A Critical and Practical Analysis of the Generic Rhetorical Structure of Literature Reviews In the Non-Native Theses of Iranian TEFL Students

Seyyed Mohammad Reza Adel

Assistant Professor of TEFL, Department of English Language, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

Seyyed Mohammad Reza Amirian

Assistant professor of TEFL**,** Department of English Language, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

Homeira Ghaderi

MA Student, Department of English Language, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Hakim Sabzevari University, Sabzevar, Iran

Abstract

This study intended to report findings from a survey of 95 literature reviews of TEFL graduate students' theses at four universities to foster improvements in the compilation and assessment of literature reviews. A variant of a rubric for evaluating was used and inspired by Boote and Beile (2005). For validating the rubric, in addition to evaluating literature reviews in the whole literature, 60 students' responses and three experts' reflections were gathered through questionnaires and interviews accounting for the construct, content, and response validity of the rubric to improve skills in conceptualizing, writing, and analyzing data. The overall results signified deficiencies in some parts in the use of writing resources. To have pedagogical implications, findings revealed the necessity to teach knowledge transformation skills in graduate classes and collaboration among disciplines on the writing instruction and academic practitioners and also introduced a comprehensive rubric for evaluating literature reviews in the MA theses.

Key words: Genre, Rhetorical Structure, Review of Literature, Thesis

1. Introduction

A significant goal of scholarly research can be looking for innovations in the existing perception of the world or converting it to a more desirable locale to live in. Rarely are cognitive innovations created unexpectedly, nor are they exclusively derived from individuals (Kaufer & Geisler, 1989). What are specifically expected from post-graduate students are in the form of theses which are submitted when higher degrees are fulfilled. Of the specific sections of theses, it is the literature review which is essential but infamously difficult task to manage (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1995, 1997; Meloy, 2002; Oliver, 2012; Shaw, 1991).

Although there are a lot of guides and handbooks available for the students to write thesis or dissertation, the analysis of the actual texts of these two is very scarce (Mauch & Birch, 1998). Another problem is related to the size of the text which limits the observation or analysis of them (Swales, 1990; Thompson, 1999). Moreover, Atkinson (1997) has found a number of reasons for this problem such as the lack of their accessibility in university libraries. One can point to the remarks of Swales and Feak (2000) where they consider the literature review as a section of a research dissertation, thesis, paper or proposal to be boring but an essential chore. In addition, recent changes in the trend towards doing academic works have affected the theories, researches and the styles of academic writing (Noble, 94; Goodchild & Miller 1997).

As Paltridge (2002) states, despite the number of recommendations available in guides and handbooks, few contain assessing discussions of the actual texts to fully match with what occurs in the real world. Therefore, the acquirement of knowledge and skills of research should specially be considered before writers of research begin to do anything for the improvement of scholarly investigations.

As a consequence, our work is an attempt to add to the extant literature and to compensate for the gap by developing a modified and reasonable yardstick for the post-graduate students in order to evaluate the quality of literature review section of the theses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Literature on Literature Reviews in a Broad View

As the knowledge network is broadening, the ability to dominate the newly published issues becomes more prominent. Since new findings are basically related to previous knowledge, there are a lot of cases in which many researchers totally rely on the previous academic works on every field of study without a need to collect any novel data. Although data collection has always been an essential focus of scholarly activities, the significance of literature reviews cannot be ignored since it assumes to be one of the earliest requirements of many new research students. To Baumeister (2013) in order to help researchers cope with a great deal of unarranged information, literature reviews provide precious services in different ways. The importance of literature reviews is also explained in Boot and Baile (2005) as: "A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research. "Good" research is good because it advances our collective understanding" (p. 3).

Up to now, literature review has been immensely investigated in diverse aspects. As an example, it is found that scholarship and research call for the application of literature review in case of descriptive or instructional reports (Miller & Crabtree, 2004; Rumrill & Fitzgerald, 2001). Afolabi (1992) and Swales & Lindemann, (2002) provided some suggestions on literature review construction. Acquirement, evaluation, and organization of the literature are also studied and worked on as elements of the literature review process (e.g., Morner, 1993; Nimon, 2002). Qian (2003) and Krishnan and Kathpalia (2002) used literature review writing as an indication of understanding students' strategies to learn academic writing. Bruce's (1994a, 1994b, 1996) studies consolidated the processes of gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing stages of the literature review process. However, Zaporozhetz (1987) concluded that the literature review is given the least instructional consideration among dissertation chapters when he was reporting on doctor advisors' instructional practices and attitudes toward the review of literature.

