



Highlighting the Gap Caused by Neglecting the Teaching of Punctuation Marks in English Course Books: The Case of Libyan Students

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إبراز الفجوة الناتجة عن إهمال تدريس علامات الترقيم في كتب مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية:
حالة الطلاب الليبيين

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Abstract

This study explores the lack of focus on teaching punctuation in English course books for Libyan students. Punctuation is crucial for obvious written communication, yet various students struggle with its correct use. The research examines the differences and similarities between English and Arabic punctuation, highlights common errors in students' writing, and identifies limitations in existing course materials. Practical solutions, including the creation of tailored teaching materials and interactive classroom activities, are suggested to meet these issues. Improving punctuation instruction can enhance students' writing ability and support effective language learning. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach based on the analysis of students' written samples and a review of English course books used in Libyan higher education.

Keywords: Punctuation, English course books, Libyan students, writing skills, teaching materials, qualitative analysis, material adaptation.

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة ضعف التركيز على تدريس علامات الترقيم في كتب مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية الموجهة للطلاب الليبيين. وتعد علامات الترقيم عنصرًا أساسيًا في وضوح الكتابة، إلا أن العديد من الطلاب يواجهون صعوبات في استخدامها استخدامًا صحيحًا. وتهدف الدراسة إلى فحص أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين علامات الترقيم في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، وتسليط الضوء على الأخطاء الشائعة في كتابات الطلاب، وتحديد أوجه القصور في المواد التعليمية الحالية. كما تقترح الدراسة حلولًا عملية، من بينها إعداد مواد تعليمية ملائمة وابتكار أنشطة صفية تفاعلية لمعالجة هذه المشكلات. ومن شأن تحسين تدريس علامات الترقيم أن يساهم في تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى الطلاب ودعم عملية تعلم اللغة بصورة أكثر فاعلية. وتعتمد الدراسة المنهج الوصفي النوعي من خلال تحليل عينات من كتابات الطلاب ومراجعة كتب مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية المستخدمة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في ليبيا.

Introduction

Course books are expected to meet learners' needs by emphasizing the aims of the language teaching syllabus, which can help learners to use the language professionally and assist their learning. Therefore, Libyan students face difficulties in learning English punctuation, which is considered to be significant and necessary in the written language. Despite the importance of using punctuation in writing, however, a great number of Libyan learners encounter many difficulties and challenges in using punctuation marks in their writing. It seems that mother tongue interference can influence English punctuation. Moreover, students are often unconfident and in many cases are unconscious of the appropriate use of these marks. In other words, the accurate use of punctuation marks can help and facilitate the comprehension of any written textbook. In spoken language, students seem to be able to pause, continue or alter the tone of the voice but in written language punctuation marks can be used in order to highlight and elucidate what the writer means. This study will highlight the gap which is caused by neglecting teaching punctuation within Libyan students. In doing so, this essay divides into five sections. The first section will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using a course book. The second section will talk about English punctuation. The third section will look at punctuation in Arabic. The purpose of these two sections is to illustrate the similarities and differences between English and Arabic punctuation. The fourth section will be presenting some models of paragraphs written by Libyan students. In the fifth section, some techniques can be suggested to help students overcome this problem. Besides that, creating materials can be a solution in order to cover the missing part in course books. Finally, it comes to the conclusion where it will be repeating the main points of this essay.

Problem Statement

Despite the importance of punctuation in English writing, Libyan students demonstrate persistent weaknesses in using punctuation marks correctly. This problem appears to be reinforced by the limited treatment of punctuation in English course books and the absence of explicit instruction within the curriculum. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is the neglect of systematic punctuation teaching in English course materials, which contributes to students' writing deficiencies. Although punctuation errors are often attributed to mother tongue interference, this explanation alone does not sufficiently account for the widespread nature of the problem among Libyan EFL learners. The lack of explicit and systematic punctuation instruction in English course books appears to play a more decisive role in shaping students' inaccurate writing practices.

Aims of the Study

This study aims:

- To examine the difficulties Libyan students face in using English punctuation in their writing.
- To investigate the extent to which current English course books in Libya address punctuation skills.
- To compare English and Arabic punctuation systems in order to identify potential mother tongue interference.
- To explore strategies and techniques that teachers can use to improve students' punctuation proficiency.
- To suggest the creation or adaptation of teaching materials that can fill the gap in course books regarding punctuation.

