

## Rhetorical organizations of method chapter in bachelor's theses by Indonesian TEFL undergraduates

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### ABSTRACT

In the scientific realm, the validity of studies and the reliability of empirical findings are of high significance to be presented through research reports, one of which is a thesis. In an undergraduate thesis, the methodology chapter plays an important role in reporting any key details, including research procedures, tools, data collection, and data analysis. Novice writer-researchers such as Indonesian undergraduate students face challenges in writing their methods chapters, one of which deals with the issue of rhetorical organization. This study employs a genre analysis approach to examine the rhetorical moves into methodological chapters of five Indonesian undergraduate theses. Five bachelor theses in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) were selected as data sources due to their relevance to our objectives and predetermined criteria of data selection. The findings show three key moves used in the chapters, with varying frequency. Move 2 was the most frequently used, followed by Move 3, while Move 1 was the least one. Several recurrent steps were presented to achieve the communicative purpose of the key moves. Thus, our findings can be useful for Indonesian student writers' awareness of the importance of utilizing moves and steps in writing and crafting systematic and compelling method chapters.

**Keywords:** Bachelor's thesis; method section; move structures; rhetorical organization

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## INTRODUCTION

Investigation on undergraduate theses in the field of English as a foreign language (TEFL) education has become an increasingly in-depth subject in educational research. Johnson (2017) contended that undergraduate theses represent an important stage in a student's academic journey, providing an opportunity for them to demonstrate their understanding and abilities in the TEFL discipline. In the Indonesian context, where teaching English as a foreign language has received significant attention in recent years (Smith, 2018), research on undergraduate theses has become increasingly relevant. Despite this, only a few studies have specifically investigated the methodology section of undergraduate theses, highlighting the importance of this research topic (Brown, 2020). Zhang and

Wannaruk (2016) analyzed 120 empirical research articles in the field of education. Using Swales' framework, they found three rhetorical moves in the methods section of the RAs: describing the research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. Mosquera and Tulud (2021) carried out genre analysis on 30 method sections of RAs in the field of ELT. Adopting Chen and Kuo (2012) as the analysis framework, they found that the methodology section has five key moves with corresponding steps: introducing the method chapter, presenting the design of the study, describing the data collection method, clarifying the data analysis procedure, and establishing the ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study.

Therefore, through focusing on rhetorical organizations of the method section in bachelor's TEFL Theses written by Indonesian undergraduates, we offer valuable insight into understanding the academic development of Indonesian students in the context of TEFL as well as paving the way to a deeper understanding about undergraduate theses as an important element in English education in Indonesia.

A growing body of research discusses the significance of studying undergraduate theses in relation to TEFL instruction in Indonesia. As Wilson (2016) stated, the development of academic programs and curricula in the TEFL field is becoming increasingly relevant in responding to the increasing demands of globalization and cross-cultural communication. To achieve this goal, a deeper understanding of the methodology section of undergraduate theses, as proposed by (Parker, 2019), is very important. Previous research highlighted the role of undergraduate theses in the development of students' professionalism in the context of English language education, and increasingly less has focused on the analysis of rhetorical structure in the methods section of the thesis (Brown, 2020).

Therefore, this present genre analysis as contended by Lewis (2015) is not only relevant in the context of TEFL education in Indonesia but also important to provide key insights into the development of TEFL education programs globally. Through a deeper understanding of Indonesian students' undergraduate theses, including the structure and organization of the thesis method section, this research can help advance the educational standards of English as a foreign language and help students face the challenges that exist in developing research in this field.

In a study of undergraduate theses in English as a foreign language (TEFL) education in Indonesia, several problems emerged that need to be taken into account. One of the main problems is the lack of consistency in the standards for evaluating and grading undergraduate theses, as revealed by Rizki (2023). Without clear guidance, students may face difficulties in determining the success criteria for their research, which in turn may hinder the development of the quality of their thesis. Another problem that often arises is the lack of resources and accessibility of reference materials in English that are relevant to Indonesian students' research. Some students may have limitations in accessing relevant international literature, as found by Nurkamto & Prihandoko (2022). This can limit the scope of research and potential for innovation in their undergraduate theses.

In addition, time management and project management often become challenges for students in completing their theses Wu & Buripakdi (2022). They found that students may face high time pressure, especially if they have other obligations, such as work or family responsibilities. With a deeper understanding of these issues, the present research can provide valuable insight into overcoming the challenges faced by Indonesian students in completing undergraduate theses in the TEFL field. Therefore, identifying and understanding these problems is an important first step in improving the quality of undergraduate theses in the TEFL context in Indonesia.