2.2. Undertaking and Generating the Literature Review

One of the earliest requirements of many new research students is doing a literature review. To facilitate the evaluation of reviews, Cooper (1985) offered a general definition and taxonomy of literature reviews for the first time. Later, other researcher added something more to the literature.

A summary of what is included in Clerehan (1990, CQ University (2010), Leedy & Ormrod (2005), Littrell (2003), Roberts & Taylor (2002) and Swales & Feak (1994) imply that a literature review whether written as part of a thesis, or as an exercise in itself is considered to provide an opportunity to:

- identify a gap in previous research
- outline the main arguments in the field
- show that the writer is familiar with the literature on your topic
- indicate who the main writers are in a particular area
- evaluate previous studies
- position the work in relation to other writers
- identify areas of controversy
- support the work by citing other authors
- highlight current literature and use older sources where relevant
- see what previous methodologies have been used and to avoid making the same   mistakes as previous researchers
- demonstrate that the writer is able to do research
- avoid plagiarism and demonstrate referencing skills
- provide a clear theoretical framework
- demonstrate the perception of the key ideas and concepts in your topic
- define the terms, drawing on other writers' definitions
- make the researcher more confident that his/her area of research is worth studying

To demonstrate what is expected from a researcher when generating the literature, Boot & Baile (2005, p. 3) suggest that:

A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research. "Good" research is good because cannot perform significant research without first understanding the literature in the field. Not understanding the prior research clearly puts a researcher at disadvantage.

2.3. Education Research and Academic Preparation

Boot & Baile (2005) believe that the writer's way through writing the literature as a basis of theoretical and methodological sophistication becomes smooth if he or she is to discuss widely accepted issues and to communicate disciplinary research with accurately- defined audience.

What differs in the education research is the heterogeneous audience who rarely agrees upon shared knowledge and even commonly accepted problems (Boote & Gaudelli, 2002). They also claim that the idea unified in research communities seldom exists in the education realm which consequently demands to construct a firm foundation as a base for their research projects. They also mention some of the purposes of literature reviews such as the provision of a broader historical context, determination of the scope, justification of the decisions, critical analysis of the methods to support the claims, distinction between the known and the unknown and synthesis of a novel perspective.

In the analysis Alton-Lee (1998) did on the reviews submitted to *Teaching and Teacher Education,* she found out some inadequacies associated with doctoral researches by those who are not really aware of their field literature. The most common of these problems were related to methodological issues and deficiencies in literature reviews were in the second place.

Boot and Baile (2005) conclude that any kind of shortcomings that researchers suffer whether in submission or in their knowledge, grow out of deficient doctoral preparations. They neither believe in methodological training in a vacuum, nor in the increased training by itself. They focus on the centrality of the literature review in doctoral research preparation and extending our recognition of what literature reviews implicate since investigations of the literature review and practices in teaching and learning the process appear in a small cohort.

2.4. The Literature Review: An Essential Drudgery?

Development of the literature review is both a process and a product. The novice graduate researcher initially considers it as a list of sources which finally germinates as a vehicle for shaping research into a final integrated report (Bruce 1994a; Cole 1993), a recitation of information that are assembled from other sources or an annotated bibliography (Bruce 1994b; Granello 2001). However, those who try to manage the process, feel themselves under a lot of pressure and anxiety (Green & Bowser, 2001; Macauley & Addie, 1999). It specifically begins with writing a thesis in graduate students, the most considerable reason of which may be the lack of direct guidance (Bruce, 1994a; Green & Bowser, 2002). Swales & Lindemann (2002) also confirmed very little guidance in compounding linguistic attributes and structure in order to complete a literature review. In fact, the literature review process requires conversion to a sophisticated product (Bruce, 1994a). Kwan, Chan & Lam (2012) attribute much of the challenge to "the complexity and tacit knowledge the task involves." (p. 189). In Dong's (1998) study some general themes concerning non-native graduate students' thesis/dissertation writing the following themes has been outlined: Firstly, they show more writing difficulties with discipline specific, genre specific, and audience specific knowledge. In the second place, a significant problem is the lack of social networks and resources to help them their difficulties. According to Turner & Bitchener (2011) a number of factors that causes difficulties, are related to their frequently limited knowledge of the genre or part-genre functions under consideration and of the discourse options that that are eventually considered.

