

Exploring the Impact of Punctuation Usage on Students' Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

Punctuation usage has an essential role in creating effective writing in paragraphs. This article explored how the students' activity in using punctuation as an aspect of writing skills correctly. Twenty secondary students participated in this study to investigate how to employ punctuation in their English writing skills correctly. This is descriptive qualitative research. In this case, the researcher used observation and interviews to get the data. This research was conducted for three weeks, from the end of November until the second week in December 2020. The finding from the study demonstrated that the students learned to be more inventive and skillful in using punctuation in their writing skills. However, some punctuation usage errors were being to support students in their produce paragraph. The study's implication is discussed to students' writing comprehensibility of graphic principles relative to linguistic principles.

Keywords: *English; paragraph; Punctuation; writing aspects; writing skill.*

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential tool for communicating with people and, as a result, is critical to contemporary society's prosperity and survival. It is the use of

symbols to communicate thoughts or ideas. It converts thoughts and ideas, sounds, or pictures into some tangible trace. It needs a well-structured way of presenting ideas prepared and planned

(Javed et al., 2013). Although the written language is founded on oral language, it is more sophisticated than its oral equivalent. Written language is an encoding of spoken language, including characteristics that have evolved to express various concepts. Printed symbols encode the phonemes of a language in an alphabet, but the prosodic characteristics of spoken language are primarily encoded through Punctuation (Heggie & Wade-Woolley, 2018).

Punctuation has existed since the creation of writing, but not in its modern form. Researchers offer various opinions on the origins of punctuation marks and why they were first employed. According to Saenger (1997), punctuation marks were originally employed to indicate when the reader needed to halt. Thompson (1912) reported that punctuation marks used in Latin were adopted from the Greek system of punctuation termed 'distinction finalis, sub distinction, and distinction media.' In McCaskill (McCaskill, 1990), Linton stated that the function of punctuation marks is fundamental for the rules regulating its use and should be essential for deciding whether or not it is required. It means giving the right punctuation at the right place to indicate the length of the sentence and its meaning exactly. Giving proper Punctuation in English is important to make it simpler for the readers to apprehend what is written.

Punctuation is an attempt to compensate. It entails using punctuation (commas, periods, dashes, colons,

interrogation points, and so on) to help the reader understand what is being said (Borochovsky Bar-Aba, 2003). Most students produce the text and ignore the punctuation in the writing process. They may be perfectly capable of using proper punctuation, but they accidentally overlook it due to the numerous other demands on their time. The text message may not be easily understood or misleading without correct punctuation. For example, "Let's eat, Mom" and "Let's eat Mom" are significant differences. As a result, it's critical to assist them in becoming more automatic in applying the rules. Regarding this, Hutauruk (2016) stated that, commonly, English learners demonstrate their ability in writing form by communicating experience and knowledge. It may be demonstrated that there are flaws to be found in the selection of acceptable words, grammar, and punctuation usage in writing.

However, few researchers have been able to draw on any systematic research into punctuation usage. Grünke & Coeppicus (2017) examined the percentage of correctly used punctuation marks in free writing tasks. The experimental data showed an incredibly easy contingency contracting intervention to aid students who have difficulty writing while producing a text to enhance punctuation performance. Another study found that using spelling standards and punctuation correctly can be improved by using Peer and Self-Assessment-Based Editorial studies (Tavşanlı & Kara, 2021).

Considering the rationales, the present study seeks to answer two research questions: First, how do students use punctuation correctly in the writing process in the classroom? Second, what are teacher and students' views on the use of punctuation in writing activities?

METHOD

Design

A qualitative research method was conducted to collect data from the participants. In most situations, the qualitative approach is used to elicit detailed information from participants about specific phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Hammarberg et al., 2016). The qualitative techniques were used in this study to obtain teacher and students beliefs on the usage of punctuation in the writing process.

Participants

The study included 20 students from the writing class as well as the class teacher. The students that took part in the study were in their second semester. These 20 students of eleventh graders in secondary school in Sekampung and instructor were observed for 150 minutes, or one complete class session. The teacher had used punctuation usage material learning for more than two semesters, which was one of the reasons her class was observed. Based on the findings of the observations, four student participants, two men and two females, and the teacher (female), were asked for

interviews. The four students were chosen based on their level of participation in the writing exercise seen before. Two students were catatonic.

Instruments

To be more explicit, this study relied on observations and interviews. The observation was carried out for the duration of the class in order to answer the first research question about the implementation of punctuation in writing activities. Interviews were performed to answer the second question about teachers' and students' beliefs about punctuation usage in their writing class. The use of two distinct methodologies was also intended for triangulation, with the goal of obtaining a more accurate assessment of qualitative results linked to the current study's aims (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006).

