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**EFL learners' Misuse of The Semicolon and Comma in
Paragraph Writing.
Case of EFL Second Year Students at M'sila University**

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Requirements for the Degree of Master**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

- My precious beloved *parents* who have always been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of my whole college life, and for their endless care and love.
 - My treasured brother: *Hamza*.
 - My dear friends, teachers, colleagues.
 - All people who left a touch in my life.
- To the one who left a great impact on our hearts

Senouci Youcef

May your soul rest in peace

May Allah grant you the highest place in paradise

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ABSTRACT:

This research aims to investigate the misuse of comma and semicolon in paragraph writing. To explore this effect, this research was conducted at the University of M'sila. A descriptive method was applied for the current study in which a sample of 09 teachers and 66 students of second-year license students were selected from the English department. Quantitative tools were used during data gathering and analysis. Two questionnaires were addressed for both teachers and students with a test for students that includes two paragraphs to be appropriately punctuated. The results indicated that students face multiple difficulties in punctuation especially in the use of comma and semicolon. The findings reveal that students do not get sufficient instructions from their teachers about punctuation, as well as, students do not give importance to punctuation in comparison to other components of writing. Additionally, both teachers and students claim that the allocated time for written expression should be more than one hour and thirty minutes per week. Moreover, they believe that more practical courses about punctuation should assigned to enhance students' mastery of punctuation.

Keywords: academic writing, punctuation, comma, semicolon, paragraph

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General introduction

1 Introduction:

Writing is a crucial skill for EFL learners to develop their critical thinking and improve their creativity. For university students, it helps them to accelerate their academic learning due to its interdisciplinary nature (Zahida, Farrah, & Zaru, 2014)

In academic context, writing paragraphs is regarded as a challenging task for EFL learners. Therefore, they must understand and gain mastery of the correct components of writing and avoid the various types of orthographical errors associated with spelling, capitalization, word emphasis, vocabulary and punctuation to produce correct sentences which form paragraphs.

In this research, we aim to identify, discuss, and attempt to recommend solutions to EFL students' misuse of punctuation in paragraph writing as it is frequently made and commonly observed at M'sila University. Such misuses can sometimes be relatively harmful, undermine the credibility of any piece of writing, and even raise questions related to the writer's basic literacy skills. Because effective writing is based on understanding the conventions of punctuation use. The system of punctuation we apply today has evolved through many centuries in written texts and were solid block of symbols with no gaps between words arranged, in kind of zigzags (Scott and Chapman, 2001).

The present study is restricted to two types of punctuation misuses, mainly the misuse of the semicolon and the comma. King (2004: 1) insisted that punctuation is the most important aspect in writing, especially when compared to spelling. He posits that spelling is one of the decencies of life, like the proper use of knives and forks. But if you are getting your commas, semicolons and full stops wrong, it means that you are not getting your thoughts right, and your mind is muddled.

2 Literature review

Punctuation plays very important role in giving intended meaning to the language. Use of wrong punctuation or even wrong placement of punctuation can change the meaning of the sentence completely and sometimes even convert the sentence to complete nonsense. According to Nordquist (2016), punctuation is the set of marks used to regulate texts and clarify their meanings, principally by separating or linking words, phrases, and clauses. Lauchman (2010:17) said that punctuation is a code, used in writing, often necessary for meaning and for emphasis. The code originated in attempts to capture, in text, the various stops, pauses, and inflections of speech, while Wikoff (2012) states that punctuation is the “symbols” used to help people read/process sentences, the way people want them to be heard and understood.

Punctuation is often essential to convey meaning. Poor punctuation contributes to unorganized writing and confuses readers. Coherence and structure in any piece of text are influenced by punctuation marks (Gamaroff, 2000; Shaughnessy, 1977) As the common example of An English professor who asked his/her student to punctuate the following sentence:

A woman without her man is nothing.

The males punctuated the sentence as: "A woman, without her man, is nothing." However, the females punctuated it differently: "A woman: without her, man is nothing." This above example demonstrates the power of punctuation and its role in resolving ambiguity.

According to Carroll and Wilson (1993: 191) learners encounter punctuation problems as there are no universal rules of punctuation. Similarly, Byrne (1988) said punctuation is very

problematic as it has never been standard. Shokouhi and Zadeh Dabbagh (2009) believe that learners are inconsistent in utilizing commas and periods.

Jones (1994, p.421) stated that punctuation, as we consider it, can be defined as the central part of the range of non-lexical orthography. Although arguments could be made for including the sub-lexical marks (e.g. hyphens, apostrophes) and structural marks (e.g. bullets in itemizations), they are excluded since they tend to be lexicalized or rather difficult to represent, respectively. The other concept comes from Samson (2014, p.23). He said, “punctuation enables us to clarify statements and communicate better with readers.” It is similar with the opinion from Ritter (2001, p. 112) who said that punctuation exists to clarify meaning in the written word and to facilitate reading. Too much can hamper understanding through an uneven, staccato text, while too little can lead to misreading. Within the framework of a few basic rules (fewer still in fiction), a 12 author's choice of punctuation is an ingredient of style as personal as his or her choice of words.

Based on Samson (2014, P.25-26) “Many writers have trouble punctuating correctly because they have not read enough well-written prose to internalize the principles of punctuation usage, or they were taught by the pause approach”. According to the statement before, writers had problem using punctuation mark in writing. It means that writers probably made mistake using punctuation marks correctly.

Based on research from Awad (2012, p.227) Students in the early academic levels made punctuation errors more than students in the higher academic levels. This finding is due to the impact of studying more courses. The more exposure the students have to language, the fewer mistakes they make in their dealing with the punctuation marks. Based on the statement above,

students in the early semester potentially made a lot of mistake in using punctuation marks than students in the higher academic level.

Nunberg's *The Linguistics of Punctuation* (Nunberg 1990) was the motivation for research on punctuation in the 90's. In this study, he takes the offensive on the general opinion that punctuation is prescriptive and only a device for reflecting intonation, and he claims that after the parting of written and spoken languages, punctuation has become a linguistic system on its own right. He suggests to use two separate grammars to analyze texts. A lexical grammar accounts for the text-categories (text-clauses, text adjuncts, and text-phrases) occurring between the punctuation marks: A text grammar deals with the structure of punctuation, and the relation of punctuation marks to the text-categories they separate. Included within his text grammar are rules (for English orthography) that handle the interactions between various marks such as a point absorbing a comma when they are attached and a group of hierarchically-ordered rules for the presentation on paper of marks such as face- or font-alterations.

3 Statement of the Problem:

In any EFL program, students are required to receive instruction in academic writing, such programs focus on many aspects, some of these are paragraph writing and punctuation. Accordingly, they are provided with the necessary tools to help them write documents such as essays, articles, home works and so forth. However, many of them seem to have poor performance when it comes to the usage, especially the comma and the semicolon. This could be traced back to their false perceptions about punctuation.

4 Questions of the Study:

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- Do students misuse the comma and semicolon in their paragraph writings?
- What are the reasons behind those misuses?

5 Research Hypothesis:

According to the research questions, we hypothesize the following:

- Students may misuse the comma and semicolon when writing paragraphs
- The lack of linguistic knowledge may cause the misuse of punctuation rules

6 Objectives of the study:

This piece of paper attempts:

- To investigate if students misuse the semicolon and comma in their paragraph writings.
- To highlight the main reasons behind those misuses.

7 Significance of the Study:

This research has the potential to be of great significance that stems from the importance of clear and appropriate use of orthography in writing. This study is considered to be of vast relevance and value to both instructors and learners since it aims to enhance both teaching and learning writing skills.

8 Methodology

In this descriptive research, the research questions, objectives, and hypothesis highly induce the use of quantitative approach, research tools and techniques for compiling data. These tools and techniques are two sorts of questionnaires, one will be provided to the teachers of English to ask them about their attitudes about the instructions of punctuation in paragraph writing and also about their teaching methodology, and students' attitudes to such instructions. On the other hand, the other questionnaire will be provided for students to investigate their perceptions and knowledge on punctuation and its usage in paragraph writing. In addition to that, a written test that is shaped in the form of two exercises will be provided to students to test their use of the comma and semicolon in paragraphs.

CHAPTER ONE:

writing

Introduction:

Writing skill is among of the four language skills that learners of English as a foreign language are eager to develop, since the graphic form of language is considered as sharper and more lasting, and can force itself at the expense of sounds. However, some EFL learners find that developing the skill of good writing a difficult mission to achieve as a result of not constructing the required basics and mechanics for writing. Thus, the present chapter attempts to cover the term writing from different angles by presenting different definitions stated by many authors, in addition to the criterion that should be developed by EFL writers in an EFL classroom context. Moreover, it deals with the types of writing produced by a foreign language learner as well as the identification of the features of skillful writers. It tackles further the problems that EFL learners face when they write. In addition, it sheds light on the different factors that make writing difficult. Finally, it concludes with the importance of punctuation as a significant component of the writing mechanics.

1 Writing Definition

Several definitions are introduced in the literature for the term writing: for instance, Antoine Meillet (d,p) states “ The men who invented and perfected writing were great linguists and it was they who created linguistics”. Writing has witnessed a rising interest at higher levels to develop entirely and become a distinguished discipline on its own. Many researchers have different concepts about writing, for everyone seeks to refine it from a different angle according to a specific field of study. Kellogg (2001) declares that writing is a cognitive process that tests memory, thinking ability, and verbal command to successfully express the ideas, because that proficient composition of a text points out an effective second language learning (Geiser & Studley ,2002; Hyland ,2003; McCutchen ,1984; Nickerson, Perkins, & and Smith, 2014).

For Nunan, writing is “an extremely complex, cognitive activity for all which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously” (1989, p.36). This shows the complexity of the task of writing, and the clear link to the cognitive aspect that often creates a difficulty to learners during their writing. Nunan’s idea about writing gives more details about the skill of writing than what is overtly seen.

Moreover, writing is defined as “a process that requires extensive self-regulation and attentional control...writers must change ideas into text, repair organization and mechanics, and monitor their success--all while trying to formulate a coherent message” Ransdell and Levy (as cited in Singleton- Jackson, 2003). In fact, to deal with writing means to be able to manage all the different stages and aspects included to arrive at producing a successful piece of writing.

Similarly, to speech which cannot be only restricted to producing sounds, the process of writing is obviously much more than the production of graphic symbols. It is admitted that this range of symbols should be arranged in accordance with the writing conventions, rules and procedures. All that is to produce words which themselves are combined to form sentences which cannot build a meaningful communication separately, but rather by a sequence of sentences either short or long linked together to constitute a whole, coherent, unified text (Byrne,1988).

So, writing is regarded as a complex cognitive activity which inevitably depends on the mastery of the following elements: A full knowledge of the alphabet, knowing how to combine letters to form words in order to understand the relationship between the word and its meaning, adopting the mechanics of writing throughout the text like spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and other writing conventions, mastery of the rules that govern the structure of sentences, ability to combine different sentences to build an effective paragraph, and then combining paragraphs to produce different

compositions and awareness of the importance of transitions which achieve coherence throughout all types of texts (Al Mutawa and Kailani, 1989,p).

In this respect, Bell and Burnaby (1984; cited in Nunan, 1989, p. 36) explain that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts.

Additionally, the process of writing has a wide range of purposes. It is a good means of enhancing one's grammar and vocabulary through learning their norms and applying them. For example, during writing classes, teachers may ask their students to write paragraphs or even sentences in which they adopt recently learned grammar, or vocabulary conventions to test to what extent they tend to manipulate their different uses (Harmer,2004).

Furthermore, Hyland (2003, p. 3) regards writing as “marks on a page or a screen, a coherent arrangement of words, clauses, and sentences structured according to a system of rules.” He views writing as “composing skills and knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers.” In simple words, in writing one should bear in mind that stating words, sentences, or even paragraphs on a sheet of paper is not sufficient; it is mandatory to pay attention to the different rules and norms that go with every type of writing. Thus, being able to write is not an easy task because it obliges students to master various elements that shape the writing skill (Harris 1969) identifies five general elements:

- Content, which represents the ideas expressed in the whole text

- Form, which refers to the organization of the content.
- Grammar, which refers to the application of grammatical forms and syntactic patterns.
- Style, which displays the use of structures and lexical items to give a particular tone to writing.
- Writing mechanics, which consist of the use of surface features and graphic conventions of language.

Subsequently, if writing is viewed in a narrow sense, it will certainly have several definitions. When considering the Product Approach, it is "a creative discovery procedure characterized by the dynamic interplay of content and language: the use of language to explore beyond the known content." (Tylor, 1981, p. 60). Therefore, when taking all these definitions into consideration, it is most noticeable that writing is not an easy task, neither it is possible to put it under one single view since it is not a simple task and involves control over various conventions as coherence, cohesion, grammar, tense and, of course, surface features.

2 Writing difficulties in EFL Context

Writing in a foreign language is one of the most challenging skills for almost all learners. Developing the writing skill is thought to be highly complex if not the most complex in comparison to listening, speaking, and reading. Writing requires some criteria of acceptability relative to different aspects of writing which include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, spelling, punctuation and accurate capitalization and paraphrasing, and that what

makes it a troublesome task for EFL learners who face difficulties when writing in EFL for many reasons such:

- English Competence
- Native language interference
- Motivation and reading habit

3 EFL learners writing Characteristics

In describing the characteristics of EFL Learners writings, it is at first worth mentioning the cognitive process of writing and composing. These processes have been studied by Flower and Hayes (1981) and were identified as “distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing” (p. 366). Nonetheless, these processes are not the only aspects to focus on during the composition, “when it comes to formulating a message, linguistic skills and knowledge become prominent in the writing process” Chenoweth and Hayes (as cited in Schoonen, Snellings, Stevenson & van Gelderen, 2009).

As a result, studies have come to conclude that “writing in an L2 or FL is much harder and time consuming in the native language” Chenoweth and Hayes, 2001; Roca de Larios et al., 2006 (as cited in Schoonen, Snellings, Stevenson & van Gelderen, 2009).

Therefore, FL writers are influenced by their experience in writing in their L1 to FL writing situations, further they were identified to have limited linguistic knowledge that can hamper the use of metacognitive knowledge and writing experience (Jones and Tetroe, 1987 ;WhalenandMe´nard, 1995; Schoonenetal., 2003) (ascited in Schoonen et al., 2009).

In addition, these L1 writing experiences at various occasions affect FL writing in different ways such as the writing process and therefore make the writer struggle during composition due to his inadequate FL linguistic knowledge (Schoonen et al., 2009). To conclude, most of EFL writers are facing difficulties in FL composition due to the interference of L1 expertise, and lack of FL linguistic knowledge resulting in a low proficiency in writing.

