

**INVESTIGATING ERRORS IN THE USAGE OF
PUNCTUATION MARKS IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF
HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA (HND) STUDENTS:
A CASE STUDY OF THE BOLGATANGA POLYTECHNIC.**

BY

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS PRESENTED TO
(THE DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS), UNIVERSITY
OF GHANA, LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF
ARTS (M.A) DEGREE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS
A SECOND LANGUAGE (TESL).**

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

(OCTOBER, 2005)

DECLARATION

I, Avomah, Oscar Mac A., wish to humbly declare that apart from references and quotations made, which I have honourably acknowledged, this dissertation presented is my own research work carried out under the able supervision of Professor Akosua Anyidoho of the Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Legon



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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear mother, Mrs Paulina Apummalum Akampinge, Mrs Cecilia Nsomah Avomah, (my wife), my two children, Miss Josephine Ayinimi Avomah and David Afanaam Avomah and my late friend Mr. Michael Sebighon of Blessed Memory. May the Good Lord bless them all for their moral support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher is sincerely appreciative to the following persons who in diverse ways have contributed to the success of this study.

My first thanks go to all lecturers and staff of the Department of Linguistics of the University of Ghana, Legon, for the instructions and advices given me during my one year stay with them.

My greatest appreciation goes to Prof. Akosua Anyidobo, who in her motherly patients and concern, marked the work and made all corrections for it to be presented. May the Good Lord reward you abundantly, "Prof".

To my students and co-lecturers of the Bolgatanga Polytechnic, I say thank you and God bless you. I would not also forget Miss Cynthia Kpamah, Miss Kasandra Seidu, Miss Justina and the staff of Printbar Legon who all helped in typing the manuscript at various stages for me. To the TEWU Executive of the Bolgatanga Polytechnic, I say God bless you all and reward you a hundred fold for your financial and moral support.

Last but not least, I say a big thank you to the Good Lord for giving me good health and mind to be able to go through this study

ABSTRACT

The study takes a look at errors in the use of punctuation marks by Higher National Diploma (HND) students with particular reference to students of the Bolgatanga Polytechnic in the Upper East Region.

This study which has been organized into five chapters seeks to find out whether students can identify areas in an unpunctuated passage and to insert punctuation marks correctly. Again, the study seeks to find out how students use punctuation marks in their own extended writing.

To achieve this objective, an unpunctuated passage was given to students to insert the right punctuations at their appropriate places. An essay topic was also given to students to write paying attention to the correct use of punctuation marks.

The findings disclosed that generally, students at all levels of education, particularly those of the polytechnics, do not have explicit knowledge in the use of punctuation marks in their writing. The way forward has been suggested in the concluding chapter and relates to practical involvement of syllabus designers, communication skills lecturers, English language teachers, policy makers and other stakeholders.

It is the hope of the researcher that if these suggestions are heeded, standards in the Polytechnics will improve.

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INTRODUCTION

1.0 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The English language occupies a very significant position in all aspects of the life of Ghanaians. It is indeed the "lingua franca" of the country, serving as the main language of government, commerce, administration and in fact, the main medium of instruction in all educational institutions.

In spite of the important role played by English in the socio-economic development of Ghanaians, there have been several complaints that the standard of English at all levels of education is falling. This low standard has been observed and voiced by many Ghanaian scholars. Notable among them is Basil Gbeli Yaabere who wrote in the Monday, September 12, 1993 issue of the "Daily Graphic" in an article entitled "Low Standard of English In Our Schools", opened his contribution to the debate as follows:

Much ink has been spilt over the question of the poor quality of English language particular in secondary schools. The concern of patriots is as widespread as the language disease itself but there still seems to be no marked improvement. Perhaps a more sagacious approach by both educationists including English Language teachers is badly needed.

Yaabere goes further on the same page of the newspaper, to express his disgust over the usage of the language by remarking that:

What is even disheartening is the fact that the use of pidgin has virtually overlapped the use of refined grammatically correct English and even on our university campuses (page 5).

The Chief Examiner's report of November (1994:6) and November (1999: vi) also testify to the poor standard of English in our schools, especially in the senior secondary schools.

For instance the Chief Examiner's report of the Senior Secondary School Examination Certificate (SSSCE) in 1994/6 States that:

Candidates English was depressing. One would find it boring that we keep on harping on poor English performances year in, year out. Candidates English continues to be ABYSMALLY OBTUSE. For most of these candidates, the only grounds examiners had for suspecting they wanted to write English Language were

- i) the fact that they wrote English Language Core on their scripts; and
- ii) the occasional appearance of traditional English words in their scripts.

In the Chief Examiner's report of November (1999:vi) issued in January, 2002, the concern was raised again about the poor performance in English by candidates. The Chief Examiner Stated as follows:

...as usual, the poor performance of the majority of candidates was attributed to their inability to express themselves well in English Language (West African Examination Council (WAEC, 1999: VI)

The above concern raised by some people on the status of the English language in Ghana affects all level of education including the polytechnics. Many researchers have carried out research on the problems related to the English language at the primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, teacher training colleges as well as the universities. However, not much research has been done on the use of the English language at the polytechnic level, which is the concern of the present researcher.

It is for this reason that the researcher chooses to investigate an aspect of the written English of Polytechnic students specifically errors in the use of punctuation marks. The researcher seeks to identify the problems, analyze the available data and to offer useful recommendations to policy makers, English language teachers and learners, syllabus designers and other stakeholders to help these students overcome this problem.

1.1 HYPOTHESIS

Polytechnic students do not use punctuation marks correctly in their extended writing

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are to:

- i. Identify the errors of students in the use of punctuation marks.
- ii. To identify the causes for these errors.
- iii. To offer useful suggestions to communication skill lecturers at the polytechnics to redouble their efforts in teaching this important aspect of English.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

1. The general view in certain quarters is that polytechnic students use English throughout as a medium of instruction right from the basic to second cycle institutions so they do not need to study Communication Skills at the HND level.
2. A second view is that the polytechnic students need little knowledge in English to be able to function in society, since their subjects of study do not require an in-depth knowledge of the language.
3. The third view is that punctuation marks are regarded mere mechanical marks and whether they are used correctly or not meaning is still conveyed.
4. The fact that punctuation has been given little or no attention at all the polytechnics has prompted the present researcher to carry out this study. Another fact is the heterogeneous nature of polytechnic students – heterogeneous in the sense that they enter the polytechnic from diverse educational institutions such as the Commercial/

Secretarial Schools, the Senior Secondary Schools (new) and (old), Technical Institutions, Teacher Training Colleges and in some cases from the universities.

The problem with this heterogeneous nature is that those from the secretarial, commercial and technical institutions generally perform poorer than their counterparts from the senior secondary schools because English language is not taught extensively in such institutions. The few teachers and university graduates perform also better because they have had better training in the language than their colleagues from the secretarial, commercial, technical institutions and senior secondary schools.

It is this category of students who have a big problem in the use of punctuation marks in their written English that, the present researcher focuses. The findings of the study will go a long way to help this category of students to use punctuation marks effectively.

1.4 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is relevant in the following ways.

1. It addresses errors of punctuation marks of Polytechnic students so that they can communicate effectively in writing. It will help Communication Skills lecturers in the Polytechnics to restructure their teaching method related to punctuation marks to help students out of this problem.

2. It will help other English language teachers, especially those at the basic and second cycle institutions to teach this aspect of English early enough to equip students with the requisite knowledge in the use of punctuation marks.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

Due to time constraint, the study is limited to only students of Bolgatanga Polytechnic.

1. The subjects are HND Students of the Bolgatanga Polytechnic. One hundred and forty (140) out of about 300-student population was randomly sampled
2. Testing: (a) on punctuated passage
(b) Essay-type question
3. Analysis of the data collected
4. Presentation of findings and suggestions / recommendations for improvement in the teaching of punctuation marks in our schools.

