PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED IN CREATIVE WRITING BY XITSONGA GRADE 10 LEARNERS: THE CASE AT MAFEMANI CIRCUIT, BOHLABELA DISTRICT, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

By

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DECLARATION

I, Ndlovu Lamisile, declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of Masters in Language Education has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Ndlovu L (MISS) 11.11.2024

…….. ……..

(Surname, Initial) Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my family, whose firm love and support have been the driving force behind my academic excellence. I would also like to dedicate this work to my daughter, Enelo Bokang and my son Mulweri Andzani, as my intrinsic motivator during the academic process of conducting this study.

Thank you all for your firm support and inspiration throughout this research.

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Thank you all!

ABSTRACT

The study focused on punctuation errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays in Xitsonga Home language. The study was a case study at Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, in South Africa. The study aimed to examine the types of punctuation errors that learners commit when writing narrative essays, the goal of which was to find an effective approach be used to suppress the problem. The nature of the study and the type of data needed, motivated the researcher to use a qualitative approach. Therefore, the researcher used the qualitative method to collect and analyse the data for this study. This method gave the researcher a variety of opportunities to collect valuable data which helped her gain an in-depth understanding of the study, and the problem researched. In data collection, the researcher used document analysis to analyse learners' Xitsonga essays. In addition, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews by asking open-ended questions to Xitsonga Home Language educators to ascertain their experiences and knowledge of the types of punctuation errors learners make when writing narrative essays. The findings revealed that learners commit punctuation errors such as the misuse of capital letters, commas, hyphens, semicolons, question marks, full stops, and exclamation marks. The researcher relied on the findings of both the interviews and document analysis, in conjunction with recent empirical studies, to conclude that learners continue to experience many challenges with regard to punctuation marks when they write in Xitsonga. Therefore, the researcher urged educators to put extra effort in teaching punctuation marks to learners.

Key terms: Punctuation, Errors, Narrative, Essay, Case study, Writing, Interview.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

1.1 Introduction

Errors are mistakes or inaccuracies that occur when something deviates from what is intended, correct, or expected. Albert (1949) states that “anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new”. This quote by Albert Einstein emphasizes that errors are a natural part of the learning process and that growth and innovation often come from making and learning from mistakes. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:138) add that “making an error is an unavoidable part of learning; people cannot learn a language without first scientifically making errors”. This, therefore, means that errors are sometimes unavoidable and are the best way for learners to learn when learning a language. However, errors in writing make it problematic for learners to mix the dialogue of subjects and disciplines in schools. Furthermore, they generate difficulty for educators to acquire the meaning of the written language and endanger the development of learners’ language skills (Oyinloye, Olusegun, Adeyemi, Uwannah & Olufunke 2019). Errors are crucial strategies that reveal the degree of capability of a learner. However, it is of value to notice that errors in writing affect the readability and excellence of a piece of work (Shigini 2020:101).

There are many categories of errors and, as such, the following punctuation errors will be discussed in detail: comma, colon, semi-colon, hyphen, and full stop. These punctuation marks were found to be wrongly used by Xitsonga learners when writing narrative essays. Xitsonga HL learners committed errors and mistakes when they attempted to construct meanings in their written narrative essays. This is supported by Goldsmith and Sujaritjan (2020: 77) when stating that a learner who compels a mistake is clever enough to notice and correct such a mistake while an error is unknown to the learner compelling it. As such, the learner can do self-correction without the interference of the educator. On the same note, Moe and Toe (2020) point out that the

inadequacy of teaching and learning material and lack of teaching experience among language educators are some of the causes of the mistakes that learners commit during narrative essay writing. In this study, the researcher sought to elaborate on some of the causes of punctuation errors and attempted to find solutions. Norrish (2017) classifies the causes of punctuation errors into three categories: lack of attention, First Language interference, and transformation. The researcher, during her teaching in the classroom, observed that the other causes of punctuation errors are tiredness during writing because most learners are urged to write an essay of a maximum of two pages, and this puts pressure on learners as they are propelled to complete their essay within a short period. Awad (2012:213) said that “punctuation has three important functions: 1. phonetic function, grammatical function and semantic function”. Thus, narrative essay composition is made up of paragraphs that contain punctuation marks that include the above-mentioned functions. Chackett (2010:287) emphasises that teaching how to write a narrative essay with the use of correct punctuation is important. Riddell (2001:361) also highlights the importance of equipping learners with the skill of writing narrative essay but states that the educator has the responsibility to show learners how to use the correct punctuation marks when writing. This prompted the researcher to venture into this research to outline possible ways of teaching punctuation.

1.2 Research Aim

This study aimed to identify and analyse punctuation errors made by Xitsonga Grade 10 Home Language learners when writing narrative essays in Xitsonga within the context of Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the common punctuation errors observed in Xitsonga narrative essays written by Grade 10 learners?

- How do these punctuation errors impact the overall clarity and coherence of the narrative essays?
- How can targeted interventions be designed to address and mitigate punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative writing among Grade 10 learners in Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District?

1.4 Rationale of the study

The significance of investigating punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners lies in numerous key factors. However, the current study acknowledges two factors among many that, addressing punctuation errors is crucial for improving the overall quality of written work; and that proper punctuation contributes to clarity, coherence, and effective communication all of which are essential for academic success. Xitsonga is an indigenous language with deep cultural roots in the region where this study was conducted. By examining and rectifying punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays, this study contributes to the preservation and development of the language, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality in contemporary educational settings. Xitsonga narrative essays often reflect local culture, traditions, and values. Ensuring proper punctuation in these essays not only enhances linguistic skills but also fosters cultural authenticity and pride among learners. By focusing on Grade 10 students, this study addresses a crucial stage in their educational journey where foundational language skills are developed. Identifying and rectifying punctuation errors at this stage can help bridge educational disparities and ensure equitable access to quality language education for all learners.

The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for learners, educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers on effective strategies for teaching punctuation in Xitsonga and other Indigenous languages. By understanding common errors and their underlying causes, educators can tailor instructional approaches to better meet the needs of learners. Conducting the study within the specific context of Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, ensures that the findings are relevant and applicable to the unique linguistic and educational landscape of the region. This localized approach facilitates targeted interventions and solutions tailored to the needs of learners in the area. Investigating punctuation errors

in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners is not only academically relevant but also culturally significant and pedagogically valuable, because of the study's potential to yield insights that contribute to educational excellence and linguistic heritage preservation.

1.5 Understanding the use of punctuation marks in writing narrative essays

According to Smith (2019), proper punctuation plays a crucial role in enhancing the clarity and coherence of written narratives. Additionally, Jones et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of addressing punctuation errors to improve overall academic performance among learners. Within the context of Xitsonga narrative essays, understanding the correct usage of punctuation marks is essential for effective communication and expression (Mukhari, 2017). Furthermore, Ndlovu and Maluleke (2020) argue that a lack of proficiency in punctuation can hinder the development of writing skills in indigenous languages. Moreover, recent studies such as those of Chauke and Mthombeni (2023) and Nkuna (2024) have highlighted specific punctuation errors commonly observed among Grade 10 learners in Xitsonga narrative essays. Such errors include inconsistent use of commas, misuse of apostrophes, and confusion regarding end punctuation.

By investigating these punctuation errors within the unique context of Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by learners and propose practical interventions to improve punctuation proficiency in Xitsonga narrative writing. This study explores the prevalence and implications of punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners in the selected circuit. Drawing on a comprehensive review of literature from 2016 to 2024, the study investigates common punctuation errors, their impact on the clarity and coherence of written narratives, and potential interventions to address these challenges. The findings underscore the critical importance of punctuation proficiency in indigenous language education and highlight the need for targeted strategies to enhance learners' punctuation skills.

1.6 The knowledge gap

Punctuation errors pose significant challenges to effective communication and expression in written narratives. In the context of indigenous language education such as Xitsonga, understanding and applying correct punctuation marks are essential for fostering linguistic proficiency and cultural preservation (Mukhari, 2017). However, despite the acknowledged importance of punctuation, Grade 10 learners in Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province continue to struggle with various aspects of punctuation in their narrative essays. This study aims to address this knowledge gap by examining punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners in the Mafemani Circuit. This research seeks to identify common punctuation errors, explore their implications on written communication, and propose practical interventions to improve punctuation proficiency among learners. Smith (2019) emphasises the pivotal role of punctuation in enhancing the clarity and coherence of written narratives, highlighting its significance for academic success and effective communication. Similarly, Jones et al. (2022) emphasises the importance of addressing punctuation errors to improve overall writing proficiency among learners.

Within the context of Xitsonga narrative essays, Ndlovu and Maluleke (2020) The argument is that insufficient proficiency in punctuation can hinder the development of writing skills, and hinder learners' ability to express themselves effectively in their native language. Moreover, Chauke and Mthombeni (2023) and Nkuna (2024) have identified specific punctuation errors commonly observed among Grade 10 learners, including inconsistent comma usage, misuse of apostrophes, and confusion regarding end punctuation. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of punctuation proficiency in indigenous language education, there remains a paucity of research specifically addressing punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners in the Mafemani Circuit. This study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of punctuation errors, their implications, and potential interventions within this unique linguistic and educational context. Punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners in the Mafemani Circuit represent a significant challenge to effective written communication and language proficiency. By addressing this issue through targeted interventions and educational initiatives, educators and policymakers can help enhance learners'

punctuation skills, thereby promoting academic success and linguistic development in indigenous languages like Xitsonga.

1.7 Study context

Punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners are a significant concern within the educational landscape of Mafemani Circuit. This study aims to delve into this issue to understand its implications and propose effective interventions. Mafemani Circuit is within the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga Province, characterised by its rich cultural diversity and linguistic heritage. Xitsonga is one of the predominant indigenous languages spoken in this region, reflecting the cultural identity of its inhabitants. Within the educational framework, the teaching and learning of Xitsonga are integral components aimed at preserving and promoting indigenous languages. As such, Grade 10 marks a critical stage in the educational journey of learners, where foundational language skills are honed, and academic proficiency is cultivated. At this juncture, learners are expected to demonstrate competence in various aspects of language, including writing skills. However, the prevalence of punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners poses a challenge to their linguistic development and academic achievement.

The significance of investigating punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays lies in its implications for both academic excellence and cultural preservation. Addressing these errors not only enhances the clarity and coherence of written expression but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the linguistic heritage of the region. By conducting this study within the specific context of the Mafemani Circuit, the findings will be tailored to the unique linguistic and educational landscape of the area, ensuring their relevance and applicability. Despite the importance of punctuation in written communication, there is a knowledge gap regarding the specific punctuation errors made by Grade 10 learners in Xitsonga narrative essays within the context of Mafemani Circuit. Prior research has primarily focused on broader aspects of language proficiency, overlooking the nuances of punctuation errors in indigenous

language writing. This study aimed to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of punctuation errors and their implications for Xitsonga narrative writing among Grade 10 learners.

1.8 Chapter outline

1.8.1 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter serves as the introductory section of the dissertation, providing essential background information on narrative essay writing by Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners at Mafemani Circuit in Mpumalanga Province. Specifically, it highlights learning problems as a focal point that influences the learners' writing throughout the thesis. The chapter outlines the research questions, and rationale, and identifies the knowledge gap. This chapter sets the stage for the subsequent chapters' exploration and analysis of punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative essays among Grade 10 learners in Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, and South Africa.

1.8.2 Chapter two: Literature review

The chapter gives a detailed discussion of the scholarly work on writing narrative essays amongst learners. The chapter explains what challenges learners experience in writing narrative essays and what studies have revealed to be the best ways to respond to this problem. Grade 10 learners fail to write narrative essays in the Xitsonga Home language at Mafemani Circuit using punctuation marks. These problems are discussed in conjunction with what the literature says. With the discussions mainly contextualised to Mafemani Circuit, the chapter exposes the problem that Grade 10 learners at Mafemani Circuit face when writing narrative essays using punctuation marks.

1.8.3 Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology and explains the adopted narrative approach as a research framework that suits the exploration of the punctuation errors that learners commit when writing narrative essays. The chapter further details how the study was conducted (where, when, and with whom), indicating the importance of multiple data sources as elements of narrative research. The ethical considerations for the study are also discussed in the chapter. The chapter is followed by the empirical chapters (4, and 5) that contain the findings of the study, and the conclusion as explained below.

1.8.4 Chapter four: Data analysis

Chapter 4 deals with the presentation of data and discussions of the findings. In this chapter, several key insights emerge from the analysis conducted among Grade 10 learners in Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The analysis reveals prevalent patterns and trends in punctuation errors, including inconsistent use of commas, misplacement of apostrophes, and confusion regarding end punctuation such as periods and question marks. Furthermore, this chapter sheds light on the factors contributing to these errors, including limited exposure to formal grammar instruction, the influence of spoken language norms, and insufficient practice in written expression.

1.8.5 Chapter Five: Recommendations

This chapter has provided valuable insights into the challenges and implications of punctuation proficiency in indigenous language writing. Through the analysis of prevalent patterns and trends in punctuation errors, as well as an exploration of contributing factors, and their impacts on language proficiency and academic performance, this research has highlighted the significance of addressing punctuation errors in Xitsonga narrative writing. The findings signify the need for targeted

interventions, increased educator training, and the development of culturally relevant teaching materials to improve punctuation proficiency among Grade 10 learners.

CHAPTER 2

PUNCTUATION ERRORS IN WRITING

2. INTRODUCTION

The ability to write effectively is a crucial skill in academic and professional settings. However, many learners face challenges in expressing their thoughts coherently and accurately in writing. One important aspect of writing is punctuation, which plays a significant role in conveying meaning and ensuring clarity. This section aims to explore existing research on the investigation of grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners' punctuation errors in writing narrative essays.

2.1 DEFINITION OF PUNCTUATION

A sequence of words without punctuation in a text does not bear a meaning hence the writer needs to punctuate a text to give meaning to the reader. Punctuation is one of the facets that must be waged devotion in writing. Punctuation marks are commonly used to separate items or indicate the end of a sentence. The discussion about punctuation marks is based on the following themes: punctuation in writing narrative essays, types of punctuations, the importance of punctuation, and causes of punctuation errors. According to Yulianti (2017:17), a punctuation mark is "…a sign to help the reader to understand the content of a sentence". The above scholar defines punctuation marks as symbols that navigate the reader in understanding the written text. In line with the above argument, Yuliah et al. (2019) argue that a punctuation mark is a character or signal that indicates the order of a sentence, and it eases the comprehension of written work.

The above scholar explains punctuation marks as characters that are used in a sentence to show the order in which words are arranged within a sentence. The researcher considered the punctuation as a vital aspect of productive writing skills because it gives an understanding and unlocks the meaning of a text to the reader. Therefore, learners need to master the correct use of punctuation. Punctuations are

also important in writing because they show how words and sentences are related to each other in a text, thus, conveying clear information to the reader. Furthermore, misuse of the punctuation marks can cause misunderstanding of the text or make the message of the text ambiguous to the reader. In the study of Mujiyanto (2017), entitled “Errors of spelling, capitalisation, punctuation marks in writing, encountered by first-year college learners in Merghib University Libya”, it was proven that even university learners face challenges with using punctuation marks in their writing. Hence the researcher sees a need to address the proposed problem to find a solution in the context of the selected South African school. Therefore, this study was conducted to attempt to close the gap of knowledge that is lacking about punctuation. This study might be of good use as there will be new knowledge that can assist learners with composing meaningful texts.

2.2 WRITING NARRATIVE ESSAY

Writing is one skill that should be learned by learners as it enables them to communicate or express ideas, thoughts, and feeling to readers. Moe and Toe (2020: 361) braced by indicating, “Writing is more than arranging words into sentences; it also includes the act of picking various words that are related grammatically and logically to form a sentence”. These scholars view writing as a way of selecting correct words to form a sentence that the reader can easily gain meaning from. This, therefore, implies that a sentence needs to be coherent and logical.

Writing plays a crucial role in our daily lives, yet it is often neglected. Many people prefer verbal communication, which can hinder their ability to express themselves effectively in writing. It's important to view writing as a daily practice for everyone, as it is an integral part of our identity. The researcher regards writing as an important tool of communication that must be handled with care because failure to write with the aid of the correct punctuation marks can result in a group of words with no sense.

Nunan (2017) states that writing is a process which someone thinks and makes a choice about an idea and serves information accurately by putting coherent statements in paragraphs with the proper use of punctuation marks for the reader to

understand. Nunan (2017) describes writing as a process that writers follow to organise words correctly and construct sentences that others can understand. The researcher believes that an act of human process starts from a learner's mind and influences the information they have, their feelings, suggestions, advice and point of view. This is substantiated by Ceyla (2019) when stating that writing is a process that must be learned for learners to learn to use correct punctuation marks and to turn words into meaningful sentences because a sequence of words without punctuations is meaningless.

Qin (2017) concurs with Ceyla (2019) when stating that writing is a procedure that needs to be learned by learners for them to learn how to use punctuation marks correctly to apply them in their writing because failure to use them correctly can result in their texts being nothing beyond the group of words. Qin (2017:25) explains writing as the ability to utilise realistic language to convey consideration and sentiments. Thus, this process requires familiarity with sentence structure, reasonable choices of jargon units, and a mindful consideration of accentuation and spelling. Furthermore, Qin (2017) said that writing is a skill that one needs to apply correctly to express feelings. This is supported by Belkhir and Banyelles (2017:81) when they said, "Writing as a painstakingly implemented procedure of transferring exact importance into a composed structure adjusting to the principles of punctuation".

The above scholar explains writing as a carefully implemented procedure of sharing important information through a combination of written words while taking into consideration, the principles of writing. The researcher sees writing as a skill that needs to be taught in schools, and this is also emphasised by Jabali (2018) and Tobal et al. (2019) saying that writing can be viewed as one of the productive skills that are crucial for Xitsonga Home language learners. This speaks most particularly to the learners in the FET phase who are being prepared to enter university that, the primary objectives of teaching them should be to enhance their writing skills.
The researcher urges that Xitsonga Home language educators teach writing along with punctuation so that learners can know the basic parts of writing for ease of producing readable texts with meaningful ideas.

2.3 THE NATURE OF WRITING

Writing is one of the language skills that learners need to know. Thus, to learn this skill, they must undergo the teaching process that starts exposing them to this skill at an early age. This will help them master all the skills and processes that need to be followed when writing. Good writing skills cannot be taught nor learned overnight, they require more time and both mental and physical readiness. Nunan (2003:88); Teng (2021) define the nature of writing “as both physical and mental activity that aims to express and impress”. The above scholars attest that to know that a person is a good writer one needs to be engaged physically and mentally, this helps in expressing their thoughts accurately because the writer sometimes needs to communicate words or ideas to the reader without obstruction of thoughts. As a mental work, the activities of writing focus more on inventing ideas, thinking about how to express and organize them into clear statements and paragraphs that enable a reader to understand the ideas of the written work. Qin (2017:25), explains writing as “A productive skill that uses graphic language to convey thoughts and feelings. It involves fluency in sentence structures, suitable selection of vocabulary units, and cautious attention towards punctuation and spelling”.

The above scholars explain writing as a skill that needs clear language, vocabulary, and the use of punctuation when one wants to communicate with others. Belkhir and Benyelles (2017:81) view writing as “a carefully executed process of transferring accurate meanings into a written form, conforming to the rules of grammar”. It is a conscious process that uses sets of symbols to denote oral sounds (Apsari, 2018:39 & Gebhard, 1996). The aforementioned scholars explain the nature of writing as a process of sharing meaningful information to another person. The information needs to provide logic for readers to draw meaning out of it through the correct use of vocabulary and punctuation. Writing comprises numerous components such as word choice, use of appropriate punctuation, syntax, mechanics, and organisation of ideas into a coherent and cohesive form.

The researcher concludes on the theme of the nature of writing by observing what has been said by the different scholars above that the nature of writing comprises two main

purposes. Firstly, the intention or desire to express the ideas or feelings one has in the mind; in other words, the written text is used to communicate a particular thought. Secondly, the text is written to communicate the ideas to the readers or audience. This is why, writers need to communicate and express ideas in certain ways depending on the level of complexity. Furthermore, the researcher urges the learners to use writing as a means of communication that enables them to synthesise the knowledge that they have into an acceptable text that is by the Xitsonga writing conventions such as using appropriate content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and letter formation and so on.

2.4 THE PROCESS OF WRITING NARRATIVE ESSAY

A narrative essay is a form of writing that requires learners to write that happened in the past. Therefore, the learners need to write this type of essay in past tense with proper punctuation marks. Richards and Renandya (2002:316) state that the process of teaching writing consists of four basic stages. To write well, students must learn the four essential processes of writing: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. For each of these stages, a variety of learning activities can be suggested to help develop specific writing skills. For instance, in the planning stage, educators can help their learners improve their writing skills through activities that require them to generate ideas, such as brainstorming, clustering, and rapid free writing. The planned writing experiences for the learners can be described as follows

2.4.1 Planning

Planning or pre-writing is an activity of writing that aims to encourage and stimulate the learners to write. Since its function is to stimulate learners' ideas to write, educators must prepare activities to provide learners with rich experiences of learning writing skills, such as brainstorming. According to Oxford English Dictionary (1989), a plan is explained as a formulated or organised method according to how something is to be done, a scheme of action. In this context, planning can be defined as a process in which learners outline how they are going to do their writing activity. Thus, the planning stage helps them in putting their thinking into action. The researcher sees planning as

an intellectual exercise that helps learners to use their thoughts and gather all ideas that need to be discussed in their essays by using mind mapping as their tool.

