

# **Problem Facing EFL University Students in Using Punctuation Marks:**

A Case Study of Students of Faculty of Art, Omdurman Islamic University, Sudan ( 2017 )

**Hamad Alneil Bakhet Elemam Mohamed**

**May / 2018**

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# **Dedication**

With gratitude and respect

To my parents

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to investigate the problems facing university students in using punctuation marks. It is based on three assumptions, first whether some of EFL university students' problems in writing are due to their ineffective practice in using punctuation marks, secondly whether most EFL university students are not aware of punctuation marks, and the third one, whether EFL university students face difficulties in using punctuation marks in writing. To examine these assumptions, the researcher adopted a questionnaire for the students in order to collect the data. The instruments were distributed to the respondents; they were fifty (50) third year students of Omdurman Islamic University for men. The data was analyzed with use of the statistical analysis. The researcher has organized the gathered data, and then the data was presented in a form of graphs, percentages and tables. The data has obtained the necessary results that address the objectives of the research. After testing the hypotheses and relating the analyzed data to the research objectives, the researcher found that the majority of the third year students in Omdurman Islamic University for men face problems in using punctuation marks. Accordingly, the researcher recommends that it is advised to include the whole punctuation marks in the process of teaching and learning. Besides, the designed syllabus has to be concentrated in teaching and learning of the punctuation marks as a separate unit of writing system. And the teachers should try to use more activities to develop students' ability in punctuation marks. Moreover, remedial activities should be made to develop the level of less able students.

مشاكل استخدام علامات الترتيم التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية  
بالجامعات:

دراسة حالة طلاب كلية الآداب بجامعة ام درمان الاسلامية – السودان (2017)  
حمدالنيل بخيت الامام محمد

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### ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي معرفة مشاكل استخدام علامات الترتيم التي تواجه طلاب اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات. وهي مبنية علي ثلاثة افتراضات. الافتراض الاول هو: بعض مشاكل طلاب الجامعات في الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية ناتج عن عدم الممارسة الفعالة في استخدام علامات الترتيم. الافتراض الثاني هو: معظم طلاب اللغة في الجامعات غير مدركين لعلامات الترتيم. والافتراض الثالث هو: طلاب اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات يواجهون مشاكل في استخدام علامات الترتيم في الكتابة. لتعزيز اسئلة اهمية الدراسة قام الباحث باجراء استبيان للطلاب بغرض الحصول علي معلومات. وزعت الاستبيانات عينة من الاطلاب وعددهم (50) طالب من جامعة ام درمان الاسلامية – وحلت النتائج باستخدام التحليل الاحصائي حيث تم تسجيل البيانات في صورة نسبة مئوية، ومن ثم عرضها علي شكل جداول ومخططات بيانية، وقد وجد ان جميع البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها تخدم اهداف البحث. وجد الباحث ان معظم طلاب اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة ام درمان الاسلامية السنة الثالثة يواجهون مشاكل في استخدام علامات الترتيم، وعليه يوصي الباحث بادخال جميع علامات الترتيم عند التدريس. ويجب علي المدرس استخدام نشاطات كثيرة لتنمية مقدرات الطلاب في استخدام علامات الترتيم بالاضافة الي المعالجات لتطوير المستويات الضعيفة.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background

Learning English as a foreign Language usually implies making mistakes. A very common types of mistakes which EFL university students make when writing is the use of punctuation marks. This study intends to deal with using of punctuation marks and the problems facing EFL university students when using punctuation marks in writing, with particular reference to the third year university students, Faculty of Art at Omdurman University, hoping that this study will come up with effective solutions.

A good writing has some aspects such as grammar, vocabulary and punctuation marks which are used in writing a text. These aspects can help the reader to understand the text easier. Traditionally, teaching English has only focused on grammar and vocabulary but punctuation marks is rarely taught in the university, where as the use of punctuation marks in writing English is very important. Punctuation marks are the “traffic signal” of a language. When correctly used, they guide the reader through the text and makes comprehension easier. However, when incorrectly placed, the meaning of the text can be changed. Using of punctuation marks in writing helps the reader to understand the passage that is being conveyed. Punctuation marks primarily help to indicate the pauses and the emphasis on certain ideas or thoughts that are discussed in the text. So that using of punctuation marks is very important.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

The researcher has noticed that large numbers of EFL university students' achievement in writing a text is very poor. They do not use the punctuation marks correctly. This inability due to students' difficulties in using punctuation marks. The researcher also noticed that EFL university students exhibit errors of punctuation marks in writing. These errors are reflected in their performance.

The majority of the students cannot deal with punctuation marks .This problem is a call for an urgent investigation and underlines a quick finding of solution to put the process of teaching and writing, by using the punctuation marks correctly, on the righttrack.

## **1.2 Objective of the Study**

1. To investigate the main causes of the problems that affects the EFL university students' performance when using punctuation marks in writing.
2. To find out whether the EFL university students are aware of the use of punctuation marks.
3. To determine the difficulties which EFL university students encounter when using punctuation marks in writing.

## **1.3 Question of the Study**

1. Why EFL university students have problems in using punctuation marks in writing.
2. To what extend are EFL university students aware of using punctuation marks.
3. What are the difficulties which are encountered by EFL university student when using punctuation mark.

## **1.4. Hypotheses of the Study**

2. Some of EFL university students' problems in writing are due to their ineffective practice in using punctuation marks.
3. Most EFL university students are not aware of punctuation marks.
4. EFL university students face difficulties in using punctuation marks in writing.

## **1.5. Significant of the Study**

This study investigates the problems that face EFL university students in using punctuation marks .This investigation into EFL universitystudents'

errors can help in suggesting some techniques for dealing with the problems facing EFL university students in using punctuation marks. This investigation can also be considered as an exploration of an area that helps both students and teachers map out their learning and teaching strategies to develop professionally.

### **1.6. Methodology of the Study**

The descriptive method will be followed in conducting the study to verify the hypotheses of the study. The tool which will be used for collecting data is questionnaire. This questionnaire will be distributed randomly to collect data from EFL university students at Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Art.

### **1.7. Limits of the Study**

This study will be limited to the problems that face EFL university students at Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Art. All the students are in the third year, semester five, 2017-2018.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.0. Introduction

The main purposes of this chapter are to review literature related to the topic writing. It also deals with the rules of punctuation marks in English language. The researcher has noticed that EFL university students face problems in applying punctuation marks in writing. So he intends to study problems in the use of punctuation marks in written discourse.

### 2.1. The Concept of Punctuation

Punctuation marks are considered as one of the most important aspects of written language. They are symbols used in a sentence to indicate the structure of a sentence. It also helps to clarify meaning in English. Without punctuation it would be difficult to determine the exact meaning of sentences. The word “punctuation” is derived from the Latin “punctus” which means “point out”; the present day meaning comes from the insertion of “points” or “dots” into written text to indicate pauses. According to Gerhard, R and Margret, A (1914:1) “*punctuation is a convenient mechanical device for indicating or assuring the unity, the coherence, or the emphasis implied in the written expression of thought*”. Lambm, (2008:32) define the concept of punctuation as “*series of marks which can be used to separate words or group of words to make the intended meaning clear and easy to follow. It can be used to emphasize certain words or phrase, and to distinguish between major and minor ideas*”.

Nurnberg “1990:11” state that:

*“punctuation is a large part of a system of convention the function of which is to assist the written language in indicating those elements of speech which cannot be conveniently set down on paper: chiefly pause, pitch and stress.”*

According to Gerhard, R and Margret, A (1914:1) “*punctuation is a convenient mechanical device for indicating or assuring the unity, the coherence, or the emphasis implied in the written expression of thought*”.

## **2.2. Function of Punctuation Marks**

Punctuation is placed in a text to make meaning clear and to make reading easier. The various punctuation marks perform four functions: they (1) separate (a period separates sentences}, (2) group or enclose (parentheses enclose extraneous information}, (3) connect (a hyphen connects a unit modifier), (4) impart meaning (a question mark may make an otherwise declarative sentence interrogative). Murry (1985:498} states that: “*In general punctuation separates, links, encloses and show omission.*” For example: period (.) separate one sentence from the other, hyphen (-) links part of compound words, quotation marks (“ ”) enclose speaker’s exact words and separate them from the rest of the sentence, and apostrophe ( ‘ ) shows that letters have been omitted from a word. The function of punctuation marks is the basis for the rules governing its use and should be the basis for determining whether or not are needed. **2.3.**

## **Categories of Punctuation**

According to Gerhard R and Margret, A (1914:2):

*“the chief punctuation mark are : the period, the question mark or interrogation point, the exclamation point, the colon, the semicolon, the comma, the dash, the apostrophe, the quotation marks and the parentheses, the brackets, and the hyphen”.*

It is convenient to divide punctuation into two broad categories: the stops and the others. Stops take their name from the fact that they correspond (though only loosely) to pauses. The other marks do not mark pauses (though on occasion some of them signal voice intonations). We look at the stops first, then we look at the other marks.

### **2.3.1. The stops**

The stops include the period, the comma, the question mark, the exclamation point, the colon, the semicolon, and the dash.

#### **2.3.1.1. The period (.)**

According to Stratus (2010: 17) the period is used in the following situations:

- 1- At the end of a complete sentence that is a statement (e.g. They visit their relatives.)
- 2- After an indirect question (e.g. He asked where we were going.)
- 3- At the end of a declarative sentence (e.g. We have a meeting with a manager today.)
- 4- At the end of most imperative sentences (e.g. Please let me know when you are leaving for the journey.)
- 5- After most abbreviations and initials (e.g. Mr. Burns /

Dr. Hassan /a.m. / p.m.)

#### **2.3.1.2. The comma ( , )**

The comma is the most important punctuation mark after the full stop. It shows extra information has been added to a sentence. The main use of the comma is separating the parts of the sentences.

