

Thesis Writing in English Language Teaching: Structure, Organization and Practices

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Abstract

Background: Thesis writing is a significant academic requirement for master's level students in English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, demanding critical thinking, academic writing competence, and systematic organization of research. However, many students face difficulties in understanding the rhetorical structure, methodological considerations, and academic conventions of thesis writing.

Methods: This paper adopted a conceptual and review-based approach by critically examining relevant theoretical perspectives and scholarly literature related to thesis writing and structuring in ELT and applied linguistics. The discussion focused on major thesis components, including the abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

Results: The results indicated that coherence, clarity, methodical arrangement, and critical engagement with literature are crucial for good thesis writing. The paper also revealed that the sections of the thesis have a rhetorical and methodological purpose, which contributes to the overall quality, rigor, and scholarly value of the research. Furthermore, the paper emphasized the need for genre knowledge, research positioning and adherence to academic standards in the development of a good thesis.

Conclusion: The article highlights the importance of structured academic guidance in developing effective thesis-writing practices among students and novice researchers in ELT and applied linguistics.

Novelty: The article provides a systematic and comprehensive overview of thesis writing practices by integrating rhetorical, methodological, and pedagogical perspectives within the context of ELT and applied linguistics.

Keywords: Thesis writing, rhetorical structure, academic writing, niche, establishing a territory

Introduction

At the master's level in English Language Teaching (ELT) at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, academic writing plays a pivotal role. The thesis serves as a final requirement that demonstrates scholarly competence while also encouraging critical thinking and the development of a research identity. The thesis is more than just a requirement for graduation; it is also a crucial way for master's students to add to what is already known. Thesis writing is regarded as an important but highly challenging task at colleges and universities all around the world. Along with speaking, listening, and reading, writing is a fundamental language skill. The impact of technology on our lives is growing daily, and textual communication is becoming more and more significant in connection with this. One of the ways to gauge a society's level of development is through written communication. In this sense, it is crucial for any culture that pupils' writing abilities be developed. As [Coskun, Balci and Ozçakmak \(2013\)](#) state, "Writing arises from the needs of the people to express their thoughts and feelings in accordance with variety of purposes" (p. 1526). In this regard, [Murray and Moore \(2006\)](#), "It is a journey that leads us to many new discoveries about ourselves, about our ideas, about the world in which we live, and about our professional identities as academics, teachers, researchers and scholars" (p. 4). Among different forms of academic writing, a thesis is a form of scientific writing characterized by objectivity, systematic inquiry, and evidence-based argumentation. [Hartley \(2008\)](#) remarks, "Writing a thesis is like writing an academic article, only worse. The thesis is much longer. Unfortunately, students normally write their thesis before they start on articles, and they only write one" (p. 81). Writing a thesis is consequently seen to be an integral and necessary part of university education that guarantees the academic credentials and status of graduates. In this connection, [Ylijoki \(2001\)](#) argues, "Thesis writing is regarded as an inherent and necessary part of university studies that guarantees the academic qualifications and status of graduates" (p. 21). Owing to its importance in higher education, successful academic writing requires a range of academic writing skills. [Swales and Feak \(2012\)](#) assert that academic writing, particularly at the thesis level, requires critical engagement with literature, coherence, and clarity, areas in which many students encounter difficulties when they lack adequate guidance. Highlighting the demand of the process, [Pandey \(2024c\)](#) states, "Thesis writing at the master's level represents a significant academic milestone,

requiring students to demonstrate their ability to conduct independent research and contribute meaningfully to their field of study” (p. 26).