2.4.2 Drafting

In this stage, the learners focus on the fluency of writing and write without paying much attention to the accuracy of their work. While writing, learners should prioritise both the content and meaning. Additionally, learners can be encouraged to share their messages with various audiences, such as peers, classmates, and educators, to gain insights on their ideas from others. Oxford Dictionary (2011:89) explains drafting as “a rough written version of something that is not yet in its final form”. Agreeably, the current scholar explains drafting as a way in which one puts together different ideas that later can be reviewed and constructed to form a good text.

2.4.3 Revising

The learners review and re-examine the text to see how effectively they have communicated their ideas to the reader. Revising is not simply an activity of checking language errors, but it is done to improve global content and organization of the ideas to ensure that the writer’s intention is clearer for the reader. Collins English Dictionary (2020:27), explains revising as “the way you think of something, you adjust your thoughts, usually to make them better or more suited to how things are. In other words, revising is a way in which a writer looks back to what has been written to rephrase it to suit the audience and their context.

2.4.4 Editing

At this stage, the learners are focused on tidying up their work as they prepare the final draft to be evaluated by the educator. The main activity done by the learners at this stage is editing their mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax, diction, etc. To sum up, the arrangement of the steps cannot be separated because it works

like a wheel. Each stage in the process of writing will work in line to help the learners in composing the text.

Cambridge Dictionary (2022:89) explains editing as a way in which a writer views the entire text to check and rectify the mistakes, they have committed for the text to be a better piece for the readers. Thus, to produce a good essay, some steps need to be followed by the learners, which help them to know what is needed before they engage in writing. Highlighting the process of writing might enable educators to guide the learners in the right direction of producing texts that are free from punctuation and other language errors observable in learners' narrative essays. CAPS document also highlights the stages that could be followed when writing an essay. Thus, by following the stages with the help of the process of writing, learners can recognise the errors they commit when writing and be able to rectify them without the educator's intervention.

2.4.5 Punctuation in writing narrative essay

One of the most important mechanics of writing is punctuating. Utilising punctuation is vital because it helps the reader to effectively comprehend the important message of the text without taking a gander at the statement of the individual who composed the message. Alfaqiri (2018:26) explains punctuation as "the system of symbols that we use to separate written sentences and parts of sentences, and to make their meaning clear". This scholar emphasises that punctuations help the writer to form meaning in a text because, without punctuation, much writing would be open to multiple interpretations and would want the writer to be present when the text is read to explain it orally.

Punctuations are the signs in writing that make the meaning of sentences clear and make it easy for the reader to understand the messages that the writer wants to deliver. Kan (2000: 29); Huliah et al. (2020) states that "all punctuations exist to help readers understand what you wish to say". The scholar explains that punctuation helps convey the intended expression in the writer's sentences. It is supported by Jackson (2005); Huliah et al. (2020:27) who said that punctuation enables the reader to interpret the

structure and the meaning of a text unambiguously. The scholar endorses that punctuations allow the reader to understand the written text clearly. In agreement Rehman et al. (2016) view punctuation as “A device used by a writer to help understand the meaning of words. Punctuation also aims to make a good sentence or paragraph in writing text”.

The above scholars see punctuation as a device that is used to help the reader convey the correct meaning of words in a sentence. Punctuations also help the writer in composing a good paragraph or sentence when writing a text. The researcher deems this study as necessary because learners at Mafemani Circuit continue to struggle with punctuation marks. Tayco, Janet, and Casta (2017) also conducted research to show the learners’ punctuation errors. Their study revealed that learners neglect or misuse punctuation in written output. In agreement, the study of Ginting (2018) explored the learners’ ability to utilise punctuation marks in a descriptive written paragraph. The study revealed that learners have challenges when it comes to punctuation, and this causes problems in their academic writing as they cannot produce a written text. Learners are not able to use the correct punctuation when writing. The current researcher sought to investigate this challenge because literature indicates that learners in both high school and universities face many difficulties in writing as they cannot use the proper punctuations in their writing, hence it becomes difficult for them to apply punctuations in their academic writing.

2.4.6 Importance of punctuation in witting

Punctuation marks are a vital part of our lives, we need them when writing essays, letters, applications, research papers, books, etc. Writers should understand the importance of using correct punctuation to compose a good piece of writing. The importance of punctuation is highlighted by Nuriyanti and Yuliawati (2017:118) when they said “[punctuations are] an indication that helps the reader understands the substance of a sentence”. The above authors indicate that punctuations help the reader to understand the sentence. This is supported by Yulah *et al.* (2019) when they said that a punctuation mark is a character or signal that indicates the order of a phrase and provides comprehension of writing.

The above authors highlighted the importance of punctuation as a need to use the character as an indication of word order in understanding writing. The correct use of punctuation must be used. The researcher regards punctuation as important component of writing because they demonstrate that each phrase is related to the others and conveys clear information. Misuse of punctuation marks can sometimes lead to misinterpretation or erroneous meaning. Without punctuation, writing has no meaning and communicating with others from a distance. Punctuations are highly vital in our lives. They play a vital role in writing as they facilitate the reading of a text and prevent confusion and overlap between the sentences. Thus, if a good writer uses them, and puts them in the right position, they will help the reader to understand what is written. If the writer neglects these signs and misuses or misplaces them, their texts will be difficult to read and may be misunderstood. Punctuation marks are a group of symbols or signs used to demarcate phrases, words, and portions of sentences to clarify what is written (Husada et al., 2018). They show the sentence's sequence, and the level of comprehension utilised while writing (Huliah et al., 2020). According to Snooks (2002), punctuation marks "Play a crucial role in conveying the intended meaning of the language.". He adds that the wrong placement of such marks can change the meaning of the sentence completely and sometimes even convert the sentence to complete nonsense.

The researcher deems punctuations as vital aspect of writing because it serves different functions in a text. Thus, the researcher suggests that punctuation be included in every subject to prevent errors that are likely to be committed by learners.

2.5 TYPES OF PUNCTUATION MARK

Learners struggle with using proper punctuation when writing narrative essays, such as (.) comma (,), double quotation marks ("..."), exclamation (!), question mark (?), and hyphen (-). A statement will have no effect or influence if punctuation is not used correctly. As a result, poor punctuation has an impact on the meaning of the sentence. According to Husada et al. (2018), punctuations are signs or groups of symbols used to divide phrases, words, or portions of a sentence, or to convey the meaning of a

sentence. The quotation attests those punctuations are needed in writing to separate phrases, words, parts, and the meaning of a sentence. Zemach and Rumisek (2003) support Husada (2018) by claiming that the most common types of punctuation in writing are full stops, commas, quotation marks, double quotes, exclamation marks, and hyphens.

2.5.1 Full stop (.)

This is a sign that must be used to show the reader the end of a sentence. Learners need to know this sign because it is a proper way of ending their sentences. Full stops are crucial punctuation marks in writing. According to Yuliah et al. (2019:15), "punctuation is used as a character to indicate the order of sentences".

The above scholars explain that punctuation must be put in a right place to effectively play its part in giving a clear meaning. Full stop is one of the punctuation marks that are located at the end of a sentence. Husada et al. (2018:23) explain punctuation as “the symbols that must be used to separate phrases, words, and parts to explain their meaning in writing.” These scholars explain punctuation as the symbols that are used to separate words, phrases, and parts to give meaning to the text. For example, Tatana *wa famba.* (Located at the end of sentence). *Eka nkomiso wa riviti. Tatana. Tat.*

The authors above outline that full stops are symbols used to show the proper ending of a sentence, and when used correctly, they give a reader time to think of what the next sentence might mean.

2.5.2 Comma (,)

When writing a text, learners need to utilise commas to separate different sections of a sentence. Therefore, when used appropriately, commas offer clarity and flow to learners’ writing. Jo and Anthony (2000:660) said “Comma is used to set phrases or clauses that interrupt the flow of sentences of the meaning of sentence.”

The above scholars see commas as a symbol that writers use when the speaker wants to take a break or when the speaker is interrupted. A comma is defined as "the mark used to separate the item in a list or to show where there is a slight break in a

sentence" Oxford Dictionary, (1989:89). A comma is defined by the Macmillan dictionary (1989:89) as a sign used in writing and printing to separate items in a list. The cited Dictionaries view commas as an aspect that is used in writing to separate words or groups of items that follow each other. Comma also breaks words and create a pause where necessary. There are several uses of comma. Firstly, a comma is used to break several items in one sentence. For example, *Ndzi tala ku khoma riqingho, manghilazi ya mahlo, xitsalo na tibuku loko ndzi ya exikolweni*. Secondly, a comma is used to separate two sections of phrases that have a subject and a verb, such as and, but, or so, and yet. For example, *N'wana wa mina wa ntombhi u tlharihile, kambe a nga lavi ku dyondza.* Thirdly, a comma is used also to show an expression or an introductory word, such as however, therefore, and in conclusion. For example: *hi ku komisa, matsavu ya kahle swinene emirini.*

2.5.3 Quotation mark (“”)

Witting is one element that allows the writer to transfer what has been said by one person to the others using the correct punctuation marks. In writing, quotation marks are required to show the words said by someone. According to Husada et al. (2018), the use of punctuation symbols in writing is important. Jo and Anthony (2000:665) view quotation marks as “Marks that are used to indicate the exact spoken or written words of another person”. Based on the above explanations, all punctuation marks are important in writing. Quotation marks are used to show the exact words that have been spoken by other people. We also use quotations to write the title of the book or movie names. For example: “*Switlula magandzelo*….” Yi tsariwile hi I.S Shabangu. Quotation marks are used to show the exact words someone spoke. For example, *Manana u te*: “*u nga rivali ku xava malekere*”.

2.5.4 Question mark (?)

A text that demands a response from the second party can be answered if a question mark is used, but if it is not used, the text will be words that are grouped. Bryson (2022)

emphasised that a question mark is used to pose a question and must be followed by a response. The question mark is used to indicate that a person is asking a question. This scholar views a question mark as a symbol used to pose a question to others, and used in a statement that requires an answer. There are two functions of using a question mark; to ask a direct question, for example, will you go home with me, and when asking a tag question. Example, “You trust me, don’t you?”

2.5.5 Exclamation mark (!)

An exclamation mark, also known as an exclamation point, is a punctuation mark used to express intense emotions and feelings. It is used with exclamation points and interjections. Jo and Anthony (2000:663) said that exclamation marks should be used only to express surprise, disbelief, anger, or other strong emotions. The above scholars view exclamation as a symbol use to show emotions towards a situation. An exclamation mark is defined as "the mark that is written after an exclamation” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 1989:89). On the other hand, Cambridge Dictionary (1989:89) defines an exclamation mark as “The symbol written immediately after exclamation”. An exclamation mark is defined as a sign which is used in writing to show that a word, phrase or sentence is an exclamation. According to Merriam-Webster (1989:89) an exclamation mark is "a mark used especially after an interjection or exclamation to indicate forceful utterance or strong feeling."

The above scholars view exclamation as a tool used to show a word or sentence that needs to emphasise something to learners. At times, exclamation marks can show how that speaker is amazed by something that is happening. For example, the exclamation mark is used to show an expression of surprise or emphasis. This kind of punctuation mark is vital in showing expression. Thus, one cannot use exclamation points in formal situations. Example, just go!, I am very shocked by your argument!

2.5.6 Colon (:)

The punctuation mark that allows the student to list the group of items is the colon. Failure of learners to know this results in the use of commas, will cause confusion to

the reader. Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines colon as a punctuation mark consisting of two equally sized dots that align vertically. A colon often precedes an explanation, a list, or a quoted sentence.

The above scholars define a colon as a symbol used to introduce a list of ideas or an explanation. There are two purposes and examples of using colons. First, we use a colon to introduce a list of items. For example, 'you may be required to bring many items: sleeping bags, pans, and warm clothing'. Secondly, the colon is used to follow the salutation in a business letter. Example: Dear: Ms Ndlovu

2.5.7 Hyphens (-)

Hyphens have various functions but are mostly used to join word units. They are also used to join prefixes, suffixes, and letters to words. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines a hyphen as a "punctuation symbol used to join words".
The above definition perceives a hyphen as a punctuation mark used to combine words that have the same meaning. There are four functions and examples of using hyphens. First, to hyphenate all compound numbers from twenty-one to ninety-one. Example: 'the educator had thirty–two children in her classroom'. Secondly, to hyphenate prefixes. Example: Un-American. Thirdly, to hyphenate all words with self at the beginning. Example: Self-respect. Fourthly, to indicate a prefix in a word. Example: 'His ex-wife will come to your birthday'.

Based on the various explanations provided, the researcher concludes that punctuation marks serve multiple functions. Each punctuation mark can have two or three different purposes depending on the intent of a sentence. Xitsonga home language learners need to understand the various functions of punctuation marks and how they are used in different contexts. The learners should understand how to apply every kind of punctuation when writing Xitsonga Home language sentences.
The researcher urges the learners to take the types of punctuation marks and their function in a text into consideration. This might help them to know that the most enjoyable language is Xitsonga, only if you know the punctuation marks and all parts of the language.

2.6 FUNCTIONS OF PUNCTUATION IN WRITING NARRATIVE ESSAY

Punctuation marks are small symbols, but they play a significant role in a text. When looking at punctuation marks, one can undermine their influence on meaningful writing, but once one reads a text without punctuation, one will realise that punctuation marks are important in clarifying the meaning of a text. As such, punctuations give a clear sound of words. Yulah *et al.* (2019:15) argue that "A punctuation mark is a character or sign that indicates the order of a phrase and provides comprehension of writing". This argument shows that punctuation marks help to arrange words into more coherent and understandable messages. The other insight that can be deduced from the above argument is that punctuation marks have several functions, such as:

2.6.1 Phonetics

The correct use of punctuation marks in a text allows the reader to extract the correct meaning of the text and generate the correct sound of written words. Learners must use punctuation marks when they write their texts as they help readers to have a good flow of ideas through sounding words (reading aloud). Baumbach (1981) defines phonetics as an "…the linguistic science employed by phoneticians to examine the creation of speech sounds and their representation in a language".

The above scholar defines phonetics as a way in which linguists use words to create meaning. The researcher outlines that word creation is important in a sentence because it allows the writer to have a meaningful sentence. The study of phonetics is very important, the researcher urges the Department of Basic Education to initiate the educator in teaching the student at an early stage the importance of sound formation. Maluleke (2013:01) defines phonology as "The study of sounds, linguistics related with the dispersion and structuring of speech sounds."

The scholar supports the above claim by saying phonetics is the study of sounds. The researcher sees that phonetics and phonology in a word are very important as learners need to write their narrative essays and use words meaningfully. The text with

punctuation marks clearly indicates a written document's rhythm, pauses and inflexible tone. Tone is often ignored in writing. This can lead to confusion, which is even more so than grammatical errors. Commas, semicolons, colons, and ellipses control the tone. For example, one can use question marks, exclamation points, parentheses, and commas to indicate the tone of a written message. For example,
What are you doing? Throw it away now!

2.6.2 Grammatical function

In writing a narrative essay, the words need to be arranged properly. Thus, to arrange words properly, the writer needs to use punctuation marks. One needs to know that punctuation has significant grammatical functions in a text, hence one cannot have a proper narrative essay free from grammatical errors without using punctuation marks. Grammar, according to Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:1), is a system of principles that allows language users to combine words into bigger units. The above quotation explains grammar as a value that allows the language writer to combine words and form bigger units. According to Sadiah and Royani (2019: 764), grammar can be explained as “A static set of arbitrary rules in the language that connects distinct words that are used to produce meaning”.

The above scholar supports what has been said by Nelson when he explained grammar as a form of rules that needs to be followed. The researcher sees grammar as a reference mechanism that places words in predictable groups to generate sentences. It is a repository for expressing meaning. The researcher emphasises that a text without proper use of grammar with the aid of punctuation marks cannot provide clear meaning. Hence punctuation plays an important role in how the words are arranged in a text. Grammar highlights synthetic elements that appear from their natural position; it builds the structure of sentences, compound sentences, paragraphs and all written documents. For example, commas, periods, etc. used to mark word, phrases and subordinate clauses within a sentence can clarify the meaning of incomprehensible sentences.

2.6.3 Semantic functions

A written text must convey meaning to the reader. As we generate text to impart information to others who are far from us, we should be aware that failure to punctuate sentences creates ambiguity for the reader. Betti and Alfartoosy (2019:99) define semantics as “The study of meaning in language”. The quotation implies that a word in language must contain meaning on it; hence student needs to write a text that communicates a clear meaning.

“Without our knowledge, semantics play a significant role in our daily communication, comprehension and language development” (Palmer, 1997: 5-8; Betti & Mahdi, 2020: 51). The above scholars show us that semantics is used in our daily activities without our knowledge. However, when it comes to a written text learners need to use correct punctuation in writing so that the educators can extract what the student intended to say in the text. With all the explanation above the researcher sees punctuation as a vital element in writing that one should follow to produce a readable text. One might ask him or herself why we emphasise punctuation. The answer is ‘because a text without punctuation will be a group of words that has no sense’. Thus, to make sense of it, the use of correct punctuation must be applied.

2.7 IMPACT OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON PUNCTUATION USAGE

Language transfer, particularly mother tongue interference, significantly impacts the accuracy of learners’ writing in a second language. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in multilingual settings such as South Africa, where learners frequently use English as a second or third language in academic contexts, despite speaking indigenous languages like Xitsonga at home. This sub-topic explores the effects of mother tongue interference on punctuation usage, focusing on the errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 Home language learners when writing narrative essays in Xitsonga at Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province. In contexts where Xitsonga is the primary spoken language and English is the dominant language of instruction, learners are often exposed to punctuation conventions that differ from

their Xitsonga structures. The unique syntactical and grammatical features of Xitsonga can lead to errors when learners attempt to apply L1 rules to their L2 writing (Gumbo & Ramalepe, 2021). This interference is particularly apparent in the realm of punctuation, where rules governing the use of commas, full stops, and question marks vary significantly between languages.

2.7.1 Mother Tongue Interference and Punctuation

Mother tongue interference manifests when learners attempt to transfer the punctuation rules from other languages into their Xitsonga narrative writing. Xitsonga, as an indigenous language, has distinctive syntactical and punctuation conventions. For example, pauses and clause divisions in Xitsonga oral storytelling, which often rely on oral tradition, may not always align with the punctuation rules taught in formal Xitsonga writing (Nkuna & Shilubane, 2019). This mismatch can lead to frequent errors, as learners may overgeneralize or underutilize punctuation marks based on their experiences. Furthermore, Xitsonga speakers are accustomed to oral communication patterns where intonation, rather than written punctuation, conveys meaning. In written forms, learners often struggle with where to place commas, full stops, and other punctuation marks. As a result, errors such as run-on sentences or comma splices are common in Xitsonga narrative essays (Baloyi & Mabunda, 2022). These errors often stem from attempts to replicate the fluidity of oral speech in written form, which overlooks the need for punctuation to demarcate ideas. Errors in punctuating direct speech are particularly prevalent. In English, quotation marks, commas, and periods follow a well-defined structure, but in Xitsonga, learners often struggle to apply these rules consistently. For instance, they may forget to include punctuation inside quotation marks or place the marks incorrectly, leading to confusion between the speaker’s dialogue and the narrative voice (Ndlovu, 2020).

2.7.2 The Role of L1 Syntax in Shaping L2 Punctuation Errors

The syntax of Xitsonga plays a significant role in shaping punctuation errors. Xitsonga tends to favour long, complex sentence structures with multiple clauses connected by conjunctions. In contrast, English and formal Xitsonga writing encourage the use of

punctuation to break up complex sentences into shorter, more manageable ones (Baloyi, 2019). Xitsonga learners accustomed to lengthy oral expressions may, therefore, write run-on sentences with little or no punctuation. Additionally, the verb-centric structure of Xitsonga can create difficulties in English and Xitsonga writing, where punctuation marks often signal shifts in subjects, clauses, or ideas (Gumbo, 2021). Without a clear understanding of how to punctuate in written language, learners may resort to overusing conjunctions or failing to distinguish between dependent and independent clauses, resulting in punctuation errors.

2.7.3 Instructional Challenges and Teacher Training

The impact of mother tongue interference on punctuation usage is exacerbated by insufficient educator training in bilingual or multilingual education settings. Many teachers in the Mafemani Circuit are not adequately equipped to teach Xitsonga punctuation rules in a way that bridges the gap between oral and written forms. Consequently, learners are left to navigate these differences, often relying on transfer strategies from their mother tongue (Mashele, 2020). In many South African schools, the curriculum does not fully account for the linguistic diversity of learners. Educators may lack the resources or pedagogical strategies to address mother tongue interference effectively. This leads to a disconnect between what learners are expected to produce in written form and the linguistic resources they bring from their L1 (Sithole & Ndhlovu, 2021). Educator training programs on multilingual education and explicit instruction in punctuation usage could alleviate some of these challenges, helping learners apply punctuation rules more effectively in their narrative essays.

2.7.4 Strategies for Reducing Punctuation Errors

To mitigate the effects of mother tongue interference, several strategies can be employed:

- Teachers can provide more direct instruction on punctuation rules, especially in contexts where learners are transitioning from oral to written forms of communication (Nkuna, 2022).

- By incorporating code-switching strategies into the classroom, teachers can help learners identify where their L1 habits interfere with L2 writing (Mashaba, 2021).
- Peer review and collaborative learning can provide learners with opportunities to observe and correct punctuation errors in the work of their classmates, fostering a deeper understanding of punctuation rules (Moyo, 2022).

