

## Analysis of Nepalese post graduate students' errors in writing research proposals

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### ABSTRACT

With the change in socio-political and educational contexts in global academia, the trend of writing academic papers has arisen among Nepali students and educators in higher education. However, many of them are still unfamiliar with the basic standard to be incorporated in an academic paper. In this context, this study examined the post-graduate students' errors in writing research proposals. A textual analysis method was employed, where quantitative phase of analysis was followed by qualitative, and the data were collected from 24 purposively selected research proposals and from the interview with 10 students. The quantitative data were gathered from content analysis of the research proposals and qualitative data were collected from the unstructured interview. The collected proposals were studied, erroneous expressions were listed and categorized in to four parameters like grammatical errors, lexical semantic errors, mechanic errors and syntactic errors. The information from the interview was recorded, noted and analyzed. The results exhibited that (1) article and preposition usages were more persistent grammatical errors; (2) run-ons and fragmentation were more reiterated syntactic errors; and (3) uses of single lexical items were more common lexical-semantic errors and punctuation was the more regular mechanical errors. These findings reveal that students have insufficient knowledge and skills for academic writing. Therefore, they need academic writing courses, training, or workshops from the early level of their schooling. The findings of this study are useful for curriculum designers, policymakers, instructors, and students because it provides significant information on the building blocks experienced by English language learners in writing research paper.

**Keywords:** Academic writing; error analysis; post graduate students; writing ability

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### INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex, powerful and formal process of communicating information. It is a mental process of thinking and concentrating for organizing ideas logically, critically and creatively in a meaningful manner (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019). It is one of the bridges to connect people together. Writing is a means of global communication through which people transmit their ideas and culture (Harmer, 2007; Hyland, 2015). It is the most complex and challenging language skill that requires writers to have complete mastery over

capitalization, conventions, grammar, vocabulary and punctuation, and their cohesive and coherent linkage in forming sentence, text and discourse (Jusun & Yunus, 2018; Ramasamy & Aziz, 2018). Writing is the expression of human desire, emotion, feeling, ideas, and intention through graphic symbols. Many people can speak but can't write properly because writing is a complex process for second/ foreign language learners.

Among several types of writing, thesis writing is an important part of any college education program. Before students can obtain any degree in a

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university, they should have a passing grade in a thesis writing class in Nepalese Universities. Thesis is one of the final works of their degree requirement that students must write after attending several core courses accompanied by English courses. Among four language skills, writing is deemed as the “most difficult of the language abilities to acquire” (Allen & Corder, 1974 as cited in Lasaten, 2014). It was further observed that errors still exist even for those students in the higher education level despite having studied several language courses in their academic years (Lasaten, 2014). This implies that writing is the most intricate and most complex task.

Thesis writing is a part of academic writing that requires a particular language that is different from the colloquial or literary language. Academic writing involves language with suitable grammatical structures, appropriate punctuation marks, verbs in their correct tenses, pronouns in the proper case, and correct spelling of words (Alinsunod, 2014). In this context, Whitaker (2009) notes that academic writing is essentially a part that university students write for their academic courses. In the same context, Irvin (2010) takes academic writing as an evaluation that asks an author to show their knowledge and proficiency with specific disciplinary-specific skills of thinking, interpreting, and presenting. Similarly, context, thesis (theme), navigation, evidence, counter argument are described as the essential qualities reflected in academic writing (Welfe, 2007 as cited in Paudel, 2018, p. 145). Further, Whitaker (2009) discusses that clear purpose, audience, engagement, clear point of view, style focus, logical organization, strong supporting detail, clear and complete explanation, effective use of research, correct style and appropriate vocabulary selection as the guiding principles of academic writing.

Similarly, Al-Tamimi (2018) argues that sentence structure, vocabulary and expressing ideas, punctuation, prepositions, spelling, use of articles, and use of irregular verbs are the common errors that learners commit in their academic writing. Academic writing is supposed to be standard, formal, and error-free, and it should give academic sense to its readers (Molinari, 2022; Paudel, 2018). If any writing is with errors, it may violate the system of an academic paper and may serve misinformation to its readers. Academic writing is a difficult skill for non-native learners of English because they have to deal with issues like content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary and using correct punctuation, spelling, and capitalization (Bolsunovskaya & Rymanova, 2020). Any academic writing should be accurate in grammar, acceptable in meaning, word choice, and appropriate to culture and style.

