

## **Punctuation Errors in Writing: A Comparative Study of Students' Performance from Different Pakistani Universities**

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### **Abstract**

*The study aimed at exploring the different types of punctuation errors made by students in their writings, the reasons behind these errors, and the reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by students from two different sets of universities, with one set belonging to backward areas and the other set to well-developed areas. The universities selected from the backward areas were Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) Kohat, University of Malakand (UoM), Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University (SBBU), Sheringal University (SU) and Khushal Khan Khattak University (KKKU), Karak and the universities selected from developed areas were National University of Modern Languages, (NUML) Islamabad, International Islamic University (IIU), Islamabad, University of Sargodha (UoS) and Gomal University (GU), Dera Ismail Khan. The study used Corder (1975)'s Error Analysis approach for analysing the errors. The study used mixed-method research design. The sample included a total of 200 students, out of which 25 students were selected from each university through simple random sampling technique. Test and interviews were used as instruments for data collection. For the identification of punctuation errors, the students were made to take a punctuation test. A probe was made into the possible reasons behind the punctuation errors by interviewing the students. The data collected was analysed by using content analysis technique. The study revealed that the most frequent errors were errors related to comma, apostrophe, and capitalization. The analysis of the interviews showed that the lack of practice on punctuation marks, lack of teaching punctuation within context, lack of checking of punctuation errors and lack of error corrective feedback on the punctuation errors were the major reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors.*

**Keywords:** Punctuation, Punctuation errors, Error analysis, KUST, NUML, IIUI, KKKUK

### **Introduction**

Writing is a very challenging task and mastering it requires both skills and effort. Students face many problems in the correct and appropriate use of punctuation marks while learning English as a second or foreign language. Appropriate use of punctuation marks makes writing understandable as it clarifies its meaning whereas their wrong use leads to ambiguity and confusion. According to Tariq Rehman (2005), punctuation is a device that is used by a writer for assisting their readers in understanding the meaning of their words". Adelola (2017) states that punctuation mark is the use of conventional signs and certain typographical devices as aids to the understanding of handwritten and printed texts. Omission, as well as the wrong use of punctuation marks, leads to confusion. According to Mccuen & Winkler (2000), punctuation errors occur with the omission or misuse of one of the punctuation marks. Punctuation errors are found in the writing of many students from different universities of Pakistan. Normally students in some universities of Pakistan know the punctuation marks and their placement theoretically but when it comes to their practical application, they use them inappropriately and incorrectly. However, the competence in the proper use of punctuation marks varies between the students coming from universities situated in well-developed areas and students coming from universities situated in backward areas. The current study follows the identification of different punctuation errors made by final year students of BS English, the reasons behind these errors, and the basic reasons behind the difference in frequency of punctuation errors made by

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students from two different sets of universities as its objectives. The research questions to be answered by the study are: 1. What are the punctuation errors made by final year students of English from different universities? 2. What are the general reasons behind the punctuation errors? 3. What are the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by final year students of English from different universities? 4. What are the basic reasons behind the difference in frequency of punctuation errors made by final year students of English from different universities?

Due to the lack of time and resources, the current study was delimited to eight universities of Pakistan, with four belonging to backward areas and four belonging to well-developed areas. The universities selected for the study from the backward areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan were KUST, SBBU, UoM and KKKUK and the four universities selected from the well-developed areas of Pakistan were NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI.

### **Literature Review**

When people speak, they make use of voice intonation, hand gestures, and eye movement to express ideas. When they write, they take the help of punctuation marks to tell the reader when to slow down, stop, or emphasize. So, learning the use of punctuation is very important because they bring clarity to writing. Writing is viewed as a multifaceted and tricky activity for many students. Teachers must focus on the grammatical concepts necessary for clear communication of meaning. Punctuation marks are very much essential to communicate meaning. The misuse of punctuation marks adds to unorganized writing and bamboozles the readers. Structure and coherence in every piece of writing are affected by punctuation marks (Gamaroff, 2000; Shaughnessy, 1977). According to Carroll and Wilson (1993), learners face punctuation problems because there are no universal rules of punctuation. In the same way, Byrne (1988) said punctuation is extremely difficult because it has never been standard. Shokouhi and Dabbagh (2009) said that learners face difficulties in using periods and comma. Mahmood et al. (2014) say that errors of punctuation are the most frequent errors in the writing of students. He says that the students commit punctuation errors in a bulky magnitude, particularly, the errors in the use of full stop, comma and apostrophe. The students mostly use “of” to show possession for animate nouns. It means that the rules of punctuation are not taught to them properly and they keep on making errors of punctuation.

Sajid and Siddiqui (2015) say that punctuation errors are the most dominant errors found in the different writings of the students of social sciences and medical sciences. The percentage of punctuation errors is 27 that is above other types of grammatical errors. Students both from medical sciences and social sciences faced difficulty with using a comma. They say that the use of comma requires in-depth understanding of English grammar for proper use of punctuations as the comma is used in more than 16 various places in a sentence of complex or compound types. However, most common mistakes in punctuations were omitted and additionally used a comma. Younus and Albalavi (2015) reported that students suffered severely in using the punctuation marks appropriately in their text. They pointed out that the absence of the capital letter at the beginning of new sentences, rare capitalization of proper nouns, incorrect usage of the colon, the omission of the semicolon, the absence of the exclamation mark where required, poor or no revision of what is written and not enough spaces between words, lack of question marks and the omission of the comma after introductory elements were the most severe errors in the writing of the students. They reported that the students of the subject need learning the aspects of the English punctuation system, such as the way to punctuate a question or when to end a sentence.