According to ( Fawcett and Standberg, 2000:434) a comma is used:

1. After most introductory phrases and more than two words (e.g. By the end of the day, we wanted to leave).
2. To separate the adjectives when two or more adjectives precede a noun (e.g. A high, big, beautiful building.)
3. To separate independent clauses that are joined by the coordinating conjunctions (e.g. I locked the car, but I foolishly left the keys of the car.)

#### **Other uses of comma:**

According to Winterrowd ( 1985:577) a comma is used :

1. To separate introductory adverbial clauses (e.g. Before the featured movie began, the audience saw three short films.)

2. To separate introductory participial phrases (e.g. Exercising everybody, Ali lost three pounds easily)
3. To separate long or successive introductory prepositional phrase from the rest of the sentence (e.g. in the shop on the corner of the market, beautiful winter clothes are on sale).
4. To separate some short introductory elements from the rest of the sentence (e.g. No, I'm not leaving), also to separate contrasting word, phrase and clauses introduced by the word not (e.g. That magazine is published weekly, not monthly.)
5. After the noun of direct address when it appears at the beginning of a sentence (e.g. Hassan, when is the soccer match?)
6. To separate a person's name from a degree or affiliation that follows it (e.g. Louisa Maya, Ph.D.).

According to Furthermore Fawcett and Sandberg (2000:435) a comma is used:

1. To set off appositives (e.g. this is her favorite food, Ketchup sandwiches).
2. To set off the nonrestrictive reactive clause (e.g. Raj, Who is apart-time aviator, loves to tinker with machines of all kinds).
3. To set off a parenthetical elements (e.g. By the way, where is the judge's umbrella?).
4. Also is used after answering a Yes /No question (e.g. No, I'm not sure about that answer.)
5. A comma is used when addressing someone directly and specifically naming the person spoken to (e.g. Alicia, where did you put my law books?)
6. The comma is used after interjections (e.g. Ah, these apples are delicious).
7. To separate parts of geographical names and parts of dates when it occurs within a sentence (e.g. the carters were married on Monday, April 12, 1975, in London, England ).

Sometimes the comma is placed before and after the expression. These paired commas separate the expression from the rest of the sentence. According to Winterowd and Murry(1985:582):

1. Paired commas are used with nouns of direct address when they interrupt the flow of a sentence (e.g. when, Hassan, will the job be finished?)
2. And are used with transitional expressions that interrupt the flow of the sentence (e.g. People left, however, when it began to rain.)
3. Also paired commas are used with contrasting expressions when they interrupt the sentence (e.g. I like to watch ice hockey, not field hockey, on TV.)
4. And to enclose nonessential appositives and nonessential appositive phrase
5. that interrupt a sentence (e.g. Georgia O’Keeffe, an American painter, has lived in new Mexico for many years).

#### **2.3.1.3. The question mark (?)**

Bramer and Sedley (1981: 493) explain the use of the question mark as follows;

1. The question mark is used to punctuate direct questions wherever they occur (e.g. How can you introduce your lesson?)
2. The question mark is used to punctuate an utterance which is worded as a request for information (e.g. Who are you?)

#### **2.3.1.4. The exclamation mark (!)**

An exclamation mark is used at the end of an exclamatory sentence to show strong emotion (e.g. I passed my English exam.)

An exclamation mark may be used after an interjection. An interjection is one or more words used alone to show strong feeling (e.g. Whew! It’s hot out today.)An exclamation mark may be used at the end of an imperative sentence that gives a strong command (e.g. Lock the door right now! Stop! Don’t sit down!)

### **2.3.1.5. The colon ( : )**

The colon is a device that gives the reader a signal to anticipate more information, and indicates a discontinuity of grammatical construction greater than that by the semicolon. The colon has many uses. According to Hairston (1981:265) “*the colon signals an illustration at the end of an independent clause*” (e.g. One attribute is necessary for living in Mexico: patience). Also according to Cowan and Cowan (1980:663) “*a colon can connect a series or list to the sentence*” (e.g. I have four classes: math, biology, English and history). Also a colon can link one statement to another to develop, illustrate, explain or amplify it (e.g. Any large cafeteria can have two related problems: it must fix enough food but not too much, and it must keep the food from spoiling). A colon adds emphasis to a phrase that completes sentence (e.g. Only one thing can make me happy: a new camera). Also colons can follow salutation in letters ( e.g. Dear sir : ) . A colon always goes outside quotation marks. In proportions, colons mean ratios (e.g. 8:4 = 12:x). In expression of time, a colon is used to separate hour and minutes (e.g. 9:30 A.M.), moreover Turabian (1973 : 48) says: “*a colon is used between place and publisher in footnote and bibliographical references, and between volume and page references in citation*”. Also Winterowd and Murray (1985 : 591) says: “*a colon is used to separate chapter numbers from verse numbers in references from the Bible*” .

### **2.3.1.6. The semicolon (;)**

The semicolon is a stronger mark of punctuation than the comma. It indicates a greater pause than the comma, but not as great pause as a period. A semicolon can join two sentences that are close in meaning; also it can add clarity to involved sentences. The semicolon has different uses Wintered and Murray (1985: 588) suggest that:“*a semicolon is used to separate closely related dependent clauses that are not joined by coordinating conjunction*” (e.g. One of the twins has traveled all over the world; the other rarely leaves home.). It is also used between independent clauses when the second clause begins with

transitional expression such as therefore, however, besides, in fact and for example (e.g. Everyone had already seen the local movie; therefore, we decided to go bowling). The semicolon is used to separate items in a series when one or more of the items contains commas (e.g. Driver's examinations will be given on Monday, June 19; and Wednesday, June 21). Also a semicolon is used between independent clause when commas appear in the clause (e.g. We had wanted to drive Shorn Colorado to Arizona; but since a blizzard made driving hazardous, we decided to fly).

### **2.3.1.7. The dash(-)**

Crystal (1995:283) explains that, "*the dash does not have many special uses of its own and is mostly used as a replacement for the comma, the semicolon, the colon, or parentheses*". It is usually considered to be stronger than a comma. The dash, however, can be over used. It should be used only for special emphasis and effects. Dashes like commas are often used in pairs. The dash is used in the following situations;

1. In forceful expressions, where repetitions and restating make important words stand out (e.g. He is an honest worker — an honest worker indeed!)
2. The dash is used with afterthought. We are unable to do It — unless the situation changes I'll meet you before the movie starts — unless something happens to make me late.
3. To indicate a sudden, abrupt break of an unfinished word or sentence (e.g. She will take charge of this post and — Wait a minute. Who are you"?)
4. To set off a summary of a preceding series (e.g. Food, clothing, shelter, and a sense of humor — those are the things a man needs to survive.)
5. Dashes can be used like parentheses to set off material that interrupts the flow of the sentence when that material needs special attention. Parentheses are used for less important material (e.g. Frank—the guy who broke Sarah's heart and stole her car—now dates her sister.)

The majority of EFL university students cannot deal with these marks. That large numbers of students are unable to apply these marks in written text. So that the students should apply these marks and try to use more activities. In addition to that, the students have to use the marks while writing a composition and reading a text.

### **2.3.2. The other marks**

The other marks include the apostrophe, the quotation mark, the hyphen, the parenthesis and bracket, the ellipsis, and diacritics (marks placed with a letter to indicate a special pronunciation). Along with these marks we consider capitalization and underlining (or use of italics)

#### **2.3.2.1. The apostrophe ( ' )**

The apostrophe is used to show the omission of letters or numbers, to form the plural of letters or numbers, and to form possessive nouns. In omission the apostrophe is used (Wintcrowd, 1985: 598) *“to show that a letter or letters have been omitted from contractions”* (e.g. can't of cannot). The apostrophe is used to show that the first two numbers have been omitted from a year (e.g. '80 and '76). Also the apostrophe is used to form the plural of letters, numbers, and words (e.g. He's in his late 20's). And no apostrophe is needed when making centuries and decades plural (e.g. What will the 1980s be like?). In possession Hairston (1980:270) states that: *“apostrophe is used plus an (s) to make the possessive form of both single and plural nouns that do not end in (s)”* (e.g. Jack's apron, the men's soccer). Also the apostrophe is used after (s) to make the possessive form of names, singular or plural, that end in an (s), and of plural nouns that end in an (s) (e.g. the students' playground) In compound nouns according to Cowan (1980: 665) *“the last noun take the possessive to show that they both own something”* (e.g. Sami and Ali's farm).

#### **2.3.2.2. The quotation marks (“ ”)**

Quotation marks (inverted commas) are used to enclose words quoted from another source, direct discourse, or words requiring differentiation from the

surrounding text. Since they enclose, they always come in pairs. Quotation marks are used in the following situations:

1. At the beginning and at the end of a direct quotation. A direct quotation tells the reader exactly what someone has said (e.g. He was heard to say, "Let me tell you that she was saying 'no, I won't do it before she went home'")
2. To show the exact words which I have been borrowed from another speaker or writer (e.g. Hamlet said, "*To be or not to be*")
3. Unusual words or phrases, such as technical terms or special meaning of words, slang, and so on, may be enclosed in quotation marks (e.g. He said that the entire story was "phony".)

#### **2.3.2.3. Parentheses (( ))**

Parentheses in English, is the insertion of extra material into away which interrupts the flow of that sentence, and show stranger break than commas or dashes do. (Wintcrowd and Murray. 1985 .594) states that: "*words in parentheses are set off from the rest of the sentence. Parentheses are used to enclose items that provide additional information*" (e.g. A few foods (oranges and apricots) are rich in potassium). Booad (1997: 43) states that "*the parentheses are used to enclose the clause when inserted into a sentence of which it really forms no part, and from which to could be omitted without materially affecting the sense*" (e.g. I remember that I drove in hansom (it was before the coming of the taxi) from Ealing to Marble Arch in record time).

#### **2.3.2.4. Brackets ([ ])**

Brackets are related parentheses, but the two are not interchangeable. Brackets are used to enclose corrections, interpolations, and supplied omissions added to a quotation by the person. Brackets are used to signal that the explanation in a quotation is not part of the original (e.g. It was tariff policy which seemed to him [Cordell Hull] "at the very heart of this country's economic dilemma", (Wilson 1980:323) .

