

ERROR ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN ENGLISH ESSAYS: THE CASE OF BACHELOR FIRST YEAR EDUCATION STUDENTS OF THREE CAMPUSES IN MAKAWANPUR DISTRICT, NEPAL

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Abstract: The present study attempts to investigate the errors in a corpus of 70 essays written by 70 bachelor first year education students studying Compulsory English as a foreign language at three community campuses in Makawanpur District, Nepal in the Academic Year 2017-2018. The instrument used for this study to cull data was students' written essays in English language. All the students were asked to write an essay of almost 500 words on a topic "Growing Use of You Tube among College Students". Only 70 essays that represent 40% of the total 175 essays were selected through the simple random sampling lottery method. All the errors in their essays were identified and classified into different categories. The results showed that the students in this study committed sixteen common errors: noun, main verb, auxiliary verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, article, singular / plural, verb tense, sub-verb agreement, possessive, conditional sentences, punctuation, capitalization and spellings. The most committed errors at the lexical level and the syntactic level were preposition errors and addition errors with the frequency of 261 (13.14%), and 722 (36.35%) respectively. The results showed that most of students' errors were due to the intralingual factors, because students from government schools did not have much exposure and communication in target language. Errors in the sentence structures and verb tense were normally influenced by their mother tongue interference.

Index Terms: English language, errors analysis, interlingual, intralingual, writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Language, which is a means of communication, is based on four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Sweet (1992) defines language as "an expression of ideas by means of which speech sounds are combined into words, words are combined into sentences and combination of sentences gives answers to ideas and thoughts" (p.45). If they are not combined in a sensible and grammatically acceptable way, the ideas or information will not be communicated well.

Nepalese students read and write English as a foreign language. Writing is a highly complex task and writing in English as a foreign language makes the task further complicated. It is a productive skill which involves the cognitive process of formulating ideas in the mother tongue and then translating them into the target language. While checking the students' answer papers or written compositions, teachers tend to notice that almost all the students' written texts are marked with errors.

The written text must be grammatically correct, logically ordered, semantically comprehensible and syntactically precise. It is crucial for students to learn how to write compositions accurately and fluently to pass their university examinations or to succeed in other examinations for getting jobs or for enjoying the promotion in the jobs. A good command of writing is an indisputable advantage that all students at schools and campuses should strive to achieve sound knowledge in language use in order to be successful in life. Writing has always been an essential aspect of the curriculum of English for academic purposes in educational institutions in Nepal.

The students of different levels writing in English as a foreign language are found to commit several errors. Errors, of course, are natural for foreign learners of English language. Committing errors is a reflection of a cognitive activity of a learner and it tells us a great deal about the internalize process of language production. It is essential to minimize the occurrence of errors in the students' written texts for their language proficiency.

Error Analysis is an apt corrective technique that can support effective learning and teaching of English. It is understood that learning a foreign language is a gradual process, during which errors are to be expected in all stages of learning. Error Analysis is the best device for describing and explaining errors committed by the students. By investigating students' written work, it will provide a means to help English teachers to discern errors as one of the challenging issues in teaching learning English as a foreign language. Error analysis can be helpful for structuring syllabus design and teaching techniques in ways that minimize the occurrence of errors.

This study was conducted with the purpose of finding out what kinds of errors are committed by bachelor first year education students in English writing at campuses of Makawanpur District in the Academic Year (2017-2018). There were 56

male and 119 female students participating in the essay writing. They were asked to write an essay of almost 500 words on a single general topic in an hour. The topic was “**Growing Use of You Tube among College Students**”. The data were categorized and analyzed according to the strength of errors. It was investigated that students committed sixteen types of errors. On the findings of the research paper, a set of recommendations was suggested to improve the proficiency and accuracy of education students in writing.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1.1.1 To explore the kinds of errors made by bachelor first year education EFL students at three campuses of Makawanpur District, Nepal.

1.1.2 To investigate the most common errors that students committed in their written essays.

1.1.3 To find out the possible causes or sources of those errors.

1.1.4 To recommend the teachers and the students to minimize such errors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review embraces basic concept of mistake and error, categories of errors, error analysis, sources of errors, and proceedings of error analysis, significance of error analysis and studies on error analysis.

