

A Genre Analysis of Rhetorical Moves in MA Theses Written by Students of TEFL and Nursing

¹Maryam Jamalzadeh Jahromi

²Ehsan Hadipour*

³Leila Akbarpour

Research Paper

IJEAP- 2306-1967 DOR: [20.1001.1.24763187.2023.12.4.6.0](https://doi.org/10.1001.1.24763187.2023.12.4.6.0)

Received: 2023-06-05

Accepted: 2023-11-03

Published: 2024-01-31

Abstract: Within the academic genre, an MA thesis is compulsory for students to complete their postgraduate degree. By focusing on the relationships between text elements, Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) uses clauses as its building blocks and connects them in a hierarchical manner through rhetorical relations. These relationships are described in their model in terms of how they affect the reader. The present study intended to compare the introduction and literature review sections of master's theses written by Iranian postgraduate EFL and Nursing students. The corpus included 40 MA theses written by Nursing students and 40 written by TEFL students from four branches of Fars Province Islamic Azad University. A descriptive corpus-based design was used in this study. Swale's (1990) CARS model for the structure of the Introduction and Chen and Kuo's (2012) model for the Literature Review sections were adopted. To investigate the (in)significance of the differences between the moves and steps used in TEFL and Nursing MA theses, a series of *chi-square* tests were conducted. Different steps were used in the final papers from both disciplines, and significant differences were found between the steps in the Introduction and Literature Review sections. The results of this study can help post graduate students learn how to write their theses. Scholars who wish to become journal reviewers may also benefit from this study.

Keywords: Move Analysis, Nursing, Rhetorical Moves, Thesis Introduction, Thesis Literature Review

Introduction

Writing has consistently been shown to be one of the most difficult tasks, especially for students who are not native English speakers (Swales, 2004). Moreover, inadequate learning of L2 grammar and vocabulary makes it more demanding (Hinkel, 2004), which makes writing more difficult for Iranian EFL students. Writing skill is considered a cognitive process that is influenced by many different variables. Writing is an essential component of education. Postgraduate students must write a thesis or dissertation in addition to writing and publishing articles in all subjects, including TEFL.

By focusing on the relationships between text elements, Mann and Thompson (1986) created the framework known as Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST). RST analyzes the text structure above the clause level. According to Mann and Thompson (1989), this theory uses clauses as its building blocks and connects them in a hierarchical manner through rhetorical relations. These relationships are described in their model in terms of how they affect the reader. According to Al-Ali and Sahawneh (2011), RST is used not just as a tool for assessing the structure of linguistic communication text, rather

¹PhD Student of TEFL, Jamalzadeh_ma@yahoo.com; Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran.

²Assistant Professor (Corresponding Author), e.hadipour@gmail.com; Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran.

³Assistant Professor, akbarpourleila@yahoo.com; Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran.

it is an aid in text generation. Additionally, they think that rhetorical devices can be used to demonstrate how language can serve speakers' objectives and have an influence on listeners, and it demonstrates how to discriminate between incoherent and coherent texts and outlines the effects of text structure.

A unique educational genre that MA students should complete so as to graduate is the MA thesis. A well-organized MA thesis, according to Hüttner, Smit, and Mehlmauer-Larcher (2009), "could specify to authorities that the postgraduate is competent and skillful in implementing the rhetorical rules of their discourse community," (p. 4).

Within the academic genre, an MA thesis is compulsory for students to complete their postgraduate degree. Yet, this task is considered a great challenge for postgraduate students, mainly EFL students. This is because of the fact that in addition to language issues, through their theses, the students are expected to coherently communicate their ideas. Postgraduate students need assistance to write their thesis effectively. Such needs have led to an increasing number of genre analysis studies investigating different chapters of the thesis. Lack of understanding of the lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic conventions to know each rhetorical move, as well as knowledge of the rhetorical structure of academic works, has been identified as an issue for writers (Curry & Lillis, 2004; Flowerdew, 2001; Swales, 1990). It therefore seems vital to increase postgraduate EFL students' awareness by giving them more rhetorical knowledge and instructions so they can create theses that are more structured.

As noted by Fazilatfar and Naseri (2016), among genre-based methods for determining the structural elements of research articles, move analysis is one. In communication, movements are seen as functional roles; in this instance, academic writing is the functional role. According to Jalilifar (2009), "the researchers make use of quantitative analysis and statistical methods, such analyses provide answers to educational problems" (p. 65).

According to Hüttner et al. (2009), from a pedagogical standpoint, the benefit of categorizing texts according to rhetorical strategies is that it distracts students' and teachers' attention away from surface features of texts toward how texts are used in society with certain purposes. Kanoksilapatham (2007) compared the move structures of Thai and English organic chemistry RAs and discovered apparent variations between them in terms of analysis communities, the dimensions and expectations of the community members, and therefore the scope of analysis conducted. A variety of comparative studies have discovered the variations within the rhetorical structures of RAs created by EFL learners and native speakers.

In spite of various techniques or strategies for academic writing, EFL writers may have different problems when writing their theses. Instances of such problems include textual organization, ways to make knowledge claims, relating the text to the audience, and referring to the existing literature (Flowerdew, 1999). The above-mentioned studies have investigated various sections of masters' theses and research articles; however, not many studies have investigated the rhetorical structure of the whole master's theses. The results of these researches have demonstrated that each part adheres to very rigid conventions in various academic fields. To our knowledge, there have been few studies comparing master theses written by EFL students and other theses written by students of other disciplines' rhetorical strategies.

Among various skills, writing is truly proved to be one of the toughest tasks especially for non-native students (Swales, 2004). Moreover, insufficient knowledge of L2 grammar and vocabulary makes it more demanding, this makes writing more difficult for Iranian EFL students. Writing skill is considered as a cognitive process which is influenced by many different variables. Writing has a crucial contributory role in education.

Writing a thesis is considered as a time taking task which needs a great deal of planning and research. In academic settings all students need to produce good written pieces for assigned academic writing tasks (Swales & Feak, 2012). The writing tasks also must be structured with effective organization. However, graduate students, may face difficulty in writing good academic texts (Wuttisrisiriporn, 2017). Writing in academic settings can be challenging for native as well as nonnative speakers. Additionally, academic writing has always been the focus of formal education and is an

important area in applied linguistics. Post graduate students encounter difficulties in writing academic texts that comply with the requirements of the genre (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Cho, 2004).

