

EXPLORING THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURES IN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS INTRODUCTIONS: A GENRE ANALYSIS

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Received: 2024-11-25

Accepted: 2024-12-12

Published: 2024-12-20

Abstract

The introduction section of a thesis or research paper serves as a critical foundation, providing readers with a clear understanding of its objectives, context, and significance. This study aims to analyze the rhetorical structure of introduction sections in undergraduate theses to identify patterns and variations in their construction. Specifically, the research investigates the use of Swales' revised Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model in 10 undergraduate theses from two universities. This qualitative analysis uses a dataset randomly selected from a larger corpus, combining Swales' CARS model with frequency analysis of moves and steps, as described by Kanoksilapatham (2005). The findings reveal consistent application of Moves 1, 2, and 3, although the frequency of specific steps varies. Moreover, all writers demonstrated appropriate sequencing of moves and steps, aligning with the CARS framework. These results aim to provide valuable insights for academic writing pedagogy, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors, in helping students develop effective thesis introductions. Additionally, the findings contribute to enhancing EFL students' skills in writing well-structured introductions and increasing researchers' competency in crafting coherent and impactful introductory sections.

Keywords: *genre analysis; introductory chapter; Swales' revised CARS (Create-a-Research-Space) model*

1. Introduction

Writing a thesis is a fundamental requirement for undergraduate students to earn a bachelor's degree in Indonesia. Among its five typical chapters, the introduction is particularly critical. It sets the stage for the study by clarifying its purpose, outlining its goals, and establishing its relevance. However, crafting a well-structured introduction is widely regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of academic writing, especially for non-native English speakers (Swales & Feak, 2005).

The introduction serves several crucial functions: it clarifies the study's objectives, aids readers in understanding the research goals and challenges, prevents the writer from making unfounded assumptions, and outlines the research hypothesis (Noorzan, 2012). These functions make it a cornerstone of academic writing. Despite its importance, writing

an effective introduction is a daunting task. It must not only engage readers and generate interest in the research topic but also justify the study by demonstrating its relevance and significance (Swales & Feak, 2005). Martin et al. (2014) further highlight that the introduction is one of the most rhetorically complex sections to write, second only to the discussion section. Thus, the quality of the introduction is a key determinant of the overall success of a thesis.

Given the complexities and pivotal role of introductions, it becomes essential to investigate their rhetorical structures—comprising moves, steps, and sub-steps—to assist students and novice researchers in producing persuasive and well-structured introductions. Such investigations also hold significant pedagogical implications for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors, particularly those teaching undergraduate thesis writing.

Several genre-based studies have explored rhetorical structures in academic writing. For instance, Mustaqim and Zuhra (2023) examined the structure of student thesis abstracts across Aceh, while Samad and Adnan (2018) focused on the spoken genre of thesis defense examinations. Alfarisyi et al. (2022) conducted studies investigating the rhetorical structures of thesis introductions at two universities in Aceh. These studies underscore the importance of genre analysis in understanding academic writing; however, they also highlight the need for further research to develop comprehensive frameworks for writing effective thesis introductions.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the rhetorical structures of thesis introductions written by undergraduate students from multiple universities in Aceh. The study aims to identify the common rhetorical moves and steps employed, analyze their frequency, and compare students' introduction writing practices against established frameworks. By doing so, the study seeks to formulate a practical and effective structure for writing thesis introductions, contributing to both academic writing pedagogy and student learning.

Swales' revised CARS (Create-A-Research-Space) model (2004) provides the theoretical framework for this study. Widely adopted in international academic writing, the CARS model is instrumental in guiding students to construct well-organized introductions. It emphasizes three key moves: establishing a research territory, identifying a research niche, and occupying the niche. These moves are foundational to academic writing as they help situate the research within its broader context and justify its necessity. Additionally, Kanoksilapatham's (2005) frequency analysis framework is employed to examine the occurrence and distribution of rhetorical moves and steps in the selected corpus.

By identifying the rhetorical patterns and their frequencies, this study aims to propose a robust framework for crafting thesis introductions. Such a framework will not only aid students in producing coherent and persuasive introductions but also support EAP instructors in teaching effective academic writing techniques. Ultimately, the findings are expected to enhance the academic writing skills of EFL students and improve the quality of undergraduate theses.