1.6 PROJECTED OUTCOME

The under listed are foreseen to be the projected outcome of the study;

1. Students will make errors in the use of the end marks – the full stop, period, question marks and exclamation marks.
2. Students will make errors in the use of internal punctuation marks – the comma, the colon, the semicolon, the apostrophe, the quotation marks, the hyphen, and the dash. These errors do occur in the written English of HND students in the Bolgatanga Polytechnics and other Polytechnics in Ghana

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study will be structured as follows

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 General Introduction

1.1 Hypothesis

1.2 Objective of the study

1.3 Justification of the study

1.4 Relevance of the Study

1.5 Methodology

1.6 Projected outcome

1.7 Structure of the study

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Error

2.2 The Importance of Punctuation and Writing

2.3 Research on Errors of the Written English of Students

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Sampling of Subjects

3.2 Data collection

3.3 Conclusion: Limitations

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1.0 Results of Test and Exercises
 - 4.1.1 Results of Unpunctuated Passage
 - 4.1.2 Results of Essay Topic
- 4.2 Discussion of Research Findings
- 4.3 Conclusion
- 4.4 Other Errors

Chapter Five: Recommendations/Suggestions

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Recommendations
- 5.2 Summary and Conclusion

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature related to the research topic. The focus is on how the topic has been treated in selected works. After a brief background to the concept of ERROR other aspects such as the importance of punctuation marks in written English treated by different authors have also been reviewed. Research work on the errors of the written English of students in Ghana has been reviewed as well to give the research topic prominence.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF ERROR

An error may be said to be a breach of code. That means it is a deviant form which may occur regularly in the speech and writing of the learner. This is quite different from a mistake, which often occurs once because there is a slip of tongue. With a mistake, the learner may be able to recognize it himself/herself and correct it afterwards. An error however, may be something that the learner is unaware of and it may continue to occur if no purposeful effort is made by the teacher to address it. As the learner progresses his/her inter-language also moves closer to the target language system and fewer errors may be produced. It will therefore mean that those errors that do not disappear entirely may be said to be fossilized errors. Those that disappear eventually may be described as transitional errors.

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Many authors of English or Linguistics have done some studies and have written books, all aiming at helping learners of a second language to reduce the number of errors in their inter-language. These authors have also tried to find the causes of these errors and have suggested ways of reducing them. One of these authors is Burton (1963), who discusses some of the errors of second language learners. He treats these errors in an alphabetical order so that at any point in time when the learner needs help he can easily look up these errors. Burton does not only arrange these errors but tries to explain them in everyday English which gives the learner a quick reference guide to better his/her written English

In doing all this, Burton does not have a group of people from a specific geographical area in mind. He addresses the issue of error generally made by second language learners irrespective of where they come from.

Earlier, two other co-writers, Brown and Scragg (1948), tried to identify the causes of errors made by second language learners and to find possible ways of correcting them. They made the effort to explain the sources of learner errors.

The work by Brown and Scragg was divided into one hundred and sixty sections. The book is further divided into two columns. One column lists the errors and the second column lists the correct versions, and the opposite page is devoted entirely to explanations, including references to mother tongue interference mainly Ewe, Twi Ga and Fante, which were Ghanaian languages familiar to (Brown & Scragg). Brown & Scragg do not have particular users in mind, and their lists of errors were drawn from all

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classes of English users in the Gold Coast. Similar research on errors has also been carried out by Tandoh (1987), and Buandoh (1996), in relation to the use of English by university students in Ghana. Tandoh, for instance, drew her sample from students of the Faculties of Science and Arts of the University of Ghana and came out with interesting findings. She attributed the poor English language usage to the weak foundation that is laid at the pre-university level. Research has also been carried out on errors in the spoken English of basic school pupils and teacher-trainees in Ghana by Dolphyne (1997-97) in "The teaching of spoken English in Ghana". in Dakube (ed.) English in Ghana.

The present research looks at a different group of students, Higher National Diploma (HND) who have for all these years, been left out by previous researchers. Investigations into errors in the use of punctuation marks in the written English of this category of students will be looked at closely. These errors will be identified, analyzed and concrete suggestions given to help all stake holders of Polytechnic education to help their students out of this problem.

2.2 IMPORTANCE OF PUNCTUATIONS IN WRITING

The importance of punctuation marks in written English cannot be overemphasized since they help a writer to make meaning of what he/she writes. Again, the reader makes meanings of what he/she reads because of the judicious use of punctuation marks in reading materials.

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Discussing the importance of punctuation marks in written material, Eckersley and Sckersly (1970: 376) state that, "Punctuation is simply a device for making easy to read and understand written or printed matter". They go further to categorically explain that, in speech we can read pauses between words, and phrases, we can use gestures, give emphasis to a word and raise or lower the voice to help the listener to understand our meaning, but in writing much of that work is done by punctuation. Again they content that the proper use of punctuation gives clarity of meaning to a passage that might be misunderstood or even not understood at all. They identify the principal punctuation marks as the full stop (.), the colon (:), the quotation mark (""), and the apostrophe (').

Sally et al (2000: 419), refer to punctuation as "The standardized marks inserted in written material to clarify meaning and to separate structural units of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. The purposes of punctuation, they state, are many and most of them can be used for more than one purpose. For instance, they may connect or separate sentence elements, they may enclose material, and they may end sentences. Sally et al (2000) identify thirteen (13) punctuation marks that may be used when writing. These include: the apostrophe ('), the brackets ([]), the colon (:), the comma (,), the dash (-), the exclamation point (!), the hyphen (-), the (-), the (-) the parenthesis ((;)), the period (.) the question marks (?), the quotation marks (" "), the semicolon (;) and the slash (/). They conclude by saying that when the writer knows his writing task, he/she focuses and appropriately communicates by the use of punctuation marks.

Gary et al (1982), compares the writer to a composer of music. They state that just as a composer sets down notes and tells the musicians how to play the music, so also the writer, who puts down words on paper, must tell his/her readers how the words could be read. To achieve this, they argue, the writer must use a set of standardized marks called punctuation. A simple definition they give to punctuation is that, "it is a commonly accepted set of symbols used in writing to convey specific direction to the reader" (p. 328).

They also explain that the purpose of punctuation marks, when judiciously used, give readers such information as when to pause for clarity, when to read with particular emotion or when to stop completely. They also identify the following as important punctuation marks.

1. The end marks – the full stop (.), the question mark (?), the exclamation mark (!)
2. The internal marks – the comma (,), the semicolon (;), the quotation marks (" "), the dash (–), the parenthesis ({ }), the hyphen (-) and the apostrophe (')

Wiredu (1998:117), underscores the fact when we speak, we are able to use facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice and body movements to convey information. But the major problem is with writing where it is difficult to indicate the changes, which come about through our voice, and gestures. To achieve this, he states, there are devices called punctuation marks, which are used to show where we are pausing, or where we want to ask questions or even where we want to emphasize. He explains the importance of:

punctuation marks in writing when he said, "a sentence can be punctuated in several ways to give different meaning". He adds capitalization to those mentioned earlier in this review.

Schor and Summerfield (1986), observe that in the 1400s, no commas, periods, capital letters or any other punctuation marks, and no paragraph indentation were used to guide readers through a piece of writing. So readers often guessed each time they read anything. To them, punctuation shows the relationship between one's ideas and emphasizes those ideas that are important. A period at the end of a sentence, for instance, tells the reader to come to a full stop and separate that idea from the next. A semicolon between clauses, tells the reader to make connection between the writer's ideas. This therefore shows that the sentence can be punctuated in several ways allowing for varied emphasis and effects. The key to effective punctuation, Schor and Sumerfield emphasize, is an understanding of the sentence and its elements, as well as an understanding of co-ordination, subordination and modification.

Another writer worthy of note is Sekyi-Baidoo (2000), who states categorically that punctuation marks are indispensable in the organization of written language. According to him they help us to assign the correct meaning to the words, phrases and sentences we meet when reading. Punctuation, he says, is principally a sentential mechanic. It generates at the level of the sentence. For instance, the full stop, the comma, the exclamation mark, the interrogative marks all occur at the level of the sentence. But only the quotation marks and the elliptical marks are used beyond the sentence. He classifies

punctuation under two major uses, which are the mechanical and the discourse usages.