Mother tongue interference plays a significant role in the punctuation errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays. The structural differences between Xitsonga and formal Xitsonga writing conventions lead to frequent errors, particularly in the use of commas, full stops, and question marks. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of improved teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and explicit instruction in punctuation. By creating teaching methods that consider linguistic diversity and the influence of students' mother tongues, educators can help learners improve their writing skills and reduce punctuation errors in their narrative essays.

2.8 CAUSES OF PUNCTUATION ERRORS

Inability of learners to punctuate correctly sometimes is overlooked by the educator. The researcher is going to outline the cause of punctuation errors in learners' written work. Some of the causes will be generated when the researcher starts to collect data to determine more causes of learners' inability to use punctuation marks correctly. According to Moe and Toe (2020: 362), "The fundamental causes of punctuation problems in learners are both inadequate resources and insufficiently qualified Xitsonga Home language educators".

The above scholars outline that the cause of punctuation is a lack of resources at schools. In some instances, learners are compelled to learn Xitsonga Home language without textbooks. This affects how they are supposed to learn as stipulated by the curriculum. The scholars further mention that unskilled educators contribute to this challenge as some are forced to teach language without the required qualifications and competencies. A lack of teaching and learning resources creates punctuation problems when learners learn a language. For instance, when learners learn a song

without seeing its lyrics, they can find it difficult to write the lyrics and punctuate them correctly even if they can sing them. The researcher urged that this study be conducted not only to benefit the scholar to obtain the qualification but also to bring new knowledge that can help hinder the problem from resurfacing again.

2.8.1 Simplification

According to Moe and Toe (2020: 362), “Simplification happens when learners reduce a complex feature of grammar to a much simpler set of rules, and it is a technique employed when messages must be transmitted with limited language resources”. The scholar attests that simplification happens when learners want to use less grammar in their written text to make it simpler for the reader, while not knowing that by doing so, they limit their own vocabularies. This often leads to the construction of simple texts with lots of mistakes and confusing meanings. This researcher suggests that learners must be taught how to simplify words in more acceptable ways. For example, the educator must teach simplicity when they teach learners how to write a summary.

2.8.2 Language Transfer

According to Al-husban (2018), the primary sources of errors can be divided into three categories: carelessness, first language interference and translation on. Inaccuracy in pronouncing or writing the Home Language according to language standards results in carelessness. The study identifies a lack of desire to learn Xitsonga as a contributing factor because most learners think that it is pointless to learn Xitsonga.

The above scholar alludes that the cause of punctuation errors is learners’ carelessness when composing texts. Learners’ complication of Xitsonga Home language essays get affected by their native languages and dialects in that their essays resemble much of the everyday languages spoken at home, which do not conform to the rules of the formal Xitsonga Home language learned at school. The other cause is translation which seems to be easy when speaking because there is no punctuation marks needed. However, when it comes to writing, it becomes difficult because the proper punctuation must be applied. Therefore, all the above factors

make it more difficult to teach learners punctuation when they are coupled with the learners' lack of desire to learn Xitsonga. According to Al-husban (2018), carelessness is caused by a lack of motivation to learn the Xitsonga Home language. As such, educators should teach the language using exciting teaching techniques. This can lessen learners' disregard for the Xitsonga Home language. The scholar attests that the cause of carelessness is rooted in a lack of motivation among learners. Therefore, the Department of Education needs to reshape the teaching process into a more interesting adventure, particularly in subjects that learners look down on, such as the Xitsonga Home language. Errors produced due to first language interference and errors induced by the effect of the mother tongue are influenced by the time of acquisition of the Home Language. The researcher concludes that one of the causes of this linguistic interference is that the language used at home differs from the language used at school. Translation eventually leads to inaccuracy. This is due to the learner's failure to communicate with others through written words.

2.8.3 Fossilisation

Saville-Troike (2012:198) defines fossilisation as "A stable state in XITSONGA HOME LANGUAGE in which pupils stop developing interlanguage skills before reaching target norms, despite continued XITSONGA HOME LANGUAGE input and the passage of time". The scholar defines fossilisation as a state in which learners stop developing new concepts in their minds even though the educator continues to teach more vocabulary. This becomes a challenge when they write their narrative essays because they tend to misuse punctuation marks due to poor vocabulary. Fossilised errors are unlikely to hinder comprehension, but they may be stigmatised because they frequently reflect common errors among extremely basic-level learners.

2.8.4 Lack of knowledge of the rules

Most learners lack knowledge of language rules because teaching language requires an educator who is equipped with adequate skills to transfer knowledge to learners**.** Moe and Toe (2020:362) emphasise that "Lack of rule awareness contributes to

learners' errors". Lack of appropriate awareness of the Xitsonga Language laws among Xitsonga Home Language learners leads to inaccuracies in the use of Xitsonga and hinders language acquisition. In Xitsonga grammar, a noun is a word that comes after an article (a, the) and can take possessive (-s) and plural (-s) inflections. Xitsonga Home language learners with little knowledge of possessive -'s and plural -s may fail to appropriately use words like learners, learner's, and learners' in writing.

The above scholar attests that a lack of knowledge of the rules of Xitsonga makes learners have problems with the use of punctuation marks because they do not know where they should use the correct punctuation. This, therefore, creates problems concerning the readability of the learners' texts because they fail to convey meaning. In Xitsonga, for example, *"riencis ri vekeriwa rihlamari emakumu ka xivulwa kasi exikarhi ku vekeriwa hefemulo".* Failure to understand this guideline leads to blunders or a written document with a plethora of meaningless words.

2.9 ERRORS AND MISTAKES

Mistakes and errors are frequently observed in the Xitsonga Home language in writing narrative essays. Nevertheless, mistakes and errors are outwardly identical, therefore, it is important to make a distinction between them to analyse them from a proper position. Gayo and Widodo (2018:61) stress that "Mistakes are intentional or unintentional language deviants and can be self-corrected by their writers". The scholar explains errors as a mistake that can be corrected in due time. Mistakes occur when a language learner feels stressed, nervous, tired and anxious. "They can also happen due to a learner's slips of the tongue or a pen" (Sobhi 2019:53). The scholar said that a mistake occurs when a language learner fails to utilise the known punctuation marks correctly or due to fatigue, mispronunciation, and slip of a pen while writing.

Luyue and Lim (2020:934) stress that while both Xitsonga Home language and second language learners can commit mistakes, Home Language speakers are easy to recognise and are usually self-corrigible. Richards (1971); Khatter (2019:366) categorises errors as errors of competence and errors of performance. The former

occurs when a Home Language student applies punctuations that do not correspond to the norm of the language, whereas the latter is the result of a mistake in language use and manifests itself as repetition, false starts, corrections or slips of the tongue. In contrast, Nhut (2020:25) views errors as a systematic deviation demonstrating learners' level of competency.

Errors are language forms that deviate from the rules of the target language that violate or stand against the expectations of literate adult Home Language speakers. Learners' errors develop due to a lack of linguistic knowledge and awareness rather than performance (Sobhi, 2019:52). Errors demonstrate insufficient language competence, and it reflect a student's current stage of Home Language development. While with local errors the meaning is not lost, global errors are severe as they interfere with the communication or writing process by tempering the meaning. These errors include inappropriate use of punctuation in writing, which results in the loss of meaning.

Errors indicate the progressive advancement of the learners toward their language goals, and highlight what the learners have yet to learn (Goldsmith & Sujaritjan, 2020:77). In agreement, Richards (1974); Houssos (2020:63) states that the learners' errors demonstrate the state of their language knowledge and the approaches in which a Home Language is learned. Errors are essential devices that demonstrate the extent of competency of a student. However, it is worth noting that errors in writing affect the readability and quality of a piece of work (Shigini, 2020:101). Xitsonga Language users often create errors and mistakes when they construct meanings in the language. Goldsmith and Sujaritjan (2020:77) point out that a student who commits a mistake capable of noticing and rectifying such a mistake while an error is unknown to the student committing it, as such, the student is incapable of self-correction without the intervention of the guidance.

2.10 TAXONOMY OF ERRORS IN WRITING

According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982); Hikmah (2020:2), "Errors are classified as omission, addition, mis-formation and mis-ordering". These error categories illustrate the location of errors in writing. The presence of these faults demonstrates

how written materials differ and stray from the Xitsonga Home language form. According to Hayati (2019:84), errors in this area "…are usually due to insufficient application of the norm in Xitsonga Home language". The above scholar argues that the taxonomy of error in writing is usually caused by a lack of application of Xitsonga rules when teaching. This might be because we are from different backgrounds. The author further classified errors into groups to see that there are many areas in which errors can be categorised. The researcher concurs with the author's argument that there is a need to emphasise Xitsonga Home language rules when teaching, so that learners may understand the importance of obeying the norms when writing.

2.10.1 Omission

Gayo and Widodo (2018:65) define omission as "A mistake in the deletion or obliteration of a sentence". It is an error caused by the absence of the other essential grammatical piece that classifies a statement as grammatically correct. This sort of error happens when a student's work lacks necessary components such as verbs, articles, or punctuation. Dulay et al. (1982) cited by Setyaningrum and Fatmawaty (2020:45) discovered that grammatical morphemes such as verbs, articles, nouns, prepositions, and inflections are dropped more frequently than content morphemes. According to Yule (2010:162); Gayo and Widodo (2018:65), the regular omission of functional morphemes such as articles, prepositions, or inflections (e.g. plural -s, past tense -ed) has led to the classification of this type of aphasic speech as grammatical; in grammatical speech, the grammatical markers are missing. Furthermore, Hayati (2020:82) claims that pupils make omission errors by leaving out the articles 'a' and 'the' and by omitting the suffix -s on plural nouns. The omission error occurs when functional morphemes (e.g., articles, prepositions) and inflections (e.g., plural -s, past tense -ed) are ignored.

The above scholars view omission as a mistake that learners commit due to a lack of important pieces that classify a text as grammatically correct. Such pieces include verbs, nouns, punctuation marks, and other pieces that constitute good writing. Hayat supports the above scholars as he said omission occurs because of the learners leaving the articles in their writing such as "a" and omitting the suffix "-s" in the plural.

According to Hayati (2020:82), “pupils commit omission errors in the domain of auxiliary usage. Consider the following sentences: He was very unhappy (he was so sad) that you came from a wealthy family. You come from a wealthy family. I am also a vegetarian. I am a vegetarian as well.” Gayo and Widodo (2018:66) discover that learners make morphological errors such as “…omitting inflection -es and -'s, derivation omission of inflection -ing and -er, omission of preposition to and in, omission of article, copula be; omission of be is and am, personal pronoun; omission of personal pronoun, and omission of auxiliary has”. The above scholar said that learners commit omission in their writing and that there is a need for interference to assist the learners.

2.10.2 Addition

Hikmah (2020:2) defines addition as a type of error that happens when the learners add an unnecessary word or phrase. Burt et al. (1982) cited by Setyaningrum and Fatmawaty (2020:45) view addition as one of the preposition's errors that is characterised by the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance. It is a type of error that surfaces when more unnecessary or redundant parts of words occur. The scholars define addition as a way in which students add unnecessary items in their text which later cause problem. For instance, in Xitsonga Home language, the word *“famba”* is a verb but when punctuation is put to it *“famba!”,* it shows that something must be done. Learners might tend to use unnecessary words to give a sign to the listener that something must be done and end up committing errors. The researcher urges that the educator needs to teach learners that any punctuation symbols that are added to a text can affect the meaning of what is written, depending on the role it plays in language.

2.10.3 Mis-formation

The wrong form of structure of an essay is regarded as misinformation. Misinformation does not only happen when learners do not know that an essay must have an

introductory paragraph, body, and conclusion, but when they also fail to know that the structure of an essay becomes wrong. Hikmah (2020:3) defines misinformation error as “The wrong form of the structure”. Dulay et al. (1982); Setyaningrum and Fatmawaty (2020:47) view mis-formation error as an incorrect presence of an item in an utterance. Mis-formation is the inappropriate use of a particular form in writing. The above scholars define misinformation as a situation in which a word is wrongly used. According to Setyaningrum, and Fatmawaty (2020:47) mis-formation appears in the sentence below: “In the sixth grade, I must go to a study tour — **at** the sixth grade**;** I must go to a study tour**.”**

2.10.4 Mis-ordering

The ability to put words in a correct sequence is called ordering, but when learners arrange words wrongfully, this is regarded as mis-ordering. Ellis (1997:18) defines mis-ordering as “Sequencing words or utterances in the wrong order”. Hikmah (2020:3) stresses that mis-ordering errors occur when the writer puts an item in the incorrect place in a sentence construction. Mis-ordering is the inaccurate word order in a sentence. Mis-ordering can happen when a head noun ‘car’ in the noun phrase ‘big car’ is placed before the modifier, resulting in erred writing ‘car big’. The scholars view mis-ordering as a way in which the student puts incorrect words to form a sentence which later hinders the meaning of the sentence. Setyaningrum and Fatmawaty (2020:49), demonstrate that mis-ordering error can be identified in the sentence below: “We leave the house **about at** 7 o’clock. We leave the house **at about** 7 o’clock.”
The researcher urges that the educator needs to highlight learners about the importance of taxonomy in writing so that learners will know the incorrect use of one taxonomy because it might change the entire meaning of a text; this might encourage them to take into consideration the language use in writing.

2.11 IDENTIFYING ERRORS

The identification and description of errors serve as preliminaries in the task of trying to explain why they occur. Errors are largely systematic, and to some extent,

predictable. Errors are not only systematic but universal too (Ellis, 1997:19), cited by Shigini 2020:101). Errors are essential devices that demonstrate the extent of competency of a student. However, it is worth noting that errors in writing affect the readability and quality of a piece of work (Shigini 2020:101). Thus, classifying errors in these ways can help researchers or educators to diagnose learning problems at any stage of their development, and to determine how changes in error patterns occur over time. Punctuation is a group of symbols or signs used to demarcate phrases, words, and portions of sentences as well as to clarify what is being written, Husada et al (2018). Songxaba and Sincuba (2019:2), declare that learners' use of words from technical devices has a huge impact on written essays. Inter-lingual errors are identified as transfer errors and an outcome from a learner's HL features, for example, grammatical and lexical errors.

By looking at the above review on how to identify errors, the researcher draws that to identify the errors there must be certain skills that will help so that there will be no learner left out struggling to punctuate correctly when writing, and to have those skill that is where the DOE can interfere to equip the educators with relevant knowledge because not all the educators are trained for four years to teach learners as some educators come from different fields of study, for example, science stream and they only did one year certificate and obtain their teaching certificate. This will assist learners in getting positive results at the end of the day.

2.11.1 Intra-lingual and Inter-lingual errors

Richard (1974) cited in Angguni (2020:79) points out that there are two types of errors within EA framework, namely, intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors. Shousha et al. (2020:48) view intra-lingual errors as the kinds of errors that occur due to inadequate learning of a language such as incorrect application of grammatical rules and unawareness of the restrictions of rules. These are the kinds of errors that occur when Xitsonga Home language learners depend on their Home Language while using English. Raissah and Aziz (2020:258) highlight that these errors occur during the first phase of learning a new language thus, learners who are not accustomed to the target language system rely on their Home Language system. Raissah and Aziz (2020:258) Stress that intra-lingual errors (also known as developmental errors) are inaccurate

utterances that represent incomplete learning of L2 rules or over-generalisations. Angguni (2020:79) finds that learners of the Xitsonga Home language tend to over-generalise the rule of punctuation in writing, and this end up confusing them when punctuating their sentences.

2.11.2 Classification of intra-lingual errors

Richard (1974) cited in Angguni (2020:79) classifies the intra-lingual errors into four categories: over-generalisation, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of the rules, and false concept hypothesised. Shousha et al. (2020:48) note that intra-lingual errors arise from the target language itself and can be attributed to several factors: incomplete application of rules, neglecting exceptions to those rules, excessive reliance on certain rules, or over-generalization. This often occurs when educators explain the language without providing correct models of the Home Language.

2.11.3 Over-generalisation

Angguni (2020:79) maintains that over-generalisation occurs when a Xitsonga Home language student commits a deviant structure based on the experience of other structures in the Home Language. Over-generalisation simply refers to errors caused by the extension of Home Language rules to inappropriate contexts. For example, using improper punctuation in a sentence such as “What is your name?”. Instead of putting a question mark, learners put a full stop.

2.11.4 Ignorance of Rule Restrictions

Rana et al. (2019:27) argue that ignorance of rule restrictions occurs when the learners flout the rules of the existing structure by applying rules to contexts where they are not applicable. James (1998) cited in Angguni (2020:79) concurs that this happens when the Xitsonga Home language student does not adhere to the structure of the language.

These errors emanate from the avoidance or failure to use certain writing structures. They happen when the Xitsonga Home language student fails to observe the restrictions of existing structures. For instance, when a Xitsonga Home language student fails to observe punctuation marks but due to their ignorance, they do not apply it.

2.11.5 Incomplete application of the rules

Ramli (2020:3) views the incomplete application of the rules as an error that happens to a student who does not apply the rules completely. For example, “You student’” instead of “You are student”. Rana et al. (2019:27) stress that incomplete application of the rules is a type of error that occurs when the learners fail to utilise a fully developed structure. They tend to use a statement form instead of a question, or a question word for a statement.

The researcher sees a need to teach learners the rules of writing so that they will use all the required aspects of writing. This will allow the learners to edit their essays before handing them to their educator.

2.11.6 False concept hypothesised

Angguni (2020:79) points out that “Learners’ faulty understanding of distinctions of target language items leads to false conceptualisation”. Ramli (2020:3) stresses that “False concept hypothesised refers to errors produced when the learners make mistakes in formulating own hypotheses about the grammatical rules learned: such as ‘She is not go to school yesterday’ instead of ‘She did not go to school yesterday’.” The words ‘is’ and ‘did’ may have the same use but apply in different contexts. Learners’ faulty understanding of distinctions of target language items leads to false concept hypothesised.

The researcher argues that learners who tend to ignore what they have been taught, especially when they proceed to the next grade, must be given psychiatric tests to

check their readiness for the next grade. In most situations, this is not implemented, and the results are that more errors get committed because learners do not have adequate prior knowledge that they can use to learn everything new. Thus, intervention in terms of reinforcement is needed as it can yield positive outcomes.
EA approach was influential in drawing attention to the creative processes that guide the learners' language development. It also contributed to the view that errors can provide evidence into language development of the learners' inter-language, strategies or procedures the learners use in the discovery of a new language. Hummel (2014:66) points out that the shortcoming of the EA is that focusing on learners' errors takes attention away from what learners can do correctly in acquiring a new language and learners also find alternative ways to avoid certain structures or patterns that cause them difficulties.

2.12 COMMON PUNCTUATION ERRORS IN XITSONGA

Punctuation errors are influenced by insufficient teaching material. While teaching aids may be available in schools, learners can still make punctuation errors because they are often instructed by unskilled and unqualified educators. Berman (2017) argues that learners should be engaged in writing to use written language effectively and meaningfully. Gove and Caliche (2018) emphasise that writing skills should be taught as early as in the Foundation Phase. The above scholars emphasise that the learners need to be taught basic language skills in the early stages of their educational development so that they may be able to write for meaning using necessary punctuation. Thus, learners should be engaged in frequent writing so that they do not perceive writing as a punishment, but as another form of communicating thoughts.

This implies that a good foundation in language can help learners use their prior knowledge when they learn essay writing in other educational phases. Learners will know that punctuation marks are signs that aid the construction of appropriate expressions in writing. Crème and Leas (2017) indicate that a text must contain words that are set together in a specific form to create meaningful sentences. Furthermore, Crème and Leas (2017) indicate that the text must have the correct formation for the reader's ease of access to meaning. Khalil (2000) mentioned that the most common

frequent errors made by Palestinian EFL learners in their writing are the misuse of commas and periods. This indicates that the challenges faced by learners in Palestine are similar to those experienced by learners in the Mafemani Circuit. During the interactions with the learners in the circuit, and before this investigation, the researcher noticed that learners cannot use a comma appropriately resulting in a text with a group of words that make no sense.

According to Nurwahyuni (2017), the most common errors in the use of commas are comma splice and superfluous commas. Nurwahyuni (2017) mentioned that the omission of commas is the most frequent error made by learners. Apart from commas, Nasruddin (2015) found that apostrophes are the most common error in his research. Although the most common error of punctuation marks is the comma, other structural marks like colon, semicolon, period, and dash also deserve investigation. The argument above shows that the most common errors committed by learners involve comma usage. This motivated the current researcher to conduct this study to find out more about the common errors that learners at Mafemani Circuit commit and to come up with remedial strategies to help the learners and educators to improve in this area.

2.13 SIGNIFICANCE OF ERRORS

There are stages to deal with the errors committed by the learners. The stages involve: recognition, description, and explanation. The recognition of errors depends on the interpretation of the learners' intention. Description begins when recognition has taken place while explaining errors is regarded as a linguistic activity accounting for why and how errors come about.

Thus, the researcher has recognised errors committed by learners when they write narrative essays. These errors committed are described, explained, and classified in this study (Chapter 4). One of the most significant contributions of Xitsonga Home language lies in its success in elevating the status of errors from being undesirable to that of them providing a guide to the inner workings of the language learning process.

This research has provided evidence to emphasise errors as an effective means of improving the language. Errors serve as feedback that can make educators aware of

the effectiveness of their teaching as well as teaching techniques. The errors also help educators to become aware of subject topics or areas that need more time or different teaching strategies.