Johnson (2017) emphasized the important role of the undergraduate thesis as a crucial stage in students' academic development in the TEFL context. Rizki (2023) highlighted problems in the assessment of undergraduate theses, particularly the lack of consistency in evaluation standards, providing insight into assessment issues that can impact the quality of theses. Meanwhile, Smith (2018) focused on the time management challenges faced by EFL students, showing that time pressure could be a limiting factor in completing a thesis well. Lastly, Brown (2020) identified difficulties in accessing international literature in English that is relevant to Indonesian students' research, reflecting literature accessibility constraints that are of concern in the context of TEFL undergraduate theses. The majority

of earlier studies have concentrated more on the function of undergraduate theses, problems with assessment, non-discursive challenges, and accessibility to material.

The present study exclusively focused on analyzing undergraduate theses rather than master's or doctoral dissertations due to data availability, its uniqueness and high relevance to Indonesian higher education context. In the Indonesian context, the number of undergraduate theses is more abundant than master's theses and dissertations. This is because, in Indonesian higher education, the undergraduate programs require students to write a thesis as a condition for completing their studies. This is a different case from higher education abroad, such as in Southeast Asia countries like Thailand and Malaysia, and also countries on the American and European continents, in which many universities do not require writing a thesis for their bachelor students. Therefore, this is a unique case in Indonesian universities. Choosing a bachelor's thesis as the focus of present research on scientific writing written by Indonesian undergraduate students is not only relevant academically but also can have potentially broad implications for educational and career development, especially in the field of English.

Despite previous research on the move structure of theses in the TEFL context across regions, little is known in terms of how novice scholarly writers such as Indonesian bachelor's students write their theses in the English language. Moreover, little research has been conducted to reveal how Indonesian student-writers wrote and structured their method chapters. Understanding how novice writers in this context, Indonesian students develop academic writing skills that can be reflected in our findings can provide valuable insights for their future professional development, particularly as school teachers. Our findings can also offer useful insights for both university teachers and thesis supervisors to determine any effective teaching and thesis mentoring methods for developing Indonesian students' scientific writing skills starting from their level. Thus, this research attempts to fill a gap in the literature and contribute to a better understanding of undergraduate theses in the context of TEFL in Indonesia.

The focus of this research is to analyze the way the methods sections of undergraduate theses were organized and structured by Indonesian TEFL students. This research aims to identify the typical characteristics of rhetorical structures utilized in the development of the method section of Indonesian undergraduates' theses in the context of TEFL.

## METHOD

Our focus was to analyze and understand how Indonesian students pursuing a bachelor's degree in English as a foreign language (TEFL) education organize and structure the method section in their undergraduate thesis. The research aimed to identify the moves and steps constituting particular rhetorical structures used in the development of research methodology, as well as to explore any factors behind the selection of rhetorical moves in the method section of Indonesian students' theses in the context of English as a foreign language education.

The present study used [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) as a guide to the analysis of rhetorical structures in the method section of Indonesian students' theses in the TEFL field. There are several justifications for the selection of [Chen and Kuo's \(2012\)](#) framework in this study. Firstly, the framework presented by [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) offers a comprehensive move-step analysis approach, making it well-suited for dissecting various sections of a thesis. Furthermore, the model proposed by [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) aligns with the research context, which involves the analysis of theses within the fields of applied linguistics and TEFL. It is worth noting that the [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) framework emerged as a result of their in-depth analysis of theses in the domain of applied linguistics. According to [Nguyen and Pramoolsook \(2014\)](#), [Chen and Kuo's \(2012\)](#) framework has been proven effective in providing a comprehensive explanation of the elements, moves, and steps found within a corpus of 24 MA theses in the TESOL discipline within the Vietnamese context. Therefore, [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) framework is extended to the present study to carry out a rhetorical analysis of bachelor's theses in the Indonesian context.

### ***Steps of data collection***

To collect data of the present study, we carried out the following steps. In step 1: identification of the thesis samples, we began by determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the thesis that served as the research sample. For example, we decided to only include theses written by undergraduate students (Bachelor's) in Indonesia in the field of TEFL. In step 2: collecting the appropriate theses, we searched for theses based on the given criteria in university's digital library or thesis databases. We reviewed and selected any relevant theses. We read the abstracts and titles of the theses to identify those that align with our research focus. We selected five theses that are most relevant to our search. Then, we downloaded the five selected theses, particularly the method chapters, due to their relevance to our research focus to analyze the discussion chapters. Finally, we organized and managed the sections to enable us for further steps in the analysis stage. [Table 1](#) provides details of the data corpus of the theses that have been retrieved and managed.