2.1 Mistake and Error

A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a “slip” in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. An error is a noticeable deviation from the standard grammar of the native speakers. A mistake is accidental and the learner knows it is wrong. It is performance based and can be self-corrected, but an error occurs due to lack of knowledge. It may occur repeatedly and is not recognizable by the learner. It can't be self-corrected because the learner does not know or recognize the problem. An error is more technical and more formal than a mistake.

Richards and Schmidt (2002) define an error as “the use of language in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as faulty or incomplete learning” (p. 184). Norrish (1987) defines an error as a “systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong” (p. 7). Richards (1984) states a mistake is made by a learner when writing or speaking which is caused by lack of “attention, fatigue, carelessness, or other aspects of performance” (p. 95). Norrish (1987) defines a mistake as an inconsistent deviation, which means sometimes the learner “gets it right but sometimes gets it wrong” (p.8). Ellis (1996, p.710) and Brown (2002, p. 220) differentiate between covert and overt errors by defining covert errors to be “grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context of communication, whereas overt errors refer to the obviously ungrammatical utterances”.

2.2 Categories of Errors

Richards (1971) classified errors into three major categories: interference errors that occur when the language learners use their mother tongue to create a sentence in target language, intralingual errors that reflect general characteristics of the rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply, and developmental errors that occur when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of limited experiences.

2.3 Sources of Errors

Brown (2000) states there are two main sources of errors, namely, “interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer” (p.224). Interference or interlingual transfer is such a source of error which influences the foreign language learning in a negative way because of the mother tongue of the learner; whereas intralingual transfer refers to the negative transfer of items within the target language. It means it is a source of error which tends to make the learner employ the incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language.

2.4 Error Analysis

Error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by a learner learning a foreign language. Error analysis can be defined as the process of observing, analysing, and classifying the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by a learner. Richards and Schmidt (2002) defines error analysis as “the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners” (p.184). According to James (2001), EA is “the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance” (p. 62).

2.5. Proceedings of Error Analysis

Corder (1974) proposes five steps in error analysis research in order to reach that objective. These steps are:

2.5.1 Collection of a Sample of Learner Language: The researcher made use of a specific sample of learner language. It consisted of one sample of language use that was writing an essay and data were collected from a limited number of learners.

2.5.2 Identification of Errors: The researcher differentiated between errors as the language deviation that arises as a result of lack of knowledge and mistakes as the learners' failures to perform to their competence in the target language; moreover mistakes were immediately corrected by the learner.

2.5.3 Description of Errors: The researcher described errors as the errors of linguistic categories and that of surface strategy. Linguistic categories state that the learners' errors are the result of L1 interference. Errors of Surface strategy highlights the ways in which surface structures are altered by means of such operations as omissions, additions, misformation, disordering and substitution. Omission is considered as the absence of an item in a well-formed sentence structures. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) consider an omission "as a type of error which is characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance" (p.154). "He looking" is an example of omission. Addition is defined as the presence of an item that should not appear in well-former utterance. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) view an addition as "a type of error which is characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in well-formed utterance" (p.156). "She doesn't works at home" is an example of addition. Misformation is the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. The same view is expressed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) with this remark "misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of structure or morpheme" (p.158). "The table was maked by the carpenter" is an example of misformation. Disordering is regarded as the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in a sentence pattern. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) also support this concept through their expression "these types of errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance" (p.162). "What is doing your brother?" is an example of disordering. Substitution refers to the selection of one word in the place of other word. "He have played ball" is an example of substitution.

2.5.4 Explanation of Errors: Errors are explained as interference errors from the mother tongue, and developmental errors are due to overgeneralization

2.5.5 Evaluating Errors: Errors are evaluated as global and local. Global error is the error which affects overall sentence organization. "My house beautiful red" is an example of global error; and local error is the error which affects single elements in a sentence. "He is a honest man" is an example of local error.

2.6 Significance of Error Analysis

Error analysis is beneficial to teachers, syllabus designers, textbook writers, researchers and students because it shows them what common types of errors students commit, what type of errors the most frequently occurs and what the possible sources of the errors are. This study of error analysis contributes to improving teaching and learning of English language. It identifies reasons behind the poor achievement of students in English, the students' level of achievement in their English language writing skills and the problems they encounter in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

Error analysis retains its significance as a mechanism for improving writing skills Lightbown and Spada (2000) argue that when errors are persistent, especially when they are shared by almost all students in a class, it is useful for teachers to "bring the problem to the students' attention" (pp.176-192). Corder (1974) considers that error analysis is useful in second language learning, because "it reveals the problem areas to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers" (p.125).