In doing so, the study seeks to provide pedagogically grounded insights that may contribute to improving writing instruction in the Libyan EFL context.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it draws attention to an often-overlooked aspect of English language teaching in Libya. By identifying the lack of focus on punctuation in course books and syllabuses, the research provides insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to develop writing instruction. Enhancing punctuation teaching can help students write more clearly and professionally, improve comprehension, and support overall language proficiency. Moreover, the study highlights practical solutions, such as designing tailored materials and interactive classroom activities, to address students' needs successfully. The findings of this study may also assist curriculum designers in recognizing the need to integrate punctuation instruction more systematically into English course books used in Libyan higher education.

Literature Review

1-1 Course book in ELT

Richard & Schmidt defines a course book as "a book (usually as part of a series of books) that contains all the materials necessary for a particular type of language learner at a particular level (e.g. intermediate level adults). Such a book is typically based on an integrated or multi-skills syllabus i.e. one that contains sections on grammar functions, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing". (2002, p.129).

The course book is an almost worldwide aspect of ELT teaching. There are huge numbers of English course books in second language learning that are planned for learners for different aptitudes, ages and levels. Course books are used in many diverse institutions the world. Kayapinar (2009) states that using the course book is more popular than before, particularly when numerous ELT classes have been introduced for a great number of institutes, for example local private schools, colleges and universities. To conclude, course books are very important in language learning but they have both advantages and disadvantages.

Therefore, evaluating the effectiveness and limitations of course books remain an essential concern in ELT research.

1-2 Course Book: For and Against

This section will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using the course book. Using the course book in the ELT classroom can be a debatable issue and has positive and negative points, depending on the usage. Kayapinar (2009) believes that using course books might have good results for both teachers and learners, because the ready-made syllabus includes cautiously designed and balanced options of language that can be effortlessly followed by teachers and students. This is particularly beneficial for novice teachers who may lack extensive classroom experience.

In other words, many inexperienced tutors possibly use the ready course books in the ESL classroom as a result of providing a great number of activities that can be beneficial and simple to prepare.

According to Ur (1996), teachers can find the teaching process easy by using the course book but the important point is that teachers need to use the course book critically by creating and applying their own plan. Blind reliance on course books may limit teachers' flexibility and reduce opportunities for meaningful language use.

The over-use of course books in the classroom can reduce the chance of learning the target language, because learners will be demotivated and will find the learning process as routine

and less encouraging. According to Richard (2001), using course books should be relevant for students' needs and interests in increasing the opportunity to use and acquire the target language. It is clear that teachers should bear in mind that course books should be designed actively, in order to raise students with good chances of learning activities and new items autonomously.

According to Torres and Hutchinson, " ... textbooks impose a structure on the interaction of the lesson and should be seen, not as an undesirable constraint, but rather as a potentially beneficial phenomenon, which teachers and learners will welcome"(1992, p. 391). This structured nature can be advantageous when course books are aligned with learners' linguistic and academic needs.

In other words, course books can provide well structured and organised lessons, which can be useful for both teachers and learners. However, some inexperienced teachers will find it difficult to be familiar with the course book, because it is highly structured and teachers' role will be reduced.

Richard (2001) illustrates that course books provide various amounts of resources in the classroom, such as CDs, DVDs, videos and workbooks, which are planned for pedagogical purposes and have an essential role in facilitating learning and teaching process. On the other hand, course books contain various topics on the essential productive skills (writing, speaking) and receptive skills (reading, listening). However, there is very little emphasis on writing skill in course books. As an example, Johnston demonstrates that writing skills can be found in the introduction to the teacher's book of "First *Certificate Masterclass*" but cannot be included in the writing tasks in learners' books. (1994, p. 352). Moreover, in many course books, writing tasks can be provided in the work book as a personal work at home.