2.5. A Genre-Based Outlook

The desire for the scholars and scientists to communicate ideas and findings through publication and to supply students with scientific and academic texts demands a full understanding of discourse community's conventions (Martin, 2003).

According to Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans (2002) linguistic approaches characterize genres by the communicative functions they serve and analyze them into "generic structures" or optional or obligatory features which entail these functions.

Genre analysis can be considered as the "best-realized link between discourse analysis and contemporary L2 pedagogy" by analyzing different academic texts and helping students in appropriate discourse awareness (Poole, 2002, p. 76). It also implies different pedagogic implications. If genre is a "very powerful pedagogic tool" , it is because it makes the kinds of discourse the students need prominent, and also explains —considering—"why a discourse is the way it is" according to its social context and purpose (Kay and Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 310).

Some institutions, being aware of students' needs, proposed special courses on a range of writing academic genres, few of which have been published. (for example, those by Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz, and Nunan (1998), Dudley-Evans (1995), Frodeson (1995), Richards (1988), and Silva, Reichelt, and Lax-Farr (1994) (as cited in Bitchener, J., & Turner, E., 2011).

Nonetheless, none of these attempts made an effort to measure the approach effectiveness by assessing the texts written by students after instruction.

2.6. Towards an Assessment

Thesis and dissertation studies as part of higher education are conducted to distinguish important problems, to investigate and analyze the findings, to relate them to significant concepts or issues, and to clearly draw conclusions and implications to others in an objective prose. This huge activity is the result of a collegial cooperation between students and faculty members and a launch pad for later independent investigations. It is quite clear that if little attention is devoted to each related process, the quality and standards of theses to complete master degrees will definitely suffer (Mullins & Kiley, 2002).

Although Turner & Bitchener (2006) noted positive feedback on this account, they also mentioned that it does not usually attest to students' improvement in writing literature even if the students participated in the course. Their research reveals instructional details of an ESL course for writing a literature review in a short form in addition to the measurement of the effectiveness of their approach. There is no other evidence to include such kinds of accounts.

We hereby are not claiming that no attempt has been made by the program designers or academics to assess the effectiveness of students' literature-writing knowledge. We are pointing out that there appears to be a gap in the published literature on what attempts have been made and an aggregation of what is expected. Moreover, despite the fact that it is almost obligatory in research studies and dissertations, there is often not the time on busy courses for tutors to dedicate to the subject as it deserves. For the first time, this research, built upon an earlier study by Boot & Baile (2005), has tried to hinge around making a comprehensive rubric in order for TEFL students, academic practitioners and thesis examiners to be used in dealing with literature review in the related fields.

3. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Is there a common rhetorical structure in the literature reviews of theses agreed upon by the genre experts in the field?
2. Do Iranian TEFL students follow a systematic rhetorical structure in writing the literature review section of their theses?
3. Is there any significant difference between gender and the quality of the literature reviews conducted among Iranian TEFL students?

4.   Methodology

4.1. Corpus

The corpus of this qualitative study includes the literature reviews of 95 Iranian theses in TEFL which are drawn from some theses on a variety of applied linguistic topics. Only the parts of the theses that occur between the introductory and methodology chapters were selected for analysis. If some of the literature review texts spanned more than one chapter, with the longest one occupying a total of three, all parts were analyzed. However, a pilot study was first conducted to identify and elicit the problems MA students have already confronted.

4.2. Pilot Study

To achieve our goal, there was a need to begin with students' background knowledge and build from that point which to Weimer (2003) assists to teach and to improve teaching.

The project began by applying an open-ended questionnaire provided by Freer & Barker (2008) that was designed to elicit the extent of the students' perception of literature reviews. Their questionnaire consisted of four items: (a) "What is the value of a literature review to a researcher?" (b) "How can (or should) a literature review be organized?" (c)"What is the purpose of a literature review to a reader?" and (d) "On what criteria should a literature review be evaluated?" (P. 72).

To begin our pilot study, thirty MA students took part. We gathered their responses and reflections through Boot and Bail's questionnaire and consequently made interviews for further explanations. The purpose was to make good progress in their skills to conceptualize the idea, to write it, to analyze literature reviews and to cover their concerns.