Writing a thesis is an intellectual endeavour that provides students with a novel opportunity. As [Pandey \(2024b\)](#) noted, “Nepalese students pursuing a master's degree in English lack sufficient or any structured guidance on effectively composing a thesis or an academic essay” (p. 70). Thesis writing is one of the critical components of the M.Ed. programme at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. Since this course is completely practice-oriented, it equips the students with actual practice in thesis writing. The overall objective of the course is to provide students with ample opportunity to gain knowledge and expertise about how to develop a research proposal, conduct research and write thesis in a proper format. The course is comprised of three sections: Academic Writing (AW), Proposal Writing (PW) and Thesis Writing (TW). The Academic writing section acquaints students with rudimentary knowledge on writing skills needed for thesis and proposal development, and would be conducted by the course instructor. The Proposal Writing section deals with the basic elements of a research proposal and guides students in drafting a proposal in an area of interest within their major subjects. The Thesis Writing section guides students to write a thesis on topic of their interest. Students are required to develop a comprehensive proposal and write a thesis under the supervision of a thesis supervisor and submit both for evaluation to the departmental research committee. The thesis development and presentation are carried out individually. Students have to write their thesis following the format provided by the department and submit to the departmental research committee for evaluation.

Several scholars have examined how theses are structured. IMRAD stands for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion (also written as IMRaD or IMRD) and refers to a common format for scientific writing that gained popularity in the 1970s. A thesis with a simple traditional structure presents a single study and is typically arranged into sections such as introduction, literature review, materials and methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on thesis and dissertation writing in ELT research. The analysis and teaching of various aspects of theses and dissertations across a range of disciplines have been widely discussed ([Abrar et al., 2023](#); [Belcher, 1994](#); [Dudley-Evans, 1986](#); [Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988](#); [James, 1984](#); [Makati & Sibanda, 2025](#); [Pandey, 2022](#); [Richards, 1988](#); [Shamsi & Osam, 2024](#); [Shaw, 1991](#); [Swales, 1990](#); [Tran et al., 2025](#)).

Objectives of the Study

This article aims to discuss major concepts, structures and practices involved in thesis writing in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The major sections of a thesis include the abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion and this paper intends to present a systematic overview of them. The article also aims to introduce students and novice researchers to the rhetorical structure, academic norms, and methodological questions that are important for writing a good thesis. Moreover, it tries to explain how the different

components of a thesis contribute to the overall quality, coherence and academic significance of research in ELT and Applied Linguistics.

Analysis and Discussion

The section offers a critical analysis and interpretation of the key elements in writing and structuring a thesis in English Language Teaching (ELT). This section discusses the rhetorical organization, academic conventions and methodological considerations of the different sections of a thesis based on relevant theoretical perspectives and previous scholarly works. These sections include the abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion. It continues to explore how the components contribute to the coherence, clarity and academic significance of thesis writing and to foreground their implications for research practices in ELT and Applied Linguistics.

Writing and Structuring a Thesis

Currently, there is a significant amount of interest in the rhetorical structure of thesis chapters. The rhetorical structure of thesis chapters has been a preferred focus of English language teaching researchers ([Bunton, 2002, 2005](#); [Kamler & Thomson, 2014](#); [Kwan, 2006](#); [Paltridge, 2002](#); [Paltridge & Starfield, 2007](#); [Pandey, 2020](#); [Samraj, 2008](#)).

Writing and structuring a Master's Thesis in English Language Teaching (ELT) involves a rigorous and systematic process aimed at contributing new insights to the field. Typically, the thesis begins with a clear introduction that outlines the research questions and objectives, providing a rationale for the study within the context of existing literature. This is followed by a methodology section, which details the research design, participants, data collection methods, and analysis techniques used to explore the chosen topic. The results section then presents the findings, often accompanied by charts, tables, or excerpts from data to support the analysis. The discussion interprets these findings, linking back to the theoretical framework and prior research to highlight significance and implications. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the study, offering reflections on the research process, potential limitations and suggestions for future research in the field of ELT. This structure ensures a logical flow of information and a comprehensive examination of the thesis topic, contributing effectively to the academic community.

