

**PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



**Exploring Graduate Students' Challenges in Dissertation  
Writing: The Case of Master 2 Didactics Students at Blida 2  
University – Department of English**

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctorate LMD in Applied Linguistics and TEFL**

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## **Declaration of Authorship and Originality**

I, Abla Benbellal, declare that the thesis entitled:

“Exploring Graduate Students’ Challenges in Dissertation Writing: The Case of Master 2 Didactics Students at Blida 2 University, Department of English”

Is my own work and was composed as a result of my original research. This thesis has not been submitted to any other degree or qualification. I also certify that the sources I used or quoted in my work have been all acknowledged by means of complete references.

**Date:** December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Signed:** Ms. Abla Benbellal

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to:

- My dear parents
- My lovely sisters: Soumia, Sarah, and Nawel
- My niece “Imene” and my nephew “Iyed”
- The memory of my dear aunt and uncle: “Zhor” and “Allal” BENBELLAL
- My friends: Djamila Houamdi, Walida Laraba, Fatma Zohra Sahraoui, Meriem Kali, Khadidja Remel, Sadjia Badaoui, Djihed Mohamedi, and Khadidja Cherguelaine.
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## **Abstract**

Writing a dissertation is a prerequisite for the award of the Master's degree. However, despite the fact that Master's students in the English Department -at Blida 2 University- are introduced to the fundamentals of research writing and methodology in academic writing and research skills classes, many students are still far from being able to write a successful dissertation that adheres to the academic research writing standards. This is believed to be due to a number of challenges related to the schematic structure of the dissertation and research methodology. This doctoral research, therefore, attempts to explore the challenges experienced by graduate students, from the Department of English at Blida 2 University, in writing the Master's dissertation. More specifically, this research is mainly concerned with the challenges related to the content/schematic structure of the following parts: The Abstract, the General Introduction, the Literature Review Chapter, the Method Chapter, the Results and Discussion Chapter, and the General Conclusion. This research also sheds light on the reasons why most Master's students in the Department of English failed to write a successful dissertation, and suggests an academic framework and techniques that will hopefully assist the students and supervisors overcome, or at least alleviate, the content-related challenges and achieve quality work. To this end, an exploratory concurrent-nested design was adopted using various investigative methods namely: two questionnaires administered to 28 graduate students majoring in didactics and 10 teachers, two semi-structured follow-up interviews conducted with students and teachers, and an additional in-depth document analysis of six randomly selected dissertations using Chen and Kuo's framework (2012). The research findings showed that most students were not fully aware of the content of the dissertation parts. The data obtained from the research tools showed that the literature review was the most difficult chapter to write, followed by the results and discussion chapter, then the general introduction, the method chapter and the general conclusion, while the least difficult part was the abstract. Further, it was found that the majority of students lacked summarizing and paraphrasing skills, and experienced serious challenges in making their writing coherent and cohesive. According to the participants, the aforementioned challenges were primarily due to four main factors namely: lack of practice and ineffective training in academic writing and research skills classes, lack of supervisor's guidance, and absence of a common assessment framework. On the basis of these results, a number of pedagogical implications are offered. The study argues for more attention to developing students' research writing through organizing training workshops on aspects of dissertation writing and research

methodology, allocating sufficient time and opportunities to practice writing and research skills, showing instead of telling students what to do (i.e.; using exemplars), and incorporating student-centered activities such as peer and self-assessment, and designing assessment rubrics. These activities are believed to be beneficial for students to promote their reflective-critical thinking skills and self-regulation. Besides, the pedagogical implications of this research have potential to support and improve research supervision and the assessment process through stressing the need for designing a common analytic rubric for assessing Master's dissertations and rethinking feedback practices of the dissertation advisors.

**Key words:** Challenges, Master's Dissertation, Schematic Structure, Applied Linguistics & Didactics, Graduate students, EFL, University of Blida 2,

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

|             |                               |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Ab</b>   | Abstract                      |
| <b>IN</b>   | Introduction                  |
| <b>LR</b>   | Literature Review             |
| <b>M</b>    | Method                        |
| <b>RD</b>   | Results and Discussion        |
| <b>GC</b>   | General Conclusion            |
| <b>MA</b>   | Master                        |
| <b>EFL</b>  | English as a Foreign Language |
| <b>ST</b>   | Student                       |
| <b>T</b>    | Teacher                       |
| <b>SQD</b>  | Split Questionnaire Design    |
| <b>CARS</b> | Create A Research Space       |

# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

## **General Introduction**

### **1. Background of the Study**

In Algerian universities, including Blida 2 University, writing a dissertation is a requirement for Master's students in order to graduate. Students are supposed to write a research project of approximately 60 to 70 pages on a specific research topic. This research report is called a 'dissertation' in which students state their research problem, describe the research tools and procedures they followed to investigate the problem, report the findings of their studies, and come up with recommendations that would help develop the field of interest.

Actually, reviewing the few related studies carried out in different contexts (such as Ghana, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Australia, and New Zealand) demonstrated that the process of writing a dissertation represented a nightmare and source of anxiety for the great majority of graduate students due to its challenging nature which made them fail to fully meet the required academic standards for the award of the Master's degree (details are provided in the theoretical chapter). One of the most common challenges, according to earlier studies, was the students' lack of awareness of the communicative functions and content parameters of particular parts of the dissertation namely the literature review and the results and discussion chapters (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Yeh, 2010; Mafa & Mapolisa, 2012; Loan, 2017; Peng, 2018). Apart from content-related challenges, poor supervision and absence of instant feedback were identified as other hurdles that stood in the way of writing a quality dissertation (Wang & Li, 2008; Tiwari, 2019; Wanasighe, 2020). Additionally, poor English language proficiency was a further issue highlighted in Wang and Li's study (2008) which showed that the majority of EFL students were unable to clearly, accurately and coherently express themselves in English.

As far as the Algerian context is concerned, the issue of dissertation writing is still under-explored. We could find only one study (Ghaouar, 2019) that was intended to investigate the challenges experienced by 45 students from Badji-Mokhtar University – Annaba. This questionnaire-based study revealed that writing a Master's dissertation was not an easy task for the majority of students who faced a number of difficulties including lack of relevant sources and reading skills, writing the main parts of the

introduction such as the problem statement and the research questions, writing the review of the literature, writing the conclusion, coherence and cohesion issues.

## **2. Statement of the Problem and the Research Questions**

The Department of English at Blida 2 University offers research skills and academic writing courses (see appendices I & J) to Master's students over a period of three semesters. In these courses, students are introduced to the fundamentals of research methodology and research writing to help them carry out successful and independent research in the field of educational research. More specifically, the students are taught the basics of research, qualitative and quantitative research designs, identifying and defining research problems, formulating research questions, citing and referencing using the APA or MLA styles, research proposal and dissertation writing. However, despite this fairly-good course content, the work submitted by the majority of students at the end of the academic year demonstrated their struggles and confirmed the fact that writing a dissertation is a tough and challenging task.

In fact, interest in dissertation writing challenges stems primarily from our observations during the oral defenses we attended for several years in the English Department. Our observations and the examiners' comments (see examples in Appendix A) showed that most dissertations suffered from a poor and unsatisfactory presentation of the different sections and chapters including the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the research method chapter, data presentation and discussion chapter, and the general conclusion.

The researcher's observations were backed by the perspectives of other teachers, supervising and examining Master's dissertations, from the department where this study took place. Being their colleague, the researcher could easily conduct some informal interviews with the teachers to get a preliminary idea about their perspectives concerning the quality of the work achieved by their students. The teachers maintained that there was a mismatch between what was taught in the research skills and academic writing courses and the students' actual research writing performance. In other words, the teachers claimed that the majority of the dissertations submitted by the students entailed chapters and sections that were improperly written and failed to fulfill the following commonly encountered expectations and requirements of a successful Master's dissertation proposed by Paltridge and Starfield (2007, p.56):

- An original investigation or the testing of ideas;
- Competence in independent work or experimentation;
- An understanding of appropriate techniques as well as their limitations;
- An expert knowledge of the published literature on the topic under investigation;
- Evidence of the ability to make critical use of published work and source materials;
- An appreciation of the relationship between the research topic and the wider field of knowledge;
- The ability to present the work at an appropriate level of literary quality.