Without enough linguistic proficiency in the English language, writing is one of the most difficult tasks, particularly, in different genre-specific disciplines by L2 trainee writers. Sajid (2016) studied the role of expression and diction through error analysis in the English language of L2 fresh writers' academic text in interdisciplinary texts of Business & Management Sciences and IT & Computer Sciences. He evaluated a corpus of forty introductions of the published research articles that were downloaded from different journals. 20 articles of IT & Computer Sciences and 20 articles of Business & Management sciences were downloaded. These were written by L2 novel writers. He found that punctuation errors are the most frequent errors in the writings of the writers. Abbasi (2017) says that punctuation errors are the most frequent errors made by undergraduate students in Pakistan. The analysis of the writings shows that total of 111 mistakes were committed by the students in which 41 were punctuation mistakes. The frequency of punctuation errors among females was 42 percent

and among males, it was 32 percent which shows that female students make more punctuation errors as compared to male students. The ratio of punctuation errors was 61:50.

It is clear that the students of every level face problems in using punctuation marks. There can be many reasons behind it. First language interference, over-generalization, and little knowledge of written English rules and conventions can be accounted for as the major causes of errors (Hussain et al., 2013). Pakistani English teachers regard first language interference, large classes, lack of motivation both on the part of learners and teachers, inadequate teacher training, and lack of knowledge regarding modern instructional and error analysis methodologies as the prime factors behind errors in students' written English at the degree level (Butt & Rasul, 2012). Another study confirmed that the majority of the errors in Pakistani students' written English resulted from mother-tongue interference (Sarfraz, 2011). Moy (1996) stated that errors are committed due to the lack of teaching materials provided by the English teachers and lack of teaching methods besides motivation. Therefore, motivation towards the use of punctuation marks might help students deal with punctuation activities and pay them more attention to use them correctly in their writing.

A review of the related literature on punctuation errors indicates that it is important for English learners to understand the significance and function of punctuation marks. The review shows that almost all the researchers conducted research to figure out the different types of punctuation errors that students make. These studies were limited to just a single institution. The current research focuses on all punctuation errors in four different universities of Pakistan. The study will discover the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors and the basic reasons behind these differences in the writing of students from different universities.

### **Research Methodology**

The current study uses Corder (1975)'s approach to analyze the errors made by the students. Corder suggests the following steps in the process of analysis of errors i.e. 1) Collection of the sample, 2) Recognition of errors, 3) Description of errors, and 4) Explanation of errors

### **Participants**

Two hundred final year bachelor students of English were selected for the study by using simple random sampling. The teachers were asked to provide the mixed ability group. From each selected university, 25 students were selected. Most of them were from the age group of 18-25 years. The students from KUST and KKKUK were native Pashto speakers and students from NUML and IIUI were native speakers of Urdu, Balochi, Panjabi, and Pahari.

### **The Method of the Research**

The mixed-method research design was used to analyze the performance of the students in punctuating a paragraph. In the first phase, the researchers provided an unpunctuated paragraph to the students to be punctuated. In the second phase, interviews of the students were conducted to know the basic reasons behind the committed errors. The data collected through interviews was analyzed to know the basic reasons behind the differences in frequency of punctuation errors made by students of different universities.

### **The Instrument of the Research**

The researchers used test and interviews as instruments for the collection of data. The test was taken from the students in the form of a paragraph. The students were asked to punctuate the paragraph. After that, the researchers took interviews from the students. Open-ended questions were asked from the students regarding the problem.

### **The Techniques of Data Analysis**

The researchers analyzed the punctuated paragraph of each student and found out the errors made by the student by using the content analysis technique. The researchers listed the errors made by the students in the form of tables. The errors made by the students from different universities were compared to know if there are any differences in the frequency of errors.

The interviews were analyzed by using content analysis technique to know the basic reasons behind the errors made by the students. The different reasons given by the students from different universities were listed under the name of each university. Then, these reasons were analyzed to know the basic reasons behind the difference in frequency of punctuation errors made by the students from different sets of universities.

**Data Analysis**

**Quantitative Data**

The analysis of the paragraphs given to the students for punctuation shows that the students face difficulties in using punctuation marks.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of KUST.