According to Johnston, "writing is being reflected in these EFL course books. Of the seven books reviewed, only *Intermediate Matters* came out well". In other words, despite the fact that course books are considered as a main tool for the teacher, some teachers are creating or adapting materials which have a useful role in considering some important needs for the learner. This tendency contributes to learners' limited exposure to guided writing practice in the classroom

According to Altan (1995), created materials can help teachers to take into consideration students' learning backgrounds and their individual needs. In other words, despite the lack of inclusion of writing skills in many course books, such as 'Face 2 Face' and 'Cutting Edge', teachers can decide what can be suitable for students' culture, age and interests.

As indicated by Johnston (1994), there seems to be a tendency for a lack of integration of writing skills within some course books. A good example of that is Libyan students disregarding using punctuation marks in their writing because of the absence of writing tasks in some course books. The absence of explicit punctuation instruction in course books may lead learners to underestimate the importance of punctuation in English writing.

To some extent it is true to say that this problem may occur because of the fact that influencing students' native language often avoids the use of punctuation in the second language. It is important to demonstrate the differences between Arabic and English punctuation to show the difficulties with Libyan learners.

2-Teaching English punctuation.

Richard & Schmidt define punctuation as "the use of graphic marks such as commas, semicolons, dashes and periods to clarify meaning in written sentences or to represent spoken sentences in writing". (2006, p. 434). This definition emphasizes the functional role of punctuation in organizing written discourse and facilitating meaning construction for readers.

According to Peters, "The origin of Western punctuation is found in ancient rhetorical theory, in which the terms *periodus*, *komma*, *kolon* referred to segments of discourse". (1968, p. 298). Peters (1968) stated that punctuation marks were noticeably evolved and formalized to be completed from the early 16th to the end of the 17th century. This historical growth reflects the growing need to regulate written language and make texts more accessible to readers. Considerable debate has emerged over whether English punctuation should primarily reflect pauses in speech or grammatical structure. Peters (1968) reports that clearly views favored punctuation as a guide to oral reading, whereas later approaches emphasized its grammatical function. Contemporary views tend to regard punctuation as a system that serves both grammatical and rhetorical purposes.) It appears important to use punctuation to indicate where readers should pause, continue, or interpret relationships between clauses. The following subsections outline the major functions of English punctuation marks (Peters, 1968). Rather than treating punctuation as a set of isolated rules, effective instruction should highlight how punctuation contributes to textual clarity and coherence.)

2-1 Capital letters

Capital letters can be used at the beginning of sentences and questions with adjectives, proper nouns, titles and names of places.

According to Peters (1968), there seem to be a tendency to use capital letters to show stress on significant words. In English writing, capitalization plays a vital role in marking sentence boundaries and distinguishing proper nouns from common nouns.

2-2 the Comma

According to Field (2003), the comma in English has a crucial role in punctuation.

It is used regularly and for various purposes:

- To divide objects in a list.
- To divide the main clause from the subordinate clause when the sentence starts with a subordinating conjunction.
- To divide between subordinate clause and principles and vice versa.
- To divide groups of terms in the middle of the main sentence.
- It can be used following to a participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence
- It can separate a group of words, clauses and phrases to clarify the meaning (Field (2003).

Misuse or omission of commas may lead to ambiguity or misinterpretation, particularly for EFL learner

2-3 The full stop

It can be used at the end of a sentence, which always expresses statement. Field (2003). Moreover, full stops have been used often to abbreviate words, phrases and names (King, (2009).

Failure to use full stops appropriately often results in excessively long sentences that reduce textual clarity.

2-4 The question mark

The question mark is clearly sited at the end of a direct question. There seems to be a tendency for question marks to be used for a rhetorical one (Field 2003).

In EFL writing, incorrect use or omission of question marks can obscure the intended communicative function of a sentence.

2-5 The semicolon

According to Field (2003), the semicolon was introduced into English in 1644. It can be used in order to link two comprehensive sentences into a single one. Harris (2010): these sentences seem to have a closer correlation to each other and can be divided by a full stop without use of linking words which entail a comma, for example so, and, but. Moreover, it can also be used

to link two sentences when the second part of the sentence starts with a conjunctive adverb, for instance, therefore, hence, thus, however, consequently (Field 2003). The semicolon is particularly challenging for EFL learners due to its limited use and abstract function.

2-6 The colon

The colon has a great role in written English. In the 16th century the colon was adopted into English and it was used regularly for many different reasons (Field 2003). Furthermore, there is a tendency to indicate that the colon and the semicolon are not two of the main marks regularly used, compared with other punctuation marks. Despite its usefulness, the colon is often underused or misused by EFL learners.