What students reflected did not retrospectively echo their mastery of the whole idea of literature review writing and assessing. Consequently, to the end of the questionnaire which was a kind of needs analysis, another open-ended questionnaire was attached which asked students to include any idea they felt necessary to process their MA dissertation. Accompanied with three professors' opinions and experiences on their students' literature writing, a modified version of the questionnaire was distributed among students to elicit further deficiencies:

Table 4.1: The Modified Questionnaire

1. What is the value of a literature review to the researcher?
2. What is the purpose of a literature review? What questions should the literature review try to answer?
3. How might a literature review be structured? What different forms of a literature review may appear in the research?
4. How might readers view the importance of literature reviews?
5. What are the criteria for evaluating literature reviews? What are the examiners of the theses looking for?
6. What points are to be considered in the literature discussion and evaluation?

Since the second questionnaire was administered among thirty students, no improvement in the answers was observed. But it had the capability of extracting more problems students encounter in this field. It established an introduction for us to go deep into the related literature and make an endeavor to provide a collection of comprehensive criteria with multifarious implications which is fully explained in the next section.

4.3. Procedure towards the Rubric Refinement

Having the required data in hand, we searched for the necessary benchmarks within articles, books, on-line sources and so on to provide a yardstick with which we could assess student's literature reviews. All the similar criteria were assembled under the same categories. Once the related information were sorted and arranged, we removed the overlapped criteria, and preserved the remaining ones. Based on Boot & Baile (2005) and Later, Freer & Barker (2008) we constructed a variant of the modified rubric. Thus Boot and Baile's (2005) rubric was developed to establish a clear outline of elements necessary to a literature review and to provide guidelines for assessment. The primary analytic rubric by Boot & Baile (2005) contained five criteria which were measured in a range of three scores:

1. Coverage
2. Synthesis
3. Methodology
4. Significance
5. Rhetoric

To develop a rubric for training and also evaluation purposes of the literature reviews of theses or dissertations, this research has attempted to construct a comprehensive scoring instrument to apply and investigate criteria relevant to theses or dissertation literature reviews. It echoes the ways researchers accumulate information, evaluate them and construct a justified literature review of an academic work. The scholarly literature review is expected to be something more than a recitation of data that is accumulated from other sources or what may seem as an annotated bibliography (Bruce 1994b; Granello 2001).

Freer & Barker (2008) in their study adapted a team-teaching approach in an attempt to improve the writing of literature reviews in music education by applying a variant of a rubric by Boote and Beile (2005) by adding "style" and "format" as two criteria to the end of the rubric and made the seven categories to be used for our criteria as well.

To develop our own rubric, our necessary data were gathered through an investigation of various literature reviews, our pilot study, the questionnaire and interviews, and three experts' comments on the data. The result was primarily a checklist of forty-four-item rubric to rate thesis literature reviews. To make and analyze the items and to investigate theses, three PhD experts in Applied Linguistics were asked to comment. Some of the overlapped items were consequently omitted. For those items that were congruous with Freer & Barker's (2008) rubric, we preferred to apply theirs. To establish the instrument validity and reliability of the other parts which were included and analyzed by literature reviews, the questionnaire, and interviews, three theses examiners and reviewers were asked to study our original rubric and signify the most necessary items to be included in the terminal rubric. Then the rubric was revised, and some parts were modified, included or even split into sub-parts. The new version of the rubric was then distributed among twenty MA students and 5 professors and both contributed their personal comments on our account based on the relevant need they felt in this specific domain.

Therefore, what remained for us to retain was originally derived from the foundation of our original rubric, the seven categories for criteria: Coverage, Synthesis, Methodology, Significance, Rhetoric, Style, and Format. However, we modified the points based on their comments to acquire the final one hundred points (see Table 3.2)