4 Types of EFL Learners' Writings

In studying English (I added it because your sentence was not complete) as a foreign language, students encounter different types of writing throughout their academic course, especially at University when they are introduced to written expression module and they learn to produce different written genres such as essays, reports, short stories, and paragraphs.

4.1 Paragraph writing

Paragraphs are the fundamental building blocks of texts. Their purpose is to inform, give an opinion, state facts or explain. An effective paragraph is logical and well-structured and clear” (Courtauld, 2008). So, a paragraph is a group of sentences that fleshes out a single idea. In order for a paragraph to be effective, it must begin with a topic sentence, have sentences that support the main idea of that paragraph, and maintain a consistent flow

A paragraph is a block of text, used in most assignment types in EFL classroom context. Just as your sentences show how you've divided your information into logical pieces, your paragraphs show how you've divided your argument into logical stages. For instance, an essay usually presents and argues one claim (all the claims in order make the argument) a report paragraph usually has one of the report's functions (such as describing a methodology or recommendations)

A successful paragraph is more than just a collection of sentences related to the same topic. Writing a convincing argument in an essay requires a series of effective paragraphs. Each paragraph should provide details supporting that single point of one's argument and then show how the point in that paragraph relates to the thesis.

4.2 Features / characteristics of a good paragraph

To learn how to develop good paragraph is essential in academic writing. A good paragraph is critical as it helps the readers to understand the content of the writing. Coherent paragraph results in sufficient development of main idea reflected by appropriate supporting sentences, which will help readers, find the main idea and supporting details of the paragraph. Moreover, cohesion among paragraphs is also essential to build a bind among paragraphs. It shows the readers the unity of the paragraph. Knowledge of developing a paragraph is very crucial for EFL students especially in academic writing. They need to make sure that the language used in developing the paragraph is correct, formal, systematic, and suitable with academic nature.

Moreover, sentences should be arranged in such a way so that it results in good comprehension to the readers. Academic features such as citation and writing format are also important to be taken into consideration by the students to meet the academic requirements. Although a paragraph only consists of one main idea, the development of a paragraph is sometimes difficult to achieve. Writers should consider some aspects of a paragraph to build them into a good paragraph. Vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, cohesion, and coherence are among the aspects requiring attention in paragraph writing. The words used in paragraph should be correct and suitable to represent the idea. In addition, the paragraph should fulfill language rules in term of grammar.

Moreover, authors have to make sure that each sentence is correctly constructed. The last, each sentence in a paragraph should be interconnected to the sentences and each paragraph should also connect to other paragraphs. In writing an academic text, EFL students should put more efforts than L1 students. In writing a paragraph, EFL students potentially face more challenges than first language (L1) learners (Hussen,2015). Both of them may share similar difficulties related to the writing format and mechanic. However, students of English as foreign language face more difficulties in composing academic text than L1 students (Yakhontova, 2003). EFL students are likely to have more difficulties in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure.

The objective of this study is to investigate how students develop paragraphs and identify problems in writing paragraphs of academic texts. In EFL contexts, academic writing requires the students to use a foreign language, proper academic format and standard, and other paragraph writing requirements. Those requirements make EFL students have more challenges in academic writing than L1 students, and they potentially make academic writing more difficult to accomplish

5 Paragraph Writing Problems

Writing in EFL context is still challenging for many students. The issue is that it requires students to refer to academic writing system and use foreign language (FL). EFL writers have several problems in writing such as vocabulary selections, punctuation error, generating idea, organizing problems, spelling errors and appropriate grammar usage. In writing an academic text, EFL students potentially face some problems. Related to the influencing factor of academic writing problems, Hailemariam (2011) states that the possible causes of students' problems in EFL paragraph writing are due to inadequate exposure of target language, lack of practice, problem in writing apprehension, misuse of lack of appropriate feedback, lack of vocabulary, and carelessness.

6 Difficulties with writing skill

Learners of English as a foreign language often say that writing is the most difficult skill compared to the other skills. In fact, most native speakers of the language themselves have to make efforts to write correctly, accurately, and effectively even on what they are well aware of. Indeed, it is a hard task for a non-native speaker to do something that an average native speaker usually considers a difficult job to do. To put it simply the writing difficulties are commonly shared among English native speakers, and even students who are learning English both as a second or foreign language (Aragón, Baires & Rodriguez, 2013) Then why is writing found to be difficult to learn? Raimes (1983) thinks that: “When students complain about how difficult it is to write in a second language, they are talking not only about the difficulty of finding the right words and using the correct grammar but also about the difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in a new language. (p. 13)”. Thus, writing demands mental and physical efforts from the writer as it has been defined as the activity of transforming thoughts into language. In effect, Byrne (1988) explains that the difficulty in writing stems from three kinds of problems:

6.1 Psychological:

It is caused by lack of interaction and feedback between the reader and the writer. The learners' psychology is an important volunteer to the success writing acquisition. Motivation, attitudes, and anxiety all these psychological factors would affect the success or lead students to

unconsciously built barriers that end with an evident failure in acquiring the necessary skills to achieve competence and proficiency in English language.

6.2 Cognitive:

As a result of the organization framework of our ideas in written communication has to be mastered. Learners with lower writing quality have to use part of their cognitive capacity to focus on the language, making it impossible for other functions concerning writing organization and discourse to be used at maximum level. Baoshu and Chuanbi (2015) displayed that working memory had an important impact on syntactic complexity and fluency of students' writing, but no influence was discovered within the lexical complexity and accuracy; Bergsleithner (2010) discovered the influence of working memory on accuracy and complexity; and (Baoshu and Luo ,2012) almost found the effect of working memory on the precision of writing.

Additionally, the cognitive side of difficulty in writing that students encounter is that learning writing can be devastating and exhausting to students' education and self-esteem; because within the years of learning they are increasingly expecting demands of what they know about many different subjects through writing. Any beam of a fail to develop certain basic skills, students will be unable to write with the fluency and speediness needed to surpass these demands as they augment (Dianna and Nickesha ,2013).

6.3 Linguistic:

In writing we have to express ourselves in a clearer and more grammatical manner than in speech, to compensate for the absence of certain features of spoken language such as gestures and facial expression. In addition, the writer has to handle many components at the same time: content,

organization, grammar, syntax, mechanics, word choice, audience, purpose and the writing process. The combination of all these components makes writing a sophisticated and a difficult skill. Such significant components can be represented in the following:

6.4 Vocabulary

It is considered as the body of words that make up a language, as Ourghi (2002:77) argues: “writing is primarily conveying meaning and sending a message by selecting relevant lexical items and putting them in a written form. First year EFL learners have a lack of vocabulary due to the lack of reading stories, articles, newspapers, magazines, the decrease of participation in speaking sessions, as well as the diminution of using dictionaries which results in a limited vocabulary.

6.5 Grammar

Knowledge about grammar is crucial and necessary in writing; there are rules and norms that should be known by both teachers and learners in order to get the message across. Learners should be aware of the most grammatical patterns with the aim of producing meaningful and well-structured sentences. However, most second year EFL learners encounter grammatical problems in their attempts to write in the second language. “As verbs take different forms depending on tense and subjects they are used with, they create problems for second language writing students” (Tyner, 1987). Similarly, Kharma (1987) in Melese (2007: 12) states that students have problems with subject verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors (Tyner, E. 1987).

6.6 Mechanics

Error-free writing requires more than just using good grammar. an EFL learner must also use correct mechanics of writing in their writing pieces:

6.6.1 Spelling

Problems with spelling are shared as a most noticeable writing difficulty among students. Learning to spell words correctly is expected to take place in the earliest stages of language teaching, yet it is not always the case for spelling may become difficult in some instances. Moreover, spelling is said to be closely interrelated with reading; Frith (1980) argues that “Learning to read should imply learning to spell, and learning to spell should imply learning to read” (p. 496). However, this is not always the case, for there are students with excellent reading abilities, but struggle when it comes to spelling words (Frith, 1980, p. 497). Writing difficulties of relevance to spelling mainly include the misspelling of words which are a result of the irregularities of the English spelling system (Banchara, 2013). This related to the similarities of vowels, for instance, that can be decoded in different spelling.

Additionally, Banchara further explained that spelling mistakes may occur when students are less concentrated due to tiredness or carelessness about the correctness of words (p. 4). While Harmer (2001) states that “...the correspondence between the sound of a word and the way it is spelt is not always obvious” (p. 256). Furthermore, he indicates that the reason spelling is difficult for students is “...the fact that not all varieties of English spell the same words in the same way”. For instance, the way American English pronounce the word ‘behavior’, differs from British English ‘behaviour’. In this sense, Harmer (2001) proposed extensive reading as a remedy for students to overcome spelling difficulties.

6.6.2 Capitalization

Capital letters are useful for sentence initials, the beginning of important words, in topics, headings, etc (Kroll, 1991). However, learners have problems in using capitalization properly. There are reasons for students' problems in using proper capitalization. "The rules of capitalization are not universal and classifying nouns as proper and common nouns are difficult for students" (Gowere et al, 1995).

6.6.3 Punctuation

When speaking, we can use pauses and gestures to clarify the meaning of our words. In written communication, punctuation such as commas, dashes, colons, and semicolons, provide most of these interpretation clues. They are signals to the reader that indicate a pause, place emphasis, alter the function or show the relationship between elements of the text. According to Nunberg, punctuation now a linguistic "system on its own right" (Nunberg 1990: 9).

Briefly, punctuation is the act or practice of inserting standardized marks or signs in written matter to clarify the meaning and separate structural units.

6.6.3.1 The Importance of Punctuation Marks

Good punctuation is crucial for successful and effective academic writing and both writers and readers need to understand it and pay attention to it.

The punctuation marks serve two functions:

1) they define and show how the various elements of sentences relate to each other, thereby ensuring clear and unambiguous communication.

2) they help to establish the tone of a written text.

Punctuation marks are not used as a decoration in writing but it is so essential for the unity of the sentence and for clarifying the meaning given in a piece of writing since they are used to break up words and sentences and consequently, they make written material easier to read and easier to understand. Punctuation marks cut the flow of words into meaningful groups and that prevent confusion.

In addition, in speaking people can change the way their words sound to show what they mean. They may change their facial expressions, the tone of their voice, or the rhythm of the sentences. But with writing there is no nodding, gestures, body language, intonation or falling and raising tone to aid understanding. In other words, there is no direct contact with the reader; therefore, punctuation marks are essential. Our words on the page are silent, so the use of punctuation marks will replace the many pauses and changes of tone that are found in spoken language. We use punctuation marks in writing because of the lack of voice intonation and body language.

Punctuation marks are like traffic signals, they tell the reader when to stop, slow down or proceed. They have the power not only to define textual meaning but they also add rhythm, breath and life to a text. So, without punctuation marks, many sentences are mere a jumble mass of words without division to mark pauses and breaks in thoughts and inevitably it will be difficult to determine the exact meaning of sentences and consequently it will hinder understanding the meaning of a written work. In other words, an unpunctuated sentence or text will be like a puzzle. So, student need to know what are the punctuation marks and how to use them and more important

how to use them properly because wrong use of punctuation mark can interrupt the flow of ideas and change the meaning entirely.

Punctuation is very important for English language learner. The student should know the role of using punctuation mark in writing. Doran 1998 contends “Punctuation helps us to structure, and thus to understand text”. Based on Doran, we know that punctuation mark could help the writer had good structure in written sentence and make the sentence clearly.

Other statement the importance of punctuation comes from Ritter. Ritter (2002, p.10) stated “the wording, punctuation, and capitalization of part and chapter titles must be consistent” Based on Ritter, writer must be consistent use punctuation mark in writing. It means that the writer must be consistent using punctuation mark correctly in writing. The similar opinion come from Benzer (2010, p. 1879) who said “without punctuation marks, reading would be a very difficult task”. This opinion means that the writer should put punctuation mark in their writing. Because the reader finds it difficult to read a written text which lacks punctuation marks.

7 Punctuation marks

The essential punctuation marks (excluding usage in reference systems) are the period, comma, semicolon, and colon. These include the following:

- **The period:** primarily marks the end of a sentence. A period is also used after an abbreviation where the final letter of the word is not the final word of the abbreviation, e.g., in enc. for enclosure, although Mr. for Mister is an exception (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
- **The comma:** it is primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning remains clearer for the reader.

- a comma separates words in a list, e.g., He brought coal, kindling, matches, and turf.
- A comma separates subordinate clauses within a complex sentence where two separate sentences are not required (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
- **The semicolon:** have two common uses. First, it may be used to separate items in a list after a colon. Second, it may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
- **The colon:** may be used to indicate the start of a list, as is similar to the above example for the semicolon. It may also be used before a quotation begins (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
- **The dash:** it is used to enclose a group of words in a sentence where a list of items is separated by commas (Murphy, 2010, p. 9).
- **An omission** (where words are deliberately left out) is noted by the use of three periods (an ellipsis) followed by a space. If the omission occurs at the end of a sentence, the ellipsis follows the period.
- **Parentheses/brackets** are used to enclose information of minor importance in a sentence. Brackets are useful if a writer is restricted to the use of footnotes (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
- **The hyphen** is used within compound words such as co-opt, half-day, two-thirds, three-week holidays, inner-city streets, student-centered, problem-based (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
- **Italics** are used for titles of books, plays, films, etc., and some names, such as those of planes or ships, etc. (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
- **Capital letters** are used for names and titles, the first word in a sentence, and acronyms, e.g., NQAI (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
- **Numbers** fewer than one hundred are generally spelled out. When a number is the first word in a sentence, it is spelled out regardless of its size. Hyphens are used when numbers are

spelled out, e.g., twenty-nine. Street numbers www.ccsenet.org/elt English Language Teaching Vol. 5, No. 3; March 2012 Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education 125 are given in figures, e.g., 12 Upper Mount Street. A number used in a date is not spelled out, e.g., January 14, nor is time, e.g., 12:30 pm. Decades, such as the 1990s, have an “s” added to them with no preceding apostrophe (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).

- **An apostrophe** has no primary purpose. These are largely used to show ownership and indicate that a letter or letters have been left out. (Murphy, 2010, p. 10).
- **Quotations** present information and ideas that the student has gathered from other sources. Academic honesty requires that the student provide documentation to indicate the sources of the information and ideas (Troyka and Hesse, 2006, p. 51).
- **Foreign words and phrases with popular abbreviations** (particularly Latin and French words) are frequently used when writing in other languages. The convention in academic writing is to use italics or abbreviations for foreign words or phrases and abbreviations (Murphy, 2010, p. 11).
- **Footnotes and endnotes** are important, along with references and bibliographies, because they inform readers of who said what, where, and when. When the student provides this information, readers consider their ideas to be buttressed by the ideas of experts and are more likely to engage in those ideas (Fulwiler, 2002, p. 59).