#### 2.4.2.5. Capitalization

Capitalization comes from the Latin word *caput* meaning “head”. A capital letter is the chief letter. The rules of capitalization that follow indicate the uses of capitals in Edited Standard English (Raimies, 1992: 390). The first word of sentences is capitalized (e.g. The three most common colors of flowers are white, red and blue, in that order). Also the first word of direct quotation is capitalized even if the quotation is a fragment (e.g. “You’re a fabulous swimmer, ”Jana exclaimed.). In addition the first word, the last word and all other important words in the title of a work of art (e.g. Breaking away is a delightful movie about teenagers). (Winterwod and Murray, 1985: 608). Moreover the proper names is capitalized, names of persons (e.g. James / Frank/ Harper), names of places (e.g. Washington / the Library of Congress), names of Event and Periods (e.g. The Civil War) and names of vessels (e.g. The U.S.S. Constitution) (Cowan, 1980: 676). Other rules for capitalizingproper nouns, (Raimies, 1992:391). Words like North, West and Southcapitalized when they name particular parts of the country (e.g. She’s from West Texas). Also names of politicalparties, religious and beliefs, nations, nationalities, and races (e.g. Republican Party, Baptist, Catholicism, Buddhism, Cherokee, Oriental, Egyptian). In addition the names of members of political parties and followers of these religions are capitalized (e.g. Democrat, Catholic, Buddhist). Moreover, the names of governmental bodies and of departments (e.g. Senate, Department of Housing and Unbar Development). Furthermore the titles which show office, rank, or profession when used with the name of the person are capitalized (e.g. President Johnson, Chief Justin). Also Winterowdand Murray (1985:614) state that “*the names of stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies are capitalized*” (e.g. Did the Mariner spacecraft visit Mars or Jupiter).Moreover, words referring to the deity, holy families, holy books of all religions, and religious terms are capitalized, also personal pronouns are capitalized when they refer to deities (e.g. The story of the Jew’s exodus from Egypt is in the old Testament).

In addition the names of school subjects are capitalized when they are formed from proper nouns, are followed by a number, or name of specific course (e.g. Social Studies , Spanish, German). Also the names of months, days of the week, and holidays (e.g. Thanksgiving is always the fourth Thursday in November). Other rules of capitalization, according to (Cowan, 1980:676), “*the titles before and after names are capitalized*” (e.g. Dr. John Smith, Susan)The trade name of a product is capitalized (e.g. Lipton’s tea). In the salutation of a letter the first word and all nouns are capitalized, and in the closing only the first word is capitalized (e.g. Dear Aunt Louise, Yours truly,). Other rule of capitalization (Winterwod and Murray, 1985:614), “*the words that show family relationships when they precede a person’s name or when they are used in place of someone’s name are capitalized*”(e.g. Aunt Edith Just opened an antique shop in Philadelphia). Also the abbreviations A.D., B.C., A.M. and P.M. are capitalized (e.g. the party starts at 9 P.M). In addition the pronoun I and the interjection O are capitalized (e.g. when should I call you?, My humble apologies, O wise one). Furthermore, the first word of each topic of an outline (e.g. Care of house plants (a) Amount of water, (b). Special fertilizing.). Also the names of specific trains, airplanes and spacecraft (e.g. Everyone was astonished when Sputnikwas launched into orbit by the Soviets).

#### **2.3.2.6. Slash (/)**

Slash is used to indicate the end of a line of poetry Example: Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough, /A Flash of wine, a Book of verse — and Thou.To set off phonemic transcriptions (e.g. In French the sound /e/ is pronounced as /a/) To separate paired terms (use sparingly) (e.g.pass/fail).

#### **2.3.2.7. Italics**

Italics in handwritten and typed work indicated by means of underlining. (Bonad, 1997:56), “*italics are used to emphasize words and phrases*” (e.g. I am not going to receive any help from him). Also (Hairston, 1981:261) says:

*“italics are used to highlight the names of books, plays, magazines, movies” or plays, long poems, or musical compositions, and often for the name of special planes, or trains, or ships . Increasingly, however, writers are putting titles in all capital letters rather than in italics. Moreover, foreign words or phrases that are not commonly used in English are printed in italics”*

(e.g. cuisine minceur, deus, machina ). Also italics are used to highlight a word or phrase to call attention (e.g. in England a lawyer is a barrister or a solicitor, not an attorney).

#### **2.3.2.8. Ellipsis (...)**

An ellipsis — the omission of a "word, phrase, line, paragraph, or more from a quoted passage — is indicated by ellipsis points (or dots)... Ellipsis points are three spaced periods (...), sometimes preceded or followed by other punctuation mark. An ellipsis (...) is used to show when one or more words are omitted in quoted material or an unfinished sentence. Use three ellipsis marks if they are used to interrupt the sentence. Use four ellipsis marks (one as a period) if they are used to finish the sentence, Crystal (1995:283) (e.g. The speaker said, “Love your work...and follow your dream”).

#### **2.3.2.9. The Hyphen (-)**

Hairston (1991:271) states that *“the hyphen is used as a separation mark in compound nouns”* (e.g. brother - in - law), and is used to make the division between parts of compound modifier (e.g. a blow -by — blow description). Crystal (1995:283) states that; *“the hyphen is really a spelling device. The hyphen is used with some adjectives which come before a noun if they are acting as a single modifier”* (e.g. He is a well-known lawyer.). In addition, the hyphen is used to write fractions (e.g. only one-half of the members attended the meeting last night.)

Other uses of the hyphen: A hyphen is used to link parts of a fraction used as an adjective (e.g. one - half fare). Also the hyphen is used to link the parts of a compound number between twenty - one and ninety - nine (e.g. twenty - five dollars). Furthermore, the A hyphen is used between a prefix and a root word when two identical vowels come together or when the new word could be confused with a similarly spelled word (e.g. co-operate anti-abortionrecreation).

Most students are not aware of these marks. In addition to that, the students do not practice these marks in writing English. To solve this problem, students have to understand and practice the marks.

## **2.5. Punctuation Problem**

Hiana, H. (2004) point that:

*“if you do not feel confident about punctuation marks, the best advice is:*

- 1. Write short sentence, and use only one full stop, comma, and question mark.*
- 2. If you run into problems with complex or lengthy sentences, then arrange the sentence to avoid the problems.”*

## **2.6. Previous Studies**

It is very useful to look back at some previous studies. Previous studies help the researcher to gain experience and skill in order to solve the problems of punctuation marks which face EFL university students. This section is about providing a survey of some previous studies in the field of punctuation marks problems in English writing skill.

### **The First Study**

The first study is a Ph.D. thesis conducted by **Al-Sadig Yahya Abdalla** (2000), University of Khartoum , under the title “Investigating Sudanese EFL Learners' Written Discourse Competence: The Case of Fourth Year English Students In Some National Universities”. The study aimed at giving insight into

the nature of English written discourse, investigating Sudanese EFL learners written problems at discourse level and proposing discourse-based approach to EFL writing in Sudanese academic institutions. The materials of the study were originally written answers for final examinations at three national universities (University of Khartoum, Omdurman Islamic University and AI-Nilein University ) all of them were fourth year English students. The sample size of the study was (149) students chosen randomly. The study found that punctuation is a problematic area in written performance of the subjects of the research. In my opinion the research methods and material is wide and suitable but I think his recommendation were left unnoticeable.

### **The Second Study**

The second study is conducted by **Abdel Gani** (2004). His study has examined the students' abilities in paragraph writing with more emphasis on the structure, coherence, and punctuation of a paragraph. The writer has concluded that the students have a weak performance in writing the paragraph as the students have shown a weak performance regarding the structure, topic sentence, coherence and punctuation of paragraph. The study recommended that teaching writing should be accompanied with some techniques in order to motivate the students such as workshop activities, group -work, and providing the students with model paragraph. The present study goes in the same line with that of (Abdel Gani:2004) , but takes a different level and a different part of writing skills which is “Problems Face University Students in Using Punctuation Marks”

### **The Third Study**

The third study is a Ph.D. thesis conducted by **Ali Muhsin Gharab** (1996) University of Khartoum, under the title “An Analysis of the Written Performance of Iraqi Students at the University Level ‘Error Analysis’”. The study aimed at identifying, classifying and analyzing the different language errors that constitute problematic areas of learning to Iraqi learners of English. Computing the frequency of these errors to identify the most recurrent ones.

Explaining the sources of these errors to provide measures to overcome them. The subjects of the study were (281) first year students of English language, College of Arts and the College of Education for women, university of Baghdad. The data for the study were mainly collected from an analysis of (230) scripts of written English produced by (230) Iraqi first year university students as free composition writing test. The data was strengthened by classroom observation conducted by the researcher. In my opinion the methodology and the materials of the research is very good and suitable. The study found that in the orthographic errors there were (1412) cases in punctuation errors (11.93%). That means there was lack of awareness of the use of punctuation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter describes the research methodology which applied the descriptive analytical method, and the work directed by the researcher in order to test the hypothesis that was previously stated. It consists of population, sample of the study, instruments of data collection, and the procedures which were followed to achieve the aims of the study, besides validity of the instrument.

#### **3.1. Population of the Study**

The population of the study is the students of the third year at Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Art, and English Department. A total of (150) students all of them are male are the subject of the study. This population under the study is representative of the most significant of variables, such as degree of exposure to English and age.

#### **3.2. Sample of the Study**

The sample for the study was drawn from Omdurman Islamic University, faculty of Art, English Department. The sample consists of (50) students from the third year. The sample was selected randomly by the researcher to investigate the problems face university students in using punctuation marks in written English.

#### **3.3. Research instrument**

The instrument for collecting data is students' questionnaire. Questionnaire is a data collection instrument. The researcher used it to gather information about problems which face university students in using punctuation marks in written English. This tool was used because it is suitable for collecting reliable and valid data from a proportion of population. The options are well designed (always, sometimes, rarely and never). The whole questionnaire contains fifteen items revolving around the research hypotheses. The questionnaire will be given

is a group that consists of (50) EFL university students. The group will be selected randomly from the third year.

