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Examining the Use of Swales' CARS Model in MA Dissertation Introductions:

A Study of Moroccan Applied Linguistics Students

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Abstract

This study examined the extent to which Moroccan MA Applied Linguistics students (N = 105) utilized Swales' CARS model to structure the introductions of their dissertations. The participants represented various universities across Morocco. A deductive qualitative research method was employed to analyze the students' introductions. Three key findings emerged from the investigation. First, the majority of students did not adhere to Swales' CARS model. Second, there was no consistent model that students followed. Third, the transitions between moves were often ambiguous, making it challenging for readers to identify where one move ended and another began. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of integrating the teaching and learning of rhetorical moves and steps into the Moroccan EFL university context.

Keywords

CARS Model, EFL applied linguistics students, Moroccan universities

INTRODUCTION

Enabling L1 and L2 students to write effectively is by and large a major project university invests in, or should invest in, because of the role writing has for students to succeed their higher education and professional life after. However, the endeavor to learn how to write effectively is challenging because of a number of reasons, of which are its complex processes (McKay, 1979), cultural dissimilarities (Raimes, 1983), or simply the writer's being unable to know what to say (Schleppegrell & Go, 2007). Consequently, a significant number of university students, graduating and graduate, face major difficulties to successfully compose quality written texts despite the writing training they undertake (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Levy & Ransdell, 1995; Lo & Mohan, 1985). Added to this lamentable status quo, there is a need for university to tailor its writing curricula to the rhetorical and linguistic disciplines for students to meet their goals as writers (Berkenkotter et al., 1991). Universities also need to ascertain their writing curricula respond to the demands of a learner's future professional life (Wise, 2010). For such an end, it is time university students were trained to write with an identity and a sense of belonging to a writing community after they are trained to write for general purposes.

The situation of Moroccan EFL university students is not any better according to a number of studies. Two of these relate the writing problems of Moroccan university students to difficulties at the levels of grammar, lexis, and organization (Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2018; Elhaddad & Najbi, 1991). Another study argues the problem in Moroccan EFL students' writing is a result of their "low level of critical thinking" that "they were unable to develop a stand and support it with arguments" (Hellalet, 2021, p179.). Also, the writing mediocrity of Moroccan university EFL students may result from their lack of reading, especially that for a student to be a good writer, they have to be good readers (Bouznirh, 1998). Last but not least, Ziad (2015) states students' writing mediocrity might emanate from teachers

not being aware of the writing theories and their applications in EFL classroom. Although these studies differ in terms of where the problem of writing originate for Moroccan university students, they all confirm the significance of its existence. Accordingly, this study departs from the premise that Moroccan EFL students face writing difficulties; however, it attempts to analyze it from CARS rhetorical moves and lexicogrammar genre perspectives by asking and trying to respond to the following research question:

To what extent do Moroccan MA students in Applied Linguistics employ Swales' Create-a-Research-Space (CARS) model in organizing the introductions of their dissertations?

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative content analysis (QCA) to examine the introductions of MA dissertations written by Moroccan EFL applied linguistics students at Moroccan universities between 2022 and 2023. Its aim is to identify the nature and structure of the rhetorical moves and steps in the students' introductions.

To begin with, qualitative analysis possesses several specific characteristics that excellently apply to the scope and nature of the current study. One is that it encompasses the scope of quantitative content analysis because the reading of every text is qualitative even though it can seek quantifying some of its patterns (Krippendorff, 2018). For instance, the qualitative investigation of the rhetorical moves in the collected body of texts allows for some margin to quantify these moves, thereby extending the possibility of accurately understanding the students' writing and validly reporting on them.

Another characteristic is that it can be either deductive or inductive (Azungah, 2018). When analyzing data inductively, researchers identify the analysis' thematical units along the research process; however, analyzing data deductively means analysts begin their analyses with clearly set and decided upon themes and patterns (Creswell, 2009). Inductive analyses are often used when researchers lack or have limited knowledge about the themes the text analysis could yield; on the other hand, a deductive analysis is used when theories and previous findings are available before the conduction of research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It is also possible for qualitative content analysts to employ both inductive and deductive techniques concomitantly (Krippendorff, 2018).