8 The comma and the semicolon

As far as our study is concerned with EFL learners and their use of the comma and semicolon in paragraph writing, here are the rules of their usages provided with examples:

Commas rules and examples:

- **Rule 1.** To avoid confusion, use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more.

Example: My \$10 million estate is to be split among my husband, daughter, son, and nephew.

Omitting the comma after son would indicate that the son and nephew would have to split one third of the estate.

- **Rule 2.** Use a comma to separate two adjectives when the word and can be inserted between them.

Examples: He is a strong, healthy man. We stayed at an expensive summer resort. You would not say expensive and summer resort, so no comma.

- **Rule 3.** Use a comma when an -ly adjective is used with other adjectives.

Examples: Felix was a lonely, young boy. I get headaches in brightly lit rooms. Brightly is not an adjective because it cannot be used alone with rooms; therefore, no comma is used between brightly and lit.

- **Rule 4.** Use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.

Examples: Will you, Aisha, do that assignment for me? Yes, Doctor, I will.

- **Rule 5:**

- a. Use a comma to separate the day of the month from the year and after the year.

Example: Kathleen met her husband on December 5, 2003, in Mill Valley, California.

- b. If any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma.

Example: They met in December 2003 in Mill Valley.

- **Rule 6.** Use a comma to separate the city from the state and after the state. Some businesses no longer use the comma after the state.

Example: I lived in San Francisco, California, for twenty years. ORI lived in San Francisco, California for twenty years.

- **Rule 7.** Use commas to surround degrees or titles used with names. Commas are no longer required around Jr. and Sr. Commas never set off II, III, and so forth.

Example: Al Mooney, M.D., knew Sam Sunny Jr. and Charles Starr III.

- **Rule 8.** Use commas to set off expressions that interrupt the flow of the sentence.

Example: I am, as you have probably noticed, very nervous about this.

- **Rule 9.** When starting a sentence with a weak clause, use a comma after it. Conversely, do not use a comma when the sentence starts with a strong clause followed by a weak clause.

Example: If you are not sure about this, let me know now. Let me know now if you are not sure about this.

- **Rule 10.** Use a comma after phrases of more than three words that begin a sentence. If the phrase has fewer than three words, the comma is optional.

Examples: To apply for this job, you must have previous experience. On February 14 many couples give each other candy or flowers. OR On February 14, many couples give each other candy or flowers.

- **Rule 11.** If something or someone is sufficiently identified, the description following it is considered nonessential and should be surrounded by commas.

Examples: Freddy, who has a limp, was in an auto accident. Freddy is named, so the description is not essential. The boy who has a limp was in an auto accident. We do not know which boy is being referred to without further description; therefore, no commas are used.

- **Rule 12.** Use a comma to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction and, or, but, for, nor. You can omit the comma if the clauses are both short.

Examples: I have painted the entire house, but he is still working on sanding the doors. I paint and he writes.

- **Rule 13.** Use the comma to separate two sentences if it will help avoid confusion.

Example: I chose the colors red and green, and blue was his first choice.

- **Rule 14.** A comma splice is an error caused by joining two strong clauses with only a comma instead of separating the clauses with a conjunction, a semicolon, or a period. A run-on sentence, which is incorrect, is created by joining two strong clauses without any punctuation.

Incorrect: Time flies when we are having fun, we are always having fun. (Comma splice)

Incorrect: Time flies when we are having fun we are always having fun. (Run-on sentence)

Correct: Time flies when we are having fun; we are always having fun. OR Time flies when we are having fun, and we are always having fun. (Comma is optional because both strong clauses are short.) OR Time flies when we are having fun. We are always having fun.

- **Rule 15.** If the subject does not appear in front of the second verb, do not use a comma.

Example: He thought quickly but still did not answer correctly.

- **Rule 16.** Use commas to introduce or interrupt direct quotations shorter than three lines.

Examples: He actually said, “I do not care.” “Why,” I asked, “do you always forget to do it?”

- **Rule 17.** Use a comma to separate a statement from a question.

Example: I can go, can't I

- **Rule 18.** Use a comma to separate contrasting parts of a sentence.

Example: That is my money, not yours.

- **Rule 19.** Use a comma when beginning sentences with introductory words such as well, now, or yes.

Examples: Yes, I do need that report. Well, I never thought I'd live to see the day . . .

- **Rule 20.** Use commas surrounding words such as therefore and however when they are used as interrupters.

Examples: I would, therefore, like a response. I would be happy, however, to volunteer for the Red Cross.

- **Rule 21.** Use either a comma or a semicolon before introductory words such as namely, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., or for instance when they are followed by a series of items. Use a comma after the introductory word.

Examples: You may be required to bring many items, e.g., sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.
OR You may be required to bring many items; e.g., sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing. You may be required to bring many items, e.g. sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.

Semicolons rules and examples:

- **Rule 1.** Use a semicolon in place of a period to separate two sentences where the conjunction has been left out.

Examples: Call me tomorrow; I will give you my answer then. I have paid my dues; therefore, I expect all the privileges listed in the contract.

- **Rule 2.** It is preferable to use the semicolon before introductory words such as namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., or for instance when they introduce a complete sentence. It is also preferable to use a comma after the introductory word.

Examples: You will want to bring many backpacking items; for example, sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing will make the trip better. As we discussed, you will bring two items; i.e., a sleeping bag and a tent are not optional.

- **Rule 3.** Use either a semicolon or a comma before introductory words such as namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., or for instance when they introduce a list following a complete sentence. Use a comma after the introductory word.

Example: You will want to bring many backpacking items; for example, sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.

Example: You will want to bring many backpacking items, for example, sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing.

- **Rule 4.** Use the semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.

Example: This conference has people who have come from Boise, Idaho; Los Angeles, California; and Nashville, Tennessee.

- **Rule 5.** Use the semicolon between two sentences that are joined by a conjunction but already have one or more commas within the first sentence.

Examples: When I finish here, I will be glad to help you; and that is a promise I will keep. If she can, she will attempt that feat; and if her husband is able, he will be there to see her.

9 Conclusion

Writing is being introduced in the literature in diverse ways, and a variety of definitions are given to writing per se, yet all agree on that writing is the ability to produce adequate and accurate, and meaningful composition which respects the set of rules dedicated for writing skill as such. Hence for an EFL learner to attain a certain acceptable level of proficiency in the foreign language, he has to develop this skill in parallel with the rest of skills. Therefore, an EFL teacher should emphasize on implementing a myriad of activities, techniques and materials in the EFL classroom to improve his learners command over the writing skill and its mechanics in attempt to avoid any kind of its misuse.

CHAPTER TWO:

Field of investigation

introduction

The aim of this research study is to investigate students' misuse of the comma and the semicolon when they write paragraphs. For this purpose, a test, a learners' questionnaire, and a teachers' questionnaire were administered. The test aims to assess students' use of punctuation in paragraph writing, more precisely the comma and the semicolon. On the other hand, the questionnaire aims at gathering data about students' interest, knowledge, and difficulties in writing and punctuation.

1 Method:

In this research, we utilize quantitative research tools that are three data collection tools; a students' test that is followed by student's and teachers' questionnaires.

2 Participants

The test and the questionnaire were submitted to a sample of sixty-six (66) second year English LMD students of M'sila University in the academic year of 2018/2019. Another questionnaire was given to ten (10) teachers. The submission was only for teachers who taught written expression module. They were picked up due to their experience and perception of their students' writing difficulties in punctuation.

3 Data collecting tools:

we used three data collecting tools:

3.1 Students' test:

In order to reach the aim of the study, the researcher designed a test containing punctuation exercises to measure students' abilities in using comma and semicolon in paragraph writing. The test was divided into 2 sections:

In section one, we asked the students to write a short paragraph on one of three suggested topics to test their general proficiency in using punctuation. In section two, we gave them a paragraph without the comma and semicolon and we asked them to put the proper punctuation mark; this is to see whether they can use the two marks well or not. The test is out of 20 points. 8 grades are for activity one while 12 grades are for activity two;

3.2 Students' questionnaire:

This questionnaire is designed for second year LMD students at English department of Mohammed Boudiaf University of M'Sila for the academic year 2018/2019. This questionnaire is intended to collect data about our sample's background on writing and punctuation, especially about the comma and the semicolon. It consists of 17 questions. The first two questions are about general information; age and gender. The next six (06) questions are about student's interest in writing and their perceptions towards the important elements of writing and the difficulties they face when they write paragraphs. Different options were given to students who are supposed to select the appropriate answer(s). The questions nine (9) and ten (10) investigate whether students read English texts and pay attention to punctuation marks while reading, the rest of the questionnaire focuses on knowing if students are willing to learn punctuation and whether they are helped by their teachers to do it, especially for the comma and the semicolon.

3.3 Teachers' questionnaire:

This questionnaire was designed for ten (10) teachers who taught written expression module. It tends to demonstrate teachers' points of views towards the importance of writing and punctuation, to explore their preferred method in teaching writing. In addition to that, it aims to illustrate the instructions they give to their students about punctuation.

4 Data Analysis:

4.1 Analysis of Students' test Results:

therefore, we evaluated the final score as: 0-7 grades as weak, 8-14 as medium, 15-20 as excellent.

After correcting all the papers, we reached the following results:

Table 1: Students' level in punctuation

Category	Number of students
0-7 weak	57
8-14 medium	9
15-20 excellent	0

$$M = \left(\sum_{i=0}^m x_i \right) / N$$

$\sum_{i=0}^m x_i = x_1 + x_2 + x_3 \dots \dots x_m$ students test results

N= number of students

Table 2: Samples' mean in punctuation level

Category	0-7 weak	8-14 medium	15-20 excellent.
Students' mean	6	X	X

So, we concluded that students' knowledge in punctuation is less than average and can be categorized as weak. Thus, the misuse in the comma and semicolon in paragraph writing is present.

4.2 Students and teachers' questionnaires:

4.2.1 Analysis of student's questionnaire's results

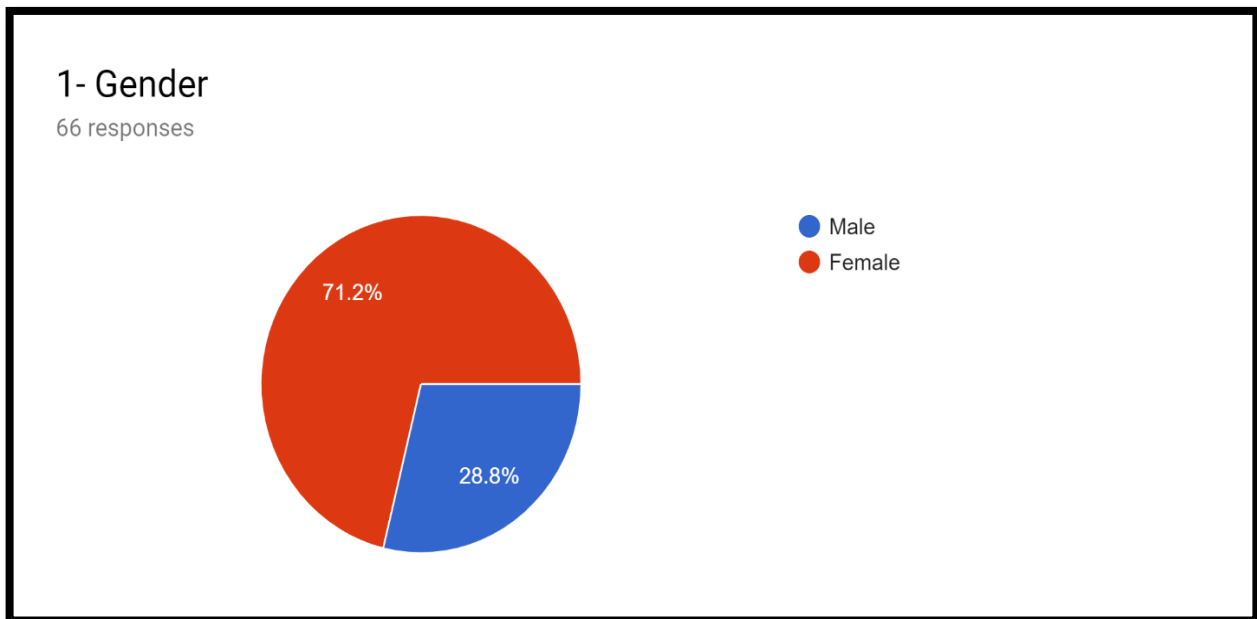
Q01: Gender:

-Female

-Male

Table 3: Students' gender

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Female	47	71.2%
Male	19	28.8%
Total	66	100%



Graph 1: Students' gender

The graph and the table demonstrate that 71.2% of the sample are females and 28.8% are males which means that the majority of the sample are females.

Discussion and interpretation:

the majority of the participants of the questionnaire are females.

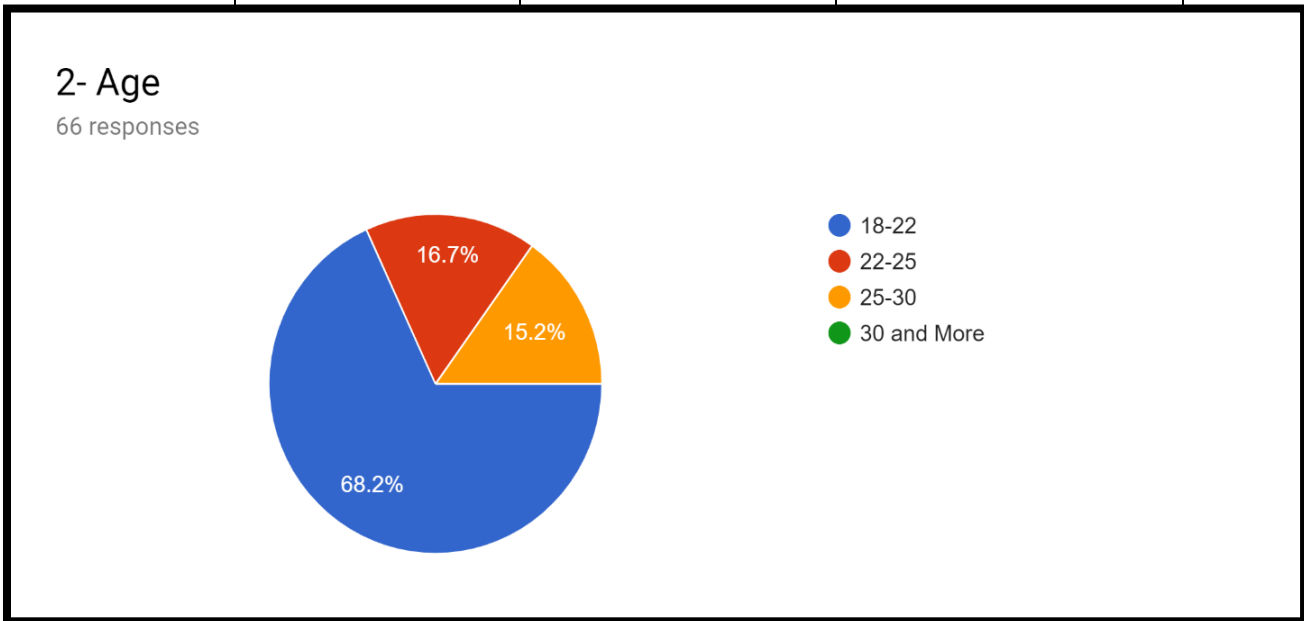
Q 02–What is your age?