### 3.4 Validity of the Instrument

In order to have a high validity the researcher used written questionnaire in multiple choices. The researcher asked his colleagues at English department at Gezira University, to validate, modify and give opinions about questionnaire items and how far they reflect the importance and purpose of the study. These colleagues, who are experienced teachers and educators, gave valuable feedback. Then the questionnaire was judged by the experts in the Department of English at Gezira University, Faculty of Education, Kamleen. It was modified and corrected according to his comments to achieve its required objectives.

### 3.5 Reliability of the Instrument

To check the reliability the researcher chose a group of students in November, 2017. They were given the questionnaire. After two weeks the researcher gave the same questionnaire to the same group for the second time. Then collect the total to every students computing the rank order correlation. Reliability below is 0.88. It is considered as satisfactory.

**Table (3 – 1) students**

Students	X	Y	D	D <sup>2</sup>
A	16	13	-3	9
B	11	9	2	4
C	16	13	3	9
D	8	8	0	0
E	10	12	2	4
F	14	12	-1	1
G	11	10	1	1
H	15	12	3	9
I	12	15	-3	9
J	11	13	-2	4
Total				50

$$1 - \frac{6\sum D^2}{N(N^2 - 1)}$$

D = The different between paired ranks

D2 = The sum of the squared differences between ranks.

N = Number of paired ranks.

$$1 - \frac{6 \times 50}{10(10^2 - 1)} =$$

$$1 - \frac{300}{1000 - 10} =$$

$$1 - \frac{300}{990} = 0.30$$

### 3.6 Procedures

The procedures that the researcher has followed to achieve the results of the study, that he went to intended university and distributed The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire by making a tick to his choice of response that seems applicable and appropriate. The respondents were friendly and cooperative. The data collected by the questionnaire will be analyzed by using statistical analysis. Tables and graphs will be used to present the results of the statistical analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.0. Introduction

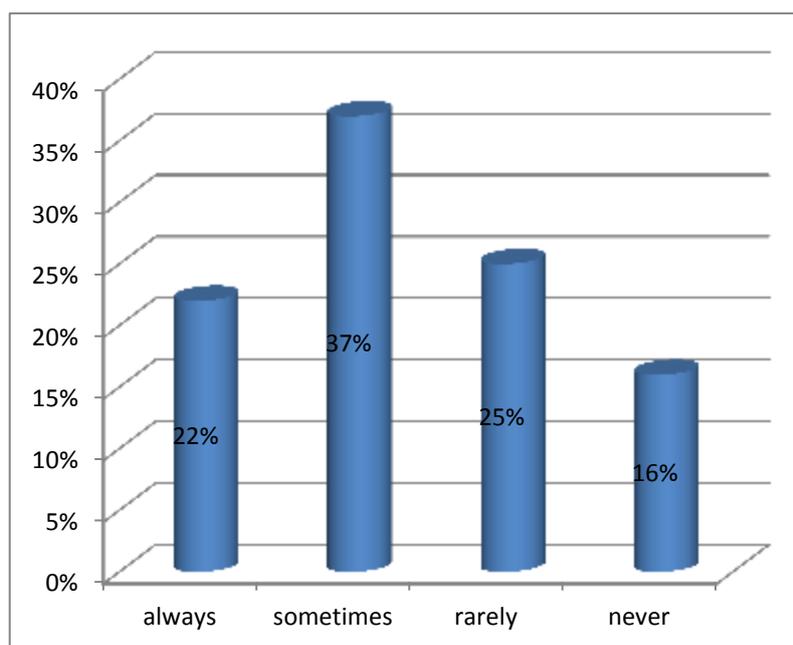
In this chapter the researcher analyses and discusses the data which was collected through the students' questionnaire. The collected data contains of fifteen items which are presented in the form of charts and graphs to be discuss. The chapter analyses this type of tool to obtain the results in order to show the significance of the research objectives. However, the analysis of the data in this chapter was implemented in accordance with the hypotheses stated in chapter one.

#### 4.1. Data Analysis and Discussion

This questionnaire was designed to elicit data from students about the problems which face university students about the problems which face university students in using punctuation marks. The questionnaire was composed of fifteen items. The validity of this tool was checked by the supervisor. The researcher distributed it to 50 students based on convenience random sampling. The present study stated four hypotheses assimilate to the questions of the study. The researcher will analyze them in an attempt to solve the problems and answer its questions.

**Table (4.1)** learns the punctuation marks through exercises in the syllabus book.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	11	22%
sometimes	18	37%
rarely	12	25%
never	8	16%
total	49	100%

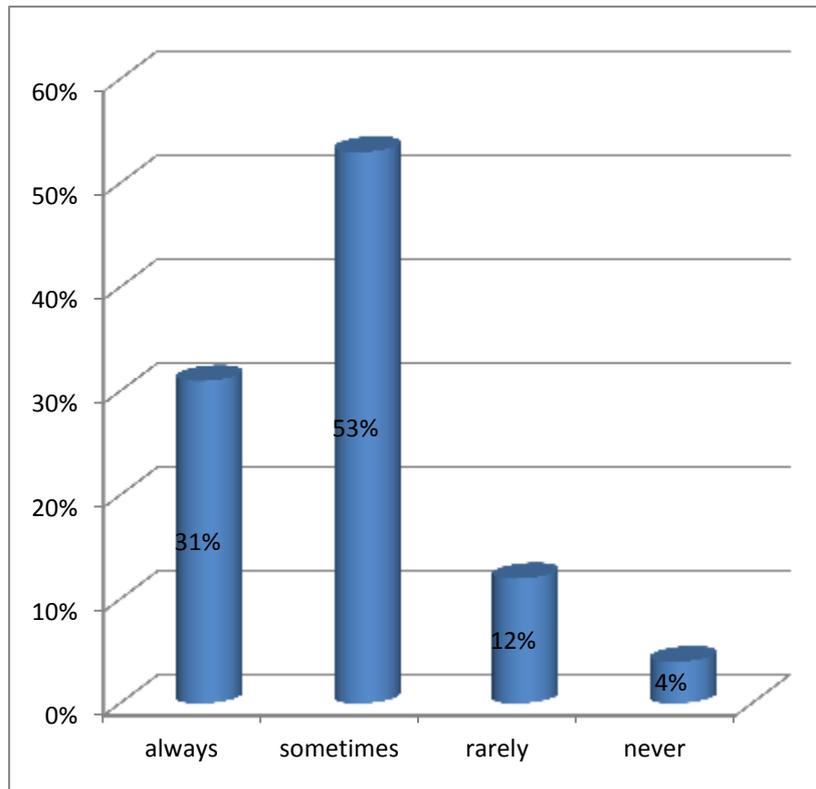


**Fig(4. 1)**

The analysis of the Table (4.1) and Figer (4.1) above explains that 22% of the students' responses to the item number (1) of the questionnaire are (always), 37% their responses are (sometimes), 25% of their responses are rarely, and 16% of their responses are never. The table and the chart explain the result statistically. The result indicates that the majority of the respondents learn the punctuation marks through exercises in the syllabus book.

**Table( 4.2)** I have given opportunities to use punctuation marks in exercises.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	15	31%
sometimes	26	53%
rarely	6	12%
never	2	4%
total	49	

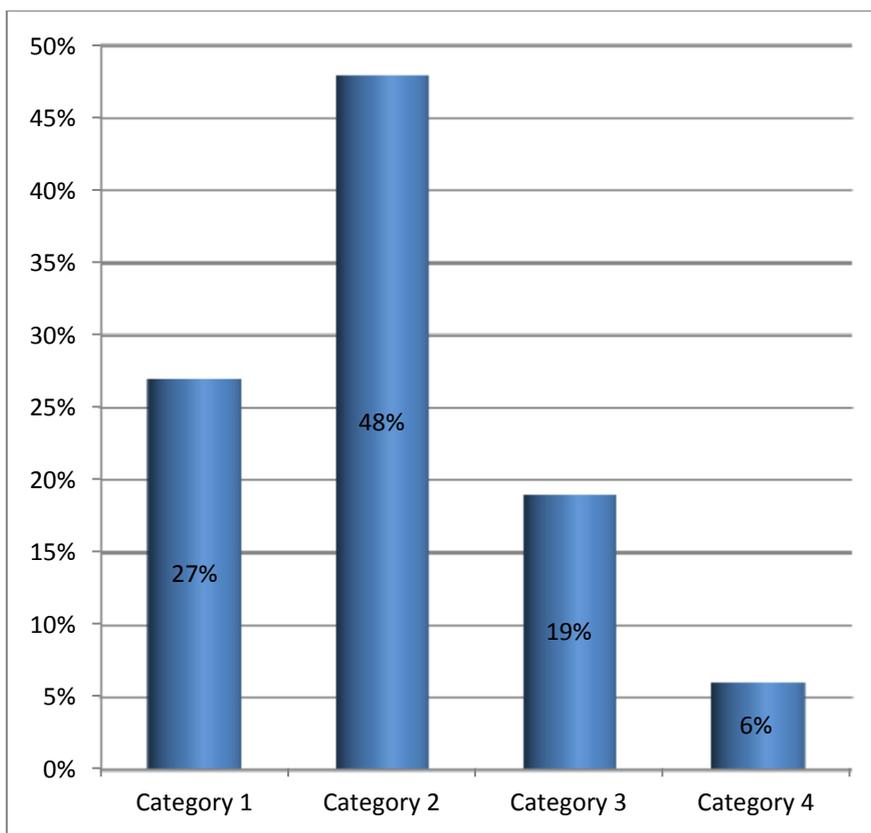


**Figure (4.2)**

The analysis of the Table (4.2.) and Figure (4.2.) above explains that 31% of the students' responses to the item number (2) of the questionnaire are (always), 53% their responses are (sometimes), 12% of their responses are rarely, and 4% of their responses are never. So the result of the analysis points out that the majority of the respondents have given opportunities to use punctuation marks in exercises.