In spite of various techniques or strategies for academic writing, EFL writers, may have different problems when writing their theses. Instances of such problems include textual organization, ways to make knowledge claims, relating text to audience, and making references to the existing literature (Flowerdew, 1999).

Students often copy what others have written without being aware of their purposes. Graduate students need to think of the possible factors, which might influence how they employ different steps and moves as well as their choice of lexicon and grammatical structures. By showing the generic structure of masters' theses, and demonstrating how the writers formulate their theses, the researcher intended to add something to the existing literature, show the importance of the genre, and provide post graduate students as well their instructors with a thorough understanding of the genre, and finally help EFL students write their MA thesis academically and fluently. Moreover, several studies have been conducted on genre analysis of different sections of MA theses around the world. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, regarding the genre analysis of all sections of MA theses, no work has been done yet in Iran and other countries. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the thesis as a whole product and scrutinize all units altogether.

To fill the existing gap, the main objective of the present study was to compare the rhetorical structure of M.A. theses written by Iranian postgraduate EFL students with the rhetorical structure of M.A. theses written by students of Nursing to investigate to what extent they note the rhetorical structures of different sections that are approved by the field experts.

According to Jalilifar, et al., (2012), graduate students should consider the elements that might affect their choice of vocabulary and grammatical structures, as well as the steps and moves they apply. By showing the generic structure of masters' theses, and demonstrating how the writers formulate their theses, the researcher intended to add something to the existing literature, show the importance of the genre, and provide postgraduate students as well as their instructors with a thorough understanding of the genre, and finally help EFL students write their MA thesis academically and fluently. Moreover, several studies have been conducted on genre analysis of different sections of MA theses around the world. The main goal of the present study was to fill the existing gap by examining the rhetorical structures of master's theses written by Iranian postgraduate EFL students with those of master's theses written by students of Nursing.

Many students experience difficulties with writing a thesis. The results of this study can help reveal how important writing a well-designed thesis is. The findings of this thesis can also show the importance of a cohesive and coherent thesis. Developing content that organizes their ideas in a coherent manner, setting goals for writing, and managing the mechanics of writing knowledge on all of these topics can attract more attention. Due to the fact that writing and publishing theses and articles is a must for postgraduate students, the findings of this study may provide a guideline for university professors and postgraduate students including PhD candidates and MA students. The findings of this study may recommend that during the post-graduate courses in MA, teachers include some exercises on rhetorical structures of writing. The results will also benefit the field of instruction by guiding syllabus designers to incorporate rhetorical practices into the curriculum when creating books and teaching materials, as well as English language teachers in implementing new techniques in their classes to improve their students' writing skills.

Literature Review

Postgraduates are under more pressure than ever before to publish in scholarly publications as soon as possible. The majority of postgraduates are aware of how competitive the job market is both inside and outside of academia, and that within academia, publications are the main indicator of employability. There are numerous motives for academics to publish aside from the apparent market pressures. Peer

recognition, the ethical and professional obligation to communicate one's findings, or the desire to contribute and advance knowledge are a few examples of these (McGrail, 2006).

Swales (1990) explains how the meaning of the term is evolved in relation to this topic. According to him, the concept of genre has been given a number of different definitions in different academic disciplines. For example, in folklore it is considered to be a constant form that conveys the concept of hierarchy, while in literary criticism it is defined as a kind of implicit concept as opposed to some hierarchical concept. According to Boarchi and Reeve (2010), Structuralist approaches, Reader response approaches, Neoclassical approach, cultural studies Genre approaches and Romantic and post-romantic approaches are in this direction. The second tendency is genre in rhetoric, whereby scholars have tried to group language into broad classification. A piece of writing or a speech might be categorized as expressive, persuasive, literary, or referential depending on what is being discussed in it. For instance, a piece of art is deemed expressive when the writer or speaker lays emphasis on expressing oneself. The majority of earlier attempts here consider genre as a set of filled categories that forbid any misuse of any kind. Recent approaches, on the other hand are dynamic and advance along an inductive wing, giving genre a more prominent place in rhetorical inquiry and criticism.

Swales discusses the definition of genre as a distinguishing category of any discourse type in this trend; here, genre is given credit for being completely dynamic because it has attracted a lot of attention including English for Specific Purposes (ESP). As far as genre analysis is concerned, Move analysis has traditionally been regarded as one of the most powerful components. A move is a rhetorical device that serves to correlate and bring the spoken or written context together (Lorés, 2004; Swales, 2004). But because it can change depending on the situation, it is not a set entity that must behave in a specific way. Differently stated, Move is a communicative role between every transition within the rhetorical framework. The most fundamental move theory is briefly elaborated in terms of three-, four-, and five moves.

Scholars commonly use Swales' (1990) (CARS) model in their studies (Cheng, 2006). The three-move theory, which consists of 12 steps, was used in this study by the researcher. Table 2.1 lists the various three-move theory movements and phases. Numerous studies on the rhetorical elements of the introduction section have been done (Kawase 2015; Marefat & Mohammadzade, 2013; Soodmand Afshar, Doosti & Movassagh, 2018; and Swales, 1990, 2004) and the literature review (Pieketaleyee & Taghipour Bazargani, 2018). In this section, the results of some of the previous studies are reviewed.

Ebadi, et al. (2019) investigated the rhetorical variations and similarities within the introduction and abstracts sections of MA theses written by international and Iraqi students within the field of Applied Linguistics (AL). The sample consisted of sixty MA theses. It was found that in comparison to their foreign peers, Iraqi university students employed the steps of research hypotheses and outlining thesis structures in their abstracts. Moreover, Soodmand Afshar, et al., (2018), based on Swales' (2004) approach, investigated a number of 52 Chemistry and 52 Applied Linguistics research articles' Introduction sections. To this end, they employed semi-structured interviews with several Chemistry scholars and Applied Linguistics (ALs) experts in order to supplement quantitative data collection and frequency and *Chi-square* analyses for triangulation. The findings revealed that the frequency with which some steps and sub-steps were used by the two disciplines varied significantly. The results of the interviews revealed why authors in each subject would favor one move or step over another.