2.14 THE EFFECTS OF PUNCTUATION ERROR IN NARRATIVE ESSAY WRITING

Learning Xitsonga is directed at improving the learners' ability to communicate using Xitsonga properly and correctly, both orally and in writing. Thus, it becomes a problem when the learners cannot correctly use the punctuation marks because it affects the way they communicate their written text to their educators, and it also affects their social life as they communicate. Punctuation fills our writing with silent intonation and all the writing requires complete mastery of punctuation because it is punctuation that removes ambiguity and makes text clear and easily comprehensible. Adeloka (2017) states that punctuation mark is the use of conventional signs and certain typographical devices as aids to the understanding of handwritten and printed text.

The above scholar explains punctuation marks as a tool that makes a written text to be more understandable. As such, failure to comprehend might result in miscommunication or the breakdown thereof. Based on the explanation above, the researcher sees punctuation as an important aspect of writing skills. Hence, wrong punctuation can interrupt the flow of ideas and affect meaning. This shows that the incorrect use of punctuation changes the meaning of a written text, and it can affect how the information is supposed to be transmitted. This will not only affect the reader but also the writer because there are some words in Xitsonga that when not well punctuated, sound as if the writer is insulting the reader. For example, *Xikombiso: a ndlala masangu, hi ku hetiseka. Masangu ma nga va na tinhlamuselo timbirhi, laha ku nga na sangu ro tlela ka rona kasi ku na sangu ro va varhandzani va tsaka swin'we.*

The imperial literature above justifies that there is a gap in how to use punctuation marks by learners when writing narrative essays. This gap must be addressed to assist learners in writing their sentences correctly.

2.15 THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST-LANGUAGE STRUCTURES IN PUNCTUATION

The influence of first-language (L1) structures on second-language (L2) writing has been a focal point in understanding the challenges learners face, particularly concerning punctuation usage. For Xitsonga Grade 10 learners at Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, this influence manifests in specific punctuation errors when composing narrative essays in Xitsonga. This literature review examines how L1 structures impact punctuation in L2 writing, with a focus on Xitsonga learners, and explores related findings in other linguistic contexts. L1 interference, or negative transfer, occurs when structures from a learner's native language influence their use of a second language, often leading to errors. In writing, this interference can affect various aspects, including syntax, grammar, and punctuation. Punctuation, while often overlooked, plays a crucial role in conveying meaning and ensuring clarity in written texts. Studies have shown that learners frequently apply punctuation rules from their L1 to their L2 writing, resulting in errors. For instance, Mubarok and Nur'aisyah (2020) identified that Indonesian students often committed punctuation errors in English due to the direct transfer of Indonesian punctuation conventions. Similarly, research by Apuhin et al. (2023) revealed that Filipino students' misuse of commas and periods in English persuasive essays stemmed from the influence of their native language structures. Xitsonga, as a Bantu language, possesses unique syntactic and grammatical structures that differ significantly from those of English. These differences can lead to specific challenges in punctuation when Xitsonga learners write in English or apply English punctuation rules to Xitsonga writing. Mahlaule (2024) observed that Xitsonga Grade 10 learners often misused punctuation marks, such as commas and full stops, in their narrative essays. This misuse was attributed to the interference of English punctuation rules, which learners had internalized, leading to their incorrect application in Xitsonga writing. Furthermore, the lack of standardized punctuation conventions in Xitsonga exacerbates these challenges. Unlike English, which has well-established punctuation rules, Xitsonga's written form is still evolving, and its punctuation practices are not uniformly taught. This inconsistency can cause confusion among learners, leading them to rely on the punctuation norms of their L2, thereby introducing errors into their Xitsonga writing. The phenomenon of L1 structural influence on L2 punctuation is not

unique to Xitsonga learners. In a study examining Tamil-speaking students learning English, Remoshan (2021) found that learners often transferred Tamil punctuation rules into their English writing, leading to errors such as incorrect comma placement and misuse of capitalization. These errors were directly linked to the structural differences between Tamil and English punctuation systems.

Similarly, research focusing on Arabic-speaking learners of English highlighted that the absence of certain punctuation marks in Arabic led to their underuse or misuse in English writing. Shakir et al. (2020) noted that Arabic learners often omitted necessary punctuation in English sentences, a tendency stemming from the less rigid punctuation rules in Arabic writing. Understanding the impact of L1 structures on L2 punctuation is essential for developing effective teaching strategies. Educators should be aware of the specific punctuation challenges their students face due to L1 interference and tailor their instruction accordingly. Explicit teaching of punctuation rules in both L1 and L2, along with comparative analyses, can help learners discern the differences and apply the correct conventions in each language. Moreover, creating standardized punctuation guidelines for languages like Xitsonga can provide learners with a clear framework, reducing reliance on L2 rules and minimizing errors. Incorporating practical exercises that focus on punctuation usage within the context of both languages can reinforce proper application and enhance writing proficiency. The influence of first-language structures on punctuation use in second-language writing is a significant factor contributing to writing errors among learners. For Xitsonga Grade 10 learners, the interplay between Xitsonga and English punctuation conventions presents unique challenges. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of both languages' structures and the development of targeted instructional strategies to mitigate L1 interference, thereby improving learners' writing accuracy and overall language proficiency.

2.16 STANDARDIZED VS. NON-STANDARDIZED PUNCTUATION PRACTICES IN XITSONGA

Punctuation is an essential component of written language, ensuring clarity, coherence, and accurate meaning transmission. However, learners often struggle to

adhere to standardized punctuation rules, leading to deviations that impact their written communication. This literature review explores how learners conform to or deviate from these rules, with a particular focus on Xitsonga Grade 10 learners at Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Some learners demonstrate a high degree of adherence to standardized punctuation rules due to effective instruction, exposure to well-punctuated texts, and reinforcement from educators. Research by Mthembu (2022) highlights that learners who engage in consistent reading activities, particularly in their first language, tend to have better punctuation skills. Exposure to correctly punctuated narratives in Xitsonga and English enables students to internalize conventions, reducing errors in their writing. Furthermore, studies indicate that structured language instruction plays a crucial role in punctuation mastery. According to Khoza and Ndlovu (2023), learners who receive explicit grammar and punctuation instruction in their home language exhibit fewer punctuation errors when transitioning to second-language writing. This finding suggests that adherence to standardized punctuation rules can be fostered through targeted teaching methodologies that emphasize practical application and reinforcement. Despite the benefits of structured learning, many learners deviate from standardized punctuation rules due to various linguistic and educational factors. One primary cause of deviation is the influence of oral tradition in African languages, where speech patterns do not always align with written conventions. Dlamini (2021) found that Xitsonga-speaking learners often omit commas and periods in their writing because these punctuation marks do not have direct equivalents in spoken discourse. Another significant factor contributing to deviation is the lack of standardized punctuation rules in Xitsonga compared to English. Research by Moyo (2024) indicates that inconsistencies in punctuation instruction contribute to learners applying English punctuation rules inconsistently in Xitsonga writing. This issue is further exacerbated by the multilingual nature of the South African education system, where students switch between languages, often leading to punctuation errors due to interference from English writing conventions.

Moreover, limited access to reading materials in Xitsonga affects learners' ability to grasp punctuation rules effectively. According to Nkosi and Maseko (2023), many South African learners primarily read English texts, which means their exposure to Xitsonga punctuation conventions remains limited. As a result, they tend to insert

English punctuation rules into their Xitsonga writing, causing errors such as misplaced quotation marks and incorrect capitalization. Addressing punctuation errors requires innovative teaching strategies that align with learners' linguistic backgrounds. Makhubela (2020) advocates for comparative language analysis, where students analyze punctuation rules in both Xitsonga and English to understand their similarities and differences. This method allows learners to develop metalinguistic awareness, thereby reducing cross-linguistic interference. Furthermore, incorporating technology-based learning tools has shown promise in enhancing punctuation proficiency. Research by Baloyi and Sibanda (2025) suggests that digital learning applications that provide interactive punctuation exercises help students reinforce correct punctuation usage. Gamified learning experiences, in particular, have been found to improve learners' retention of punctuation rules by making the learning process engaging and interactive. The extent to which Xitsonga Grade 10 learners adhere to or deviate from standardized punctuation rules is influenced by multiple factors, including linguistic traditions, educational exposure, and instructional methodologies. While some learners demonstrate adherence due to structured learning and reading exposure, many struggle due to inconsistencies in punctuation instruction and the influence of multilingualism. Effective pedagogical interventions, including comparative language analysis and technology-assisted learning, can help bridge the gap, ensuring better punctuation accuracy in both Xitsonga and English writing.

2.17 TEACHING AND LEARNING OF PUNCTUATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Punctuation plays a crucial role in written communication, aiding clarity and coherence in language. In South African schools, particularly in multilingual contexts, teaching punctuation presents both challenges and opportunities. According to Mahlangu and Nkosi (2021), the diversity of linguistic backgrounds among learners impacts their understanding and application of punctuation rules. Many learners, including Xitsonga Grade 10 students, struggle to transfer punctuation conventions from their first language to their second language writing, leading to errors and inconsistencies. One of the primary challenges in teaching punctuation in South African schools is the lack

of explicit instruction and reinforcement in early education (Mthembu, 2022). Teachers often focus on broader grammatical structures, leaving punctuation as an assumed skill rather than an explicitly taught component of writing. Research by Dlamini (2023) suggests that many teachers themselves may not have received adequate training in punctuation instruction, which affects their ability to impart these rules effectively to learners. Additionally, language interference is a significant factor influencing punctuation use. Studies indicate that first-language punctuation rules often conflict with second-language conventions, causing learners to misuse punctuation marks such as commas, full stops, and quotation marks (Khumalo, 2024). This issue is exacerbated by the absence of standardized punctuation teaching methods in multilingual classrooms. Effective teaching methods can enhance learners' punctuation skills and reduce errors in narrative writing. One approach, as highlighted by Ndlovu and Sibanda (2025), is integrating punctuation instruction with reading and writing activities. This method allows learners to observe punctuation use in context and apply it practically in their writing tasks. Furthermore, technology-driven learning tools, such as digital writing programs and interactive grammar exercises, have shown positive results in improving punctuation accuracy (Moyo, 2023). These tools provide immediate feedback, allowing learners to recognize and correct punctuation mistakes in real time. The teaching and learning of punctuation in South African schools require more structured and explicit instruction. Teachers need professional development programs focusing on punctuation pedagogy, and curricula should incorporate targeted exercises to reinforce punctuation rules. By addressing these challenges, educators can equip learners, including Xitsonga Grade 10 students, with the necessary skills to improve their writing proficiency.

2.18 INFLUENCE OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES ON PUNCTUATION SKILLS

Curriculum and assessment policies play a crucial role in shaping learners' punctuation skills, particularly in multilingual contexts such as South African schools. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) provides guidelines on language teaching, including punctuation instruction. However, research suggests that

the implementation of these policies often falls short, leading to persistent punctuation errors among learners (Mahlangu, 2022). The design of the curriculum influences how punctuation is taught and reinforced in classrooms. According to Ndlovu and Khumalo (2023), the South African curriculum emphasizes broad literacy skills but provides limited explicit instruction on punctuation. This gap leaves many learners struggling with correct punctuation usage in writing tasks, particularly in narrative essays. Additionally, the sequencing of language instruction in the curriculum affects punctuation proficiency. Studies show that punctuation is often introduced in lower grades but not sufficiently reinforced at higher levels, causing learners to forget or misuse punctuation marks (Dlamini, 2024). This issue is further exacerbated by teachers' reliance on outdated instructional materials that do not align with contemporary linguistic research on punctuation pedagogy. Assessment policies determine how punctuation skills are evaluated and the emphasis placed on them in language education. Mahlangu (2022) argues that the current assessment practices prioritize content comprehension and writing fluency over grammatical accuracy, leading to insufficient feedback on punctuation errors. Consequently, learners receive minimal correction for punctuation mistakes, which hinders their ability to improve.

Moreover, standardized tests often neglect punctuation-focused assessment, contributing to a lack of accountability in punctuation instruction (Sibanda, 2025). When punctuation is not explicitly assessed, both learners and educators may underestimate its importance, resulting in continued errors in narrative writing. To enhance punctuation skills among Xitsonga Grade 10 learners, curriculum developers must incorporate structured punctuation instruction into language teaching frameworks. Research by Mthembu and Nkosi (2023) suggests that integrating punctuation-focused activities within reading and writing lessons can significantly improve learner proficiency. Additionally, assessment methods should be revised to include punctuation as a critical component of language evaluation. Teacher training programs should also be strengthened to ensure educators are equipped with effective punctuation teaching strategies (Moyo, 2024). By aligning curriculum and assessment policies with best practices in language instruction, South African schools can foster better punctuation competence among learners. The influence of curriculum and assessment policies on punctuation skills cannot be overlooked. While current policies provide a foundation for language instruction, their limitations contribute to persistent

punctuation errors among learners. A more structured approach to punctuation teaching, coupled with comprehensive assessment practices, is necessary to address these challenges and enhance the writing proficiency of Xitsonga Grade 10 learners.

2.19 THE INFLUENCE OF READING HABITS ON PUNCTUATION ACCURACY

Reading habits play a crucial role in shaping an individual's punctuation accuracy, particularly among students learning to write in their first or additional language. Extensive reading exposes individuals to well-structured sentences, reinforcing proper punctuation use through repeated exposure to correctly punctuated texts. Conversely, limited reading habits may lead to frequent punctuation errors, as learners lack sufficient exposure to accurate writing conventions (Krashen, 2018). One of the primary ways reading habits influence punctuation accuracy is through implicit learning. According to Nation (2020), when students regularly engage with well-punctuated materials, they unconsciously internalize punctuation rules, such as the appropriate use of commas, periods, and quotation marks. This exposure fosters automaticity, reducing the likelihood of errors in their own writing. Additionally, frequent readers tend to develop a stronger sense of sentence structure, which aids in recognizing the natural pauses that dictate punctuation placement (Swan, 2019). Furthermore, the genre of reading materials plays a significant role in punctuation proficiency. Academic and literary texts generally adhere to formal punctuation norms, offering clear models for learners (Parrott, 2021). On the other hand, excessive engagement with informal digital communication, such as social media or texting, may contribute to punctuation inaccuracies due to the prevalent use of abbreviations and non-standard sentence structures (Tagg, 2018). This shift in reading habits has led researchers to argue that students must balance their reading sources to maintain punctuation accuracy in academic writing. Moreover, studies suggest that explicit instruction combined with strong reading habits produces the best outcomes in punctuation accuracy (Ellis, 2020). While reading provides a foundation for learning punctuation intuitively, direct grammar instruction reinforces the rules systematically, ensuring that students can apply them correctly in various writing contexts. Teachers

and educators are encouraged to integrate both strategies, promoting a reading culture alongside structured punctuation instruction.

In conclusion, reading habits significantly influence punctuation accuracy by exposing learners to correct sentence structures and punctuation conventions. A consistent and diverse reading practice, especially in academic contexts, enhances writing proficiency, whereas reliance on informal digital communication may hinder proper punctuation use. Therefore, fostering a strong reading culture remains essential for improving punctuation accuracy in writing.

2.20 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PUNCTUATION ERRORS IN XITSONGA VS. ENGLISH

Punctuation plays a vital role in written communication, yet its usage varies across languages due to differences in linguistic structures and writing conventions. In comparing Xitsonga and English, it becomes evident that punctuation errors among learners often stem from the influence of their first language, leading to interference in writing practices. Research suggests that mother tongue interference significantly impacts punctuation accuracy when students transition from Xitsonga to English writing (Mafela, 2020). The structural differences between these languages contribute to specific challenges, particularly in the use of commas, full stops, and quotation marks. One key difference between Xitsonga and English punctuation is the use of pauses in writing. In Xitsonga, sentence structure is more flexible, and pauses are often dictated by context rather than strict punctuation rules (Baloyi, 2019). This contrasts with English, where commas and full stops are governed by rigid grammatical conventions. As a result, Xitsonga speakers may underuse or misuse commas in English writing, leading to run-on sentences or incorrect clause separation (Nkuna, 2021). Additionally, Xitsonga does not traditionally employ the same frequency of punctuation marks as English, leading learners to omit essential punctuation when writing in English (Chauke, 2018). Another area of divergence is the use of quotation marks. English writing requires quotation marks to indicate direct speech, with specific rules governing their placement alongside commas and full stops (Crystal, 2020). However, Xitsonga oral traditions rely heavily on spoken narratives,

and written conventions for direct speech are less formalized (Mahlalela, 2017). As a result, Xitsonga-speaking learners may struggle with the correct placement of quotation marks and punctuation within dialogue structures in English. Furthermore, capitalization rules in English, particularly for proper nouns and sentence beginnings, differ from Xitsonga, where such distinctions are less emphasized in informal writing (Hlongwane, 2022). The impact of these errors is significant in academic and professional contexts, where incorrect punctuation can alter meaning and readability. To address these challenges, educators must implement targeted strategies, such as contrastive grammar instruction and bilingual literacy programs (Makhubele, 2021). By highlighting the differences between Xitsonga and English punctuation rules, students can develop a deeper understanding of their writing practices and reduce errors. The comparative analysis of punctuation errors in Xitsonga and English reveals that structural differences and mother tongue interference contribute to common mistakes among learners. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of explicit instruction and extensive reading to enhance punctuation accuracy in both languages.

2.21 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PUNCTUATION SKILLS

Punctuation is essential for effective written communication, yet many learners struggle with its correct usage due to insufficient instruction, language interference, and limited reading exposure (Brown, 2021). To address these difficulties, educators can implement intervention strategies such as targeted grammar instruction, reading-based learning, writing practice with feedback, and the use of digital tools. These approaches help students develop a stronger understanding of punctuation rules and their application in writing. One effective intervention strategy is targeted grammar instruction, where teachers explicitly teach punctuation rules through structured lessons. According to Richards and Reppen (2020), direct teaching of punctuation, combined with sentence construction exercises, enhances students' ability to use commas, periods, and apostrophes correctly. Teachers should incorporate interactive activities, such as sentence correction and guided writing tasks, to reinforce learning.

Reading-based learning is another crucial approach. Learners exposed to well-punctuated texts develop an intuitive understanding of punctuation placement and

sentence structure (Zhang, 2019). By engaging in extensive reading of books, articles, and essays, students internalize punctuation usage, making it easier to apply in their own writing. Additionally, oral reading activities encourage students to recognize natural pauses, which align with punctuation marks such as commas and full stops (Larsen-Freeman, 2022). Writing practice with constructive feedback plays a significant role in punctuation improvement. According to Hyland (2021), frequent writing tasks, combined with teacher and peer feedback, help students identify and correct punctuation errors. Teachers should encourage learners to revise their work based on feedback, promoting self-correction and deeper understanding. Peer editing activities, where students review each other's work, further enhance punctuation accuracy by allowing them to identify errors in different contexts (Truscott, 2020). The integration of digital tools also supports punctuation learning. Applications like Grammarly and Hemingway Editor provide instant feedback on punctuation errors, helping learners improve their writing skills in real time (Jones, 2018). Moreover, online grammar games and quizzes offer engaging ways to practice punctuation rules, making learning interactive and enjoyable. Improving punctuation skills requires a combination of targeted grammar instruction, extensive reading, structured writing practice, and the use of digital tools. These strategies, when effectively implemented, enhance students' punctuation accuracy and overall writing proficiency, preparing them for academic and professional success.

2.22 CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON PUNCTUATION ERRORS

Conducting research on punctuation errors presents several challenges that can affect the quality and reliability of findings. One of the primary challenges is the inherent subjectivity in identifying and categorizing punctuation errors. Punctuation rules can vary across different languages and writing styles, and what may be considered an error in one context could be deemed acceptable in another (Abdulrahim & Al-Busaidi, 2022). This variation makes it difficult to establish a universal criterion for what constitutes a "punctuation error," particularly in multilingual settings where individuals may be influenced by their first language conventions (Nguyen & Lim, 2021). Researchers must carefully define these boundaries to ensure consistency in error

classification, which can be labour-intensive and time-consuming. Another significant challenge lies in the cultural and linguistic factors that influence punctuation usage. In some languages, punctuation is used more sparingly or with different rules compared to others. For example, while English has strict punctuation rules around commas and periods, languages like Chinese or Japanese may have distinct punctuation practices that do not align with the conventions of Western languages (Smith & Chen, 2020). This cultural and linguistic variability can complicate cross-cultural studies, as researchers must account for differences in punctuation norms when analyzing errors across diverse populations. Moreover, participants' writing proficiency levels introduce additional complexities. Studies on punctuation errors often focus on learners at varying stages of language acquisition, from beginners to more advanced writers. Errors made by novice learners may differ significantly from those of advanced writers, leading to challenges in comparing error patterns across groups (Yuan & Wang, 2023). Researchers must carefully control for these variables to draw accurate conclusions about the sources and types of punctuation errors among different learner groups.

Another hurdle is the limited access to representative data for comprehensive analysis. Punctuation errors in student writing are often context-dependent and may be influenced by the type of writing task or the writer’s familiarity with the subject matter (Shaw & Patel, 2024). As a result, collecting a sufficiently large and diverse sample of written texts that accurately reflect the spectrum of punctuation errors in real-world settings is challenging. Finally, the use of automated tools for error detection and analysis presents both opportunities and challenges. While technology can help in quickly identifying punctuation errors, these tools are not foolproof and may overlook certain subtleties in language use. They may also struggle with complex syntactic structures where punctuation serves more than just a grammatical function but also conveys meaning and tone (Zhang & Tan, 2025). Therefore, relying solely on automated tools for data analysis may lead to incomplete or inaccurate results, necessitating the integration of manual coding and expert analysis. In conclusion, while researching punctuation errors offers valuable insights into language acquisition and writing proficiency, it is fraught with challenges. These include issues related to subjectivity in error classification, linguistic and cultural variability, differences in writing proficiency, and the limitations of data collection methods and technological tools.