Furthermore, qualitative content analysis proves valuable when the researcher's objective is to examine the features of texts in terms of the communicative purposes they serve (Lindkvist, 1981; Tesch, 1990). This aligns closely with the goal of this study as it aims to analyze the introductions of the participants in this study by exploring the participants' use of rhetorical moves. Then, content analysis, in its generality, is guided by the goal of reaching a systematic description of the analyzed material (Krippendorff, 2004). Key to the identification of this goal is the analyst's need to specify from which angle they plan to study their data, and simultaneously be open to altering their research scope along the analysis process (Krippendorff, 2018). Of equal importance is that qualitative content analysts can make conclusions that reach beyond the physical description of data (Krippendorff, 2004). They, in other words, can subjectively infer and/or evaluate meanings texts express either explicitly or implicitly (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2012).

Taking these characteristics in consideration, the current study has conducted a deductive content analysis to investigate the employment of **Rhetorical Moves and Steps** as proposed by Swales in his CARS Model (2004). The analysis of Moves and Steps in the introductions of dissertations Moroccan applied linguistics students write should provide a rigorous understanding of the **generic identity** (ways a text resembles others of its genre) of the writing of Moroccan EFL applied linguistics students (Imtihan, 2010).

Collecting data from the target Moroccan universities has proceeded quite smoothly, notwithstanding the few challenges the researcher had faced to access the data sources. After obtaining official authorization to conduct the research both within and outside Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, where this study was conducted, the researcher collected texts from the Departments of English Language and Literature at Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra; Mohamed V University, Rabat; University Hassan II, Casablanca; Chouaib Doukkali University, El Jadida; Moulay Ismail University, Meknes; Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fes; and Cadi Ayyad University, Marrakech.

To broaden the scope of the corpora significantly, the current study employed the snowball sampling technique. The researcher reached out to their professors, colleagues, classmates, and friends, requesting them to share the introductions of their dissertations and to extend the request to their own networks. Although this approach was time-consuming, it resulted in an additional 40 introductions and extended the study's reach to include texts from universities that would have been difficult for the researcher to visit. It is worth noting that, despite criticism of snowball sampling for its perceived inability to produce generalizable results (Morgan, 2008), the technique garners support from qualitative experts who argue that the aim of qualitative research is not necessarily to generalize to broader populations, but rather to explore phenomena in depth (Creswell, 2002; Krippendorff, 2018). The table below provides details on the number of texts collected through in-person visits to university libraries and via snowball sampling.

The selection of texts (introductions) for analysis in this study was guided by several key criteria. Firstly, only dissertations authored by Moroccan MA applied linguistics students were considered eligible for analysis. Secondly, dissertations written within the academic years 2021 and 2022 were included. Thirdly, no restriction was on the topic of the dissertations as long as they related to applied linguistics. Lastly, the attainment of data saturation determined the number of texts utilized in the study. Overall, the analysis of the texts within the framework of these criteria was guided by the question of whether "the data provide useful evidence for testing hypotheses or answering research questions" (White & Marsh, 2006, p.27).

Table 1 Body of texts collected from EFL departments of Moroccan universities

University	Number of texts
ibn tofail - kenitra	35
Mohamed V - Rabat	30
HASSAN II - Casablanca	30
CHOUAIB DOUKKALI - Eljadida	25
MLY ISMAINL – Meknes	30
SIDI MED BEN ABDELLAH - Fes	20
ABDELMALEK ESSAADI - Tetouan	20
Total: 210	