Abstract Section. The abstract presents a summary of the topic of the paper and the major findings of the research. The main aim of a thesis abstract is to introduce the readers the main considerations of the thesis in a precise manner. According to the American Psychological Association, “An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper” ([APA, 2020, p. 111](#)). Writing an abstract involves concisely summarizing the key aspects of your research, including its purpose, methodology, findings, and implications. Thus, the abstract is placed immediately following the title page and is generally short. The abstract should include a brief introduction and statement of the problem, as well as a summary of the methodology,

findings and conclusions. According to [Hartley \(2008\)](#), “Structured abstracts are typically written using five sub-headings-‘background’, ‘aim’, ‘method’, ‘results’ and ‘conclusions’. Sometimes the wording of these sub-headings varies a little – ‘objectives’ for ‘aim’, for example, but the meaning is much the same” (P 31). A structured abstract may be used if preferred.

According to [Bitchener \(2010\)](#), abstract consists of the following components: a) The aims of the study b) The background and context of the study c) The methodology and methods used in the study d) The key findings of the study e) The contribution of the study to the field of knowledge. (pp. 10-11)

The abstract of a research study usually comprises five major moves and their corresponding sub-moves. The first move, Introduction, sets the context and background of the research, sets the motivation for doing the study, explains the importance or centrality of the research focus, and identifies a research gap or continuation of an existing research tradition. The second move, Purpose, is where the authors identify and elaborate on the goals or intentions of the study, along with the research questions or hypotheses. The third move, Method, identifies and justifies the overall research approach and methods, describes the key design aspects, identifies the data sources and parameters, and explains the processes of data analysis. The fourth move, Product, contains the main findings or results in relation to the key aims and research questions, and also additional or subsidiary findings. Finally, the fifth move, Conclusion, emphasizes the importance and significance of the findings beyond the study itself, considering contributions to theory, research and practice, and also suggests practical applications and implications for further research.

Introduction Section. The introduction is always the beginning of the body of a thesis. The introduction section of a establishes the context of the issue under investigation. The entails the framing of the importance of the issue raised. The first paragraph of the thesis introduces the concept and lays the groundwork for the problems under study. [Pandey \(2022\)](#) notes the section “plays a pivotal role in showing the relevance of the research and setting up the context. The main of this component in thesis writing is to build territory for the research” (p. 32).

A research thesis typically begins with a clear statement of the problem, issue, or question that the researcher is interested in. It also consists of a review of the background and context of the study and a review of the literature to explain what is already known about the chosen area. Based on the review, the researcher identifies the gaps in the current body of knowledge and explains how the study aims to address one or more of these gaps. The procedures and methods to be used in conducting the investigation and the scope and delimitations of the study are also presented in the thesis. It also specifies the expected contribution of the research to the knowledge field concerned. Finally, the thesis presents the general content and organizational structure of the study to guide the readers to read the study. In this connection, [Greene and Lidinsky \(2012\)](#) argue,

“Basically, academic writing entails making an argument- text crafted to persuade an audience- often in the service of changing people’s minds and behaviors” (p. 2). They further state:

When you write an academic essay, you have to define a situation that calls for some response in writing; demonstrate the timeliness of your argument; establish a personal investment; appeal to readers whose minds you want to change by understanding what they think, believe, and value; support your argument with good reasons; anticipate and address readers’ reasons for disagreeing with you, while encouraging them to adopt your position. ([Greene & Lidinsky, 2012, p. 2](#))

The main aim of this chapter of the thesis is to familiarize readers with the thesis. The Creating a Research Space (CARS) model, developed by [Swales \(1990\)](#), is a methodology used primarily for crafting research paper introductions. This model is highly regarded in academic writing, especially for its structured approach to establishing a context, indicating a gap, and then introducing the research itself. The model entails three major components namely, establishing a territory, establishing a niche and occupying the niche

Establishing a Territory. The first stage involves laying the groundwork for the introduction, emphasizing the importance of the research topic. It generally starts with the act of establishing centrality by which the researcher demonstrates that the subject is important and relevant in a particular academic discipline or in a more general social and educational context. This is then followed by topic generalizations, broad statements about the subject area that provide background information and context. Moreover, it is part of the phase to review items of previous research by referring to key studies and scholarly works closely related to the topic. This shows that the study is rooted in an existing body of knowledge and supported by previous academic inquiry.

