

Analytical Study on Punctuation Errors in the Persuasive Writing of English Language Learners



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ABSTRACT: The study was conducted to determine the types of punctuation errors and the most frequently occurring punctuation errors in persuasive writing committed by English language learners in higher education. The descriptive-qualitative design was employed to obtain the purpose of the study. The study participants were eighteen (18) third-year students of Bachelor of Arts in the English Language in one of the state universities in Negros Occidental during the academic year 2022–2023, chosen through purposeful sampling. The data source is the participants' independently composed persuasive essays with a provided topic. The errors were identified according to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. and classified according to the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay et al.: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The results revealed that omission obtained the highest frequency among the four (4) types of error, and comma is the most frequent punctuation error they committed, obtaining 67.7% and 77.4%, respectively. The researchers recommend that English language learners engage in self-correction and peer-correction activities to build competence and gain command and intelligibility in English language writing.

KEYWORDS: punctuation error, surface strategy taxonomy, English language learner

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

One of the Basic English structures taught in school is the proper usage of punctuation. Harmer (2004) stated that he considered punctuation as one of the important features of writing, and using punctuation correctly is an important skill. However, in countries where English is their second language, proper punctuation usage as part of the English language study is taken lightly compared to grammar that is extensively taught. For instance, in the study conducted by Mccuen and Winkler (2000) in Pakistan, punctuation errors occur with the omission or misuse of one of the punctuation marks. They further stated that normally Pakistani students from different universities know its uses and placement theoretically, but when it comes to their practical application, they use them inappropriately and incorrectly. Likewise, in the study of Angelillo (2002) conducted in Sudan, South Africa, he stated that teachers often lament that many students do not remember how to put in the punctuation when they write. He added a recommendation that teachers may need to change the way they teach punctuation by leaning toward inquiry and conveying meaning. Moreover, in the Philippines, punctuation errors also dominate the students' errors in their writing tasks. In the study conducted by Catabay (2016), the study exposed that the most committed errors made by the high school students are placing punctuations and these were often misused by them. These instances prove that punctuation errors often happen in students' written academic tasks or in writing in general.

Much research has been undertaken in punctuation errors, for instance, in the studies of Al-Tamimi, 2018, Ali et al., 2020, and Alharthi, 2021, they focused on the punctuation errors committed by the university students, particularly on their narrative writing where they found out that students have poor knowledge of the usage of punctuation. However, not much has been done to investigate the punctuation errors committed by college students in their persuasive writing – a gap in the field of English language studies in higher education that is widely happening that needs to be studied and addressed.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to identify the punctuation errors committed by English language learners in higher education in their persuasive writing.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What types of punctuation errors are committed by English language learners in higher education in their persuasive writing?

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2. What is the most frequent punctuation error committed by English language learners in higher education in their persuasive writing?

3. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study aimed to obtain information concerning the types of error and the most frequent punctuation error in persuasive writing committed by English language learners in higher education. Additionally, the scope of this study focused on the punctuation errors of English language learners in their persuasive writing in one of the state universities in Negros Occidental, who were enrolled in the academic year 2021-2022. The data collection of this study was limited to eighteen (18) third-year BA-English language students only. The second-year second-semester grades on their technical writing course were used to determine the participants in this study. Six (6) students were purposefully chosen as the participants, which came from the top and bottom three (3) students from three (3) sections were taken. However, regardless of the participants' standings in terms of being in the top or bottom three (3), the results of this study were generalized to contain bias and obtain an objective verdict that only answers the set objective of this study.

Each participant underwent a face-to-face conduct of writing a persuasive essay for the researchers to attain the needed information to answer the study's objectives. This method of data collection enabled the researchers to ensure the accuracy of the data gathered from the participants, specifically that it is their knowledge of the use of punctuation marks in the persuasive essay that will be reflected in the data analyzed. The data obtained from the participants were then analyzed using the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014) and the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1982).

Significance of the Study The researchers believe that this study would benefit the following groups of people:

English Language Learners. This study provided information about the proper usage of punctuation in academic writing, particularly persuasive writing. Similarly, this study evaluated the English language learners' punctuation errors, which would help them assess and reflect on their existing knowledge and make necessary efforts to improve their knowledge of the functions and use of punctuation marks in English language writing.

Language Researchers. The results of this descriptive study are foreseen to serve as a founding study for language researchers to improve further and explore areas beyond the scope of this study, for instance, the factors that affect the errors English language learners commit in using punctuation marks in their writings. Also, this study can be replicated to see how comprehensive the gap between the identified issues covers.

English Language Teachers. This study would help the English language teachers identify learners' capacity to utilize punctuation marks in persuasive writing. The results of this study would allow them to develop and evaluate their teaching strategies to enhance and effectively administer the importance and proper usage of punctuation in English language studies.