Under the mechanical usage, the punctuation may be used to:

- i. To separate ideas and constructions from those that follow them: e.g. the hyphen, colon, apostrophe, etc.
- ii. To link one item of language to the other: e.g. the hyphen, colon, apostrophe, etc.
- iii. To show that letters have been omitted: e.g. the apostrophe and the full stop in abbreviation.
- iv. To enclose what is within main ideas e.g. quotation mark, double commas, etc.

DISCOURSAL USAGE

1. Punctuation helps the readers to phrase their readings.
2. They help to observe units and breaks, which in turn help us to obtain meaning.
3. Question and exclamation marks help us to read with the right intonation.
4. The end marks tell us how to interpret some units of speech whether as statements, question or exclamation.

Opoku Agyemang (1998), looks at punctuation as pauses in writing, just as we normally pause or change the tone when we speak. To her, the kind of punctuation mark used in a sentence is determined greatly by the structure of that particular sentence. She identifies the following as the most common forms of punctuation marks in writing: the comma, the semi-colon, the colon, the quotation mark or the apostrophe, the parenthesis, the question mark and the full stop.

Among these, Opoku Agyemang (1998), states that the comma is the most frequently used punctuation mark within a sentence, and it is also the most frequently misused mark. The comma, she says, is usually used to separate items from each other in the sentence. These items can be words, phrases or clauses. The comma is also considered to play similar roles to that of the dash, the parenthesis, the colon and the semi-colon. She identifies about more uses of the comma.

Besides the comma, the full stop or period is the next most frequently used in writing. It is used to punctuate the end of the sentence which is not a question, a command or an exclamation. The full stop may also be used to mark formal abbreviations as in the following

- (i) Titles: Mr., Mrs., Dr., Lt. Col., Fr., Sr., Miss., etc.
- (ii) Degree: M.A., M. Phil; B. Sc; M. SC., M. Ed., Ph.D., etc.
- (iii) Days and months: Mon., Tues, Oct., Nov., etc.

It should not be misunderstood here that, Opoku Agyemang (1998), does not consider the rest of the punctuation marks important. She discusses all of them, but only points to the comma and the full stop as the most frequently used and misused punctuation marks. Opoku Agyemang (1998), identifies and discusses nine uses of the comma. These include:

- (i) Using commas to separate independent clauses joined by and, or but, for and similar coordinating conjunctions; as a "You must pay the fine and then I will think of what to do next".

- (ii) Using commas to set off names and similar words in direct address; as in, "I am calling, Darling, to say that I will be home at the weekend".
- (iii) Using commas to separate elements in a series as in, "Inside my children's desks you may find books, pencils, crayons, erasers, pieces of paper, and toys".
- (iv) Using commas before and after direct quotation marks and to set off, "he said", and similar attributions as in "We are really lucky to have such a lecturer," remarked Nancy.
- (v) Using commas to separate items which suggest a contrast or a choice e.g., "Atia drinks beer, not pito".
- (vi) Using commas to separate names of places, addresses and items in dates, e.g., "The chief's Palace at Yendi, Northern Region, bears testimony to a terrible fact"
"My daughter, Josephine was born on December 28, 1993.
- (vii) Using commas to separate an introductory phrase or adverbial clause from the main clauses e.g. "Impressed by his thorough analysis of the problem, his supervisor awarded a B+ for the dissertation".
- (viii) Using commas to set off forms of the appositive. E.g. Please leave the dissertations with Mrs. Agatha August, The Department Secretary"
- (ix) Using commas to set off non-restrictive modifiers. E.g. "The priest, who takes care of orphans, has been robbed".

Hacker (1995), identifies thirteen (13) punctuation marks used in writing. These include the comma, the semi-colon, the colon, the apostrophe, the quotation mark, the period, the

question mark, the exclamation point, the dash, parenthesis, the brackets, the ellipsis mark and the slash.

In discussing each of the above punctuation marks, Hacker (1995), seems to emphasize more on the use of the comma which she considers most frequently used. She discusses ten different uses of the comma as well as seven different misuses of it. The rest of the punctuation marks are equally discussed as regards their uses and misuses. Again Hacker (1995), considers ellipsis and the slash as punctuation marks, while other authors such as Opoku Agyemang does not include them in the list of punctuation marks.

In discussing the use of punctuation marks Keene and Adams (1996) place emphasis on the comma and the apostrophe. They, like Opoku Agyemang, discuss nine uses of the comma, giving examples in each case. However, Keene and Adams (1996) outline ten incorrect uses of commas as follows:

1. Commas should not be used between a verb and its subject or object. E.g. "The quarrels among political leaders, seem to fascinate their supporters."
2. Commas should not be used after a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) e.g. The new book I bought has 426 pages, but, the old one has less pages.
3. Commas should not be used before and after essential elements. E.g. David forgot the book, he needed, to send to school.
4. Commas are not necessary before the first or after the last item in a series. E.g. A beautiful girl should have, soft hair, bright eyes, and a round face, to be admired.

5. Commas are not necessary between two compound elements. E.g. Both the car, and its tyres need maintenance.
6. Commas should not be used between cumulative adjectives or adverbs. E.g. Moses still uses an old, phoenix bicycle.
7. Commas are not necessary between an adjective and a noun or between an adverb and an adjective. E.g. New life line was one of those suddenly, popular bars.
8. Commas should not be used after "such as", "like" or before "than". E.g. His tests required more studying, than I was used to.
9. Commas should not be used before indirect quotations. E.g. Was it Milton's character Satan who said, he would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven?
10. Commas are not used with question marks, exclamation points, parentheses and dashes. E.g. David is like his father, (who leans a lot).

For apostrophes, Keene and Adams explain that they are used in the possessive case of nouns, pronouns, contractions and plurals. In the possessive case of nouns, they state that, a noun shows possession with an apostrophe and an "s"; but if the plural form already ends in an "s", the apostrophe is placed after this "s". For example, the lecturer's decision; her boss's car, the girls' school.

With possession in pronouns, the personal and indefinite pronouns form their possessives in very different ways. The personal pronouns such as I, you and they form their possessives by switching to different forms with I becoming "my"; you becoming "your" or "yours"; they becoming "their" or "theirs"

In contractions, the apostrophe replaces the missing letters as in: "don't" for "do not"; "can't" for "can not"; "didn't" for "did not" etc.

The apostrophe is also used in the plurals of letters, numerals, and words referred to as words. For example, "the student was reminded to remove some of the and's from his sentences and cross his t's". "British draw a line through their 7's so that they won't look like 1's".

Sackeyfiio et al (1991: 139), simply describe punctuation marks as the writer's signals to the reader. They state that the full stop shows that a sentence has been ended. A comma shows a pause in thought, action or a separation of parts of a compound sentence. Apart from the full stop and the comma given as example, Sackeyfiio et al (1991) also discuss the exclamation mark, the dash and ellipsis in Book One of the Ghana Senior Secondary School English Book.

They explain that the exclamation mark is used to show emphasis and to make interrogative utterances. The dash on the other hand is used to show a sudden change of ideas and to set off a word or phrase repeated for emphasis. The ellipsis, they explain, is used mainly to indicate the omission within a quoted passage.

Hennessy (1988), identifies ten punctuation marks such as the period, the question mark, exclamation points, comma, semi-colon, colon, dash parentheses and the quotation mark. He also considers the comma and the period as the most frequently used and misused punctuation marks. He cautions the careful use of the other punctuation marks.

especially the dash, parentheses, and quotation marks, since their misuse can cause confusion for the reader.

Another writer, Muller (1991), explains that there are no precise rules about punctuation. He points out that there are only four stops (the comma, the semicolon, the colon and the period). The question mark and exclamation points are not, strictly speaking, stops; they are only indicators of tone.

Miller (1991), emphasizes that the comma is the most useful and misused of the stops. He however cautions that, it is better to use them sparingly and with affection and precision when the need arises because the reader can easily get confused when they are misused. He again warns that quotation marks should be used honestly and sparingly, when there is a genuine quotation mark at hand and he adds that it is necessary to be very rigorous about the words enclosed by the quotation marks.