With the purpose of exposing academic knowledge and skills to the students, the department of English Education, Faculty of Education under

Tribhuvan University has introduced thesis writing in its masters’ degree courses as an optional subject in its annual system and obligatory in the semester system. The course intends to provide the students with hands-on experience in preparing to write a thesis. The students are expected to be conversant with the basic concepts, processes, and techniques of academic writing and maintain clarity, honesty, accuracy, and conciseness in writing (FOE, 2019). The thesis writing process begins with preparing a proposal where the students are expected to prepare a complete research proposal in an organized way. Many students in the context of universities in Nepal, are not well trained with the basic parameters of academic writing and are habituated in academic writing. As a result, they commit errors in their writing. To improve their academic writing skill and making their writing standard, it is necessary to analyze their errors and provide them feedback.

Error analysis is essential in teaching and learning process in the EFL context. It assists policymakers, curriculum developers, and teachers to recognize the most erroneous areas and supports to take suitable remedies. Error analysis is evidence of the areas of differences and difficulties for the students (Amnuai, 2020; Seitova, 2016). Error analysis ensures improvement in teachers’ professional development and students’ performance in second language acquisition (Anefnaf, 2017; McDowell, 2020). Error analysis provides insight on not only what has not been learned but provides feedback for the effectiveness of teaching (Calderón & Plaza, 2021). The reviewed accounts exhibit that the findings from error analysis can be important for designing suitable materials to abet students in avoiding errors in their writing.

As a teacher, I personally have observed and read the students’ research proposals and also talked to them formally and informally about their writings. The students are afraid of making errors and worried about their capacity in selecting and organizing words to produce sentences. Those feelings seem to make students’ self-doubting in making up academic writing. Similar to my experiences, studies show that students commit errors mostly in word choice, punctuation, spelling, syntax and subject- verb agreement (Amiri & Puteh, 2017; Onyinyechi, 2017). Writing the thesis proposal is obligatory for pursuing and completing the task of thesis writing and getting their master’s degree in the context of Nepal. Thus, the draft of the students’ research proposals should be consistently studied and analyzed for recognizing and describing the communal pitfalls in their writing. In this context, this study aims to investigate students’ errors in research proposals by analyzing the research proposals and conducting interview with the students to investigate the reasons for committing errors. The results of this study can serve as a basis for rigorous training aimed at

helping the students improve their way of academic writing in EFL/ESL contexts in the world.

### **Error Analysis**

Error analysis is an activity to reveal the learning outcomes achieved by learners in developing an inter-language system in writing and speaking, which consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself. Error can have a positive role in language learning since it is a sign that language learners do not effectively learn the rules of the target language. As Erdogan (2005, p. 263) emphasizes that “error analysis deals with the learners’ performance in terms of the cognitive processes they make use of recognizing or coding the input they receive from the target language”. Following Lee (2004), students expect to get feedback from their teachers and hope that it would be beneficial for them to be good writers. Error analysis is a domain of applied linguistics that assists both teachers and students to find the problems and their possible solutions (Iqbal et al., 2021). So, by analyzing the errors, the students would know what areas should be focused on and what kinds of materials are emphasized in learning them.

Moreover, identifying learners’ errors is significant because it sheds light on the problems they face and helps the teachers provide feedback to the learners to make their writing more accurate and successful. Showing the value of error analysis, Corder (1974) regards the importance of error analysis as something beyond merely eliminating them. He notes that students’ errors should be considered in language and literary studies. Further, Corder (1981) highlights the significance of error analysis from various stakeholders’ perspectives. For teachers, it would manifest students’ current level of learning. For researchers, it would reveal the way language is learned and structured. For students, these errors can be utilized as a learning device to improve language proficiency. Error analysis can be carried out in a systematic process that includes; a) collection of a sample of learner language; b) identification of errors; c) description of errors; and d) explanation of errors (Corder, 1974; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Error Analysis is one of the most significant fields of second language acquisition because it investigates errors made by L2 learners and describes a set of procedures to identify, describe and explain learners’ errors and provide appropriate remedial for improvement (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Therefore, it merits a continuous process to examine more cases in English as a foreign language context, and errors are not always bad. Instead, they are crucial parts and aspects in enhancing learners’ writing skills.

Errors are classified differently by different scholars. Corder (1974) classifies errors as omission, addition, selection, and mis-ordering.