Collecting the body of texts encountered several challenges. Firstly, most Moroccan universities lack a centralized database for storing previous MA dissertations in an organized manner. Instead, dissertations from various disciplines are often stored together in mixed boxes, making it difficult for researchers to locate specific EFL applied linguistics dissertations. Secondly, librarians are often unable to grant access to students' previously written works, particularly when researchers request to photograph specific pages needed for their study. Consequently, researchers are left with no choice but to explain the purpose of their research in detail, seek permission, and assure confidentiality. Additionally, some universities do not maintain records of their students' previous MA dissertations, necessitating direct contact with professors to inquire if they possess any copies. Fortunately, this approach proved successful in gathering significant amount of data for the current paper. Last, of the 210 sampled introductions, only 105 were considered for analysis as a result of data saturation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In his revised CARS model, Swales and Feak (2004) proposes three main moves to constitute the rhetorical structure of an introduction. These are Establishing a territory, establishing a niche, and presenting the present work. Except for move 1, establishing a territory, both move 2, establishing a niche and move 3, presenting the present work, manifest via several steps, which are sometimes optional but obligatory some other times (Swales & Feak, 2004). Details about these moves and their corresponding steps have been explored previously in the review in this study and shall be revisited in this section along the analysis of the students' introductions.

However, before addressing the distribution of the rhetorical moves in the introductions of the dissertations the current study has analyzed, it is worth to highlight some findings deemed to be of value to the scope of the present study. First, the length of the introductions varies strikingly, ranging between one page and five pages with an average word count varying between 250 and 1200 words. According to Geçiklî (2013), this means the distribution of the moves and their corresponding steps should be inconsistent along the body of texts because the longer an introduction is, the higher the frequency of moves and steps should be; whilst, shorter introductions would supposedly have less moves and steps. Second, the correlation between the length of the introductions and that of the papers where they belong is of no significance.

Finally, the number of sentences per introduction significantly varies across the studied data, ranging from 20 to 100 sentences per introduction. Two explanations for this discrepancy are that some students have used more words to express the moves and steps than others, and that certain sentences do not belong to any of these moves or steps. As such, these general findings constituted a major starting point to predict a lack of consistency in terms of the students' employment of rhetorical moves and their corresponding steps. Needless to reiterate is that this analysis is primarily concerned about the obligatory moves and steps while its concern about optional steps is of secondary importance.

The departing data for the current study consisted of 210 introductions. However, data saturation commenced to emerge after the analysis of 90 introductions. Still, 15 more introductions were added to ascertain the analysis of further data would yield consistent results. Consequently, these additions were deemed to contribute negligible, if any, value to the overall study results. Hence, the final number of introductions this study has analyzed is 105. The CARS analysis of sentence in each of these introductions has entailed results the paper approaches in terms of the three rhetorical moves and the steps relevant to each of them.

The analysis of rhetorical moves and their relevant steps is conducted in light of Swales' (2004) observation with regards to the linguistic flexibility of the realization of a move. He highlights a set of components to consider in the process of move demarcation, and of these are clauses, sentences, grammatical patterns, and lexical signals.

Move 1: Establishing a territory

Establishing a territory, which marks the starting point of an introduction, is denoted as Move 1 according to Swales (2004). Its aim is to establish and document topic generalizations that are of growing specificity within the realm of the research a paper seeks to conduct. Citations are obligatory at this stage. The next two examples illustrate how the current study has examined the occurrences of Move 1, as well as the other two moves, in the introductions of the students' body of texts.

Learning Arabic as a foreign language has gained ground around the world in the last few years and qualifying teachers for this profession has been on regular progress. Many Arab language centers and universities around the Arab World have embarked on this experience and launched programs, targeting foreigners to learn Arabic; Morocco is actually one of these countries that invest in the teaching of Arabic to foreigners even if it is still in the preliminary phase compared to Jordan or Egypt which provide competitive Arabic programs that attract foreigners to join them. Beside the activities that are conducted in the language classroom that basically focus on the four skills, there are extracurricular activities that take place beyond the walls of the classroom with the aim to provide more opportunities for learners to practice the target language more genuinely and contextually.