Pearson and Cunningham (1986), speak of fourteen punctuation marks. These include the apostrophe, brackets, capitalization, colon, comma, dash, ellipsis, explanation point, hyphen, parenthesis, period, question mark, quotation mark and the semi-colon. They also caution the use of the more difficult punctuation marks (the dash, ellipsis, hyphen, parenthesis and the apostrophe).

On punctuation marks, Crews (1987:344), points out that marks of punctuation are essential for clear meaning in written prose. He says that, beyond showing where pauses

or stops would occur in speech, punctuation marks indicate logical relations that would otherwise be hard for a reader to understand. He further states that, though parentheses, brackets, dashes and commas, signal a pause, they suggest different relations between main and subordinate material. He cautions that, "to be sure that your punctuation marks are working with your meaning, not against it, is to master the rules". Crews (1987), identifies nine punctuation marks which are the period, question mark, exclamation point, comma, colon, semi-colon, dash, parenthesis and quotation marks.

Le Tourneau (2001), remarks that punctuation marks, apart from marking pauses, can also be said to set off grammatical units and boundaries between these units. He classifies punctuation marks into two categories: terminal punctuation and internal punctuation. Terminal punctuation marks, he points out, are the ones that end a sentence. These include; the period, the question mark, and the exclamation mark. The terminal punctuation marks, according to Le Tourneau (2001), have two main functions. The first of these functions is that they indicate the end of a written sentence that begins with a capital letter. The second function of terminal punctuation marks is to indicate the mood of a sentence: declarative (a statement), interrogative (a question), imperative (a command), or explanative (an exclamation).

Internal punctuation marks, on the other hand, are those that occur between the initial capital and a terminal mark. These marks include semi-colons, dashes, colons, and commas. Coe (1988: 69, 92) gives an insightful explanation for how the first three (semi-colon, colon, dash) function in terms of levels of generality. The semi-colon indicates

that the units on each side are at the same level of generality. Colons indicate that what follows is more specific than what precedes.

Le Toumeau (2001), adds that dashes are also used to enclose material that occurs between constituents as well as at the end of a sentence.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) explain that punctuation serves two main functions. These include:

1. Separation of
 - a. successive units, such as sentences by periods, or items in a list by commas
 - b. Included units such as parenthesis being used to mark off an interpolated phrase of clause.
2. Specification of language functions as when an apostrophe indicates that an inflection is genitive.

Quirk and Greenbaum identify hyphens, commas, parenthesis, quotation marks, question marks, exclamation points and periods as the most commonly used punctuation marks. They, however, point out that the exclamation mark is sparingly used in English and it does not also occur with vocatives or imperatives.

Achampong (2005), states that punctuation marks serve two main purposes. In writing, punctuation marks make sentences meaningful, clear, interesting or forceful. In reading, however, punctuation marks serve as a guide to the meaning of written or printed

passages. He identifies thirteen punctuation marks. These are: full stops, commas, colons, semi-colons, question marks, quotation marks, hyphens, exclamation marks, capitalization, dashes, parenthesis, brackets and dots (ellipsis).

From the above review, it would be noticed clearly that there are differences in opinion about what really constitutes the right punctuation marks. Whereas, some authors include capitalization, slashes and ellipsis as punctuation marks, others do not. Again, some authors consider the brackets and parentheses, the dash and hyphen to be the same, while others look at them as being different. These differences in the use of punctuation marks coupled with English teachers from different training backgrounds may account for the errors in the use of punctuation marks by students in their writing.

It is the importance of punctuation marks in the written English of students, especially HND students that the researcher is concerned. It is also because the language skills of this category of students have not been researched into that the research deems this study relevant.

From the above review one would be right to conclude that for any good written work to be done, punctuation marks must be judiciously and effectively used. Therefore HND students, like their counterparts in the universities, need to be taught how to use them effectively to improve their writing skills.

2.3 RESEARCH ON ERRORS OF THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF STUDENTS

The researcher, in his bid to fish out works on the errors of the written work of students, consulted Tandoh (1987), who did research on "Some Aspects of the Written English of University of Ghana Undergraduates". He came out with some findings on errors in the use of the comma, the full stop, and the dash. Other researchers such as Buandoh (1997) undertook a study on error patterns in the written essays of Senior Secondary Students in the Central Region. In this study, she concentrated on errors related to spelling, concord, prepositions, vocabulary and expression, the article and others. She also looked at incomplete sentences, rule violation, pidgin construction, wrong capitalization and wrong use of the apostrophe. In this work, Buandoh touched on only one punctuation mark, the full stop.

Yankson (1994), analysed errors in the use of English by students of the University of Cape Coast and the University of Nsukka, Nigeria. In this study, Yankson identified three broad types of errors and offered plausible causes of these errors. Some of the errors involved complex noun phrases. Here again Yankson did not consider punctuation errors.

Odamtten et al (1994), also discuss problems of English Language skills at the university level with particular reference to first year Law and Administration students of the University of Ghana. The most common errors compiled by these authors are grouped into (i) concord errors; (ii) vocabulary and expression errors, (iii) spelling errors, (iv) parts of speech errors and (v) idiomatic and style errors. Punctuation marks are again not considered in their study. The researchers on errors of students writing reviewed indicate

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that a good number of them focus much on undergraduates and Senior Secondary School Students. The work of these researchers also involved causes of the errors. Odamtten et al (1994), for example, went a step further to offer recommendations for correcting the situation. They all assert that the level of proficiency in English of Ghanaian students has fallen.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Due to time constraint, the study is limited to only Higher National Diploma (HND) students of Bolgatanga Polytechnic. The subjects for the study were sampled from HND students offering Accountancy, Marketing, Statistics and Secretaryship and Management Programmes. There is another group (Agricultural Engineering) that is left out of the study because this category of students was going through the Pre-HND programme before it would be absorbed into the HND programme.

3.1 SAMPLING OF SUBJECTS

The sampling method used in the study is random sampling using the "Yes" and "No" technique. The intention was to capture about one hundred and forty (140) subjects for the exercise. However, only one hundred (100) subjects were successfully captured partly due to pressure on subjects because they were preparing for their end of semester examination and partly due to lack of interest in the exercise by some subjects.

The breakdown of the total number of subjects sampled according to programmes is as follows:

1. Higher National Diploma (HND) Accountancy	-	40
2. Higher National Diploma (HND) Marketing	-	25
3. Higher National Diploma (Secretaryship & Management)	-	20
4. Higher National Diploma (Statistics)	-	15
5. Total Number of Subjects	-	100

Before the above figures could be arrived at, the researcher gathered students from each programme and explained the rationale behind the study. The researcher, with the help of programme leaders (Class monitors), write "Yes" or "No" on pieces of paper and asked subjects to pick. Those subjects who picked "Yes" were given the exercise to do while those who picked "No" were excluded. This was done from programme to programme on two different days depending on the students present on campus at the time since the majority of them are day students.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The study depended on a test and an exercise as the mode of collecting data. A test and a take-home exercise were given to subjects. The test was a page of an unpunctuated passage given to students to read and punctuate.

Thirty (30) minutes were allotted for the test with subjects under strict supervision. The reason for choosing this procedure was that, subjects had been taught the use of punctuation marks in the first semester. Students had written a good number of exercises on the topic. Giving them the passage to punctuate was then to test subjects' knowledge on the identification of punctuation marks.

The second exercise was an essay type question. This was also meant to test subjects' ability to write on their own using punctuation marks appropriately. The essay topic was given to students as a take home exercise to be done over night. All exercises were collected at 11:00am the following morning by the researcher but with difficulty.

The scoring of the two exercises was done focusing on all errors of punctuation marks, i.e. full stop, commas, colon, semi-colon, question mark, hyphen, dash, parenthesis, capital letter, apostrophe, quotation mark, etc.