Table 4.2: The modified rubric for scoring and evaluating the literature reviews

Coverage – 5 Possible Points				
Justified criteria for inclusion and exclusion		Justified inclusion and exclusion of literature 5	Discussed literature included and excluded 3	Did not discuss the criteria for inclusion or exclusion 0
Synthesis – 31 Possible Points				
Distinguished what has been done from what needs to be done		Critically examined the state of the field :Evaluation of Previous Studies which reflects the analytic abilities of the writer 4	Discussed what has and has not been done 2	Did not distinguish what has and has not been done 0
Placed the topic or problem in the broader scholarly literature		Topic clearly situated in broader scholarly literature 6	Some discussion of broader scholarly Literature 5	Topic not placed in broader scholarly literature 0
Placed the research in the historical context of the field		Critically examined history of topic 6	Some mention of history of topic 5	History of topic not discussed 0
Acquired and enhanced the subject vocabulary		Discussed and resolved ambiguities in definitions 5	Key vocabulary Defined 4	Key vocabulary not Discussed 0
Articulated important variables and phenomena relevant to topic		Noted ambiguities in literature and proposed new relationships 5	Reviewed relationships among variables, phenomena 4	Key variables and phenomena not discussed 0
Synthesized and gained perspective on literature		Offered new Perspective 5	Some critique of Literature 4	Accepted literature at face value 1
Methodology – 10 Possible Points				
Identified and critiqued the main methodologies and techniques in field	Introduced new methods to address problems with dominant methods (*5 bonus points*)	Critiqued research Methods 5	Some discussion of research methods to produce claims 4	Research methods not discussed 0
Related ideas and theories in the field to research		Critiqued appropriateness of methods to claims	Some discussion of appropriateness of methods to claims	Research methods not discussed 0

| methodologies		5	4	
Significance – 10 Possible Points				
Rationalized the practical significance of the research problem		Critiqued practical significance of research 7	Practical significance Discussed 5	Practical significance of research not discussed 0
Rationalized the scholarly significance of the research problem		Critiqued scholarly significance of research 3	Scholarly significance discussed 2	Scholarly significance of research not discussed 0
Rhetoric – 10 Possible Points				
Coherent, clear structure supports the review.		There is an organizational frame, which groups relevant scholarship by topic, chronology, theoretical approach, methodology, etc. and/or a combination of approaches. 5	It is subdivided into appropriate topic areas or sections, each representing a subtheme of the research topic. 3	Topic areas are not included. 2
		There is a clear justification for the different section of the review. The perspective used links with the research subject and the data. 5	Only some coherent Structure are included, a series of transitions organic to the discussion that indicate how different studies approach the same issues both within individual paragraphs and between paragraphs. 3	Poorly conceptualized, Haphazard. 2
Style – 10 Possible Points				
Feel	Writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout. 2	Writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention. 1	Writing is dull and unengaging. Though the paper has some interesting parts, the reader finds it difficult to maintain interest. 0.5	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading. 0
Tone	The tone is consistently professional and appropriate for an academic research paper. 2	The tone is generally professional; it is appropriate for an academic research paper. 1	The tone is not consistently professional or appropriate for an academic research paper. 0.5	The tone is Unprofessional. It is not appropriate for an academic research paper. 0
Sentence Structure	Sentences are well phrased and varied in length and structure. They flow smoothly from one to another. There is an ability to link relevantly each statement to preceding statement e.g., use of discourse markers and other techniques. 2	Sentences are well phrased; some variety in length and structure. Flow from sentence to sentence is generally smooth. 1	Some sentences are awkwardly constructed so that the reader is occasionally distracted. 0.5	Errors in sentence structure are frequent enough to be a major distraction to the reader. 0
Word Choice	Word choice is	Word choice is good;	Word choice is merely	Many words are used