Likewise, Dulay et al. (1982) classify errors into linguistic categories (phonology, syntax & morphology, lexical-semantics & lexicon, & discourse), surface category (omission, addition & misordering of items), and comparative analysis (comparison of synonymous items) and communicative effect (effects of the utterances on the audience). Likewise, Darus and Ching (2009) identify three categories: grammatical errors (Verb-tense, preposition & article), syntactical errors (Fragment, Run-on sentence, Misplaced modifier, Dangling modifier & Faulty parallelism), and mechanics (Capitalization, Punctuation, & Spelling). Sentence structure, articles, punctuation, and capitalization, subject-verb agreement, preposition, word choice, gerunds, spelling, pluralism and possessive were the major categories of errors found in students’ writing (Al-Zoubi, 2018; Amiri & Puteh, 2017; Perales; 2020; Spies et al., 2018). Similarly, wrong word selection, missing/unnecessary use of the comma, mechanical errors, errors in the quotation, unnecessary/missing uppercase, an unnecessary shift in verb tense, run-on sentences, missing or unnecessary hyphen, sentence fragments, lack of pronoun/antecedent agreement and poorly integrated quotation are the major erroneous aspects found in the academic writing of the students of tertiary education (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Errors are prevalent in academic writing, which range from spelling to discourse.

### **Previous Studies on Academic Writing Errors**

The research on academic writing errors reveals that errors are prevalent in academic writing for all second or foreign language learners. In an analysis of global and local errors in the writing of university students, Tizon (2019) concludes that students committed more local errors than global and indicates the need for remedial teaching to overcome such errors. The research study of Kikula and Qorro (2007) reveals that writing the research problem, articulating the importance of the research problem, and proposing an appropriate methodology were the major problematic issues in academic writing.

Similarly, the research carried out by Darus and Subramaniam (2009) shows that students committed grammatical errors more than others in writing an academic paper at the university level. Analyzing the errors in Chinese students’ essay writing, Darus and Ching (2009) conclude that mechanics, tenses, prepositions, and subject-verb agreements were the most common errors of the students. In a study, Al-Buainain (2010) concedes that verbs, noun modifiers, relative clauses, fragments, countable and uncountable nouns, articles, and prepositions were the most frequent errors the learners committed in their academic writing. While analyzing linguistic errors, Lasaten (2014) found that verb-tenses, sentence structure,

punctuations, word choice, spelling, prepositions, and articles were the major errors in students' writing. Manchishi et al.'s (2015) indicates that failing to state the problem and identify the gap in the literature, employing the wrong methodology, wrong referencing style, exist of plagiarism in writing, and more linguistic errors have prevailed in academic essay writing of the students. Similarly, in their research, Katiya et al. (2015) claim that punctuation errors, misapplication of essay construction rules, spelling errors, syntactic errors, and morphological errors compromised the quality, meaning, and rhetorical aspect of the contents were the major errors in academic essay writing. Moreover, Sermsook et al.'s (2017) study on Thai students showed that punctuation was the major error in writing essays while use of articles and application of grammatical rules were the major problems in students' writings found in the researches (Alhaisoni et al., 2017; Promsupa et al. 2017; Sermsook et al., 2017). Similarly, Sharma (2018) found that prepositions and additions were the frequent errors at lexical and syntactic levels respectively in the writing of school students in Nepal.

In Nepal's context, though academic writing has been started with the inception of universities, specifically with the launching of Master's degree programs in different streams, there was less interest of the people on it (FOE, 2015). However, shifting an annual system into the semester and the running of M. Phil. and Ph.D. programmes obliged the people's craze towards academic writing (FOE, 2021). Thesis writing, translation, book reviews, term paper writing, and article writing and publishing are the standard academic writing practices in the universities of Nepal. The literature review reveals that there is a plethora of research on error analysis of writing produced by second or foreign language learners in a different context abroad. However, the research on analyzing students' errors in academic writing in the context of Nepal is rarely found. In this context, this study explored students' errors in their research proposal using steps of error analysis specified by Corder (1974) and Darus and Ching (2009) error classification model that includes grammatical errors, syntactical errors, and mechanics (described in the preceding part of this section) and lexical-semantic error was added in this category that explains the selection of right words in right places making appropriate concord. The present study differs significantly from previous studies in its context, objectives, methodology, data, and findings.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

A textual analysis method with quantitative and qualitative approach was employed in this study.

The quantitative method is conducted in the first phase, then only the qualitative approach using thematic analysis (Wipulanusat et al., 2020). The results of quantitative and qualitative data were interpreted in the discussion. This study aims to make the in-depth study on the phenomenon by explaining the findings from the first phase of the study with the qualitative data collected during phase second. It is believed that balance and reliable generalization would be derived through this research.

### **Participants**

The participants were the fourth-semester students specializing in English language education and pursuing their thesis writing process (Eng. Ed. 544) in the department of English Education, Faculty of Education under a public university in Nepal. The 24 students' proposals were selected purposively in the study, and among those 24 students, ten students were selected purposively for the interview.