Field states that the colon has many various purposes, such as:

- "To show two statements reinforcing each other"
- "To introduce a list of statements" 1997, p. 17"
- To stress on two main clauses.
- To introduce instances or examples explaining the prior sentence.

2-7 The exclamation mark.

The exclamation mark seems to be used rarely, otherwise it may lose its function. According to Field (2003), exclamation marks can be used when the speaker is surprised and exclaiming. It also indicates a short sentence but conveys a powerful feeling.

In academic writing, exclamation marks are generally discouraged, which may further limit learners' exposure to their appropriate use.

2-8 The quotation mark

Field (2003) believes that one of the major uses of quotation mark is to point to someone's precise spoken words. It can be used only to surround the direct quotation. Accurate use of quotation marks is essential in academic writing to avoid misrepresentation of sources.

2-9 The apostrophe

According to Field (2003), using the apostrophe has two main functions. Firstly, it can be used to signify possession, particularly when the noun belongs to something. Also, it can be used in order to make a contraction, which is two words merged or combined into one. Apostrophe misuse is a common error among EFL learners, particularly in distinguishing possessive forms from plural nouns.

2-10 The hyphen

According to Field, the hyphen seems to have essential functions in English. It tends to be used to show that the long word can be "broken off" in the last part of a line (2003, p. 101) it is important to use the hyphen when there is a need to write compound words, which tend to be vague, difficult to read or extremely long. Field (2003). Hyphenation rules often vary, which can confuse learners without explicit instruction.

2-11 The dash

According to Field (2003), a dash has a vital use in emphasizing and it also can be used in order to bond between two words. In addition, the dash is usually used when there seems to be a sudden pause from the rest of the passage (Field 2003). Learners may confuse the dash with other punctuation marks, such as commas or parentheses.

2-12 Brackets

Field (2003) states that there are two types of brackets, square and round. Square brackets might be used when words are written within a quotation, particularly when the words cannot be an ingredient of the original passage. On the other hand, round brackets are mainly used to add additional idea or information into a sentence. Understanding the pragmatic function of brackets can help learners manage supplementary information more effectively in writing.

3- Teaching Arabic punctuation.

Ibraheem (1980) recognizes that Arabic punctuation seems not to have existed in early textbooks in standard Arabic. Moreover, the primary use of punctuation marks in Arabic was when the Arab sought to write down the Holy Qur'an. According to Abdel Haleem (2005), punctuation marks have a vital role in the Qur'an, which assists readers to be able to distinguish between descriptions and the questions and the reader can also know when he can pause and continue reading the text. This indicates that punctuation in Arabic initially served a functional role related to recitation and comprehension rather than formal written structure.

Ibraheem (1980) argues that the purposes of using the punctuation marks in Arabic are basically rhetorical. In other words, there seems to be a tendency to use these marks to denote where the stresses and the pauses can be found. This rhetorical function contrasts with the grammatical role punctuation plays in English writing. The following is a concise explanation of Arabic punctuation in both forms and functions.

The mark (لا)

Ibraheem illustrates that this mark is called the "prohibited stop"; it indicates that the reader should be continuing in reading, owing to the fact that the meaning seems to be unclear as a result of the connection between the first and the second sentence. (1981, p. 17).

The mark (م)

Ibraheem (1981) demonstrates that this mark is called obligatory stop; it confirms that the reader seems to be entitled to pause because it signifies that the meaning can be clearly understood and is alienated from the sentence that follows.

The mark (صلى)

Ibraheem (1981) emphasises that in this case the pause is preferable; nevertheless, the continuity can be permitted.

The mark (قللى)

Ibraheem (1981) believes that pausing or continuing seem to be allowable. In other words, the reader is able to stop or continue.

As shown above, these marks can be found at the end of a word and used in Arabic punctuation, which was the first source of punctuation marks that emerged in Arabic textbooks. Ibraheem (1981) recognizes that these marks are merely used in the Holy Qur'an and cannot be found in standard Arabic textbooks. There seems to be a tendency to write Arabic language to avoid using punctuation marks, as can be seen in many Arabic course books. According to Haywood (1984), the requirement for using punctuation in classical Arabic is due to spreading Islam, which increased the number of Arab people who would like to learn Arabic. It is clear that the opportunities to learn Arabic punctuation have increased, in order to assist non-Arabs to read the Arabic language through using punctuation marks.