**Table (4.3.)** To what extend have you trained yourself to practice punctuation rules in your writing by providing writing activities?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	13	27%
sometimes	23	48%
rarely	9	19%
never	3	6%
total	48	100%

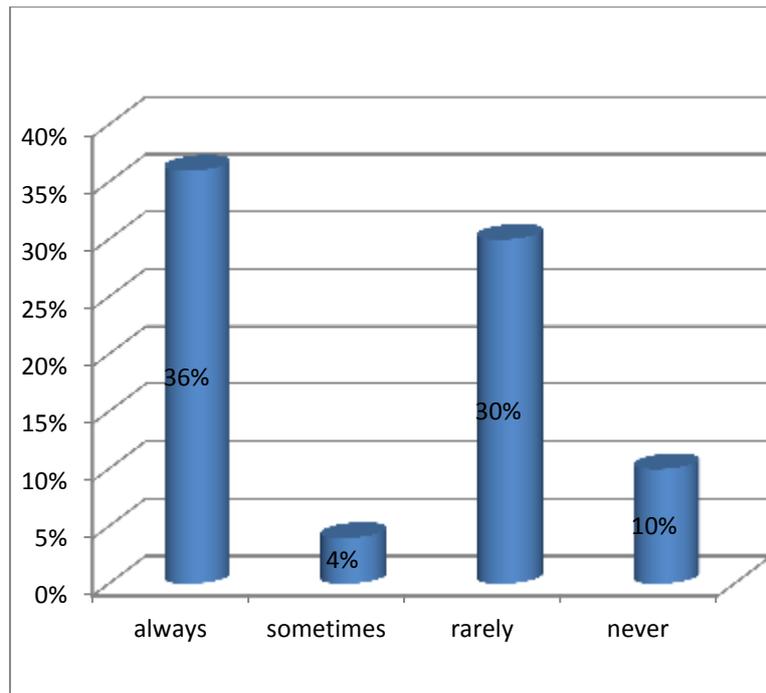


**Figure (4.3)**

The analysis of the Table (4.3.) and Figure (4.3.) above explains that 27% of the students' responses to the item number (3) of the questionnaire are (always), 48% their responses are (sometimes), 19% of their responses are rarely, and 6% of their responses are never. The result of this analysis indicates that some of the respondents have never trained themselves to practice punctuation rules in their writing by providing writing activities to punctuation marks.

**Table (4.4)** Do you learn punctuation marks effectively?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	18	36%
sometimes	12	4%
rarely	15	30%
never	5	10%
total	50	100%

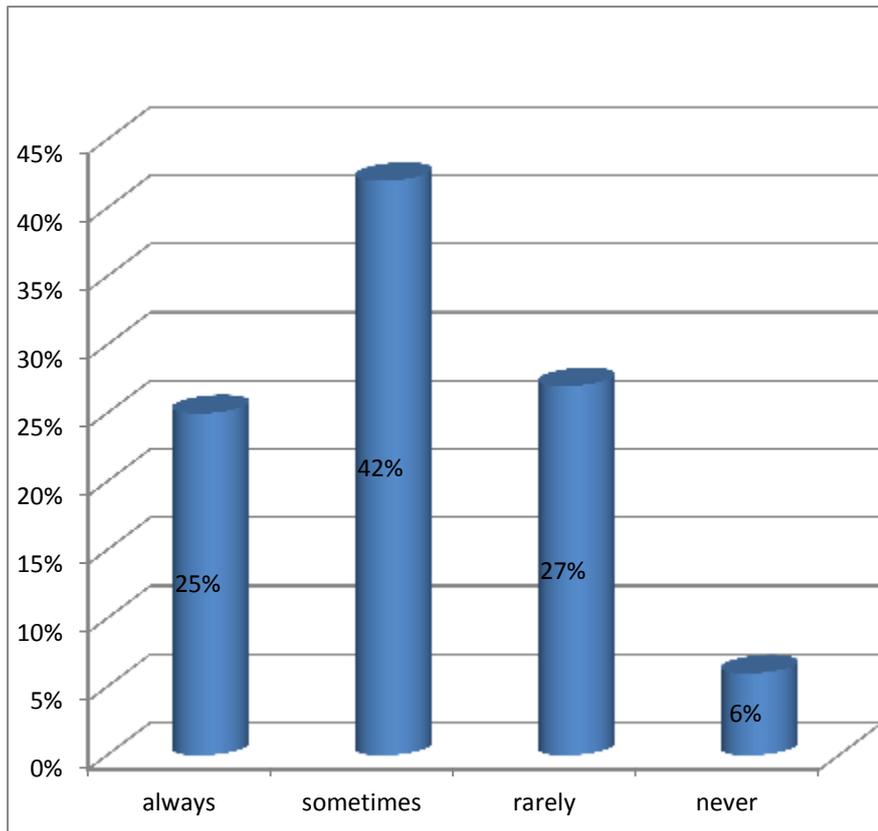


**Figure (4.4)**

The analysis of the Table (4.4.) and Figure (4.4.) above shows that 36% of the students' responses to the item number (4) of the questionnaire are (always), 4% their responses are (sometimes), 30% of their responses are rarely, and 10% of their responses are never. Therefore, the result of this analysis reveals that some of the respondents learn punctuation marks effectively, while some of them do not learn punctuation marks effectively.

**Table (4.5)** I do not learn the punctuation marks while reading comprehension texts.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	13	25%
sometimes	22	42%
rarely	14	27%
never	3	6%
total	52	100%

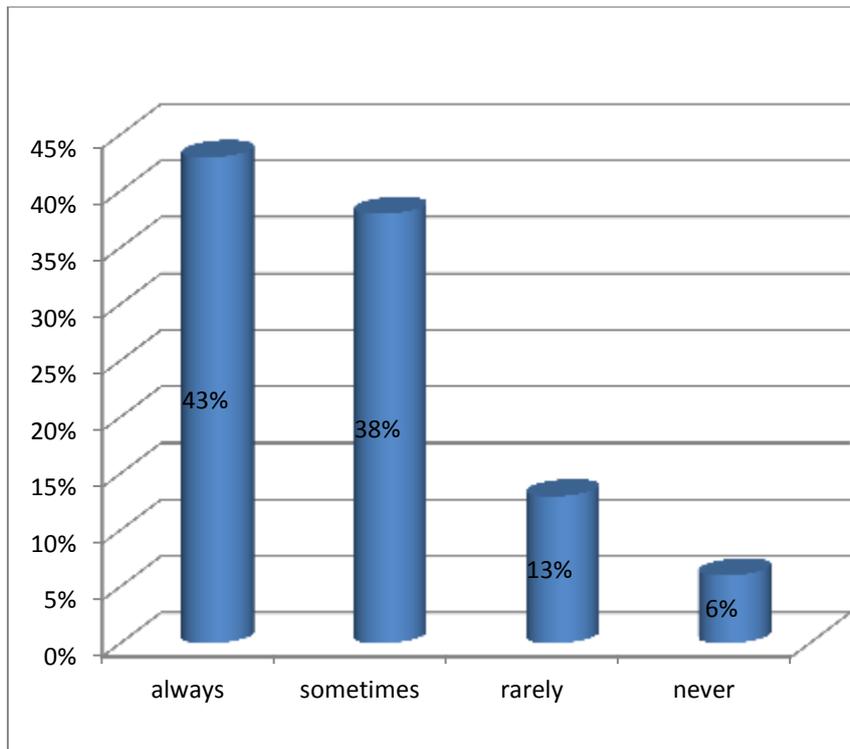


**Figure(4.5)**

The analysis of the Table (4.5.) and Figure (4.5.) above show that 57% of the students' responses to the item number (5) of the questionnaire are (always), 42% their responses are (sometimes), 27% of their responses are rarely, and 6% of their responses are never. The result of the analysis explains that the majority of respondents do not learn the punctuation marks while reading comprehension texts.

**Table(4.6)** I have never focused largely on punctuation during my study.

Answers	frequency	percentage
always	20	43%
sometimes	18	38%
rarely	6	13%
never	3	6%
total	47	100%

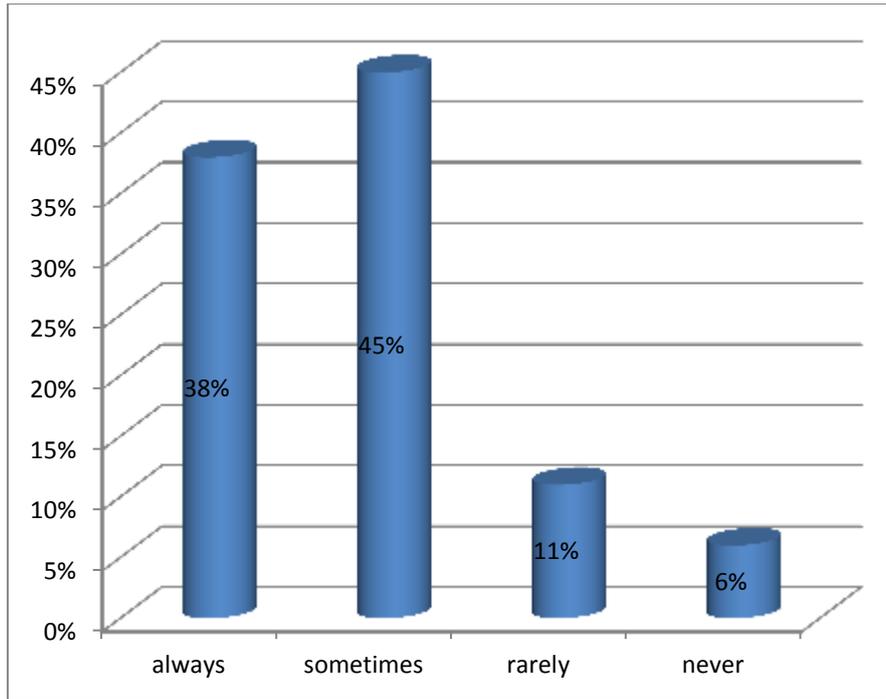


**Figure(4.6)**

The analysis of Table (4.6.) and Figure(4.6.) above shows that 43% of the Students' responses to the item number (6) of the questionnaire are always, 38% of their responses are (sometimes), 13% of their responses are (rarely), and 6% of their responses are (never). The result of this analysis reveals that most of the respondents have never focused largely on punctuation marks during their study, while some of them rarely focused on punctuation marks during their study. On the other hand few of them have never focused on punctuation marks.