### **Instruments**

This study employed a content analysis tool for qualitative data collection. Content analysis as a method, can be used for systematic analysis of verbal, written or visual documents both qualitatively and quantitatively (White & Marsh, 2006). In this research, the content of the students' research proposal was analyzed, breaking them into the parameters set for error analysis suggested by Corder (1974) and Darus and Ching (2009). The parameters used in the analysis of grammatical errors were articles, prepositions, verb, adjectives, noun, pronoun and determiners. Similarly, fragments, run-ons, comma slices, misplaced modifiers, and faulty parallelism were used for analyzing Syntactic errors, and lexical single, lexical connectors, independent prepositions were used for analyzing Lexical-semantic errors, and punctuation, capitalization and spelling for mechanic errors. Content analysis was used to quantify the occurrence of certain words, phrases, subjects, or concepts in the selected proposal. To validate the quantitative data, selected students were interviewed with unstructured interview guidelines as a part of qualitative data.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I visited the department of English Education of the selected university, then explained the purpose of the research to the authority. Getting consent from the authority, I selected 24 research proposals submitted to the department. I requested the authority for the contact detail of the students of selected proposals. After getting the contact detail of the students, 10 students were contacted for the interview. Before the interview, they were explained the purpose of the research and a written permission form was signed. They were assured that all

information gathered would be treated with strict confidentiality. The proposals were studied critically to find out the erroneous expressions. All the erroneous items were listed first, then they categorized into grammatical, syntactical, or mechanics-related errors. Those errors that did not come under these categories were left. After quantifying the errors in the proposal, the selected students were interviewed, and the interviews were audio-recorded on the cell phone. A note was also taken to make analysis easy and comfortable for the researcher and not to misinterpret the participants' actual responses.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The collected data through a content analysis were analyzed into three broad categories; grammatical errors, syntactical errors, and errors in mechanics, were presented in table specifying them into different parameters by using simple mathematical notion percentage, and the qualitative data collected through interviews were transliterated, coded, categorized and analyzed textually in the same categories immediately after each table. The two sets of data (quantitative & qualitative) were interpreted in the discussion. For the purpose of data analysis, steps of error analysis specified by Corder

(1974) were followed. First, each proposal was examined word and word and sentence by sentence. Coding categories were generated the based on all writing samples. Second, the numbers of errors were counted and converted into percentage to examine the occurrence. The analysis parameters were based on Darus and Ching (2009) error classification model.

**FINDINGS**

Since this research has used a textual analysis design, the presentation and analysis of the results have been done into four parameters. The listed erroneous expressions in each proposal were counted and aggregated into number and converted into percentage. The results of quantitative data have been presented first in the tables and immediately followed by qualitative data in each parameter.

**Overall Errors**

In this category, the errors were analyzed by categorizing them into four categories; grammatical error, lexical error, lexical-semantic error, and mechanics. Table 1 presents the overall errors.

**Table 1**  
*Overall Errors in Students' Research Proposals*

Types of Errors	Number of the errors	Frequency of Occurrences
Grammatical errors	359	60.23%
Syntactic errors	91	15.26 %
Lexical-semantic errors	82	13.75%
Mechanics	64	10.73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that grammar, as the main concern in writing competency, is the most common error among the students while writing their thesis proposals. The data show that 60.23 % of them were grammatical errors, 15.26% syntactic errors, followed by 13.75% lexical-semantic errors, and 10.73 % mechanic-related errors.

The result shows that students mostly committed grammatical errors followed by lexical-semantic error. This fact was validated from the interview with the selected students. They all agreed that due to their negligence and incomplete knowledge in grammar, they commit more grammatical errors. Due to a lack of the ability to select appropriate field-specific words, they commit lexical-semantic errors more than others. Sharing the experience, S1 stated, "We feel difficulty using articles and prepositions in our writing, which leads us to have more grammatical errors". In the same vein, S10 conceded, "Grammatical errors occurred the most frequently because students have deadlines to meet and it is obvious that students have little or no time to proofread or recheck". S3 also agreed

with the results of quantitative data and expressed, "Yes, I am still confused by many grammar rules, like subject-verb agreement and verb tenses. I think it's because we need to master the rules in grammar and the practice of choosing an appropriate word in the appropriate context." Another participant, S7, conceded:

we do not have the habit and practice in academic writing, and we do not have sufficient time for rigorous study and proofread. When we finish typing, we think it is the job of the supervisor to correct. So, we submit the proposal to the department without spending enough time to proofread everything anymore. As a result, we commit more grammatical, syntactic, and lexical-semantic errors in our research proposals though we are English specialized students.

These accounts reveal that grammatical and syntactic errors are more frequent and serious for the English specialized students in their academic writings.