Microsoft Office User
Highlighting the increasing interest in learning Arabic as a FL.

Microsoft Office User

Microsoft Office User
Showing the response of some Arab countries including Morocco to the increase in learning Arabic as a FL.

Microsoft Office User
Revealing how Morocco is behind other Arab countries in terms of teaching Arabic as a FL.

Microsoft Office User
Narrowing the topic to the extracurricular activities to teach Arabic as a FL.

Fig. 1 Examination of move 1 sample 1

In the excerpt above, the first sentence emphasizes the growing interest in learning Arabic as a foreign language (FL). The second sentence explores how certain Arab countries have addressed this interest, highlighting that Morocco lags behind Egypt and Jordan in teaching Arabic as a FL. The third sentence then refines the focus, connecting the topic with the paper's study on teaching Arabic as a FL through extracurricular activities. Considering these sentences within the perspective of Move 1, establishing a territory, the following remarks persistently emerge:

- The first and second sentences provide general information; yet, there is some doubt as to whether this generalization serves to contextualize the topic of the research, which is how to teach Arabic using extracurricular activities.
- The third sentence does not highlight the significance of extracurricular activities in teaching Arabic as a FL. Instead, it only declares their existence.
- There are no citations.

Below is another example of how the current study has explored the use of move 1 in the collected body of texts.

Most university programs require students to carry out a research project in their field of specialization for their graduation. In fact, doing research is one of the most important but challenging tasks students face at the university. Thus, previous research in this area revealed that many students, if not most, have negative attitudes towards research courses in general, and conducting research in particular. This is believed to be due to the various problems and difficulties they face while they are actually conducting their research projects. Therefore, investigating these problems and attitudes is essential because their impact is proved to be great on students' willingness and readiness to do research.

Microsoft Office User
Highlighting the significance of the topic, which is doing research projects at university + qualifying it as challenging.

Microsoft Office User
Stating the problem and attempting to explain its cause by referring to previous research.

Microsoft Office User
Justifying the need for researching the topic.

Fig. 2 Examination of move 1 sample 2

In this introduction, the first and second sentences highlight the significance of the topic of the research, doing university projects, and qualify it as a difficult task to undertake. Next, sentence three and four announce the problem and explain its causes with limited reference to previous literature; the writer, however, does not provide any citation to support their claim. Finally, sentence five emphasizes the importance of the study and declares the value of its outcome. Approaching the sentences of these opening paragraphs, separately and together, reveals the students have, but partly, abided by the principles of CARS move 1.

Also, these two examples demonstrate that students have employed topic generalization and referred to previous research, but without providing the necessary citation(s). Additionally, there is a declaration of research significance, which does not align with the requirements of this move.

Through this type of analysis, the current study has successfully drawn valid conclusions regarding whether students are aware of the rhetorical moves and their corresponding steps or, conversely, still need to learn them. Regarding the analyses presented above, it appears that the students were not sufficiently knowledgeable about how to rhetorically organize their paragraphs, at least when viewed through the lens of Swales' CARS model (2004) at the time

of writing their MA dissertation introductions. They do not use the move appropriately, often disregarding its obligatory constituents and adding others that should not belong to it. For the sake of convenience and appropriateness, however, this paper focuses only on the commonalities among the announcements of Move 1 in the analyzed introductions.

One of the most noticeably recurrent finding bearing on the first sentences of the introductions is that they clearly provide general information about the topic of the studies they belong to. Of the 105 studied texts, 99 introductions (94.28%) meet this criterion. Three of the remaining others declare specific information, two claim centrality, and one is a citation of no clear relevance to the topic of the paper. It is worth to mention, however, that not all these generalizations are related to the topic of the research, and this sometimes challenges the students' smooth progression towards the declaration of the specific issue they plan to discuss. For example, one participant starts their introduction with a sentence describing language planning in Morocco, while the research topic focuses on the use of gamification in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to teenagers. The challenge lies in the student's inability to bridge the gap between the generalization with which they open their introduction and the specific objective declared by the end of the first paragraph. Here are the two sentences:

Introduction paragraph 1 **opening sentence:** *Morocco language planning policies...*

Introduction paragraph 1 **closing sentence:** *The positive impact of gamification on ... is the core issue this paper...*

The diagram below shows the distribution of the functions of the first sentence in the body of texts the current paper has studied.