2. Literature Review

Swales (1990) defined genre analysis as a cornerstone of comprehending academic discourse. His Create a Research Space (CARS) model identifies three key rhetorical moves in research article introductions: establishing a territory, establishing a niche, and filling the niche. This paradigm offers a methodical technique for examining how writers place their

work in the academic sector. Bhatia (1993) broadens this paradigm by highlighting the importance of communicative aim and audience expectations in developing genre standards, making his work useful for studying professional and academic literature. In the context of undergraduate theses, Paltridge (2004) emphasizes the need for genre awareness for new writers. Unlike experienced researchers, undergraduate students frequently struggle to follow academic writing rules, making genre analysis of their work an important topic of study.

Developing genre awareness is critical for undergraduate students to grasp academic writing since it allows them to understand and apply the conventions of numerous academic genres. This understanding is especially important when writing thesis introductions, where recognizing and using proper rhetorical structures can considerably improve clarity and persuasiveness. Recent research has underlined the value of genre understanding in academic settings. For example, Morelli (2023) emphasizes that mastering genre-specific conventions helps students produce academic writing that meets disciplinary criteria. Similarly, Clark (2019) contends that a metacognitive understanding of genre allows students to transfer writing skills across settings, increasing their versatility in a variety of academic assignments.

The genre study of research articles, particularly introductions, has become increasingly popular, with a focus on rhetorical structure and linguistic aspects. Because the introduction is critical for establishing the study framework and enticing readers, its analysis provides insights into writing habits and educational techniques. Swales' CARS (Create A Research Space) model remains the foundation of move-step analysis for introductions. Recent research, such as that conducted by Manzoor et al. (2020), has applied this model to undergraduate theses in a variety of disciplines, identifying common characteristics such as context establishment, gap identification, and presentation of the study's objective. They also discussed how these changes are modified across disciplines to suit disciplinary norms and student competency.

Furthermore, including genre analysis in instruction has shown potential for improving students' writing skills. Educators can help students comprehend rhetorical structures more deeply by involving them in the analysis of mentor texts and encouraging them to mimic genre-specific qualities. This technique not only enhances students' immediate writing skills but also prepares them for future academic and professional communication. In conclusion, undergraduate students should focus on genre awareness and rhetorical patterns, especially while writing thesis introductions. Understanding and using genre rules allows students to generate more clear and persuasive academic writing, contributing more effectively to scholarly discourse.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study is genre-oriented and classified as qualitative research. The researchers focus on analyzing the literary structure of thesis introductions. Swales' (2004) model of rhetorical structure, which includes moves and steps, will be applied to evaluate the introduction text. Additionally, Kanoksilapatham's (2005) frequency analysis of moves and steps will be incorporated. To analyze the rhetorical structure of the introduction chapter, the researchers use discourse markers that reflect the organization of the text.

3.2 Location and Object of Research

The researchers looked at the introductions to theses written by English Education students at two Aceh universities: the State Islamic University of Ar-Raniry and the Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe. This study focuses on the introduction chapter of a thesis prepared by English Education students. The researchers select the sample at random. The samples are taken from different Thesis disciplines, such as English teaching, which focuses on a) exploration of teaching and acquisition of language skills; b) English Linguistics, which focuses on exploring problems in the field of linguistics; and c) English Literature, which focuses on literary works. Each subdiscipline varies but is often similar. As a result, the researcher uses a modified model by Swales (2004) to assess the rhetorical movement in the introduction.

As a result, this study's sample consists of ten introductions from two Aceh institutions. The researchers collected five introductions from each university. While the sample size is confined to 10 theses, it still offers a broad representation of various fields within the discipline of English Education. These theses encompass different areas of study, such as language acquisition, literature, linguistics, and teaching methodologies, which allows for a preliminary exploration of the rhetorical structures used in thesis introductions across different subfields. This diversity helps provide a snapshot of how rhetorical strategies may vary or remain consistent within the broader context of English Education. Despite the small sample size, the analysis offers valuable initial insights that can inform further studies in this area, highlighting possible trends and patterns in rhetorical organization. To maintain research ethics, the researchers will get approval from each university before using the data for this study. As a result, the title and author of the thesis will remain anonymous.