	Consistently precise and accurate. 2	goes beyond generic to be more precise and effective. 1	adequate; range of words limited; some used inappropriately. 0.5	inappropriately, confusing the reader. 0
Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics, Punctuation	The writing is free or almost free of errors. 2	Occasional errors that don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. 1	The writing has many errors; reader is distracted by them. 0.5	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading. 0
Format – 11 Possible Points				
Length	Paper is the number of pages specified in the assignment 1		Paper length exceeds the framework of the Assignment. 0.5	Paper length does not meet the framework of the assignment. 0
Citation Within the Paper	Compelling evidence from professionally legitimate sources is given; attribution is clear and fairly Represented. 2	Professionally legitimate sources that support claims are generally present; attribution is clear and fairly represented. 1.5	Attributions occasionally given; many statements unsubstantiated; confusion about sources and ideas. 1	References are seldom cited to support statements. 0
Quality of References	References are primarily peer reviewed professional journals or other approved sources (e.g., government Documents, agency manuals, etc.). The reader is confident that the information and ideas can be trusted. 2	Although most of the references are professionally Legitimate, a few are questionable (e.g., trade books, Internet sources, popular magazines, etc.). The reader is uncertain of the reliability of some of the sources. 1.5	Most of the references are from sources that are not peer reviewed and have uncertain Reliability. The reader doubts the accuracy of much of the material presented. 1	There are virtually no sources that are Professionally reliable. The reader seriously Doubts the value of the material and stops reading. 0
APA Use	APA format is used accurately and consistently in paper and on "References" page. 2	APA format is used with minor errors. 1.5	There are frequent errors in APA format. 1	Format of the document is not recognizable as APA. 0
Appropriate introduction	It presents a correctly focused introduction to the thematic unit. 2	An introduction that shares the persistent question(s) the reviewed literature address but does not indicate how the reviewed scholarship will be framed. 1.5	The purpose of the review (preliminary or exhaustive) is not clearly indicated. 1	There is no outline of the main arguments in the field. 0
Appropriate conclusion	There is a conclusion that clarifies how the literature demonstrates the efficacy of the dissertation study. 2	It identifies a conflict that needs resolution but it is not shared with the research question of the student author. 1.5	It demonstrates no gap in the literature. 0.5	There is no conclusion in the literature review. 0
Summary and Analysis – 13 Possible Points				
interpretation and understanding of research		Recent developments in the literature are emphasized in the review. Highlights current literature and uses older sources where relevant.	The summary just provides an overall interpretation of current research without mentioning the	No current research is mentioned. 0

		3	previous ones if there are any. 2	
Use of quotations		The number of quotations seems logical per page. There is adequate analysis or critique of the methodologies of important studies so that the reader can determine the quality of previous research. 3	The essence of the chapter analysis, is almost illustrated and exemplified by quotations. 2	The quotations from texts are so predominant that they monopolize the chapter, and overshadow what the writer writes himself. 0
Production of a fair and even-handed analysis		It enables us to weigh up different features of the question. 3	Studies are compared and contrasted and conflicting or inclusive results are noted, without using clearly reasoned judgments. 2	Research that supports and research that opposes the main arguments are not included. 0
Discussion of pmajor and minor studies		Major studies are discussed in detail and the actual findings cited. Minor studies with similar results or limitations are summarized as a group. 4	Only the work of recognized experts on the topic are identified and referred to. 2	Does not indicate who the main writers are in a particular area. 0

To demonstrate what has already been done to validate the questionnaire; the following diagram can be very illuminating:

Figure 4.1: Summary of the Rubric validation
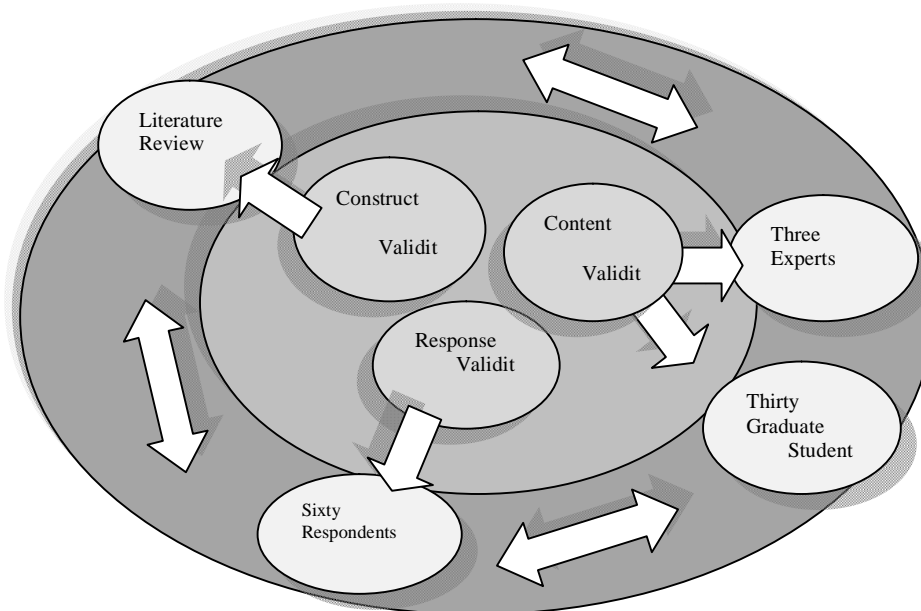
5.   *Discussion & Analysis*

In order to answer the first question to find common rhetorical structure in the literature reviews of theses agreed upon by the genre experts in the field it should be mentioned that various studies have tried to work on different elements of literature as a particular genre and have achieved approximately similar outcomes. Trivial differences are likely the result of looking at the issue from different faucets. . An accumulation of what has been done so far is presumed to constitute the essential elements of qualified literature review.