Our observations were also sustained by the students' perspectives. As a member of the academic staff in the English Department, the researcher was involved in co-supervising several Master's dissertations. Hence, it was easy to get in touch with the students and have preliminary discussions with them about their experiences with research and dissertation writing. Almost all the students expressed their worries about the difficulty of writing a dissertation especially that they were still novice researchers.

Accordingly, all of the abovementioned results increased our interest in investigating the main challenges that prevented Master's students from writing a successful dissertation. To this end, the following research question is raised:

**RQ1:** What challenges do the students of didactics, at the English Department - Blida 2 University, encounter in writing their Master's dissertations?

Identifying the challenges will inevitably lead us to investigate the factors that are believed to be responsible for the students' failure in writing the different parts of their dissertations. Knowing the reasons, we believe, will help the researcher recommend a set of useful coping strategies and techniques that both students and teachers can adopt to overcome the challenges and facilitate the research writing process. Accordingly, the following research question is asked:

**RQ2:** What factors are believed to be responsible for the challenges experienced by Master's students in writing their dissertations?



### 3. The Research Rationale

In this section, we shall explain why our research is important, identify the gap to be addressed, and discuss the areas of differences between our study and previous works on the topic under investigation.

*a. Significance of the Study:* Our research is significant for the following reasons:

- Theoretically speaking, it aspires to expand the existing body of knowledge on dissertation writing; more specifically the challenges encountered by novice researchers in research writing through an in-depth investigation of students' and teachers' perspectives and a comprehensive analysis of some Master's dissertations.
- It is hoped that the findings of this study will raise students' and teachers, supervising Master's dissertations, awareness of the attributes of a successful dissertation and provide them with insights into the challenges that might be encountered when writing the different parts of the dissertation as well as the contributing factors.
- It is also hoped that the identification of the challenges and the contributing factors will have significant implications for Didactics Master's students, their supervisors and academic writing and research skills teachers to improve the dissertation writing process.

*b. Research Gap and Major Differences in Relation to Previous Studies on the Topic*

A relatively few studies were conducted to investigate graduate students' challenges in dissertation writing in various contexts outside of Algeria (e.g., Ghana, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Australia, and New Zealand). However, the primary focus of most, not to say all, studies that were carried out in the Algerian context was on students' difficulties in writing paragraphs and essays. To the best of our knowledge, only one study (**Ghaouar, 2019**) tackled the difficulties faced by Master's students in writing their dissertations in Algeria, more specifically at Badji-Mokhtar University- Annaba. This scarcity of literature triggered our interest in this research and oriented our attention towards exploring the challenges encountered by Master's students,

from Blida 2 University, in writing their dissertations. Therefore, our study is hoped to act as a reference to other Algerian researchers who will investigate the same issue or any other related issues.

Our study differs from previous works in various aspects:

- Previous works were interested in investigating the generic difficulties (social, cultural, financial, personal, psychological) faced by graduate and post-graduate students in research writing, while our study focuses mainly on content-related difficulties/challenges.
- Except for **Ghaouar (2019)**, no studies shed light on the challenges experienced by Algerian Master's students in writing their dissertations. Our study is intended to explore this issue particularly at Blida 2 University with Master's students majoring in didactics.
- Except for **Bitchener & Basturkmen's (2006)** and **Azila-Gbette et al.'s (2015)** studies which focused on student difficulties in writing the discussion of results section and institutional-student-supervisor related challenges respectively, no studies considered the perceptions of both students and teachers. Our study looks simultaneously at the issue under investigation (i.e.; challenges in dissertation writing) from two different perspectives (i.e.; students Vs. supervisors).
- None of the studies we reviewed in the theoretical chapter (chapter 1, section 1.8) adopted the triangulation method in data collection. Each study used one particular data collection instrument (either questionnaires, interviews or content analysis). In our study, triangulation takes place by collecting data from students' and teachers' questionnaires, students' and teachers' semi-structured interviews and through the document analysis of some dissertations.
- Previous studies that relied on the content analysis of the dissertations (e.g., Loan, 2017) focused their attention on merely checking the presence and absence of particular moves and steps (to be defined later in chapter 1, section 1.1.3) in the dissertation parts. In our study, a detailed-comprehensive document analysis of Master's dissertations is conducted to identify the major content-related and methodological challenges and cross-check the data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews.

#### **4. Scope and Aims of the Study**

This study is delimited to the English Department at Blida 2 University and the findings, conclusions and implications exclusively reflect the actual situation in this context. The primary research aim is to explore graduate students' challenges in dissertation writing. More specifically, this research concentrates in particular on investigating content-related challenges and the extent to which Master's students at Blida 2 University can successfully meet the requirements of writing a good dissertation. This work also attempts to determine the leading causes of the challenges and suggest some pedagogical implications to help Master's students achieve quality work and improve teachers' feedback and supervision practices.

#### **5. Operational Definitions of Key Terms**

- **Dissertation:** In this study, dissertation refers to a research project that is presented by the students at the end of the Master's program.
- **Challenges:** In our study, this term refers to the difficulties/problems/issues particularly related to the schematic structure and content of the Master's dissertation.

#### **6. Thesis Structure**

This doctoral thesis is divided into six interrelated chapters. One chapter represents the theoretical part of the work, while the other five chapters concentrate on the practical part.

The first chapter provides a theoretical background to the present study by shedding light on the main concepts and discussing the relevant literature. This chapter is then divided into eight sections. The first section provides detailed explanations of the main key term in this research - notably genre, dissertation, schematic structure and move – and highlights on the attributes of a good dissertation. This is followed by six sections which focus centrally on discussing the features, communicative purposes, and the schematic structure and content of the main parts that make up the dissertation namely: the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter, and the general conclusion. The last section in chapter one is devoted to a critical review of previous studies on dissertation writing.

The second chapter is mainly concerned with the methodological aspect of this study. First, it describes the research design, setting and participants. Next, it provides a detailed outline of the research process showing how the participants are selected to answer the questionnaire and then conduct the interview, explaining how the research instruments are developed and why they are believed to be appropriate for the collection of the data needed to answer the research questions. Details about the data analysis procedures are also given in this chapter. Last but not least, the method chapter concludes with discussion of possible ways to increase trustworthiness and dependability of the study.

Chapters three, four and five are devoted to presenting the research findings obtained from the students' questionnaire and interview, the teachers' questionnaire and interview and the document analysis of Master's dissertations respectively.

Chapter six summarizes the main research findings and discusses them in relation to the literature and the research questions. It also sheds light on the pedagogical implications of the findings for research writing and supervision. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and suggestions for further research.

# **CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

## **Introduction**

The present chapter reviews the literature (theory and practice) related to our research topic. Because our study aims to identify students' challenges in writing the sections and chapters of Master's dissertations, we believe that the review of the literature chapter should be divided into sections where each section would be devoted to discussing the characteristic features as well as the schematic structure of each section and chapter in the dissertation. This division will later help our study in the analysis of the dissertations. That is, the challenges students encounter in writing the sections and chapters of their dissertations will be later identified on the basis of their characteristics and schematic structure which are discussed in details in the following sections:

The first section aims at defining the major key concepts related to our research such as genre, dissertation, schematic structure, move and step. Section two discusses the characteristics and structure of the abstract. Then, the generic section headings included in the general introduction of a dissertation are highlighted and a detailed examination of the major related frameworks on the schematic structure of this section is provided. The next section describes the attributes of a good literature review and highlights its importance in a dissertation. It also examines the main frameworks that focused on studying the structure and content of the literature review chapter. This is followed by section five which provides a detailed description and discussion of the features and function of the methodology chapter as well as the models of analysis used to analyze its schematic structure. As for the characteristics, function and major analysis frameworks related to results and discussion chapter and the general conclusion, they are discussed in section six and seven respectively. Finally, the last section in this chapter reviews some related studies on dissertation writing challenges.

### **1.1. Dissertation as a Genre**

Before providing a detailed discussion of the sections and chapters that make up a master's dissertation and the main genre analysis frameworks, we believe it is important to define some key concepts that are relevant to the topic under discussion and genre analysis.

### **1.1.1. What is Genre: Definition and Characteristics**

Genre is defined by Swales (1990) as:

A class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation (p. 58).