Establishing a Niche. The second step is to identify a gap in the existing research that the current study aims to fill. There are several ways you can do this. One way is counter-claiming where the researcher points out the weaknesses, limitations or problematic aspects in previous studies. Alternatively, a gap can be shown by explicitly pointing out the areas that have not been adequately investigated or understood in the existing body of knowledge. Researchers can also ask questions that previous research has not properly answered. This can justify the need for further research. The study may continue an existing research tradition, adding to, refining or building on earlier work and positioning the current research as an important next step in the field.

Occupying the Niche. The final step requires the author to describe how the present research addresses the gap identified in the previous stage of the literature review. Involves clearly stating the purposes and nature of the current study by defining its aims, focus and scope. The writer may also briefly announce the principal findings of the research when it is considered appropriate or strategically helpful to introduce them early in the text. This step also usually contains a statement of the general framework of the research paper or thesis, providing readers

with a clear guide of the forthcoming chapters or sections and helping them to understand the organization of the study.

The CARS model is effective because it provides a clear and logical structure for introductions that can lead the reader through the complexity of academic discussions. It also ensures that the research is positioned as relevant and necessary, which is crucial for engaging the reader's interest and underscoring the value of the research.

Review of Literature Section

The aim of the literature review is to provide an in-depth account of the background literature relevant to the context that your study is situated in and, in doing so, to provide an 'argument', 'case' or justification for the study. In a research study, a literature review typically includes a review of non-research literature to summarize and synthesize background and contextual information related to the study. [Dornyei \(2007\)](#) identifies four different functions of literature review:

(a) it can act as the map of terrain', providing a comprehensive and often historical overview of the books, articles, and other documents describing the broader domain under investigation, (b) it can provide the specific theoretical background of the empirical investigation reported, justifying the need for it, thus focusing primarily on works that have a concrete bearing on the research design or the interpretations of the results, (c) it can be used to mark out the intellectual strand/position that the author is aligning with and to generate trustworthiness in the audience by showing that the author is knowledgeable in the area, and (d) finally and related to the previous point, in the university assignments (for example, dissertations and theses) it is also to prove that the author has done his/her 'homework' and has become familiar with a wide range of relevant theoretical and research approaches. (pp. 281-282)

According to [Pandey \(2024a\)](#), "The primary goal of conducting a literature review is to ascertain the existing body of knowledge relevant to the research issue under investigation" (p. 133). It also considers the theoretical perspectives that inform or underpin the research project and reviews relevant research literature relating to the area of investigation. In addition, the review offers a critique that looks at the arguments for and against important questions and controversies in these fields, and assesses the value of theories, ideas, claims, research designs, methods and conclusions, by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. The literature review also identifies gaps or limitations in the current knowledge base and explains why these gaps are important and worthy of further study. Finally, it discusses how the literature reviewed contributed to the design and implementation of the research project, particularly in the formulation of the research questions or hypotheses and guidance on the selection of the appropriate methodology and research design.

Methodology Section

The method section describes in detail how the study was conducted including the conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in the research. Methodological approaches of different types of studies differ. The detailed description of the procedures allows the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of used methods and the reliability and validity of conclusions. It also allows other researchers to replicate the study. If the manuscript is a sequel or a revision of an earlier study in which the methodology has been fully described in another source, the author may refer readers to that source and/or provide only a brief overview of the methods in this section. According to [Bitchener \(2010\)](#),

the methodology section consists of the following components: a) A description and justification of the methodological approach best suited to your research questions/hypotheses b) A description and justification of the research design best suited to examine your research questions/hypotheses c) A description and justification of the specific methods employed for data collection d) A discussion of ways in which the validity and reliability of your data were achieved e) A description and justification of the data collection procedure. f) A description and justification of the data analysis procedures. (p. 111)

The methodology section includes the relevance of the chosen methodology to answering the study research questions. It clearly states if the research design is qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods and provides a rationale as to why the approach is appropriate for addressing the research problems. It also discusses the general design of the study, such as experimental, correlational, case study, ethnography, or other relevant designs, and the rationale for selecting that particular design.