3.3 Research Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Research instruments are measurement techniques used to acquire information about a specific topic. Document analysis is the process utilized for data collection. In this study, researchers examined written papers, namely the Introduction section from the English Education Department students' theses from numerous universities in Aceh. This study's data-collecting technique is documentation. The texts in this study are considered research samples since they represent an analysis of the thesis's introduction genre. In this study, 10 introductions to the thesis from two Aceh universities served as research samples. The data-gathering procedure is divided into the following stages: initially, researchers create a timetable for visits to each university/institution's libraries. Second, researchers go to the library and request authorization to collect data in either hard copy or digital format.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Since this is a genre analysis, the researchers analyze the data using a framework that includes a conceptual framework. The methodology utilized to examine the introduction part is based on the model (Swales, 2004), as illustrated in the figure below. The procedure of identifying rhetorical units or moves in the introduction chapter is as follows (Dudley-Evans, 1986) and (Loan & Pramoolsook, 2014), with the following five processes. To understand the substance of each Introduction chapter, start by reading the title, subtitle, and key terms. Second, the whole Introduction chapter is read to gain a better understanding. Third, the introduction chapter is reread to look for available discourse and language cues, such as specific lexicons, discourse markers, formulaic phrases, lexical items,

and cohesive markers. Fourth, possible communication units in the introduction are selected through the use of linguistic and discourse clues, as well as comprehension and inference from the text. Fifth, the rhetorical structure of the introduction is recognized using the proposed improved CARS model framework.

Move 1	Establishing a territory (citations required)
Step 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic generalisation of increasing specificity (obligatory) • Reporting conclusion of previous studies • Narrowing the field • Writer's evaluation of existing research • Time-frame of relevance • Research objective/process previous studies • Terminology/Definitions • Furthering or advancing knowledge
Move 2	Establishing the niche (citations possible)
Step 1A	Indicating a gap (obligatory)
Step 1B	Adding to what is known
Step 2	Presenting positive justification (optional)
Move 3	Presenting the present work (citations possible)
Step 1	Announcing present work descriptively/purposively (obligatory)
Step 2	Presenting Research Questions or hypotheses (optional)
Step 3	Definitional clarifications (optional)
Step 4	Summarising methods (optional)
Step 5	Announcing principal outcomes (PISF)
Step 6	Stating the value of the present research (PISF)
Step 7	Outlining the structure of the paper (PISF)

Table 1. Revised Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model by (Pashapour et al., 2018)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) How do the structures of move and step appear in the introduction part of undergraduate theses? (2) What are the most common moves and steps in the introduction section of undergraduate theses? To answer the research questions, the researchers used discourse analysis in the introduction sections of the undergraduate theses. First, the researchers extracted the corpus data from each dataset. After that, the researchers examined the introduction part of each thesis to determine the overall organization of the text. The revised Swales' CARS model (2004) served as the basis for data analysis.

The results revealed that all datasets employed Moves 1–3 in the introduction sections of the theses. While each thesis demonstrated slight variations in writing style, the overall format adhered to Swales' CARS model. In terms of move patterns, all thesis introductions incorporated the prescribed moves and steps. Moreover, all authors followed a consistent structure when writing their introductions. These findings further confirm that Swales' CARS model (2004) is applicable to writing English thesis introductions.

Introductions	Move-Steps Structure	Number of moves
Dataset 1 UIN		
T1	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3-M3S4	6
T2	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3	5
T3	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3-M3S4	6
T4	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3	5
T5	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3-M3S4	6
Dataset 2 IAIN		
T6	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3	5
T7	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3-M3S6	6
T8	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3	5
T9	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3-M3S4-M3S7	7
T10	M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3	5

Table 2. Move pattern of Introduction UIN sections in two datasets

Table two above showed the pattern of all introductions of undergraduate theses from all datasets. It can be concluded that all datasets followed the revised Swales Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model by (Pashapour et al., 2018). The number of moves in each introduction section is various ranging from five to seven moves with the linear pattern (M1-M2-M3). The starting points of all introduction section are with the patter of M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3 (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10). Four introductions then were followed by M3S4 (T1, T3, T5, T9). The only data that came with the M3S6 was T7 and T9 was the only data that had M3S7.

The table above also showed the cycle of the move found in all datasets. Surprisingly, the whole sections were organized based on particular cycles (M1S1-M2S1A-M3S1-M3S2-M3S3). The cycles consisted of the following five or more moves and steps: Move 1 Step 1 (Topic generalization of increasing specificity), Move 2 Step 1A (Indicating a gap), Move 3 Step 1 (Announcing present work descriptively/purposively), Move 3 Step 2 (Presenting Research Questions or hypotheses), and Move 3 Step 3 (Definitional clarifications). These moves were linked in various ways to construct a cycle; therefore, the moves and steps presented in all cycles were categorized as core moves and steps.

Certain rhetorical moves are essential in academic writing because they address core reader expectations while serving the introduction's primary communication purposes. Move 1 (Establishing a Territory) and its steps M1S1 appear consistently across all introductions in this research. This step enables writers to contextualize their research by defining the larger field of inquiry. It establishes the topic's relevance and importance, essential for engaging readers and providing background information. Without this step, the reader may struggle to place the study within a larger academic or practical context. Thus, M1S1 serves as the basis upon which the following rhetorical maneuvers are formed.