Data Collecting Technique

The study's instruments were an observation checklist and an interview checklist on punctuation usage in their lesson. An observation checklist was utilized during the observation period to record the participants' behaviours, instruction answers, and activities (Nelson et al., 2008). Furthermore, because of the Covid-19 epidemic, this study employed online semi-structured interviews. The interview checklist prepared ahead of time was adapted according to the dynamics of the interviews, allowing for optional follow-up questions as needed.

Data Analysis Technique

Furthermore, the observation result was presented descriptively, allowing for a thorough narrative of what transpired in class and a vivid depiction of occurrences connected to the first research questions. In addition, the interviews were transcribed, translated, and coded following the second research question. The coded transcripts were then analyzed using Thematic Analysis, which yielded reoccurring themes concerning the study's goal (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The names of all participants were changed to pseudonyms. Ana (Female/F), Sri (F), Doni (Male/M), and Anton (M) were the student participants, while Tutik (Teacher) was the teacher participant (F).

Research question 1: To What Extent do Students Use Punctuation in the Writing Process in the Classroom?

Before the observation meeting, the students were given a written assignment to complete at home. The assignment was given by instructing to write an expository paragraph that used some punctuation correctly. As a result, twenty students complete the assignment. The teacher offered to the students 10 minutes to prepare their thoughts and points to share in the next group, which consisted of two students from each group." Tutik stated in front of the class:

Tutik (T): "I give you (students) ten minutes to prepare what you are going to discuss with your friends later to

ensure that you (students) have learnt at home." Use your time wisely so that you may find all of the punctuation points."

After the students completed their conversation with their group, the teacher invited each group to complete their written assignment by using some punctuation correctly. The students from those groups joined and discussed their duties in a group."

Tutik (T): "Students, please find your partner to proofread each other from your assignment. You can choose it by yourself, if you have done, tell me, then we will start the discussion."

There were twenty students, and they were given 30 minutes of discussion consisting of 10 minutes for discussing each paragraph and another 10 minutes to make sure those two students in each group had mastered the punctuation used in writing a paragraph. The teacher began the discussion with the following instruction:

Tutik (T): "Please discuss and share your comprehension of the punctuation usage portion that you are currently discussing with your new partner". You have already mastered it, and I will provide thirty minutes. In thirty minutes, I will divide it into three parts, the first 10 minutes can be used in the first person, and the second 10 minutes can be spent for the second person in a group. Then, the third 10 minutes can be used for both of you to ensure that you understand of the material about punctuation usage in writing paragraph."

When the students made the conversation, the teacher walked around and checked each group to see what they talked about. The students enjoyed the discussion with their group. They were still busy and loved sharing at the end of the thirty minutes. Finally, the teacher instructed that the time was up for discussion. The teacher checked the result of the discussion about their understanding of punctuation usage in writing paragraphs by asking them to present or share their ideas in front of the class.

As suggested by Tavşanlı (2018) that in writing activities of the students still need a partner to organize their writing skills; such as topic selection, researching a topic planning of writing, drafting, correct use of punctuation marks, performing spelling rules, sentence creation, word selection, fluency, organization, and subject integrity. Seen based on the purpose of writing learning, students had achieved the goal of writing skills. One of them is that they can use the punctuation mark correctly to understand the reader of the message written. As mentioned by (Batur, et al., 2016), the use of spelling rules and punctuation correctly in the writing process is important to be known as theoretically and applied directly by the students. As the time the observation was conducted in the classroom, the discussion of the punctuation usage in learning activity done by the student participants in the class, they seemed to have been familiar

with the kinds of punctuation and to enjoy finding themselves learning collaboratively with others.

When the students completed the punctuation learning exercises, the atmosphere in the classroom was quite positive. Students to participate studied materials formed groups and discussed what they had learned with their group mates. The majority of the students appeared to be actively debating the information provided by the teacher.

Research question 2: What are Teacher's and Students' Views on the Punctuation Usage for the Writing Activities?

Table 1 presented the significant statements about the perspectives of student and teacher participants on the usage of punctuation learning in the classroom.

Table1. Emerging Themes on the Perspectives of Participants on the Usage of Punctuation Marks

Theme 1	Previous learning experiences as passive students have reduced writing quality.
Theme 2	The implementation of punctuation learning was helpful, but its effectiveness depended on individual student's performance
Theme 3	Teacher's expectations improve students' participation in punctuation learning activities.

Theme 1 Previous learning experiences as passive students have reduced writing quality.