- 18-22

- 22-25
- 25-23
- 30 and More

Table 4: Students' age

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
18-22	45	68.2 %
22-25	11	16.7%
25-30	10	15.2%
30 and more	00	00.0%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 2: Students' age

The graph and the table above represent the students' age, they are varying from 18 to 30 years and more 68.2 % represent the majority of the students who are between 18 and 22 years. 16.7% of the students are between 22 and 25 years. And, 15.2% stands for those who are between 25 to 30. The last category represents those who are 30 years old and more.

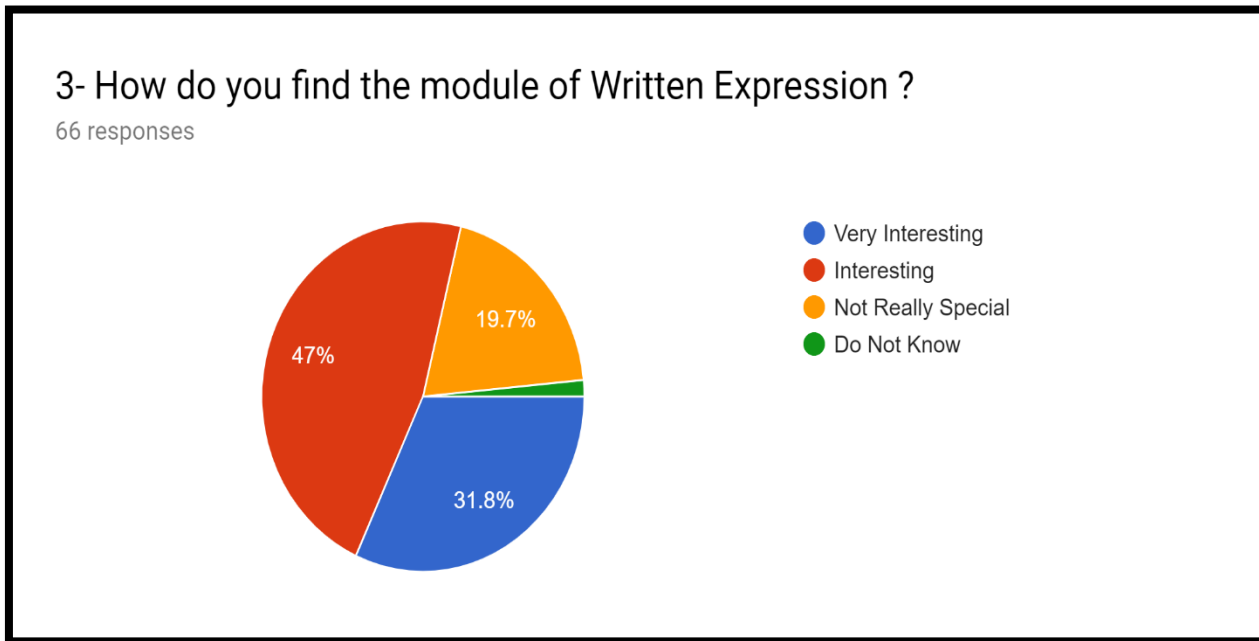
Q 03: How do you find the module of Written Expression?

- 1- Very Interesting
- 2- Interesting
- 3- Not really special
- 4- Do not know

Table 5: Students' degrees of interest in written expression module

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Very Interesting	21	31.8 %
Interesting	31	47 %
Not really special	13	19.7 %

Do not know	1	1.5 %
Total number	66	100%



Graph 3: Students' degrees of interest in written expression module

The results above represent students' answers about their interest to their written expression module, the graph and the table clarify that half of the participants 47% responded that they find it interesting, and 31.8 % find it very interesting, 19.7 % answered that they find it not really special while 1 student (1.5 %) answered that he does not know.

Discussion and interpretation:

Based on students answer, most of them find the module of written expression either interesting or very interesting. Taking this fact into consideration, we may consider that the module of written expression is not the main reason behind students' deficiencies in punctuation .

Q 04: Do you think that one hour and thirty minutes a week are enough for “Written Expression”?

1- Yes

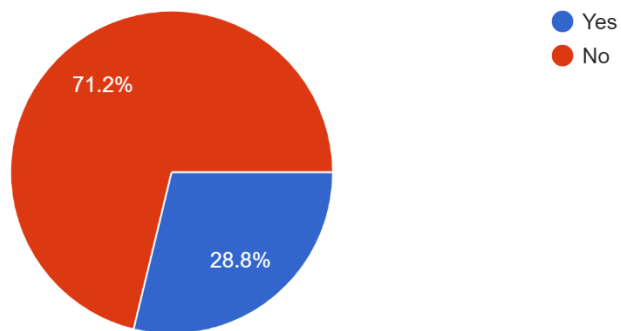
2- No

Table 6: Students' point of view about the needed time for written expression session

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	19	28.8 %
No	47	71.2 %
Total number	66	100%

4- Do you think that one hour and thirty minutes a week are enough for “Written Expression” ?

66 responses



Graph 4: Students' point of view about the needed time for written expression session

Students' point of view about the needed time for written expression session as shown in the table and graph 04 is indicates that 71.2 % of the students think that an hour and a half is not enough for written expression per week and 28.8 % of them think that it is enough.

Discussion and interpretation:

Almost all students agree that one hour and thirty a week is not sufficient to study writing which could be one of the main reasons for students' misuse of punctuation.

Q05: How often do you practice writing paragraphs?

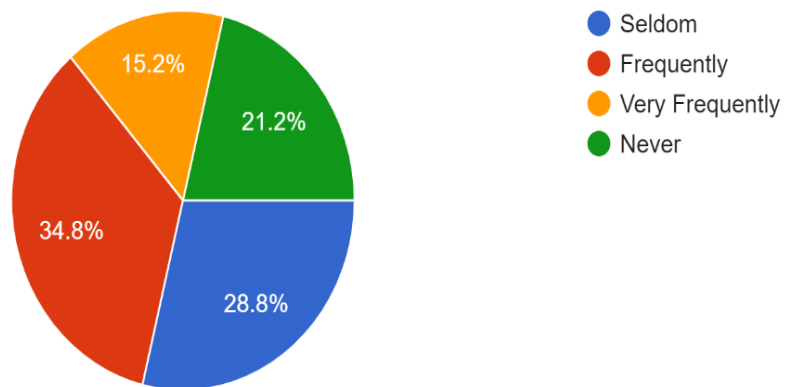
- 1- Never
- 2- Seldom
- 3- Frequently
- 4- Very frequently

Table 7: Students' practice frequency of writing paragraphs

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Never	14	21.2 %
Seldom	19	28.8 %
Frequently	23	34.8 %
Very Frequently	10	15.2%
Total number	66	100%

5- How often do you practise writing paragraphs ?

66 responses



Graph 5: Students' practice of writing paragraphs

The table and the graph above demonstrate students' practice frequency of paragraph writing. 34.8 % of students opted for high frequency of practice. 28.8 % seldom practice, 21.2 % opted for never while 15.2 % have said they never do practice paragraph writing.

Discussion and interpretation:

The results show that students practice of writing are equally divided between

Q06. In writing paragraphs, what is the most important component to you?

1- Punctuation

2- Spelling

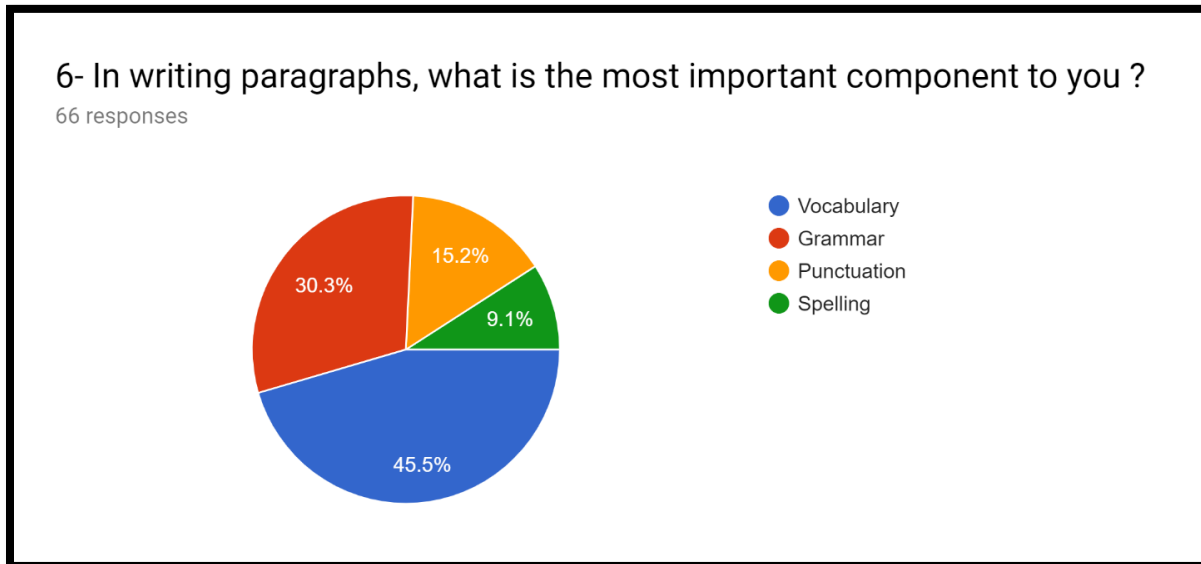
3- Vocabulary

4- Gramma

Table 8: Students' point of view towards the important component in writing a paragraph

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Punctuation	10	15.2 %
Spelling	6	9.1%
Vocabulary	30	45.5%

Grammar	20	30.3%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 6: Students' point of view towards the important component in writing a paragraph

As shown in the graph and the table, 45.5 % of students have opted for vocabulary as the most important component to write paragraphs and 30.3 % selected grammar, 15.2 % have chosen punctuation while only 9.1 % chose spelling.

Discussion and interpretation:

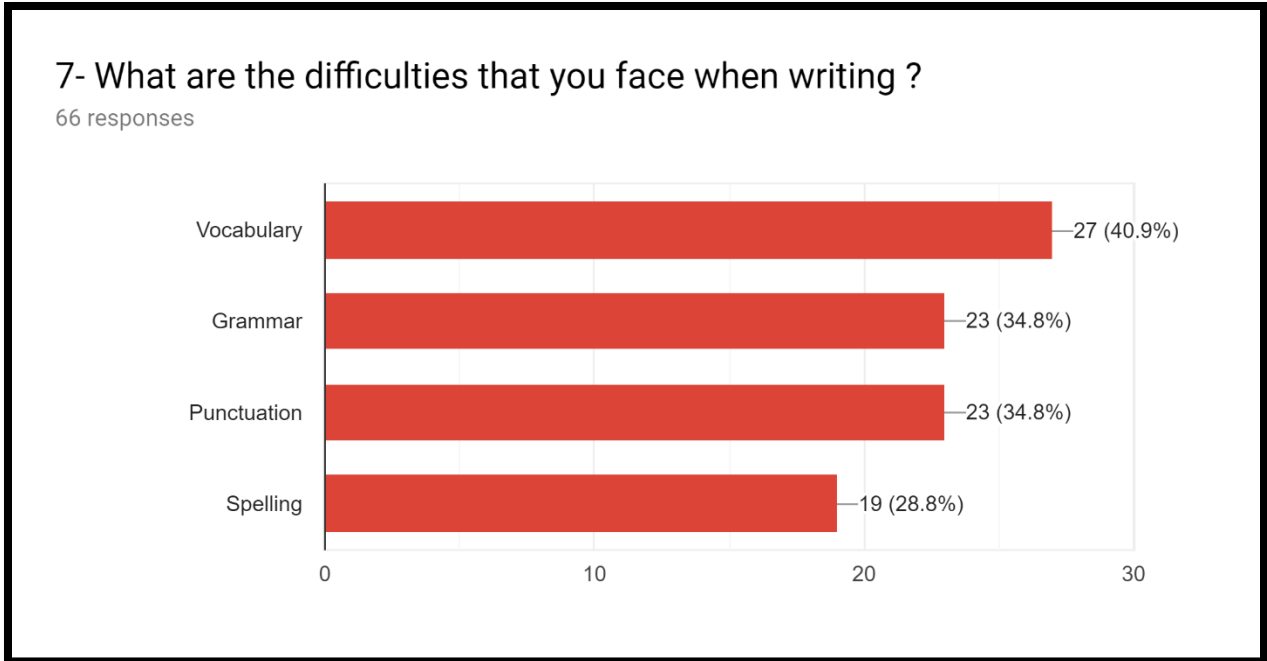
It's obvious that the lack of importance that students give to punctuation when writing a paragraph, resulted in the weak level that we witnessed in the test.

Q07- What are the difficulties that you face when writing?

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Punctuation
- Spelling

Table 9: students' difficulties while writing

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Vocabulary	27	40.9 %
Grammar	23	34.8 %
Punctuation	23	34.8 %
Spelling	19	28.8 %
Total number	66	100%



Graph 7: students' difficulties while writing

Students provided divergent answers regarding the difficulties they encounter while writing. 40.9% said that vocabulary is their difficulty. However, grammar and punctuation received the same percentage of 34.8%. Lastly, spelling was about 28.8%.

Discussion and interpretation:

A major portion of the students find it difficult to make the right punctuation, due to the lack of formation they receive in this field.

Q08: Which of the following elements of mechanics do you think is important in writing paragraphs?