Similarly, Move 2 (Establishing a Niche) is universally present in the form of M2S1A, in which writers identify gaps, limitations, or unresolved difficulties in past studies. This stage is crucial in demonstrating the need for the current investigation. By selecting a niche, the writer not only demonstrates their familiarity with the research topic but also promotes their work as a valuable contribution. Undergraduate authors, in particular, are likely to be

educated to include this stage, which immediately addresses the academic requirement for originality and relevance. The persistent use of M2S1A demonstrates its importance as a rhetorical bridge between the existing literature and the current research.

Move 3 (Presenting the Present Work) is another critical component, particularly Step M3S1, in which the authors state their study aims or focus. This step is critical for moving from the problem described in Move 2 to the solution or contribution provided by the current study. Its regular occurrence throughout your data implies that writers understand the necessity of making their study objectives clear early in the introduction. This transparency allows readers to see how the study fits into the designated niche, ensuring that the argument structure is clear and coherent.

While the core moves remain consistent, different steps in the Revised CARS model vary, reflecting changes in rhetorical styles, writer competence, and disciplinary traditions. For example, Steps M3S2 (Describing Objectives) and M3S3 (Describing Methods) are prevalent but not universal in this research. These steps provide more information on the study's objective and methodology, which is necessary for readers to grasp the scope and approach of the research. However, some writers may presume that these aspects would be explored in other sections, such as the techniques chapter, and thus exclude them from the introduction. This omission could also be owing to poor academic writing expertise, particularly among undergraduate students, who may prioritize conciseness above comprehensiveness.

Steps like M3S4 (Highlighting Importance) and M3S7 (Outlining Structure) are much less common, occurring in only a few documents. M3S4 can be found in introductions such as T1, T3, and T5, where authors underline the importance of their study's findings or contributions. This phase deepens the introduction by reaffirming the worth of the study, although it may be skipped by less experienced authors or those who see it as unnecessary. Similarly, M3S7 (Outlining the Structure) emerges in T9, indicating a greater level of rhetorical complexity. By explaining the organization of their thesis, the writer provides a guide for the reader, an approach frequently applied in advanced academic writing.

The persistent appearance of moves such as M1S1, M2S1A, and M3S1 emphasizes their importance in academic writing, as they serve critical rhetorical purposes such as contextualizing the study, explaining its necessity, and emphasizing its aim. The variation in subsequent steps and the number of shifts show disparities in rhetorical skill, disciplinary norms, and writer experience. Overall, our findings show how undergraduate thesis introductions reconcile core rhetorical criteria with individual stylistic and structural choices, giving insight into students' academic writing practices.

The moves and steps mentioned in the introduction sections of undergraduate theses were discussed in earlier sections. However, not all of these moves and steps were included in every introduction, and their frequency varied across datasets. These frequencies are reported in the following section of the undergraduate theses' introductions.

Moves		UIN (n=5)		IAIN (n=5)		Status
		N	%	N	%	
Move 1	M1S1	5	100%	5	100%	Obligatory
Move 2	M2S1A	5	100%	5	100%	Obligatory
	M2S2B	0	0%	0	0%	Optional
	M2S2	0	0%	0	0%	Optional
Move 3	M3S1	5	100%	5	100%	Obligatory
	M3S2	5	100%	5	100%	Obligatory
	M3S3	5	100%	5	100%	Obligatory
	M3S4	3	60%	1	20%	Optional
	M3S5	0	0%	0	0%	Optional
	M3S6	0	0%	1	20%	Optional
	M3S7	0	0%	1	20%	Optional

Table 3. Move and step occurrences across two datasets

The moves and steps discussed in the preceding sections were not consistently present across all 10 introduction sections of the undergraduate theses. While certain moves and steps appeared frequently in the datasets, others were less common (see Table 3). Table 3 provides a comprehensive summary of the number and percentage of undergraduate theses that included specific moves and steps. As illustrated in the table, all moves were generally prevalent across the datasets. Move 1 (Establishing a Territory), Move 2 (Establishing the Niche), and Move 3 (Presenting the Present Work) were the most frequent, appearing in all 10 thesis introductions, which classifies them as obligatory moves. However, not all steps within these moves were present in every dataset. Steps identified as obligatory, appearing in all datasets, include M1S1, M2S1A, M3S1, M3S2, and M3S3. In contrast, the remaining steps were categorized as optional, as they did not consistently appear across all datasets.