Students have indicated that their past learning experiences at the second semester have influenced their writing activities. Due to their participation in punctuation learning activities were still in the beginning of the second semester. Ana stated, for example, that her past experiences in writing class that used, a 'teacher-centred' approach to education impacted her level of independent written learning. She said:

"We were perhaps unable to do individual learning effectively as a second-semester student. It's still hard even to read the material at home. We often receive everything in the classroom with teachers who explain to us." (Ana)

Ana's remark was the same as Sri. Sri has also mentioned that her teachers constantly discussed things in secondary school. Thus, it is highly challenging for her to write class materials independently at home in the writing process. She said that:

"...I was still inspired by my second-semester previous studying, in which teachers constantly provided us with knowledge. The teachers described the materials and we as students just listened to what the teacher requested... we are given a material that we must read ourselves the punctuation material. Because we are still in the second semester (of the secondary

school), we still have difficulty being independent students occasionally." (Sri)

Students still found it challenging to participate in the punctuation learning session before the scheduled meeting, as seen from the quotations. They had to write materials for themselves. It has been said that their teachers in high school generally provided them with the necessary learning materials. The learning process was the same as the finding of Kula, et al. (2015) study. They found that the students misuse punctuation marks and do not use spelling standards appropriately. They can enhance their writing skills. For example, punctuation marks are not regarded part of writing, no attention is paid to where they are used, and spelling standards are ignored. The most important of the writer is placed on the content of writing (Batur, et al., 2016). As a result, the influence of punctuation usage on preventing these mistakes was evaluated in this study.

Regarding students' experience in learning the writing process, the English teacher also had the same idea that during the second semester in secondary school, the English teacher addressed many aspects of the writing process, especially punctuation marks. She commented:

"I'm also prepared that they don't have the skills to write. Because when they were in the second semester, they usually copied and paste from the sources. They can get the result of writing without considering the aspects

of writing... but, the reason why I still use teacher-centered in my class because I believe that it provides good strategy for them to learn from the explanation from the teacher." Tutik (T)

As seen from the teacher's excerpt, she agreed that students' prior learning experiences as passive learners decreased the quality of writing learning activities. However, she believed that the most important variables influencing students' writing motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic. To be more explicit, intrinsic motivation refers to how the individual works or attempts to acquire the language because of a desire to do so and the enjoyment received in doing the activities (Gardner, 1985). Perhaps, it also reflected the statement of Badrasawi, et al. (2016) that writing apprehension negative, worried sentiments (regarding oneself as a writer, one's writing circumstance, or one's writing assignment) that disturb some element of the writing process.

Theme 2. The implementation of the Punctuation Learning was Helpful, but Its Effectiveness Depended on Individual Student's Performance

Students believed that the application of punctuation learning was beneficial to their understanding of the texts. They did, however, point out that it was not entirely adequate because they did not contribute enough at times. Doni, for example, stated:

"...Because I did not read the entire section of the materials, I just shared a few ideas with my partner. They may not receive accurate information from me, but who can ensure that I received complete information from them?" (Doni)

Ana, Sri, and Anton also indicated that they did not contribute well while engaging in punctuation marks learning exercises. They said:

"In my opinion, the problem of punctuation marks learning is that not all students have the same (level of) comprehension. Some have less comprehension and some who have a little bit more... if we are partnered with the less understanding, we also comprehend the contents less." (Sri)

"... I had learnt a great deal about the materials. But, when my partner just revealed a few details, I did the same, despite the fact that I could explain more. In the end, we simply could not understand the concepts..." (Anton)

"...the teacher's problem is that he was unable to detect and check which students had not previously studied the material...." I won't be able to contribute many thoughts during the discussion, but I still need to grasp the subject, right? Then I just read it after the punctuation marks learning since I had some suggestions from my friends." (Ana)

Students, interestingly, did not just note their limited participation in punctuation mark learning activities. They also identified several problems in the

application of punctuation in the writing process. It was in line with Sülükçü & Kirboğa (2020) idea that writing lacked phenomena such as pausing, raising or lowering the tone, which explained or modified the meanings of the sounds. However, there were difficulties in reading and comprehending. People looked into several approaches to solve these difficulties by utilizing different markers. Therefore, the earliest examples of modern punctuation marks began to develop.

In response to the students' worries, the teacher explained that it was normal to face some difficulties because a certain learning approach could not be taken for granted. Her statement:

"...Ideally, the process of acquiring punctuation is just the aspect of writing abilities to assist students in understanding materials in terms of Time efficiency. However, efficiency is not the same as effectiveness. Isn't it always effective? ... If the student if they want it to be effective, they have to read and understand all of the material again for sure. The goal of implementing punctuation is used to help them in reading. Collaborating... But, of course, It is dependent on how they (students) learn it.