Program Chairperson of the English Language Department. The data gathered from this study would provide the department with information about their student's performance and ability to utilize punctuation marks in English language writing and may conduct necessary interventions for improvement or enhancement in the English Language courses' if needed. The researchers believe this study would also help future department researchers, who would take it as their basis or guide, especially for an action-long research study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded upon Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

The analysis of errors from the surface strategy taxonomy perspective enables researchers to identify the cognitive processes underlying learners' new language reconstruction. At the same time, it allows the researchers to gain knowledge that errors committed by learners are based upon a variety of logic, hence are not a product of sloppy thinking, instead learners' use of interim principles to produce a new language (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 150).

In particular, this taxonomy highlights the ways surface structures are being altered, where learners may omit the necessary items or add unnecessary items in a text or may misform or misorder them. The researchers employed this taxonomy in classifying the errors identified, for it is suitable for analyzing the surface elements of a language that learners alter in specific and systematic ways. Collectively, the researchers selected and employed the theory mentioned above for it is suited to the attainment of this study's aim

Conceptual Framework

Guided by the theory, principles, and rules of punctuation in English language writing by Dulay et al. (1982) and Straus et al. (2014), this study's conceptual framework depicts the process this study took to derive the findings.

To provide a diagrammatic representation of the direction of the study, the research paradigm illustrating the study's conceptual framework is presented.

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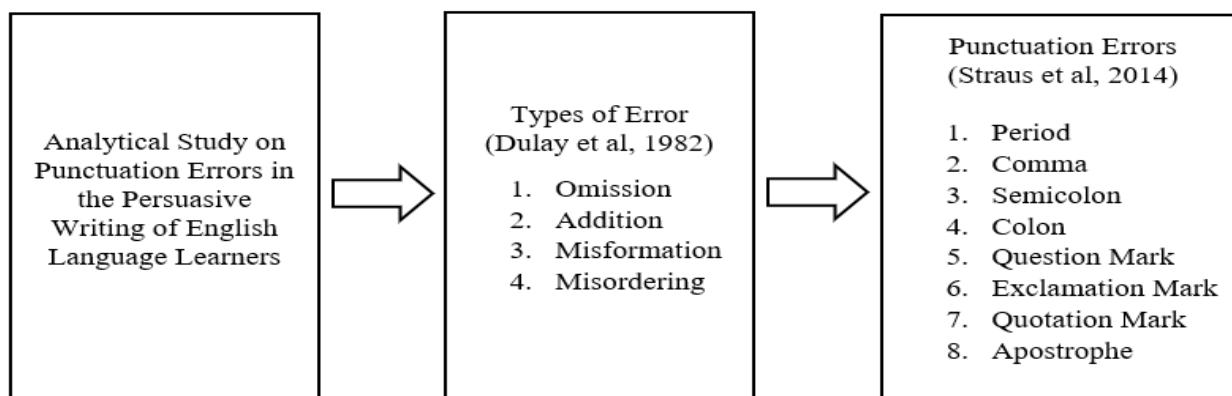


Figure 1 Schematic Diagram of the Study

Definition of Terms

English Language Learners

English-language learners or ELLs are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds (EdGlossary, 2013).

As used in this study, English language learners pertains to students who learn English as their second language.

Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing is a form of academic writing that uses evidence-based logic, emotive language, and ethical appeals to express an opinion or point of view and may also encourage readers to take a particular action or agree with a new way of thinking (Indeed Career Guide, 2022).

As used in this study, persuasive writing is a type of academic writing presenting an argument backed with factual, logical, and well-organized evidence to prove a point or take a position and convince the reader to reside with the author's point.

Punctuation

Punctuation is a system of symbols and graphic features used to protect the integrity of the sentence in the English writing system and make it visible (Krahn, 2014).

As used in this study, punctuation refers to the symbols or conventional signs incorporated in English Language writing to understand and clarify sentence meaning.

Punctuation Errors

Punctuation errors are deviations from punctuation conventions (Turabian's Manual for Writers, 2013).