**Table (4.7)**To what extend do you aware of punctuation marks?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	20	38%
sometimes	24	45%
rarely	6	11%
never	3	6%
total	53	100%

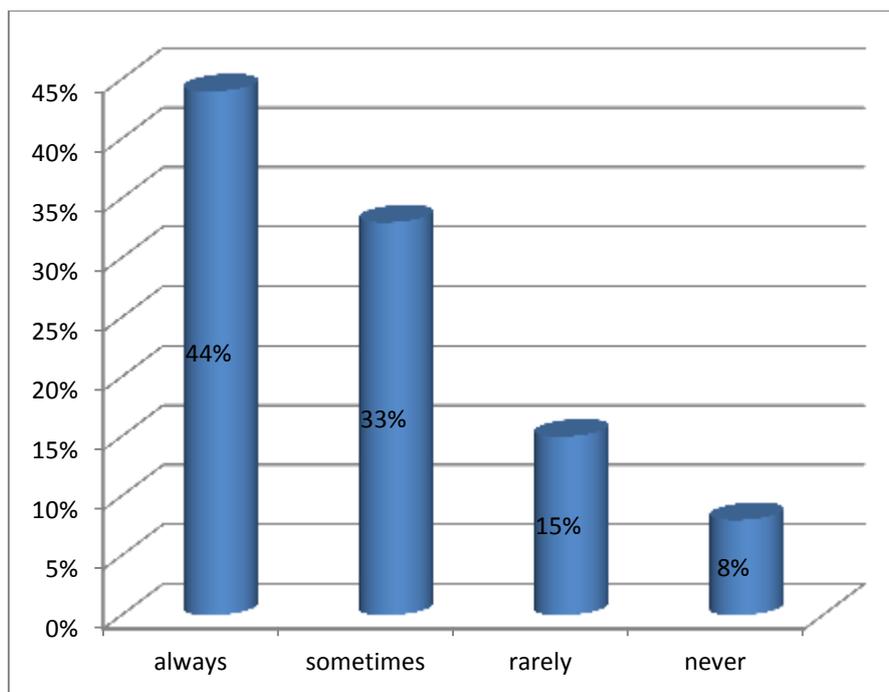


**Figure (4.7)**

The analysis of the Table (4.7.) and Figure(4.7.) above shows that 38% of the students' responses to the item number (7) of the questionnaire are (always), 45% their responses are (sometimes), 11% of their responses are rarely, and 6% of their responses are (never). The result indicates that some of the respondents do not aware of punctuation marks.

**Table(4.8)** 1 do not pay attention to punctuation marks?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	23	44%
sometimes	17	33%
rarely	8	15%
never	4	8%
total	52	100%

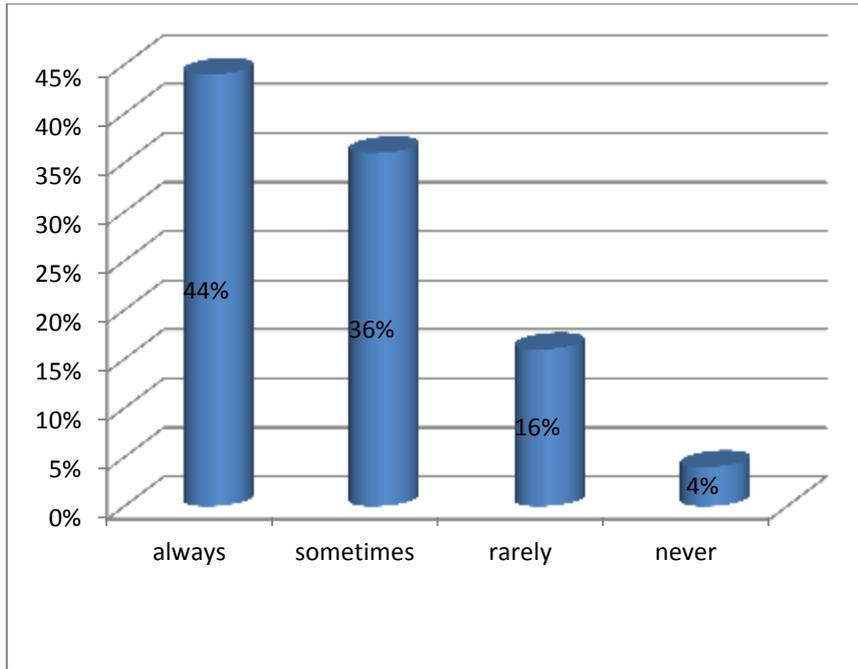


**Figure(4.8)**

The analysis of the Table (4.8.) and Figure(4.8.) above explains that 44% of the students' responses to the item number (8) of the questionnaire are (always), 33% their responses are (sometimes), 15% of their responses are rarely, and 8% of their responses are (never). The result of this analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents do not pay attention to punctuation marks. Meanwhile some of them pay attention to punctuation marks.

**Table (4.9)** I do not consider and pay attention to punctuation rules when writing topics?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	22	44%
sometimes	18	36%
rarely	8	16%
never	2	4%
total	50	100%

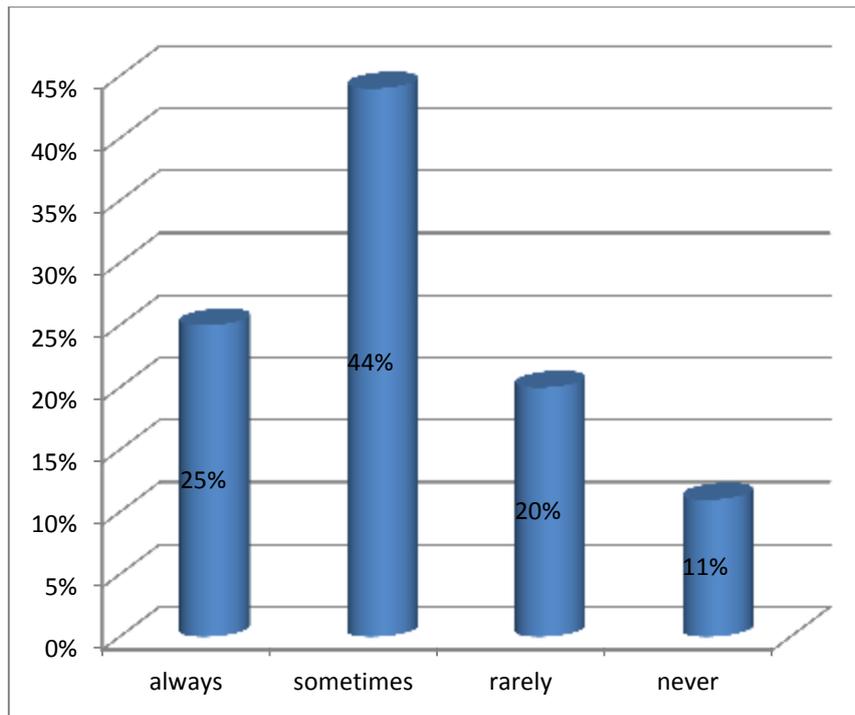


**Figure (4.9)**

The analysis of the Table (4.9.) and Figure(4.9.) above shows that 44% of the students' responses to the item number (9) of the questionnaire are (always), 36% their responses are (sometimes), 16% of their responses are rarely, and 4% of their responses are never. The result of this analysis points out that some of the respondents have never trained themselves to practice punctuation rules in their writing by providing writing activities to punctuation marks.

**Table (4.10)** I do not know how to differentiate the punctuation marks that have the same rules of usages?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	11	25%
sometimes	20	44%
rarely	9	20%
never	5	11%
total	45	100%

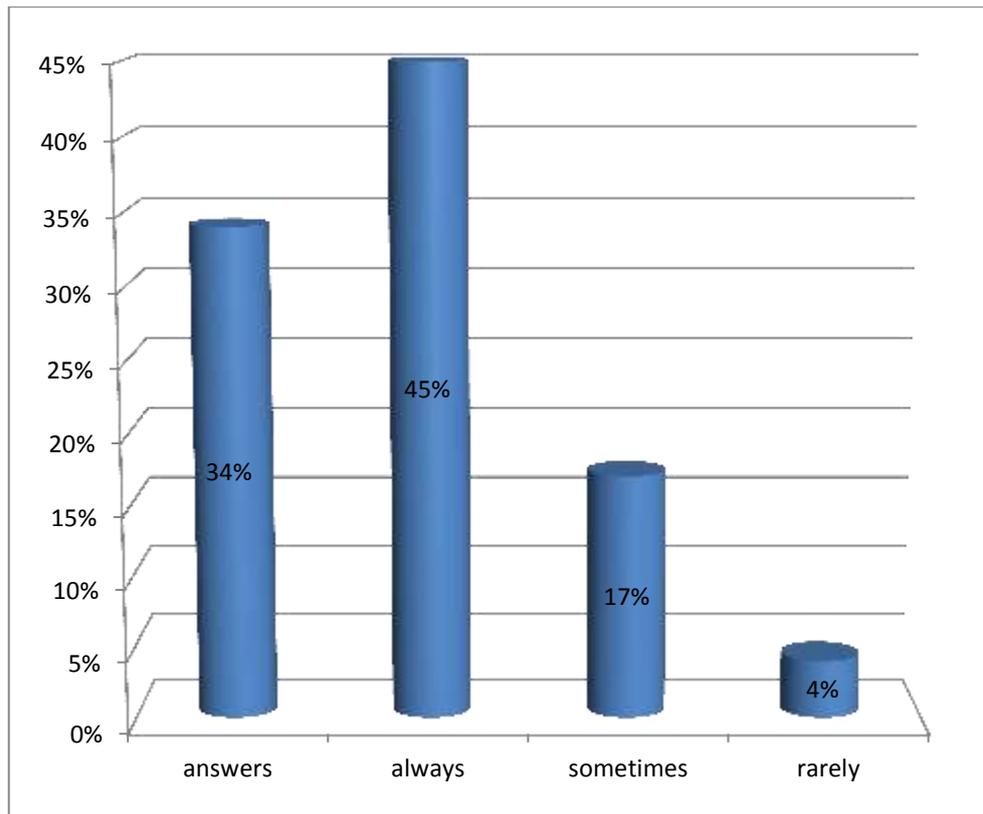


**Figure (4.10)**

The analysis of the Table (4.10.) and Figure(4.10.) above explains that 25% of the students' responses to the item number (10) of the questionnaire are (always), 44% their responses are (sometimes), 20% of their responses are rarely, and 11% of their responses are never. The result of this analysis indicates that most of the respondents do not know how to differentiate the punctuation marks that have the same rules of usages.