In the same vein, Lim, et al (2015) investigated the Introduction sections of thirty-two PhD dissertations through Swales' (1990, 2004) model to seek out how much the PhD candidates used inter-move shifts to achieve their final purpose. The findings discovered the required position of purpose statements within the academic degree dissertations on language education. Nasserri and Nematollahi (2014) compared the generic structures of Iranian and Natives' Master of Arts (MA) theses. Five moves were identified, 'Situating the research, Presenting the research, Describing the methodology, Summarizing the results, and Discussing the research, among these moves in both groups only the last move, Discussing the research', with some variation between the two groups.

Martin and Peréz (2014) evaluated the usual rhetorical strategies used in Move 3 of Swales' (2004) CARS model in four disciplines in the humanities/social sciences and health sciences. There

were 80 RAs written in Spanish and 80 produced in English. The findings showed that, within a given subject and across all disciplines, the English texts displayed more rhetorical promotion than the Spanish texts did. But when the two major fields were compared, the Spanish writings in the health sciences showed more rhetorical promotion than the English (and Spanish) texts in the humanities/social sciences did.).

Several studies have focused on the introduction sections of various sub-components of RAs. For instance, Lim (2014) examined the phases in developing RQs by looking at the Introduction sections of 32 dissertations using Swales' (2004) CARS model. RQs were discovered to be used in roughly 81% of the dissertation introduction sections. Khany and Tazik (2010) additionally compared the overall organization of the Introduction sections of eighty applied linguistics articles using Swales' (1990) CARS model. Their analysis found no significant difference within the necessary actions of the Introduction sections. Moreover, Khany and Tazik (2010) compared the generic structure of the Introduction sections of 80 applied linguistics RAs published locally and internationally adopting Swales' (1990) CARS model. Their findings revealed no significant differences in the obligatory moves of the Introduction sections. In addition, Samarj (2008) examined the Introduction sections of master's theses from three different fields. He conducted both interviews with subject experts and discourse analysis to analyze the corpus. a review of the thesis's overall organization Introductions revealed discourse characteristics that differentiated this genre from research papers and also highlighted disciplinary variation in this genre.

Moreover, using Swales' (1990) CARS model, Keshavarz, Atai, and Barzegar (2007) examined sixty Introduction sections authored by non-Iranian and Iranian applied linguists. The findings showed that there was no significant variation within the frequency of Move one and Move two in either class of Introduction. Though several Iranian writers failed to use Move three, no significant distinction was found within the frequency of Move three in RAs made by Iranian and non-Iranian English writers. A similar study was conducted by Shirani and Chalak (2016) who examined the Introduction sections of forty master's theses created by Iranian TEFL students using Swales' (1990) CARS model. The descriptive analysis showed that the rhetorical structures (moves) projected by Swales' (1990) CARS model were present in nearly all of Iranian M.A. theses. Using Swales' (1990) conceptions of genre, Jalilifar and Golkar Musavi (2016) examined the purposes and potential generic structures of the introduction sections of textbooks. To determine the changes in the moves throughout the study datasets, a total of 75 text samples were examined. The findings showed that the three manifestations of introductions all used essentially identical schematic frameworks. Additionally, analyzing rhetorical devices in the datasets demonstrated how authors of book introductions make use of genre resources and combine a promotional and informative goal. Finally, Pieketaleyee and Taghipour Bazargani (2018) explored the moves and steps employed by M.A. students of TEFL in the Introduction and Literature review sections of their M.A. theses. It was found that the five moves of Swale's (2004) framework were present in the M.A. theses. All these studies revealed that the researches employed the moves and steps presented by Swales (1990 & 2004) in academic writing.

As the literature reviewed above reveals, there is a lack of study comparing TEFL and Nursing master theses; therefore, the following research questions were posed:

Research Question One: What is the rhetorical structure in the introduction section of Iranian EFL and Nursing students' M.A. theses?

Research Question Two: Is there any significant difference between the rhetorical structure of the introduction section of Iranian EFL and Nursing students' M.A. theses?

Research Question Three: What is the rhetorical structure of the literature review section of Iranian EFL and Nursing students' M.A. theses?

Research Question Four: Is there any significant difference between rhetorical structure in the literature review section of Iranian EFL and Nursing students' M.A. theses?

Methodology

Design of the Study

The present study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach to investigate the aforementioned objectives, focusing on text analysis of the thesis introduction and thesis literature. The technique to evaluate thesis sections as a genre was genre analysis, one of the most significant approaches to text-level analysis. According to Swales (1990) genre analysis is "a qualitative methodology of study that focuses on numerous sections and structures of the associated genre" (p. 6).

Construction of the Corpus

To answer the research questions, a total number of 80 MA theses (40 MA theses written by students of Nursing and 40 written by TEFL students) from four branches of Fars province Islamic Azad University, namely, Shiraz branch, Abadeh Branch, Marvdasht branch, and Fasa Branch, were chosen through criterion sampling. In fact, after evaluating the scores obtained by the theses from these four branches, those which had been defended with scores higher than 17.5 were chosen. Considering that the rhetorical structure of linguistic options of one discipline are often totally different from those of other disciplines, and to have additional choices and, thus, additional generalizable results, the information was gathered from theses of 2 fields of study.

In this study, one discipline was chosen from humanities and one from natural sciences, each with its own requirements and expectations, so that we could delve more deeply into the possible variation in the rhetorical structure of their rhetorical structures. Secondly, to the best of our knowledge, very few studies so far have investigated the generic structure of Nursing theses. Therefore, this genre based study is expected to further our understanding of the generic structure of TEFL and Nursing and offer new insights into the generic structure of theses in these two fields of study.