Overcoming these challenges requires careful consideration of these factors to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings.

2.23 RELATED RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN XITSONGA

On the other hand, research on writing skills and punctuation in Xitsonga has revealed significant linguistic challenges faced by learners in educational. Contexts. Baloyi (2021) conducted a study on the orthographic competence of Xitsonga learners in secondary schools, with a particular focus on punctuation usage. The study highlighted that learners frequently misuse punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and quotation marks due to a lack of formal instruction in Xitsonga grammar. The findings indicated that Xitsonga language teachers often prioritize content over writing mechanics, leading to gaps in learners' understanding of punctuation rules. Baloyi (2021) recommended that teachers adopt explicit instruction methods on punctuation to improve learners' narrative writing skills. This study is particularly relevant to understanding the underlying causes of punctuation errors and provides a pedagogical framework for addressing them. In another related study, Mhlongo and Shiluvane (2020) investigated the influence of code-switching on Xitsonga writing proficiency among Grade 10 learners in multilingual settings. The study found that learners often transfer punctuation patterns from English into their Xitsonga narrative essays, resulting in syntactic and grammatical inconsistencies. The researchers argued that this transfer occurs because learners are more familiar with English punctuation conventions due to the dominance of English as the medium of instruction. To address this challenge, Mhlongo and Shiluvane (2020) proposed a bilingual teaching approach that reinforces Xitsonga-specific writing rules while acknowledging learners' multilingual backgrounds. This research offers valuable insights into the role of language transfer in punctuation errors and suggests practical teaching strategies to mitigate this issue.

2.24 CONCLUSION

Related literature on punctuation errors was reviewed and they indicated that it is important for Xitsonga Home Language to understand the significance and function of punctuation marks in writing. This shows that writing alone is a waste of time as the

text might not give the meaning it intended to deliver. The study was conducted as there is still a gap in terms of the lack of punctuation marks. This will not only affect the Xitsonga Home language but also other subjects and hinder their academic performance. This research was conducted to bring awareness to the Department of Basic Education that there is a need for educators to be trained on how to teach punctuation marks. This research aimed to look at the different types of punctuation errors that learners commit. The research focused on all punctuation errors in one school at Mafemani Circuit of Bushbuckridge. The study discovered the differences in the frequency of punctuation errors and the basic reasons behind these differences in the writing of learners from the chosen school. This study attempted to find a solution on what can be done to prevent punctuation errors that the learners commit and suggest ways that educators must identify learners who face challenges in punctuation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is a way in which the researcher gathered the information to produce viable findings for this study. Dawson (2019) views research methodology as a primary principle that will guide one's research. The above scholar sees methodology as a primary procedure that needs to be followed in research. Hence, this chapter outlines all procedures that were followed to culminate in the findings generated in chapter four of this study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study will adopt a qualitative case study design to explore punctuation errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays. The case study approach is suitable because it allows an in-depth examination of learners' writing practices within a real-life educational context (Yin, 2018). Data collection methods will include document analysis of learners' written essays to identify specific punctuation errors, as well as semi-structured interviews with Xitsonga language teachers to understand the teaching strategies employed in addressing punctuation issues. Classroom observations will also be conducted to gain insights into how punctuation instruction is integrated into teaching practices. This multi-method approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to punctuation errors and potential solutions. While the case study design is appropriate for this research, one area that requires improvement for future studies is the inclusion of longitudinal data collection to observe changes in learners' writing over time. The current study focuses on a cross-sectional analysis, which may limit the understanding of how sustained teaching interventions affect punctuation accuracy. Future research could adopt an action research design to implement and monitor the effectiveness of targeted instructional strategies over multiple academic terms. Such an approach

would provide more robust insights into the long-term impact of teaching methods on learners' writing proficiency (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.2.1 Research Location: Mpumalanga Province, South Africa's Mafemani Circuit in the Bohlabela District

This research was carried out in the Mafemani Circuit, Mpumalanga Province's Bohlabela District. The schools in Mafemani Circuit offered Xitsonga Home language. The researcher specifically investigated the narrative essay writing challenges of learners in the Department of Languages within the selected school. The study's sample and research site were both given by the Xitsonga Department. Many learners were anxious to learn the Xitsonga Home language in this department, which was regarded as one of the best and most respected. The Mafemani Circuit served as the study's location during the research.

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

In this study, the researcher used a population of all the Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners. The researcher wrote ‘yes’ and ‘no’ on pieces of paper and asked all learners to pick one piece of paper. The learners who picked ‘yes’ had an opportunity to take part in this research. The reason for doing this was to be fair to all learners and give all of them an opportunity to participate.

3.3.1 Population

The research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that are the focus of the study (Majid, 2018). The population of this research consisted of 53 Grade 10 learners in the selected school and 2 educators who taught Xitsonga Home language in Grade 10. Majid (2018) explains population as a group of interest that the researcher intends to study and where the sample will be drawn from.

The above scholar explained population as a group of people whom the researcher intends to study. In this study, the selected population was chosen because the group members had the same traits in terms of the proposed problem. The researcher chose Grade 10 learners because they resembled the traits that the researcher needed to study vividly to get valid results. Thus, the research population was drawn in the Mafemani Circuit at one selected secondary school. The school was physically located at Demulani Village: a poverty-stricken area with many unemployed residents who mostly depend on farming. In addition, the researcher also works in one of the schools within the circuit; and had the privilege of observing the difficulties experienced by learners regarding the use of correct punctuation in written essays.

3.3.2 Sampling

Choosing the group of people to form part of this research was not easy. Thus, the researcher needed a technique to choose suitable people to help make the study a success. According to Dawson (2019), sampling is a technique of selecting individual members or subgroups of the population to make statistical inferences from them and estimate the characteristics of the whole population.

At the selected school, there were 53 Grade 10 learners and five Xitsonga Home language educators. The researcher applied purposive sampling to select 10 learners from the population of 53 learners. To achieve gender balance, the researcher selected 5 boys and 5 girls to participate in the study, along with 2 Xitsonga HL educators. An essay was given to all learners to generate a sample of 10 participants. Those who seemed to struggle were set aside as they were the most suitable persons to express the challenges they experienced regarding punctuation. The researcher did this to focus on the learners who struggled with writing an essay. By default, the two educators were selected because they all teach the Xitsonga Home language in the selected school.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher needed to generate data from the chosen sample and be able to draw valid conclusions from it. Leedy and Ormrod (2018:26) define data collection as “A procedure of collecting, measuring, and analysing accurate insights for research using standard validated techniques”.

The above authors define data collection as a way in which researchers gather data, measure and analyse it to get correct results after data analysis. In agreement, Marais and Malatjie (2019) indicate that an interview is a two-way discussion in which the evaluator asks participants questions to learn about their ideas, beliefs views, opinions, and behaviour.

The scholars quoted above support each other as they both illustrate that there is a need to collect data for the proposed problem to gain insights regarding the problem and be able to develop relevant strategies on how the problem could be solved. In this study, the researcher started by preparing questions that would act as a guideline for the study, although the questions were not strictly followed because the researcher used unstructured interviews to gain information from the participants. This approach was inspired by Tegan’s argument (2022) when he indicated that an unstructured interview is a data collection method that relies on asking participants questions randomly depending on the flow of the conversation between the researcher and the respondents. In other words, the scholar emphasises that in an unstructured interview, one needs not follow a procedure of the set question, but rather ask questions and follow-up questions when necessary. The interviews were recorded and analysed at the end of the interview process. In short, the current researcher collected data using interviews, observations and document analysis.

3.4.1 Documents analysis

The collection of data required more time and sufficient procedures to become a success. Therefore, the current researcher deemed it fit to use document analysis as one of the ways to collect data. The researcher gave the learners different topics and

asked them to choose the one they best understood and write narrative essays on it (see Appendix 5). When learners were writing the essays, the researcher urged them to always use corrected punctuation marks. Using this method to collect data was beneficial as the researcher took the written scripts and evaluated them as part of document analysis. This provided the researcher with first-hand data and allowed her to gain clear and valid conclusions concerning the challenges learners encounter when using punctuation marks.

3.4.2 Observation

Observing learners in a language classroom was a difficult process. However, the researcher chose this method because there were perceived factors from the literature that could impede learners' composition of good essays. As such, the researcher saw the need to determine (through observations) if the challenges were also prevalent in the case of this study. The researcher started by observing the classroom environment to check whether there were factors that hampered the learner's effective writing, with more focus on factors that contributed to the learner's inability to use correct punctuation marks.

One of the factors that the researcher observed was the classroom seating arrangements to check if learners were arranged according to the requirements of CAPS. This is because seating arrangements have the potential to impede learners' interactions with one another as well as their overall class participation. In addition, the seating arrangement can hold educators back from implementing some strategies or activities that could enhance their understanding. For instance, in an overcrowded classroom, educators could find it difficult to use group activities or individual activities because of space and time. Thus, the researcher observed the learners and gave them a group work to determine if punctuation problems could not be overcome by group work. The reason was to check if learners did better when they wrote in groups or when they wrote alone?

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were two-way in which the interviewer asked questions, and the respondents answered. The researcher did not follow the sequence of questions in the interview schedule for the interview to run smoothly, hence the interviews were unstructured. The scheduled questions acted as a guide to help the researcher obtain the required data. Doing the research allowed the researcher to get more opinions concerning learners' punctuation difficulties as respondents express their views regarding this challenge. The researcher used this method to validate the findings as it allowed the interviewer to ask open-ended questions, particularly regarding some of the findings obtained from the observed incidents during essay writing. The interviews provided unexpected data that enabled the researcher to make relevant recommendations and suggest practical solutions to the study's problem.

3.4.4 Focus group

The researcher gave topics to the learners to write. Thereafter, the researcher selected a group that committed numerous errors and worked with them to identify and correct the errors. This allowed the researcher to draw a valid conclusion on how learners committed punctuation errors when writing narrative essays after the completion of the research.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

It was very important for the researcher to collect the data of the proposed problem and be able to analyse it and conclude based on the data that has been evaluated. Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) view data analysis as "The procedure followed to establish order, structure and meaning to the volume of collected data". The above scholars view data analysis as steps that the researcher establishes to make meaning of the collected data. The researcher used the content analysis strategy to analyse the data collected through observation. However, this process was preceded by data organisation and coding. Leavy (2017:147) states that "Content Analysis (CA) includes

initial immersion into the content to secure a sense of the ‘big picture’, determining the components of coding, analysis and interpretation”. The above scholar emphasises that when doing content analysis, one must be engaged with the content to have a clear understanding of it. This understating was necessary for this study to help the researcher in analysing and drawing conclusions from the content. As mentioned, a thematic analysis strategy would be used for interview data, this area of analysis focused on the recordings of the data collected through interviews and learners' focus-group discussions. All data was categorised according to their varying themes. The researcher highlighted that it was possible to assess someone’s ability to punctuate by interacting with them orally. Content analysis was employed to analyse the data collected through the learners ‘scripts or documentation. Leedy and Ormrod (2015:102) view content analysis as a “Comprehensive and systematic investigation of the contents of a certain body of material such as magazine advertisements, television shows, works of art and Internet websites to identify patterns, themes, or biases within that material”. The researcher saw content analysis as a process in which one could be able to evaluate written texts and spoken facts to conclude factors that influence the identified problem. In addition, Leavy (2017:147) stated that “CA includes initial immersion to determining the components of coding, analysis and interpretation”. The above scholar emphasises that CA can be used to analyse written content. As this was done in this study, the researcher was able to link results from different data collection procedures and determine all factors that contributed to the identified problem in this study.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodology employed to solve the identified research problem; a plan that combined all the major parts of the researched aspects to develop conclusions. The chapter also presented the population, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures that were followed in the study. Further, the measures that were followed to enhance the quality of the research results were also outlined.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter defined the methodology utilised in the study to investigate the punctuation errors committed by learners when writing narrative essays. The current chapter describes the data collected from learners through document analysis, observations, and interviews. The interviews not only focused on the learners but also included Xitsonga's home language educators. In this chapter, the researcher begins by presenting the findings from the collected data, focusing on punctuation errors committed by the Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays. Thereafter, the researcher presents the analysis of error and the discussion of what emerged from the analysis. All information in this chapter is analysed without bias or ambiguity. Also, the graphs are included as part of the analysis to show a comparison of the analysed result. The use of graphs in analysing the result helped the researcher to draw a viable conclusion from the gathered data.

Learners in high schools and universities face many challenges regarding the use of punctuation marks in writing. Literature has shown that this hurts the readability and comprehensibility of their texts. The researcher initiated this study to investigate punctuation errors made by Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners. The reason for conducting this research was to examine the causes of the errors, to find solutions that might help the learners to overcome the identified challenges. The research also aimed to help the educators with strategies and methods of teaching punctuations. The motive for this was the researcher’s realisation, as an educator, that failure of learners to know punctuation impede on their ability to communicate through writing. Thus, the researcher needed to research punctuation errors to make educators and learners aware that when people read their texts, they search for meaning, and without proper punctuation, their intended written messages may never reach the reader.

This study used qualitative research methodology to investigate the identified problem, i.e., challenges faced by learners regarding the use of punctuation marks when writing

narrative essays. Using qualitative methods to gather and analyse data was inspired by the need for explanations for the causes of the identified problem, and for the participants to state their views regarding the experienced challenges of using punctuation marks. With the use of the qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to explore the perceptions of the participants regarding the importance of using punctuation in writing academic essays. As the CAPS (2011) curriculum states, there is a rising need for educators to train pupils for a broader audience. However, this may not be achieved when learners are not able to use punctuation marks in their writing. Thus, this methodology aided the researcher in further generating solutions out of the data collected that can help learners, educators, and stakeholders how to improve learners writing skills, particularly with the appropriate use of punctuation marks.

4.2 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The research was conducted through documentation, interviews, and observation as instruments. A classwork was used to investigate the punctuation errors committed by Grade 10 Xitsonga HL learners when writing narrative essays in Xitsonga. The researcher gave the topic to learners and explained what should be done when one wants to write an essay, particularly the steps to be followed before they write. The researcher taught learners essay writing steps outlined by the CAPS (2011) document. The first step was to prepare themselves before they started writing; this is a stage of thinking about the topic and some important aspects that could be included in the essay. The second stage was where the learners were required to do the actual writing. The third stage involved presenting a good essay through writing. The researcher gave the learners a topic to write a narrative essay. This was done on the 20th of October 2023. In this research, the dates of the planned schedule of work were as follows:

On the 11th of October 2023, the researcher conducted consultations with the Xitsonga educator and took the sample that can form part of the participants by observing the learners' engagements when learning essay writing.

On 12th October 2023, the researcher asked for Xitsonga test scripts in which the learners wrote their essays during the trial examination to see the way they presented their lesson by checking the use of punctuation.

On the 13th of October 2023, the researcher evaluated the learner's written essay to generate suitable participants.

On the 16th of October 2023, the researcher gave learners a topic to write narrative essays, only the learners who struggled to punctuate were asked to write the essay for the researcher to evaluate their essays more in-depth, and to evaluate the types of errors they committed.

On the 17th of October 2023, the researcher asked the additional information about the school or data, such as the history of the school, looking at the Grade 10 learner's results from the previous year, looking specifically for Xitsonga Home language results. The researcher also asked for a profile of the Xitsonga subject educator and their intervention strategies for improving Xitsonga results.

The researcher included the above information to highlight the importance of having enough time to gather the data from the chosen sample. Sufficient time was necessary for collecting data to achieve a viable outcome that could be easily analyzed, providing real insights into the problem the researcher aimed to address. By creating a schedule, the researcher could plan effectively for the steps needed to resolve the identified issue. Collecting reliable data in a single day was not feasible. Therefore, an extended data collection process allowed the researcher to gather information until no new insights emerged from the participants.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THE DATA COLLECTED AND THE ANALYSIS.

The researcher conducted the research on the 20th of October 2023, from 09h: 20 am up to 10h:20 am. During the first encounter with the participants, the researcher formally introduced herself and disclosed the research topic to the participants as well as the aim of the research. The researcher further gave the participants topic to write

an essay of a minimum of one page and instructed them to submit it when they were done. The researcher saw a need to present the findings in a graph as it will be easy and will save time for other researchers who will use this research as their reference.

4.3.1 Data collected through documentation.

The researcher saw a need to present the findings with the aid of a graph. The researcher's review of learner's essays yielded the need to present the information using a graph so that all discovered contributory factors can be presented without omission. The graph enabled the researcher to outline or report on errors associated with each punctuation mark, and the possible causes thereof.

The graph below shows the percentage of errors found in learners' essays. In the x-axis, the graph shows the types of punctuation marks and in the y-axis, it shows the percentage of each error made by the learners. For the researcher to draw the graph and get the percentage of each punctuation mark, she multiplied the total number of learners who committed the errors by a hundred and divided it by the sum of learners who wrote the essay.

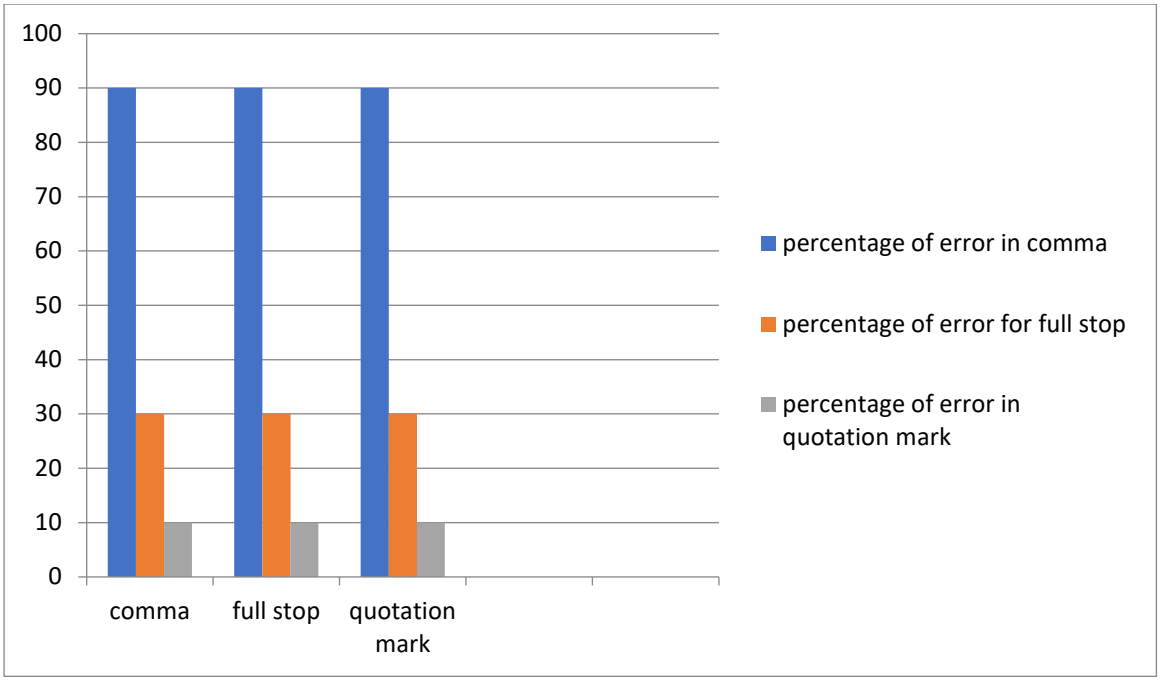

Figure 1 Percentage of punctuation errors committed.

The graph above provided evidence of percentages, regarding the common punctuation errors learners commit. The graph shows that learners experience more problems with the use of commas in writing, followed by a full stop and quotation marks. Below are the descriptions of the findings regarding the errors committed by learners?

As there were ten learners, the researcher used the total number of committed errors and multiplied it by a hundred, then divided it by the total number of learners to get the percentage. This was done to check the percentage of learners who were unable to practice the correct use of punctuation. The researcher saw a need to show calculations so that it could be verified that indeed there is a problem concerning the use of specific punctuation marks. This was also done to draw attention to the specific problems that need to be addressed to suppress their occurrence in the future.

Number of errors in comma = total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 09 x 100%

10

=90%

The study found that 90% percent of learners' writing comprised of erroneous use of comma. From all the reviewed essays, most learners could not use commas correctly. There was only one student who seemed to understand how to use commas. Representing a 10% proportion of essays with the correct use of commas. However, when the researcher deeply reviewed the essay of that learner, she found that the learner still needed to be taught how the comma is used to prevent some of the mistakes found.

Number of errors in full stop= total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 03 x 100%

10

= 30%

The study found that 30% of the errors found in learners' essays were due to the inability to use a full stop correctly. This shows that out of ten learners, only three learners could not use full stop correctly. The percentage of full-stop errors (30%) shows that full-stop is not a threatening factor to most learners, but intervention is needed for those who struggle.

Number of errors in quotation marks= total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 01 x 100%

10

=10%

The 10% of errors in quotation marks implies that out of ten learners' essay, only one essay demonstrated a learner's attempt to use quotation marks, although incorrectly applied. As such, the other nine learners did not use the quotation marks, suggesting that they can be knowledgeable about their use or not knowledgeable. The researcher holds perspective. that the nine learners did not use quotation marks because they did not have sufficient knowledge about their usage. Hence, they opted to construct sentences that excluded quotations. The researcher notices that learner's lack of knowledge about punctuation marks is caused by educators' negligence in teaching them due to insufficient textbooks.