As used in this study, punctuation error pertains to the errors in the use of punctuation in English language writing that deviates from the rules set by Straus, Kaufman, and Stern's (2014) book entitled *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the qualitative research methods employed by the researchers in the study. This chapter includes the research design, locale of the study, participants of the study, research instruments, data gathering procedure, data analysis procedure, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The descriptive qualitative design was the research design employed to obtain the purpose of the study. According to Gay et al. (2011), the qualitative method is determined as an analysis and explanation of data to obtain insights into a particular topic of interest. Subsequently, according to Calderon (2006), descriptive research is an intentional process of gathering data on current circumstances and afterward providing a sufficient and reliable interpretation of the data, sometimes with limited or no help from statistical methods. Hence, this design allows the researchers to provide a descriptive summary of the data's informational components, which are logically arranged. Additionally, it is stated by Surakhmad (1991) that the descriptive qualitative research approach is one in which the researcher gathers, organizes, classifies, examines, interprets, and eventually derives conclusions from the data. Thus, the researchers utilized the qualitative descriptive design to provide the desired description of the chosen phenomenon.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in one of the state universities in Negros Occidental, Philippines. This school comprises various courses with a population of first-year and fourth-year college students. Additionally, it is an institution of higher education that provides higher professional, technological, and vocational instruction and training in science, and industrial fields and short-term or vocational courses. Arts and Sciences is one of the courses offered by the institution, which specifically encompasses Bachelor of

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Arts in Social Science, Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Bachelor of Public Administration, and Bachelor of Arts in English Language.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study are the purposefully identified eighteen (18) third-year Bachelor of Arts in English Language students from sections D, E, and F of the study's chosen locale in the academic year 2022-2023. The researchers derived six (6) participants from each section through the inclusion criteria followed: the top three (3) and bottom three (3) students in each section in terms of their technical writing course grades during their previous academic year. Consequently, the researchers regarded the chosen participants as a representative sample determined from purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases to derive the most effective use of limited resources. Given that the course of the chosen population is inclined toward English language studies in which punctuation is primarily essential to use correctly in persuasive writing, the researchers considered these individuals as they met the criteria for the study's desired participants. Hence, the researchers believe that the identified third-year students from each section as participants would provide the answer to what the study seeks to investigate.

DATA SOURCE

The data source utilized in this study is the participants' independently composed persuasive essay. According to Fitzgerald (1994), writing an essay is an activity that should be done to improve one's writing skills' concerning that it improves writing abilities such as the capacity to build an argument and the ability to write clearly, logically, and persuasively. The researchers provided the identified participants with a topic and allowed them to independently compose a persuasive essay containing at least 350 words in a period of 60 minutes about the researchers' given topic, "Why choose to study in a state university?" The essay will revolve around the eight (8) commonly used punctuation marks in English language writing by Abdulrahman (2022), which are as follows: period (.), comma (,), semicolon (;), colon (:), question mark (?), exclamation mark (!), quotation mark ("") (' '), and apostrophe ('). Accordingly, the essay was done by the participants in a hand-written form on the scheduled day and time of the conduct of the study, which was convenient for them. Thus, this tool for data gathering aided the researchers in gaining critical insights and obtaining the response to what the study seeks to investigate - the dominant punctuation errors committed by English language learners in persuasive writing.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE

In gathering the data, the researchers took the preliminary step by making a request letter to ask permission from the program's dean to conduct the study on the participants of the chosen locale. Upon approval, the researchers retrieved the request letter. Accordingly, the researchers secured an informed-consent letter for the participants to be included in the research tool. After this, the researchers, in collaboration with the mayors of the three sections of the chosen participants, discussed the conduct procedure. Accordingly, each section's mayors provided the researchers with the list of grades obtained by each student in their technical writing course taken in the previous academic year, where the researchers identified the top three (3) and bottom three (3). Then, the classified 18 participants were grouped and recruited to join their intended Facebook Messenger group chat to discuss their availability to participate physically in the conduct of the study. Upon conduct, the participants were assembled in a room to begin doing the research material together. The researchers then distributed the research tool containing the consent letter seeking their permission to participate and explained the research process, particularly the topic and the punctuation marks to be used in the persuasive essay they wrote. Moreover, the researchers ensured the participants that their data would be confidential, that codes would be reflected in the study instead of their given names, and it would be discarded once the study concluded. The researchers opted for the face-to-face approach to data gathering for reasons that it is efficient, and it allowed the researchers to ensure that it is the chosen participants who wrote the instrument to gauge the accuracy of the researchers' analysis of their data. Thus, the data obtained from each participant's essay served as the basis for the analysis and interpretation of this study.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

In analyzing the data gathered from the study's participants, the researchers employed the error analysis method recommended by Brown (2000), which includes three major steps: identifying, classifying, and tabulating errors. Accordingly, in identifying the punctuation errors made by the participants, the researchers based their analysis on the principles or rules of punctuation in Straus, Kaufman, and Stern's (2014, p. 25-48) book entitled, *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*. Subsequently, in classifying the punctuation errors made by the participants, the researchers employed Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, composed of four (4) types:

Omission (the absence of an item that must appear),

Addition (the presence of an item that must not appear),

Misformation (the use of the incorrect form of the morpheme or structure or substitution), and

Misordering (the incorrect placement or misplacement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in a sentence).