The aforementioned citations prove the existence of some widely accepted variety of literature writing conventions. No one denies and ignores the unanimity and consensus which (in) directly reflects literature writing principles in theoretical positions, although the organizational structure of academic writing and assessment are sometimes based on an unstated consensus.

Therefore, we can conclude that there is no record of contradicting beliefs in relation to basic principles of literature writing in the related literature. One aspect of the issue that matters, however, is ideological and cultural differences which indirectly affect individual style and creativity. In case of Iranian literature reviews, it was accordingly observed that every college has provided some established criteria especially on the style of literature writing which according to Flowerdew (2000) can consequently be regarded as tolerable. The other mentioned facet of the issue is the sections and sub-sections of each and every literature which makes it particular and reveals the writer's creativity and initiation (Oliver, 2012) .This aspect is also clearly demonstrated in the literature reviews provided by Iranian MA students.

To tackle with the second question and to commence the practical phase of the process, an open-ended questionnaire was administered which was mainly derived from and designed by Freer & Barker (2008) in order to elicit information about how MA students perceived literature reviews .We then engaged in analyzing 95 thesis literatures the result of which is to be reported in the following sub-section.

The first set of computations is of the frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations of each and every section of their literature review based on the rubric elements. It should be mentioned that the range and number of the scores differs among the elements of the rubric.

Table 5.1: Descriptive Statistics for the analysis of MA literatures

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cov/1	95	3	5	4.653	0.75
Syn/1	95	0	4	3.779	0.69
Syn/2	95	2	6	5.884	0.50
Syn/3	95	0	6	5.790	0.91
Syn/4	95	4	5	4.526	0.50
Syn/5	95	4	5	4.021	0.14
Syn/6	95	1	5	3.979	0.48
Met/1	95	0	5	2.958	1.78
Met/2	95	0	4	2.821	1.83
Sig/1	95	5	7	6.368	0.93
Sig/2	95	2	3	2.716	0.45
Rhe/1	95	2	5	4.537	0.86
Rhe/2	95	2	5	4.505	0.84
Stl/1	95	1	2	1.842	0.37
Stl/2	95	1	2	1.726	0.45
Stl/3	95	1	2	1.868	0.34
Stl/4	95	0	2	0.995	0.15
Stl/5	95	1	2	1.968	0.18
Fmt/1	95	0	2	0.911	0.31
Fmt/2	95	1	2	1.879	0.24
Fmt/3	95	1.5	2	1.932	0.17
Fmt/4	95	0	2	1.284	0.44
Fmt/5	95	1	2	1.884	0.27
Fmt/6	95	0	2	1.132	0.95
S&A/1	95	0	3	2.832	0.45
S&A/2	95	2	3	2.874	0.33
S&A/3	95	0	3	2.390	0.55
S&A/4	95	0	4	2.379	0.81
Total	95	52	94.5	84.432	9.26

Note: The abbreviations stand for: Co=coverage, Syn=Synthesis, Met= Methodology, Sig= Significance, Rhe=Rhetoric, Sty=Style, For-Format, S&A=Summary & Analysis

As noted above, on these twenty-eight evaluative yardsticks, every letter stands for the subsections of the main criteria which are analyzed as follows:

According to Table 4.1.we can conclude that the least amount of problems lies in Fmt1, Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics, Punctuation and the most problematic item regarding the distance with the Maximum score are the following features:

Table5.2: Most problematic features

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Syn/6	95	1	5	3.979	0.48
Met/1	95	0	5	2.958	1.78
Met/2	95	0	4	2.821	1.83
Stl/4	95	0	2	0.995	0.15
Fmt/1	95	0	2	0.911	0.31
Fmt/4	95	0	2	1.284	0.44
Fmt/6	95	0	2	1.132	0.95
S&A/4	95	0	4	2.379	0.81

This descriptive statistics, nonetheless, manifest other minute problems in every sub-section of the criteria. As it can be shown, there is not even one criterion with no deficiencies which demands further attentions and treatments. An overall survey of the results makes the details and ambiguities in literature prominent and proposes new relationships to provide the least SD. We would anticipate that other criteria for quality and relevance of studies and for presentation to improve over time as students gain more experience with the literature. In order to investigate the third question, one independent sample t-test was conducted. But before conducting the test, we acquired the frequency and percentage of males and females whose theses we investigated. It should be mentioned that since we applied a qualitative design, we had to apply all the available theses and naturally the number of males and females were not necessarily equal.