The rationale behind this take-home exercise was to allow subjects to feel relaxed to do the exercise. Subjects would also punctuation marks that were not captured in the unpunctuated passage. The unpunctuated passage was on the use of make-up whilst the essay topic was a speech to be written. Inserted are:

- i. the unpunctuated passage
- ii. its correct version
- iii. the essay topic

Read the following passage carefully and put in the needed punctuation marks / capital letters.

those who see nothing wrong with makeup argue that man must continue to improve on gods creation else we would return to the culture of the stone age we go in for the latest fashion sin dress and decorate our house why should women not paint their lips or even their bodies to them makeup heightens the beauty of women and gives them the angelic brightness good intended for them but like the true disciple of hamlet that i am i would complain to my ophelia god has given you one face and you make yourself another unpainted house may look unfinished and dull but i do not see unpainted lips ugly and incomplete on the contrary, it retains the innocence god gave it i believe a woman who uses make up primarily intends nothing but to charm men

besides i do not know any religion that advocates makeup emboldened by moses' law against the use of ear rings one saint forbade a woman to smear her face with ensnaring devices of cunning while another one asked what have brought and white to do on a christian woman face why then should a woman perforate her ears or nose or even dye hair even feminists supporters of women's right would like women to avoid using makeup for they say it is one of the tools men use to subdue women instead of yielding to that male chauvinist pigs would have them concentrate on their looks and so fall easy prey to their rights beauty cannot be a substitute for hard work they believe nor can it create self esteem no wonder they demonstrated so vehemently against beauty contest in america in the 1960s environmentalists and animals rights groups also came up strongly against the use of cosmetics many living animals and plants are destroyed every year to manufacture makeups and this threatens the environment in 1984 they pointed out experiments were conducted on no more than seventeen thousand living animals and plants in experiments for the benefits of man surely it must be for something better than creating makeups to beautify a woman face we should not deny our children the beauties of nature just because some women would like to have facelifts perhaps the most important argument against womens use of makeup is the risk to their health over the years women have been casualties of cosmetics and lead poisoning modern scientists have warned that cancer can be caused by skin bleaches and hair dyes and michael jackson can testify that hair spray can cause harm indeed using makeup can be painful costly and deadly

CORRECT VERSION OF THE UNPUNCTUATED PASSAGE

Read the following passage carefully and put in the needed punctuation capital letters.

Those who see nothing wrong with make-up argue that man must continue to improve on God's creation; else we would return to the culture of the Stone Age. We go in for the latest fashions in dress and decorate our houses; why should women not paint their lips or even their bodies? To them, make-up heightens the beauty of women and gives them the angelic brightness God intended for them.

But like the true disciple of Hamlet that I am, I would complain to my Ophelia: "God has given you one face and you make yourself another". Unpainted houses may look unfinished and dull; but I do not see unpainted lips ugly and incomplete. On the contrary, it retains the innocence God gave it. I believe a woman who uses make-up primarily intends nothing but to charm men.

Besides, I do not know any religion that advocates make-up. Emboldened by Moses' law, against the use of ear rings, one saint forbade a woman to smear her face with ensnaring devices of cunning, while another one asked what have rough and white to do on a Christian woman's face. Why then should a woman perforate her ears or nose or even dye her hair?

Even feminists – supporters of women's rights – would like women to avoid using make-up; for, they say it is one of the tools men use to subdue women. Instead of yielding to

ESSAY TOPIC

You are a contestant for the forthcoming S.R.C elections. Write a campaign speech you will deliver, stating in detail three (3) priority areas you will be tackling if you win the election.

3.3 CONCLUSION: LIMITATIONS

This study encountered a number of problems some of which are associated with pressure on the subjects that the researcher sampled and lack of materials because of funds, etc. For instance, the sampled subjects were at the time of the study preparing for their end of semester examinations. The researcher had to chase them round to participate in the exercises. Therefore instead of the one hundred and forty subjects sampled one hundred of them responded to the exercises.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is mainly devoted to the analysis of data and information from subjects. In view of the fact that information was gathered from the subjects who were all HND students of the same polytechnic, the analysis looks at the subjects as one entity and not by programmes, as indicated in chapter two (2).

The chapter is divided into the following parts:

- i. Results of test and exercise
- ii. Discussion of findings

4.1 RESULTS OF TEST AND EXERCISE

The scripts for both the test and the exercise are two hundred (200) in all. Each of them was marked taking note of each punctuation mark at a time. This particularly refers to the unpunctuated passage. For the essay topic, no specific numbers of the punctuation marks were recorded. The study tried to look at whether subjects used the various punctuation marks correctly in their own writing.

As stated in Chapter Two the study made use of a test (an unpunctuated passage) for subjects to punctuate. An essay topic (a speech) was also given to subjects to write on paying attention to the correct use of punctuation marks. The results of the two exercises are analysed separately.

RESULTS FO UNPUNCTUATED PASSAGE

In the unpunctuated passage the following punctuation marks were expected to be filled

in: inserted

i.	Full stop	-	20
ii.	Question mark	-	3
iii.	Semi-colon	-	4
iv.	Apostrophe	-	5
v.	Quotation marks	-	4
vi.	Hyphen	-	12
vii.	Commas	-	17
viii.	Capital letters	-	40

An analysis of subjects performance for each of the punctuation marks are given below

TABLE 1: THE FULL STOP

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
0	0	0%
16	1 - 5	16%
48	6 - 10	48%
20	11 - 15	20%
10	16 - 19	10%
6	20	6%

Table 1 shows the number of subjects and the range of scores of full stops obtained in the unpunctuated passage. The percentage number of subjects is put against the range of

scores. No subject scored zero (0), which represents 0%. Sixteen (16) subjects scored between one (1) and five (5) representing 16%, forty-eight (48) scored between 6 – 10 marks, representing 48%. Twenty (20) scored between 11 – 15 marks, representing 20%. Ten (10) scored between 16 – 19 marks, representing 10%, six (6) scored all twenty (20) marks, representing 6%. From the scores, it could be said that the majority (about 64%) scored between 1 – 10 marks and about 36% scored between 11 – 20 marks.

TABLE 2: QUESTION MARKS

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
11	0	11%
52	1	52%
32	2	32%
5	3	5%

Table 2 indicates the distribution of marks scored for question marks in the passage. There were three (3) question marks to be inserted in the passage. Eleven out of the one hundred subjects could not insert any of the three (3) question marks representing 11%. Fifty two (52) succeeded in inserting one (1) of the question marks, representing 52%, thirty two (32) subjects inserted two (2) question mark, representing 32%, whilst five (5) subjects inserted all three (3) question marks, representing 5%.

TABLES 3: THE COLON (:)

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
10	0	10%
50	1	50%
36	2	36%
4	3	4%

Table 3 displays the number of subjects that were able to insert colons missing in the passage. Ten (10) subjects scored zero (0), representing 0%, meaning they could not insert any of the three (3) colons in the passage. Fifty (50) subjects, that is 50% could insert only one (1) colon; thirty – six (36), that is 36% inserted two (2) colons and only four (4), that is 4% succeeded in inserting all three colons.

TABLE 4 : THE SEMI COLON (;)

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
13	0	13%
40	1	40%
30	2	30%
55	3	15%
2	4	2%

Table 4 represents the number of subjects who were able to insert semi-colons in the passage at their right places. Out of the hundred subjects, thirteen (13) could not insert even one (1) of the semi-colons, representing 13%. Forty (40) inserted only one (1), thirty

inserted two (2), fifteen (15) inserted three (3) and two subjects inserted all four (4) semi-colons. These represent 40%, 30%, 15% and 2% respectively. The analysis shows that about 8% performed badly, showing subjects' inability to identify and insert semi-colons at the right places in the passage.

TABLE 5: THE HYPHEN (-)

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
20	0	20%
45	1 - 5	45%
26	6 - 10	26%
9	11 - 12	9%

Table 5 shows the scores for the insertion of hyphens in the passage. There were twelve (12) hyphens in all. Twenty (20) scored zero (0) representing 20%; forty-five (45) scored between 1 - 5, representing 45%; twenty-six (26) scored between 6 - 10, representing 26% and nine (9) scored between 11 - 12, representing 9%. This means 65% scored between 0 - 5, indicating poor performance.