**Chart 1.**

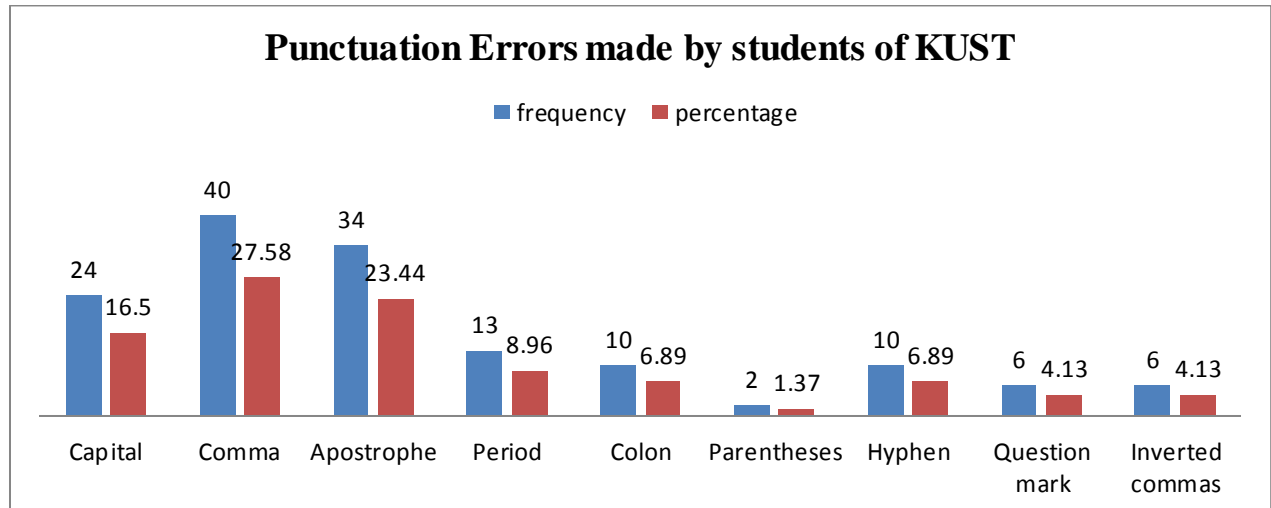
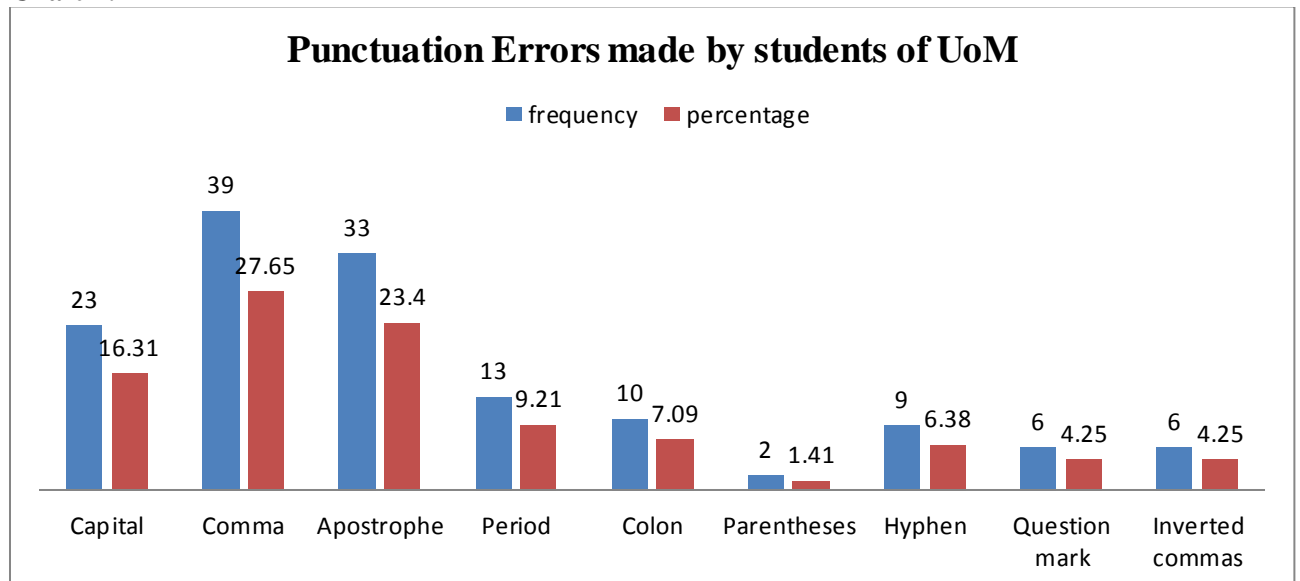


Chart 1. shows that the paragraphs contained 43 punctuation marks. Total of 145 errors were made by the students. The students were good at using full stop, parenthesis, question mark, and inverted commas. The students faced problems in using comma, capitalization, and apostrophe. The chart given above shows that the percentage of comma errors is greater than all the other types of errors. The basic reason behind it is that comma is used in many places and it performs different functions in the text. Students get confused in using it because of its multiple functions. Apostrophe error is on the second position with 23 percentage. The use of apostrophe is always problematic for students because sometimes it is used for contractions and sometimes it is used for showing possession.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of UoM.

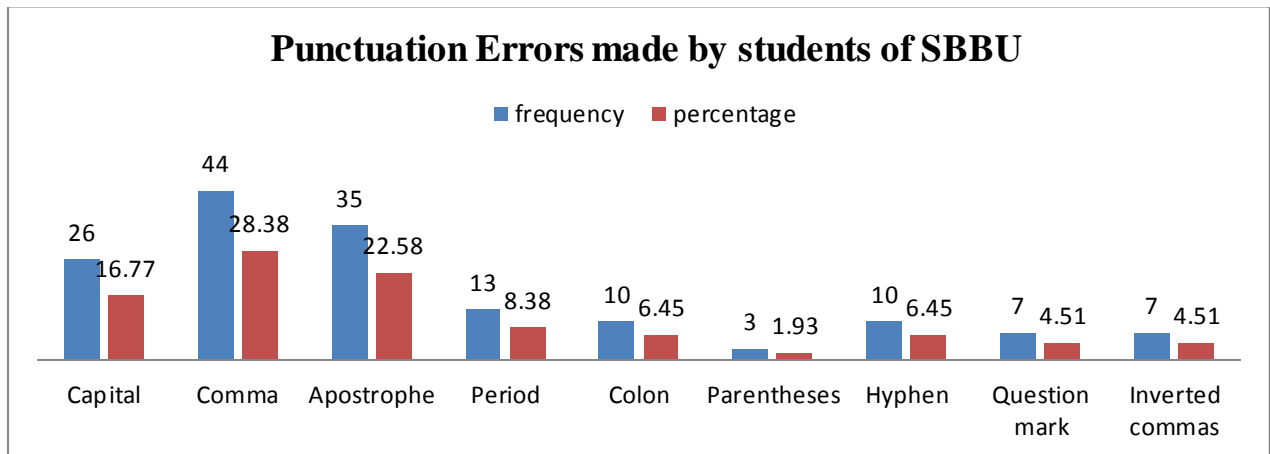
**Chart 2.**



The students of the University of Malakand faced the same problems as KUST students in using punctuation marks. Chart 2. shows that comma errors are more than any other type of punctuation mark. Its percentage is 27.65 which is above all the other punctuation marks.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of SBBU.

**Chart 3.**



A comma is used in many places in a text to perform multiple functions. It can play different functions in the same sentence. Due to its multiple functions, it is difficult for students to use it appropriately and correctly. Chart 3. shows that the comma-related errors are 28.38 percent of the total errors. The percentage of apostrophe errors also shows that students face problems in using it. The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of KKKUK.