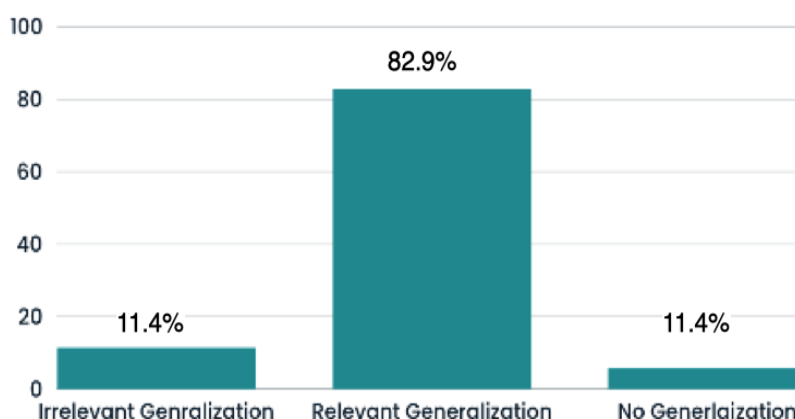


Fig. 3 Function of Sentence 1 in Students' Introductions

It is significant to note that nearly 83% of students who commenced their introductions with a generalizing sentence managed to produce one relevant to the topic of the study, whereas approximately 11.5% began with a generalizing sentence irrelevant to the study's topic. Together, these two figures indicate that approximately 94% of the participants have effectively utilized Move 1 (establishing a territory). However, the remaining participants, comprising just under 6%, have not met the criteria for Move 1.

Move 2: Establishing a niche

According to Swales' revised CARS model of 2004, establishing a niche is accomplished through two steps. Step 1 serves to indicate a gap (Step 1A) or add to what is already known about the topic (step1B). Authors can realize step 1 via step 1A, step 1B, or both. On the other hand, step 2, which is optional in the CARS model, aims to positively justify the need for the research. Citations in move 2 are possible. Interesting amongst the findings of this study is that the realization of move 2 (Swales, 2004) manifests fully in 38 introductions, partly in 60 introductions, while it is inexistent in 7 introductions. The full realization of move 2 means the student has used either step 1A, step 1B, or both - not necessarily all the steps. The table below presents a comparison of the rates of using Move 2 in the analysed body of texts.

Table 2 Rates of Move 2 Use in Students' Introductions

Text ID	Total	Degree of realization
01-04-07-012-015-016-017-018-019-022-023-024-025-028-029-030-031-032-033-034-040-041-049-054-060-061-065-070-071-072-077-078-085-089-093-096-100-104	38	Fully
02-05-08-09-010-014-020-021-026-027-035-036-037-039-042-043-044-045-046-047-047-048-051-052-053-055-056-057-058-059-063-064-066-067-068-069-073-074-075-076—079-80-081-082-083-084-086-087-088-090-091-092-095-097-098-099-101-102-103-105	60	Partly
03-06-08-011-013- 062-094	07	Inexistent
Total: 105		

Deductions from the table above reveal that Move 2 manifests in about 93% of the introductions, while it is not realized in approximately 7%. Nevertheless, this high rate of appearances does not reflect the participants' mastery of the

rhetorical use of move 2. This is because, firstly, the complete utilization of the components of Move 1 is quite low, not exceeding 38%, while 60% of the participants have used it only partially. Secondly, there is a noticeable inconsistency in the use of move2 - step1 and move2 - step2. Participants demonstrate a lack of uniformity in employing these two steps. Some use only step 1, while others omit step 1 in favor of step 2, and vice versa. Furthermore, some participants employ both steps, but the order in which they do so makes it challenging to identify them accurately. The graph below illustrates the frequency of step 1 and step 2 in introductions where move 1 is partially evident. It also depicts the percentage of cases exhibiting uncertainty in the order of the steps.