This definition involves a set of criteria that writers should rely on to define a particular genre. They are listed as follows:

- **A genre is a class of communicative events:** According to Swales' description, an event is said to be communicative only if it is expressed through verbal language. He claims that activities which rarely require the use of verbal language – i.e.; “in which talk is incidental” (p. 45) – such as physical exercises and household chores are not seen as communicative. Additionally, Swales notes that communicative events differ in terms of their frequency of occurrence (i.e.; very frequent Vs. infrequent) and are highly influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they occur.
- **The principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes:** According to Swales, a genre is defined and distinguished from other genres on the basis of shared *communicative purposes* that are identified by discourse community members. In this sense, he points out that “it is communicative purpose that is the prototypical criterion for genre identity” (p.10).
- **Exemplars or instances of genres vary in their prototypicality:** In his framework, though he stressed the crucial role of the communicative purpose in determining genre membership, Swales claims that there are other important elements

that writers need to consider in order “to identify the extent to which an exemplar is prototypical of a particular genre.” (p. 52). These elements include “form, structure and audience expectations.” (ibid). Swales further adds that instead of relying on the exact features shared between the text and the genre category, “family resemblances” (Wittgenstein, 1985 as cited in Swales, 1990, p.50) should be the basis upon which writers determine genre membership (i.e., a given text belongs to a particular genre). In Swales’ words: “it might be the case what holds shared membership together is not a shared list of defining features, but inter-relationships of a somewhat looser kind” (p. 49).

- **The rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning and form:** According to Swales, there is an interdependent relationship between the communicative purpose, the rationale and the schematic structure of a particular genre which in turn influences the content of the text and the writer’s word choice. That is, the communicative purpose shapes the rationale and the latter “determines what Martin (1985) refers to as the schematic structure of the discourse and also constrains lexical and syntactic choice” (ibid., p. 53). Swales further adds that the communicative purpose (rationale) of a specific genre is better identified by what he calls ‘established members of a discourse community’ (i.e.; experts who know the conventions of that genre) than non-established members (i.e.; apprentice).
- **A discourse community’s nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight:** According to this principal, only professional and expert discourse community members can best name different communicative events. This is because these “active discourse community members” (p. 54) are more knowledgeable about the writing conventions of each genre than novice members or outsiders.

### ***1.1.2. Definition of Discourse Community***

As noticed in the definition of genre and its characteristic features, the concept ‘discourse community’ is mentioned quite often as, according to Swales, it plays a pivotal role in shaping rhetorical conventions of a genre and determining its communicative purpose. For Swales, a discourse community refers to a group of people who share the same objectives, assumptions and interests and work on accomplishing them through employing various ways of communication. In his attempt to better clarify the meaning of



this concept, Swales (1990, pp. 24 – 27) suggests the following criteria that he believes are “necessary and sufficient for identifying a group of individuals as a discourse community” (p. 24):

- a. A discourse community has a broadly agreed set of common public goals.
- b. A discourse community has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members.
- c. A discourse community uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback.
- d. A discourse community utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.
- e. In addition to owing genres, a discourse community has acquired some specific lexis.
- f. A discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursual expertise.

### ***1.1.3. Definitions of Schematic Structure, Move, and Step***

As already mentioned, every genre has a set of communicative purposes to achieve. These communicative purposes, according to Wang (2016), are realized through schematic structures which consist of a set of moves and steps.

As far as the term ‘schematic structure’ is concerned, it simply refers to the way the text is organized. In Wang’s words: “the term schematic structure can simply refer to the staged and step-by-step organization of the genre.... Each stage in the genre contributes a part of the overall meanings that must be made for the genre to be accomplished successfully” (ibid., p. 321). This organization of genre, as we shall see in the next sections of this chapter, is achieved through the different sections (sentences) of the text which fulfil a variety of communicative functions. These sections are called ‘moves’. According to Lorés (2004), “move is a functional term that refers to a defined and bounded communicative act that is designed to contribute to one main communicative objective, that of the whole text” (p. 282). The communicative purpose of each rhetorical move in the text is in turn realized through a smaller unit called ‘step’. The latter is defined by Wang (2016) as “a lower text unit than the move in that it provides a detailed perspective on the options open to the writer in setting out the moves.” (p. 321)

#### **1.1.4. Difference between Dissertation and Thesis**

Given the fact that they share some common characteristics, the terms ‘dissertation’ and ‘thesis’ are used interchangeably in many academic contexts. For instance, both are academic papers that have the same format and structure. This means, they both contain the same sections (introduction, conclusion, list of references and appendices) and chapters (literature review, research design and results and discussions). In addition, both thesis and dissertation serve the same academic purpose. According to Thomas and Brubaker (2000), both of them “provide graduate students guided practice in conducting and presenting research and make a contribution to the world’s fund of knowledge or to improve the conduct of some activity” (p. 1). Last but not least, both theses and dissertations have to be orally defended by candidates, in front of a jury which consists of a supervisor and a group of examiners, in order to obtain an academic degree. However, here similarities between the two concepts end and differences begin. According to the literature, thesis and dissertation are used differently in different contexts. For example, in American universities, Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) used the term thesis to refer to a research project that is submitted by Master’s students at the end of the program to get their academic degree (i.e., Master), while they referred to a doctoral research project as ‘a dissertation’. According to them, the two differ in terms of length where a doctoral dissertation is longer than Master’s thesis. Another difference lies in the way the research topic is treated and data are analyzed. That is to say, in a doctoral dissertation, a thorough investigation of the topic under study is required as the candidates should contribute to knowledge development in the field. Nevertheless, given the amount of time students have to conduct research, a Master’s thesis deals with the topic in a less complex way through employing a simple methodology.

In other contexts, however, such as UK and Australia (Hyland, 2004) and even some Algerian universities, the two terms are reversed (i.e., Master’s **dissertation** and Ph.D. **thesis**). In the Australian context for example, though Paltridge and Starfield (2007) disagree with Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) in regard to the use of each term, they mention nearly the same points of differences between Master’s and doctoral research projects. According to them, the former should demonstrate the researcher’s understanding of the main steps to conduct research, ability to do an independent work and skills to synthesize, analyze and critically evaluate ideas. However, in addition to the aforementioned requirements, a doctoral thesis should “demonstrate authority in the area of research”

(p.56). That is, the student is expected to have an expert and up-to-date knowledge of the area of the study and research that is relevant to their particular topic.

In our research, we are going to follow the UK academic conventions and use the term ‘*dissertation*’ to refer to master’s research project.

#### ***1.1.5. Definition and Purpose of a Dissertation***

In the simplest terms, a dissertation is defined as a long academic paper that is submitted by Master’s students at the end of the program (i.e., Master 2) in order to graduate and get an academic degree. In this paper, students clearly state the research problem, provide a detailed description of the research tools employed and the procedures followed to investigate the problem and finally report the research findings.

With regard to the purposes served by a dissertation, Lovitts and Wert (2009) note that a dissertation is an academic document that examiners rely on to examine and evaluate quality of the research conducted by the student. That is, it shows them the extent to which the candidate is skilled, competent and qualified to be a successful and an effective member in the academic community. Moreover, a dissertation is considered as “a training document” (p.2) that provides the candidates with opportunities to develop their creativity, writing, research, critical thinking and problem-solving skills and prepares them to be experts in their field of research.

#### ***1.1.6. Attributes of a Successful Dissertation***

A group of researchers (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Evans et al., 2014; O’Hara et al., 2011; White, 2002) concur that a good dissertation should exhibit the following characteristics:

**A. Good writing and clear academic format:** A good dissertation should be well-written and adheres to academic writing conventions. That is, writers should pay attention to their language, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Also, writers should consider the use of appropriate cohesive devices to show how ideas, paragraphs, sections and chapters are related and connected to one another. Besides, writers should follow a standard and accepted format of writing and referencing. For example, in the introduction, writers should include the following elements: background to the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, research question(s) and so on.

**B. A thorough knowledge of the literature:** A good dissertation should demonstrate writers' familiarity and deep understanding of the available literature as well as their ability to discuss and evaluate strengths and weaknesses of previous related studies.

**C. Originality:** A good dissertation should be an original contribution to the area of interest. This originality, according to Biklen and Casella (2007), can take various forms. "It adds new information, provides an interesting perspective on a subject, proposes a new approach to a topic, offers a sophisticated analysis of an issue, presents rich descriptions of a group that has never been studied" (p.12).

**D. Relevance to the context of existing knowledge:** A good dissertation should show the link between the focus of the study undertaken and previous relevant works and theories.