... It also depends on who you are gaining knowledge from and that is not always the case. Causes Punctuation learning activity to be less than perfectly efficient" (Tutik, T)

As seen from the teacher's and students' perspectives on punctuation

learning, it could be stated even though punctuation learning was reported to be helpful, students' performance during writing and reading activities affected the punctuation mark's degree of success. In other words, the students' accomplishment upon finishing the punctuation learning activities depended on their performance during the writing process. This present study found that the students may not be able to understand the materials successfully as the punctuation marks were made because of their limited contribution. Some previous studies also reported relatively similar findings Ari, & Keray (2012) discovered that students made fewer mistakes in multiple-choice questions and more mistakes in dictation technique in their study with 8th-grade students. Karagul (2010) studied students' usage of punctuation marks and discovered that they were unable to attain the necessary level in the curriculum. Avci (2006) stated that students made numerous punctuation errors in research that looked into the punctuation mistakes produced by eighth-grade students. It could be concluded that punctuation marks could be successful in writing and reading performance if each learner performed well.

Theme 3. Teacher's expectations improve students' participation in punctuation learning activities.

Students acknowledged that teacher's expectation improved their participation in punctuation in writing

learning activities. They admitted that the way the teacher expected them positively affected their participation in writing learning activities. Anton, for example, stated that the teacher's high expectation was meant to motivate the students to explore the materials more. He commented:

"... despite the fact that it is difficult to fulfil, I know that the way she sets the expectation is to allow us (students) to explore ourselves in learning the materials..." (Anton)

In line with Anton's opinion, Dhoni agrees that the teacher hoped to encourage students to have strong reading abilities through punctuation instruction. He made the following reflection:

"In my opinion, she (teacher) wants the students to have good writing skills by appropriately using punctuation marks. We are expected to read the content ourselves as well as distribute the material to others. So, I believe that by using punctuation as a writing aspect, she is providing learning material that allows us to practice not just our reading skills, but also how to create effective paragraphs or texts..." (Dhoni)

As seen by the excerpts, the student participants appeared to concur that their teacher's expectations allowed them to expand their learning abilities and potential in punctuation marks learning. It was consistent with the idea of Sülükçü & Kirboğa (2020), stating that punctuation

marks are extremely important in understanding the meaning of a written phrase. As a result, these marks must be properly instructed, and students must apply them appropriately.

Furthermore, the teacher explained the same perspective that she supported the students in achieving the goal of the writing process by not lowering the expectation but giving good learning material in the process. She stated:

"I don't want to accept their rules. First, I communicate my expectations with the students; I always tell them that by the conclusion of the course, they should be able to accomplish the aspects of writing, especially punctuation usage. After I have shared my expectations, I proceed as planned, regardless of whether they like it or not. I understand their reasoning, but I don't care." Tutik (T)

Based on the teacher's statement, the previous study reported that O'Donovan, (2017) teachers' expectations were an essential factor in assisting students in reaching the course's goal. The teacher's concept of setting high expectations might alternatively be interpreted as a technique to encourage the development of "pushed output," which students were unlikely to generate unless driven to do so by the assignment (Swain, 1995). Here, the students were facilitated through the use of punctuation marks. They were able to go beyond their comfort zone of being passive learners to

become independent learners who took greater responsibility for their learning, despite any errors.

CONCLUSION

This was the first study to look into teachers' and students' views about applying punctuation marks in the writing process to the best of our knowledge. As a result, a secondary review in the writing process revealed that they lacked instructional activities that would allow students to learn punctuation marks and their purposes and attract various forms of intelligence. When it is recognized that students have distinct intelligence areas in content, knowledge retention should be enhanced by activities that address various intelligence areas. In the writing process, the teacher employed reinforcing work, measurement, and assessment questions, and the questions contained in the writing process, and the questions included in the exams that indicate where the punctuation marks should be used should not be included, and the students should find where to use the punctuation marks without a clue. Furthermore, the students' understanding of punctuation marks should be evaluated using texts written by the students.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

The current study included several drawbacks as well. Furthermore, the use of qualitative approaches in the recent study had the unintended result of the findings being unique to their settings.

Although the findings could be duplicated in different circumstances, generalization may be impossible. Furthermore, due to the scarcity of research on punctuation in the writing process, the literature with which the findings of this study were compared may have come from a variety of other fields. It can give possibilities to investigate the impact of nationality, language and cultural background, and academic discipline on possible compositional variances.

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