2.7 Previous Studies on Error Analysis

The research study carried out by Sarfraz (2011) on "Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Pakistani Undergraduate Students: A Case Study" with 50 undergraduate Pakistani students of FAST-National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences Lahore Campus, Pakistan ascertained that the total number of errors was 76. Results showed that 61 out of 76 errors which were collected from the essays resulted from learners' Interlanguage process and 15 errors were those which resulted from mother tongue (MT) interference.

Yahya, Ishak, Zainal, Faghat and Yahaya (2012) carried out a research study on "Error Analysis of L2 Learners' Writings, a Case Study" involving 30 students of lower secondary schools, Malaysia, found 11 categories of errors in their writings: articles, possessives, prepositions, pronouns, singular/plural, subject-verb agreement, verbs, infinitive "to", word choice and spelling. The total number of errors made by the thirty students was 665. The most committed errors were singular plural errors with the frequency of 64 (9.62%) and the least committed errors were infinitive to errors with the frequency of 7 (1.05 %). They concluded that most of the errors occurred due to mother tongue interference, instability of the learner's linguistic knowledge, uncertainty or inconsistency in handling a linguistic system.

Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 English as Foreign Language (EFL) college students and then categorized the errors according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors can be due to L1 transfer. Furthermore, she found that most of the learners rely on their mother tongue in expressing their idea. She added that although the rating processes showed that the participants' essays included different types of errors, the grammatical errors and the mechanical errors were the most serious and frequent ones.

Sawalmeh (2013) carried out a research study on " Error Analysis of Written English Essays: The case of Students of the Preparatory Year Program in Saudi Arabia" involving 33 male students who graduated from Saudi secondary schools and joined the Preparatory Year Program at University of Ha'il, found 10 categories of errors in their writings: verb tense, word order, singular/plural form, subject-verb agreement, double negatives, spellings, capitalization, articles sentence fragments and

prepositions. The total number of errors made by the thirty students was 1422. The most committed errors were verb tense errors with the frequency of 235 (16.5%) and the least committed errors were capitalization errors with the frequency of 88 (6.3%). It was concluded that most of the errors occurred due to L1 transfer.

The research study entitled “Error Analysis in Academic Writing: A Case of International Postgraduate Students in Malaysia” by Amiri and Puteh (2017) included 16 Iranian international students taking IEC at a public university in Malaysia, found that the total number of errors was 389. Sentence Structure (32.90%), Articles (13.11%), Punctuation (11.82%), and Capitalization (11.56%), Word Choice (6.68%), Prepositions (5.91%), and Verb Form (5.39%), redundancy (2.31%), Word Form (2.05%), Subject-Verb Agreement (1.79%) and Word Order (1.54%). Other errors that amounted less were Possessive (0.77%) and Verb Tense (0.51%). The prime reasons for committing such errors were due to mother tongue interference, intralingual interference and overgeneralization.

The research study carried out by Onyinyechi (2017) on “Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Junior Secondary School Two Students in Owerri North” with 42 Junior Secondary School Two (JSS2) students drawn from Comprehensive Secondary School, Amakohia in Owerri North LGA, ascertained that the total number of errors was 587. Error types were: punctuation, spellings, tense, word choice, syntax (sentence structure), number, prepositions, subject/ verb agreement, articles, wrong splitting of words and wrong amalgamation of words. The most committed errors are punctuation errors which had the frequency of 196 (33.4%). The least committed errors were with the frequency of 7 (1.2%). This study showed that the errors committed by the subjects were due to mother tongue interference, intralingual transfer and the carelessness of the participants. All these studies showed that there was not a single cause of committing errors by the students in their writings.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology involves research design, population, sampling design, sample size, nature and sources of data, data collection technique, and processing and analysis of data. A checklist for recording errors made by students in their writings was drawn up, whereby the data obtained via the checklist were analyzed and quantified in terms of numbers and percentages.

3.1 Research Design

Error analysis is a research method which involves mixed method: collection of types of errors as nominal scale data which is qualitative in nature and quantitative analysis of the errors which involves the description of frequencies and percentages of errors.