As previously mentioned, the researcher identified numerous errors in learners' essays, making it difficult to create a single graph that represents all the mistakes made. The researcher saw a need to have many graphs that contain the errors committed by the learners so that it will be easy to draw clear conclusions without confusing explanations by the researcher. A different graph that contains different errors was necessary as there were many punctuation errors identified regarding different punctuation marks. The graph below is a continuation of punctuation errors committed by the learners, but it differs from the first graph as it presents the findings on different punctuation marks.

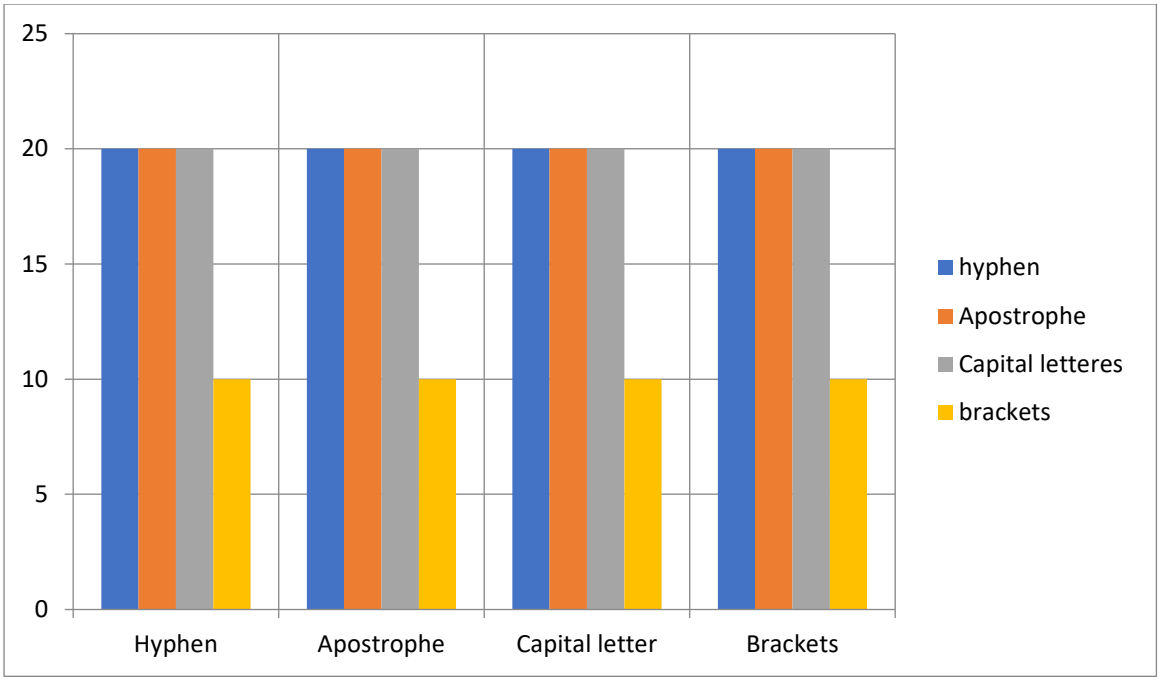

Figure 2: Percentage of punctuation mark errors committed

Number of errors in Apostrophe= $\frac{\text{total number of learners committed}}{\text{Total number of learners}} \times 100$

$= \frac{02 \times 100\%}{10}$

$=20\%$

The 20% errors in using apostrophe show that out of ten learners, only two learners attempted to use apostrophes in their essays, even though the use was incorrect. The rest of the learners did not use apostrophes because they did not know it, or how to use it. The researcher commended the urgent intervention in teaching learners about punctuation. The use of hyphens was also a big problem when it came to essay writing, and this can be illustrated by the following:

Number of errors in hyphen= total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 02 x 100%

20

=20%

There were 20% of errors committed concerning the use of hyphens 20%. This percentage implied that only two learners knew this punctuation mark, although could not use it appropriately. The rest of the learners did not know the punctuation mark, nor how to use it. In some of the learners' essays, there was a point where they had to use a hyphen. However, the learners could not apply it because of a lack of knowledge about hyphens. Rather, the learners replaced hyphens with different punctuation marks which created a different meaning for their sentences and text. The use of capital letters was also another problem and can be highlighted as follows:

Number of errors in capital letter = total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 02 x 100%

10

=20%

The researcher found the errors in using capital letters to be 20%, the reason being that almost all learners did not use capital letters when starting their sentences. Thus, only two learners out of ten used capitalisations of initial titles at the beginning of their sentences. The 20%, however, is not a representative of correct use, but a proportion of the number of learners who attempted to use capitalisation. Meaning that, although two learners capitalised initial titles, their use of capitalisation was inaccurate. Thus, intervention is needed in the use of capital letters. This led us to the use of brackets when writing a narrative essay.

Number of errors on brackets= total number of learners committed x 100

Total number of learners

= 01 x 100%

10

=10%

Out of ten learners' essays, only one essay showed a learner's attempt to use brackets. However, the attempt was found to be inconsistent with the correct use of brackets in writing. The other nine learners did not use brackets in their essays. Thus, the researcher concluded that there is a high possibility that they did not know this punctuation mark and that there is a need to teach it to the learners as those who used it, did so incorrectly.

Even though the percentages may show that punctuation problems do not affect most learners, the above evidence shows that there are concerning problems regarding the use of punctuations even amongst the few learners' essays in which certain punctuations were applied. Therefore, intervention is needed to suppress the percentage and to help learners overcome punctuation challenges. Looking at the percentages, there is a high probability that our Xitsonga language learners might suffer in terms of heritage and culture because of the scarcity of published books. There is a need for stringent measures that can encourage learners and educators to read Xitsonga literature in case of availability, to improve the quality of writing, particularly the use of punctuation marks. Recognising punctuation problems is essential for enjoyable and academic writing.

Serious recommendations on how to assist learners who commit punctuation errors will be highlighted in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, it is very important to take responsibility for ensuring that learners' writing is error-free. One must know that writing needs to be concise, and this can be achieved using punctuation marks. Intrinsic motivation is key in ensuring that people are aware and willing to do positive things to minimise the percentage of errors in punctuation. Learners played a significant role in responding when it comes to the usage of punctuation marks.

Learner 1

The researcher saw a need to review all the learners' responses and assess them thoroughly to know the kinds of errors they commit. The study found that learners had knowledge about punctuation marks but had problems with applying them when writing. The challenge that the researcher noticed was the failure of learners to use commas when writing. There were countless sentences without a comma in learners' essays. As a result, their essay sentences read like song lyrics. Example:

"A ku ri wavuntlhanu hi ti 14 nyenyankulu 2023 mina na malume wa mina hi fambile hi ya eKwazulu-natal hiya lunghisisa movha hikuva ayi onhakile".

"It was 14 March 2023 when my uncle and I went to Kwazulu Natal to fix the car that was broken".

The learner also failed to use the colon correctly to show that, there are several things that are grouped together.

Example: *"Xo sungula xiharhi va hi kombile Nghala hi yi vonile. Hiterile hi vona Girafi, nyarhi na swin'wana na swin'wana".*

"The animals that they showed us are Lion, Giraffe, Buffalo, and many others".

The correct sentence should have a colon to introduce a list of items that have been listed in the sentence. Therefore, the sentence should be:

"We saw the following animals at Kruger National Park: lion, giraffe, buffalo, and many other things".

The other error that the researcher noticed is the failure of learners to put a full stop at the end of a sentence to show that the sentence has ended. This caused problems as the essay became a group of sentences with one idea from the introduction to the conclusion. Out of the five paragraphs in one of the reviewed essays, only one paragraph had a full stop to show that the paragraph had ended.

The researcher can attest that learners know punctuation marks, but they have little knowledge about their usage, which is why they use them incorrectly. The cause of this problem might be that educators do not have enough time to teach punctuations, especially because they want to finish their Annual Teaching Plan (ATP). The researcher urged that, due to the lack of time for educators to teach learners the types of punctuation marks and how they should be used, they should create time during their lessons to teach punctuation.

Learner 2

This learner seemed to confuse the comma with the full stop, as they used a full stop in some parts of the sentences that required a comma. This disconnected the learner's ideas in the essay.

For example: *"Ku yingisa i swa nkoka. a swikolweni lava yingiselaka va pasa kahle".*

"Listening is very important. Even at school those who listen are the ones who perform well".

Looking at the above quote, there was supposed to be a comma where the learner used a full stop. Even if the use of a full stop was correct, the sentence that followed had to start with a capital letter, but in this case, a small letter was used. The correct sentence should be "Listening is very important, even at school, those who listened are the ones who performed well".

The researcher also discovered that learners had challenges with the use of semicolons. The learners seemed to lack awareness of what semicolons are used for.

For example, *“Ku yingisa i swa nkoka*, *vana lava pasaka kahle hi lava yingiselaka”.*

“Listening is very important at school; those who listened are the ones who performed well”.

Hyphens are also used to show that there is not enough space on the paper for the next word or phrase. Hence, learners put hyphens at the end of a sentence line. The quotation that was extracted from the learner’s written piece of work had errors. The learner should have put a hyphen in the word “*evu-tonwini”* to show that the space was not enough to write this word in full. Another challenge was the correct use of apostrophes.

Example: the word “*Evutonwini”* (Life) should have an apostrophe and be written like as *“evuton’wini”* (in life).

Although the hyphen is required when the word is written in Xitsonga, it is inapplicable when the word is translated to English, i.e., ‘in life’.

The researcher was not satisfied with the review of the above learner’s script. Hence, the researcher continued to assess the essay of Learner 3 to explore other errors.

Learner 3

Learner 3 seemed to know the types of punctuation but could not utilise them correctly. The learner could not use commas correctly when writing. The sentence below exemplifies the learner’s errors:

“Van’wana vadyondzi va tshika xikolo vaya endla vugangu swona va tlhela va dzaha swi dzidziharisi va ha ri vatsongo kambe ku yingisa swi tlula magandzelo”.

“Other learners left school to engage themselves in adultery they even start smoking at an early stage, but listening is very important.”

There should be a comma in the above sentence, and the correct sentence should be:

“Van’wana vadyondzi va tshika xikolo va ya endla vugangu, va tlhela va dzaha swidzidziharisi va ha ri vatsongo, kambe ku yingisa Switlula magandzelo.”

“Other learners left school to engage themselves in adultery, they even start smoking at an early stage, but listening is very important.”

Based on the learner’s essays, the results show that a lack of knowledge on the use of capital letters after the full stop and the use of small letters after the comma was a problem. Learners seemed to mix the two punctuation marks. For learners to know the different applications of commas and full stops, the learners need to be enlightened about the importance of using the correct punctuation. They should be aware that wrongly used punctuations change the meaning of a sentence and may add a different view of the text, instead of the intended one. The researcher recommended that educators should encourage learners to read their written text to determine whether their text messages are the exact message they want to convey. In this way, the learner will be aware that wrongful use of punctuation in a text changes the meaning of their message.

4.3.2 DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEW WITH LEARNERS

The researcher was not satisfied with the response found in learner’s essays. Hence the researcher continued collecting data through interviews with the learners to get more insights regarding the learners’ perceived causes of punctuation challenges. Learners responded in this way:

Learner 1

4.3.2.1 Do learners need to elaborate on the challenges they experience when writing essays?

The following were the answers to the posed question:

- The learner outlined that she faces challenges of word formation as she tends to mix two words that are not supposed to be one word.
- The challenges when it comes to composing an introduction that can make the reader not take their eyes off of it.
- The learner does not know the eight parts of speech.
- Failure to produce coherent paragraphs in an essay becomes a problem.
- The use of punctuation marks becomes a problem especially when it comes to exclamation marks.
- Concluding sentences is another challenge because learners tend to repeat what they have discussed in the introduction.

The researcher's view on the answers given by the learners is that there is a persisting problem regarding learners' ability to use punctuation. For instance, some learners struggle to combine vowels and consonants to form words. Example, b+a=ba. Failure of learners to develop a good introduction was also identified as a problem. This problem was found to be caused by learners' limited vocabulary in Xitsonga. Thus, when it comes to punctuation, learners get more lost in the process of writing. These identified challenges have an immense impact on learners' academic performance; hence intervention is needed.

4.3.2.2 Are punctuation marks important?

The responses are as follows:

- To give a coherent paragraph to the reader.
- To get clear meaning from the reader.
- To draw the meaning of a writer and emotions.
- Provide us with knowledge of good sentence structure.

- To be able to distinguish a question from a sentence by putting a question mark in a statement.

Looking at the above responses, punctuation marks play a vital role in enhancing the meaning of a text. They help the reader to know the feelings of the writer as portrayed in a text. One can control her tone while reading a well-punctuated text.

4.3.2.3 Does teaching using spoken language instead of written language contribute to the errors that are committed when writing?

Learners expressed that relying on spoken language without incorporating writing can lead to errors due to the inherent differences between the two. Spoken language lacks punctuation, while written language includes it. Consequently, educators often emphasize spoken language, and when they ask learners to write, confusion can occur.

The researcher noticed that the use of spoken language hurts the learning of punctuation marks. This is because some spoken words used in class are not acceptable in formal writing. Hence, when learners use them in their essays, they get wronged, yet they have not been taught proper Xitsonga words to use nor punctuations that must be used in some words. Example: *“ku gijima”* instead of *ku tsutsuma.*

4.3.2.4 What can be done to help you when it comes to punctuation?

- The use of standardised language can help us know how to write a correct word with the correct use of punctuation.
- Educators should focus more on punctuation marks when teaching essays, rather than skills because when they evaluate the essay, they look at the

meaning of a text; but writing without punctuation hinders the meaning the writer wants to convey to the reader.

- Educators should give learners more work related to essays to practice f punctuation.

It is imperative for educators to always use a standardised language because learners come from different areas and, therefore, use different languages at home. Thus, when the educator uses their dialect during a lesson, they disadvantage some learners in class. Educators should always consider that learners come from diverse family, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Thus, to know that a school is a diverse place that needs caution when teaching, educators can adopt a parallel structure that accommodates all learners, which is the formal use of a language. The use of dialect may contribute to errors committed as learners would not know how to punctuate standardised words.

4.3.2.5 Is there anything that you need your educators to do when it comes to learning to use punctuations in writing?

- Educators must teach them word formation because they tend to separate words which must not be separated.
- Learners need to be taught the process of writing essays.
- Learners need to be taught elements of paragraphs to know how paragraphs should be structured in the introduction, body, and conclusion.
- Educators need to teach them the use of punctuation marks explicitly.

Based on the answers provided by the learners, it is evident that when teaching learners, the teacher needs to start with the sounds of words so that the learners will know how words are formed and pronounced. When learners know how words are pronounced, they are likely to know where to place punctuations in the words for the words to sound as they should. Also, this will help learners to gain knowledge on the

use of capital letters, i.e., when and how they should capitalise titles. This will yield positive results as the learners will not struggle with paragraph composition.

Learner 2

4.3.2.6 What challenges do you come across when writing Xitsonga academic essays?

- Approaching an essay is challenging as learners have difficulties with developing relevant subtopics. Sentence construction is also a challenge.
- Linking paragraphs in an essay while ensuring each paragraph has one idea is a challenge.
- The inability to use correct punctuation makes learners lose interest in Xitsonga academic essay.

Learner 2 seemed to have little vocabulary to express themselves well enough through writing. This is highlighted by their comment on the inability to generate subtopics for the main topic. As such, this deters them from constructing coherent paragraphs that contain one main idea. There needs to be constant teaching to learners on the functions of punctuation marks and their application in writing to prevent the errors they commit. They have to take into consideration that when constructing a sentence, a sentence must have a subject, verb, and object.

Example: "*Gezani u hlantswa swiambalo swa yena".*

Gezani is washing her clothes.

Gezani- noun and topic (riviti xikan'we na ku va nhlokomhaka loko hita eka xivumbeko xa swivulwa)

Wa- adverb

Famba-verb

Swa yena – object

Teaching this to learners will deepen their knowledge about sentence construction.

4.3.2.7 In your opinion, explain the importance of using punctuation marks when writing.

- To shorten a sentence.
- To have good sentences with clear meaning.
- To know what the sentence needs from the reader.

The learners' responses about the importance of using punctuation marks in writing can be summed up as; to create short, meaningful, and concise sentences. This knowledge can help learners construct essays that deliver the intended meaning to the reader and with sentences that are easy to read.

4.3.2.8 Does teaching using the language of spoken language instead of written language contribute to the errors that are committed when writing?

"It contributes a lot because when it comes to communicating with each other, there is no need to use punctuation, but when it comes to writing there is a need to use a standard language with relevant punctuation marks so that the third party can understand. It becomes a challenge to most of us as learners because we don't know what word should be included and the types of punctuation should be applied."

It is evident that the use of oral communication only to teach learners language skills, especially writing, hinders learners from gaining sufficient knowledge to compose meaningful essays. Learners cannot distinguish spoken language and written language because they are not exposed to writing. As such, learners write as they speak, and sometimes misuse or abuse punctuation marks. This also has an impact on their writing as most of the reviewed essays showed that learners have low vocabulary. Thus, language teaching should integrate spoken and written languages and be delivered using a standard language.

4.3.2.9 What can be done to help you when it comes to punctuation?

- They need to teach us the types of punctuation marks and their usage.
- Educators should teach the use of punctuation marks and write examples on the chalkboard.
- More work should be given, especially that requires punctuation marks.

The above responses indicate that there is a need for educators to conduct lessons that will teach learners the types of punctuation marks and their usage in writing. The educators need to exemplify the use of different punctuation marks by writing exemplary sentences on the chalkboard. Further, more writing activities should be given to learners for them to practice what they have learned. This will help educators identify the causes of learners' punctuation errors and the amount of help different learners need.

4.3.2.10 Is there anything that you need your educators to do when it comes to punctuation in writing?

- To emphasise on punctuation marks when teaching.
- To give feedback should regularly for learners to know and rectify their mistakes.
- Educators should allow group discussions in class to enable us to share ideas with our classmates as sometimes we are afraid to ask questions to the educator, but it will be easy for our group mates.
- Educators should teach the steps needed for writing an essay and guide us through each step on a chalkboard so that we know how to do it.

The response shows that educators need not to only teach the steps of writing an essay, but also to teach learners how to apply the steps in essay writing with the correct use of punctuation marks.

Learner 3

4.3.2.11 Challenges that learners come across when writing Xitsonga narrative essays.

- Not having enough points for a chosen topic.
- Not knowing which points should be included in a plan.

4.3.2.12 Importance of using punctuation marks when writing a narrative essay.

- Give meaning to the text.
- Allow coherence when reading.
- Allow a good understanding of a text.

4.3.2.13 Does teaching using spoken language instead of written language contribute to the errors committed when writing?

“No, because the language we use to communicate does not affect the way we use punctuation in our writing. The problem is lack of background knowledge about punctuations.”

The above response shows that spoken language does not affect the way learners punctuate their work. The problem is a lack of knowledge, which affects the use of punctuation in a text. A text composed with the correct use of punctuation marks is easy to understand.

4.3.2.14 what can be done to help you with punctuation?

- Provide us with books that have many examples of punctuation.

- The educator should provide us with feedback about the essays that we write to improve from our mistakes.

4.3.2.15 briefly explain the punctuation errors you are more likely to commit.

- The use of a comma is a problem as I tend to use it incorrectly.
- The problem lies where I should write the name of a person in the middle of a sentence. It becomes a challenge to know whether to write it with capital letters or small letters as they are found in the middle of a sentence.

4.3.2.16 is there anything that educators should do regarding teaching punctuation?

- Educators should honour their classes and teach us to the best of their knowledge.
- Provide us with the study material.
- Use practical examples on how to write an essay when teaching.
- Educators should avoid assuming that all learners know punctuation.

4.4 DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH THE EDUCATORS

The researcher saw it befitting to include educators in the research for them to contribute to the required data. Their views about the observed punctuation errors when marking the learner's essays were crucial for this study. Thus, data was collected from educators using the questions below:

4.4.1 What challenges do you come across when marking a narrative essay for learners?

Educator 1

The educator mentioned the following points in answering the above question:

- Learners fail to start each sentence with a capital letter and to use capital letters when writing the names of places and people even in the middle of a sentence.
- Poor construction of sentences.
- Poor planning which leads to a lack of points to support their chosen topic.
- Excessive use of words which are not necessary.
- The use of language that is not standardised.

4.4.2 Types of punctuation errors that are more likely to be found in learners' essays.

The educator illustrated that many errors are likely to be found in learners' essays, but the most common once are:

- The use of capital letters, commas, full stops, semi-colons, quotation marks and apostrophes.

4.4.3 Explanation of punctuation marks

i. Capital letter

According to Smith (2019), capital letters signal the beginning of sentences, proper nouns, and the pronoun 'I'. They are also utilised in titles and headings to show emphasis (Jones, 2021). Capital letters can also be applied to titles, headings and acronyms (APA, 2022). Therefore, proper capitalization enhances readability and

emphasises the significance of specific words or phrases in written communication (Smith, 2018). This can be supported by the following example:

Alice went to Paris last summer.

ii. Comma

Commas serve various purposes, such as separating items in a list, setting off introductory phrases or clauses, and indicating pauses in a sentence (Brown & Miller, 2018). They are crucial for maintaining clarity in writing (Jones, 2021). The following example serves the purpose: I need to buy apples, oranges, and bananas.

iii. Full Stop (Period)

According to Smith (2019), a full stop is used to mark the end of a declarative or imperative sentence. It is also used in abbreviations and initials. In agreement, Brown (2020) states that full stops signal the completion of a thought, contributing to the overall structure and coherence of written language. Example:

The meeting is scheduled for 5:00 am.

iv. Semi-colon

The semi-colon is used to connect closely related independent clauses in a sentence (Brown & Miller, 2018). It indicates a stronger connection than a comma but not as strong as a full stop. This is supported by the following example:

She finished her work; then, she went for a walk.

v. Quotation Mark:

Quotation marks are employed to enclose direct speech, and dialogues, or indicate the titles of short works (Smith, 2019). They distinguish spoken or quoted words from the rest of the text. Example:

He said, "I'll be there in five minutes."

vi. Apostrophe

Apostrophes indicate possession, denote missing letters in contractions, and are used in pluralising lowercase letters and certain abbreviations (Jones, 2021). They play a crucial role in maintaining grammatical accuracy. Example:

The cat's tail is fluffy.

