

## **A Comparative Study on the Correct Usage of Punctuation in Writing Tasks of Adult Learners of English as a Second Language**

Dr. Ramani R. Jayasinghe  
Department of English Language Teaching  
University of Kelaniya.  
ramani@kln.ac.lk

Language communication is a vital component in the Humanities, and today, most of us use verbal and written expressions to communicate. Written expressions are highly effective for communicating and transferring knowledge or providing information to others. Symbols we use to make the comprehension of texts more precise are called punctuation marks. For example, the punctuation mark '!' is used to show strong emotion or to give a command. "The Diploma in English for Professional Purposes (DEPP)" course is conducted by the Department of English Language Teaching, University of Kelaniya, for adult students who learn English as a Second Language (ESL). Even the Sinhala-speaking students are exposed to formal ESL teaching from Grade 03 to Grade 13 in Sri Lankan schools, the researcher, who was involved in teaching and coordinating this DEPP course, observed that despite this exposure to English language teaching at school, the correct usage of punctuation of the adult Sinhala-speaking students who follow this DEPP course is still not satisfactory. The aim of the study was to compare and contrast the accurate use of eight punctuation marks among a group of adult ESL learners during writing tasks. A number of 50 students' answer scripts on writing skills were randomly selected from the DEPP 2019 course. The particular chosen task, which was to add the correct punctuation marks in a given passage, was marked. The data of the students' marks were collected using the quantitative method and analyzed using the SPSS-22 software, ANOVA HSD Tukey Test. The results showed several significant differences among the correct usage of punctuation marks. The findings of this research can be used to facilitate teaching punctuation marks to adult students in the ESL classroom and to make the necessary changes in the relevant curriculum.

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