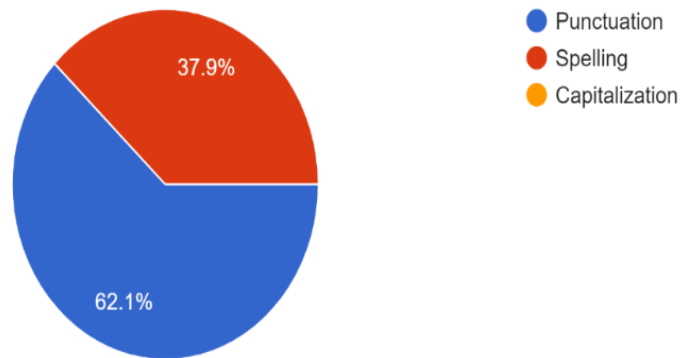
- Punctuation
- Spelling
- Capitalization

Table 10: Students’ point of view towards the important elements of mechanics in writing paragraphs

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Punctuation	41	62.1 %
Spelling	25	37.9%
Capitalization	00	00 %
Total number	66	100%

8-Which of the following elements of mechanics do you think is important in writing paragraphs?

66 responses



Graph 8:Students’ point of view towards the important element of mechanics to produce a paragraph

The previous table and graph demonstrate that 62.1% of students answered that they think punctuation in the most important element of mechanics while the other 37.9 % thought that spelling is the most important one, while capitalization received 0%.

Discussion and interpretation:

The statistics above prove that students have the right amount of awareness towards punctuation, all we need is the orientation and practice.

Q09: How often do you read English texts?

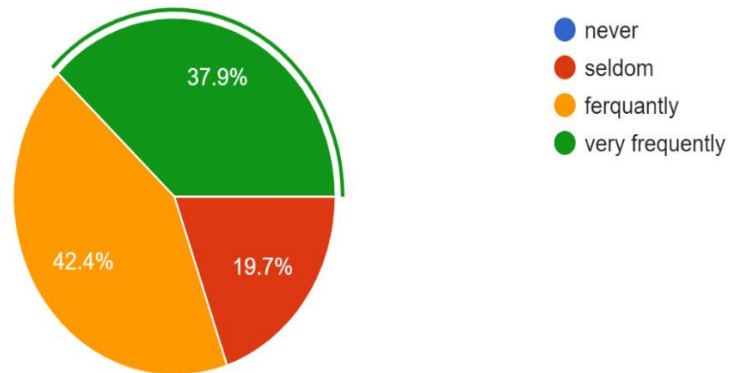
- Never
- Seldom
- Frequently
- Very Frequently

Table 11: Students' frequency of reading English texts

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Never	00	0 %
Seldom	13	19.7 %
Frequently	28	42.4 %
Very Frequently	25	37.9 %
Total number	66	100%

Q9- how often do you read English texts ?

66 responses



Graph 9: Students' frequency of reading English texts

Students' responses to this question demonstrate how the majority of students (42.4%) frequently read English followed by 37.9% who read English texts very frequently while only 19.7% have responded with seldom.

Discussion and interpretation:

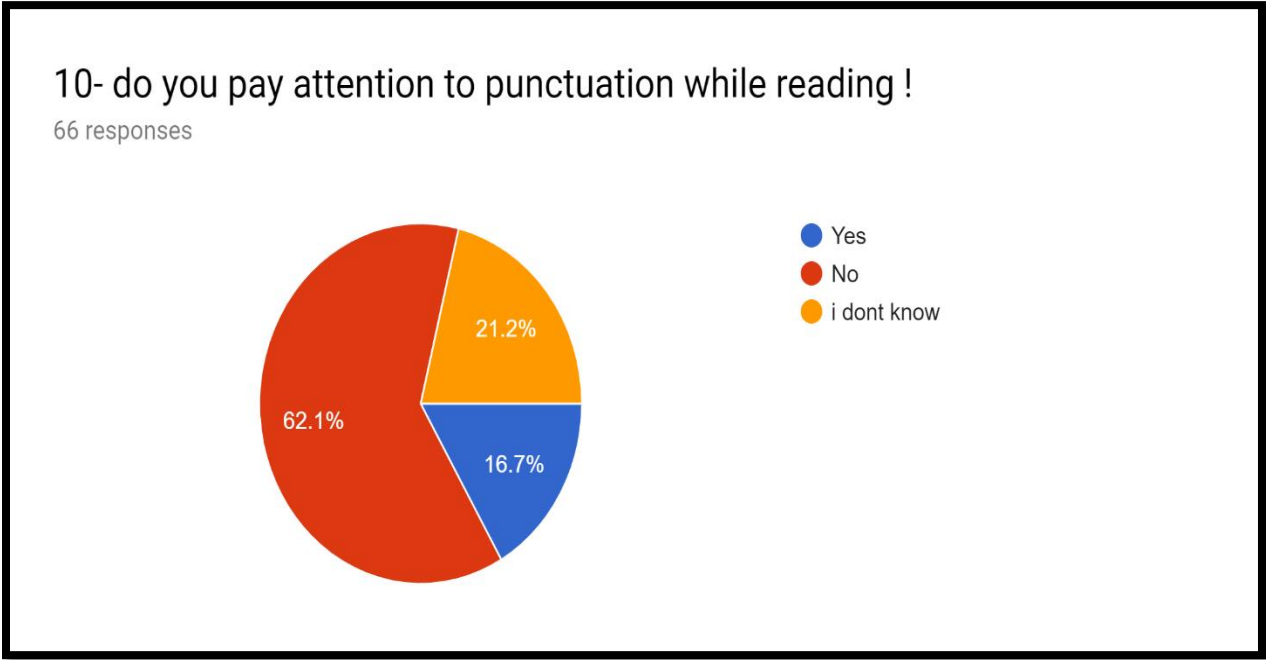
We can notice that there is a good average of reading among students, which can help in developing their ability of punctuating.

Q10: Do you pay attention to punctuation while reading?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Table 12: Students attention to punctuation while reading

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	11	16.7 %
No	41	62.1 %
I don't know	14	21.2%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 10: student attention to punctuation while reading

According to the table and the graph, it is shown that the majority of students don't pay attention to punctuation while reading.

Discussion and interpretation:

we saw in the previous question that there is a good rate in reading, however student do not pay attention to punctuation while reading, this situation needs an outside intervention, for instance, from teachers in the lectures of written expression.

Q11. Are you willing to master punctuation?

1- Yes

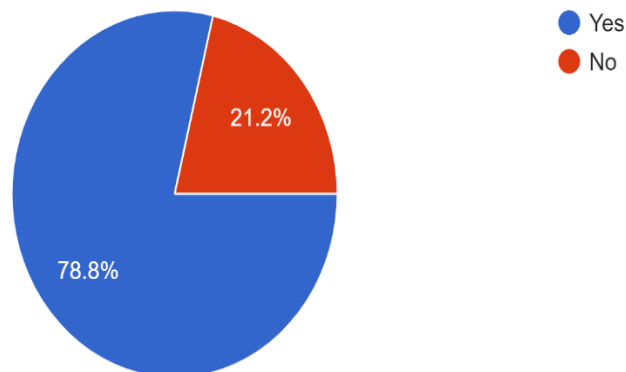
2- No

Table 13: Students willingness to mastering punctuation

Options	responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	52	78.8%
No	14	21.2 %
Total	66	100%

11- Are you willing to master punctuation ?

66 responses



Graph 11: Students encouragement to mastering punctuation

The table and the graph illustrate how the majority of students are willing to master punctuation with a percentage of 78% and only 21.2 % are not.

Discussion and interpretation: the students showed a huge tendency to master this skill, all that is left is to provide the right number of lectures and exercise.

Q12. Do your teachers ask you to follow punctuation rules?

1- Never

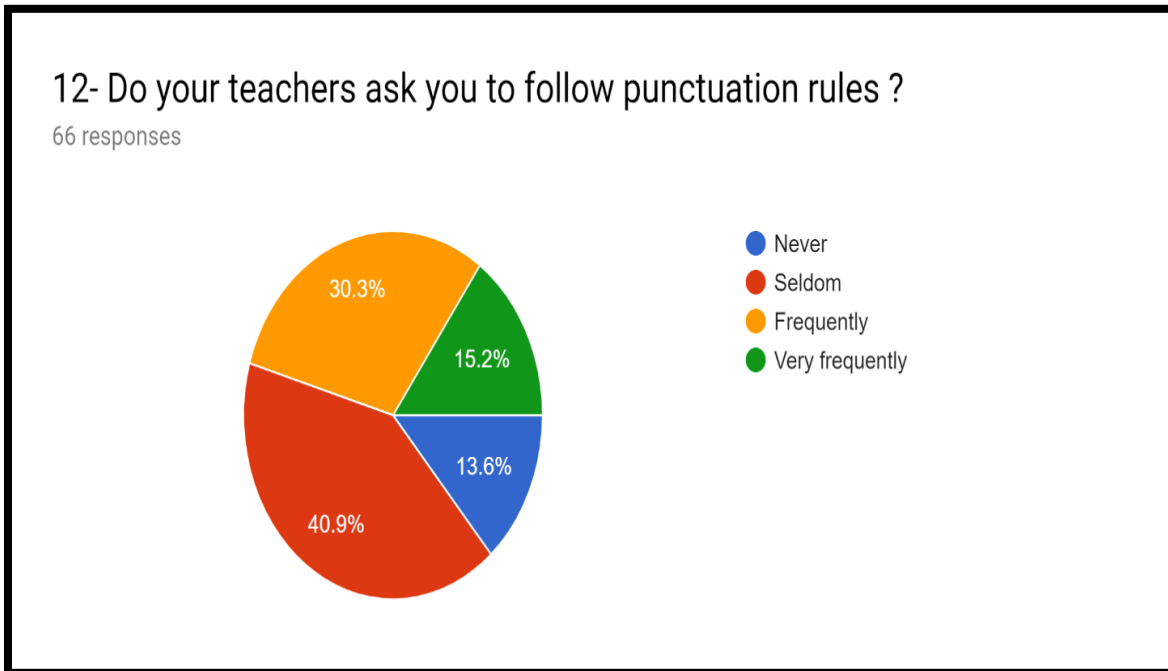
2- Seldom

3- Frequently

4- Very frequently

Table 14: teachers' instruction on the use of punctuation

Options	Responses	Percentage(%)
Never	9	13.6 %
Seldom	27	40.9%
Frequently	20	30.3%
Very Frequently	10	15.2%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 12: Teachers' instruction on the use of punctuation

The answers to the question above indicate that 40.9% of the students answered with seldom, 30.3% of them answered with frequently, 15.2% answered with very frequently, while only 13.6% said that teachers never ask them to use punctuation.

Discussion and interpretation:

the answers to this question revealed the core of the problem that we have been talking about, that is to say that students do not receive the instructions to follow punctuation, and this should change in order for them to learn the punctuation.

Q13. Does your Written Expression teacher correct your punctuation?

1- Never

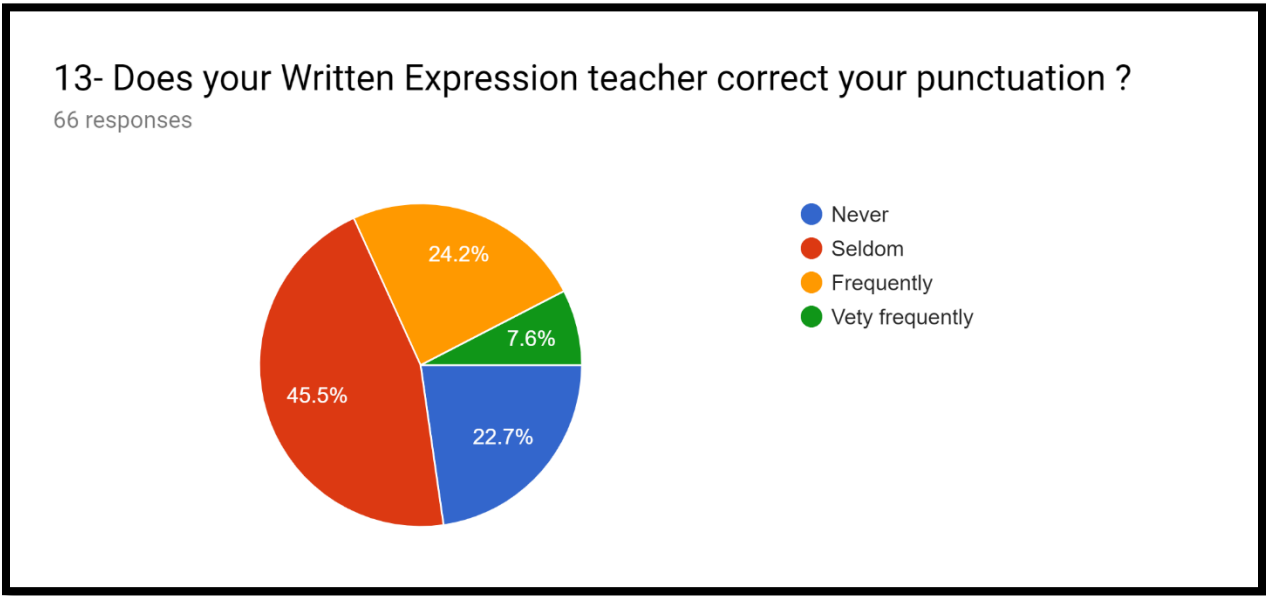
2- Seldom

3- Frequently

4- Very frequently

Table 15: teachers’ correction of their students’ punctuation

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Never	15	22.7 %
Seldom	19	45.5%
Frequently	14	24.2%
Very Frequently	5	7.6%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 13: teachers’ correction of their students’ punctuation

The table and the graph above show that the answers to the question of “does your written expression teacher correct your punctuation?” varied considerably. 45.5% of them answered with seldom, 24.2% answered with frequently, 22.7% answered with never, and 7.6% said very frequently.