4.2 Discussions

This study examined the rhetorical structure of undergraduate thesis introductions using the Revised Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model by Pashapour et al. (2018). The findings reveal consistent use of core moves across all texts, reflecting students' adherence to fundamental academic writing conventions. However, variability in the inclusion of additional steps suggests differences in rhetorical sophistication and genre awareness. Comparing these results with findings from other disciplines offers valuable insights into patterns of academic writing and highlights the influence of disciplinary norms.

The frequent use of Move 1 (Establishing a Territory), Move 2 (Establishing a Niche), and Move 3 (Presenting the Present Work) is consistent with previous research in other areas. Swales (2004) and Kanoksilapatham (2005) discovered that these actions are necessary for introductions to contextualize research, identify gaps, and outline the study's objective. Similar patterns have been noticed in STEM domains, where defining a niche (M2) is essential for justifying experimental studies, and in social sciences, where contextualizing research (M1) frequently entails addressing societal relevance (Shehzad, 2010). These analogies imply that the fundamental rhetorical form of thesis introductions is broadly relevant across disciplines and serves universal academic aims.

The current study's persistent presence of M2S1A (identifying gaps) emphasizes its significance in student writing, independent of discipline background. This supports Hyland's

(2004) statement that identifying research gaps is critical to proving uniqueness and academic ability. However, the extent to which students comment on these gaps may differ by subject. Students in STEM fields, for example, may focus on methodological limits, whereas those in the humanities may highlight theoretical or interpretive gaps (Peacock, 2002).

Additional steps, such as M3S4 (Highlighting Importance) and M3S7 (Outlining Structure), vary depending on disciplinary requirements and rhetorical practices. Outlining the thesis structure (M3S7) is more typical in subjects like engineering and natural sciences, where clarity and organization are valued (Kanoksilapatham, 2005). Humanities and social sciences, on the other hand, may place a stronger focus on M3S4, which highlights the value of the research to appeal to broader societal or theoretical concerns (Shehzad, 2010). M3S4 is occasionally included in the current dataset, indicating that some students are aware of its persuasive power, however, it is not routinely used.

Interestingly, the inclusion of M3S7 in T9 suggests a more advanced rhetorical style commonly seen in areas with highly regimented writing rules, such as economics or computer science. This finding is consistent with studies conducted by Ozturk (2007), who discovered that writers in formal disciplines convey explicit organizational clues. On the other side, the lack of such phases in introductions such as T2 and T10 may reflect the effect of less rigid rules in social sciences or humanities, where introductions are frequently narrative-driven.

The findings imply that, while students are skilled at using fundamental rhetorical moves, they could benefit from specific training in using optional steps, particularly those that improve readability and clarity. Hyland (2007) proposes genre-based writing education, which could assist students gain a better knowledge of rhetorical tactics specific to their professions. For example, humanities students should be encouraged to comment on theoretical significance (M3S4), but STEM students could focus on presenting specific methodological details (M3S7). Furthermore, incorporating comparative genre research into writing classes may improve students' ability to tailor their writing to disciplinary standards.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the rhetorical structure of undergraduate thesis introductions using the Revised CARS model by Pashapour et al. (2018). The findings highlight that students consistently employ the three core moves: Move 1 (Establishing a Territory), Move 2 (Establishing a Niche), and Move 3 (Presenting the Present Work), demonstrating an understanding of the fundamental requirements for academic writing. However, the inconsistent use of additional steps, such as M3S4 (Highlighting Importance) and M3S7 (Outlining Structure), points to variability in students' ability to craft more sophisticated and persuasive introductions. These findings indicate that, while students have learned the fundamentals of thesis introductions, they may struggle with more sophisticated rhetorical methods that improve clarity, persuasiveness, and reader engagement. This emphasizes the importance of genre awareness in academic writing, as students' use of rhetorical conventions reflects their comprehension of the expectations of their academic community.

For EFL teachers, these findings underscore the need to focus not only on the core moves of thesis introductions but also on the nuanced use of optional steps that contribute to the overall rhetorical effectiveness of students' writing. Teachers can provide targeted instruction on strategies such as emphasizing the importance of research through M3S4,

which allows students to demonstrate the relevance and impact of their work guiding students to include M3S7, a step that helps readers navigate the thesis by outlining its structure. Incorporating genre-based approaches to writing instruction can help students better understand the expectations of academic writing in their disciplines. By focusing on these rhetorical elements, EFL teachers can enhance students' ability to produce coherent and effective thesis introductions that align with academic conventions.

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