**Grammatical Errors**

The grammar domain accounts for 60.23% of all errors identified in the students' research proposals, making it the most frequent domain. The domain is very broad and is therefore divided into nine different sub-domains. The domain article counts unnecessary, wrong use and lacking article, preposition includes a wrong preposition, unnecessary preposition, and lacking preposition, and the verb error domain incorporates errors in subject-verb agreement, wrong verb form, lacking verb, and unnecessary verb. Similarly, the adjective

errors count wrong use, unnecessary use, and lacking adjectives, whereas the noun errors count the wrong number of the noun and the disagreement between determiner and noun. Moreover, pronoun errors include wrong pronoun use and lacking pronoun, and determiner errors incorporate lacking determiner, wrong determiner, and unnecessary determiner. Finally, the incorrect embedding of Wh-question and wrong usage of tense have been presented. Table 2 shows the grammatical errors found in the students' research proposals.

**Table 2**  
*Grammatical Errors in Students' Research Proposals*

Categories of grammatical errors	Number of the erroneous items	Frequency of occurrences in %
Article errors	99	27.57
Preposition errors	87	24.23
Verb error	45	12.53
Adjective error	21	5.84
Noun errors	22	6.12
Pronoun errors	11	3.06
Determiners errors	23	6.40
Incorrect Embedding of Wh- Question	9	2.50
Wrong Usage of Tense	42	11.69
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that the most frequent grammatical errors found in students' research proposals were in article and preposition uses, and the least errors were found in the embedding of wh-questions. The data reveal that 27.57% errors were in article use, 24.23% in preposition use, 12.53% errors were in verb use, and 5.84 % errors were in using adjectives. Similarly, 6.12% errors were in nouns, 3.06% in pronoun use, 6.40% errors in using determiners, and 2.50% errors were found in embedding wh-questions. Moreover, the data show that 11.69% of errors were found in the use of tense in the students' research proposals.

The data from the interview exhibit that all the students agreed that they mostly commit errors in using articles and prepositions because their internal rule systems are quite confusing, and challenging to detect the context of their use. One of the students (S5) shared that he had to review articles use one more time in advance grammar books and academic writing papers. In the same vein, S2 was confused about prepositions, which he found was a great challenge in his writing. In this context, S8 stated:

I agree that the wrong usage of tense is the most erroneous area for me and a challenge for many students like me because there is confusion in determining the proper tense to be used in the different components of the research paper. We find differences in the tense use in abstract, introduction, reviews, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. Moreover, the confusion also lies in the use of active voice form of tense or passive voice.

In the same context, S7 added that he was taught to use a passive voice in academic writing but also found an active voice. He got confused about how to maintain balance in those aspects of his writing. S6 expressed what all of them do generally in writing academic papers as, "We commit errors because we just write down in the way what is in our mind without noticing the errors". All these accounts reveal that students are conscious and aware of grammatical errors, but it happens in their writing, which is a great challenge for them. Some of the examples of grammatical errors found in the students' research proposals are presented below.

\*first researcher focuses that the students are taught English on basis of  
 The reason of carrying out this research is [...]  
 \*Sometime, the teachers used inductives method in EFL classrooms  
 One of the researcher claim that [...]  
 The language game is a fiction and not the reality. \*  
 All languages have the same linguistic aspects but different is found in its content. \*  
 My interest is on ICTs and I wanted to find out its effect in language teaching.  
 The finding of this research does not makes a sense to this study.  
 If the same trend of Spread of English goes, in next couple year the local tongues will lost [...]  
 In my opinion, homework could be least dangerous if [...]

**Syntactic Errors**

Syntactic domain accounts for 15.26 % of all errors identified in the students' research proposals, making it the second biggest erroneous domain. The domain is very broad and is therefore divided into five different sub-domains like Fragments, Run-ons, Comma Splice, Misplaced Modifiers, and Faulty Parallelism Table 3 presents the syntactic errors found in the students' research proposals.

Table 3 exhibits that run-ons were the most frequent, and misplaced modifiers were the least frequent syntactic errors in the students' research proposals. The data show that 28.57% were run-ons errors, 25.27% were misplaced modifiers, and 18.68% were fragmented. Moreover, 15.38% of errors were faulty parallelism, and 12.08% were comma splices.

**Table 3**  
*Syntactic Errors in Students' Research Proposals*

Categories of syntactic errors	Number of the errors	Frequency of occurrence in %
Fragments	17	18.68
Run-ons	26	28.57
Comma Splice	11	12.08
Misplaced Modifiers	23	25.27
Faulty Parallelism	14	15.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100</b>

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they loved to use concise sentences assuming that they give clear meaning, but they do not think too many fragments spoil the beauty and essence of academic writing. The students have less knowledge of the academic writing process. They find it difficult to write complete sentences because they assume that it already has a complete thought even if it is fragmented.