Nonetheless, Arabic punctuation tends to be adopted from the Latin punctuation, which can be used by a great number of languages, owing to the fact that Arabic punctuation seems to be disregarded. (Haywood, 1984). Nevertheless, since this essay is focused on Arabic and English punctuation, so the aim is to concentrate on the two languages in order to design materials that can be helpful for students. To conclude this, despite the similarities between Arabic and English punctuation, there seem to be slight distinctions, either in the form or in the function. The following section will identify some Arabic punctuation marks which are different from English punctuation.

3-1 Some punctuation marks that do not emerge in Arabic punctuation.

Capital letters

Nayeef (1991) states that capital letters did not appear in Arabic punctuation; it would appear that Arabs disregard using capital letters at the beginning of a sentence. This absence may contribute to Libyan students' difficulty recognizing sentence boundaries in English writing

Apostrophe

According to Nayeef (1991), Arabic punctuation considers that the use of the apostrophe is completely ignored, either with short forms or to mark possessives. This difference can lead to common errors in EFL writing, especially in possessive forms and contractions.

3-2 Punctuation marks that are similar to English punctuation but different in form.

Quotation marks

Nayeef (1991) declares that there are two types of quotation marks in Arabic, which are single goosefeet (< >) and double goosefeet (<< >>); they seem to be used as quotation marks in Arabic. The difference in visual form may cause confusion for learners transferring rules from Arabic to English.

Question marks

According to Nayeef (1991), the question mark in Arabic is similar to that in English; however, it can be merely different in shape, so the Arabic quotation mark is written as (؟). Shape differences may result in incorrect usage or omission in English texts

Semicolon

Nayeef (1991) considers that the semicolon in Arabic has the same use as in English but it seems to be different in form and it can be written upside down (؛). Such inversions may confuse students learning English punctuation rules.

4-Punctuation marks that are diverse in both form and function.

Full stop

Using a full stop has an important role in Arabic written language, compared with that of other punctuation marks. Nayeef (1991) believes that, despite the importance of using the single full stop in Arabic, there are two different types of full stops, double full stop (..) and triple full stop (...), which can be placed at the end of the sentence. According to Nayeef (1991), these dots seem to have the same function but the distinction between single, double and triple dots is that the sentence which ends with a single dot indicates that the meaning of the sentence is completed in linguistic and in genuine world. On the contrary, double and triple dots demonstrate that the sentence is not completed in pragmatic or practical terms. In other words, in Arabic punctuation the full stop can be used for a definite conclusion, whereas double and triple dots are clearly used for an undefined ending. These variations highlight the flexible and less standardized nature of Arabic punctuation, which can negatively influence learners when writing in English.

Comma

According to Nayeef (1991), the comma in Arabic can be written in a different way from in English; it is written upside down (،). In addition, there are no definite rules for using the comma in Arabic but the comma can be used in Arabic when there is a tendency to use it. Nayeef (1991) states that the use of commas in Arabic is found in a position when English uses a full stop. Nevertheless, commas in Arabic seem to be used relating to the places where people pause and breathe. This lack of consistency contributes to errors in English sentence segmentation among Libyan students.

The distinctions between Arabic and English punctuation.

The two languages tend to be parallel; however, the distinction can be superficial. Despite the similarities in the form and the function between the two languages, it seems to be different on the practical side. According to Nunberg (1990), English punctuation is used systematically as a part of any written text to convey the meaning and avoid possible vagueness of meaning and structure. English punctuation is writer-responsible, designed to guide the reader clearly, whereas Arabic punctuation is reader-responsible, relying on the reader to infer meaning.

It is clear that punctuation in English seems to be expressed clearly to identify the meaning and the structure in each text. However, Haywood, (1984) declares that Arabic punctuation marks are being ignored and can be regarded as ornamentation. This contrast explains why Libyan students often produce long English sentences without proper punctuation.

To prove this, the following is an example taken from Ziadan and Winder's book. "An introduction of Modern Arabic". (P. 64).