This section also provides detailed information about the participants including their demographic characteristics such as age, gender, language proficiency level and other relevant attributes. It describes the procedures used to select participants such as random sampling, purposive sampling or convenience sampling. It also provides a rationale for the selection method. It also covers ethical considerations related to selection of participants, including informed consent procedures. The methodology section also discusses the materials and tools used in the research, such as textbooks, software, teaching materials, questionnaires, tests, interview guides, or observation sheets. It explains the development, validity, reliability and adaptation of the instruments where applicable.

Moreover, the methodology section outlines the procedures followed during the research process, including preparation, data collection, teaching interventions, data gathering sessions, and methods used to maintain consistency throughout the study. If applicable, it also explains the pilot study and how its findings contributed to improving the main study. The section further describes the methods of data analysis. In quantitative studies, it explains the statistical techniques used for

analyzing data, such as descriptive and inferential statistics. In qualitative studies, it discusses processes such as coding, categorization, theme development, triangulation, and member checking to ensure trustworthiness. In mixed-methods studies, it explains how qualitative and quantitative data were integrated and analyzed together. Finally, the methodology section addresses ethical considerations, including anonymity, confidentiality, and participants' rights, and acknowledges the limitations of the study and their possible effects on the interpretation and validity of the findings.

In addition, the methodology section describes the procedures used throughout the research process such as preparation, data collection, teaching interventions, data collection sessions and ways to ensure consistency throughout the study. It also discusses the pilot study, if applicable, and how the pilot study findings informed the improvement of the main study. It further describes the methods of data analysis. It describes the statistical techniques employed in quantitative studies for data analysis, including descriptive and inferential statistics. In qualitative research, it refers to processes of coding, categorization, theme generation, triangulation and member checking for ensuring trustworthiness. It explains how the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated and analyzed jointly in mixed methods studies. Finally the methodology section addresses ethical considerations such as anonymity, confidentiality and the rights of the participants and acknowledges the limitations of the study and how these may affect the interpretation and validity of the findings.

Results and Discussion Section

The section "Results and Discussion" in a Master's thesis in English Language Teaching (ELT) presents the findings of the research and discusses their implications for the research questions, objectives, and literature. This section should begin with a brief introduction describing how data was collected and what analytical procedures were used in the study. Such an introduction allows readers to remember how the findings were obtained and makes a clear connection between the methodology and the presentation of results.

Results. This section presents the findings of the study in a way that helps readers understand how they address the research questions. The results should be presented in an organized manner, generally in the order of the research questions or hypotheses. Different categories, themes or variables can be distinguished by appropriate subheadings. Quantitative findings are usually presented in tables, charts, graphs, and statistical summaries, with short explanations. According to [Bitchener \(2010\)](#), the various functions of this section are:

- a) A presentation of the results/findings of your study that are relevant to your research questions/hypotheses
- b) An explanation of what the findings mean (without interpretation)
- c) A presentation of evidence in support of your findings
- d) References back to details of methodology and background/context
- e) References forward to discussion of results issues. (p. 146)

Results are usually presented in a systematic and clear manner, usually in the order of research questions or hypotheses. You can use appropriate subheadings to differentiate between different categories, themes, or variables. Quantitative studies typically present their results in the form of tables, charts, graphs and statistical summaries, along with short explanations of significant trends, relationships and patterns found in the data. In qualitative studies, the findings are typically presented as themes, quotes from participants, narratives or descriptive accounts that depict the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The results should be presented clearly, accurately and objectively, without interpretation at this stage, regardless of the type of data. The results section should be focused on providing the findings of the study in a logical and accurate fashion.

Discussion. The key purpose of this chapter is to interpret and discuss the meaning and significance of the research results or findings being reported. According to [Bitchener \(2010\)](#), the ‘discussion of results section’ consists of the following:

- a) An overview of the aims of the research that refers to the research questions or hypotheses
- b) A summary of the theoretical and research contexts of the study
- c) A summary of the methodological approach for investigating the research questions or hypotheses
- d) A discussion of the contribution you believe your results or findings have made to the research questions or hypotheses and therefore to existing theory, research and practice (i.e. their importance and significance)
- e) This discussion will often include an interpretation of your results, a comparison with other research, an explanation of why the results occurred as they did and an evaluation of their contribution to the field of knowledge. (p. 179)

The section thus begins by discussing the findings in relation to the research questions or hypotheses posed by the study. The researcher discusses the major findings and how they support, extend or differ from previous studies in the field of ELT. This part should not simply repeat the results, but interpret the meaning, relevance and importance of the results in the wider academic context.