There is not a totally homogenous culture among the theses' authors. The reason for choosing a high number of theses was due to the fact that a higher number of theses would be more representative of the data. Moreover, the rationale for selecting 80 theses, 40 in each field was to assure the reliability and validity of the findings. The corpora were chosen from among experimental research studies in the field of TEFL and Nursing. The theses were submitted during the time period between 2018 to 2021. Thus, in order to observe this assumption, the selected theses were chosen from among experimental research studies in the field of TEFL and Nursing. In fact, most studies in the field of rhetorical structures follow an experimental design (e.g., Ebadi, et al. 2019; Soodmand Afshar, et al., 2018). In addition, the chosen MA theses were constrained to a time interval of three years (from 2018 to 2021). Finally, to address the ethical imperative, the identities of the authors of the theses, as well as those of their respective supervisors and advisors, along with the titles of the theses, were meticulously removed to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

Inter-Coder Reliability

Since move analysis entails some subjectivity, which may be inevitable (Holmes 1997), a Ph.D. candidate was requested to pinpoint the individual moves in the 80 theses. As a next step, the researcher and a Ph.D. candidate set out to evaluate the degree of consistency in their analysis. Despite several minor discrepancies, they were discussed. In order to recognize the similarities and variations between the 2 sets of theses in terms of the kind, frequency, number, and language used to explain the part moves utilized by the writers, the researchers compared and contrasted the theses within the corpus. Two raters, each with an MA in TEFL, coded the corpus to ensure the inter-coder reliability of the data collected. In order to improve their level of agreement, the two raters attended a briefing session before the coding and discussed how they understood the framework for data analysis. To assess the inter-rater reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used. The outcomes demonstrated a strong reliability score ($r = .79$).

Analysis Framework

The researcher utilized two conceptual models in order to gather the required data. With the aim of reaching an analytic view for the Introduction section, a model developed by Swales (1990, p.14) CARS model was applied. This model consists of three Moves:

Table 1

Swale's (1990) Model of Introduction Section Rhetorical Structure

Moves	Steps	Label
Move 1: Establishing a territory	1	Claiming centrality and/or
	2	Making topic generalization(s) and/or,
	3	Reviewing items of previous research
Move 2: Establishing a niche	1A	Counter-claiming or
	1B	Indicating a gap or
	1C	Question-raising or
	1D	continuing a tradition
Moves 3: Occupying the niche	1A	Outlining purposes or
	1B	Announcing present research
	2	Announcing principal findings
	3	Step 3 Indicating RA structure.

For analyzing the Literature Review section of theses, Chen and Kuo's (2012, p.29) model was applied. This model consists of five Moves:

Table 2

Chen and Kuo's (2012) Model of Literature Review Section Rhetorical Structure

Moves	Steps	Label
Move LI: Introduction	1	Indicating organization of the review chapter(s) and justifying the themes (areas)LI
Move LE: Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research	1	Surveying the non-research-related Len
	2	phenomena or knowledge claims /Claiming centrality LEc
	3	Surveying the research-related phenomena LEr
Move LN: Creating a research need (in response to Move LE)	1	Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems) LNC
	2	Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity) LNg
	3	Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed LNa
	4	Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research LNr
	5	Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework LNs
	6	Concluding a part of literature review and/or LNT indicating transition to review of a different area
Move LO: Occupying the research niche by announcing	1	Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses LOa
	2	Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks LOt
	3	Indicating research design/processes LOd
	4	Interpreting terminology used in the thesis LOi
Move LC: Conclusion		Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study LC.

Results

Rhetorical Moves in the Introduction Sections of Iranian TEFL and Nursing M.A. Theses

The first analysis question of the current study aimed to analyze the rhetorical moves of Introduction sections of Iranian TEFL and Nursing M.A. theses. In order to answer this research question, a model developed by Swales (1990, p.14) CARS model was employed.

Table 3

Frequency of Occurrence of Moves and Steps in TEFL and Nursing

Moves	Steps	Nursing		TEFL		Chi-Square analysis	
		F	P	F	P	Chi-square Value	P
Move 1: Establishing territory	Step1 (M1S1): Claiming acentrality	40	100%	40	100%	.04	.42
	Step2 (M1S2): Making generalizations of increasing specificity	26	65%	28	70%	.27	.75
	Step3 (M1S3): Literature review	15	37.5%	21	53%	4.13	.01
Move Establishing a niche	2:Step 1: Indicating a Gap	10	25%	16	41%	2.14	.00
	Pointing out positive justification	12	30%	13	32%	6.23	1.09
Move 3: Presenting the present research descriptively and/or positively	Step1 (M3S1): Announcing the present research descriptively and/or positively	9	22.5%	15	39%	.44	.04
	Step2 (M3S2): Presenting research questions or hypothesis	4	10%	5	12%	9.46	.54
	Step3 (M3S3): Definitional clarification	1	1	3	9%	1.07	.61
	Step4 (M3S4): Summarizing methods	1	2.5%	2	7%	.41	.54
	Step5 (M3S5): Announcing principle	2	5%	3	9%	5.72	.31
	Step6 (M3S6): Stating the value of the present research	2	5%	5	13%	3.21	.34
	Step7 (M3S6): Outlining the structure of the paper	1	2.5%	2	7%	1.04	.28