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In tabulating the errors, the researcher applies the percentage formula Sudijono (1997) described to determine the percentage of errors the participants have committed. Presented below is the formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P= Percentage of the error

F = Frequency of the error

N= Total number of the errors

Finally, the analysis of the data made by the researchers is then subjected to cross-examination by three (3) intercoders to ensure that the data analyzed and presented are accurate and easily comprehensible.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers took several ethical measures to guarantee that the study was properly conducted:

1. The researchers provided the participants the informed consent to ensure that they were adequately informed about the research, understood the material, and could choose whether to participate or not. It was further explained to them that their responses to the consent letter in the study, whether they choose to engage in the study or not, will not have an adverse effect on their performance or grades in any courses.
2. The study's objectives and data collection procedure were explained and informed to the participants. Also, they were provided enough time to ask questions or concerns to the researchers regarding the study process.
3. The researchers explicitly explained to the participants that while participation in the study was voluntary, refusing to participate in it or deciding to leave it while the conduct is in the process is acceptable and would not affect their profile as a participant.
4. The researchers guaranteed the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Codes instead of the participants' given names are reflected in the study to protect their identity.
5. The researchers guaranteed the participants that all the data collected from them would be burned once the study had concluded.

Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

This chapter presents the analyses and interpretations of the data obtained from the 3rd year students of Bachelor of Arts in English Language, determining their dominant errors in using punctuation marks in persuasive writing.

The analyses revolved around the eight (8) commonly used punctuation marks according to Abdulrahman (2022) in English writing, which are as follows: period (.), comma (,), semicolon (;), colon (:), question mark (?), exclamation mark (!), quotation mark ("") (' '), and apostrophe ('). The errors were identified based on the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014) and are classified based on the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1982).

Types of punctuation errors that were committed by the English language learners in higher education in their persuasive writing

Table 1. Types of Punctuation Errors and Percentage

Total	155	100 %
1.1 Type of Error	1.2 Frequency	1.3 Percentage
Omission	105	67.74 %
Addition	20	12.90 %
Misformation	24	15.48 %
Misordering	6	3.88 %

As shown in table 1, the results of the analyses conducted on the participants' persuasive writings. The results indicate that the error of omission is the highest type of error committed in their persuasive writings, obtaining 67.74 % out of the total percentage. The error of misformation follows as the second highest type of error committed by the participants, obtaining 15.48 %. Succeedingly, the errors of addition and misordering were the least types of errors committed by the participants, obtaining 12.90 % and 3.88 %, respectively, out of the total percentage.

The finding of the present study is in conjunction with the findings of the study conducted by Kartika (2014), Isnaeni and Datang (2017), Nurwahyuni (2017), and Supriyani (2020) that among the four (4) types of error according to Dulay et al. (1982), the error of omission is the highest type of error committed by English language learners in higher education. However, the findings of the present study contradict the findings of the study conducted by Nur Laili and Adityarini (2018) and Azmi (2021), where it was found that the misformation of punctuation marks was the highest type of error. However, in this study, misformation came as the second highest type of error committed by English language learners in higher education.

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Furthermore, in the study of Nurwahyuni (2017), there were only six misordering errors that occurred which made this error the least type of error committed by the participants. Accordingly, Isnaeni and Datang (2017) classified the error of misordering as the lowest type of error their participants made in utilizing punctuation marks in their writings. The study by Azmi (2021) confirms a similar finding where only two cases of participants misplacing punctuation marks were found in the data source. Moreover, the study by Kartika (2014) and Nur Laili and Adityarini (2018) demonstrated that misordering resulted in no error from the data source analyzed.

Error of Omission

The error of omission is the absence of an item that is required in a properly formed sentence (Dulay et al., 1982). Therefore, in this kind, one or more punctuation that ought to be in a sentence are either missing or absent. Below are the discussions of the errors committed under omission.

Extract No. 1:

"Being a part of a state university is a great opportunity for us () because we can go to school without having to pay a large amount of tuition."

The above extract shows an omission of a comma before the connector 'because.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically, rule 3b on the use of commas, it states that when two separate clauses are connected by connectors like and, but, or, etc., at the end of the first clause, simply put a comma. Putting a comma before the word 'because' separates the idea and indicates a pause in the sentence to put more emphasis on the following statement. Thus, the correct usage of punctuation would now be:

"Being a part of a state university is a great opportunity for us (,) because we can go to school without having to pay a large amount of tuition."

Extract No. 2:

"So, if I were asked if "Is it better to choose state university?", I would say () "Yes!."

The extract above omits a comma after the verb "say." According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically, rule 4a on the use of commas, we use commas to introduce such words like why, well, hello, yes, etc. The use of a comma then after a verb would made emphasis to the next introductory word which says "Yes!" Thus, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"So, if I were asked if "Is it better to choose state university?", I would say (,) "Yes!."