Discussion and interpretation:

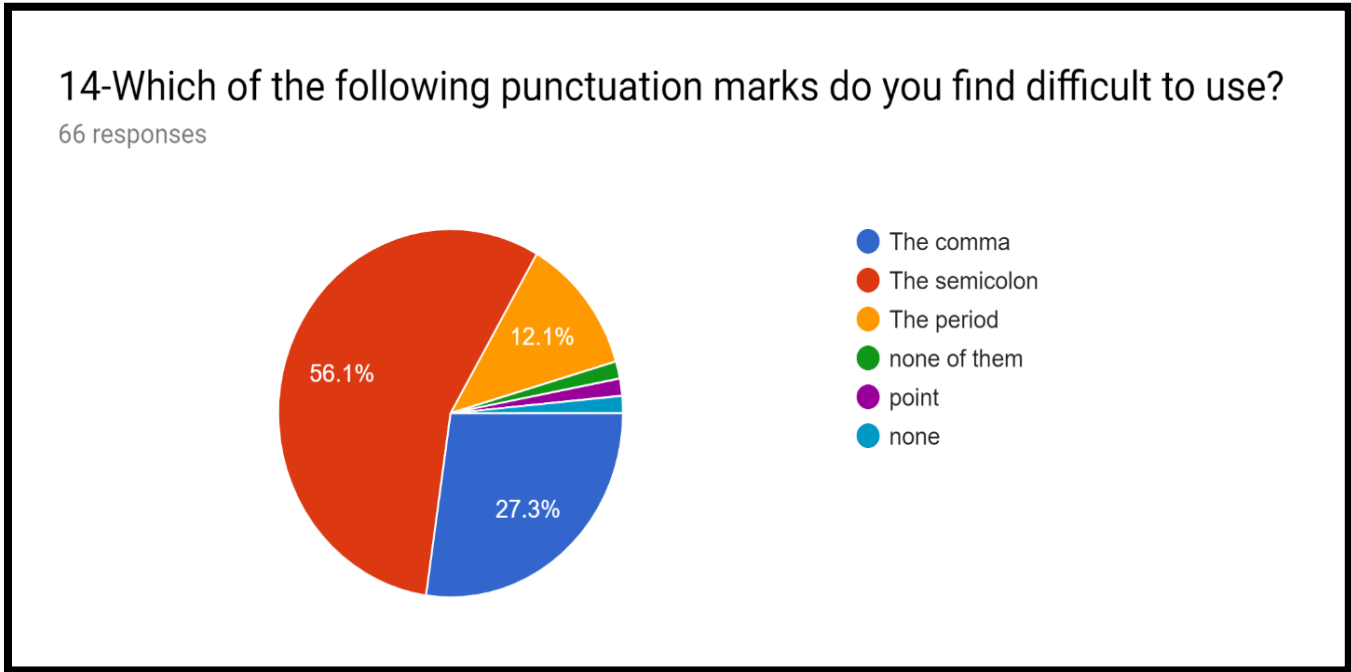
Following to the previous question, most of the time, students do not get corrected when it comes to punctuation, this fact also needs to be treated with academic procedures.

Q14- Which of the following punctuation marks do you find difficult to use?

- 1- Comma
- 2- Semicolon
- 3- Period
- 4- None of them

Table 16: students' difficult punctuation marks while writing

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Comma	18	27,3 %
Semicolon	37	56,1%
Period	8	12,61%
None of them	3	3.9%
Total number	66	100%



Graph 14: students' difficult punctuation marks while writing

The data show that there are many kinds of punctuation considered difficult by students, 56.1% consider semicolon as the most difficult, 27.3% believe that comma is the most difficult, 13.6% said period, while 3% said none of the them.

Discussion and interpretation:

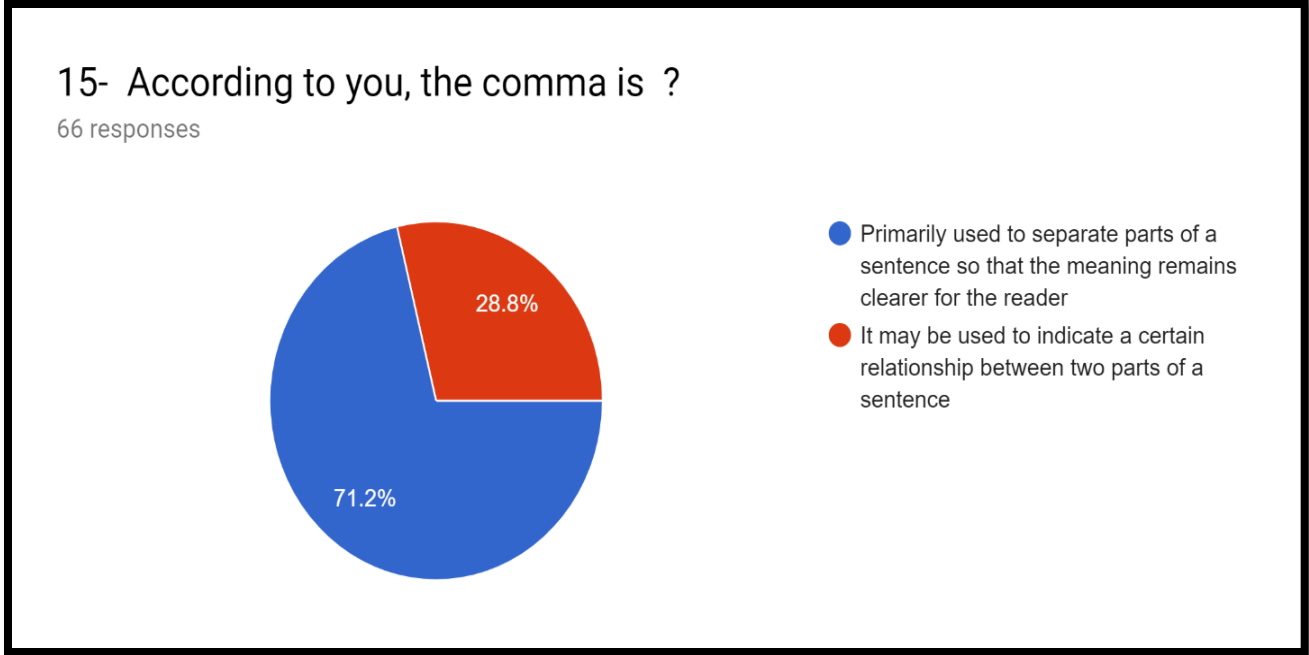
The students may need extra attention to the use of the semicolon,

Q15- According to you, the comma is?

- 1- Primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that meaning remains clearer for the reader
- 2- It may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence

Table 17: students’ perceptions of the comma

Options	Answers	Percentage (%)
Primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning remains clearer for the reader	47	71.2%
It may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence	19	28.8%
Total	66	100%



Graph 15: students' perceptions of the comma

71.2% of students regard the comma as primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning remains clearer for the reader while 28.8 % believe that it may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence.

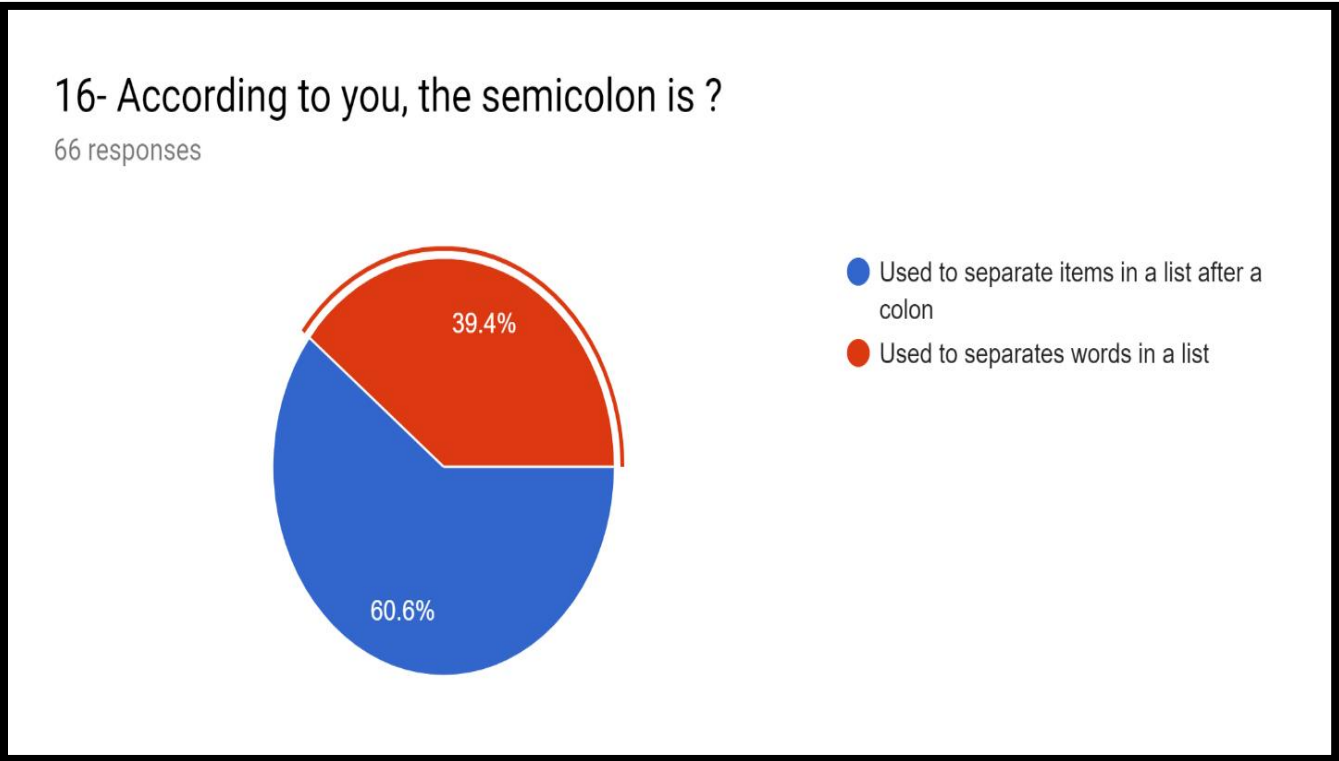
Discussion and interpretation: In this question, students proved that they differentiate between the comma and the semicolon.

Q16- According to you, the semicolon is?

- 1- Used to separate items in a list after a colon
- 2- Used to separate words in a list

Table 18: students' perceptions of the semicolon

Option	Answers	Percentage (%)
Used to separate items in a list after a colon	40	60.6%
Used to separate words in a list	26	39.4%
Total	66	100%



Graph 16: students' perceptions of the semicolon

60.6% believe that semicolon is a means through which they separate items in a list after a colon, while 39.4% use it to separates words in a list.

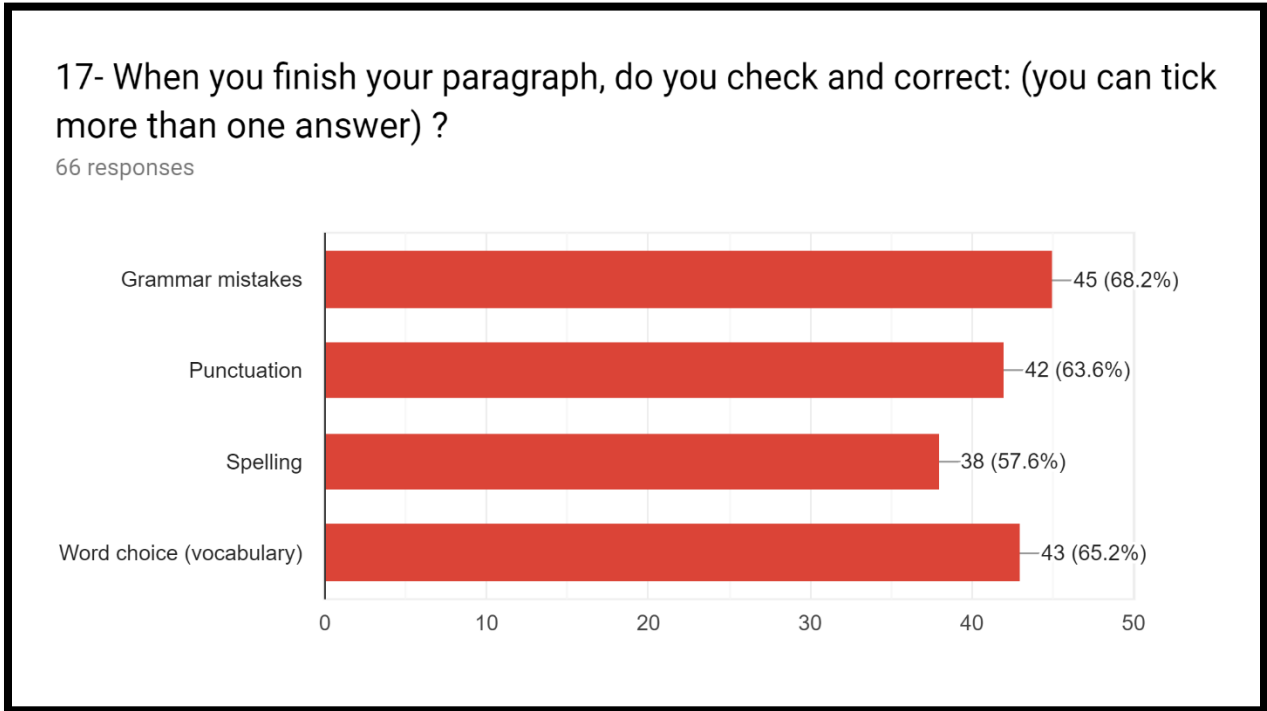
Discussion and interpretation: In this question, students proved that they differentiate between the comma and the semicolon.

Q17- When you finish your paragraph, do you check and correct: (you can tick more than one answer)?

- 1- Grammar mistakes
- 2- Punctuation
- 3- Spelling
- 4- Word choice (Vocabulary)

Table 19: students' choice on what do they check and correct after finishing their paragraph

Options	Responses
Grammar Mistakes	45
Punctuation	42
Spelling	38
Word Choice (Vocabulary)	43



Graph 17: students' choice on what do they check and correct after finishing their paragraph

As shown in the table and the graph, in terms of giving importance to re-checking and correcting mistakes, grammar comes first with (45) ticks, word choice comes second with (43) punctuation in third place with (42) ticks and lastly, spelling with (38) ticks.

Discussion and interpretation: The results of this question show that students do not check and correct their paragraphs' punctuation in comparison to how they do for other writing components.