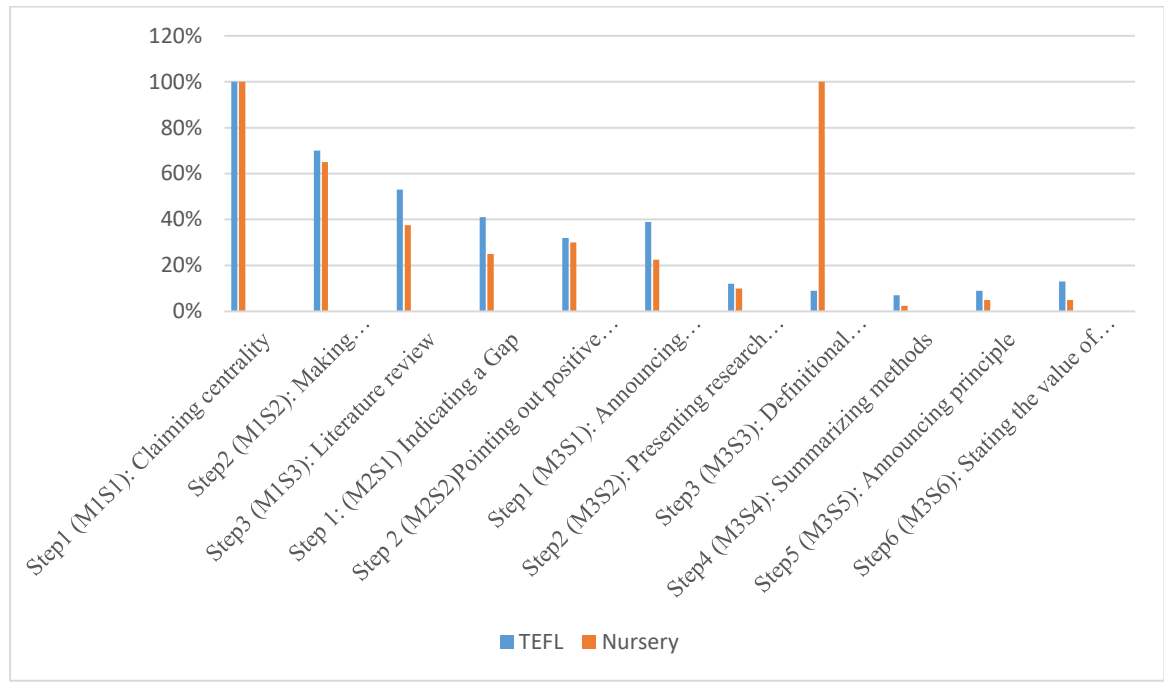
As displayed in Table 3, the results showed that move one step one “claiming centrality” is that the most common move for forty introduction sections of TEFL theses. Move three step 1a “Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively” is present in thirteen TEFL theses. Move 2 of step 1a “counter-claiming” was the next most frequently used move in TEFL introduction sections when move 1 step 1a.

The findings as with the percentage and frequency of rhetorical moves in the introduction sections of Nursing theses revealed that step one of the first move, which is claiming centrality, was used in all Nursing theses. Step 2 of the first move which is making generalizations of increasing specificity was the second most frequently (65%) used step used by Nursing students in their theses. The literature review was the next highly frequently used step in the corpus of Nursing theses with a percentage of 37.5%. Pointing out positive justification and Indicating a Gap were the next frequently

used steps by Nursing students in their theses with percentages of 30% and 25%, respectively. In order to check the moves and steps within the Introduction sections of Nursing and TEFL theses, the frequency of moves and steps were compared employing a series of *Chi-square* tests. The results revealed significant differences between the M1S3 (Literature review), M2S1(Indicating a gap) and M3S1(Announcing gift analysis descriptively and/or positively).

Figure 1

Rhetoric Structure of Introduction Sections of TEFL and Nursing



Rhetorical Moves in the Literature Review Sections of Iranian EFL and Nursing Theses

The next purpose of the present research was to investigate rhetorical moves in the literature review sections of Iranian EFL and Nursing theses. In so doing, Chen and Kuo’s (2012) model was employed. Table 4. presents the results.

Table 4

Chen and Kuo’s (2012) Model of Literature Review Section Rhetorical Structure

Moves	Steps	Label	TEFL		Nursing		Chi square analysis	
			F	P	F	P	Chi square value	P
Move LI: Introduction	1	Indicating organization of the review chapter(s) and justifying the themes (areas)LI	6	15%	3	7.5%	.31	.03
Move Establishing one part of the territory of one’s own research	1	Surveying the non-research-related Len	23	57.5 %	11	27.5%	.48	.04
	2	phenomena or knowledge claims /Claiming centrality LEc	21	52.5 %	9	22.5%	.34	.01
	3	Surveying the research-related phenomena LEr	24	60%	11	27.5%	.14	.00

Move LN: Creating a research need (in response to Move LE)	1	Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems) LNC	14	35%	8	20%	.23	.04
	2	Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity) LNg	12	30%	7	17.5%	.44	.51
	3	Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed LNa	6	15%	3	7.5%	.46	.04
	4	Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research LNr	12	30%	5	7.5%	1.07	.00
	5	Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework LNs	4	10%	2	5%	.41	.03
	6	Concluding a part of literature review and/or LNT indicating transition to review of a different area	10	25%	6	15%	.72	.07
Move LO: Occupying the research niche by announcing	1	Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses LOa	14	35%	8	20%	.23	.04
	2	Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks LOT	16	40%	6	15%	1.04	.02
	3	Indicating research design/processes LOd	16	40%	7	17.5%	.13	.03
	4	Interpreting terminology used in the thesis LOi	0	0	0	0	0	0
Move LC: Conclusion		Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study LC.	4	10%	2	5%	.31	.03

Table 4. displays that both TEFL and Nursing theses used five moves in the Literature review sections. The moves were “Introduction Move” that was associated with “Indicating organization of the review chapters and justifying the themes (areas) to be reviewed” with percentages of 15 August 1945 and seven.5% for TEFL and Nursing theses, severally. Move 2 dealt with “establishing a specific area for one's own research” which had three steps, step 1 was related to Surveying the non-research-related Len and was employed with a percentage of 57.5% by the TEFL students and 27.5% by the Nursing students. The second step of this move was phenomena or knowledge claims /Claiming centrality LEc, and it was observed in 52.5% of TEFL theses and 22.5% of Nursing theses. The next step of this move was Surveying the research-related phenomena LEr which was found to be used by the students of TEFL in 60% of theses while it as used by Nursing students in 27.5%.

Move 3 was about “creating a research need” which included six steps. Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems) LNC was the first step of this move which was employed in 35% of TEFL theses and 20% of Nursing theses, respectively. The next step of the third move was Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity) LNg with a 30% of usage in TEFL theses and 17.5% of employment in Nursing theses. LNa was the next step of Move 3 which was employed by TEFL and Nursing students with percentages of 15% and 7.5%, respectively. Step 4 of Move 3 was employed by the TEFL and Nursing students with a same percentage of 30% and 7.5%, respectively.