Extract No. 3:

"It sounds cliché() but this really apply to some and it is really a great feeling finishing your studies so that it would not be cumbersome to find a stable job."

The extract above indicates the omission of a comma before the connectors, 'but', 'and', and 'so that'. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 3b on the use of commas, clauses that are joined by connectors such as and, or, but, etc. in sentences where two independent clauses, put a comma at the end of the first clause. Since the sentence omits the use of a comma before the connectors, therefore, commas should be placed before those. Thus, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"It sounds cliché(,) but this really apply to some and it is really a great feeling finishing your studies so that it would not be cumbersome to find a stable job."

Extract No. 4:

"However despite its free tuition() state university ensure to provide quality of education and larger diversity culture..."

The above extract depicts the absence of a comma after the noun phrase, 'free tuition.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 11 on the use of commas to set off non-essential words, phrases, and clauses, a comma must be used. The extract above is a subordinate clause which needs the use of a comma after the noun phrase 'free tuition'. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"However despite its free tuition(,) state university ensure to provide quality of education and larger diversity culture..."

Extract No. 5:

"I myself belong to the latter() however despite its free tuition..."

The above extract depicts an omission of a period after the word 'latter.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 1 on the use of a period, at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement, a period must be used. In the context of the sentence, the writer expressed a complete statement where the subject 'I,' the verb 'belong,' and the object 'latter' referring to a statement previously stated are all present. Therefore, the correct punctuation would now be:

"I myself belong to the latter(.) however despite its free tuition..."

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Extract No. 6:

"In contrast, universities are much bigger institutions with a wider variety of courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels (.)"

The extract above depicts an error of omission under the use of a period after the noun 'levels'. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically the rule on the use of a period, the latter should be placed after a complete sentence. Since the extract is a complete sentence therefore a period must be used. Therefore, the correct punctuation would now be:

"In contrast, universities are much bigger institutions with a wider variety of courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels (.)"

Extract No. 7:

"A degree will not only give students the opportunity to gain an in-depth knowledge of their chosen subject but to also develop transferable skills (,) such as communication, presentation and problem solving skills, while enhancing their ability to work as part of a team."

The extract above shows an absence of semicolon after the noun 'skills'. As mentioned in the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), particularly the rule 3 on the use of semicolons, it suggests that semicolon are used to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas. Since the given extract consists of series to modify the noun phrase 'transferable skills', a semicolon must be used. Therefore, the correct form would now be:

"A degree will not only give students the opportunity to gain an in-depth knowledge of their chosen subject but to also develop transferable skills (;) such as communication, presentation and problem solving skills, while enhancing their ability to work as part of a team."

Extract No. 8:

"In this case, the government is the one's who supports the students(,)tuition."

The extract above depicts the absence of an apostrophe after the word 'students.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 2a on the use of apostrophes, to show plural possession on regular nouns that are formed plural by adding *s* or *-es*, apostrophes must be placed after the *s*. In the context of the extract, the plural noun, 'students,' was the one being referred to as the owner of the 'tuition.' Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"In this case, the government is the one's who supports the students(') tuition."

Error of Addition

The error of addition is the presence of an item that should not be present in the properly formed sentence (Dulay et al., 1982). For instance, one or more punctuation marks have been added unnecessarily or should not appear in a sentence (Isnaeni & Datang, 2017). Below are the discussions of the errors committed under addition.

Extract No. 1:

"...it is really a great feeling finishing your studies so that(,) it would not be cumbersome to find a stable job."

The above extract shows an addition of a comma after the subordinating conjunction, 'so that'. As mentioned in the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically on rule 10 on the use of commas, it suggests either using a comma if the sentence starts with a dependent clause, or disregarding the use of a comma if the sentence starts with an independent clause followed by a dependent clause. The sentence, however, had a presence of a comma, which is unnecessary since it shows an independent clause is followed by a dependent clause. Thus the added punctuation, comma should be excluded.

"...it is really a great feeling finishing your studies so that it would not be cumbersome to find a stable job."

Extract No. 2:

"Checking the background of the school(,) and then identify the ones most convenient from you is a great help in involving yourself in an institution."

The above extract shows an addition of a comma after the noun, 'school' and before the word, 'and'. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), particularly the rule 1 on the use of commas, the latter are only used to separate words and word groups in a series of three or more items. However, the extracted sentence did not show a series of items, but the participant only modified their reasons on the said idea. Thus, the extract shows a complete thought. In this case the added punctuation, comma should be excluded.

"Checking the background of the school and then identify the ones most convenient from you is a great help in involving yourself in an institution."

Extract No. 3:

"When you are considering your schools, it is best(;) if you can refer the school to your juniors."