Sharing the experiences about syntactic errors, the students stated that they committed syntactic errors primarily because of the lack of confidence in the syntax of the English language. However, they have massive exposure to linguistic knowledge through their courses. Sharing the experiences on academic writing, S7 conceded, "I think most of us committed run-ons because we do not know how to end and where to end sentences". Similar to this, S3 added, "We have a lot of linguistic knowledge, but we do not know where and when to end the sentences". These accounts reveal that students are in doubt about the structure and length of the sentences that are used in academic writing. In this context, S8 stated that run-ons are the most frequent syntactical errors because they are less aware of when to divide a sentence. Speaking about their writing fragments, S1 expressed that fragment is in their paper since they fail to identify if their sentences provide a complete thought. S3 added that

The students agreed that sometimes they use the modifiers unnecessarily, creating ambiguity in their writing. In this context, S5 expressed that they do not consider the meaning made due to the use of the specific modifying word in a particular position, and we commit errors due to misplaced of the modifiers. S4 mentioned, "we use the words like almost, hardly, just, merely, nearly, only, etc. before and after the noun which make our writing senseless". Moreover, the students committed comma splices because they thought that if they put a comma between two sentences, the sentence could be academic and give a complete sense. Likewise, all the students agreed that they do not find the complex sentence construction in which two or more parts of the sentence are equivalent in meaning but not grammatically similar in form. As a result, they commit errors. Some of the examples of syntactic errors found in the research proposals are presented below.

By questioning what, how and how much a character eats, as well how food is prepared, served\*  
 Talking quickly\* during the interview may annoys the people.  
 The research only\* takes place in[...]  
 \*Participants could leave the research survey at any time, they needed to indicate their preference.  
 \*I love to carryout research on grammar teaching I would write my thesis within three months if I have receive no any constraints.  
 \*The results of the study were inconclusive, therefore more research needs to be done on the issue.  
 The findings of this research was informative, lively and a source of inspiration\* to carry out the research in this field.  
 In this research, I want to review the existing literature and that I should pay close attention\* to the comparison and contrast in the discussion of this research.  
 So, teacher or schools should be give opportunity to explore their inner talent.\*

I agree that the wrong usage of tense is the most erroneous area for me and a challenge for many students like me because there is confusion in determining the proper tense to be used in the different components of the research paper. We find differences in the tense use in abstract, introduction, reviews, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. Moreover, the confusion also lies in the use of active voice form of tense or passive voice.

In the same context, S7 added that he was taught to use a passive voice in academic writing but also found an active voice. He got confused about how to maintain balance in those aspects of his writing. S6 expressed what all of them do generally in writing academic papers as, “We commit errors because we just write down in the way what is in our mind without noticing the errors”. All these

accounts reveal that students are conscious and aware of grammatical errors, but it happens in their writing, which is a great challenge for them. Some of the examples of grammatical errors found in the students’ research proposals are presented below.

**Lexical-Semantic Errors**

Lexical-semantic domain accounts for 13.75 % of all errors identified in the students’ research proposals, making it the third biggest erroneous domain. Lexical-semantic errors are also called lexical errors and are caused due to wrong selection of the words or the incorrect combination of the words. This domain includes errors in lexical in single, lexical connectors, and independent prepositions. Table 4 presents the lexical-semantic errors found in the research proposals of the students.

**Table 4**  
*Lexical-Semantic Errors in Students’ Research Proposals*

Categories of lexical-semantic errors	Number of the errors	Frequency occurrence in %
Lexical single	42	51.21
Lexical connectors	23	28.04
Independent prepositions	17	20.73
Total	82	100

Table 4 indicates that lexical singles were the most frequent, and independent prepositions were the least frequent lexical-semantic errors found in the students’ research proposals. The data exhibit that 51.21% of errors were lexical single related, 28.04 % were related to lexical connectors, and 20.73 % were related to independent prepositions.

Sharing the experience on lexical-semantic errors, all the students stated that they mostly committed lexical-semantic errors due to the polysemous nature of some words. In this context, S4 said, “we commit lexical-semantic errors in our

writings because in the English language there are confusing similar words that are lexical-semantic related in their use or form but make erroneous in academic writing”. Similarly, S8 added that they commit most of the lexical-semantic errors due to the lack of knowledge in making collocations among the words they use. They agreed that they fail to use appropriate connectors and suitable prepositions with the selected words, which leads them to commit errors in writing. The textual excerpts below present the examples of the lexical-semantic errors found in the research proposals.