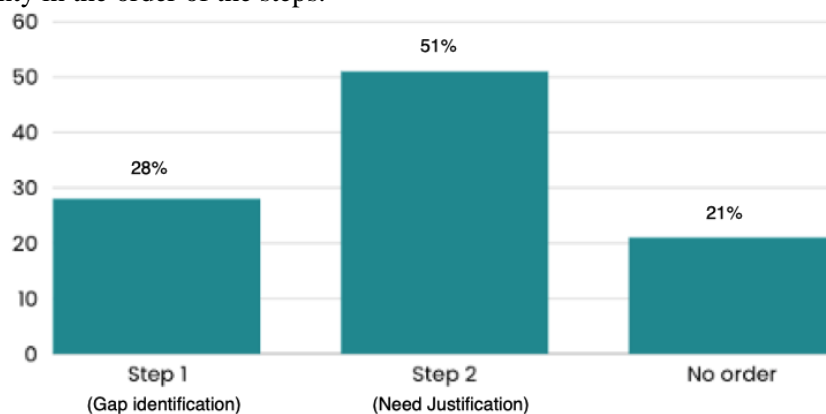


Fig. 3 Frequency of step 1 and step 2 of move 1 in students' introductions

The graph above reports two key findings. An interesting observation relates to the frequency of step 2, which is approximately two times higher than that of step 1. According to Swales' CARS model, step 1 is considered obligatory, implying that the trend should ideally be reversed. However, this may reveal that participants are more concerned about justifying the value of their research (step two), though optional, than they are about identifying a gap or adding to the literature (step one), which is compulsory. Another key finding relates to the unclear cut limit between step 1 and step 2 as one third of the participants unpredictably juggled about the two steps without any clear consideration of the steps' order they should follow. As a result, students do not strictly adhere to the order of the CARS model, nor do they consider the obligatory and optional nature of these steps. The graph below reports on the nature and frequency of how students used step 1 and step 2.

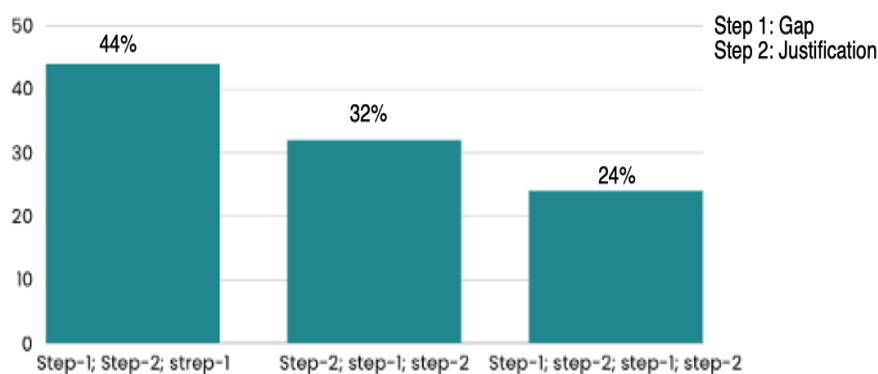


Fig. 4 Students' use of step 1 and step 2

Key to what the graph above reveals is the inconsistent employment of step 1 and step 2 in the introductions the current study has investigated. Almost half of the participants start move 2 appropriately through the enunciation of the existence of a gap before they move to adding to what is known in the literature. However, instead of proceeding to the next level, move 3, they return to step 1 and add more information about the gap in the literature.