**Chart 4.**

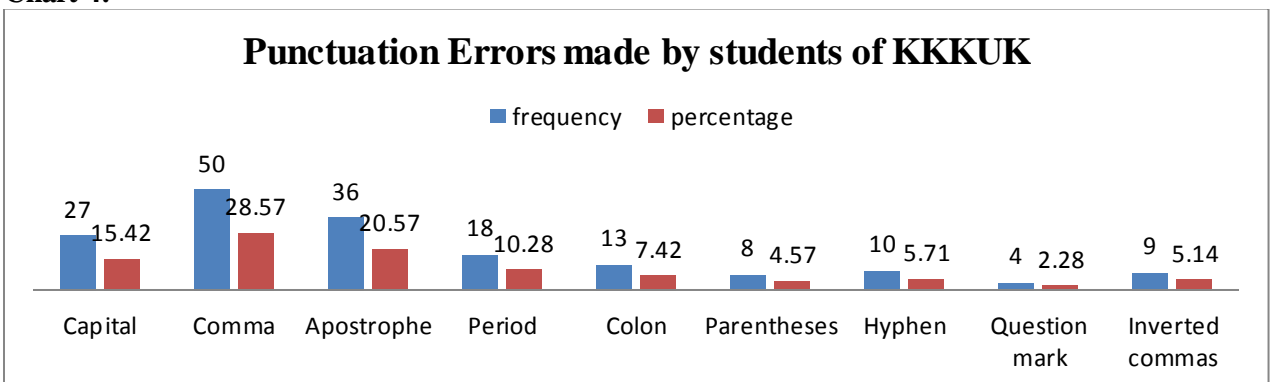


Chart 4. shows that, like the students of Kohat University of Science and Technology, the students of Khushal Khan Khattak University also faced problems in using comma, capitalization, and apostrophe. Once again the percentage of comma errors is higher than that of all other types of errors. The use of apostrophe is the second highest percentage of errors.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of NUML.

**Chart 5.**

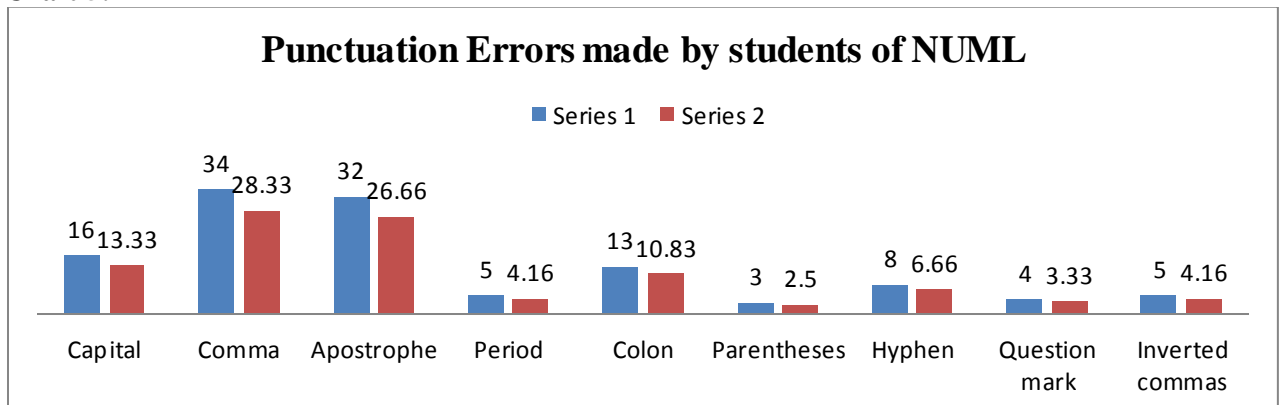


Chart 5. shows that the students of NUML were quite good at using punctuation marks as compared to the students from other universities. They made fewer errors in the test as compared to the students from other universities. Like the students from other universities, the students of NUML also faced issues in using comma and apostrophe. The percentage of comma errors is, like the students from KUST and KKKUK, higher than the other types of errors. The percentage of apostrophe errors made by the NUML students is higher than that of KUST and KKKUK students.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of UoS.