3.2 Population / Universe

The population of the study consisted of 175 bachelor first year education EFL students studying at three campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal in the Academic Year 2017-2018.

Table 1 Number of participated students in the essay writing

Students	MMC		HC		BMC		Total		Grand Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
Number of Participated Students	27	54	24	48	5	17	56	119	175

(MMC: Makawanpur Multiple Campus, HC: Hetauda Campus & BMC: Banshgopal Multiple Campus)

3.3 Sampling Design and Sample Size

The researcher followed the simple random sampling technique as a sampling design and selected the 70 students' essays (Boys: 24 & Girls: 46) from three campuses. The sample size represents the 40% of the population.

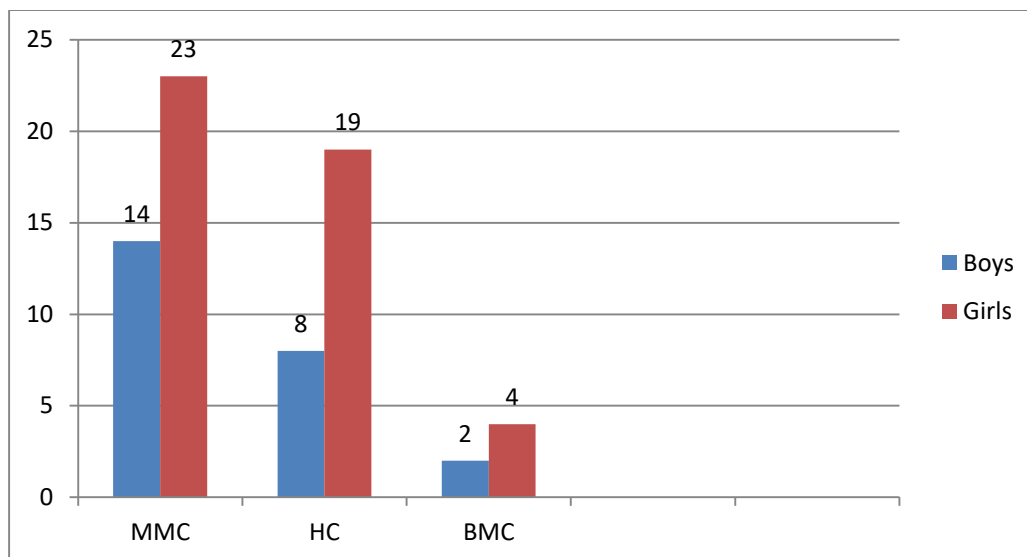


Figure 1 Number of students' essays selected from three campuses in Makawanpur District of Nepal

3.4 Nature and Source of Data

The researcher employed nominal scale data which is qualitative in nature. The primary source of data was students' essay writings. The secondary source of data included books, journal articles, web-sites etc.

3.5 Data Collection Technique

56 male and 119 female bachelor first year education EFL students , who were not informed in advance about their topic, were administered to write an essay of about 500 words on "Growing Use of You Tube among College Students " that was to be finished in an hour. The topic was shared with them in the classroom.

3.6 Processing and Analysis of Data

The analysis of written essays was derived from Corder's (1974) method on error analysis. The method retained five proceedings: collection of sample errors, identification of errors and description of errors, explanation of errors and evaluation of errors. The researcher mentioned types of errors, quantity or frequency of errors and percentage of those errors for the analysis of data.

4. VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

To ensure the content of the study instrument, three academic college lecturers were asked to evaluate the given topic. They approved that the title or rubric of the essay was appropriate to students' standard and suit their level. In this way, the validity of the instrument was maintained.

5. RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

The researcher used a test-retest device to measure the reliability of the instrument. A pilot study was conducted through selecting 20 students from the target population randomly. These students did not take part in the actual study. The students were asked to write on that topic twice within a two-week interval. Accordingly, the students' results showed consistency in the answers.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

The findings were interpreted based on the frequency and percentage of errors.