Finally, the participants have by and far used one citation or more, though optional, in both step 1 and step 2 of move 2. As such, citations are present in 96 introductions (91.5%). Of these citations 63% are direct quotes while the remaining others (37%) are paraphrased quotations or summaries of the source texts. While Swales' CARS model does not specify the preferred type of citation in social sciences, higher education institutions generally advocate for balanced quoting ratios between direct quotes and paraphrased quotes, if not in favor of paraphrasing.

Move 3: Occupying the niche

In his revised CARS model (2004), Swales renamed and modified Move 3, occupying the niche proposed in 1990 by introducing "Presenting the Present Work." As the figure below shows, the structure of this modified version is made of 7 steps of which only step 1, "announcing the present research descriptively and/or purposively," is obligatory.

Move 3 Presenting the Present Work (citations possible)
via

- Step 1 (obligatory) Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively
- Step 2* (optional) Presenting RQs or hypotheses
- Step 3 (optional) Definitional clarifications
- Step 4 (optional) Summarizing methods
- Step 5 (PISF**) Announcing principal outcomes
- Step 6 (PISF) Stating the value of the present research
- Step 7 (PISF) Outlining the structure of the paper

Fig. 5 Revised structure of move 3

The realization of move 3 varies significantly across the participants' introductions in terms of (1) the use of some steps instead of others, (2) order of the steps, and (3) the number of sentences used to express each. As for the first component, the use of some steps instead of others, the current study has found presenting research questions the most highly used by the participants; it is realized in 100% of the introductions. However, the least realized steps are summarizing methods and definitional clarifications (9% and 6% respectively). The figure below reports on findings about the use of these steps from the most to the least frequent.

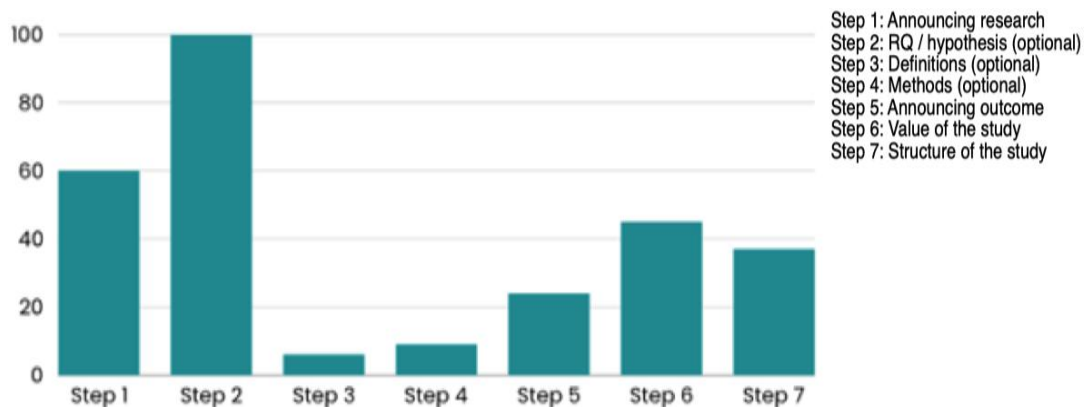


Fig. 5 Realization of steps of move 2 in students' introductions

The figure above indicates, except for step 2 which climbs up to 100%, all the other steps are below 60%. The trend should be otherwise (Swales, 2004) at least with regards to step 1 because its realization is obligatory and thus should occur more frequently than all the other steps including step 2. For this reason, data shows that students need to reevaluate how they approach the steps by focusing more on what is obligatory instead of what is optional. Nevertheless, the high occurrence of step 2, presenting RQs or hypotheses, is highly understandable as it is one of the key steps university professors focus on when teaching research methods and/or supervising students writing their research dissertations. In addition, asking RQs is a well-established convention in academic writing that graduate students are highly knowledgeable of. Another important remark is that the students, in general, have used all the steps regardless of the frequency of each.