**Chart 6.**

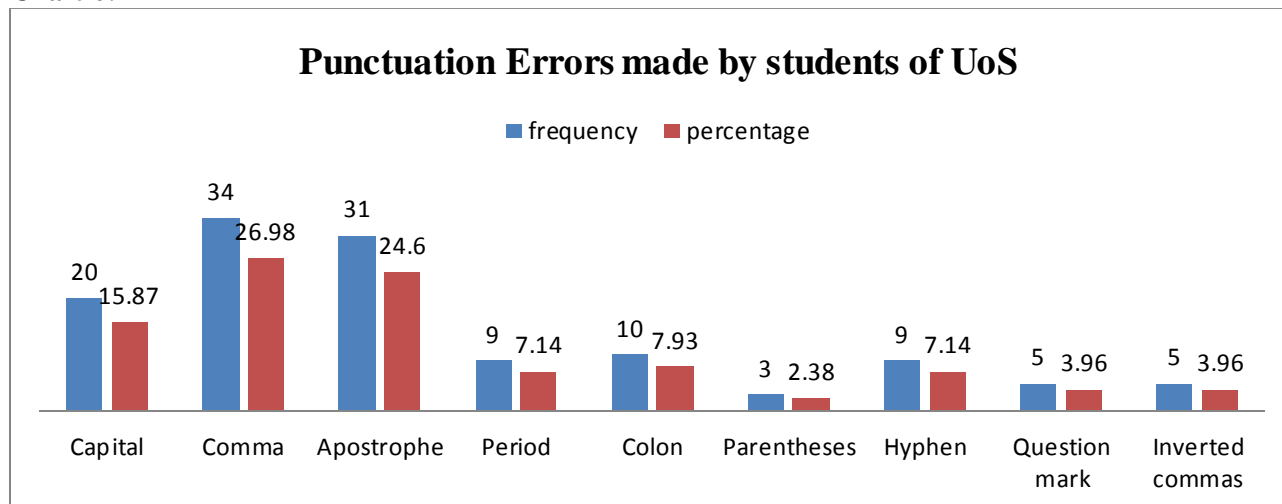
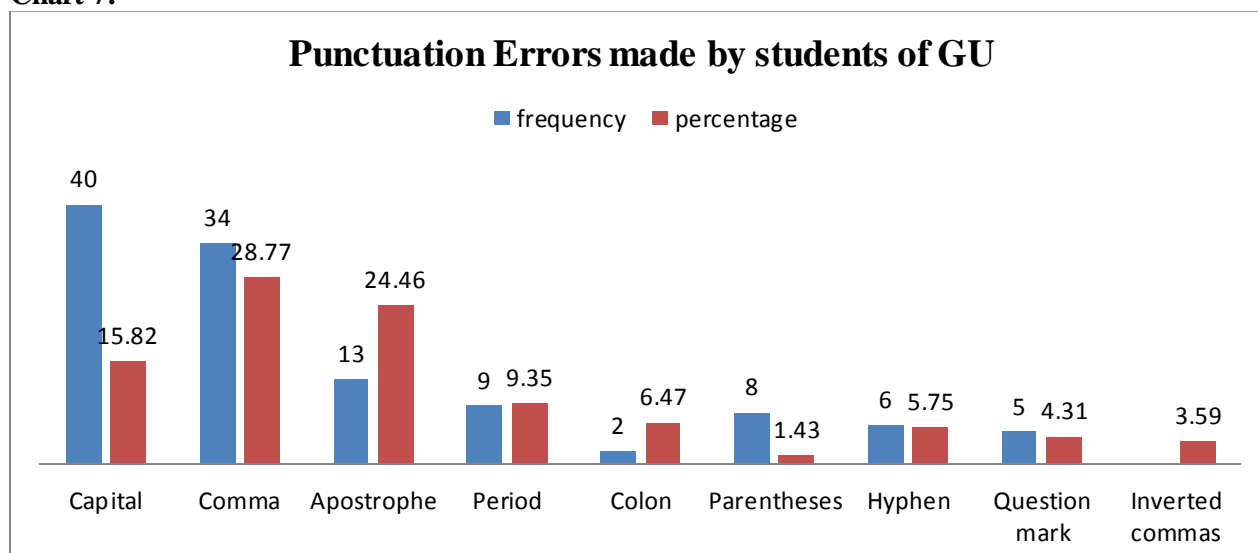


Chart 6. shows that a total of 126 punctuation errors are committed by the students of the University of Sargodha. Inverted commas and question mark errors are the same in number. Capital errors are 20. It shows that students get confused in where to use capital letter and where not to use. Students of University of Sargodha are better in using punctuation marks than the students of the other universities.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of GU.

**Chart 7.**



Gomal University is located in Dera Ismail Khan. Chart 7. shows that the students of Gomal University are good at using parenthesis, inverted commas, and question mark as their percentages are less than the other punctuation errors. Comma error is on top. Comma errors are 40 and its percentage is 28.77 which is higher than all the other kinds of punctuation errors.

The below-given chart illustrates the percentage and frequency of the different types of punctuation errors made by the students of IIUI.

Chart 8.

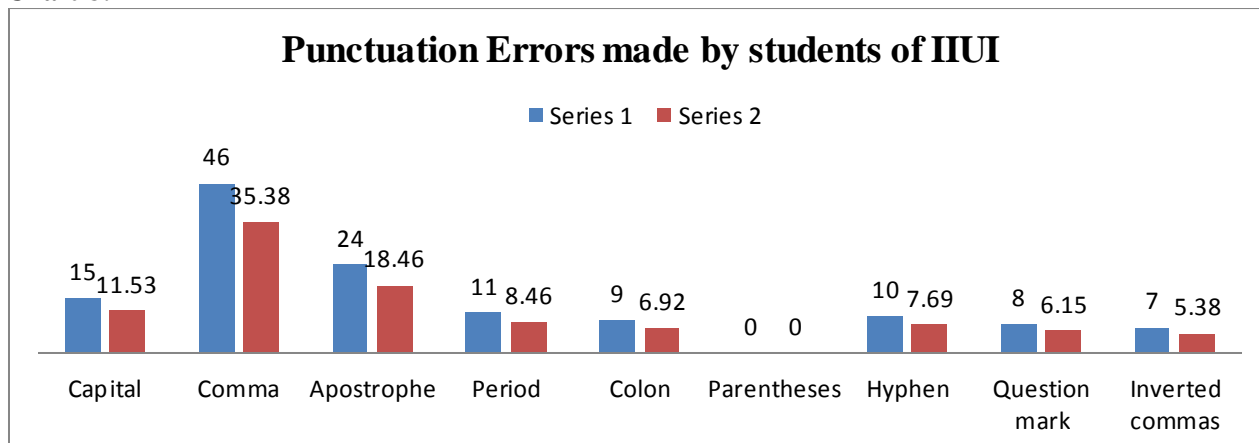


Chart 8. shows that the comma errors are the most frequent errors made by the students of IIUI. The percentage of comma and apostrophe errors is highest than all the other types of errors. The comma errors are found to be the most frequent because of its various functions in texts. It is said that there are fourteen functions of comma. Due to the multiple functions of a comma in various kinds of text and at various places, the students get confused in its use and they commit errors. The chart shows the no parenthesis mistake is committed by the students.

The below-given chart shows the comparison of the universities in terms of punctuation errors.