To assess the normality of the variables, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics was used. The level of Significance =.38 which was more than.05. It proved the normality of the data and allowed the possibility of using parametric statistics to analyze them.

To accomplish the assessment, total Mean value of males and females were compared. Homogeneity of variances in two groups was assessed through Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

Table 5.3: Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means	
	F	Sig.	T	Sig
TOTAL Equal variances assumed	4.260	.042	-1.417	.160
Equal variances not assumed			-1.225	.228

The results of the table showed that the level of Equal variance assumed was p=.042 and less than $\alpha = 0.05$, the variance for the two groups were not the same and thus violated the assumption of equal variance. Therefore, the information in the second line of T-test table was used which showed sig = 0.228 > 0.05. It was concluded that H_0 was not rejected. In other words, it proved that there was no significant difference between Males' and Female's total Literature review scores.

It is obvious that if collegial community in Iran has future programs to make an improvement in teaching and learning thesis writing, both groups need equal assistance.

6.   *General Conclusions And Pedagogical Recommendations*

Based on the critical and practical analysis of the generic rhetorical structure of literature reviews in the non-native dissertations of Iranian TEFL Students, the content analysis of interviews and one independent samples t-test, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Although one can find many opinions and findings regarding literature review studies, there is no one absolute recipe to which novice researchers refer and from which they inspire. However, we could track the issues of consensus down on miscellaneous articles, books and other references. The reflection of what is discovered is aggregated in our rubric.

2. While we can talk about the overall principles of a dissertation structuring, it should be noted that writing a dissertation is eventually a creative accomplishment. If, as Oliver (2012) indicates, looking at samples of previous works is considered as one of the sound means of grasping ideas regarding literature review structure, and looking for equilibrium between the literature review and the other parts of the dissertation, we can draw a conclusion that the structure and layout of these 'successful' dissertations have been accepted by the examiners.

3. We can take advantage of examining accepted works to discover the spectrum the literature review section appears in the prototypical samples. As an example, the literature reviews may be divided into two distinct chapters, and sometimes it may not be labeled literature review in the chapter heading. As a result, without moving too far from accepted norms, we can find out the variety extent of the literature review.

4. The total Mean score of 84.432 at an SD of 9.26 reveals the extent of distance from an ideal literature review. It shows that there exist some signs of deficiency in Iranian MA literature reviews which needs to be enhanced and improved.

5. Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics, Punctuation proved to have the least amount of SD while the length of the literature was dedicated the Maximum amount. The Range of the SDs in other criteria is something between these two.

6. The study proved no significant difference between male and female students in this regard.

Based on the results obtained from this study,

1.   The rubric is recommended to be introduced in the students' introductory courses. It will then be beneficial from different aspects:

a.   As for the students, it can be considered as a critique through which they can tackle with the literature section themselves. For each and every probable difficulty they have a criterion in their hand which in the upper stages of development can be used as a self-critique. It should be mentioned again that the final result of literature construction is not a reflection of the first exact skills of novice researchers. Many of the problems have already been verified and corrected. But according to Boot and Bail (2005), faculty members cannot be responsible for teaching the necessary skills in isolation—these skills must be integrated into the curriculum at the program level and clearly communicated and evaluated (p. 12).

b.   If it is considered and discussed as one of the most important references in research courses, it makes the whole exploit with a collaborative spirit where:

 i.   Students seriously enter the academic community of TEFL researchers and engage in serious academic work.

 ii.   Teachers are also there to make pedagogical support and strengthen their research base. It actually assists faculty members to consolidate their academic roles as instructors.

iii.   Besides, it helps fresh faculty members in their transition from graduate students to formal university instructors.

2.   Further studies on further university students are required to help increase the validity of the investigation. In case of qualitative studies we need more samples to consolidate our assumptions. If the result shows some deficiencies in this respect, a need is felt in research courses to pay more attention to this specific section, since it supports and reflects all the endeavor researchers have made in several aspects. Through a literature review a sweeping conclusion can be justified as it can draw on studies that applied various methods and measures. We can acknowledge that it is not definitely an easy going task in which many of the vital steps are remained bungled.

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