**E. Researcher's critical and analytical thinking skills:** According to White (2002), "a dissertation gives you a chance to show how good you really are. A dissertation is an excellent indicator of a student's true ability" (p.4). Writers' critical thinking and analytical skills are mainly shown in the literature review, the research design and the discussion chapters. It is there where students are expected to demonstrate their deep understanding of the topic and voice as writers. To this end, the literature review chapter should not be a mere description of what was done and who did it. Writers should rather identify key variables and theories, show relationships between previous works, critically evaluate and comment on ideas of other researchers in the field and identify areas that are still under-explored and need to be worked on (i.e., gap). With regard to the research design chapter, candidates should justify the appropriateness of the design and research instruments they employed to investigate the problem under discussion and answer the research question(s). Also, they should explain how methodological flaws in previous studies were addressed in their research. Moreover, in the discussion chapter, writers should provide detailed interpretations and explanations of the findings, and show how they support or contradict previous studies' results.

Other features of a good dissertation, according to Evans et al. (2014) and Hart (1998), include:

- A clear and descriptive title that informs readers of the content and focus of the dissertation.
- Clear research objectives and accurate definitions of key terms.
- Significant research problem.

- Clear relationship between theory (theoretical approaches) and practice (methodological approaches). That is, showing how the research design of the study was built upon the available literature.
- Clear and detailed description of the research design and data collection and analysis procedures.
- Significant contribution of the study to development of knowledge in the area of interest in particular and the academic community in general.
- Well-developed conclusions based on the research findings and research framework.
- Acknowledgement of the study's weaknesses.
- Suggestions for future research on the basis of the study limitations.

## 1.2. Writing the Abstract

### 1.2.1. *Definition and Importance*

Though it is the last section to write, the importance of the abstract has been increasingly articulated by many scholars such as, Dos Santos (1996), Hyland (2004), Cross and Oppenheim (2006), and Murray and Beglar (2009) who maintain that an abstract is one of the mandatory elements of a research paper, a research article, a thesis or a dissertation. It is the first section which influences readers' decision whether they should purchase and read the whole document at hand or just ignore it (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2004). In Dos Santos' words (1996), "abstracts have increasingly become a highly common and almost obligatory genre in the primary communication of research findings, owing perhaps precisely to their usefulness" (p.482).

An abstract is a short summary of the whole work. It is defined by Bhatia (2013) as "a description or factual summary of the much longer report, and is meant to give the reader an exact and concise knowledge of the full article" (p. 147). In other words, it is the first section that readers encounter after the title which provides readers with the most important information found in the body of the paper (Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2004). Similarly, Cross and Oppenheim (2006) refer to an abstract as a "condensed document representation" (p.430) which helps readers select and evaluate the relevance and importance of documents based on six criteria: **brevity** (a short text which is concise and summarizes the necessary points) , **exhaustivity** (a text which covers the most important points in the paper), **accuracy** (faithful representation of the document's content), **density** (the abstract should

not be so short that important information are missing and hence, the comprehension process will be difficult), **clarity** (accurate use of language to facilitate readers' understanding of the document' content) and **content** (this refers to main parts to be included in a specific type of abstracts: descriptive or informative) (ibid.).

Due to their importance and usefulness, abstracts have become obligatory sections in academic papers. In fact, almost all genre researchers, such as Dos Santos, 1996; Huckin, 2001; Hyland, 2004; Cross and Oppenheim, 2006; and Bhatia, 2013, agree on the fact that the main communicative function of abstracts is providing readers with a summary of the paper's content. They emphasize the significant role of abstracts and the key words that follow them in influencing the reader's decision whether the text is worth reading or not. In addition to summarizing the article, abstracts serve many other functions. For example, Huckin (2001) states that abstracts are used as:

- (a) **Mini-texts:** They provide readers with information about the research context, the methodology used, the main results and conclusions drawn on the basis of those results without having to read the full-text document.
- (b) **Screening devices** to assess the quality of papers and decide whether the paper is worth reading or not.
- (c) **Previews:** They give readers an idea of what the document is about, "an interpretive frame" (p.93) before reading it.
- (d) **"Aids to indexing** by professional indexers for large data base services." (ibid.)  
Therefore, they (abstracts) enable readers to quickly retrieve and access data.

### ***1.2.2. Types of Abstracts***

According to Lorés (2004), on the basis of their structure, content and communicative functions, abstracts can be categorized into two major types: indicative and informative abstracts. An indicative/descriptive abstract "helps readers understand the general nature and scope of the research article; it indicates the subject and the main findings of the paper, but it does not go into a detailed step-by-step account of the process involved" (ibid., p.282). However, in an informative abstract, which is referred to as "results-driven abstract" in Loutayf (2017, p.18), readers are provided with specific information about the research problem under discussion, the research methods used and the procedures followed, the main results and the conclusions drawn based on those results.

In terms of clarity, persuasion, usefulness and informativeness, students are most likely expected to write informative abstracts (results-driven) for their dissertations and theses. This type of abstracts, according to Stapleton (2012), is more favored by readers than indicative abstracts (or summary-driven abstracts as Loutayf (2017, p.19) called them). This is due to the fact that the latter do not provide readers with enough information about the research context and more details about the methodology used. Therefore, it is believed that articles with descriptive abstracts would lose their readership as they are, to some extent, vague and fail to convince readers to read the full document. In this sense, Stapleton (2012) writes: “indicative abstracts are the lazy way of writing an abstract; many journals will ask for a more informative version” (p. 30). However, given the amount of information provided, informative abstracts “serve the dual function of aiding the assessment of document relevance, and also serve as substitutes for the original when only a cursory knowledge of the subject is needed” (Cross & Oppenheim, 2005, p. 432).

### ***1.2.3. Difference between Abstracts and Introductions***

Abstracts and introductions are two genres which have been extensively tackled in many studies (e.g., Bhatia, 2013; Cross & Oppenheim, 2006; Dos Santos, 1996; Hyland, 2004; Kosasih, 2018; Lorés, 2004; Loutayf, 2017; Samraj, 2005; Swales, 1981, 1990, 2004;). Abstracts and introductions are the key elements in research papers, theses or dissertations. Many readers think that these two sections belong to the same genre. Hence, they are similar in terms of features and schematic structure. This is because, as Bhatia (2013) maintains, the two genres share one common point which is introducing the purpose of research. That is to say, in introductions, the first step (i.e., outlining purposes or announcing present research) in the last move in the CARS model (i.e., Move 3: Occupying the niche) appears as the first move in abstracts (Introducing purpose). However, Bhatia (2013) sees that though the two genres share common points in terms of “their contextual configuration” (p.144), mainly the same research setting, the same mode of communication (the written mode) and same participant relationships and level of formality, they serve different communicative functions. “Therefore, [abstracts and introductions] display different cognitive structuring, so that they remain distinct as genres” (ibid., p.146). In line with this claim, Swales (1990) notes that the aim of abstracts is to inform readers of the main points of the whole paper whereas, introductions aim at stating research in context and showing why the research is important to do (Cited in Bhatia, 2013). That is to say, introductions should cover particular academic elements such as, introducing the paper,

establishing context for the study through, briefly reviewing previous research relevant to the topic under discussion, showing the gap in the literature and the value of the research and outlining purposes and the structure of the paper. On the other hand, abstracts summarize the whole paper and, thus, include information about the purpose of the research, the methodology, results and conclusions (Bhatia, 2013).

In fact, Bhatia's (1993) and Swales (1990) models were used in Samraj's study (2005) to analyze abstracts and introductions respectively. Her attempt was to show the relationship between the two genres (abstracts and introductions) in two disciplines: Conservative Biology and Wildlife Behavior. Twelve (12) abstracts and introductions were selected randomly (from the same articles) from the two journals.

The results of the analysis revealed that the nature of the discipline had great influence on the rhetorical structure of the text and the relationship between genres. One of the main results of Samraj's study appears to contradict Bhatia's claim that the two genres may sometimes have similar communicative functions in some disciplines. In Samraj's words, "abstracts may not just be a synopsis of the research article but may also include rhetorical moves more commonly found in introductions" (Samraj, 2005, p.153). For example, in Conservative Biology, it was found that there was an overlap between the two genres in that the first step (Claiming centrality) in the first move (establishing territory) in Swales model was present in introductions and abstracts as well. In addition to having, approximately the same rhetorical structure, the results demonstrated that introductions also bore a greater resemblance to abstracts in terms of "semantic constituency" (ibid., p.149) and their "persuasive function" (ibid., p.151) to affirm the centrality of the topic under discussion. However, with regard to the second discipline (Wildlife Behavior), there seems to be an overlap between the results of Samraj's study and Bhatia's claim as there is a big difference in terms of communicative purpose and the rhetorical structure of abstracts and introductions. In this regard, Samraj writes: "the Wildlife Behavior abstracts generally tend not to include the moves that perform a persuasive function in article introductions" (p.152).