Chart 9.

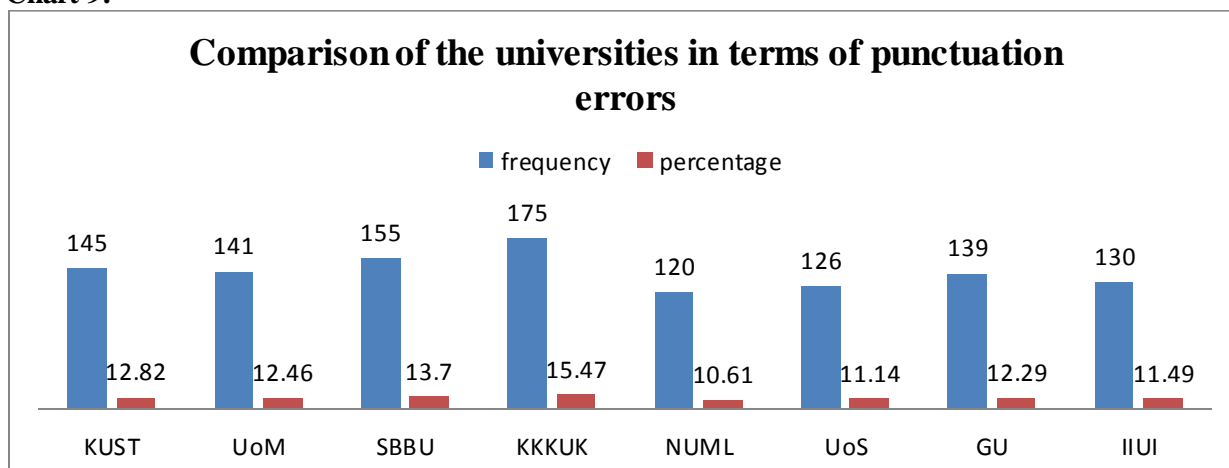


Chart 9. shows that the students from SBBU and KKKUK made more errors as compared to those of NUML and IIUI. The chart shows a big difference in the frequency of punctuation errors. The chart shows that the students of KKKUK and SBBU make more errors as compared to students of NUML and IIUI.

**Qualitative Data**

**Reasons Behind the Punctuation Errors**

**Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat**

After the test, the students were interviewed and were asked to tell the major reasons behind the errors made by them. The analysis of the interviews shows that the major reasons behind the errors are the lack of practice of using punctuation marks, the mother tongue interference (to some extent), and lack of knowledge of the punctuation marks. Ahmed et al. (2016) also reported that one of the major reasons behind the students’ errors is the interference of the mother tongue. Sarfraz (2011) also noted that the major reason behind the errors made by the students is the interference of the first language. Some of the students responded that their schooling has an impact on their use of punctuation marks.

**University of Malakand**

The students of the University of Malakand also reported that the use of punctuation marks is not taught to them. They said that their punctuation mistakes are not checked properly by the teachers that is why they face many problems in the use of punctuation marks. They also added that their main

focus is learning of the spoken language, not written language that is why they are weak in using punctuation marks.

**Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal**

Some people opine that in this modern world, fluency is more important than accuracy. The ones who say that fluency is more important than accuracy don't focus on writing skills. Some teachers and instructors are also in favor of fluency due to which they don't focus on the improvement of students' writing skills. They encourage students to speak more and more. Due to this some of the students are weak in using punctuation marks. Students of the above-mentioned university pointed out that their focus is upon learning the spoken language rather than written language that is why they face problems in the appropriate use of punctuation marks.

**Khushal Khan Khattak University, Karak**

The students reported that they don't focus on their punctuation marks when they use it. They said that they are not taught the use of punctuation in their schools and colleges and now they are not taught it in their university as well that leads them to make these mistakes. Abbasi (2017) also reported that our schooling system does not focus on the writing skills, of which punctuation skill is one skill, of the students; rather they focus on memorization and cramming. The error corrective feedback plays a highly important role in learning the use of punctuation marks but unfortunately, the students are not provided with error corrective feedbacks because of which many students have problems in using these punctuation marks. When someone learns the marks within context, he never forgets it. Learning anything within a context helps in applying it easily and appropriately. Learning punctuation within context helps in using it appropriately.

**National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad**

The students said that they do not face much problem in the use of punctuation marks and they are good at using it. The few errors that they made in the test are due to the lack of attention. They said that their instructors check their punctuation errors and ask them to correct it on their own. This helps them in learning and using the marks accurately. Some students were of the opinion that the error corrective feedback provided to them by their teachers is very momentous in and helpful in taking command over the punctuation marks. According to the interviewed students, some of the reasons behind their punctuation errors are the lack of interest and attention in learning punctuation marks, the unconscious use of the punctuation marks, and the multiple functions of a single punctuation mark in different places. According to Mahmood et al (2014), one of the reasons behind the errors is the lack of practice of using punctuation marks. The current study confirmed that it is one of the basic reasons behind punctuation errors. Students do not practice on the use of punctuation marks.

**University of Sargodha**

Students of the University of Sargodha said that the punctuation marks were not taught of them within a context due to which they are unable to memorize the use of each punctuation mark. Language instructors suggest that if the uses punctuation marks are taught to the students within a context, they will never forget it and they would be in a better position to use it appropriately and correctly. Students of the said university added that they face problems in the use of punctuation marks because they were not taught the use of punctuation marks within a context.

**Gomal University, D. I. Khan**

Error-corrective feedback is very much important in teaching-learning process. University teachers should check every type of mistake. Then, they should provide students with error-corrective feedback. Once students learn through this, they never forget it. Students of the GU reported that their punctuation mistakes were checked by their teachers but are not provided with error-corrective feedback. As a result, they are weak in the use of punctuation marks.