Concerning the order of the steps in move 3, the current study found the participants used a variety of patterns. Some of these were hard to classify under any sort of pattern because the steps used were either not clearly declared and/or the boundaries amongst them were not well defined. However, for the sake of generalizability, the following figure summarizes the most common patterns that were announced clearly in the texts and classifies those that do not have a clear pattern as others.

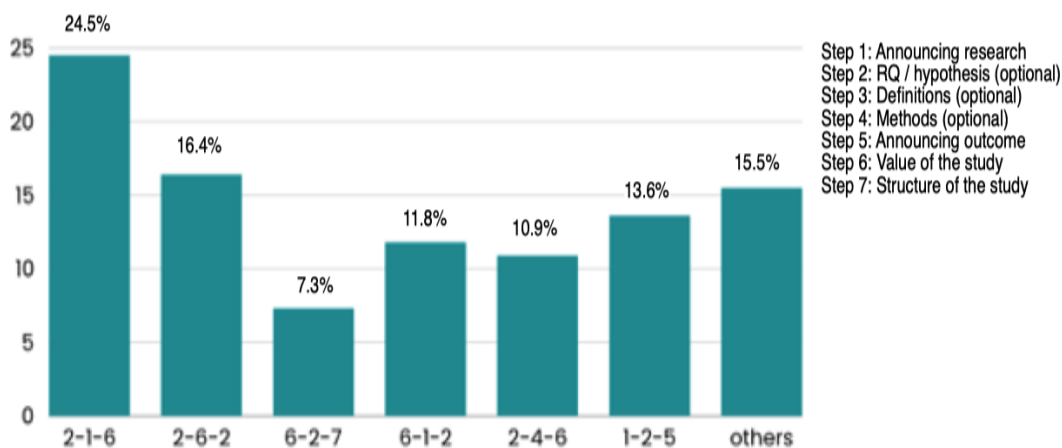


Fig. 6 Move patterns in students' introductions

A comparison of the figures the table graph above presents reveals a few interesting findings. First, no pattern seems to dominantly mark how the participants structure move 3. The most common step order is 2-1-6, which still does not even overcome a 25% rate. The other step sequences are all below 17% with 16.4 (2-6-2) as the highest and 7.3 (6-2-7) as the lowest frequent. Second, step 2, regardless of where it falls within the order of the steps, is used in all introductions at least once; it is realized twice in about 17% of the texts analyzed. Third, the no-clear step structures score significantly (15.5%) considering the low percentages of the other structures, which means an important number of students write their introductions without being fully considerate of the structure they need to abide by. Finally, step 1 which is obligatory in move 2 and which needs to be the first to realize, occurs initially only in the sequence 1-2-5 (13.6%).

As for the number of sentences used to realize move 3 with its seven steps, where they are realized, the current study has found there is a lack of balance. In other words, the participants have by and large expressed the steps with a discrepancy because of which some steps are overemphasized, others are lowly considered, while the others are totally ignored. It's worth mentioning that the use of quotes, whether direct or paraphrased, is widespread across all introductions despite being optional within the framework of move 3.

CONCLUSION

Several significant conclusions emerge from the presentation of findings on the utilization of rhetorical moves and their corresponding steps in the introductions written by Master EFL applied linguistics students in Morocco. Firstly, students extensively incorporate Rhetorical Moves and their corresponding steps in their introductions. Secondly, in terms of order, it is evident that students do not adhere to a common structure, especially the one proposed by Swales (2004). Thirdly, students tend to use Rhetorical Moves and Steps that are not obligatory while omitting those that are. Finally, the boundaries between one move and another are often unclear, making it challenging for the reader to identify where a move begins and where it ends. These results are similar to previous studies about the difficulties students' face in using moves adequately (Henry & Roseberry, 1998). Taken individually and collectively, these observations suggest that students need to benefit from targeted training on how to organize, phrase, and articulate their introductions within the framework of a specific rhetoric tradition, in this case, that of Swales (2004).

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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