#### ***1.2.4. Schematic Structure and Content of the Abstract: Discussion of the Main Frameworks***

It is worth noting that the rhetorical structure of abstracts in research articles has been widely examined in many studies such as, Dos Santos (1996), Lorés (2004), Pho (2008),



and Suntara and Usaha (2013). In contrast, literature on abstracts in theses and dissertations is very limited. This is, according to Lorés (2004), due to the fact that abstracts in research articles have a wider readership. In Lorés' words, "They [research article abstracts] constitute the gateway that leads readers to take up an article, journals to select contributions, or organizers of conferences to accept or reject papers" (p.281).

One difference between abstracts in the two genres (i.e., research articles and dissertations) can be recognized in their length where dissertations' abstracts are longer than research articles' abstracts. In addition, Ren and Li (2011) believe that another significant difference between abstracts in research articles and those in theses and dissertations appears in terms of the type of the communicative function the writers focus on. That is, research articles are generally written by experts whose main objective is not to inform but rather to persuade readers to read their papers through selecting appropriate moves and "confidently mak[ing] choices to best serve their purpose" (ibid., p.164). However, in theses and dissertations which are often written by inexperienced students, attention is paid to the informative function, where students include all moves in order to avoid criticism, rather than the persuasive function.

One of the best-known move-based frameworks employed to analyze the rhetorical structure of abstracts in research articles and, later, dissertations and theses is that of Bhatia (1993, 2013) who emphasized the informative function of an abstract and proposed a four-move model, as shown in Table 1.1. in the following page, to analyze this section in research articles. In this model, each move aims at answering the following research questions: "(a) What the author did? (b) How the author did it? (c) What the author found? (d) What the author concluded?" (p.147).

In fact, Bhatia's schematic structure seems to be the most appropriate for the analysis of abstracts in various disciplines. It has been used by many researchers in their studies on abstracts in research articles, theses and dissertations (e.g., Kosasih, 2018; Lorés, 2004; Samraj, 2005) because in the process of scientific inquiry, this four-move structure involves the most important moves (i.e., purpose, methods, results and conclusions) (Salager-Meyer, 1990) and it is generally mentioned in a large number of manuals and guidelines for article and thesis/dissertation writing (Hyland, 2004). In this sense, Salager-Meyer (1990) argues that "these four units are the ones which are generally required from

contributors in scholarly journals, scientific style manuals and rules for submitting abstracts at international congress” (p.370).

**Table 1.1**

*Bhatia’s Four-move Structure for the Analysis of Abstracts (Bhatia, 2013, pp. 148-149)*

| <b>Moves</b>                          | <b>Functions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Introducing purpose</b>    | This move gives a precise indication of the author’s intention, thesis or hypothesis which forms the basis of the research being reported. It may also include the goals or objectives of research or the problem that the author wishes to tackle. |
| <b>Move 2: Describing methodology</b> | The author gives a good indication of the experimental design, including information on the data, procedures or method(s) used and, if necessary, the scope of the research being reported.                                                         |
| <b>Move 3: Summarizing results</b>    | This is an important aspect of abstracts where the author mentions his observations and findings and also suggests solutions to the problem, if any, posed in the first move.                                                                       |
| <b>Move 4: Presenting conclusions</b> | This move is meant to interpret results and draw inferences. It typically includes some indication of the implications and applications of the present findings.                                                                                    |

In addition to the informative function of abstracts, Hyland (2004) emphasizes the great influence of the persuasive function of abstracts on readers’ selection and decision to read articles. In this regard, Hyland writes: “Abstracts, on the other hand, have both a more modest and more urgent purpose: to persuade readers that the article is worth reading.... It [abstract] does so in such a way as to encourage further examination and draw the reader into the more detailed exposition” (p.64).

In his qualitative study, which aimed at analyzing the generic structure of 800 abstracts from 10 journals over 8 disciplines, Hyland (2004) proposed a five-move framework in which he separated the introduction from the purpose of the study because he believed that the former (introduction) had a different function which was establishing context for the research and showing its significance to motivate and encourage readers to continue reading the paper. He, thus, identified the following moves in his schematic structure: introduction, purpose, method, product and conclusion (see Table 1.2.)

**Table 1.2**

*Hyland’s Five-move Structure for the Analysis of Abstracts (Hyland, 2004, p.67)*

| <b>Moves</b>                | <b>Functions</b>                                                               |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Introduction</b> | Establishes context of the paper and motivates the research or discussion.     |
| <b>Move 2: Purpose</b>      | Indicates purpose, thesis or hypothesis, outlines the intent behind the paper. |
| <b>Move 3: Method</b>       | Provides information on design, procedures, assumptions, approach, data...etc  |
| <b>Move 4: Product</b>      | States main findings or results, the argument or what was accomplished         |

|                               |                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 5:<br/>Conclusion</b> | Interprets or extends results scope of paper, draws inferences, points to applications or wider implications. |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Regarding disciplinary differences in abstract structures, the results of the study demonstrated that the majority of writers in soft disciplines such as humanities and social sciences included three moves in their abstracts namely: **introduction** (I), **purpose** (P) and **product** (Pr) while in hard knowledge domains, writers omitted the introductory move in their abstracts and focused mainly on describing the **method/design** move (M) in addition to stating the **purpose** of the study (P) and the main **findings** (Pr). Hyland concluded that these preferences were strongly related to the readers' familiarity with the field (shared knowledge) and their ability to understand the content and see the value of the research being reported. That is to say, in hard disciplines, writers of abstracts directly start by stating the purpose without establishing context for their research because "they can anticipate that readers will be able to access these understandings to determine the value of the research, the productivity of the procedures, the theoretical rationale of the study, and its significance to the incremental development of knowledge" (p.71). However, these clear understandings and shared knowledge are absent in soft domains. Therefore, writers of abstracts need to work hard in order to clearly introduce the research to readers and convince them of its significance. This is why abstracts in soft disciplines are characterized by "the presence of sometimes lengthy introductions...to accommodate and engage explicitly with readers" (p.72). However, the results of Samraj' study (2005), as described in the previous section, demonstrated that this was not always the case as the introductory move (**I**) was not only mandatory in soft disciplines but also in some hard knowledge domains such as conservation biology. Hence, according to Samraj, the writers' focus should be on the persuasive function of abstracts and providing enough background to their readers to contextualize their research.

Another study, which aimed at analyzing the structure of 36 abstracts selected from 4 journals (9 abstracts from each journal) in the field of linguistics, was conducted by Lorés in 2004. The results of the analysis revealed that the majority of the abstracts followed the IMRD rhetorical structure which matches the informative type and includes four moves: **(a) Introduction**, in which the author states the purpose of the study and the research problem, **(b) Methods**, in which the author states the research tools used and the procedures followed to tackle the problem, **(c) Results**, a section which summarizes the main findings, and **(d) Discussion**, in which results are interpreted and implications are offered. Lorés

believes that this rhetorical structure (IMRD) best “fulfills the informative function, a function which pervades the entire paper, step by step” (p.283).

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that, in some abstracts, the most favored rhetorical structure was the CARS structure which is followed in indicative (descriptive) abstracts. This structure includes three moves (establishing a territory, establishing a niche, occupying the niche) and each move is made up of various steps as shown in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3**

*The CARS Rhetorical Structure for the Analysis of Indicative Abstracts (Lorés, 2004, p.284)*

| Moves                                   | Steps                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Establishing a territory</b> | (a) Claiming centrality<br>(b) Making topic generalizations<br>(c) Reviewing items of previous research                                    |
| <b>Move 2: Establishing a niche</b>     | (a) Counter-claiming<br>(b) Indicating a gap<br>(c) Question-raising<br>(d) Continuing a tradition                                         |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying a niche</b>        | (a) Outlining purposes or announcing present research<br>(b) Announcing present findings<br>(c) Indicating RA (research article) structure |

However, Lorés (2004) found out that a few abstracts followed neither the first structure (IMRD) nor the second one (CARS), but rather a combination of both structures. Hence, she identified a third structure which she called “Combinatory structure” (p.286). That is, these abstracts generally follow the IMRD structure including the moves of the CARS model mainly in the introductory section as shown in the Table 1.4. This type of rhetorical structure, Lorés maintains, fulfills the function of a third type of abstracts called ‘informative-indicative abstracts.’