(قابلت أمس صديقي محمد الكاتب القدير في السوق فقال لي انه ارسل الى الجامعه عددا من مجلته الجديده التي كانت تحتوي على المشاكل التي تواجه الطلبة والحلول المناسبه لها)

I met the writer mohammed in the market yesterday he told me that he sent some of his new journals to the university which contain the problems that face the students and the possible solutions for them.

According to Ghazala, (1995), Arabic writing is different from the English writing system, so a great amount of orality is found in Arabic text books. These have a big role in dealing with Arabic textbooks as a written text which seems to be verbal, rather than to be read. It is clear that the majority of people believe that the main reason for the orality is the effect of Qur'an on the Arabic language. According to Ostler (1987), the orality in Arabic tends to be as a result of the Qur'an, which signifies principles of Arabic grammar in the written language. On the other hand, some writers claim that increasing the orality in Arabic can be the result of the effects of the traditional system of rhetoric of Arab authors influenced by the Qur'an. According to William (1989), "the persistence of orality in modern written Arabic suggests that Arab writers are still influenced by traditional rules of rhetoric, which are largely prescribed for the public speaker" (cited in Ayisha 1993, P.140). To conclude, the high degree of orality can be a result of influencing people with the Qur'an which is written to be a spoken language; it was shown and exposed orally and was written down in a spoken style without any changes.

There is another important difference in writing systems between the two languages, According to Ghazala, Arabic is mainly "...a reader-responsible language" (1995, P.18). An intense job can be a reader responsibility, which is a semantic understanding of the text. On the contrary, Ghazala states that English is "... a writer- responsible language", where the amenities seem to be for the reader instead of the author (1995, P.18). The distinction between English and Arabic writing systems is quite valuable in illustrating the reason why the two languages vary in valuing the use of punctuation. It is clear that, in English writing, authors use punctuation marks to facilitate understanding of the text for a reader. On the contrary, in Arabic the reader should understand the text, so it can be a reader's task. Moreover, Ghazala proves that the differences in culture between the two languages can be a result of the distinctions in the writing system. Arabic culture seems to be categorised as oral or spoken, while English culture is categorised as literate. In Arabic culture, pragmatics have a fundamental function in "the semantic interpretation of the text" (1995, p. 19). However, English culture, which is literate, tends to organise the "linguistic forms within the discourse" which are essential to "the semantic interpretation of the text" (1995, p. 19).

The marginalisation of Arabic punctuation is also reflected by the fact that in Arabic schools there is little or no concentration on teaching punctuation marks. In other words, Arabic punctuation marks are often disregarded and are not given any significance in writing and grammar course books. It is clear that there is no formal instruction on Arabic punctuation. Unfortunately, teaching English punctuation is not given much more concentration and many learners are not aware of the importance of English punctuation. The following section will categorise some of these problems by identifying some models of paragraphs written by Libyan learners.

Example (1)

I like my parents very much they brought me up and paid my tuition expenses I owe them a lot and, in the future, I hope I can repay some of their efforts and reward their kindness and love. I will work very hard now to be able to support them when they grow old. The absence of commas and full stops in this paragraph demonstrates the impact of insufficient punctuation instruction. The sentence structure lacks clear boundaries, which may confuse the reader.

Example (2)

The use of modern technology such as televisions radios computers and internet has both advantages and disadvantages one of the benefits is facilitating the learning process. Omitting commas to separate items in a list reflects direct transfer from Arabic punctuation habits and highlights the need for explicit teaching of list punctuation.

Example (3)

When I was young I was playing football with Ali Ahmed and Mohammed in the big park next to my house these were amazing days because we were always together. The long run-on sentences indicate students' reliance on Arabic rhetorical style, where punctuation is less regulated, affecting English sentence clarity.

Overall, these examples reveal that Libyan students frequently omit essential punctuation marks, particularly commas, full stops, and question marks, which undermines coherence and readability in English writing.)

As shown from the examples above, apart from using the full stop, which seems to be used infrequently, other punctuation marks have been ignored. Some may believe that the problem which faces Libyan students is simply because of the interference of the mother tongue, which often disregards using punctuation marks. This is true to some extent. However, Dulay et al (1982) claim that the majority of second or foreign language learners' mistakes are not caused by their native language, regardless of pronunciation where the transfer of the native language is clear. In other words, the main reason for this issue is not so much because of the interference of the two languages but because of the ignorance of teaching punctuation in Libyan institutions.