Table 2 Errors committed by the students

S.N.	Types of Errors	Quantity/ Frequency of Errors	Percentage of Errors
1.	Nouns	86	4.33 %
2.	Main verbs	210	10.57 %
3.	Auxiliary verbs	188	9.47 %
4.	Adjectives	82	4.13 %
5.	Adverbs	80	4.03 %
6.	Prepositions	261	13.14 %
7.	Conjunctions	61	3.07 %
8.	Articles	217	10.93 %
9.	Singular / Plural	90	4.54 %
10.	Verb tenses	214	10.79 %
11.	Sub-verb agreements	210	10.58 %
12.	Possessives	49	2.48%
13.	Conditional sentences	39	1.97%
14.	Punctuation marks	37	1.87 %

15.	Capitalization	64	3.22%
16.	Spellings	97	4.88 %
	Total	1986	100 %

This Table shows that the most committed errors were preposition errors which had the frequency of 261 (13.14%). The second and the third most committed errors were article errors and verb-tense errors with the frequency of 217 (10.93%) and 214 (10.79%) respectively. The least committed errors were punctuation errors which had the frequency of 37 (1.87 %).

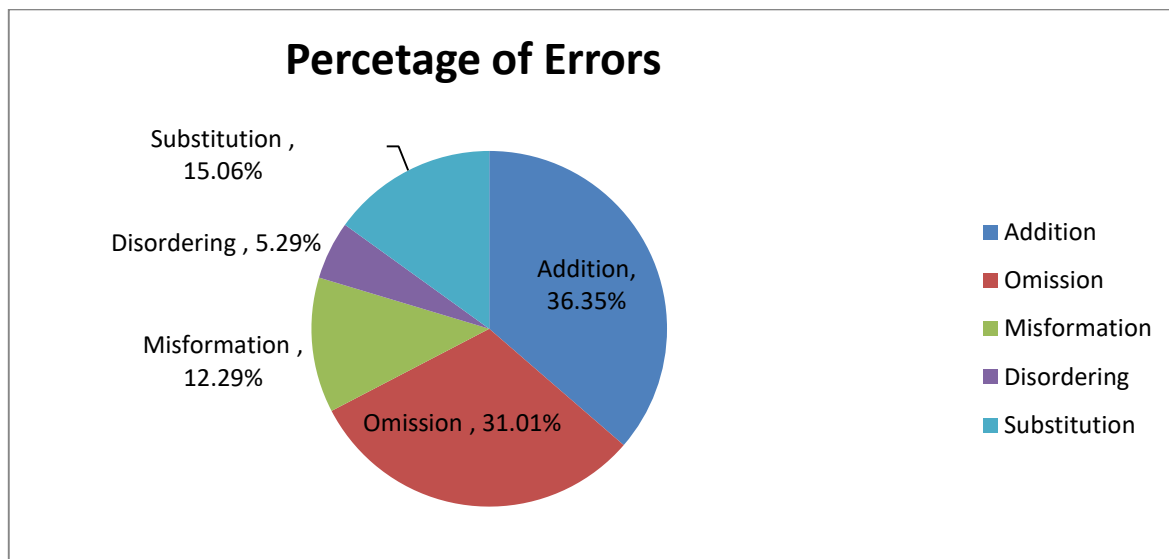


Fig 2 Percentage of errors of surface strategy committed by the students

Fig. No.2 shows that the most committed errors were addition errors which had the frequency of 722 (36.35%). The second and the third most committed errors were omission errors and substitution errors with the frequency of 616 (31.01%) and 299 (15.06%) respectively. The least committed errors were disordering errors which had the frequency of 105 (5.29 %).

Table 3 A brief presentation of the sample of errors committed by the students

S.N.	Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
1.	Noun	Children use You Tube to watch funny <u>accidents</u> .	Children use You Tube to watch funny incidents.
2.	Main verb	We can <u>uses</u> You Tube to solve problems.	We can use You Tube to solve problems.
3.	Auxiliary verb	You Tube <u>have</u> got many advantages.	You Tube has got many advantages.
4.	Adjective	You Tube provides <u>importance</u> news.	You Tube provides important news.
5.	Adverb	We should use it <u>goodly</u> .	We should use it well.
6.	Preposition	We can watch movies <u>in</u> You Tube.	We can watch movies on You Tube.
7.	Conjunction	Young boys <u>girls</u> use You Tube.	Young boys and girls use You Tube.
8.	Article	We need <u>a</u> internet to use You Tube.	We need the internet to use You Tube.
9.	Singular/ Plural	You Tube has many <u>advantage</u> .	You Tube has many advantages.
10.	Verb tense	People <u>have not learnt</u> many things yesterday.	People did not learn many things yesterday.
11.	Sub-verb agreements	<u>Child</u> do not like to read the books.	Children do not like to read the books.
12.	Possessive	Children spend <u>the</u> time by watching You Tube.	Children spend their time by watching You Tube.
13.	Conditional sentence	If we use it for good things, it <u>give</u> good results.	If we use it for good things, it will give good results.
14.	Punctuation mark	If we use You Tube, we do not need <u>anyone</u> help.	If we use You Tube, we do not need anyone's help.
15.	Capitalization	Children watch <u>motu patlu</u> on You Tube.	Children watch Motu Patlu on You Tube.
16.	Spellings	You Tube is both a <u>boan</u> and a <u>corse</u> .	You Tube is both a boon and a curse.