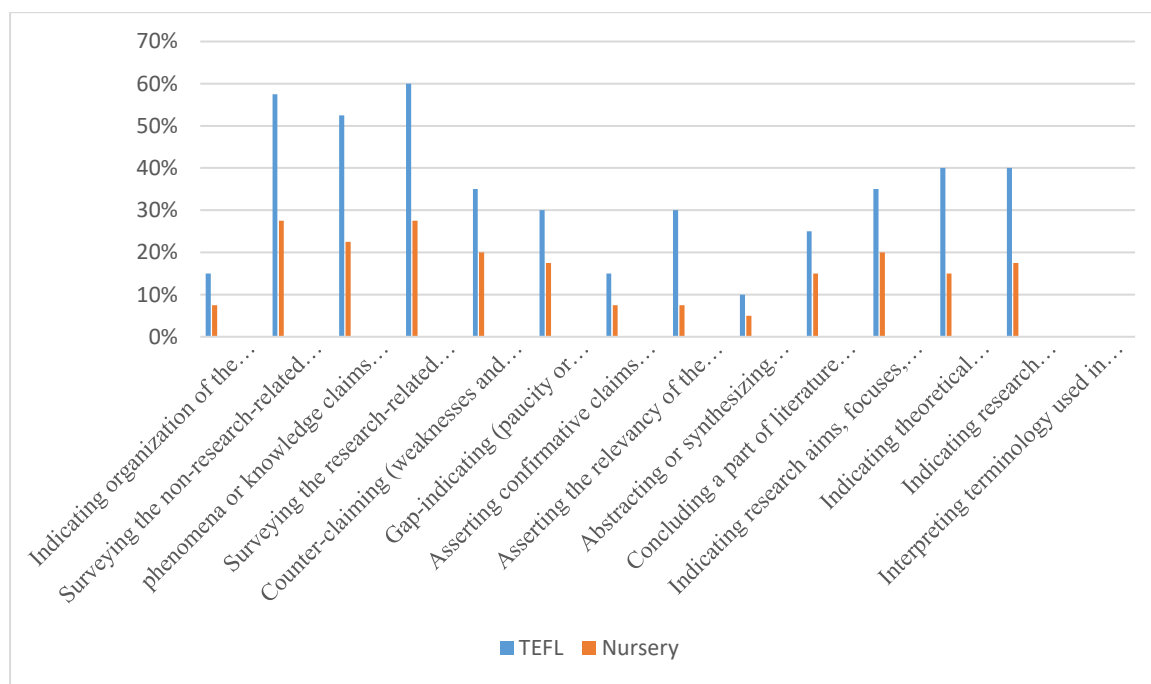
Synthesizing or abstracting information knowledge claims to ascertain a theoretical perspective or a theoretical framework LNs was the next step of Move three that was utilized but different steps and moves by TEFL and Nursing students, with percentages of 100 percent and five-hitter, orderly. The last step of Move 3 was concluding a part of literature review and/or LNT indicating transition to review of a different area which was employed by 25% of the TEFL students and 15% of Nursing students.

Moreover, Move 4 which was “occupying the research niche” was used by the two groups. This move included four steps. The first step of this Move was Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses *Loa* which was employed with a percentage of 35% and 20% in the TEFL and Nursing students, respectively. Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks *Lot* was the next step. 40% of the TEFL students and 15% of the Nursing students employed this step. The next step was Indicating research design/processes *LOd*, which was employed by both groups with percentages of 40% and 17.5%, respectively. Interpreting terminology used in the thesis *LOi* was not used by the students of the two fields at all.

The last Move, “Conclusion Move” that restricted “providing an outline of the review of the themes and relating the review to their study” was utilized by the TEFL students and Nursing students, with percentages of 100% and five-hitter, respectively. To investigate if there were any significant differences between the moves and steps used in TEFL and Nursing theses, a series of *Chi-squares* were administered. The results revealed that all steps of Moves one and two, four and five were significantly different from each other.

Figure 2

Rhetoric Structure of Literature Review Sections of TEFL and Nursing



Discussion

A branch of genre analysis called "rhetorical move analysis" studies the discourse by focusing on its organization (Biber, et al., 2007). In this context, Nwogu (1997) noted that the hierarchical schematic structures of texts are the primary focus of move-based analysis. Furthermore, the goal of rhetorical move analysis is to take into account the complicated communicative realities of the world in addition to interpreting. Writing is also seen as a challenging task. Thinking while writing might help the writer express themselves more effectively. Writing involves many distinct elements, so authors need go through various writing stages in order to complete a composition work. According to Jenks (2003), "the writing process is characterized in a five-stage sequential pattern: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publication" (p.1). Writing proficiency is a crucial skill for EFL students and a crucial

component of second language training. Writing is a language skill that is challenging to quickly get better at. To address this issue, a variety of writing strategies have been proposed.

This study was done to increase the researchers' understanding of this field in line with certain other studies and to fill a research gap. In fact, the goal of this study was to identify a strategy to enhance Iranian students' thesis writing abilities. Therefore, the aim of this study was to analyze the introduction and literature portions of master's theses written by Iranian EFL and Nursing students.

The findings of the current study concerning the rhetorical structure of the Introduction sections of theses are like those of Kawase's (2015) study, which compared the Introduction sections of PhD dissertations and RAs whereas taking into consideration the creation of metadiscourse by writers. The findings showed that the writers used metadiscourse additional often within the RAs' Introduction sections. Once discussing earlier analysis, the authors used longer language. In fact, in both the present research and the one carried out by Kawase (2015), Swale's (1990) CARS model was employed, and similar results were also obtained.

Likewise, the results also support the study by Lim et al, (2015) which investigated the Introduction sections of 32 PhD dissertations using Swales' (1990, 2004) model to find the extent to which the Ph.D. candidates used inter-move shifts to reach their final purpose statement. The findings revealed the compulsory position of purpose statements in the doctoral dissertations on language education. The reason for similar findings can be the fact that the moves and steps, according to Swales (2004) are considered necessary for the academic message to be conveyed.