Hall & Robinson (1996) state that there has been very little focus on how good punctuation could be taught to learners; strong disagreements have occurred over how punctuation should be accomplished. Some believe that punctuation can be attained through rules; some consider it as learned through the ability to write; and the rest consider it as occurring through imitating while reading. It is clear that the main argument is not with the way of teaching punctuation but the difficulty is rather that punctuation marks are barely taught to learners. In other words, the main problem is that teaching punctuation is largely disregarded in the Libyan curriculum. To overcome this problem, some techniques, along with creation or adaption of some materials which can cover the missing part in course books, will be suggested in the following section.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring patterns of punctuation use and identifying gaps in course book content.

The data consist of written samples produced by Libyan EFL students at university level. These samples were carefully selected to represent a range of academic proficiency levels and writing contexts.

These samples were analyzed to identify common punctuation errors. Error analysis focused on both omission and misplacement of punctuation marks, as well as inappropriate transfer from Arabic punctuation conventions.

In addition, a qualitative review of English course books currently used in Libyan institutions was conducted to examine the extent to which punctuation is addressed. The review aimed to

determine whether course books provide sufficient guidance and practice in punctuation, and to identify gaps in explicit instruction.

The methodology does not rely on statistical measurement but on error analysis and textual interpretation. This qualitative approach allows for in-depth understanding of students' writing practices and the instructional limitations of existing materials.

This approach is appropriate for the present study as it allows for an in-depth examination of learners' written performance and course book content, focusing on patterns of punctuation use rather than numerical frequency.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of students' written samples reveals a frequent absence of punctuation marks, particularly commas, full stops, and question marks. This pattern is consistent across different proficiency levels, suggesting that lack of instruction, rather than individual ability, is the main factor.

The examples demonstrate that students tend to write long unpunctuated sentences, which affects clarity and coherence. Long run-on sentences reduce readability and can obscure intended meaning, which is particularly problematic in academic writing.

These findings support previous studies suggesting that insufficient instruction, rather than mother tongue interference alone, contributes to punctuation errors. Although Arabic punctuation habits influence students' writing, the primary issue is the lack of explicit teaching and exercises on punctuation in Libyan English curricula

The lack of punctuation-focused activities in course books appears to reinforce this problem. Course books generally provide minimal guidance on punctuation, and writing tasks often fail to require correct punctuation, limiting students' practice opportunities. This confirms the need for explicit punctuation instruction within English course books.

Effective techniques in order to enhance teaching punctuation in Libyan classrooms.

Teachers are required to be careful to wrestle with different ways to improve teaching punctuation. Angelillo (2002) demonstrates that teachers should concentrate on teaching punctuation from the beginning of the year, through reading aloud to learners, with the emphasis on using punctuation marks, and informing students how punctuation is important by illustrating that writers use punctuation marks in order to convey meaning. On the other hand, punctuation seems to be ignored in many course books, so teachers should create their own materials to help students to achieve their needs, because teachers have the ability to decide what can be suitable for students' level, age, interests and culture.

Fareh states that "textbooks are written by native speakers, who, more often than not, have no adequate background about the learners and their needs on their linguistic background"(2010, p. 360 -3). Therefore, teachers should consider designing supplemental materials tailored to the students' cultural and linguistic context. Example activities include "Punctuation Relay," sentence punctuating competitions, and group editing exercises, all aimed at increasing awareness and correct usage of punctuation.

It is clear that creating materials can be a useful way to increase students' opportunities to communicate together in pairs or in groups and to establish a good atmosphere for learners. For a Libyan teacher to cover the missing part in the course book, creating materials can be the best way of solving this problem. For example, he can plan a unit which can be based on two purposes. Firstly, he can create a small conversation, with a strong emphasis on punctuation marks. Secondly, he can invite or encourage learners to work in groups, suggest when punctuation is required and show students the difference between punctuated and unpunctuated paragraphs, to exemplify the collision on meaning and alert learners to the necessity for amendment.