TABLE 6: THE COMMA (,)

NO OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
0	0	0%
53	1 - 5	53%
34	6 - 10	34%
10	11 - 15	10%
3	16 - 17	3%

Table 6 indicates the number of subjects and their scores as far as inserting commas is concerned. No subject scored zero (0), representing 0%; fifty-three (53) scored between 1 - 5, representing 53%; thirty-four (34) scored between 6 - 10, represent 34%; ten (10) scored between 11 - 15, representing 10%, while three (3) subjects scored between 16 - 17, representing 3%. The analysis show that 53% performed below average, 34% above average and only 13% performed well. Though better than the first five (5) punctuation marks, subjects still showed inadequate identification and use of commas.

TABLE 7: THE CAPITAL LETTER

NO. OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
0	0	0%
46	1 – 10	46%
30	11 – 20	30%
10	21 – 30	10%
8	31 – 39	8%
6	40	6%

Table 7 represents the scores for capital letters. There were forty (40) capital letters to be inserted in the passage. No subject scored zero (0), representing 0%; forty-six (46) scored between 1 – 10 representing 46%; thirty (30) scored between 11 – 20, representing 30%; ten (10) scored between 21 – 30 representing 10%; eight (8) scored between 31 – 39 representing 8% and six (6) scored all forty (40) representing 6%. Here again, about 76% scored between 1 & 20, while 24% scored above average. The difficulty here might be the inability of subjects to identify transitional points within the paragraphs. For paragraph transitions almost all subjects recognized these and inserted the capital letters needed.

TABLE 8: APOSTROPHE (')

NO OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
13	0	13%
47	1	47%
10	2	10%
4	3	4%
7	4	7%
2	5	2%

Table 8 shows the scores for apostrophes. In all five apostrophes were required to be inserted in the passage. Thirty (30) subjects could not insert any of the apostrophes, representing 30%; forty-seven (47) inserted only one (1), representing 47%; ten (10) inserted two (2) representing 10%; seven (7) subjects is scored four (4) representing 7% and two (2) inserted all five (5) apostrophes. This means about 87% obtained average score, while 13% scored above average. This suggests that the over all performance here is very poor.

TABLE 9: THE QUOTATION MARK (" ")

NO OF SUBJECTS	SCORE	PERCENTAGE
51	0	51%
25	1	25%
11	2	11%
10	3	10%
3	4	3%

Table 9 displays the scores for quotation marks. There were four (4) quotation marks to be inserted. Fifty-one (51) score zero (0) representing 51%; twenty-five (25) scored one (1) representing 25%; eleven (11) scored two (2) representing 11%; ten (10) scored three (3) representing 10%; and three (3) scored all four (4) quotation marks, representing 3%. A high percentage of subjects between 0 to 2, show that subjects have a problem identifying and using quotation marks.

4.2 THE ESSAY TOPIC

Subjects wrote an essay on speech writing. The scoring system here is quite different from that of the unpunctuated passage. Whilst the unpunctuated passage was scored on the number of times each punctuation mark was used in the passage, the essay topic was scored focusing on the correct use of punctuation marks.

Particular attention was given to the introduction of the essay (since it is a speech and vocatives would be used), the body (where points are raised and developed) and the conclusion.

Sections of the essays of some subjects are noted and quoted. Some of the scripts are attached at the appendix).

The vocatives of a written speech usually demand the use of commas to separate the personalities addressed. Many candidates about 70 – 80% did not even have vocatives, let alone to punctuate them. The few who wrote the vocatives did not use the punctuation marks correctly. Below are two examples of some subjects' essays.

Subject 1:

"Mr. Chairman Principal of the schools students ladies and gentlemen".

Subject 2:

"Mr. Chairman panel of judges principal fellow contestants I stand here to offer myself to you elect me as the next SRC president, if I am elected as the President the areas are as I will tackle include indiscipline, sanitation and water"

Apart from the vocatives, development of points in the body, also suffer the wrong use of punctuation marks, especially the comma. A clear example is stated below to show a subject who tried to develop a point.

"I will make sure that I see to running of taxis in the school, because it is one of the problems, which I have noted in the school, at times it is not all the time that the school, an even after 2.00pm when we want go."

Again, subject's knowledge of the use of the dash (-) to separate words is inadequate. The few subjects who attempted using the dash to separate words did this wrongly. One clear example is the separation of the word "Sanitation". The subject wrote it as follows: "Sanitat- ion".

In the conclusion, another subject, in an attempt to address the audience wrote the following.

"Mr. Chairman principal of the school lady's and gentlemen".

Here again this subject does not recognize that commas are needed to separate the personalities involved. The use of the apostrophe (') is wrongly used here. Instead of the plural "ladies" the apostrophe "(lady's)" is used. This indicates the subject's poor knowledge in the use of the apostrophe (').

4.3 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The intention of the study was to find out the following from the subjects:

- could subjects identify the places where punctuation marks were to be inserted in the passage?
- could they insert the missing punctuation marks at their right places in the passage?
- could they write freely, on their own, using punctuation marks correctly?

From the results of the two exercise presented above, one would say the responses speak for themselves. The subjects do not have adequate knowledge on the use of punctuation marks, especially in continuous writing.

The following observations were made on the two exercises:

- The use of the full stop is on the whole inadequate, but better than the rest of the punctuation marks. This might stem from the way the passage was typed out with the paragraphing well set out. This made most subjects to identify the full stops at the end of each paragraph.
- The identification and use of the comma in the unpunctuated passage and the essay are also inadequate, looking at the low scores (about 87%), scoring between 1 – 10 out of 17 commas. The fact is also that commas are not adequately used in the essay as indicated by the examples given in 4.1 above.
- Subjects also find it difficult in identifying the colon and the semi-colon in the unpunctuated passage. No subject even attempted using these two punctuation marks

in their essays, even though there were opportunities to do so. The comma (,) was most often used to replace colons and semi-colons.

4. The identification and the use of the hyphen and the dash are a big problem to subjects. The word in the passage that subjects could easily identify was "make-up". However, many subjects did not know this, based on the results on hyphens. As for the dash, only one subject used it the essay and it was wrongly used in a word like "sanitation". The subject separated it as follows: "sanitat-ion"
5. Many subjects could not identify and use the apostrophe and quotation marks correctly. One or two subjects who attempted using the apostrophe, for example, used it wrongly. As indicated in the results in 4.1 above, 67 subjects scored zero (0) for quotation marks in the unpunctuated passage, indicating about half (1/2) the total number of subjects. The apostrophe also posed a big challenge to subjects. About 77 subjects scored between 0 – 1 indicating their weak knowledge in the use of the apostrophe
6. Parentheses (bracket) seem to be a strange punctuation mark to most subjects, since very few subjects (10%) used it.
7. Subjects were more familiar with capitalization than any of the other punctuation marks. This was particularly so with capital letters that began paragraphs and proper nouns. Those capital letters that however began sentences within paragraphs were mostly incorrectly inserted in the unpunctuated passage. In the essay, many subjects recognized the use of capital letters to begin sentences, except a few who still do not recognize this.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter tried to examine the results of the exercises given to subjects on the use of punctuation marks.

By means of a test and an exercise the study brought to light that Higher National Diploma (HND) students have a problem identifying punctuation marks in written texts (when these are not shown). Also they have a problem using these punctuation marks appropriately in their own continuous writing.

Therefore, adequate knowledge of this should help Communication Skills lecturers at the country's polytechnics to provide opportunities which will enhance students' communication skills in and outside the classroom. The results of the test and exercise further reveal that students were not taught the use of these punctuation marks at the lower levels of education and this could be the cause for the poor performance of HND students in English.

In Chapter Five of this study; suggestions will be offered to help teachers of first and second cycle institutions and Communication Skills lecturers of the polytechnics to place emphasis on the teaching of punctuation marks in their lessons.

4.5 OTHER ERRORS

Though these were not the concerns of the study, it is worth mentioning that some other errors appeared so glaringly that, the analysis can not conclude without pointing them out. This might promote future research into the causes for these errors.