Table No. 3 demonstrates that students committed errors even in writing simple sentences because of lack of knowledge about basic grammar. Most of errors occurred because of intralingual transfer as a source of errors. They did not have confidence in vocabulary use, agreement between an auxiliary and a main verb, subject and verb agreement, use of adjective in a sentence, formation of adverb, use of proposition, connecting words with conjunctions, appropriate use of articles, use of singular and plural nouns, tense and appropriate time adverb, use of possessive case, rules of conditional sentences, use of suitable punctuation mark, conditions of using capital letters and spellings in words.

Table 4 A brief presentation of the sample of errors of surface strategy committed by the students

S.N.	Error Classification	Error Identification	Error Correction
1.	Addition	We can <u>to</u> use You Tube to watch some useful movies.	We can use You Tube to watch some useful movies.
2.	Omission	Children do not <u>like read</u> the books because of You Tube.	Children do not like to read the books because of You Tube.
3.	Misformation	We like to watch funny <u>apisodes</u> on You Tube.	We like to watch funny episodes on You Tube.
4.	Disordering	<u>This You Tube</u> many people use.	Many people use this You Tube.
5.	Substitution	We <u>loose</u> touch with our friends by using it.	We lose touch with our friends by using it.

Table No. 4 also exhibits that the students were poor in English grammar. They committed errors even in the basic level of sentence structures by adding elements where they were not to be added, and by leaving the elements where they were needed to make sensible sentences. It seems that they heard or read some new words, but they were not sure of their spellings. The poor condition in grammar and vocabulary resulted in errors in formation and substitution of words. Disordering was normally found because of their first language interference.

7. CONCLUSION

On the basis of findings and above discussion with examples, it could be concluded that students committed 16 types of errors in their writings, viz: noun, main verb, auxiliary verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, article, singular / plural, verb tense, sub-verb agreement, possessive, conditional sentences, punctuation, capitalization and spellings. The results show that most of students' errors were due to the intralingual factors, because students from government schools did not have much exposure and communication in target language. Errors in the sentence structures and verb tense were normally influenced by their mother tongue. Students tried to spell and use verb tense more like Nepali structures of language. The most committed errors at the lexical level were preposition errors which had the frequency of 261 (13.14%), and the most committed errors at the syntactic level were addition errors which had the frequency of 722 (36.35%). Most of the errors committed by the students were found to be local errors.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of findings, the researcher drew the following recommendations:

- 8.1 It is recommended to undertake further research from the primary to higher secondary level in order to find out students' initial problems in learning English.
- 8.2 Students' errors are great sources for improving teaching and learning, therefore their effort of trying to write should be praised.
- 8.3 Teachers should encourage students to be involved in writing in order to use language in the different contexts for diverse purposes.
- 8.4 Teachers should pay attention to the occurrence of those errors in order to provide relevant remedies for preventing the students from fossilizing the wrong concepts of language usage.
- 8.5 Teachers should provide regular positive feedback and motivation after correcting the students' writings. They should also identify their students' failures so that they could lesson those areas where the chronic loopholes were observed.
- 8.6 Teachers should pay attention to the specific areas while forming students' essays so that students' writing ability might be improved and developed.
- 8.7 Students should practise English grammar rules and identify the specific rules of the language and use them in different situations accordingly. They should also develop vocabulary power.
- 8.8 Students should frequently write different essays to attain their language proficiency.
- 8.9 Curriculum planners should consider their learners' needs and include relevant aspects of English writing while developing teaching materials.

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