**Table 1.4**

*The Combinatory Rhetorical Structure for the Analysis of Informative-indicative Abstracts (Source: Lorés, 2004)*

| Moves                                                                                                            | Functions                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Introduction</b><br>(a) Establishing a territory<br>(b) Establishing a niche<br>(c) Occupying a niche | Provides an overview of the topic, states the purpose of the study and the research problem to be studied. |
| <b>Move 2: methods</b>                                                                                           | States the research tools used and the procedures followed to answer the research question(s)              |

|                           |                                                              |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 3: Results</b>    | States the main findings                                     |
| <b>Move 4: Discussion</b> | Draws conclusions and suggest implications and applications. |

Additionally, based on the results of the analysis, Lorés declared that the structure of the abstract (indicative or informative) followed was, to a great extent, influenced by the position writers adopted when they wrote their research reports. That is to say, in indicative abstracts which followed the CARS structure, writers were more “active agents” (p.299) than writers of informative abstracts following the IMRD structure who “tend to hide behind real-world entities and processes.” (ibid.). Therefore, unlike Hyland’ study (2004) which revealed that abstracts in social sciences and humanities (soft disciplines) often followed the CARS structure which served the persuasive function and allowed writers to clear any confusion in readers’ minds; make readers familiar with the topic under discussion and get their attention and interest to read the whole paper, Lorés (2004) found out that linguistics, which is a soft knowledge domain, did not require writers to follow solely the CARS structure. Rather, depending on the writer’s position, the IMRD structure, which is generally particular to hard knowledge domains (Hyland, 2004), and the combinatory structure could be also followed to write abstracts.

### **1.3. Writing the General Introduction**

The general introduction plays a significant role in the structure of any academic paper including dissertations. However, it is considered as one of the most difficult sections to write (Bunton, 2002; Shaw, 1991) because it serves a very important function which is grabbing readers’ attention and interest to read the work through demonstrating the importance of the research and its contribution to the area of interest. In other words, it is in the introduction that the readers’ impression about the work is shaped. Therefore, although the body might be good in terms of structure and content, writing a weak introduction that fails to convince readers of the significance of the research will result in them losing interest in the whole work. In this regard, Nygaard (2015) writes:

While the introduction may not feel like the most difficult section to write, it is by far the most difficult to write well because it requires you to stop thinking about what is in your head and start thinking about who your readers are and how you can get them to pay attention to you and the story you want to tell (p.104).

### ***1.3.1. Content of the Introduction: An Overview of the Generic Section Headings***

A group of researchers (e.g., Bui, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Gruba & Zobel, 2017; Librero, 2012; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Murray & Beglar, 2009; Roberts, 2010;) agree that the introductory section in a thesis or dissertation should include the following key elements:

**1.3.1.1. Background to the Study:** According to the literature, this is the first section in the introduction. Though this section might have different titles like: *background to the study* (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Roberts, 2010), *background of the issue* (Murray & Beglar, 2009), *background and need* (Bui, 2014) and *context of the study* (Gruba & Zobel, 2017), it serves the same function which is establishing context for the research being conducted by introducing related theoretical frameworks briefly. It also aims at showing the relationship between the topic under discussion and previous research. In Librero's words, the background to the study "contains basic background information and assumptions that show the state of the art of a particular field.... discusses, briefly what you intend to do after establishing the need to provide bridges between what may already be known about the field and what still needs to be known" (2012, p.12).

**1.3.1.2. Statement of the Problem:** The statement of the problem is a section where researchers provide a detailed description of the nature of the issue being studied. Lunenburg and Irby (2008) define the statement of the problem as "a formal and succinct version of the process you went through in selecting and delimiting your topic. Accordingly, it clarifies, outlines, limits, and brings into existence an expression of the problem you investigated. It answers the question of *what* is being done in the study" (p.114).

According to Anderson and Arsenault (1998), Gliner and Morgan (2009), Librero (2012), and Tuckman and Harper (2012), a good dissertation/thesis research problem should exhibit the following features:

**A. Clarity and conciseness:** In their statements of the problem, researchers should clearly explain the variables to be studied and specify in what ways they are related to help readers better understand the research. Also, they ought to avoid including ambiguous and complex terms that might be interpreted differently by the target

audience. In addition, they should consider keeping their problem statements simple, concise and directly to the point.

**B. Feasibility:** This entails taking into account the practical issues related to time. That is, researchers need to check if the allotted time is enough to gain access to the target population, pilot the research tools and collect and analyze data. Moreover, researchers need to take into account other practical issues such as financial expenses and materials used to collect and analyze data. This, for instance, includes checking how much data analysis software or a particular data collection tool cost. In addition to the aforementioned issues, it is of utmost importance to consider the investigator's research skills and his/her ability to address the problem under discussion and answer the research question(s).

**C. Testability:** The statement of the problem should indicate that the problem is testable or verifiable. That is, it should show that necessary methods are available to collect and analyze data and, hence, solve the problem stated. In this vein, Kerlinger (1973) asserts: "a problem that does not contain implications for testing its stated relations of variables is not a scientific problem. This means not only that an actual relation is stated but also that the variables of the relation can somehow be measured" (Cited in Librero, 2012, p.16).

**D. Relevance to the existing body of knowledge:** A good research problem should be based on theoretical and conceptual frameworks and previous research results.

**E. Significance:** A good research problem should be not only interesting to the researcher but also to people in the academic context.

Actually, Lunenburg and Irby (2008) declare that the problem statement serves two principal functions: **(a)** the directional function and **(b)** the unifying function. With regard to the former, the statement of the problem "acts as a control of mechanism" (p. 115); that is, it helps the researcher determine the appropriate research design, the relevant sources and theories s/he needs to review, the exact kind of information needed to achieve the aims of the study as well as the necessary methods for the appropriate analysis and interpretation of data. With respect to the second function, the statement of the problem is considered as the unifying force in the dissertation/thesis owing to the fact that "the presentation and analysis of data, and the findings, conclusions and implications found in subsequent chapters of the dissertation or thesis are all focused on the statement of the problem." (ibid.).

**1.3.1.3. Significance of the Study:** One of the main aims of the introduction is convincing readers that the issue being addressed is worth investigating and has practical applications and solutions that would help improve the field concerned. This aim is achieved in a section titled '*significance of the study*' or '*research rationale*'. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), Murray and Beglar (2009), and Librero (2012), researchers in this section are expected to provide readers with arguments that explain how the study would positively contribute to the development of knowledge in the area of interest. The significance of the study can be reflected in the following questions set by Lunenburg and Irby (2008): “**(a)** why is my study important or valuable? **(b)** will it revise, extend, or create new knowledge? **(c)** does it have theoretical and/or practical application?” (p. 117).

In addition to highlighting the expected practical applications of the study, researchers should show how their research would fill a gap in the literature, or ‘deficiencies in past literature’ as referred to by Creswell (2009), and help answer particular questions that were raised in other studies. It is said that there is a gap in the literature when nothing is known (i.e.; the research problem being studied has never been tackled in previous research); or little is known (i.e.; the issue has been addressed but not thoroughly). This gap in the literature can be related to many aspects such as, a particular population or sample, context of the study, research design and data analysis procedures. In this vein, Creswell (2009) points out:

Deficiencies in past literature may exist because topics not have been explored with a particular group, sample or population. The literature may need to be replicated or repeated to see if the same findings hold, given new samples of people or new sites for study, or the voice of underrepresented groups has not been heard in published literature (p.106).