One of the most glaring errors is the omission of personal pronouns before some verbs. For instance, it is common to see most subjects writing, "am a student .", instead of "I am a student. " Another example is "My name is Sadik Abubakari and studying Accounting in this school", instead of "My name is Sadik Abubakari and I am studying Accounting in this school".

Spelling errors are also very pronounced in the essays of subjects. Examples of such spelling errors noticed in the scripts of students include:

- (i) "famours" for "foremost"
- (ii) "gentlemens for "gentlemen"
- (iii) "greatful" for "grateful"
- (iv) "pose" for "post"
- (v) "trow" for "throw"
- (vi) "proved" for "provided"

These and a lot more of such errors recur in most of the essays.

A good number of concord errors also appeared in subjects' essays. For instance, a subject wrote, "The bond of contention have as stake whether I should be the SRC president or not". The error here is "bond" and "have". Even the spelling of "bone" is wrong. A second example of concord error is "The population of the students are now gradually increasing".

Again omission of essential articles before nouns is a common error in the essays of most subjects. For example, a subject wrote, "I am young lady by name Akos", instead of "I am a young lady by name Akos".

The above errors and several others detected in the essays of most subjects need to be further investigated and solutions offered to save students from the unpardonable errors in their written work.

SUGGESTIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The major objective of this study as stated in chapter one, is to identify errors in the use of punctuation marks in the written English of Higher National Diploma (HND) students, analyse them and suggest ways of correcting these errors.

Like earlier studies on errors in the written work of students, the present study has revealed that the HND students have a problem identifying and using punctuation marks in both print and in their own extended writing. The punctuation marks that HND students find most difficult are the use of the hyphen, the apostrophe, the quotation marks (both single and double) and in some limited cases the most common ones such as the full stop, the comma and the question mark.

This problem on the use of punctuation marks can be traced to many sources. The most common factor is the fact that, right from the basic to the tertiary level of education, students are not taught punctuation marks as a topic on its own in class. The common ones like the full stop, the comma and the question mark seem to be the only ones emphasized. Even the various uses of these marks are limited to the fact that full stops end sentences, commas are used to separate a list of items when writing and the question mark is used at the end of questions. Other uses of these marks are not taught to students.

For the more difficult marks like the hyphen, the apostrophe, the quotation mark, the dash, parenthesis, etc. teachers either consciously or unconsciously leave these aspects to the students to acquire in later life. Or they themselves do not know them and find it difficult to teach them.

Unfortunately, teachers in the second and tertiary institutions assume that these punctuation marks, which are so basic, would have been taught at the basic school level. As such they consider it a complete waste of time to teach the use of these punctuation marks at these levels, thus making the student handicapped in this aspect of English.

Another problem revealed about the usage of punctuation marks is inconsistency. Referring back to the literature review in chapter one, one could clearly see that there are differences on the specific number of punctuation marks one needs to use in one particular piece of writing. Whereas some identify as many as twelve (12) punctuation marks, others identify just the end marks (about three): the full stop, the exclamation mark and the question mark, which they consider important. Even in some printed text students see differences in the use of punctuation marks. This confuses students a great deal and it is also a cause of students' inability to use these punctuation marks appropriately.

Yet a bigger problem (from the researchers own observation) is the calibre of teachers who teach English in our schools. Due to the lack of qualified trained English teachers in the system, any person who passes through the formal education system, and in a way

passes his/her ordinary Level ('O' Level) or Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) may be asked to teach English. This assumption that "anybody" can teach English is a contributory factor to the inability of students to use punctuation marks appropriately.

The calibre of students admitted into the polytechnics also accounts for the poor performance of students in English. A glance at the admission forms of students in the Bolgatanga Polytechnic reveals that it is the Accountancy, Statistics and Marketing students, who are either 'O' level or SSSCE holders, who obtained between grade D and E in the English Language. The Secretarial and Management students are mostly those who passed through Secretarial Schools after completing Junior Secondary School and used passes in Business Communication at the Diploma in Business Studies (DBS) levels to gain admission into the polytechnics. Again, the majority of the HND students in Bolgatanga Polytechnic and other polytechnics are mostly those who could not make it to the university.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study wishes to offer the following recommendations for Communication Skills Lecturers at the country's polytechnics. These recommendations may also be useful to basic and second cycle institution teachers who teach English. HND, as well as other students who read this work will also benefit from it.

1. Communication Skills lecturers in the polytechnics should, as a matter of fact, consider teaching punctuation marks to their students as they do with other lessons.

This should be done considering each punctuation mark as an entity and teaching each of them in detail.

2. Teachers of basic and second cycle institution should also consider teaching these punctuation marks as early as possible to enable pupils get a full grasp of these punctuation marks before they gain admission into tertiary institutions.
3. The admission boards at the country's polytechnics should consider admitting students for the HND programmes with grade C or D or better instead of grade E. This will let students who intend pursuing the HND programmes to be more serious with the English Language at the second cycle level.
4. More practice exercises on punctuation marks should be given to students especially, HND students to enable them to get acquainted with the use of these marks. This will also help them to improve upon their communication skills both in and outside the classroom.
5. Refresher courses should also be organized periodically to update English teachers' knowledge in the subject.
6. For those teachers who are made to teach English because of lack of qualified teachers of English, in-service training should be given to them to equip them with the requisite knowledge and methodology to be able to handle the English lessons effectively.
7. The syllabus designers of Communication Skills for the country's polytechnics should re-consider designing the syllabus to reflect all aspects of the English Language, including the in-depth teaching of punctuation marks.

8. All punctuation marks should be given equal treatment. So teachers should desist from teaching only the most common ones such as full stops, commas, and question marks. Even though these common ones are taught, they are taught in a limited form. For example, students are only taught that full stops are used to end complete statements. How about the other aspects like using them to abbreviate words, titles etc?
9. The other errors such as spellings, concord, the omission of articles and personal pronouns should be tackled by English language teachers at the various levels of education to help students out of the problem.
10. Paragraphing is also noted to be a big problem for students. This should be handled well so that students' communication skills can be enhanced both in and outside the classroom.
11. Text books and other materials that treat punctuation marks as well as spelling, concord, etc. should be provided to schools, especially the polytechnics to enable both teachers and students to use them for teaching and learning.
12. The Communication Skills course should be extended to the second year of the polytechnic programme, to enable lecturers complete the syllabus.

5.2 SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

The study has taken a careful look at errors in the use of punctuation marks in the written English of students, particularly Higher National Diploma (HND) students based on a case study of the Bolgatanga Polytechnic. To achieve its objective, the study sampled about one hundred (100) subjects out of a total population of about two hundred and

eight-seven (287) students. The subjects were sampled across the Accountancy, Marketing, Statistics and Secretaryship and Management programmes.

The subjects were given a test on an unpunctuated passage to punctuate. An essay topic was also given to students to write on. The aim of the test was to find out if subjects could insert punctuation marks correctly in the passage. The essay topic was a campaign speech at a Students' Representative Council (SRC) election. This again, was meant to test students' ability to use punctuation marks correctly in their own extended writing.

The results of two exercises were scored and the results presented and analyzed. The findings are that there is complete lack of knowledge in the use of some punctuation marks by students both in the unpunctuated passage and the essay topic. Those punctuation marks that students found it difficult to identify and use were: colons, semi-colons, hyphens, quotation marks, the dash and exclamation points. The full stop, the comma, capitalization and the question mark were however better identified and used, even though there were still a few problems with these too.

The findings also revealed that students also have problems of spellings, concord, the use of articles, the use of the third person singular verbs and even paragraphing. These need a close look at by both researchers and English Language teachers so that students can be helped out of these problems in order to enhance effective communication skills of these students.

The researcher, on this note, wishes to state very clearly that, this study is not in any way exhaustive and therefore gives room for further research. Even the study itself is open for review by any interested person or group of persons, but with objectivity. I also wish to state that the other errors discovered in the work of students such as the spelling, concord, omission of articles, wrong use of the third person singular verbs, paragraphing and other such errors, should be a great concern for English Language teachers at all levels of education in Ghana.