The findings are according to a study by Martin and Pérez (2014) that checked out the standard rhetorical ways employed in the Introduction sections of eighty RAs written in Spanish and eighty written in English concerning Move three of Swales' (2004) CARS model in four disciplines within the humanities/social sciences and health sciences. The findings showed that, at intervals every of the tested fields, a bigger level of rhetorical promotion was exhibited within the English texts than within the Spanish ones. The similarity between the two studies is in that both employed the CARS model provided by Swales. Moreover, both investigated the rhetorical structure of corpora from humanities sciences and health sciences.

The results of the study by Shirani and Chalak (2016), that examined the Introduction section of forty master theses written by Iranian TEFL students, also are supported by the findings taking into consideration the rhetorical structure of the Introduction sections of theses. In the majority Iranian M.A. theses, the rhetorical structures (moves) known by Swales' (1990) CARS model were present with a high degree of prevalence, in line with the descriptive analysis of the data.

Additionally, the findings regarding the rhetorical framework of theses' literature reviews are consistent with a study conducted by Pieketaleyee and Taghipour Bazargani (2018) that looked at the PowerPoint moves and steps TEFL theses presenters used to incorporate into their review of literature sections. According to the research, PowerPoint presentations' rhetorical structures for the five core components of M.A. theses—Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, and Discussion—are present.

Conclusion and Implications

The goal of the present study was to investigate the rhetorical structure of master's theses written by Nursing and EFL students. Various frameworks were employed to investigate different parts of the theses. In conclusion, both fields include various moves in their thesis writing. However, some differences also occur in the realization of the moves in the structure of the theses of both fields. It can be deduced that the manifestation of move and step is addressed differently by these two fields of research. Despite certain similarities between the two fields, disciplinary differences have an impact on how all moves and steps are expressed. Researchers can determine whether the findings of this study are applicable in various branches of the same field. Furthermore, given that the results of this study can assist students in writing their theses, lecturers are advised to teach their students about rhetorical

strategies. By comprehending how each discipline manifests its moves and procedures, authors can create a thesis that is consistent with the traditions and guidelines of that discipline. Master theses are considered a genre of academic texts with great importance that persuade or avoid academia to continue or avoid their education. Thus, acquiring the conventions of the rhetorical structure of theses is necessary for academia. The thesis is considered a genre; thus, the findings of the present study have implications for postgraduate students of hard and soft disciplines, as one of the fields of soft discipline and a field of hard discipline was studied in the present research. Being aware of the genre of each field, helps students of that field to be familiar with their addressees, which can help writers to employ their knowledge of the genre to be able to write more academically. Furthermore, it can be concluded that this study can help to the production of academic texts and to the content of academic writing courses by providing learners with explanations on the importance of genres. According to Pho (2008), the rhetorical moves of theses and research papers can be taught in writing courses to prepare students to write for the academic community. Accordingly, Overall, strategies like the rhetorical structure of abstracts should receive more attention.

Because this study targeted on master's theses written by Iranian MA students of TEFL and Nursing, the standards of thesis writing in Iran will be raised by employing the findings of this study. It is believed that the results of this study will be used to teach MA students from alternative disciplines with the generic alternatives and also the essential genre data they have to put in writing theses.

Because they offer an excellent opportunity for students to develop their academic writing, the study's findings could be significant for students. In reality, pupils would grow familiar with other students' writing styles and try to avoid the same issues, thus they become more conscious in their writing. The results of this study may be useful to practitioners as well, enabling them to better understand the key issues that students face and attempt to concentrate on those issues more in academic writing lessons.

Since this study was done among master's theses written by Iranian MA students of TEFL, Nursing, its results may reveal the possible effects of integrating activities to improve the awareness of Iranian MA students of the structures of theses, in order to enhance their writing ability. This study can be a starting point to improve the quality of thesis writing in Iran. It is hoped that the findings of the current study can be used to familiarize both the MA students across disciplines with the generic options, and also the necessary genre knowledge required of MA students to succeed in writing theses. Furthermore, it is not enough to teach all students from different fields the rhetorical structures suggested by the general guidelines; instead, students should be taught according to the conventions of genre analysis and rhetoric structure of writing in their own fields (Stotesbury, 2003).

There is a need for guides which show MA students the kind of generic options that occur in authentic texts and provide a rationale for the various choices writers might make (Swales & Feak, 2000). Students also need to be instructed on the particular values of the services and the importance of mastering rhetoric structure in developing theses.

According to what was said earlier, there is not strong evidence showing the rhetoric structure of various sections of master's theses. MA students usually experience problems with writing thesis. The findings of this study can help reveal how important writing a well-designed thesis can be. The findings of this thesis can also make the importance of a cohesive and coherence thesis bold. Based on the findings of the present study, developing proper content, organizing ideas in a coherent way, identifying goals for writing, and identifying the mechanics of writing may attract more attention.

Those scholars who are or are going to be reviewers of journal articles can take benefit from the results of this study, too. It should be mentioned that the findings of this study could enrich the literature in the area of second/foreign language acquisition in Iran, and the results can be applied to students at other fields of study. It must be noted here that in order for the findings of this study to be pedagogically valid and applicable, first of all, they must be subjected to replication and empirical validation. It is then and only then that the results and findings can be generalized to other populations.

Investigating the rhetoric structure of various parts of theses can be of importance for the academia; however, like any other study, this study also has a number of limitations, some of which could influence the findings and restrict the generalizability of the results. Here are some of the limitations of the research at hand. First, the study was restricted to theses in two disciplines namely, TEFL and Nursing and the results may be different with thesis from other fields of study. Second, the sample of this study, included 80 theses. However, the same study can be conducted with a higher number of theses. Then, the choice of a larger sample for genre analysis would increase the reliability. Third, the collected corpus in this study was limited to theses, future research can investigate the academic research articles published in these two fields of study. Sixth, the theses under study had been written during a short period of time, longer time periods can be taken into consideration for this analysis. Due to aforementioned facts, a word of caution should be taken in to account in generalizing the results.

Acknowledgement

I really lack words to thank the editor-in-chief of the Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes for his mindful cooperation, objective ideas and feedback on this paper, and all his time and patience during my work. I also must show my appreciation to all the instructors teaching in the Foreign Language Department at the University of Shiraz for the kind efforts they made during the years of my education. My deepest appreciation and love also go to my mother whose prayers were accompanying me during my academic journey. Of course, nothing of this would have been possible if it had not been the love and support from my family.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

There is no conflict of interest for this paper.