**Table (4.11.)** I learn the function of punctuation marks.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	16	34%
sometimes	21	45%
rarely	8	17%
never	2	4%
total	47	100%

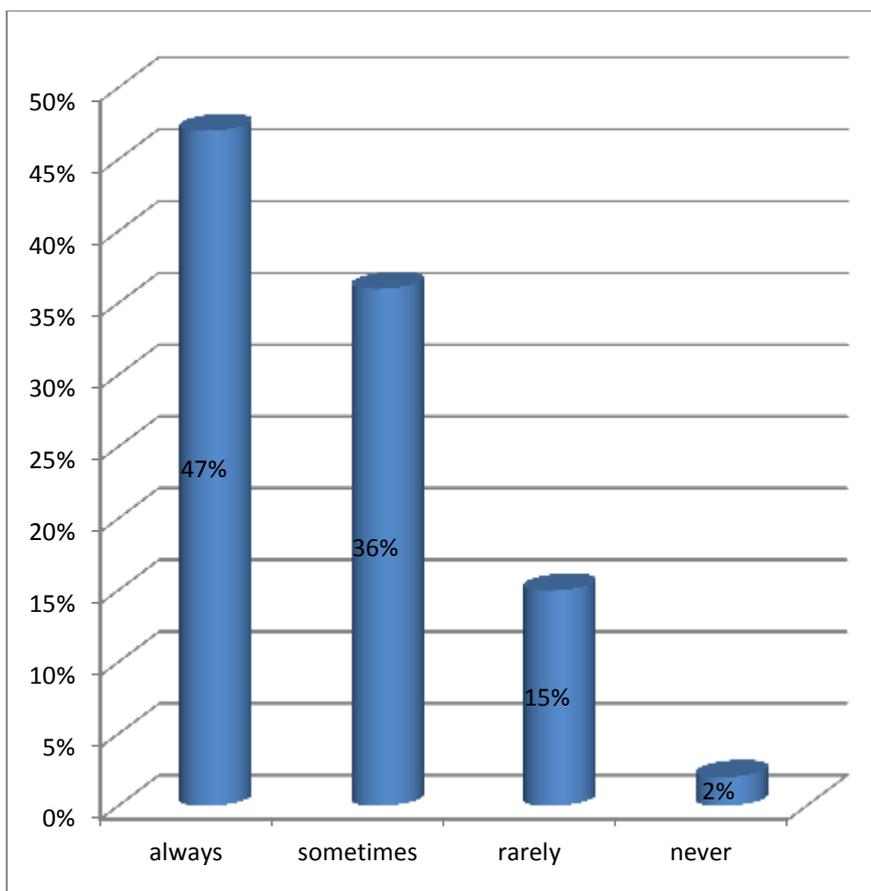


**Figure (4.11)**

The analysis of the Table (4.11.) and Figure(4.11.) above shows that 34% of the students' responses to the item number (11) of the questionnaire are (answers), 45% their responses are (always), 17% of their responses are (sometimes), 17% of their responses are (rarely), and 4% of their responses are (never). The result of the analysis reveals that the majority of the respondents learn the function of punctuation marks.

**Table 4.12.** I don't try to solve punctuation errors when face me.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	25	47%
sometimes	19	36%
rarely	8	15%
never	1	2%
total	53	100%

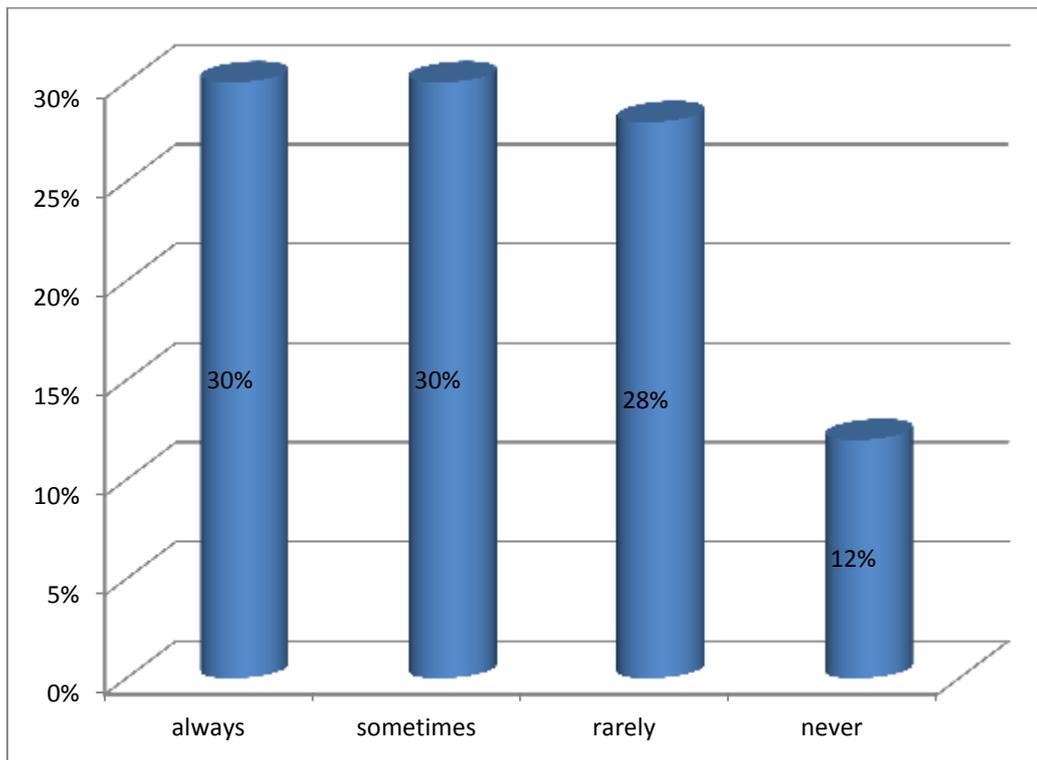


**Figure (4.12)**

The analysis of Table (4.12.) and Figure(4.12.) above shows that 47% of the students' responses to the item No. (1) of the questionnaire are always, 36% of their responses are (sometimes), 15% of their responses are (rarely), and 6% of their responses are (never). The result of the analysis points out that most of the respondents do not try to solve punctuations errors when face them.

**Table (4.13)** To what extend do you suffer problem from using punctuation marks?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	15	30%
sometimes	15	30%
rarely	14	28%
never	6	12%
total	50	100%

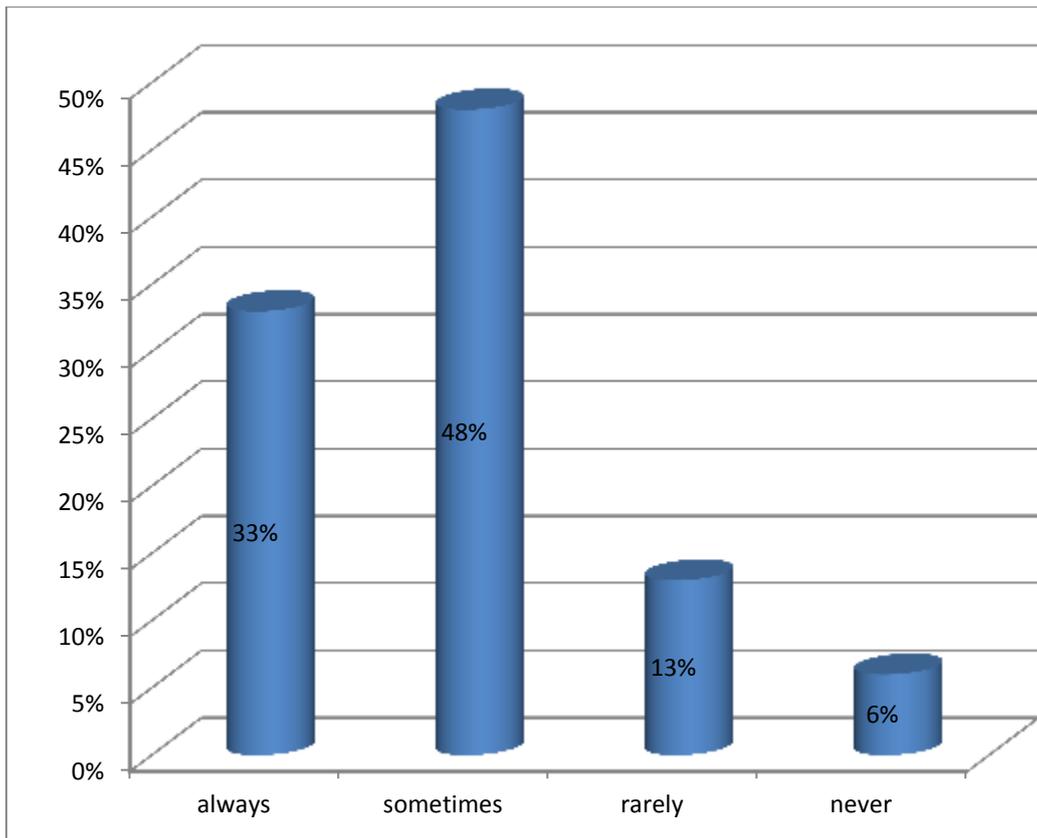


**Figure (4.13)**

The analysis of Table (4.13.) and Figure(4.13.) above shows that 30% of the Students' responses to the item number (13) of the questionnaire are always, 30% of their responses are (sometimes), 28% of their responses are (rarely), and 12% of their responses are (never). The result of this analysis explains that most of the respondents suffer problem from using punctuation marks.