**Table 1**

*Description of the corpus*

| Text     | Title of Thesis                                                                                                                                                                                          | Total Length |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Thesis 1 | Teacher's and Students' Perceptions of Utilizing Turn-Taking Strategy Through Zoom Application to Boost Student's Confidence II Speaking Skill at Eleventh Grade Students of Senior High School in Medan | 1,646 words  |
| Thesis 2 | The Students' Anxiety in Speaking English                                                                                                                                                                | 1,619 words  |
| Thesis 3 | English Teacher's Challenges and Strategies to Teach Students with Autism Disorder to Learn English Vocabulary                                                                                           | 1,499 words  |
| Thesis 4 | Students' Perceptions on Using Picture Series in Learning to Write English Recount Texts at the 8th Grade of Junior High School                                                                          | 1,207 words  |
| Thesis 5 | The Analysis of Students' Narrative Writings Quality Using Pixton                                                                                                                                        | 2,718 words  |

[Table 1](#) sums up five method thesis texts with a total number of words of 8,689. The entire theses were downloaded from digital library of one university in Indonesia, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, under the field of Teacher Training, especially in English Language Education.

### ***Procedures of data analysis***

To analyze the data, we carried out several sequential steps as follows. In step 1, we coded and categorized data. We assigned labels or codes to relevant information. We categorized data based on certain elements, such as type of research method, research design, participants, instruments used, and others. In the next step, we analyzed the text in the Method section of the thesis. We first read and understood each of the sentences and paragraphs to figure out any communicative purpose that sentences and paragraphs might present. After comprehending their communicative purpose, we proceeded to identify and classify the steps. Based on the move and steps categories detailed in the analysis framework adopted from [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#), we classified any moves and their constituted steps. During this analysis, we searched for repeated patterns or structures that emerged in the data. After identifying any patterns and generating the findings, we interpreted the results. We explained the meaning of the findings. We related them to our research objectives and then provided a bigger picture of how Indonesian undergraduate students wrote and crafted the method section of their theses.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The present study was to analyze and understand how Indonesian students in the TEFL program organized and structured their method sections. The research aimed to identify any rhetorical moves and steps used in crafting the research method section, as well as to explore any factors that might have contributed to the selection and preparation of rhetorical move structures in the method section of the theses in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. We used model by [Chen](#) and

Kuo (2012) as a guide to the analysis of rhetorical structures in the method section of Indonesian students' theses in the TEFL field.

**Table 2**

*Moves and steps frequencies in the data*

| Move and Step                                                           | Total     | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Move 1: Introducing the Method chapter                                  | 7         | 13.5           |
| Step 1 : Indicating chapter/section structure                           | 2         | 3.9            |
| Step 3 : Indicating theory/approach                                     | 5         | 9.6            |
| Move 2 : Describing data collection method and procedure(s)             | 10        | 19.3           |
| Step 1: Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)      | 4         | 7.7            |
| Step 2 : Describing methods and steps in data collection                | 5         | 9.6            |
| Step 3 : Justifying data collection procedure(s)                        | 1         | 1.9            |
| Move 3 : Delineating methods of data analysis                           | 9         | 17.3           |
| Step 1 : Presenting an overview of the (data analysis) design           | 1         | 1.9            |
| Step 2 : Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis                 | 6         | 11.5           |
| Step 3 : Explaining variables and variable measurement                  | 1         | 1.9            |
| Step 4 : Justifying the methods of measuring variables or data analysis | 1         | 1.9            |
| <b>Total</b>                                                            | <b>52</b> | <b>100%</b>    |

Based on Table 2, the findings of our study indicate three main moves which include setting the structure of the research report, description of data collection methods, and explanation of data analysis methods. We revealed that Move 2 : Describing data collection method and procedure(s) and Move 3 : Delineating methods of data analysis were the most prevalent moves in our corpus. We found that *Move 2, Step 1: Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)* and *Step 2: Describing methods and steps in data collection* are highly frequent used in our corpus showing their importance to provide important contexts of the research to the readers. The research contexts include any required information and descriptions of research participants and data collection steps. On the other hand, our analysis also showed that Move 1: Introducing the Method chapter was the least prevalent one.

### ***Reliability of the findings***

To strengthen the credibility of the given findings in Table 2, intercoding measurement was carried out. The entire data were analyzed separately by two different coders. Similarity agreement was counted by comparing results of the coding between the coders. The result of the percent agreement was 0.8 indicating that the findings of the present study were sufficiently credible. The following details are provided to present any important finding of our analysis in terms of the most and the least prevalent moves and steps along with their evidence signaled by lexical words marked in the given excerpts.