When used correctly, these punctuation marks can contribute to effective and clear communication in learner's narrative essays. These punctuations are also essential for expressing ideas and conveying meaning in written language.

4.4.4 Causes of Errors Committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 Learners

The causes of punctuation errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays in Xitsonga can be attributed to various factors. The identification of these causes is crucial for developing effective strategies to address and rectify the punctuation challenges. Therefore, such factors are that:

- Learners do not pay attention during lessons.
- They take Xitsonga for granted.
- They experience challenges with language interference.
- They lack knowledge of punctuation.

4.4.5 Solution to punctuation errors

It is important to get solutions to the errors committed by Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays. These are the solutions:

- More time should be devoted to the Xitsonga period.
- The Department of Education must establish short courses for educators to equip them with skills to teach punctuation.
- Educators should integrate punctuation lessons into their various subjects to emphasise the significance of punctuation.
- Learners must be taught how to use punctuations, rather than being taught their names and functions without application in writing.
- The Department of Education needs to recognise Xitsonga educators as much as they recognise Physical Science and Mathematics educators.

The problem of learners not planning their work before writing causes them to make mistakes that are found in their written essays, such as incoherent paragraphs. This may be due to a lack of attention in class, as students could not apply most of the skills taught. The other challenge that educators are faced with, is to cover a lot of content in Xitsonga within a short space of time. This shifts their attention from what they teach to the completion of the syllabus.

Interviewing one educator would not have been enough to yield the findings that the researcher sought. To obtain trustworthy information in this study, the researcher opted to interview another educator to explore their views regarding punctuation.

Findings from Educator 2

4.4.6 What challenges do you come across when marking narrative essays?

- Learners don't know how to construct a paragraph.
- Learners don't know that a paragraph should have one main idea. They write what comes to their mind and find that in one paragraph there are many ideas contradicting one another.
- Learners are unable to punctuate their essays.

4.4.7 Types of punctuation errors that are more likely to be found in learners' essay

- The use of capital letters when beginning a sentence; even in the middle of a sentence to show the name of place and person, capital letters must be used.
- Application of full stop at the end of sentences.
- The use of comma.

4.4.8 Causes of punctuation errors

- Learners don't understand what punctuation is.
- Learners don't know the uses of punctuation.
- Lack of background knowledge about punctuation.

4.4.9 Solution to punctuation errors

- Xitsonga educators need to teach learners about punctuation.
- Xitsonga educators need to teach learners the uses of all punctuation marks.

Learners have problem with sentence construction, which create problems in having an essay that is rich in terms of ideas. This might be caused by the inability of the learners to exercise their minds through activities; thus, leading to a lack of knowledge of applying punctuation marks in writing. This can be illustrated by the following graph:

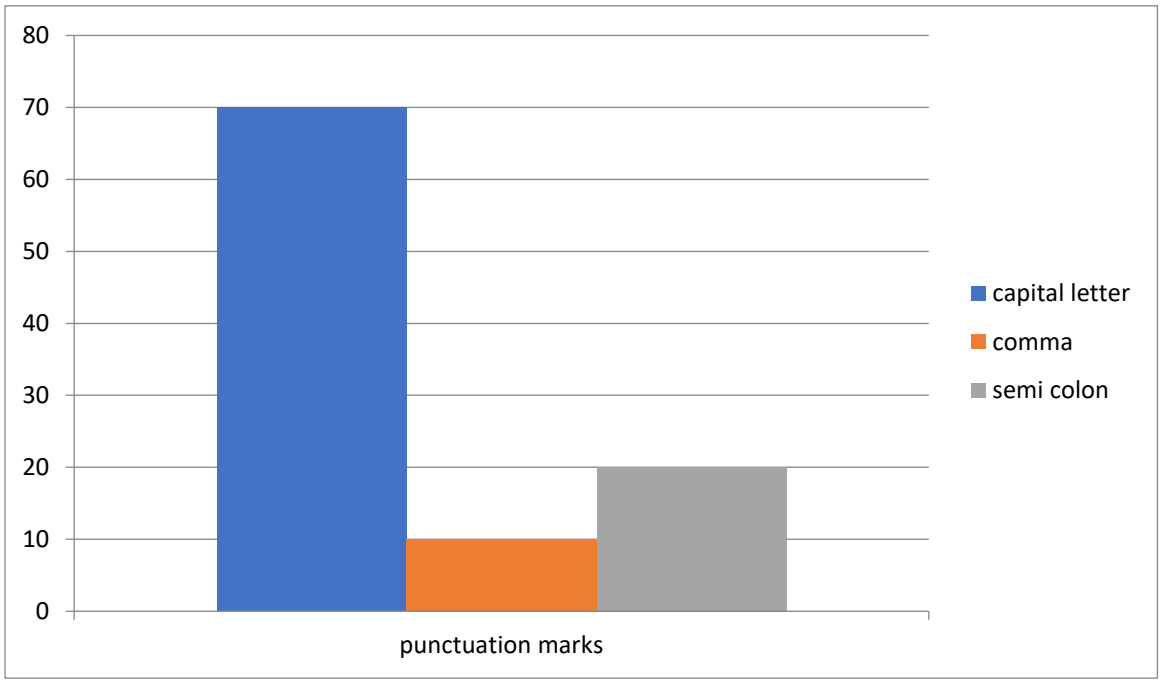

Figure 4: Response from interviews with educators

The above graph was drawn according to the percentages extracted from the educators' responses during the interview process. The above graph shows the percentage of punctuation marks that were highlighted by the educators to be the most challenging for learners. With the use of percentages, the educators outline that 70% of learners do not know how to use capital letters where it is required, while the 30% of learners seem to know but they tend to neglect it and write without using it, especially when they start a new sentence. As explained by the educator, the use of commas is at 10%. This implies that only a few learners in the classroom can use a comma. Thus, an urgent intervention is needed as it seems that there is little knowledge about the use of commas. The graph also shows that 20% of learners know what a semicolon is. Although the learners know what semicolon is, they seem to lack knowledge on how to use it when writing. This is outlined by the graph as its

percentage is below the average of 50% which is a threatening factor that needs to be addressed.

The graph above shows that the most common error committed by learners in their written essays is capitalisation. The reason for the above finding is that the learners are not familiar with capitalisation, than any other punctuation. By looking at the response given by the educators, the problem is caused by the lack of knowledge about punctuation, as most educators don't teach punctuation marks. This causes a problem when the learners are urged to write their academic essays. The researcher noticed that the problem of punctuation starts from the Foundation Phase as it is the umbrella of all the phases in education.

4.5 DATA COLLECTED THROUGH OBSERVATION IN CLASS

Observation was a valuable method for collecting data, particularly in this educational and research setting. It involved watching the behaviour, events or physical characteristics in their natural setting. The findings from observational research were considered strong in validity as they allowed for the collection of a depth of information about a particular behaviour. Observations provide useful insights into a child's skills, abilities and behaviour, enabling caregivers and educators to understand and assess the child as part of the teaching-learning process. This method proved beneficial when individuals were unwilling or unable to provide data through other means such as questionnaires or interviews. Observation allowed for the collection of data without the need to be structured around a hypothesis, making it a flexible and valuable tool for researchers. This information can be illustrated by the following graph:

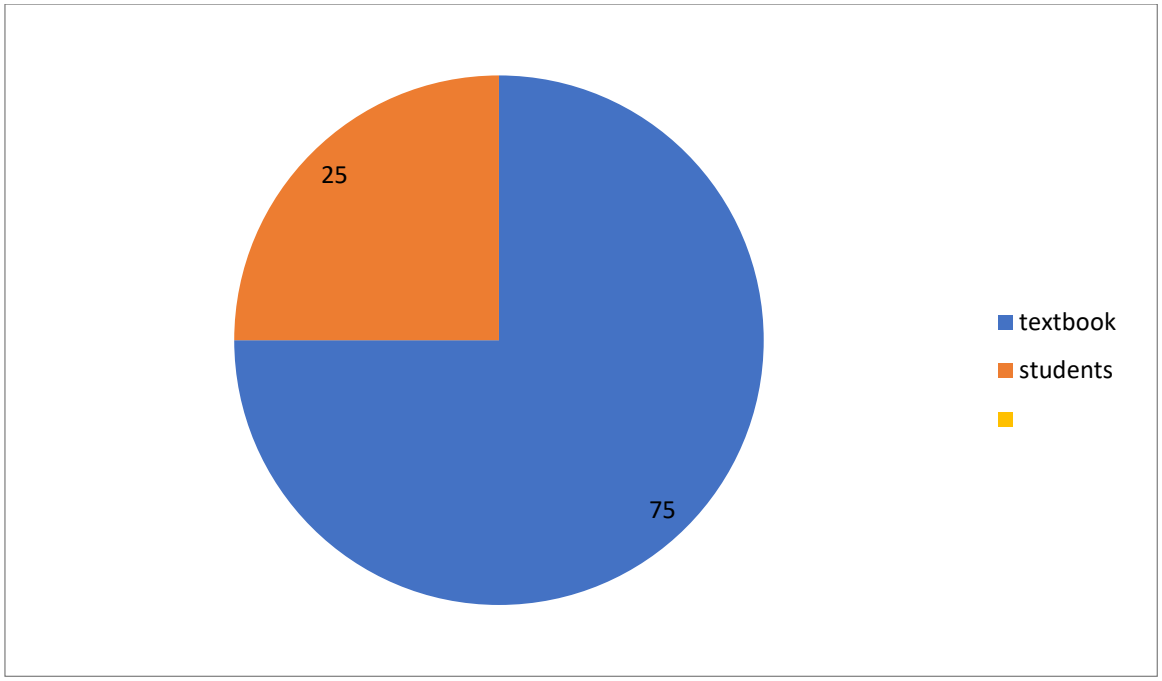

Figure 5: Data collected through observation

The graph above demonstrates the results from observations. The result was collected through observation of how the learners approach their work. The researcher used two figures in the graph, the first figure that is represented by 75% was the unavailability of the Xitsonga textbook that the learners were using as a tool to enhance learning. The 25% represents the willingness of the learners to participate in the classroom. The researcher presented the above graph because both students and the tools they use, are the cause of punctuation errors. That is, learners tend to blame the shortage of textbooks for poor performance but those who have the material, do not use them effectively to learn.

Learners lack interest in learning Xitsonga. The problem that makes learners lose interest in the subject is the subject educator as she has a negative perspective that learners do not know how to write Xitsonga. Another thing that the researcher has observed is ignorance towards the subject because educators think that it is useless to do Xitsonga as it does not make an entry to varsity for their desired career. In addition, lack of attention and respect for the subject were found to make it difficult for learners and educators to know the subject.

Shortage of textbooks contributes immensely to learners' lack of skills and knowledge of writing using proper language. This is because learners have to learn language orally without seeing some of the things that they are learning about. For example, learning about question marks during punctuation lessons without seeing them, can lead to a lack of knowledge on how it is used. Thus, learners should not only encounter the punctuation marks for the first time in question paper as this creates problems of usage. During her initial visit to the Grade 10 class to select participants, the researcher observed that the Xitsonga educator appeared to lack knowledge about diversity in the classroom. This observation was based on the interaction between the educator and the learners; some seemed confused and struggled to understand what the educator was teaching.

4.6 ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH DOCUMENTATION

Collecting data through documentation proved to be challenging due to numerous errors made by the learners. However, to address the issue of punctuation marks, the researcher thoroughly examined all aspects of the presented data to develop effective solutions. Figure 6 below demonstrates findings from document analysis.

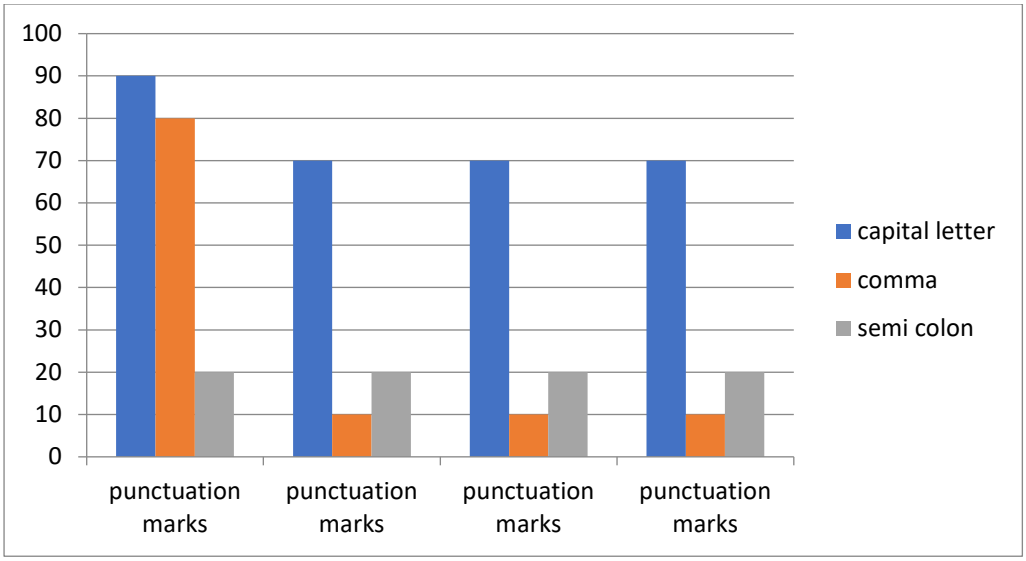

Figure 6: Result collected through documentation

The results from the graph indicate that learners faced significant challenges, particularly in the correct use of punctuation marks. This issue may stem from a lack

of understanding about how to use punctuation properly in writing. The results show that 90% of the errors pertained the use of capital letters which was higher than expected. Due to the researcher's engagements with the learners, the percentage of errors gradually decreased. This applies to all errors presented in the graph, all errors show the percentage of every learner whose previous written work was examined by the researcher, but by the time the researcher started engaging with the learners, the errors were decreasing.

The study also found that learners also failed to use commas in their sentences. For example, the sentence below should be:

A kuri wavuntlhanu hi ti 14 Nyenyenyana 2023 mina na malume wa mina hi fambile hi ya eKwazulu -Natal hiya lunghisa movha hikuva a yi onhakile.

The above sentence in English should be translated as follows:

"It was the 14th, of March 2023 when my uncle and I visited Kwazulu-Natal to fix a car that was broken."

"Aku ri ti 14, nyenyenyena,2023 hi ravuntlhanu loko mina na malume hiya ekwazulu-nata hi ya lunghisa movha leyi a yi onhakile."

In English, the above sentence should be:

"It was 14, March 2023 when my uncle and I visited Kwazulu-Natal to fix a car that was Broken".

Learners do not know that a sentence that starts after a full stop must start with a capital letter. Let us look at the sentence below:

“ku yingisa i swa nkoka swinene. nale xikolweni vana vo tala va pasa loko vayingisa”.

Listening is crucial; even in school, those who listen excel academically.

The correct sentence must be:

“Ku yingisa i swa nkoka swinene. eXikolweni vana va pasa loko va yingisa.”

Listening is very important. Learners perform better in school when they listen to their educators.

In the sentence below the comma has not been used. Let us look at the quotation:

“van’wana vana va tshika xikolo va ya endla vughangu swona va tlhela va dhzaha swi tshitshiharisi vahari va tsongo ku yingisa swi tlula magandzelo.”

Some children quit school to commit in adultery they even start taking drugs while they are still young, but listening is very important in our lives.

Looking at the above sentence there are many mistakes, starting from spelling, the use of commas, excessive use of words, and full stop. The correct sentence should be:

“Van’wana vana va tshika xikolo va ya endla vugangu, va tlhela va dzaha swidzidziharisi va ha ri vatsongo. Kambe ku yingisa swi tlula magandzelo.”

“Some children quit school to commit themselves in adultery, they even start taking drugs while they are still young, but to listen is very important in our lives”.

The problem with the use of commas seems to be more common. The following sentence has no comma where there was supposed to be a comma:

“Emugangeni wa ka hina swilo swo tala swa kala ha hlupheka hi swilo swo tala mara murhangeri u kona kambe a nga bukani na mhaka ya mati”.

In our village there is poor service delivery, there is no water but there is a leader who is not responsible for taking care of the community's needs.

The correct sentence with the use of comma and full stop should be:

“Emugangeni wa ka hina swilo swo tala swa kayivela, ha xaniseka hi swilo swo tala.

Murhangeri u kona kambe a nga languti timhaka ta mati.”

In our village there is poor service delivery, there is no water but there is a leader who is not responsible for taking care of the community's needs.

Incorrect use of hyphens makes the word to be separated and has a lack of meaning. For example, in the word *“e nselweni”* (ditch), the student should have put a hyphen to show that the word is an adjective. Further, the vowel ‘e’ is wrongly used due to not having enough space at the end of a paper. Thus, the learner should have put a hyphen in between the vowel “e” and the consonant “n”, for the word to be read as one word *“enselweni”* (ditch).

Another word that was extracted from the essay that shows there is incorrect use of a hyphen is, *“nimi-xo”* (morning). The correct word should be *“nimixo”* (morning). We removed the hyphens because there was no need to use them.

Colon was also found to be incorrectly used to show the list of things. Example:

“xo sungula xiharhi va hi kombile Nghala hi yi vonile. Hitlherile hi vona Girafina swin’wana na swin’wana”.

Looking at the above sentence there is incorrect use of capital letters and there was supposed to be a colon to list all the animals that were seen. The correct sentence should be:

“Va hi kombile swiharhi leswi landzelaka; Nghala, Girafi, Nyarhi na swin’wana swiharhi”.

They have shown us the following animals: Lion, Giraffe, Buffalo, and many other animals.

The following sentences have no full stops, and this makes them incomplete:

“A ndzi ri karhi ndzi ti lunghisela ku famba ndzi

ya edorobeni ku ya xava khekhe laha a ndzi yimele

thekisi yo ndzi rhwala, yi ndzi yisa kwale vhengeleni”

In English, the sentence should be translated as follows:

“I was preparing to go to the mall to buy a cake, I was waiting at the taxi station for me to get a taxi to the mall.”

The correct sentence must have a full stop to show that the sentence has ended.

The incorrect use of apostrophes was also a concern in this study. It was discovered in their books that they struggled to use apostrophes in writing. For example, “*n’whana*” (girl), the correct word should be “*nhwana*” (girl). Another word that was wrongly used was “*evutonwini*” (in life) the correct word is “*evuton’wini*” (in life). Incorrect use of brackets instead of using inverted commas to show that the word is borrowed from other disciplines was also a problem. The word (hotel), massage), and (engine) should have been put inside inverted commas, “hotel” “massage” *na* “engine”.

The use of capital letters at the beginning of sentences was not consistently practiced by all learners; some tended to ignore it. For example:

.

“a ku ri siku leri mina a swi lava leswaku ndzi ti phina.

Hikuva a ku ri siku ra ku tlangela ku velekiwa ka mina,

ku nga 20 Nyenyenyana 2023 hi ravumbirhi na vusiku”

In English translation the sentence should be:

“It was my birthday, on this day, I was happy as they prepared something to celebrate my day”.

The correct way should be written like this:

“A ku ri siku leri mina a swi lava leswaku ndzi tiphina. Hikuva a ku ri siku ra ku tlangela ku velekiwa ka mina. A ku ri ti 20, nyenyenyana, 2023 hi ravumbirhi.”

“It was my birthday, on this day, I was happy as they prepared something to celebrate my day. It was Tuesday, 20th February 2023”.

Using correct punctuation is crucial when writing a narrative essay.

4.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED THROUGH INTERVIEWS WITH BOTH EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS

The researcher interviewed educators and learners. Thus, a pie chart has been drawn to show the responses of both educators and learners. The researcher used a pie chart because the responses from both educators and learners showed some

relationship. During the interview with learners and educators, the researcher noticed that the learners were mixing different languages spoken in different communities when responding to questions. Thus, it was not easy for them to stick to using the standardised language. The researcher allowed the interview to become a two-way process, where the participants were allowed to ask questions; but it was revealed that the cause of learners' punctuation errors was lack of knowledge and textbooks. The researcher came up with a game to make learners free and answer questions without fear, the first one was to jump when the learners wanted to answer, and the second one was to sing before replying to the question to make it fun.

The graph below shows the outcome of the learners and educators that was drawn out of the participants' responses. It was necessary to draw a graph as it enlightens researchers to know that little things that we tend to overlook are the things that contribute to the problems we are facing.