The above extract presents an addition of a semicolon after the word 'best', which results to cutting off the thought of a sentence. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 4 on the use of semicolons, the latter may

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be used between independent clauses joined by a connector. As shown in the extracted sentence, it can be seen that the sentence presents two independent clauses. However, there is an absence of a connector in midsentence, which results in the unnecessary use of a semicolon. Thus, the added punctuation, semicolon should be excluded.

"When you are considering your schools, it is best if you can refer the school to your juniors."

Extract No. 4:

"Often choose state universities(,) like Carlos Hilado Memorial State University as their chosen school."

The extract above depicts the addition of an apostrophe after the word 'universities.' According to the punctuation rules by Straus et al. (2014), specifically, rule 2a on the use of apostrophes, it states that an apostrophe needs to be added after the s to indicate plural possession on regular nouns that are made plural by adding s or -es. In the context of the sentence, the plural noun 'universities' does not entail any possession where an apostrophe after s is needed. Thus, the added punctuation apostrophe should be excluded.

"Often choose state universities like Carlos Hilado Memorial State University as their chosen school."

Extract No. 5:

"So if I were asked if 'Is it better to choose state university?', I would say 'Yes!'.(.)"

The extract above presents the addition of period after the quoted text 'Yes!' According to the punctuation rules by Straus et al. (2014), specifically rule 3, question marks and exclamation points replace and eliminate periods at the end of a sentence. In the context of the sentence, using another punctuation mark (period) right after 'Yes!' will result to double punctuation and may lead to confusion. Thus the added punctuation, period should be excluded:

"So if I were asked if 'Is it better to choose state university?' I would say 'Yes!'"

Extract No. 6:

"There's nothing you can't choose in state university, it is made for all of us and for our educational betterment.(!)"

The extract above depicts the addition of an exclamation point after a period from the word, 'betterment.' In reference to the punctuation rules by Straus et al. (2014), specifically, Rule 2 on the use of exclamation marks, it specifies that an exclamation mark should be used instead of a period at the end of a sentence, or either one of the aforementioned punctuations should be used. In the given extract, adding an exclamation mark after the period and vice versa from the word, 'betterment' is no longer necessary. Hence, the use of two punctuation marks creates redundancy. Thus, the added punctuation, exclamation mark should be excluded:

"There's nothing you can't choose in state university, it is made for all of us and for our educational betterment."

Error of Misformation

The error of misformation refers to those errors in which the incorrect morpheme or structural form is used (Dulay et al., 1982). This type of error is present in the use of punctuation in the English language in the form of substitution (Isnaeni & Datang, 2017). Although punctuation errors classified in addition are provided, however improper or unnecessary, in misformation, something is provided but incorrect. Below are the discussions of the errors committed under misformation.

Extract No. 1:

"Some people have the false impression that only student from "well known" university can afford to attend the best university(,) hence state university are generally seen as last resort or university for financially challenge student."

The above extract presents the incorrect use of a comma after the word 'university.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al., (2014) particularly rule 3a in the use of a comma, two independent clauses should be separated by a period not joined by a comma to avoid dreaded run-on sentence. Instead of a comma, a period should be employed in this sentence Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"Some people have the false impression that only student from "well known" university can afford to attend the best university(,) hence state university are generally seen as last resort or university for financially challenge student."

Extract No. 2:

"The lower tuition fees are one of the most compelling benefits of attending state schools(,) they receive almost 90% of funding from the state."

The extract above depicts the incorrect use of a comma after the word 'schools.' According to the punctuation rules of Straus (2014), specifically Rule 3a, many inexperienced writers run two independent clauses together by using a comma instead of a period. It can be noted that it is a comma splice because two or more independent clauses are joined together by using a comma. It is suggested that either a period or a semi-colon can be used in this sentence. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

For Period: *"The lower tuition fees are one of the most compelling benefits of attending state schools(,) They receive almost 90% of funding from the state."*

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For Semicolon: *"The lower tuition fees are one of the most compelling benefits of attending state schools(;) they receive almost 90% of funding from the state."*

Extract No. 3:

"To achieve and excel (.) Students conquer intellectual challenges and develop a sense of achievement."

The above extract presents the incorrect use of a period after the verb 'excel'. As mentioned in the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), the rule 1 in the use of period states that using a period is intended for ending a finished statement or complete sentence. However, in the first statement of the extract displays incomplete thought leaving or causing it to become a sentence fragment. It is suggested that the comma should be employed in the sentence. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), the rule 4a of commas, use a comma in introducing sentence after definite words. It can be noted that *"To achieve and excel"* is an introductory word of the statement. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"To achieve and excel (,) Students conquer intellectual challenges and develop a sense of achievement."

Extract No. 4:

"One of the many reasons why most of the students choose to study in a state university is because of it(')s free tuition."