Punctuation Relay

Rationale: The purpose of this activity is to show a learner that it is relatively important to use punctuation marks with a simple and interesting game, which can be appropriate for students' level.

Level: Beginner

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

Materials: 20 Flash cards- stickers - 4 posters- 4 markers with different colours

Language focus: Teaching punctuation

Indicative language: How many cards in this team? Each team should have just four cards.

Aim: To practise the use of punctuation marks appropriately in an effective and a motivating way.

Preparation: 20 sentences should be divided into 4 sentences for 5 posters

Team (1)

- 1- in Egypt sometimes they eat pasta rice and meat
- 2- the rain in Libya falls mainly in mountains
- 3- what is your favourite food
- 4- where do you live

Team (2)

- 1- My name is Mohammed what is your name
- 2- how many languages do you speak
- 3- last month I played football baseball and volleyball with my friends
- 4- what do you do in the evening

Team (3)

- 1- I am from Libya where are you from
- 2- Is her name sarah
- 3- next Sunday my father will visit many places such as Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq
- 4- she has three sisters and a brother

Team (4)

- 1- how old are you
- 2- He gets up at 7:00 on sunday
- 3- we have a fridge a table and a cooker
- 4- is there a chair

Team (5)

- 1-in the morning my friend goes for a walk
- 2- what is the day today
- 3-My house is not big but I like it
- 4- can you answer the question

Procedure

1 -Explain to students that they are going to do an activity about punctuation, which can be competitive between students. Learners should work in four groups of five and it will be more effective if learners sit in a circle. Each team consists of four students and each student will receive a piece of card with different punctuation marks which are capital letter, full stop, comma and question mark. Ask them to stick these cards on their chests and each student will be responsible for the punctuation mark that has gone on their chests.

2- Each team will choose a marker with a different color, for example team 1 (blue), team 2 (red), team 3 (pink), team 4 (green) and team 5 (orange). Each team will obtain a poster which contains four different sentences and stick them on the wall.

3- Ask students to work in their groups and read the sentences in each poster and then explain to learners that they are going to punctuate all the sentences by sitting in the correct order of use of the punctuation marks. In other words, the students with capital letter cards are supposed to be sitting first. Then the second student, with a comma card, is supposed to sit next to the capital letter, one and the same. Students will work silently by looking at their cards and knowing their roles in putting each punctuation mark to be placed all through the sentences. At the same time, the team which is able to place its cards correctly and suitably first will be the winner.

In conclusion, this study attempts to emphasize the benefits of using a course book. While course books provide structure and resources, they often fail to address essential writing skills such as punctuation.

On the other hand, the main focus was on highlighting the gap which is caused by disregarding teaching punctuation in course books and illustrating the importance of creating or adapting some materials, in order to overcome or minimize the problems that are encountered by Libyan students in consideration of the use of punctuation marks in English. Explicit instruction and tailored materials are necessary to fill this pedagogical gap and improve students' written English.

In addition, Arabic and English punctuation have been discussed, in order to demonstrate that, despite the great resemblances and differences either in the forms or in the functions of punctuation in both languages, there seem to be dissimilarities in the manner of valuing the use of punctuation marks in the two languages. Recognizing these differences can help teachers anticipate common errors and design targeted interventions.

Some examples of students' writing are shown, in order to provide evidence that Libyan learners barely use punctuation marks in their writings. The examples confirm that the lack of instruction, rather than solely mother tongue interference, is the primary source of errors.

Many assume that the reasons for the absence of using punctuation in students' writing are mostly because of the lack of knowledge about the importance of using punctuation marks. Besides that, the recent English curriculum in Libyan institutions puts insufficient emphasis on teaching punctuation. Curriculum designers should explicitly include punctuation instruction to ensure students develop clarity and coherence in writing.

From an academic perspective the curriculum designers in Libya require to recognize that Arabic punctuation is different from English punctuation in its usage. Teachers should address these differences systematically to prevent negative transfer from Arabic to English writing.

English punctuation is fundamental in any writing. Therefore, more emphasis should be focused on teaching punctuation to Libyan students, by creating or adapting some materials, if the course book does not satisfy learners' needs. This may help them to enhance the quality of students' English writing.

Ultimately, improved punctuation proficiency will support academic success and professional communication.

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Compliance with ethical standards

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