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APPENDIX 1: Explanation of Terms

1. HND - Higher National Diploma
2. DBS - Diploma In Business Studies
3. 'O' Level - Ordinary Level
4. SSSCE - Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations
5. WAEC - West African Examinations Council

Read the following passage careful and put in the needed punctuation marks/capital letters

Those who see nothing wrong with makeup argue that man must continue to improve on gods creation else we would return to the culture of the Stone Age we go in for the latest fashions in dress and decorate our houses with vivid women not paint their lips or even their bodies to enhance their beauty. Makeup heightens the beauty of women and gives them the angelic brightness god intended for them.

But like the true disciple of hamlet that I am I would complain to my father: God has given you one face and you make yourself another. Unpainted houses may look unfinished and dull but I do not see unpainted lips ugly and incomplete on the contrary it retains the innocence God gave it. I believe a woman who uses makeup primarily intends nothing but to charm men.

Besides I do not know any religion that advocates makeup emboldened by Moses law against the use of ear rings one saint forbade a woman to smear their face with ensnaring devices of cunning while another one asked what have rough and white to do on a christian woman face. Why then should a woman perforate her ears or nose or even dye her hair?

Even feminists supporters of womens rights would like women to avoid makeup for they say it is one of the tools men use to subdue women. In the same vein holding to that male chauvinist pigs would have them concentrate on their work and so fall easy prey to their rights. Beauty cannot be a substitute for hard work they believe nor can it create self esteem no wonder they demonstrated so vehemently against beauty contest in america in the 1960s.

Environmentalists and animal rights groups also came up strongly against the use of cosmetics. Many living animals and plants are destroyed every year to manufacture makeups and this threatens the environment.

In 1984 they pointed out experiments were conducted on no more than seventeen thousand living animals and plants in experiments for the benefits of man surely it must be for something better than creating makeup. To beautify a womans face we should not deny our children the beauty of nature just because some women would like to have facelifts.

Perhaps the most important argument against women's use of makeup pertains to their health over the years. Women have been casualties of cosmetics that lead poisoning. Modern scientists have warned that cancer can be caused by skin bleaches and hair dyes and michael jackson can testify that his skin disease can cause harm indeed using makeup can be painful costly and

1. Read Under steps (11/17)
 2. Write marks 10
 3. 10

Read the following passage carefully and put in the needed punctuation marks. Capitalize.

Those who see nothing wrong with makeup argue that man must be allowed to improve on God's creation else we would return to the culture of the Stone Age. We go in for the latest fashions in dress and decorate our houses. Why should women not paint their lips ~~on their cheeks~~ or even their bodies. To them makeup heightens the beauty of women and gives them the angelic attractiveness God intended for them.

Some like the true disciple of Hamlet that I am, I would complain to my Spoken God, God has given you one face and you make yourself another. Unpainted houses may look unfinished and dull but I do not see unpainted houses as ugly and incomplete. On the contrary, it retains the innocence God gave it. I believe a woman who uses makeup primarily intends nothing but to enhance her beauty.

Besides, I do not know any religion that advocates makeup. The Bible has a law against the use of ear rings, one saint forbade a woman to cover her face with ensnaring devices of cunning, while another one asked why they have rouge and white to do on a Christian woman's face. Why then should a woman perforate her ears or nose or even dye her hair?

Even feminists—supporters of women's rights—would like women to stop using makeup for they say it is one of the tools men use to subdue women. Instead of yielding to that male chauvinist pigs, would have them concentrate on their studies and so fall easy prey to their rights. Beauty cannot be a substitute for hard work, they believe, nor can it create self-esteem. Not only that, but they have also demonstrated so vehemently against beauty contests in America.

Environmentalists and animal rights groups also came up strongly against the use of cosmetics. Many living animals and plants are destroyed every year to manufacture make-ups and this threatens the environment.

In 1954, they pointed out experiments were conducted on no more than fifteen thousand living animals and plants in experiments for the purpose of beautifying a woman's face. We should not deny our children the beauties of nature just because some women would like to have facelifts.

Perhaps, the most important argument against women's use of makeup is its effect on their health. Over the years, women have been castigated for their use of lead paint, tanning, and modern scientists have warned that cancer can be caused by hair dyes, hair straighteners, and hair dyes, and Michael Jackson can testify that heavy use of makeup can cause harm. Indeed, using makeup can be painful, costly,

Other facial makeup beautification is cosmetics usage
 26

Read the following passage carefully and put in the needed punctuation marks-capital letters

Those who see nothing wrong with make-up argue that man must continue to improve on God's creation else we would return to the culture of the Stone Age. People go in for the latest fashions in dress and decorate our houses with them. Should women not paint their lips ~~with~~ or even their bodies, for them make-up heightens the beauty of women and gives them the angelic brightness God intended for them?

But like the true disciple of Hamlet that I am I would complain to my Epithet God has given you one face and you make yourself another. Unpainted houses may look unfinished and dull but I do not see unpainted lips ugly and incomplete. On the contrary it retains the innocence God gave it. I believe a woman who uses make-up primarily intends nothing but to charm men.

Besides I do not know any religion that advocates make-up emboldened by Moses law against the use of ear rings one saint forbade a woman to smear ~~her~~ face with ensnaring devices of cunning while another one asked what have rough and white to do on a christian woman's face? Why then should a woman perforate her ears or nose or even dye her hair?

Even feminists supporters of women's rights would like women to avoid using make-up for they say it is one of the tools men use to subdue women. Instead of yielding to that male chauvinist pigs would have them concentrate on their looks and so fall easy prey to their rights beauty cannot be a substitute for hard work they believe nor can it create self esteem. No wonder they demonstrated so vehemently against beauty contest in America in the 1960s.

Environmentalists and animal rights groups also came up strongly against the use of cosmetics many living animals and plants are destroyed every year to manufacture make-ups and this threatens the environment.

In 1984 they pointed out experiments were conducted on no more than seventeen thousand living animals and plants in experiments for the benefits of man surely it must be for something better than creating make-ups to beautify a woman's face we should not deny our children the beauties of nature just because some women would like to have facelifts.

Perhaps the most important argument against women's use of make-up is the risk to their health over the years women have been casualties of cosmetics and lead poisoning. Modern scientists have warned that cancer can be caused by skin bleach and hair dyes and Michael Jackson can testify that hair spray can cause harm, indeed using make-up can be painful, costly and deadly.

Full letters Full stops Commas Colons Semi colons Apostrophes
 17 2 10 73 6 2

Mr Chairman, Acting Principal,
Acting Secretary, ~~Dean of Students,~~
Lecturers, Administration Staff, fellow
Student.

Mr Chairman, my name is Judith
and Contesting for the position
in the Students Representatives
Council President. Mr chairman, you
would agree with me that the
polytechnic is facing a whole lot of
problems here and there, to begin
with Mr Chairman, to begin with when
I am voted into power as the S.R.C.
President, I and my surburbs here
would make sure that as the school
is facing water problem, water
would be supplied to the students
twice every week to help sustain
the students until the laying out of
the pipeline is completed.

Mr Chairman, when I'm been
voted into power as the S.R.C.
President I make sure that the ^{bridge} gap
between the students body and
administration is closed, that is
making sure that the grievances of
students reach the administration
and bring every feedback to the
administration. In this way there would be
a good relationship between students
the administration and I hope that

Speech: elections

I am a young girl later by name Akos
 who wants to contest for the elections.
 I am the principal of the school. I hope
 all the gentlemen may you have my regards.
 I have been contesting for the post of
 the President of the school. I am very
 much grateful for standing before you to tell
 you to vote for me as your president. I wish
 to tell you that I will not find your
 vote a very value. I will vote for me as
 your president.

The first thing I will see to
 it is about the growth of the school and how
 of material which will enable the students
 feel comfortable when studying. I will
 be a life time officer. I will make sure to provide enough facilities
 which will enable both teachers and students
 to have a comfortable living life in the school.
 I will ensure that the school is a source of information
 from the school to students.

Next also, I will ensure that
 the school will be a source of information
 will to become a well fed ball for the school.
 I will ensure that the school will be a source of information
 and attempt to be a well fed ball. Here I go
 my speech.

Farewell
 Akos