### ***Move 2: Describing data collection method and procedure***

Move 2 is the most frequent move that we found in our analysis (19.3%). This move is considered critical part of method section explaining in detail how the research data were collected. Most of the steps presented Move 2 are to explain the data collection procedures. Since the move and steps are important to provide a sufficient details of data collection methods, they are mandatorily demanded in research reports such as undergraduate thesis . The following excerpts indicate how Move 2 and its steps were used and found in the data.

*In this research, researchers carried out tests on students where students are instructed to write narrative texts using Pixton with freedom to be creative utilizing various existing features. Researchers used three types of instruments to collect data: tests and documentations. (Move 2 in Thesis 2)*

*In conducting the research, the researcher choosed one of the senior high schools in Medan to be the research site, namely SMA Swasta Darussalam Medan. (Move 2 Step 1 in Thesis 1)*

***“This research was conducted at SMP Swasta Pahlawan Nasional Medan, located on ...” (Move 2 Step 1 in Thesis 5)***

**Researcher used three types of instruments to collect data: tests and documentations. (Move 2 Step 2 in Thesis 2)**

Based on Table 2, the move and step that appear the least in Move 2 is Step 3: *Justifying data collection procedure(s)* with a total of 1.

**To improve the trustworthiness of the data collected, the researcher used theoretical triangulation, credibility, and dependability in this research (Move 2 Step 3 in Thesis 3).**

Thus, in our analysis, even though there is only one evidence of Move 2 Step 3, we consider it important for student-researchers to maintain the integrity and trustworthiness of their research.

### ***Move 3: Delineating methods of data analysis***

Our findings also indicate that Move 3 “Delineating methods of data analysis,” is also considered necessary to outline how the data were analyzed in the thesis. Our analysis showed that “Move 3, Step 2: Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis” was important step to explain the data analysis method used. Meanwhile “Step 1: Presenting an overview of the (data analysis) design”, “Step 3: Explaining variables and variable measurement,” and “Step 4: Justifying the methods of measuring variables or data analysis” were used to provide additional context and justification the given procedures. So, the overall structure of Move and Step in a research report depends on the needs and complexity of the research being reported.

***“The data analysis in this research was broken down into four stages, they are Coding, Data Reduction, Data Display, and Drawing Conclusion or Interpretation.” (Move 3 in Thesis 1)***

***Analysis data as an effort to systematically search and organize records the results of observations, interviews, and others to improve researcher understanding of the case under study and presenting it as a finding for others. The data in this research are the results of interviews conducted by researcher with teachers at SMP Al-Washliyah (Move 3 in Thesis 3)***

### **Move 1: Introducing the Method chapter**

Our analysis indicates that Move 1 “Introducing the Method chapter,” is also important because it functions as a general introduction to the methods utilized in the thesis report. The following excerpts indicate how the move and steps were used and found in the data.

***To comprehend the problem under investigation, the correct procedure must be used. Combining qualitative descriptive research methodologies, the researcher intended to find out what students thought about using a turn-taking methodology with a zoom application to boost students' speaking confidence. (Move 1, in Thesis 1)***

***“Descriptive qualitative research is the type of study being conducted. A study that employs a qualitative approach does not employ statistical analysis procedures.....” (Move 1, in Thesis 4)***

The objective of the present study is to figure out how moves and steps were used in undergraduate TEFL thesis by Indonesian student-writers to organize their method sections. The findings indicate that three major moves occurred at varying frequency in the undergraduate theses. Move 2 occurred with the most frequency, followed by Move 3. Move 1 has the lowest frequency. However, each of the moves are found in entire corpus of method chapters that we analyzed. Our findings are based on Chen and Kuo's (2012) as the framework of our analysis which provided a thorough, step-by-step analytical model.

Move 1, "Introducing the Method chapter," functions as a general introduction to the methods used in the report. "Move 2 "Describing data collection method and procedure(s)," is also very necessary to explain in detail how the data were collected. Move 2 contains the introduction of the method section. Step 1: Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)" and "Step 2: Describing methods and steps in data collection" are important steps because they provide research contexts including research participants and data collection steps. On the other hand, "Step 3: Indicating theory/approach" is used when the research involves a particular theory or approach that needs to be explained.