The section also discusses implications of the findings for ELT practice, policy and future research. It demonstrates the relevance of the study to the existing knowledge and the newness it offers. The researcher also needs to acknowledge the limitations of the study and explain how these limitations might affect the interpretation of the findings. The findings and limitations can provide appropriate recommendations for teachers, curriculum developers, policy makers, and researchers for the future. The section closes with a summary of the main findings, a reiteration of their significance, and suggestions for possible future research in ELT.

Conclusion Section

The "Conclusion" of a thesis serves as a capstone, encapsulating the essence of the research and its contributions to the field. This part of the thesis according to [Greene and](#)

[Lidinsky \(2012\)](#) “makes a final appeal to your audience. You want to convince readers that what you have written is a relevant, meaningful interpretation of a shared issue. You also want to remind them that your argument is reasonable” (p. 266). A good conclusion according to them, “challenges readers, poses a question, looks to the future, and ends with a quotation ([Greene & Lidinsky, 2012, p. 267](#)). This section is not merely a summary of the thesis but a strategic synthesis of its most critical aspects. It begins by reiterating the research problem or question, thereby reminding readers of the study's objectives and grounding the ensuing discussion. A well-crafted conclusion then succinctly summarizes the key findings, highlighting how the research addressed the initial problem or question. This part is crucial for demonstrating the study's impact and for reinforcing the relevance of the research within the broader academic and pedagogical contexts. By distilling the essence of the research findings, the conclusion draws connections between the study's objectives and outcomes, underscoring the contributions to ELT theory, practice, and potentially policy. The functions of this chapter action to [Bitchener \(2010\)](#) are:

- a) A reminder of the aims (e.g. research questions/hypotheses) and key methodological features of your study
- b) A summary of the findings of the study
- c) An evaluation of the importance and significance of your study with commentary (i) its contribution to the development of theory and research and (ii) any limitations
- d) Practical applications
- e) Recommendations for further research.

Beyond summarizing findings, the conclusion also explores the implications of the research, both in practical terms for educators and theoretically for scholars. It offers a reflection on how the study extends existing knowledge or introduces novel insights into ELT. This section may address the implications for curriculum design, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, or technological integration in language learning environments. Furthermore, it acknowledges the limitations of the study, providing a critical lens through which the findings should be interpreted. The conclusion often closes with recommendations for future research, pointing to unanswered questions or new avenues that emerged from the study. This forward-looking perspective not only underscores the significance of the research within ongoing academic dialogues but also invites continued exploration and debate, fostering a dynamic and evolving discourse in ELT.

"Conclusion" section is where you succinctly summarize your main findings, reflect on the implications of your research, and suggest directions for future study. This section is your opportunity to make a final impactful statement about your research and its contribution to the field of ELT.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to review the main concepts, structures and practices involved in writing and structuring a thesis in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Applied

Linguistics. The article reviewed the sections of a thesis: abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, conclusion. The review was critical and focused on the rhetorical organization, academic conventions, and methodological considerations. The discussion demonstrated that writing a successful thesis takes coherence, clarity, critical engagement with literature, and systematic organisation of ideas to contribute meaningfully to academic research and scholarly communication. The article advances the theoretical and practical understanding of thesis writing by synthesising the key scholarly perspectives and providing pedagogical insights for students, supervisors and novice researchers in ELT and Applied Linguistics. Nevertheless, the article is mainly conceptual and review based and does not include empirical data from thesis writers or supervisors, which could reduce its contextual generalizability. But the article has pragmatic implications for improving academic writing practices, thesis supervision and research training in higher education.

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