**International Islamic University, Islamabad**

The students of International Islamic University, Islamabad reported that the use of punctuation requires to read more and more. The more one reads, the more one will be able to use the punctuation marks accurately and appropriately. If one does not read and does not focus on the punctuation marks used in a text, one will not be able to learn it and use it accurately in one's writing. They reported that they don't read more that is why they commit punctuation mistakes in their writing. They also said that text messaging and social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp have destroyed their writing, especially the use of punctuation marks. They said that they don't use punctuation marks



in their texts and messages that lead them to forget the use of punctuation marks. The students said that the lack of practice on the use of punctuation marks is also one of the reasons behind their punctuation errors.

**Reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by students from different Pakistani universities**

The above chart 5 illustrates that there are differences between the frequencies of punctuation errors made by students from different universities. There are many reasons behind the difference in the frequency of errors made by students from KUST, KKKUK, UoM, and SBBU and NUML, IIUI, UoS, and GU. The analysis of the interviews conducted from the students shows the following reasons behind the differences in frequency of punctuation errors:

1. The punctuation marks are not taught to the students of KKKUK, UoM, and SBBU while these are taught to the students of NUML, UoS, and IIUI.
2. Anything that is learned within context cannot be easily forgotten. If a person learns the use of punctuation within context, they will remember it for a longer period and if a person keeps practicing the use of punctuation marks, he/she will never forget it. Punctuation marks are not taught within the context that leads the students from UoM and KKKUK to make these mistakes, whereas, the students of UoS and NUML were taught punctuations within the context.
3. The error-corrective feedback on punctuation errors is not provided to the students of KKKUK and KUST. On the contrary, the teachers at NUML and IIUI provide error corrective feedback on the errors of students and help them improve and learn it.
4. The students at KKKUK and KUST said that their schooling had a big impact on their punctuation errors. Besides these students said they had got education in government schools and colleges where they were not asked to focus on punctuation. They got education in Urdu medium schools and colleges that is why they are not good at English, especially at using punctuation marks. On the other hand, the students from NUML and IIUI have got education in English medium schools that is why they are good at English, and specifically at the use of punctuation marks.
5. The students of KUST, UoM, SBBU, and KKKUK are Pashto speakers and English is a foreign language to them. First, they acquire their mother tongue and after this, they learn Urdu which is their national language after which they learn English. When they learn English, both languages, Urdu and Pashto, interfere. On the other hand, the English language is a second language for Urdu speakers. The students from NUML, UoS, GU, and IIUI are almost Urdu speakers and when they learn English, just one language interferes that is Urdu. In the case of Pashto speakers, two languages interfere. Due to these reasons, the students from NUML and IIUI make fewer errors than the students from KKKUK, UoM, SBBU, and KUST.
6. The students from NUML and IIUI reported that their punctuations were consistently checked by the instructors and the punctuation errors are pointed out by the teachers. After pointing out the errors, the teachers motivate the students to do research on the use of punctuation marks and learn it on their own. This helps the students to learn and to take command over the use of punctuation marks. On the other side, the students from UoM and KKKUK said that their use of punctuation marks is not checked consistently and they are not motivated to learn them. Rather they are asked not to use them as they are difficult to master. This leads the students of UoM, SBBU, and KKKUK to make more errors as compared to the students of NUML, UoS, and IIUI and due to this, there is a difference in the frequency of punctuation errors made by the students of KUST, UoM, SBBU and KKKUK, and NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI.

**Findings and Discussion**

The use of punctuation marks in every type of text plays an important role in beautifying the text. It helps people understand and comprehend the text easily. If no punctuation mark is used in a text, it becomes highly problematic for the readers to comprehend it. But, unfortunately, students are very much weak in using these marks. They face problems in using the marks appropriately. Ijaz et al. (2014) say that punctuation errors are the most frequent errors made by students. In the same way,

Sajid and Siddiqui (2015), Younus and Alabalvi (2015), and Abbasi noted in their researches that punctuation mistakes are the most frequently committed mistakes by the students. The analysis of the paragraph given to the students for punctuation showed that the students are very weak in using punctuation marks. This study is carried out on the students of English. The students of English are expected to make fewer errors as compared to the students of other subjects but the result shows that the students of English are also facing problems in the use of punctuation marks. The major problematic punctuation marks for the students were comma and apostrophe. The comma is used in many places in the text and it performs different functions in different places. These multiple functions of comma confuse the students and the students misuse it. One another reason behind this can be that the comma is the most frequently used punctuation mark as compared to the other punctuation marks that is why the frequency of its mistakes is more than that of other punctuation marks. The same is the case with apostrophe as well. An apostrophe is used for indicating possession and it is also used for indicating contraction. Apostrophe represents the missing letters in a word. In all the universities, the students were having problems using these two marks. The percentage of these errors is higher than that of other punctuation marks in all the researched universities. The percentages of comma errors made by students of KUST, KKKUK, NUML, and IIUI are 27.58, 28.57, 28.33, and 35.38 respectively. It can be noted that the percentage of comma mistakes of the KUST, KKKUK, and NUML is almost the same. It shows that almost all the students in different universities face problems in using a comma. The percentage of comma errors of IIUI is higher than that of the other universities. The percentages of apostrophe errors made by students of KUST, KKKUK, NUML, and IIUI are 23.44, 20.57, 26.66, and 18.46 respectively. The percentage of apostrophe errors of NUML is higher than the other universities. Mahmood et al. and Younus and Alabalvi also reported that the most common punctuation marks that have errors are comma and apostrophe. There are many reasons behind these punctuation errors. Mahmood et al. found out that the basic reason behind the punctuation errors is that the rules of punctuation are not taught to the students. Hussain et al. (2013) noted that the students are not taught the use of punctuation marks that leads them make mistakes. He also reported that the mother tongue interference is also responsible for the errors that students make. The analysis of the interviews confirmed and supported the results of the researchers I have just mentioned. The current study also found out that the major reasons behind punctuation errors are lack of interest in learning punctuation marks and mother tongue interference. The study also confirmed that students are not taught punctuation marks and it is one of the basis reasons behind punctuation errors. The use of punctuation appropriately is very much important. The students of English must know the rules of punctuation marks and they should be taught the use of punctuation marks. It is very pathetic that after studying English language for four years, the students of English makes serious errors in the use of punctuation marks. Some of the students reported that they don't take interest in learning the use of punctuation marks. Such students should be encouraged to take interest in learning it. This can be done by arranging different seminars on the importance of punctuation marks. The comparison of the errors made by students from different universities showed that the students from KKKUK, UoM, SBBU and KUST make more errors as compared to the students from NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI. Chart 5. shows that 55% of the mistakes are committed by the students from KUST, UoM, SBBU and KKKUK and 45% mistakes are made by the students from NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI.