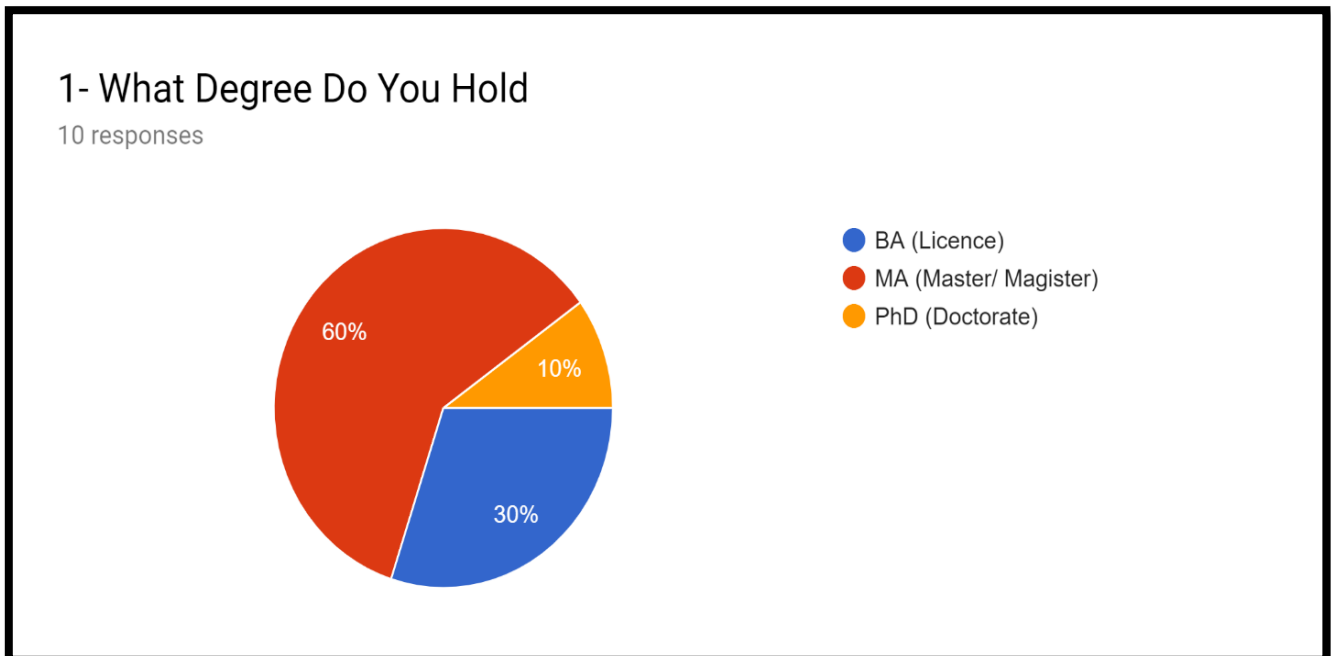
4.2.1 Analysis of teachers' questionnaire's results:

Q01: What degree do you hold?

- 1- BA (License)
- 2- MA (Master/Magister)
- 3- PhD (Doctorate)

Table 20: Teachers' degree

Options	Responses
BA(License)	3
MA(Master/Magister)	6
PhD(Doctorate)	1
Results	10



Graph 18: Teachers' degree

The table and the graph above indicate that one teacher has a PhD degree, three have Magister and Master degree while three teachers hold license degree.

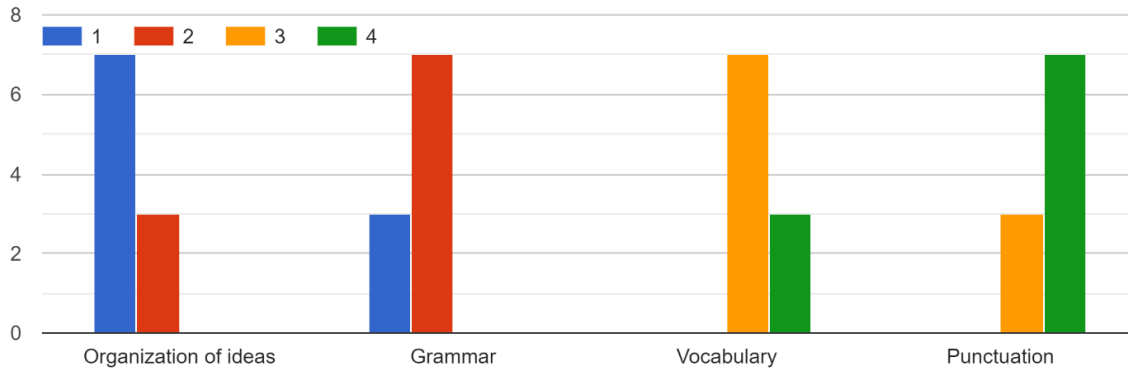
Q02: Classify the following items according to the importance you give them while teaching writing using 1, 2, 3, or 4.

- 1- Organization of ideas
- 2- Grammar
- 3- Vocabulary
- 4- Punctuation

Table 21: Teachers' given importance to writing components while teaching writing

Skill	Ranking
Organization of ideas	First
Grammar	Second
Vocabulary	Third
Punctuation	Forth

2. Classify the following items according to the importance you give them while teaching writing using 1, 2, 3, or 4:



Graph 19: Teachers' given importance to writing components while teaching writing

The table and the graph indicate that the teacher give high priority to organization of ideas, 7 of them said that it comes in the first place, grammar comes second in terms of importance according to teachers, 7 teachers declared that vocabulary comes third according to the importance in writing, Punctuation comes last in ranking.

Q03: Which approach do you usually tend to follow while teaching writing?

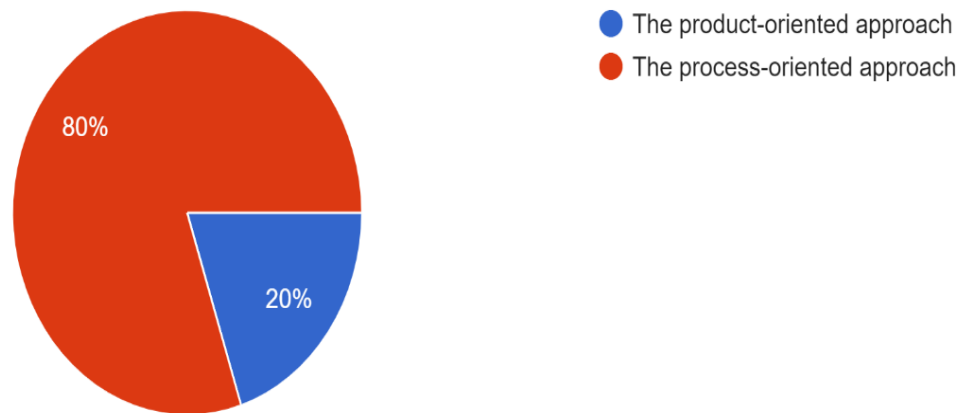
- 1- The product-oriented approach
- 2- The process-oriented approach

Table 22: Teachers preferred approach while teaching writing

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
The product-oriented approach	8	80 %
The process-oriented approach	2	20 %
Results	10	100 %

3. Which approach do you usually tend to follow while teaching writing?

10 responses



Graph 20: Teachers preferred approach while teaching writing

According to the table and the graph, the majority of teachers 80% do tend to follow the process-oriented approach whereas 20% have answered that they tend to follow the product-oriented approach.

Q04: Do you usually raise students' awareness about the importance of punctuation marks?

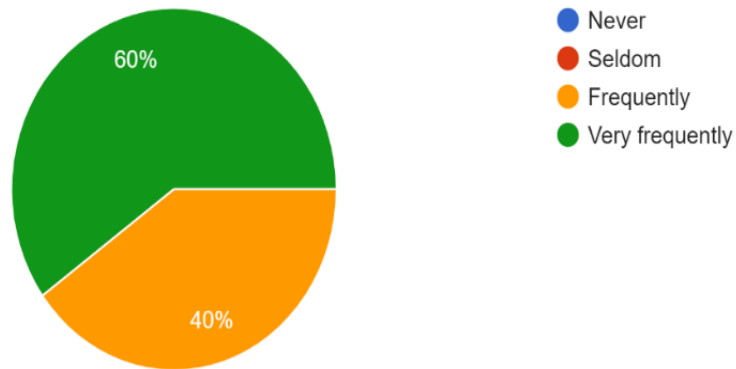
- 1- Never
- 2- Seldom
- 3- Frequently
- 4- Very frequently

Table 23: Teachers frequency of raising awareness to students about punctuation

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Never	0	00 %
Seldom	0	00 %
Frequently	4	40 %
Very Frequently	6	60 %
Results	10	100 %

4. Do you usually raise students' awareness about the importance of punctuation marks?

10 responses



Graph 21: Teachers frequency of raising awareness to students about punctuation

According to graph and the table, 80% of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire have answered that they raise students' awareness about punctuation very frequently while 40% have said that they frequently do it.

Q05: Do you think that it would be enough for students to learn only the rules that govern the use of the comma and the semicolon?

1- Yes

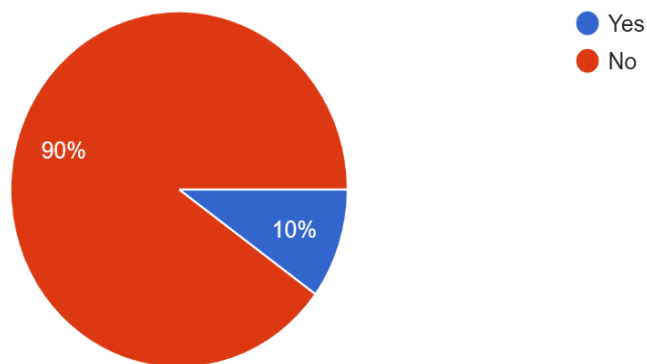
2- No

Table 24: Teachers opinion about students learning only the rules of the comma and the semicolon

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	1	10 %
No	9	90 %
Results	10	100 %

5. Do you think that it would be enough for students to learn only the rules that govern the use of the comma and the semi colon?

10 responses



Graph 22: Teachers opinion about students learning only the rules of the comma and the semi colon

The table and the graph indicate that 90% of teachers have answered with “no” about the question while 10% said “yes”.

Q06: Do you expect that giving more practical courses on where to put the comma and the semicolon will result in better written production?

1- Yes

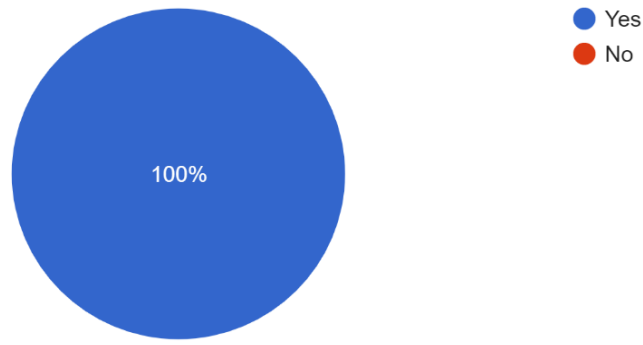
2- No

Table 25: Teachers opinion on the outcomes of giving more practical courses about the comma and semicolon

Options	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	10	100 %
No	0	00 %
results	10	100 %

6. Do you expect that giving more practical courses on where to put the comma and the semi colon will result in better written production?

10 responses



Graph 23: Teachers opinion on the outcomes of giving more practical courses about the comma and semicolon

As shown in the table and the graph, 100% of teachers have agreed that giving more practical courses on where to put the comma and the semi colon will result in better written production

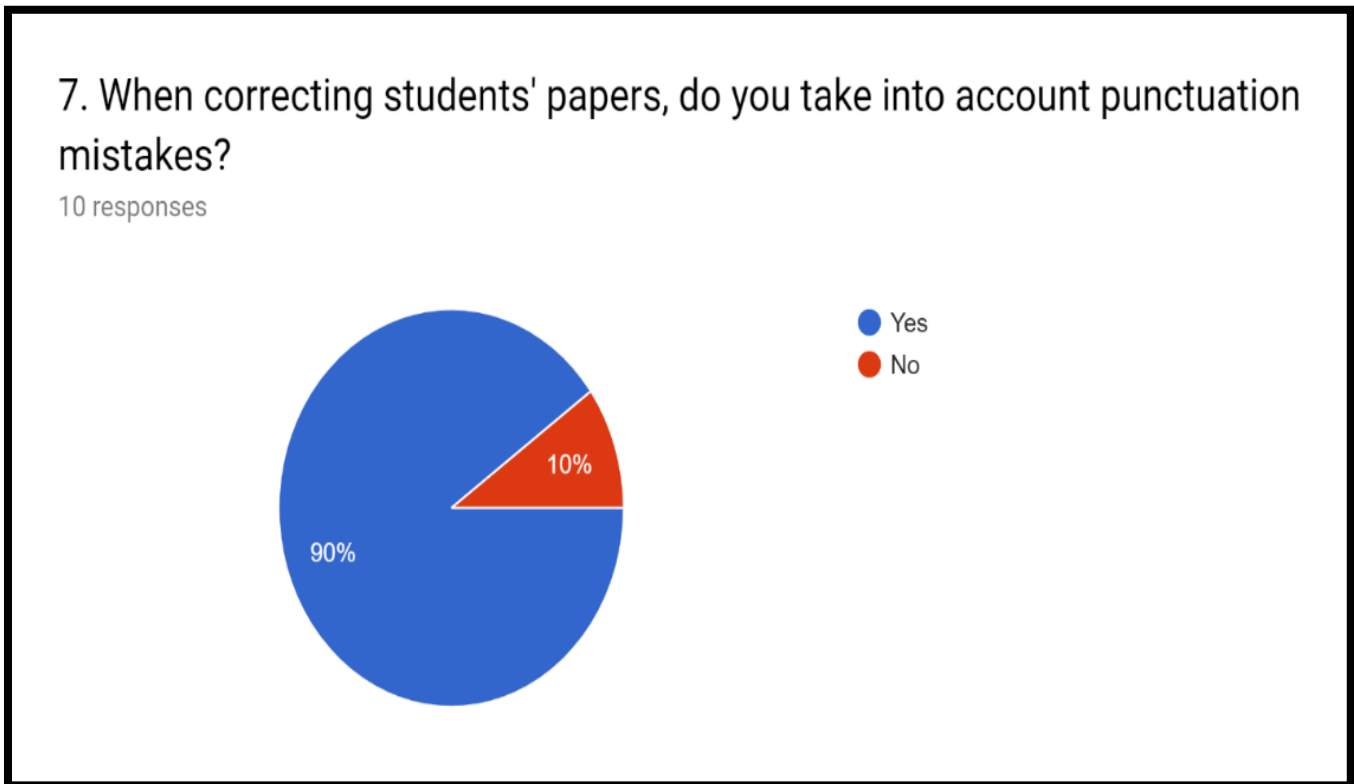
Q07: When correcting students' papers, do you take into account punctuation mistakes?