The extract above illustrates the incorrect use of an apostrophe on the word 'it's.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), particularly rule 5 on the use of apostrophes, use an apostrophe with contractions, and they should be placed where a letter or letters have been removed. However, the presence of the apostrophe makes the statement's meaning different from its original linguistic context within the sentence, making it incorrect. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"One of the many reasons why most of the students choose to study in a state university is because of it(,)s free tuition."

Extract No. 5:

"first(;) including their ability and capacity to deliver a good quality of education to students."

The above extract presents the incorrect use of colon after the word, 'first' or before the preposition, 'including.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically the use of a colon, which states that to avoid using a colon before a list that immediately follows a verb or preposition, an oxford comma is ideally used. Instead of a colon, an oxford comma should be employed in this sentence. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"first(,) including their ability and capacity to deliver a good quality of education to students."

Error of Misordering

Misordering pertains to the incorrect placement of a morpheme or set of morphemes in a sentence structure (Dulay et al., 1982). This error in the use of punctuation in the English language is identified by putting the punctuation marks in the wrong place or a misplacement of punctuation in a sentence (Isnaeni & Datang, 2017). Below are the discussions of the errors committed under misordering.

Extract No. 1:

"In state schools are generally more affordable(,) with lower tuition rates, exclusive grants(,) and scholarships for in-state students, and lower travel and/or living expenses."

The extract above shows the misplacement of a comma in a sentence after the word 'affordable,' resulting in a cut-off in the thought of a sentence. Instead, a comma should be put after the word 'grants.' According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically on rule 1 on the use of commas to separate words and word groups in a simple series of three or more items, an oxford comma must appear or must be used. Since a list is presented in the extract, a comma must be used. It shows the reader where one item in the series ends and the next item begins. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"In state schools are generally more affordable (,) with lower tuition rates, exclusive grants (,) and scholarships for in-state students, and lower travel and/or living expenses."

Extract No. 2:

"Therefore, if I am also asked if (,)Why choose to study in a state university?' is because of these kind of opportunities that it has to offer."

The extract above shows the incorrect placement of a comma before the quoted statement in the sentence. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically under rule 13a on the use of comma, a comma must be used to introduce or interrupt direct quotations. In the context of the sentence, the comma is simply misplaced in the sentence. Therefore, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"Therefore, if I am also asked if(,) 'Why choose to study in a state university?' is because of these kind of opportunities that it has to offer."

Extract No. 3:

"Education is the key for the success"(.)

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The above extract presents the misuse of a period after the quotation mark or after the quoted statement. According to the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically on the rule 1 on the the use of a period, it states that the use of a period at the end of a complete sentence is a statement. Additionally, on the rule 3a on the use of quotations, a period or a comma always go inside the quotation marks. In this case, instead of placing the period outside of the quoted statement, a period should be placed inside of the quoted statement. Therefore, the correct word form would now be:

"Education is the key for the success(.)"

Extract No. 4:

"Way back my parent(')s time, they couldn't have the opportunity to be in college because of some reasons: "We weren't able to pursue college because it's too far from our area and the money was good but isn't enough."

The above extract presents a misplacement of apostrophe in the plural noun, 'parent's'. As mentioned in the rules of punctuation by Straus et al. (2014), specifically on the rule 2a on the use of apostrophe, regular nouns are nouns that form their plurals by adding either the letter s or –es, shows plural possession. The noun in the sentence, however is a plural noun that shows possession. Therefore, instead of putting an apostrophe in between the morpheme, 'parent' and 's', simply put an apostrophe after the 's' to show that the plural noun possesses another noun, which is *time*. Thus, the correct use of punctuation would now be:

"Way back my parents(') time, they couldn't have the opportunity to be in college because of some reasons: "We weren't able to pursue college because it's too far from our area and the money was good but isn't enough."

The most frequent punctuation errors that were committed by the English language learners in higher education in their persuasive writing

Table 2. Most Frequent Punctuation Errors and Percentage

2.1 Punctuation Mark	2.2 Frequency	2.3 Percentage
Period	17	10.97 %
Comma	120	77.42 %
Semicolon	7	4.52 %
Colon	2	1.29 %
Question Mark	-	-
Exclamation Mark	1	0.64 %
Quotation Mark	-	-
Apostrophe	8	5.16 %
Total	155	100 %

As shown in table 1, the most frequent punctuation error and percentage of the errors in punctuation marks committed by the participants. The results indicate that among the eight (8) commonly used punctuation marks according to Abdulrahman (2022) in English language writing, out of the 18 persuasive essays gathered from the participants, the comma was the most frequent punctuation error they committed, obtaining 77.42% or more than 3/4 of the total percentage. The period follows as the second highest punctuation error, obtaining 10.97%, followed by apostrophe with 5.16%, semicolon with 4.52%, colon with 1.29%, and exclamation mark obtaining 0.64% or the least number of errors out of the total percentage. There were no errors found in both the usage of the question and quotation marks in the participants' persuasive essays.