**Table (4.14)** 1 do not use punctuation marks correctly?

answers	frequency	percentage
always	17	33%
sometimes	25	48%
rarely	7	13%
never	3	6%
total	52	100%

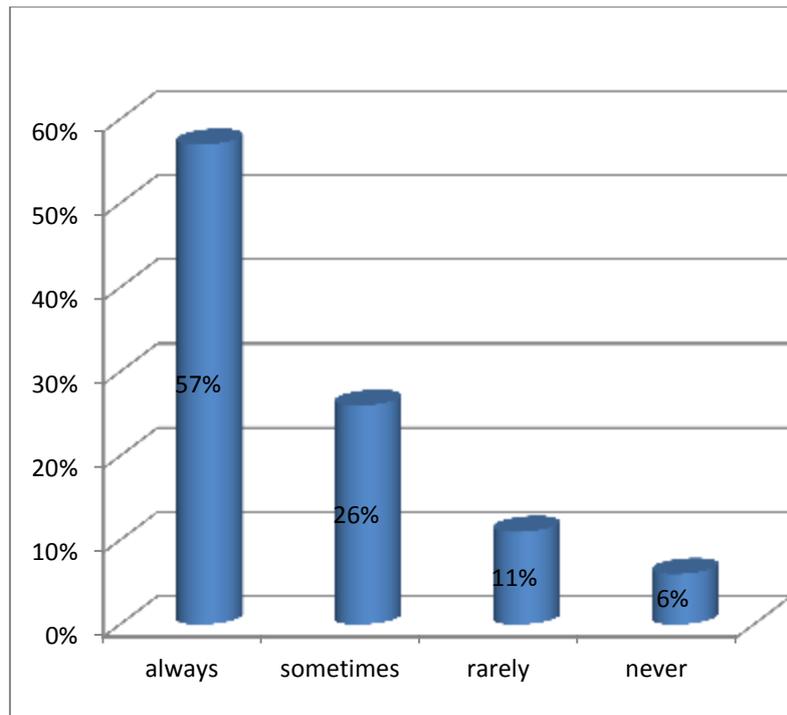


**Figure (4.14)**

The analysis of the Table (4.14.) and Figure(4.14.) above shows that 33% of the students' responses to the item number (14) of the questionnaire are (always), 48% their responses are (sometimes), 13% of their responses are rarely, and 6% of their responses are (never). The result of this analysis points out that the majority of the respondents do not pay attention to punctuation marks. Meanwhile some of them pay attention to punctuation marks.

**Table (4.15)** I learn the punctuation marks that I need in writing.

answers	frequency	percentage
always	29	57%
sometimes	13	26%
rarely	6	11%
never	3	6%
total	51	100%



**Figure (4.15)**

The analysis of the Table (4.15.) and Figure(4.15.) above explains that 57% of the students' responses to the item number (15) of the questionnaire are (always), 26% their responses are (sometimes), 11% of their responses are rarely, and 6% of their responses are never. The result of the analysis points out that most of the respondents learn the punctuation marks that they need in writing, while some of them don't learn the punctuation marks that they need in writing. According to the analysis of the students' questionnaire, the students are weak due to their neglect of punctuation marks and lack of punctuation marks' exercises providing by the syllabus and the teachers. The results of the students' questionnaire also reveal that the majority of the students are not aware of punctuation marks. Therefore, they face difficulties in using punctuation marks in written discourse. So EFL university students face problems in using punctuation marks in written English.

## 4.2. Testing the hypotheses

After analyzing the data, the researcher related the obtained results to the research hypotheses. There are three research hypotheses which correspond to the study questions. These research hypotheses will be presented individually according to the research analysis and the results. The researcher discusses them to see to what extent they have been confirmed or rejected in the light of the results obtained.

**Hypothesis No. 1:** Some of EFL university students' problems in writing are due to their ineffective Practice in using punctuation marks. The results of the students' questionnaire in Tables and Figures from (4.1.) to (4.6.) indicate that the majority of the students have learnt the punctuation marks and have given opportunities to use them, but they have never focus largely on them and they do not trained themselves to practice them. So these results verify this hypothesis that some of EFL university students' problems in writing are due to their ineffective Practice in using punctuation marks.

**Hypothesis No. 2:** Most EFL university students are not aware of punctuation marks. According to the results of Tables and Figures from (4.7.) to (4.11.) the majority of the students learn the function of punctuation marks, but they do not aware and pay attention to punctuation marks. On the other hand most of the students do not know how to differentiate the punctuation marks. As the result of these concepts, the students are not aware of punctuation marks. The analysis of these results verifies the above hypothesis that most EFL university students are not aware of punctuation marks.

**Hypothesis No.3:** EFL university students face difficulties in using punctuation marks in writing.

The results of Tables and Figures (4.12.) to (4.15.) reveal that most of the students learn the punctuation marks that they need in writing, but they do not pay attention to them and they do not try to solve punctuation errors. Moreover

the majority of the students suffer problems from using punctuation marks. The analyses of the results of these tables verify the above hypothesis that EFL university students face difficulties in using punctuation marks in writing.

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter will present a conclusion for the whole study. It will provide the findings of the study which is achieved mainly from the questionnaire. It will also include the recommendation of the study which will play an essential role in the process of teaching and learning the punctuation marks.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The main objective of this study has been to find out the real problems which face EFL university students in using punctuation marks. Moreover, this study is intended to find out the causes of the problems that affect EFL university students' performance when dealing with punctuation marks. To accomplish this study, the researcher has chosen a random sample from Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Art. The tool of data which was chosen by the researcher to conduct the study was students' questionnaire. Tools of data collection were chosen by the researcher to conduct the study. The results of the students' questionnaire were analyzed by using statistical analysis. They are discussed in relation to the hypotheses of the study by the researcher. The students' questionnaire revealed students' low ability in using punctuation marks correctly. It is clear that the students lack the adequate knowledge about the correct uses of punctuation marks that enable them to solve the difficulties and the problems that face them. Moreover, the students should practice punctuation marks by using intensive exercises and activities.

### **5.3. Findings of the Study**

The study has been conducted with the purpose of investigating the problems which face university students in using punctuation marks in written English. The researcher has come up with the following findings:

1. Most EFL university students face problems in using punctuation marks in writing English. This concept is due to their ineffective practice in using punctuation marks.
2. Most EFL university students are not aware of punctuation marks. This due to their ignorance of the basic rules, and ineffective practice.
3. EFL university students face difficulties in using punctuation marks in writing. The results of the analysis indicate that the students have never trained themselves to practice punctuation rules in their writing by providing writing activities.
4. Most of the students are unable to use the punctuation marks while reading comprehension texts. As the results show that the majority of the students are unable to use the punctuation marks in reading comprehension texts.
5. The designed syllabus does not focus enough on teaching the punctuation marks. The results of the analysis in chapter four explained this concept.
6. The ways of teaching punctuation marks are not effective. This is due to The methods of teaching punctuation marks.

#### **5.4. Recommendations**

The main purpose of the recommendations is to draw the attention of teachers, students and the syllabus designer to some important points of using punctuation marks. In the light of the results of the present study and the reviewed literature in chapter two, several recommendations can be provided in the area of punctuation analysis.

1. Punctuation marks should be presented by the teacher in the context rather than be taught in isolation.
2. Motivating and boosting students to apply punctuation marks correctly.
3. Training is one of the basic pillars of the teaching process, punctuation marks in particular.

4. EFL university students should be involved in error correction process which is considered as useful method for attaining punctuation uses accurately.
5. Teachers should try to use more activities to develop students' ability in punctuation marks. Moreover, remedial activities should be made to develop the level of less able students.
6. The process of teaching and learning is advised to include the whole punctuation marks.

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**APPENDIX**  
**University of Gezira**  
**Faculty of Education / Kamlein**  
**Post Graduate Studies**  
**Students' Questionnaire:**

Dear students,

This questionnaire is a part of M.A thesis entitled *Problems Face University Students in Using Punctuation Marks*. The information you provide will be used only for research purposes and will remain highly confidential. Your genuine responses to all statements across the sections of the questionnaire will contribute a lot to the successful completion of this study. You are therefore kindly requested to provide genuine information.

*Thank you for your cooperation.*

Sex: 1. Male  2.Female

Tick (  $\checkmark$  ) inside your choice box.

No	the statement	always	sometimes	rarely	never
1	I learn the punctuation marks through exercises in the syllabus book.				
2	I have given opportunities to use punctuation marks in exercises.				
3	To what extend have you trained yourself to practice punctuation rules in your writing by providing writing activities				
4	Do you learn punctuation marks effectively?				

5	I do not learn the punctuation marks while reading comprehension texts.				
6	I have never focused largely on punctuation during my study.				
7	To what extend do you aware of punctuation marks?				
8	I do not pay attention to punctuation marks?				
9	I do not consider and pay attention to punctuation rules when writing topics?				
10	I do not know how to differentiate the punctuation marks that have the same rules of usages? rules of usage.				
11	I learn the function of punctuation marks.				
12	I don't try to solve punctuation errors when face me.				
13	To what extend do you suffer problem from using punctuation marks?				
14	I do not use punctuation marks correctly?				
15	I learn the punctuation marks that I need in writing.				