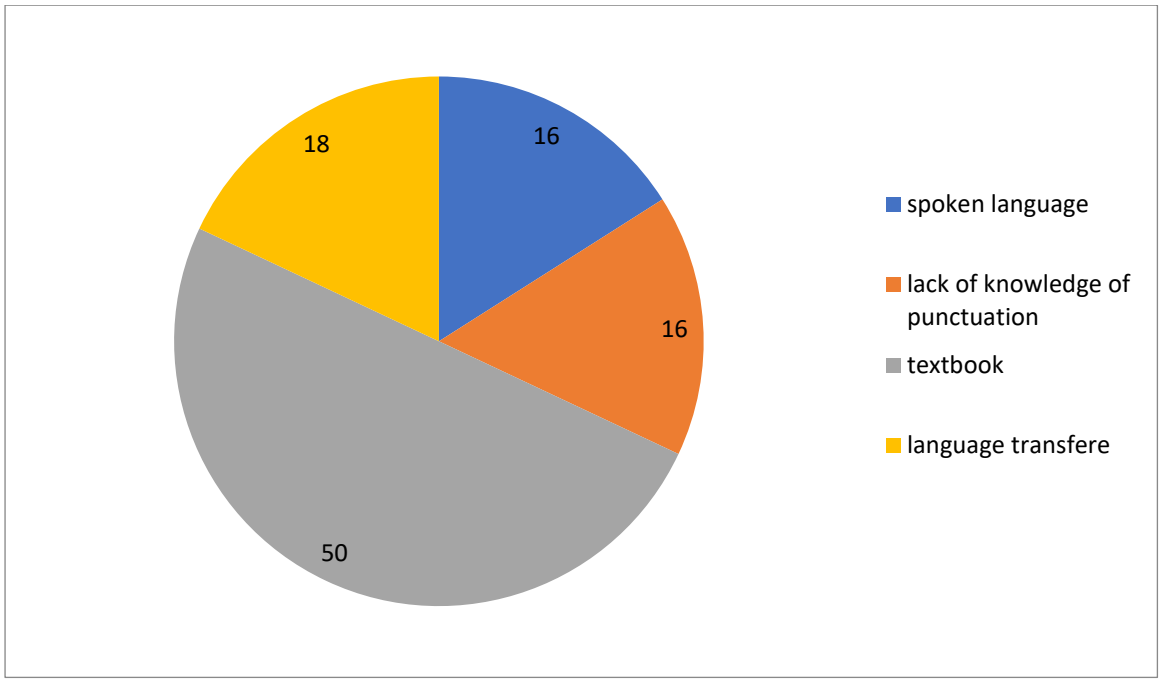

Figure 7: Educators VS Learners (punctuation marks)

The above graph shows that the most important aspect that contributes to learners' lack of skills and knowledge of using punctuation marks is the insufficiency of textbooks, hence 50% of learners must share the textbook with the rest of the class.

Thus, when a learner who has the textbook is absent from school, those they share the book with are forced to learn without a textbook to refer to what the educator is teaching. The graph also shows that educators did not put enough emphasis on the importance of punctuation because they have little knowledge about punctuation marks. Moreover, the graph shows that spoken and language interference is another factor that contributed to learners' challenges of using punctuation marks. Spoken language and language interference have the same percentage of 16%, indicating that the use of different language varieties at home interferes with learners' ability to use standardised language at school. While lack of knowledge on punctuation has 18%, this had a negative influence on learners when it comes to writing narrative essays.

This study found that there was little knowledge about punctuation, hence most learners used punctuation wrongly when they wrote their academic essays. Punctuation is an important aspect of writing, it shortens long sentences, gives meaning to the text, and allows coherence and understanding of the text. However, in the case of this study, learners did not produce the required pages needed for their essay and even if they managed to write two pages, there were many errors found. The spoken language used in the class contributed to the incorrect use of punctuation as learners tended to use some punctuation marks to close the gap of knowledge on the suitable vocabulary required. Thus, lessons that can only focus on punctuation needs to be implemented. Additionally, feedback needs to be given more often for learners to know where they committed mistakes because one of the causes of punctuation errors is a lack of feedback from educators. This study revealed that educators tend to overlook that learners do not know how to punctuate as they do not teach punctuation but give the learners essays to write and expect them to use correct punctuation. With the lack of knowledge of punctuation marks, there is a need for Xitsonga special lessons to upskill learners on the use of punctuation marks that will focus on enlightening learners about the importance of using punctuations. Language transference contributes to punctuation mistakes, as educators tend to use language that differs from the language of learners. Hence, this study found that learners were unable to understand the lesson due lack of understanding of some of the words the educator used. It is important that a pilot study be conducted to enhance the research on punctuation errors committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 learners when writing narrative essays. The pilot study served as a preliminary investigation to test the feasibility of

research instruments and procedures before the main study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). By analysing a small sample of narrative essays and conducting initial teacher interviews, the researcher identified and addressed potential challenges, such as ambiguity in data collection protocols and gaps in the research focus. This process ensured that the study captured comprehensive and accurate data on punctuation errors, contributing to more robust findings. Additionally, the pilot study refined interview questions to elicit more detailed insights from teachers about instructional strategies for teaching punctuation in Xitsonga. The pilot study also assessed the reliability and validity of the data collection methods. For instance, testing the effectiveness of document analysis criteria enabled the researcher to develop a more systematic framework for identifying and categorizing punctuation errors (Yin, 2018). The pilot phase further evaluated the feasibility of classroom observations, ensuring they yielded meaningful data without disrupting teaching activities. Based on the findings from the pilot study, adjustments were made to the research design, enhancing the methodological soundness and ensuring that the main study provided actionable insights for improving punctuation instruction in Xitsonga language education.

4.8 CONCLUSION

Several causes of punctuation mistakes made by learners were attributed to their assumption that Xitsonga is simple, reflecting a lack of understanding. Learners asserted that they pay much focus to important subjects like maths and science but seemed to forget that punctuation marks are used in every discipline. This study further revealed that language interference is among the factors that impede the correct use of punctuation marks. Learners used language varieties spoken at home and found it difficult to adapt to the use of standardised language because of the difference between formal language and colloquial language vocabulary. The lack of Xitsonga study material also contributed to a lack of punctuation skills as learners relied on the information given by educators only. Looking at the entire data, the researcher concludes that the use of punctuation marks remains a problem in schools

and an intervention is needed from all stakeholders to curb this situation of the wrong usage of punctuation marks.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this investigation was to identify and analyse the punctuation errors made by Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners when writing narrative essays. This involved systematically examining a sample of essays to catalogue the types and frequencies of punctuation mistakes. The study also aimed to gain insight into the nature and scope of the punctuation errors encountered by the learners. This involved not only identifying the types of errors, but also assessing their impact on the overall quality and coherence of the narrative essays. The investigation sought to explore possible patterns or trends in the punctuation errors observed among Grade 10 Xitsonga learners. This involved analysing the data to determine whether certain errors were more common than others and whether linguistic or contextual factors influenced the occurrence of the identified errors. A key objective was to generate findings that could inform pedagogical approaches to teaching punctuation in the Xitsonga Home language context. This included identifying areas of weakness or misunderstanding among learners and proposing strategies for addressing these issues effectively in the classroom. Conducting this study was further aimed at contributing to the broader field of language education research by providing empirical insights into punctuation proficiency among Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners. By documenting and analysing the punctuation errors made by learners, the study intended to advance the understanding of language learning and teaching in this context. Reiterating the main objectives outlined above prepares the researcher to present the conclusion of the investigation and effectively highlight the significance and contributions of the study to the field of language education and pedagogy.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This investigation yielded several key findings that shed light on the proficiency and challenges faced by learners regarding the use of punctuation marks. One of the most prevalent punctuation errors identified among the Grade 10 Xitsonga learners was the misuse of commas, often leading to comma splices or run-on sentences. Learners frequently struggled to properly separate independent clauses or coordinate sentence elements with appropriate punctuation marks. The study also observed that omission or misplacement of periods at the end of sentences was among the common errors that learners committed. Many narrative essays exhibited instances where sentences lacked proper terminal punctuation, disrupting the flow and coherence of the text. Furthermore, most learners demonstrated inconsistency in the use of quotation marks to denote direct speech or cited material within their narrative essays. This often led to confusion regarding the boundaries of quoted text and the surrounding narrative.

The misuse of apostrophes was also prevalent among the Xitsonga Home language learners, particularly in the context of indicating possession or forming contractions. There were unnecessary uses of apostrophes in plural nouns and a failure to include apostrophes in possessive contractions. Learners exhibited a limited understanding of ellipses and frequently misused or omitted them when indicating omitted words or trailing off in dialogue or narration. Some essays displayed an overreliance on exclamation marks and question marks, often inappropriately used for emphasis or rhetorical effect. This overuse detracted from the clarity and effectiveness of the narrative. The correct usage of colons and semicolons to indicate relationships between independent clauses or items in a list was notably lacking among the Xitsonga learners. Many essays lacked appropriate instances where these punctuation marks were used to enhance clarity and coherence. The analysis of Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners' narrative essays revealed a range of punctuation errors that impeded the readability and effectiveness of their writing. The most common errors include comma splices, missing periods, inconsistent quotation marks usage, incorrect apostrophe placement, ellipses misunderstanding, and overuse of certain punctuation marks. Addressing these errors through targeted

instruction and practice can significantly enhance the learners' punctuation proficiency and overall writing skills.

5.3 Implications of Findings

The prevalence of punctuation errors identified in the learners' narrative essays suggests that these learners may face challenges in communicating their ideas effectively through writing. Poor punctuation can lead to ambiguity, confusion, and misunderstandings which may hinder the clarity and coherence of the written expression. Punctuation errors can have a detrimental impact on the academic performance of Xitsonga Home language learners particularly in language-related subjects such as literature and language studies. Learners may lose marks due to punctuation errors in formative and summative assessments, and this could affect their overall grades and academic achievement. The findings underscore the importance of punctuation proficiency as a fundamental component of writing skills development. Thus, addressing punctuation errors is essential for enhancing the overall quality of learners' writing and improving their ability to convey ideas effectively and persuasively.

Proficiency in using punctuation marks is not only crucial for academic success but also for preserving and expressing cultural identity through written language. Xitsonga Home language learners need to develop sufficient punctuation skills to accurately convey their cultural heritage and personal experiences in narrative essays and other forms of written communication. The findings highlight the need for educators to be adequately prepared and supported in addressing punctuation errors in the classroom. Professional development opportunities and resources should be provided to assist educators in designing effective instructional strategies and interventions to improve learners' punctuation skills.

The findings of this study have implications for curriculum development and instructional design in Xitsonga Language education. Curricular materials and teaching resources should incorporate targeted activities and exercises to develop

learners' punctuation proficiency in alignment with curriculum standards and learning objectives. Efforts to address punctuation errors among Xitsonga Home language learners should consider the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of South Africa's educational landscape. Pedagogical approaches should be inclusive and culturally responsive, recognizing and valuing the linguistic heritage of all learners. Overall, the implications of the findings underscore the importance of addressing punctuation errors among Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners to enhance their communication skills, academic performance, and cultural expression. Effective strategies and support mechanisms are needed to assist educators and learners in overcoming these challenges and fostering proficiency in punctuation and writing.

5.4 Educational Significance

Punctuation proficiency is a fundamental aspect of language development and literacy. By addressing punctuation errors, educators can support learners in developing strong foundational skills in written communication, which are essential for academic success and lifelong learning. As such, improving punctuation skills among Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners can significantly enhance their overall writing proficiency. Using punctuation clearly and effectively improve the coherence, organization and readability of written texts allowing learners to express their ideas more confidently and persuasively. Engaging with punctuation errors in narrative essays requires Students develop critical thinking skills by analysing and correcting punctuation errors in their writing. This process helps them assess the effectiveness of their communication, fostering a deeper understanding and engagement with their work. Language education plays a vital role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. Addressing punctuation errors in Xitsonga Home language instruction ensures that learners can accurately convey their cultural identity and personal experiences through writing, thereby contributing to the preservation of indigenous languages and cultural traditions.

Providing support and resources to address punctuation errors among Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners promotes equitable access to quality education. By empowering learners with the necessary skills to communicate effectively in their

Home Language, educators can create inclusive learning environments that value linguistic diversity and promote educational equity for all learners. Proficiency in written communication, including punctuation skills, is essential for success in academic, professional, and personal development. By equipping Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners with strong punctuation skills, educators prepare them for future educational and career opportunities and empower them to participate fully and contribute meaningfully to society. Thus, this investigation highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development and reflective practice for educators. In other words, by analysing the punctuation errors identified in learners' narrative essays, educators can gain insights into areas that need instructional improvement and develop targeted strategies to address learners' needs more effectively. This will enhance the quality of language instruction and learning outcomes. The educational significance of addressing punctuation errors among Grade 10 Xitsonga Home language learners extends beyond the development of technical writing skills. It encompasses broader goals of language development, cultural preservation, and equitable access to education, and preparation for future success. It also underscores the importance of language education in fostering holistic development and empowering learners to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. Emphasising the importance of addressing punctuation errors in language education is crucial for enhancing learners' writing skills and academic success. Punctuation serves as the backbone of written communication, providing clarity, coherence, and structure to written texts. By addressing punctuation errors, educators can significantly enhance learners' writing proficiency and academic achievement. Proper punctuation ensures that written texts are clear, coherent, and easy to understand. It helps to organize ideas, clarify relationships between sentences and paragraphs, and guide readers through the flow of information. Thus, teaching learners how to use punctuation marks effectively enables them to express their thoughts and ideas with precision and clarity. Well-punctuated writing is more readable and engaging for readers. However, consistent punctuation errors can disrupt the flow of reading, cause confusion, and hinder the reader's comprehension. As such, teaching learners how to punctuate their writing correctly can improve the readability of their work and make it more enjoyable and accessible to readers.

If not well addressed, punctuation errors can have a significant impact on learners' academic performance, particularly in language-related subjects such as literature, language arts, and essay writing. Learners may lose marks because of punctuation errors in assessments and examinations, and this could affect their overall grades and academic achievement. By addressing punctuation errors, educators can help learners improve their academic performance and excel in their studies. Engaging with punctuation errors requires learners to think critically and analyse their writing. By identifying and correcting punctuation mistakes, learners develop critical thinking skills and learn to assess the effectiveness of their written communication. This process fosters deeper understanding and engagement with the content, leading to improved learning outcomes. Proficiency in punctuation is essential for success in both professional and personal contexts. In the workplace, effective written communication is highly valued and can impact career opportunities and advancement. Relatively, in personal life, strong writing skills are valuable for expressing ideas, communicating with others, and engaging in meaningful discourse. By teaching learners how to punctuate their writing correctly, educators equip them with essential skills for success in all areas of life.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the current research work, the following recommendations have been made:

i. Recommendations for the educators

- Educators should provide extrinsic motivation to encourage learners to focus on their writing.
- Educators should give more practical activities on punctuation to improve the learners' ability to write using correct punctuation marks.
- Language educators should regularly attend in-service training on how to deliver writing lessons to effectively teach the skill.

- Educators should give learners feedback regularly to help them rectify their mistakes early in their learning process and advise learners to use correct punctuation marks.
- Educators need to include punctuation marks in their daily lessons, so the learners will know the importance of punctuating their work.
- Educators should also use appropriate teaching material while always following the Annual Teaching Plan.

ii. Recommendations for the learners

- The learners should increase their understanding of using punctuation by thoroughly practicing writing using punctuation marks.
- The learners need to put more effort into the activities that involve the use of punctuation marks.
- Learners need to engage themselves in essay writing to improve their ability to write with the use of correct punctuation marks.
- Based on the findings, the researcher revealed that learners experience some difficulties in placing the correct punctuation where necessary. Therefore, learners need to pay more attention to the use of punctuation marks, particularly the comma, as it was the most dominant error they made.

iii. Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education

- The DOE needs to implement workshops for Xitsonga HL educators, specifically on punctuation, to enhance educators' knowledge about how to teach the use of punctuation marks. This will also equip them with more knowledge on how to handle learners who encounter challenges with using punctuation marks.
- DOE needs to provide enough resources for indigenous languages to expose educators and learners to everyday language and new vocabulary. As new

words are discovered daily, the learners need to have updated books to help them in their learning process.

- Time allocation for punctuation lessons in the ATP needs to be amended by the Department of Basic Education.

iv. Recommendations for other researchers

- It is important for future researchers to conduct their research with the same objects and different perspectives in another aspect of writing to determine whether the cause of the identified problem is the same.
- The researcher suggests that other researchers in this area should vividly analyse the punctuation errors in other academic writings. Thus, they may find varying types of errors in the use of punctuation.
- Other researchers can use this study to prevent the duplication of the same findings.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL CLERENCE CERTIFICATE

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: tukiso.moloantoa@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: **04 December 2023**

PROJECT NUMBER: **TREC/1726/2023: PG**

PROJECT:

Title:	Punctuation Errors Committed by Xitsonga Grade 10 Learners When Writing Narrative Essays in Xitsonga: A Case Study at Mafemani Circuit, Bohlabela District, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa
Researcher:	L Ndlovu
Supervisor:	DR B.J Chavalala
Co-Supervisor/s:	N/A
School:	Education
Degree:	Master of Education in Language Education

PROF D MAPOSA
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:

i) **This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.**

ii) **Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.**

iii) **PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**

Finding solutions for Africa

APPENDIX 2: APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT

education
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building, Government Boulevard, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombela, 1200
Tel: 013 766 5552/5115, Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

TO: DR CHAVALALA B.J

FROM: NGOBENI J.R (principal)

ONLINE REVIEW: 23 FEBRUARY 2024

ONLINE REVIEW: 23 FEBRUARY 2024

SUBJECT: PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED BY XITSONGA GRADE 10 LEARNERS WHEN WRITING NARRATIVE ESSAY IN XITSONGA IN MAFEMANI CERCUIT.

RESEARCHER: NDLOVU L.

Dear colleague

The above researcher's research proposal serves at the Mpumalanga Department of Education (school level). The principal is soundness of the proposed study.

DECISION: The research proposal is granted approval.

Regards

Principal: Ngobeni J.R (PRINCIPAL)

2024/02/23

DATE

APPENDIX 3: REQUEST LETTER TO CONDUCT A STUDY

P.O.BOX 2205

ACORNHOEK

1360

15 January 2024

The principal

Siboyiye C. School

P.O. Box 1751

Bushbuckridge

1280

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for permission to conduct a study

I, Ndlovu L, currently registered for a Master of Education in language Education at the University of Limpopo, request permission to research PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED IN CREATIVE WRITING BY XITSONGA GRADE 10 LEARNERS: THE CASE AT MAFEMANI CIRCUIT, BOHLABELA DISTRICT, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Department of Education with a bound copy of the full research report.

Hoping for a positive response.

Yours Sincerely

Ndlovu L

(Researcher)

APPENDIX 4: REQUEST LETTER TO CONDUCT A STUDY

P.O.BOX 2205

ACORNHOEK

1360

15 January 2024

The Head of the Department

Private Bag X11341

Nelspruit

1200

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for permission to conduct a study

I, Ndlovu L, currently registered for a Master of Education in language Education at the University of Limpopo, request permission to research PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED IN CREATIVE WRITING BY XITSONGA GRADE 10 LEARNERS: THE CASE AT MAFEMANI CIRCUIT, BOHLABELA DISTRICT, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the Department of Education with a bound copy of the full research report.

Hoping for a positive response.

Yours Sincerely

Ndlovu L

(Researcher)

APPENDIX 5: PERMISSION LETTER

P.O.BOX 2205

Acornhoek

1360

15 January 2024

Private Bag X415

Acornhoek

1360

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE SCHOOL PREMISES.

I hereby request permission to conduct research within the school premises. Kindly be informed the proposed topic for my research is, **"PUNCTUATION ERRORS COMMITTED IN CREATIVE WRITING BY XITSONGA GRADE 10 LEARNERS: THE CASE AT MAFEMANI CIRCUIT, BOHLABELA DISTRICT, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.** After the study, the researcher will prepare a comprehensive report detailing the findings and recommendations.

I am looking forward to your positive response**.**

Yours sincerely

……

NDLOVU L

(Researcher)

APPENDIX 6: CONSENT LETTER

Dear participants

This is a consent letter between the researcher and the participants.

I am Ndlovu Lamisile, currently doing my Master's in language education at the University of Limpopo, herby asking permission from the participants to contribute to my data collection and know that their opinion or their name won't be put in the original research unless they agree. Failure to adhere to the rules between the participants and the researcher, they have the right to report the researcher.

Signature of the researcher	Signature of the participant
……..	…….
Date	Date
15 January 2024	15 January 2024
……	……

APPENDIX 7: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR EDUCATORS

A: Background Information Circuit: _____

Name of School: _____

No. of learners in class: _____

No. of XITSONGA HOME LANGUAGE educators in school: _____

School Term: _____

Duration: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATOR

1. What challenges do you come across when marking a narrative essay for learners?
2. What types of punctuation errors are more likely to be found in a learner's essay?
3. Elaborate on how might be the cause of this error.
4. List the common punctuation errors that are likely to be found in learner essay.
5. What do you think might be the solution to this problem?

APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNERS

A: Background Information Circuit: _____

Name of School: _____

No. of learners in class: _____

No. of XITSONGA HOME LANGUAGE educators in school:

_____

School Term: _____

Duration: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

QUESTIONS FOR LEARNER

1. Elaborate on the challenges that you experienced when writing Xitsonga academic essays.
2. In your opinion explain the importance of using punctuation marks when writing.
3. Does teaching using the language of communication instead of written one contribute to the errors that are committed when writing?
4. What can be done to help you when it comes to punctuation?
5. Is there anything that you need your educator to do when it comes to teaching writing?

APPENDIX 9: NARRATIVE ESSAY

Choose one topic and write essay of two pages

1. Siku ndzi nga pona ri ahlamile.
2. N’wana wo velekiwa ehenhla ka nsinya.
3. Mbuyelo wa giredi ya 12 wa lembe ra 2022 wu khomisa tingana.
4. Loko ndzi ku whii, swi vuya hinkwaswo.