The computers in our school are very low so we all do not have the chance to use them  
 [...] every student should promote piece during the argumentative essay writing \*  
 According to their opinion, playing on language game is the best experience ever.\*  
 Aren’t our population transforms into some artificial human intelligence\$?  
 The research concludes that \*computer games aren’t good for people either for children  
 Thus could be a good idea because of getting informations.\*  
 In my point of view, there are some English based issues that can cause danger for local languages and culture. \*

**Mechanic Errors**

Mechanic domain accounts for 10.73 % of all errors identified in the students’ research proposals, making it the least erroneous domain. It includes

punctuation, capitalization, and spelling errors. Table 5 presents the mechanic errors found in the students’ research proposals.

**Table 5**  
*Mechanic Errors in Students’ Research Proposals*

Categories of mechanic errors	Number of the errors	Frequency of occurrence in %
Punctuation	25	39.07
Capitalization	16	25
Spelling	23	35.93
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 shows that punctuation is the most frequent and capitalization is the least frequent mechanic errors in the students' research proposals. The data specifies that 39.07% of errors were punctuation-related mechanical errors, 25% were capitalization, and 35.93% were spelling errors.

All the students experienced difficulty in using punctuation appropriately. They stated that they had difficulty using punctuation because they did not analyze sentences and did not take it seriously. One of the students (S9) expressed, "I get confused about the correct punctuation that I have to use in the

sentences while writing academic paper since I have less knowledge of using a semicolon, colon, comma and so on". In the same context, S10 stated that they commit more mechanical errors because they depended more on the computer than had proofread themselves. Similarly, S1 conceded that MS Word sometimes corrects the words, spellings, punctuations, capitalizations, and we encode automatically, and that auto-correction leads to mechanical errors in writing. The excerpt below presents the examples of mechanic errors.

- \*The students reaction on homework shows that [...]
- \*Bwown (2000 study shows that[ ...]
- [...] to advance level in the education system of Nepal.\*since 1910[...]
- \*English languae teaching [...] emergence of new approaches methods and technique.
- \*The study attends to explore[...]
- \*The study was dilimited in the percetion of [...]

## DISCUSSION

Analyzing learners' errors is an inevitable in second language teaching and learning. Error analysis provides evidence on students' progress, the way the language has been learned and the strategies employed on it (Corder, 1974). The results of the error analysis are the tools for improving further learning. The qualitative and quantitative data results unveil that most of the students committed grammatical errors in their writings. Both the data sets were analyzed using steps of error analysis specified by Corder (1974) and Darus and Ching (2009) error classification model.

The results exhibit that grammatical errors are more frequent and serious in students' academic writing. The finding agrees with the finding of Gráf (2015), which concludes that grammar is the main erroneous domain found in students writing specifically in English as foreign language contexts. The results exhibit a significant gap between grammatical errors (i.e. 60.23%) and the errors in the following domains where syntactic errors were only 15.26%, Lexical errors were 13.75%, and mechanic errors were 10.73%. The findings contrast with the finding that grammar and Lexical-semantic errors are almost equally represented in the students' writings (Matusevich, 2016). The inappropriate selection of lexical items leads to miscommunication (Mariko et al., 2020). However, Tajbakhsh (2017) claims that lexico-semantic errors do not impede communication and readability though their correction improves EFL learners' writing skills. The results disclose that within the grammatical domain, students committed more errors in article use followed by preposition use. Articles and prepositions are the domain of the English language where both native and non-native English language learners feel quite a difficulty in their use. Darus and Chin (2009) in their

classification claim that mechanics, tense, preposition, articles and subject verb agreement become more serious errors in students' writing. The context of the indefinite article uses definite article and vice-versa, making it difficult for the learners to identify the exact context of their use in their academic writing (Jarvis, 2002 as cited in Crompton, 2011).

The results reveal that the second-highest grammatical errors were found in prepositions. It has become the area of students' significant errors in their research proposal writing. The finding is similar to those of Anjayani and Hum (2016), who found 1002 prepositional errors in the writings of graduate students. They concluded that prepositional errors were primarily due to first language transfer to write English. A preposition is a tool to organize the sentences for making them meaningful and interconnected (Seaton & Mew, 2007) which requires appropriate use in writing. Students' errors in using verb, noun, adjective, pronoun, determiner, and tense exhibit that students have either insufficient knowledge or lack of awareness in these aspects. The results indicate that the students need to give practical knowledge on tense in different components of a research paper/proposal. At the same time, they need to have the skill of maintaining balance in passive and active voice construction, the agreement between verb and subject, pronoun and antecedent in academic writing. Grammar which is one of the core aspects of language needs to be mastered by all ESL and EFL students. to avoid errors in their English writings. In the context of Nepali university students' academic writing, students need appropriate training and ample practice for suitable usages of grammatical parameters, specifically in academic writing. More grammatical errors would disorganize the writing and lead to communication

with the readers. In this sense, grammatical errors need to be controlled to make writing standard, clear, accurate, cohesive, and coherent.