Funding Details

This research did not receive any funding from any agency.

References

- Al-Ali, M. N. (2006). *Conveying academic and social identity in graduate dissertation acknowledgments*. In C-P., Neumann, R. P., Alastrué, & G. P-L. Auria, (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International AELFE Conference* (pp. 35-42). Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, Spain.
- Al-Ali, M. N. (2010). Generic patterns and socio-cultural resources in acknowledgements accompanying Arabic PhD dissertations. *Pragmatics*, 20(1), 1-26.
- Bawarshi, A. (2003). *Genre and the invention of the writer: Reconsidering the place of invention in composition*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- Bawarshi, A.S. & Reiff, M.J. (2010). *Genre: An introduction, history, theory, research, and pedagogy*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press & the WAC Clearinghouse.
- Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.
- Bhatia, V. K. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. London: Continuum.
- Burrough-Boenisch, J. (2003). Shapers of published NNS research articles. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 12(3), 223-243.

- Cho, S. (2004). Challenges of entering discourse communities through publishing in English: Perspectives of nonnative speaking doctoral students in the United States of America. *Journal of Language Identity and Education*, 3(1), 47-72.
- Curry, M. J., & Lillis, T. (2004). Multilingual scholars and the imperative to publish in English: Negotiating interests, demands, and rewards. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 663-688.
- Ebadi, S., Salman, H., Nguyen, T., & Weisi, H. (2019). Rhetorical structure variations in abstracts and introductions of applied linguistics master's theses by Iraqi and international students. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 7(1), 101-117.
- Estaji, M., & Nosrati, F. (2018). Examining the generic features of thesis acknowledgments: A case of Iranian MA graduate students majoring in teaching Persian to speakers of other languages (AZFA) and TEFL. *Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 6(1), 71-92.
- Fazilatfar, A., M. & Naseri, Z., S. (2016). The study of rhetorical moves in applied linguistics research-based articles written by Iranian researchers. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 8(6), 154-173.
- Flowerdew, J. (1999). Writing for scholarly publication in English: the case of Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 123-45.
- Flowerdew, J. (2001). Attitudes of journal editors to nonnative speaker contributions. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(1), 121-150.
- Hüttner, J., Smit, U. & Mehlmauer-Larcher, B. (2009). ESP teacher education at the interface of theory and practice: Introducing a model of mediated corpus-based genre analysis. *System*, 37, 99-109.
- Jalilifar, A. R. (2009). *Research articles in applied linguistics: A genre-based writing guide*. Ahvaz: Shahid Chamran University.
- Jalilifar, A. R., Hayati, A. M., & Namdari, N. (2012). A comparative study of research article discussion sections of local and international applied linguistic journals. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 9(1), 1-29.
- Jalilifar, A. & Golkar Musavi, Z. (2016) Genre Analysis and Genre-mixing Across Various Realizations of Academic Book Introductions in Applied Linguistics. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills (JTLS)*, 35(1), 111-138.
- Kanoksilapatham, B. (2007). Writing scientific research articles in Thai and English: similarities and difficulties. *Silpakorn University International Journal*, 7, 172-203.
- Keshavarz, M.H., Atai M.R., & Barzegar, V. (2007). A contrastive study of generic organization of research article introductions, written by Iranian and Non-Iranian writers in applied linguistics. *Teaching English Language and Literature Society of Iran*, 1(2), 13-34.
- Khany, R., & Tazik K. (2010). A comparative study of introduction and discussion section of subdisciplines of applied linguistics research articles. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 1(2), 97-122.
- Kawase, T. (2015). Metadiscourse in the introductions of Ph.D. theses and research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 114-124.
- Lim, J. M. H. (2014). Formulating research questions in experimental doctoral dissertations on applied linguistics. *English for Specific Purposes*, 35, 66-88.
- Lim, J. M. H., Loi, Ch. K, Hashim, A., & Liu, M. S. M. (2015). Purpose statements in experimental doctoral dissertations submitted to U.S. universities: An inquiry into doctoral students' communicative resources in language education. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 69-89.

- Martin, P., & Leon Perez, I. K. (2014). Convincing peers of the value of one's research: A genre analysis of rhetorical promotion in academic texts. *English for Specific Purposes*, 34, 1-13.
- Pieketaleyee, A. & Taghipour Bazargani, D. (2018). Exploring the Moves and Steps in TEFL M.A. Theses Introduction and Review of Literature PowerPoint Presentations: A Genre Analysis Approach. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(9), 1186-1194. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0809.12>.
- Nwogu, K. N. (1997). The medical research paper: Structure and functions. *English for Specific Purposes*, 16(2), 119-138.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pho, P. D. (2008). Research article abstracts in applied linguistics and educational technology: A study of linguistic realizations of rhetorical structure and authorial stance. *Discourse Studies*, 10, 231-250.
- Pieketaleyee, A. & Taghipour Bazargani, D. (2018). Exploring the Moves and Steps in TEFL M.A. Theses Introduction and Review of Literature PowerPoint Presentations: A Genre Analysis Approach. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(9), 1186-1194.
- Shirani, Sh. & Chalak, A. (2018). A genre analysis of Iranian EFL learners' master theses. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(2), 31-37.
- Soodmand Afshar, H., Doosti, M. & Movassagh, H. (2018). A Genre Analysis of the Introduction Section of Applied Linguistics and Chemistry Research Articles. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)*, 21(1), 163-214.
- Stotesbury, H. (2003) Evaluation in research article abstracts in the narrative and hard sciences. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 2(3), 327-342.
- Swales, J. M. (1988). Discourse communities, genres and. English as an international language. *World Englishes*, 7(2), 211-220.
- Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. M. (2004). *Research genres: Exploration and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J., & Feak, C. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Wuttisrisiriporn, N. (2017). Comparative rhetorical organization of ELT thesis introductions composed by Thai and American students. *English Language Teaching*, 10, 1-14.