaching written expression?

a- Yes

b- No

Justify:.....

.....

.....

.....

Section two: The importance of Punctuation

7. One of the important elements of the writing skill is the correct punctuation. Do you include this vital element in your curriculum?

Yes

No

8. Does punctuation practice improve writing?

Yes

No

How?.....

.....

.....

Very good	
Good	
Average	
Bad	

14. If your answer is 'bad', what do you think the reason is?

.....

.....

.....

15. What are the most common writing problems you noticed in your students' writing compositions?

- a- Grammar mistakes.....
- b- Punctuation mistakes.....
- c- Poor content
- d- Poor organization of ideas.....
- e- Poor vocabulary.....

16. What are the best solutions that may make the students aware of the use of the comma and full stop while writing?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....
.....

17. How can students reach writing proficiency?

.....
.....
.....

18. Could you please add your comments about the impact of punctuation on writing proficiency?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thanks so much for your help and valuable comments

Résumé

Cette recherche vise à représenter l'importance de la ponctuation dans l'écriture, en particulier la virgule et le point. Elle montre comment la correcte utilisation des signes de ponctuation aide à transmettre le sens exact et la prévention de l'ambiguïté. Pour atteindre ce but, nous émettons l'hypothèse que si les élèves ont été sensibilisés à l'utilisation adéquate des signes de ponctuation, en particulier ceux de nos intérêts, avec la pratique intensive ils améliorent la qualité de leurs écritures. Pour en savoir davantage sur cette question, deux procédures de collecte de données ont été utilisées. Un questionnaire a été distribué à sept professeurs d'expression écrite du département d'anglais à l'Université de Guelma, et un autre à quarante étudiants de deuxième LMD année du département d'anglais à l'Université de Guelma. Le questionnaire des professeurs vise à trouver leurs opinions sur les performances écrites des étudiants et leurs applications de la virgule et du point, et le questionnaire des étudiants vise à montrer la connaissance des étudiants de la virgule et du point. Deuxièmement, le test écrit vise à évaluer l'utilisation de la virgule et du point par les étudiants. Les résultats du questionnaire des élèves ont montré qu'ils ont été informés de la ponctuation en particulier: la virgule et le point. En revanche, le questionnaire des enseignants et le test écrit ont montré que les étudiants ont un manque de sensibilisation concernant l'utilisation de ces signes de ponctuation. Sur la base de ces résultats, des conseils et des suggestions sont proposées pour l'amélioration de la performance de l'écriture grâce à l'utilisation de techniques de ponctuation.

ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث الى عرض أهمية علامات الوقف في الكتابة خاصة الفاصلة والنقطة. كما يبين لنا الاستعمال الجيد لهذه العلامات وقدرتها على الدلالة على المعنى المقصود واجتناب الغموض. من أجل تحقيق هذا الغرض, فإننا نفترض أنه اذا كان الطلبة مدركين لكيفية استعمال الكافي لعلامات الوقف وخاصة العلامات التي قدمت لدراستنا مع كثرة التطبيق, فإنهم سيحسنون من نوعية كتابتهم. ولدرس هذه الفرضية فسوف نستعمل وسيلتين لجمع المعلومات. أولاً, استبيان للأساتذة و اخر للطلاب. يهدف استبيان الأساتذة الذي وزع على سبعة أساتذة لمادة التعبير الكتابي في جامعة قلمة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية الى معرفة آراء الأساتذة حول كفاءات الطلاب الكتابية وتطبيقهم للفاصلة والنقطة. ومن جهة أخرى يرمي استبيان الطلاب الذي قدم الى أربعين طالباً من قسم اللغة الانجليزية سنة ثانية ليسانس جامعة قلمة الى اظهار مدى ادراك الطلاب لهذه العلامات. ثانياً, الاختبار الكتابي الذي يسعى الى تقييم استعمال الطلاب للفاصلة والنقطة. نتائج استبيان الطلاب بينت لنا أنهم مهتمون بعلامات الوقف, خاصة العلامات التي قدمت لدراستنا. والعكس تحصلنا عليه في الاختبار الكتابي و استبيان الأساتذة اللذان يبينان ان الطلاب مهملين في استعمال هذه العلامات الوقفية. بناء على هذه النتائج, بعض الاقتراحات و النصائح قد قدمت من أجل تحسين الكفاءة الكتابية للطلاب من خلال تطبيق تقنيات علامات الوقف.