**1.3.1.4. Purpose of the Study (statement of the purpose):** In this section, researchers are expected to briefly explain what they want to do in their study and state how they, hopefully, will solve the problem that was already addressed in the statement of the problem section. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), this section plays a significant role in informing readers of the main aim behind conducting a particular study. It serves as “a promise to the readers in which you tell them what they will discover if they continue reading your work” (Murray and Begler, 2009, p.152). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) identifies three types of purpose statements each of which is related to a particular



research paradigm. He sees that the purpose statements differ from one paradigm to another in terms of features and components. That is, in qualitative studies, the purpose statements include “information about the central phenomenon explored in the study, the participants in the study and the research site” (ibid, p.169). As for the writing style, these statements are written using particular words such as objective or intent, action verbs like: explore and understand, and neutral and bias-free language (i.e., objective) that does not reflect the researcher’s attitude towards the phenomenon being studied. Besides, writers may use words that indicate the type of the research approach adopted such as ethnographic or grounded theory approach and “include some language that delimits the scope of participation or research sites in the study.... These delimitations help to further define the parameters of the research study” (ibid., p.170). Also, because qualitative research focuses on central phenomena not variables, purpose statements pay particular attention to one central concept or an idea to be explored unlike quantitative research which aims at establishing relationship between two or more variables. In addition to the variables to be examined, purpose statements in quantitative studies show how these variables will be measured and identify the group of participants who will take part in the study and the setting.

Similar to qualitative research, researchers use particular words, such as intent or purpose, to show the aim of the quantitative study. They should also mention the type of research being conducted (e.g., experimental research) in their quantitative purpose statements. Furthermore, researchers should identify the independent variable first followed by the dependent variable and show the relationship between them by using words such as relationship, correlation, or comparison. Moreover, Creswell sees that researchers should include other possible types of variables (such as moderating and mediating variables) that may intervene. In this regard, Creswell notes: “many researchers also place the moderating variables between the independent and the dependent variables. Alternatively, control variables might be placed immediately following the dependent variable in a phrase such as “controlling for...”” (p.173).

Regarding the third type of purpose statements, they are used in mixed methods research designs and combine the features of both approaches (i.e., qualitative and quantitative). According to Creswell, “these statements need to be identified early, in the introduction, and they provide major signposts for the reader to understand the quantitative and qualitative parts of a study” (p. 177). As for the content and the writing style of mixed

methods purpose statements, writers should state the general aim of the study and provide readers with an idea about its content. Moreover, they should stipulate the type of the design adopted, such as exploratory sequential or concurrent mixed methods designs, and provide a rationale for adopting a mixed methods design in their purpose statements.

**1.3.1.5. Research Questions:** After stating the purpose of the study and defining the objectives, researchers formulate research questions which will be answered based on the research findings.

In fact, since the general aim of research is to answer the research question(s), formulating a good research question is not an easy task and requires careful consideration from the researcher to achieve this aim. Put differently, a well-formulated research question helps the researcher narrow the scope and focus of the study and guides her/him throughout the whole research process. In this sense, Halperin and Heath (2012) write:

Formulating a good research question is not as easy as it might first appear. It often demands considerable time and thought and, for many researchers, may be the most difficult part of the research project.... once you have formulated a good research question, the rest of the research process becomes far easier and clearer, and moves along much faster (p.102).

According to Hulley et al. (2007), a good research question has the following characteristics:

**(a) Feasible:** A good research question should be practical and achievable in terms of the number of participants (i.e.; including enough participants in the sample) and the researcher's skills and experience needed for the research design, data collection and analysis. In addition, a research question should be feasible in terms of time, money (i.e., less expensive) and scope (i.e., narrowing the focus of the study to investigate one single aspect of the phenomenon).

**(b) Interesting:** Having an interesting research question makes the researcher more motivated and engaged in the research process. Also, the research question should be interesting to readers and people of the same field as well.

**(c) Novel:** A good research question should contribute to the development of the field of interest. Novelty does not mean that the topic has not been worked on before, but rather the researcher can replicate a previous study to assess the generalizability of the

findings to another population and assess the effectiveness of particular research tools to avoid the pitfalls of previous research.

**(d) Ethical:** A good research question should not tackle any sensitive issues related to people's privacy or the context in which the study is conducted so that it can be approved by the institutional review board.

**(e) Relevant:** A good research question should address an issue related to the existing field of interest so that it can result in some practical applications that would improve this field and suggestions for future research.

Regarding the types of research questions, researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2012; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) point out that research questions in qualitative studies differ from questions in quantitative research in terms of characteristics and the elements they include. That is, the former (i.e., qualitative questions) focus on a central idea to be explored, state the participants and the research setting and specify the type of research design to be adopted. Moreover, Creswell (2012) notes that qualitative research questions are divided into two types: the central question and sub-questions. Regarding the first type, it is the main question of the study and it is always broader and more general than the sub-questions so that it “opens up the research for participants to provide their perspectives and not to narrow the study to [the researcher's] perspective” (ibid., p.132). The sub-questions, however, are more specific and serve as a guide that would help the researcher answer the central question(s). Creswell further divides these sub-questions into two types: (a) issue sub-questions which “narrow the focus of the central question into specific issues” (p.134) to be explored by the researcher; and (b) procedural sub-questions which demonstrate the procedures to be followed in the analysis of qualitative data.

On the other hand, quantitative research questions seek to investigate a possible relationship between two or more variables. According to Drew (1980 as cited in Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) and Creswell (2012; 2014), research questions in quantitative studies are categorized into three main types: **(a) difference questions** (Drew) or **comparison questions** (Creswell, 2012), **(b) relationship questions** and **(c) descriptive questions**. As for the first type of questions, which are generally used in experimental studies, the researcher may **compare** two groups (experimental and control) by manipulating the independent variable to figure out its possible effects on the dependent variable. Relationship questions, on the other hand, aim at measuring the variables to

determine the **correlation** between them while descriptive questions **describe** people's perspectives and attitudes towards the variables studied.

**1.3.1.6. Research Hypotheses:** A research hypothesis is a statement which postulates the expected relationship between the variables studied and predicts the possible answer(s) to the research question(s). According to Creswell (2012), a hypothesis is basically a quantitative research feature, more specifically experimental research feature, which aims at stating the researcher's expectations about the possible findings of the study. These expectations are based on previous research findings or theories which would help researchers predict the outcomes of the study if they replicated the procedures in a different context with a new population. According to Khan (2011), Kumar (2011), Suresh (2014), Ary et al. (2018), and Salkind (2018), a good hypothesis should fulfill the following criteria:

**A) Clarity and conceptual conciseness:** While formulating the hypothesis, researchers need to make sure that the concepts being used are simple, clear and interpreted in the same way by readers. Moreover, researchers should avoid constructing ambiguous hypotheses that do not clearly state the nature of relationship that might exist between variables (e.g., positive or negative) or hypotheses that aim at testing more than one relationship at once.

**B) Testability:** A good hypothesis should be testable or verifiable. That is, expected outcomes and relationship between variables can be identified using particular data collection and analysis instruments. In this regard, Suresh (2014) concurs:

A testable hypothesis clearly states the manipulatable independent variables and measurable dependent variables in specific population, which provides a clear idea about an interventional protocol and whether it will be implemented precisely and consistently as a treatment in the study, as well as understanding about how the dependent variable will be accurately measured (p. 87).

**C) Correspondence with the existing body of knowledge:** A good hypothesis should mirror the theory, assumptions or previous studies' findings upon which it is based.

**D) Relevance:** A good hypothesis should be related to the research problem under discussion, the research objectives and the operational definitions of key concepts.

As for the types of hypotheses, researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2012; Librero, 2012; Salkind, 2018) identified two main categories: null and research (or alternative)

hypotheses. The former are statements which refer to the absence of any effect, difference or relationship between the study variables. Research (or alternative) hypotheses are the opposite of null hypotheses as they state that there is a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This type of hypothesis was further divided into two sub-types: (a) directional hypotheses which predict the specific direction of the effect, difference or relationship between variables; and (b) non-directional hypotheses which state that there is an effect or a relationship between variables but do not specify the nature of the direction of that effect or relationship (Creswell, 2012; Salkind, 2018).

**1.3.1.7. Definitions of Key Terms:** In order to clear up ambiguity and avoid any confusion, writers should provide clear definitions and explanations of the essential terms in a section titled ‘definitions of key terms.’ According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), there are two types of defining the key terms: constitutive and operational. The former refers to providing conceptual or theoretical definitions of terms (i.e., as they are defined in dictionaries and other published materials) (Calmorin & Calmorin, 2007) whereas the latter alludes to defining the term as it is used in the context of the study. That is, an operational definition is “a definition of a variable in terms of the specific actions to measure or indicate it in the empirical world” (Neuman, 2014, p. 207).