The researchers have focused on the individual institutions in terms of punctuation errors and none of the researchers conducted the comparative study of the punctuation errors made by students from different universities. Sarfraz (2011) conducted her research on the students of FAST National University. Abbasi (2017) carried out his research at two institutions; Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, and Orasoft Training Institute (An affiliated institute of Federal Urdu University of Arts Sciences & Technology, Karachi), but he did not compare their results. He just focused on the mistakes of the students. The study in hand is carried out at eight different universities of Pakistan to know if there are any differences between the universities in terms of punctuation errors. The four universities are selected from the rural areas and the other four universities are selected from the urban areas of Pakistan. The universities selected from rural areas were KUST, SBBU, UoM, KKKUK, and SBBU and the universities selected from the urban areas were NUML, UoS, GU, and IIUI. The study explored that there are differences in the frequency of punctuation errors made by

students from these universities. The study not just focused on the punctuation errors but it also focused on the basic reasons behind the differences in frequency of punctuation errors between different universities. The study found out that the basic reasons behind the difference in the frequency of punctuation errors are mother tongue interference, lack of teaching of punctuation marks, lack of checking of punctuation marks, and lack of error corrective feedback. The students from SBBU, UoM, and KKKUK are not taught the use of punctuation marks that is why they commit more mistakes as compared to the students of NUML and IIUI. The students of NUML, UoS and IIUI are taught the use of punctuation that is why they are much good at using punctuation marks. It shows that punctuation errors can be controlled if the students are taught how to use them. The students of UoM and KKKUK are not provided with the error-corrective feedback that leads them to make mistakes. The error-corrective feedback has got great importance in teaching and learning. Once the students are provided with the error corrective feedback on their errors, they never forget it. The teachers must provide error corrective feedback to the students. The teachers should tell the students their mistakes and should ask the students to correct their mistakes. On the other hand, the students from NUML and IIUI are provided error-corrective feedback on their errors that helps them learn and use the punctuation marks easily. One another reason behind the difference in the frequency of punctuation errors is that the students of KUST, UoM, SBBU, and KKKUK have got their education in Urdu medium schools in their villages. The schools in villages are not of standard. In these schools, the focus is not given to the punctuation marks and just tenses are taught there at surface level. At the college level, the focus is given to science subjects, not English. The students at the college level are good at science subjects as the focus is given to science subjects. But when these students take admission in English subject, they face problems. They try to learn the English language and they focus on all the aspects of English at a time. They hardly learn tenses, narration, and passivizations when they complete their masters. I suggest that the focus should be given to every subject at every level as all the subjects are important in their own places. English is a subject that can't be ignored because it is used in each and every field of life. The focus is not given to English subjects at school and college level that is why the students from rural areas are weak in English. The students at urban areas are good at every aspect of the English language because there much emphasis is given to it. Students attend English language academies to learn it. They are exposed to the English language from an early age and they learn it slowly and gradually. When they reach to master level, they face no problem in any aspect of it. The students at NUML and IIUI are given admission after a very lengthy process. The students are tested and interviewed before they are given admission. As a result, the students who get admission at NUML and IIUI are much more competent than the students of other universities. These are some of the reasons due to which the students from KUST, UoM, SBBU, and KKKUK make more mistakes as compared to the students of NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI.

### **Conclusion**

The outgoing university students persist in making punctuation errors even after graduation. The solution requires not only time but also some skills. The most recurring errors were found to be errors made concerning comma, apostrophe, and capitalization. A comma is used in multiple places to perform multiple functions and, in the same way, capital and apostrophe are used for more than one function that leads to confusion for the students and they make errors. The absence of error corrective feedback, the lack of interest in learning the use of punctuation marks, and interference by the mother tongue are the basic reasons behind the punctuation errors. Punctuation marks are not taught in KKKUK, SBBU and UoM and error-corrective feedback is not provided to the students. The students are not motivated to learn the punctuation on their own and their use of punctuation is not checked consistently. On the other hand, the students of NUML, UoS and IIUI are taught the use of punctuation, error corrective feedback is provided to them and their punctuation errors are checked consistently. These are the major reasons due to which there is a difference in the frequency of punctuation errors made by the students from the set of universities including KUST, SBBU, UoM, and KKKUK and the set of universities including NUML, UoS, GU and IIUI. Besides, the study significantly found out the different types of punctuation errors that students make, the basic reasons behind these errors, the differences between four different universities in terms of punctuation errors, and the basic reasons behind the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors between these universities. The study will help teachers to know and address the different reasons responsible for the

punctuation errors of the students and they will help students overcome these errors by addressing those weaknesses.

It is recommended to future researchers that they should carry out their research on a large scale by increasing the number of universities and selecting one university from each district. They may carry out researches over other aspects of English grammar, such as prepositions, tenses and helping verbs, etc. To increase the reliability of results it is also recommended that instead of the final year, they can take samples from other levels of an academic program too.

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