Accordingly, the present study's finding that comma was the most frequent punctuation error committed by English language learners in higher education affirms the findings of the study conducted by Kartika (2014) and Nurwahyuni (2017). Conversely, the finding of the study by Supriyani (2020), where the period or full stop was the most frequent punctuation error, came as the second-most frequent punctuation error in the finding of the present study. Another contradicting finding is from the study of Nur Laili and Adityarini (2018), where they found that the exclamation point was the most frequent error committed, for in the finding of the present study, the exclamation point obtained 0.64% out of the total error percentage as an error committed by English language learners in higher education.

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of findings, the conclusions drawn, and recommendations based on the results of this study.

Summary

This study aimed to identify the punctuation errors in persuasive writing committed by English language learners in higher education. The participants were eighteen (18) third-year Bachelor of Arts in English Language students enrolled in one of the state colleges in the province of Negros Occidental during the Academic Year 2021-2022.

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Specifically, this study sought to uncover the types of punctuation error and the most frequent punctuation error committed by English language learners in higher education.

While errors of addition, misformation, and misordering were also found, the highest type of punctuation error committed by English language learners in higher education is the omission error or the absence of a punctuation mark that should be in a sentence.

The most frequent punctuation error committed by English language learners in higher education is the punctuation mark comma. Several errors were also found in the use of a period or full stop, semicolon, colon, apostrophe, and exclamation mark. No errors were found in the use of both question and quotation marks.

CONCLUSIONS

The study findings of the initial investigation led to the following conclusion:

Considering that the results built upon the present and the related studies conducted in countries where the English language is their second language, however subject to a comprehensive investigation, these suggest that their errors are a result of the intralingual transfer or the errors made within the target language. Furthermore, because the Filipino language does not have punctuation marks as part of their mother tongue that learners can use as referent, it interferes in the process of learning the second language. For instance, the omission of commas which were present in most of the errors identified in this present study, signifies that the participants view comma as a mark to signal a pause in their sentence when read aloud and not as a part of the sentence structure and meaning-making. These are evident in their omission of the comma between two independent clauses connected by a coordinating conjunction, in introducing or interrupting direct quotations, the oxford, and the appositive comma, which are some of the significant errors the participants committed.

Additionally, it can also be implied that the participants know the correct usage of certain punctuation marks but still commit such errors due to extraneous hindrances, which can involve extraneous factors affecting their writing performance, such as carelessness and lack of attention, interest, and motivation to write, not by lack of knowledge. However, at the same time, it cannot be denied that the teachings of punctuation marks are not given as much importance as grammar does to second-language learners of the English language and could be a pertinent factor in understanding and addressing these errors in the use of punctuation marks even on English language learners in higher education. Lastly, as with both question and quotation marks having no identified errors, it could be inferred that the participants have substantial knowledge about their functions, especially since they only have a few distinctive functions that were taught from the primary stages of the participants' acquisition or learning development of the English language as their second language. In sum, errors are common in the course of learning a second language, and the approach of error analysis can aid both teachers and learners in designing strategies to improve their teaching methods and the learners' understanding of a subject involving second-language acquisition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the previous findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were formulated:

The Bachelor of Arts in English Language learners can reflect on their errors and may continue assessing and improving their knowledge of punctuation marks through reading and writing. At the same time, they can engage in self-correction and peer-correction activities, where the latter would be ideally administered by a teacher as part of building their competence and gaining command and intelligibility in English language writing.

The English Language researchers can utilize this study as a reference study to further improve and explore areas beyond its scope. For instance, the factors that affect the errors English language learners commit in using punctuation marks in their writings. Another is to conduct action research where researchers can craft a set of lessons and activities to be administered to chosen participants, then a test by the end of the administration of the lessons and activities would be done to assess whether or not there has been an improvement in their knowledge of the use of punctuation in English language writing. Also, this study can be replicated to see how comprehensive the gap between the identified issues covers.

The Bachelor of Arts in English Language teachers may evaluate the English language learners on the uses of punctuation marks by giving them pre-tests before the start of their class. Additionally, the teachers may also conduct writing activities to enhance the learning capacity of the learners in using punctuation marks. Consequently, the teachers should provide comments on where their learners should improve to avoid repeating the punctuation errors they previously committed, which in turn can open an avenue for constructive criticism.

The Bachelor of Arts in English Language program chairperson may be informed about their learners' concerns and difficulties, particularly their performance and ability to utilize punctuation marks in their writing activities, so they can take actions to address these issues that English language learners commonly experience.

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