1- Yes

2- No

Table 26: Teachers consideration to punctuation when correcting students' papers

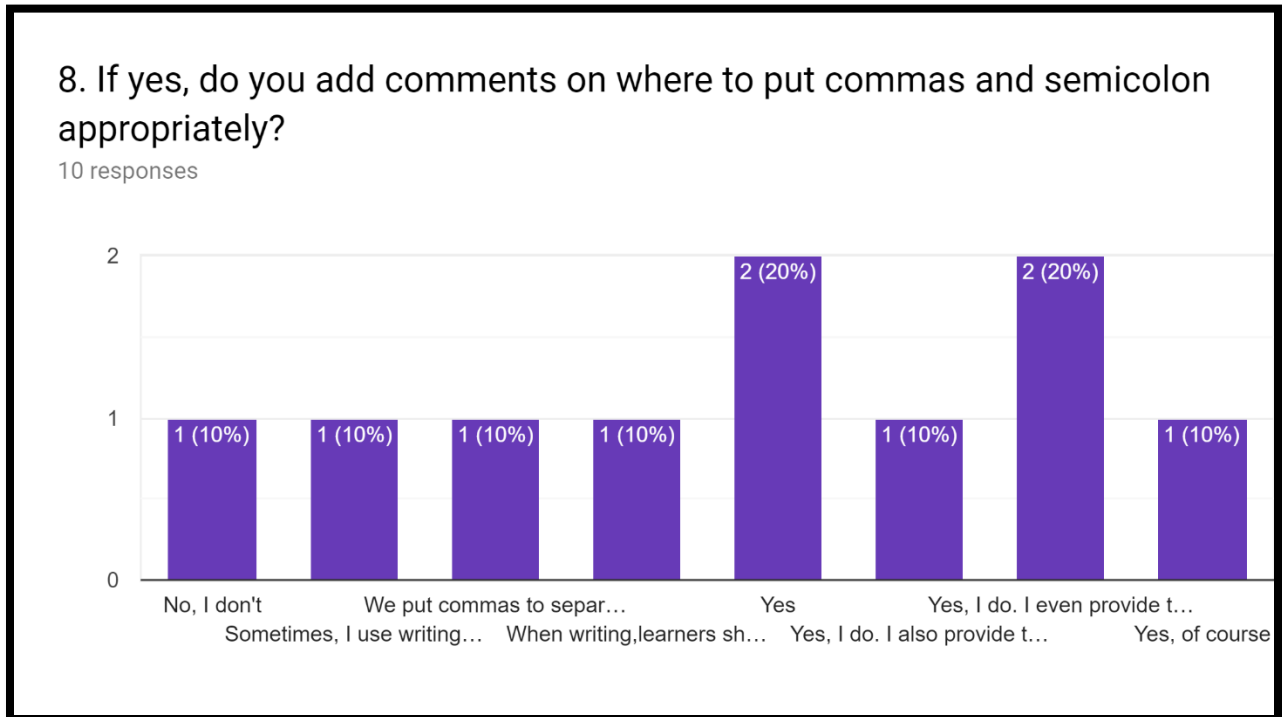
Option	Responses	Percentage (%)
Yes	9	90 %
No	1	10 %
Results	10	100 %



Graph 24: Teachers consideration to punctuation when correcting students papers

The graph and the table indicate that 90% of teachers do take punctuation into consideration when correcting students' papers while 10% do not.

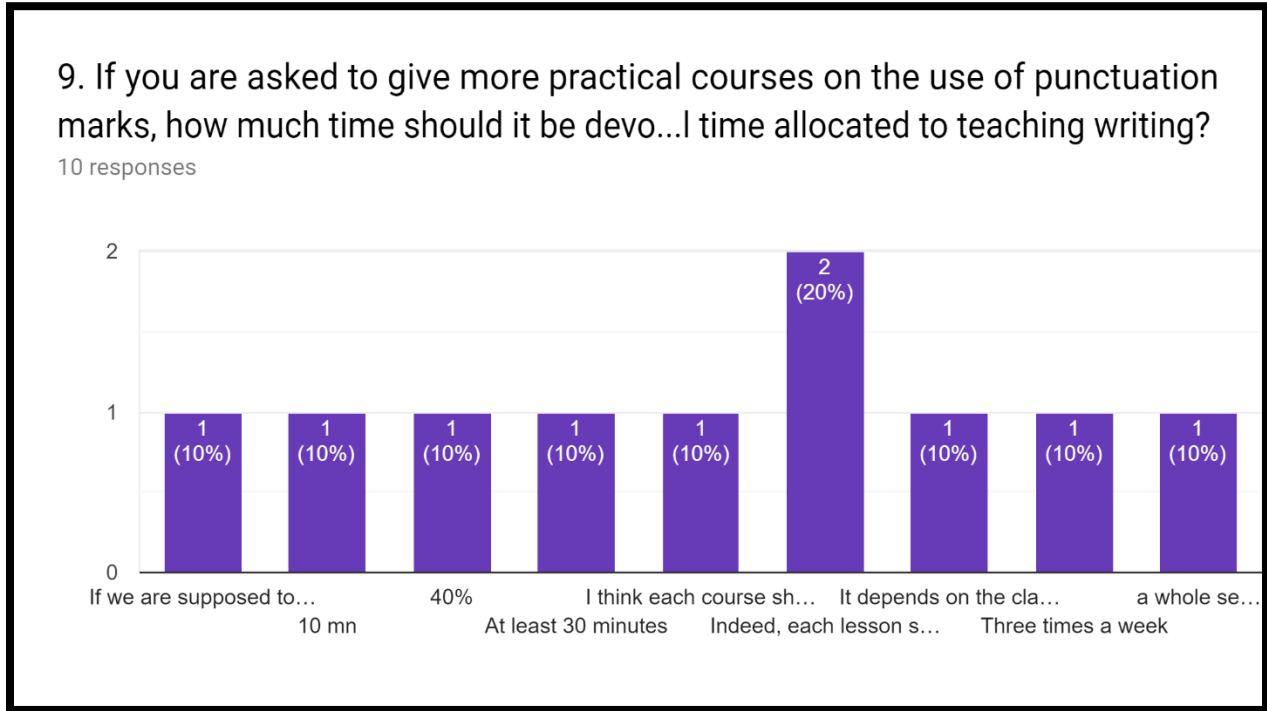
Q8: If yes, do you add comments on where to put commas and semicolon appropriately?



Graph 25: Teachers' comments on students misuse' of comma and semicolon

From the graph above, we can notice that there are three types of answers. The majority that consists of six (06) teachers answered with “yes they gave comments to students when they notice that there are misuses of the comma and the semicolon in students’ writings.”. Some of them even said they provide students with rules and courses that might help the students on further understanding the use of punctuation. One teacher responded with “no” and one responded with “sometimes” while two teachers replied with irrelevant

Q09: If you are asked to give more practical courses on the use of punctuation marks, how much time should it be devoted to it with regard to the total time allocated to teaching writing?



Graph 26: Teachers’ points of view on the length of time that should be devoted to teach punctuation

The graph above, illustrate different answers from teachers that can be summarized in the following:

“Indeed, each lesson should be followed by 10 minutes on which type of punctuation is required.”

“I think each course should be followed by about 10 minutes on which type of punctuation is to be used.”

“It depends on the class I teach (1st, 2nd or ...). I may say 15 mn.

5 Conclusion:

The second chapter is devised for the field work. It seeks to describe the course of action we followed to gather data from our informants, students and teachers. It investigates and explains the gained results. Therefore, on the basis of the analysis of students' test and students' and teachers' questionnaires, we may draw the following conclusions:

Second year of EFL students of University of M'sila show poor results in terms of using punctuation in paragraphs, especially the comma and the semi colon due to multiple factors and reasons such as the lack of importance they give to punctuation in comparison to other writing components both when reading and when writing. In addition to the defficiency of instructions and awareness about punctuation that they receive from their teachers. Nevertheless, in the questionnaire, they believe that the written expression module is interesting and they assume that one hour and thirty minutes per week for it is insufficient, that is to say that they do have the will to learn writing.

However, when it comes to teachers' viewpoints, they believe that they raise students' awareness about punctuation and they correct them and give them the needed instructions. They also added that extra practical courses and time on where to put the comma and semicolon will enhance students' level.

5.1 Recommendations:

- The obtained results from both questionnaires and the test prove the issue. Then, we can come up with some suggestions that may help overcoming this problem and improve teaching and learning:

- More written expression sessions should be added to the curriculum.
- More sessions and courses should be devoted to punctuation.
- Students should focus more on punctuation when reading.
- Students should narrow their objectives in leaning writing to include punctuations
- Teachers should raise students' awareness towards punctuation marks and their importance.
- Teachers should correct student's punctuation mistakes.
- Multiple workshops should be conducted by teachers in punctuation subject to help students.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion:

This thesis is conducted to investigate the students' misuse of punctuation precisely the comma and semicolon when writing paragraphs. It consists of two main chapters, the first deals with writing and its features as a skill in EFL context. First we talked about Writing in EFL Context In general then we specified to EFL Writers Characteristics, after that we shed light on types of EFL learners' writings such as paragraph writing and that lead us to the Difficulties that most students face when writing paragraphs among those difficulties we focused on the misuse of the comma and semicolon at the end of this chapter we decided to put the comma and semicolon rules and several examples as a reminder of their use and significant.

The second chapter of the research is a field investigation which is divided into two sections, the first section is the test and the second section is two questionnaires that have been answered by second year LMD English students and teachers at the Department of English Language, University of M'sila. The first questionnaire was designed for students to figure out their knowledge about writing, the test was designed to determine students' knowledge of punctuation which led us to construct the questionnaire. punctuation, the module of written expression, and their consciousness about the significance of the writing process

The results could affirm to a large extent the reasons behind students' deficient level in using punctuation in paragraphs, students would produce better results in punctuation and the use of the comma and the semicolon in writing paragraphs if they give more importance to punctuation and if they are given more time in written expression and more instructions from their teachers.

To conclude, the study proved significance on the basis of the teaching of paragraph writing and the use punctuation and comma and semicolon.

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Appendix A: Students' Test

Test

Dear student,

I am a master 2 student, linguistics speciality. I am undertaking a research that is entitled "EFL Learners' Misuse of the Semicolon and Comma in Paragraph Writing." This is a writing test which is devised to check your general proficiency in writing in English on one hand and to see whether you are capable of correctly utilizing punctuation marks or not on the other. Therefore, you are kindly requested to answer the following questions:

Thank you very much for your collaboration.

Part one:

Write a well developed paragraph in one of the following topics:

1. Tell about your favourite hobby. Say why you like it most.
2. How do YouTube videos help you improve your speaking skills?
3. The positive effect of using Facebook on students' writing in English.

For me youtube can be really helps full specially in terms of improving speaking skills as listening is for me much more one practice to improve ones pronunciation, listening to random daily conversation really boosted up my speaking skills, pronunciation and vocabulary which is why I always suggest youtube videos to my friends to improve speaking skills.

Part two:

Punctuate the following passage by using: **comma (,)** **semi-colon (;)** and **full-stop (.)**

The rights of children (,) as delineated in the CRC (,) include a variety of communication rights: the right to be heard and to be taken seriously(,) to free speech and to information(,) to maintain privacy(,) to develop cultural identity(,) and to be proud of one's heritage and beliefs (,) Yet(,) whether girls and boys live in deprived and resource-poor societies(;) or in overwhelmingly commercialized and profit-driven ones(,) their voices need to be heard and taken seriously(,) the possibility for expressing their needs and opinions and their access to important information should be expanded(,)

Note: Your answers sheet will not be used by any other member apart the researcher himself.

Appendix B:

Students' Questionnaire

Students' Questionnaire

In order to know what are the main reasons behind students' misuse of the comma and semicolon in paragraph writing, this questionnaire was designed. The following questionnaire serves as a data collection tool for research, conducted to obtain a Masters' degree in linguistics. You are kindly asked to fill in this questionnaire.

We greatly thank you in advance for your contribution which is appreciated.

1. Gender

- A. Male B. Female

2. Age

- A. 18-22 B. 22-25
C. 25-30 D. 30 and more

3. How do you find the module of Written Expression?

- A. Very interesting B. Interesting
C. Not really special D. Do not know

4. Do you think that one hour and thirty minutes a week are enough for "Written Expression"?

- A. Yes B. No

5. How often do you practise writing paragraphs?

- A. Never C. Seldom

B. Frequently D. Very frequently

6. In writing paragraphs, what is the most important component to you?

A. Punctuation B. Spelling

C. Vocabulary D. Grammar

7. What are the difficulties that you face when writing?

A. Punctuation B. Spelling

C. Vocabulary D. Grammar

8. Which of the following element of mechanics do you think is important to produce paragraphs?

A. Punctuation B. Spelling C. Capitalization

9. How often do you read English texts?

A. Never C. Seldom

B. Frequently D. Very frequently

10. Do you pay attention to punctuation while reading?

A. Yes B. No C. I don't know

11. Are you willing to master punctuation?

A. Yes B. No

12. Do your teachers ask you to follow punctuation rules?

- A. Never C. Seldom
- B. Frequently D. Very frequently

13. Does your Written Expression teacher correct your punctuation ?

- A. Never C. Seldom
- B. Frequently D. Very frequently

14. D Which of the following punctuation marks do you find difficult to use?

- A. Comma C. Semicolon
- B. Period D. None of them

15. According to you, the comma is:

A. Primarily used to separate parts of a sentence so that the meaning remains clearer for the reader.

B. It may be used to indicate a certain relationship between two parts of a sentence

16. According to you, the semicolon is:

A. Used to separate items in a list after a colon

B. Used to separates words in a list

17. When you finish your paragraph, do you check and correct: (you can tick more than one answer).

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| A. Grammar mistakes | <input type="radio"/> | B. Punctuation | <input type="radio"/> |
| C. Spelling | <input type="radio"/> | D. Word choice (vocabulary) | <input type="radio"/> |

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C:

Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teachers,

This questionnaire is part of the research which will be submitted in partial fulfillment for M.A degree. It aims to investigate the misuse of the comma and semicolon that face M'sila University Second Year students. Your cooperation is important as it will help us to complete this study. Therefore, please tick in the appropriate box and give a full answer where necessary. Thank you very much in advance.

1. What degree do you hold?

- A. BA (License) B. MA (Master/Magister) C. PhD
(Doctorate)

2. Classify the following items according to the importance you give them while teaching writing using 1, 2, 3, or 4.

- A. Organization of ideas B. Grammar
C. Vocabulary C. Punctuation

3. Which approach do you usually tend to follow while teaching writing?

- A. The product-oriented approach
B. The process-oriented approach

4. Do you usually raise students' awareness about the importance of punctuation marks?

- A. Never C. Seldom
B. Frequently D. Very frequently

5. Do you think that it would be enough for students to learn only the rules that govern the use of the comma and the semicolon?

- A. Yes B. No

6. Do you expect that giving more practical courses on where to put the comma and the semicolon will result in better written production?

- A. Yes B. No

7. When correcting students' papers, do you take into account punctuation mistakes?

- A. Yes B. No

8. If yes, do you add comments on where to put commas and semicolon appropriately?

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.....

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9. If you are asked to give more practical courses on the use of punctuation marks, how much time should it be devoted to it with regard to the total time allocated to teaching writing?

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Thank you for your time.