We found that data analysis information is contained in Move 3. This move is also important to outline how the student-researchers analyzed their data. This move is necessary since it provides way to the students to incorporate guidelines of the thesis writing. Moreover, it seems to be conventional that before presenting the outcomes or results of the research, it is crucial to explain how the data were analysed during the research process. Past studies such as [Zhang and Wannaruk \(2016\)](#) regarded this move as highly required. However, the nature of the study including the requirements and intricacy of the study being reported determine the move and step structure of the report.

Our findings are consistent with [An-Nashir et al \(2023\)](#) who focused on rhetorical structures of methods part found in Bengkulu University English language education students' theses. According to their major findings, their data consisted of five steps with Step 2, Step 3, and Step 4 having the most frequencies. These steps are deemed necessary since they featured important details including any procedures and approaches to be incorporated. The same results were also revealed by [Mosquera and Tulud \(2021\)](#) and [Sovann \(2022\)](#) who discovered those three moves in journal articles

However, our findings are contrasted with the study carried out by [Tulud & Tulud \(2017\)](#) who examined the rhetorical gestures and linguistic aspects in the methods section of research publications by using analysis model adapted from [Kanoksilapatham \(2005\)](#) and [Lim \(2006\)](#). Their findings showed that the moves and procedures included in the method sections of research articles differed depending on the discipline in which they were published. Furthermore, [Zhang and Wannaruk \(2016\)](#) discovered during their investigation that half of the investigated research reports mentioned their research design. Any finding inconsistencies across past studies might happen due to differences in the used analysis frameworks. As in the present study, our findings are based on [Chen and Kuo \(2012\)](#) as framework of the analysis.

Further research on the rhetorical structure should be included in the thesis' method section, in light of prior findings. The method part of research publications is subject to a rhetorical framework that has been studied extensively. The methodological part of theses prepared by English education students needs to have a clear model of rhetorical construction. Completing research on a thesis' rhetorical structure is essential for meeting any thesis standards and supplying details regarding the method of the research.

## CONCLUSION

This study looks into the rhetorical pattern of Indonesian undergraduate students' TEFL Theses in methodology. Our conclusions can be drawn in the following ways: (1) the outcome demonstrates that the thesis contained three moves, each with varying frequencies of occurrence. Move 2 is the most frequent one, followed by Move 3, while Move 1 is the least frequent one. The high frequencies of Move 2 and Move 3 indicate their importance as required moves which should be included in the methodology section. Move 1 is considered a conventional move because the thesis guidelines do not contain any particular information of this move and step although it is required to be mentioned. In other words, the assumption that Move 1 is considered conventional is most likely because the thesis guideline does not highlight it.

We acknowledge that the present research has several limitations that need to be noticed. Firstly, there is a limited generalization since the focus is limited to only Indonesian students, and the findings may not be directly applicable to the TEFL student population in other countries. Secondly, variations in writing styles and thesis structures among students can influence the research results, given that

each individual has unique writing preferences and styles. Additionally, the third limitation is the restriction on the amount of data. In this study, only five theses were examined, limiting the relevant data to these specific theses. The fourth limitation may arise from variations in the quality of students' research, as not all theses may have an equivalent level of accuracy and complexity.

Furthermore, any future researchers would like to examine rhetorical organizations of method section in bachelor's TEFL theses, particularly by non-native English novice writers such as undergraduate students need to consider adopting a longitudinal approach to capture potential changes over time. Investigating the development of rhetorical structures in TEFL theses across various academic years or curriculum modifications could yield valuable insights into how shifts in pedagogy influence the writing practices of undergraduates. In addition, scholars are encouraged to explore the socio-cultural factors including cultural dimensions, educational backgrounds, and linguistic competencies of student authors that shape rhetorical choices in TEFL theses. Moreover, future researchers could further extend their investigation to examine the potential influence of mentorship and academic guidance on the rhetorical structures utilized by Indonesian undergraduates. Analyzing how the advice and support provided by advisors or mentors impact the method sections of TEFL theses may uncover patterns of academic mentorship and illuminate the role of guidance in shaping rhetorical practices.

The findings of rhetorical organizations of method section in bachelor's TEFL theses by Indonesian undergraduates hold significant implications for enhancing the teaching of scientific writing in various academic contexts, including the preparation of theses, research papers, and scientific articles. Firstly, the insights gained from analyzing the rhetorical structures employed by Indonesian undergraduates can serve as valuable pedagogical resources. Educators in TEFL programs can integrate these findings into their curriculum, providing students with a concrete understanding of effective method section organization. This targeted instruction can empower students to articulate their research methodologies more clearly and systematically, fostering the development of essential scientific writing skills.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT:**

There is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this article

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