The results further states that run-on, fragment, comma splice, misplaced modifier, and faulty parallelism are the errors found in the students' research proposals. The students mostly committed run-ons followed with fragments. The students are found to have very little knowledge of the basic syntactic pattern and style of academic writing though they were exposed to sufficient linguistic knowledge. Their erroneous expression in syntax shows their inability to form correct sentences and use appropriate punctuation and transitions. Syntactic errors violate the beauty of academic writing and make writing meaningless. Run-ons, fragments, and comma splices are serious errors caused mainly by the carelessness of the writers and lack of adequate knowledge and skills of sentence construction in academic papers (Hayes & Flower, 1980, as cited in Sharp, 2016). An academic paper requires complete and meaningful writing without errors. Every complete sentence should have at least one subject-verb pair and express a complete meaning and thought (Woods, 2010). In this context, Yarber and Yarber (2011) concede that syntactic errors result from the writer's carelessness and inability to construct a complete and sensible sentence. Most students commit run-on, misplaced modifiers, and faulty parallelism due to the lack of knowledge of word placement, lack of punctuation use, and lack of the use of appropriate transition.

Concerning the lexical-semantic errors, the results demonstrate that errors in the use of single lexical items are more frequent than the error with lexical connectors and independent prepositions. The students have problems in defining and deciding the semantic boundaries of the lexical items and are unable to use the proper lexis in the context. Sequencing the words and structuring them in academic writing maintaining semantic and syntactic appropriateness has become a potential problem for the students. Similar to the finding of this research, Taiwo (2001) argues that lexical-semantic errors are common and frequent in students' writing because of the improper mastery over the lexical sense relations. The students need to learn academic lexical items, their sense relations and collocation, and their appropriate use in academic writing

Moreover, the results uncover that punctuation is the most frequent mechanical errors followed by spelling and capitalization. This finding assimilates with the finding of Yuliah et al. (2019), who found that punctuation errors are the most common in students' essay writing. The students sharing on mechanic errors show that their carelessness and lack of proper proofread before their submission are the sole cause. Further, the students' confusion in using punctuation marks shows the lack of adequate

knowledge on it. The students are required separate teaching and practice on using punctuation in academic writing.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the master level's students' errors in research proposals under grammatical, syntactic, lexical-semantic, and mechanic categories as a part of textual analysis research design. The results exhibit that the students committed grammatical errors more than the syntactic, lexical-semantic, and mechanic errors in their research proposals. The results imply that students do not have sound knowledge on the basic parameters like accuracy, clarity, completeness, and comprehensiveness to be maintained in academic writings. The students are more uncomfortable using articles and prepositions, single-word lexical items, and punctuations in their writing. From these findings, it can be inferred that despite the huge exposure to grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and mechanics from their basic to a higher level of education, they could not have sound knowledge on the basics of correct writing, if they have, they are not serious in using it. The students' shared experiences reveal that their grammatical and mechanic errors are primarily on the surface level because they did not put sufficient effort and time to proofread their proposals before submission. The students need an intensive academic writing course, training, or workshop for preparing themselves confident, knowledgeable, and well trained for error-free research proposal writing.

Despite several limitations in its scope and methodology, this study has opened new waves and insights in the field of research paper writing. It is limited to only 24 research proposals of the master level students specialized in English education investigated the grammatical, syntactic, lexical-semantic, and mechanic errors in their research proposals. Thus, it can be reiterated for more research proposals or research reports from the different subjects and universities in the country or across countries, and a comparative study can be made either in the same four parameters or more. These perspectives can be crucial for decision-making at the policy level. Moreover, it has used only textual analysis research design, which has opened up avenues to apply other research designs. Therefore, the subsequent studies can use more tools. Though this study has a small scope, the findings provide feedback to the teachers, administrators, students, curriculum designers, and policymakers for designing the courses, materials, and teaching-learning techniques focusing on academic writing and open up avenues for further studies.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that teachers should expose the

learners to the basic way of academic writing. The learners should be immediately given training of academic writing either from the department or from the university. The academic writing courses and practices should be used from the basic level of education. The learners are recommended to spend sufficient time learning the basic features of academic writing, grammar, syntax, lexical item, and writing mechanics. They are also suggested that they make rigorous reading and proofreading before submitting their reports to the department. The university and the department should improve the quality of students' academic writing skills and abilities by offering different academic writing training and courses for all the semesters. Similarly, the policymakers should make explicit academic writing policies in language education, develop the curricula accordingly, and encourage teachers and students to write and publish academic papers.

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