### ***1.3.2. Schematic Structure of the General Introduction: Discussion of the Main Frameworks***

Due to its importance, writing the introductory section in academic papers has become the subject of interest of many scholars (e.g., Anthony, 1999; Bunton, 2002; Chen & Kuo, 2012; Samraj, 2002; Swales, 1981, 1990 and 2004) who designed frameworks to analyze the rhetorical structure of introductions in research articles, dissertations, and theses. The aim of this section is, therefore, to shed light on these frameworks and show, step-by-step, how the framework that will be used to analyze the schematic structure of dissertations in our study has been developed.

John Swales’ framework (1981, 1990, 2004) is probably the most well-known framework that was constructed to analyze the structure of introductions in research articles. In 1981, Swales designed the CARS (Create a Research Space) model which included four moves each of which was divided into steps. These moves are: **(1) Establishing field** (by: (a) showing centrality, (b) stating current knowledge, and (c) ascribing key characteristics), **(2) Summarizing previous research** (through: (a) strong

author-orientation, (b) weak author-orientation, and (c) subject orientation), **(3) Preparing for present research** (by: (a) indicating a gap, (b) Question-raising, and (c) Extending a finding) and **(4) Introducing present research** (by: (a) giving the purpose and (b) describing present research) (Bhatia, 2013, pp.150 – 151).

However, this four-move framework had some flaws which made it subject to academic criticism. One of the flaws, as underlined by Swales (1990), was “difficulties of separating Move 1 and Move 2” (p. 140) as noted by many genre analysts who believed that the two moves should be amalgamated. He further added: “The fact that the original corpus was deliberately restricted to short introductions led to the creation of a separate citational category (Move 2 – Summarizing previous research) clearly at odds with the increasing practice of spreading references throughout the introduction (Jacoby, 1986)”. (p. 140).

Swales, therefore, amended the CARS model in 1990 and created a new version in which some modifications were made with regard to the number of moves and the steps included in each move. Thus, the new version of Swales’ model is made up of the following three moves (Biber et al., 2007):

**A) Move 1: Establishing a Territory:** This move is a combination of moves 1 (establishing field) and 2 (summarizing previous research) of the old model (1981). It is achieved through the following steps:

- a) Claiming centrality:** This involves demonstrating the significance of the topic under discussion and stating arguments that show why the research topic is important and worth studying.
- b) Making topic generalizations:** This includes providing readers with a general overview about the topic being studied. This may be in “the form of either statements about knowledge or practice, or statements about the phenomena.” (ibid., p. 26).
- c) Reviewing items of previous research:** By this step, we mean establishing context by briefly referring to the key findings of previous studies in order to inform readers of the situation that resulted in the topic under investigation.

**B) Move 2: Establishing a Niche:** This move is about stating the problem being studied. It is accomplished by four steps:

- a) Counter claiming:** Writers state the limitations of previous studies.

- b) Indicating a gap:** By this step, researchers identify the aspects that were completely ignored or superficially dealt with in previous research.
  - c) Question raising:** This includes turning the gap or problem into research questions. That is, researchers address the research question(s) they want to answer with their research.
  - d) Continuing a tradition:** This refers to “extending previous knowledge in some way” (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 331)
- C) Move 3: Occupying the Niche:** This move is achieved through four steps:
- a) Outlining purposes:** By this step, the researcher is required to explain what s/he wants to achieve by the research being undertaken.
  - b) Announcing present research:** This involves providing a description of the study being carried out.
  - c) Announcing principal findings:** Researchers present the main findings of the study and the conclusions drawn from those findings. It is worth noting that this step, according to Biber et al. (2007), is found in the introductions of articles in specific disciplines.
  - d) Indicating RA (i.e., research article) structure:** This includes informing readers of the organization and structure of the paper. That is, writers give a brief overview about the content of sections (if it is an article) and chapters (if it is a dissertation or a thesis).

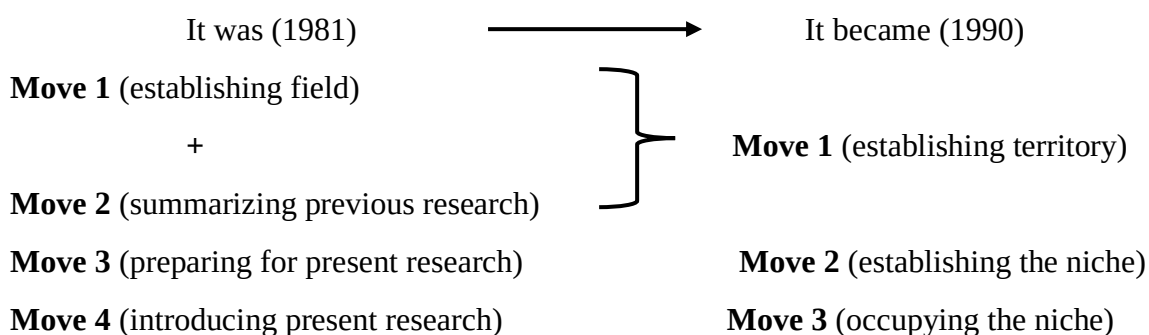
As shown in Table 1.5, modifications were made to the CARS’ model in terms of the number, the order and the names of the moves. To begin with, the number of moves was reduced from four to three moves. That is, Swales combined moves 1 and 2 (i.e.; establishing field and summarizing previous research) in the original version of the CARS model to become move 1 (establishing territory) in the amended model. Additionally, Swales changed the order of the moves in the updated model where moves 1 and 2 have become move 1, move 3 (preparing for present research) has become move 2 (establishing the niche) and move 4 (introducing present research) has become move 3 (occupying the niche).

**Table 1.5**

***Comparison between the Original Version (1981) and the First Updated Version (2004) of Swales' CARS Model***

| Swales' model (1981)<br>Source: Bhatia (2013, pp. 150 – 151) |                                                                                           | Swales' model (1990)<br>Source: Swales (1990, p.141) |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moves                                                        | Steps                                                                                     | Moves                                                | Steps                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing field</b>                        | a) Showing centrality<br>b) Stating current knowledge<br>c) Ascribing key characteristics | <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing a territory</b>          | <b>Step 1</b> Claiming centrality<br><b>Step 2</b> Making topic generalization(s)<br><b>Step 3</b> Reviewing items of previous research                                                    |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Summarizing previous research</b>             | a) Strong author-orientation<br>b) Weak author-orientation<br>c) Subject orientation      | <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing a niche</b>              | <b>Step 1A</b> Counter-claiming<br><b>Step 1B</b> Indicating a gap<br><b>Step 1C</b> Question-raising<br><b>Step 1D</b> Continuing a tradition                                             |
| <b>Move 3:<br/>preparing for present research</b>            | a) Indicating a gap<br>b) Question-raising<br>c) Extending a finding                      | <b>Move 3:<br/>Occupying the niche</b>               | <b>Step 1A</b> Outlining purposes<br><b>Step 1B</b> Announcing present research<br><b>Step 2</b> Announcing principal findings<br><b>Step 3</b> Indicating RA (Research Article) structure |
| <b>Move 4:<br/>Introducing present research</b>              | a) Giving the purpose<br>b) Describing present research                                   |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                            |

As for the last modification, the names that were used to refer to each move were changed as follows:



In fact, even this amended version of the CARS' model (1990) has been subject to criticism from many researchers (such as, Anthony, 1999; Samraj, 2002) who declare that some significant parts that are usually found in introductions are missing in the CARS' model. Hence, they suggested that Swales needed to revise his proposed model and add



some important steps so that it does not remain limited to particular disciplines, but rather it can be applied in any field when analyzing introductions.

One of the researchers who criticized Swales' model (1990) is Anthony who conducted a study in 1999 to evaluate this model in terms of its applicability to the analysis of research articles' introductions in the field of software engineering. The analysis of the introductions revealed that, in addition to the steps already mentioned in the CARS, almost all software engineering introductions included two important steps which were ignored by Swales in his model. One of these steps is 'evaluation of research in terms of its applicability and originality' which was considered as an obligatory fundamental step in the introduction. Moreover, Anthony noted that given the difficulty of the concepts used in software engineering, writers should consider providing detailed explanations of complicated terms in their introductions so as to make readers clearly understand the research. To this end, Anthony suggested adding a new step which involves "definitions of important terms and examples to illustrate difficult concepts" (p. 43).

Similarly, in 2002, Samraj carried out another study which recommended that Swales' model should be updated and account for all possible steps that might be included in research articles' introductions from various disciplines. Using the CARS model (1990), Samraj analyzed the structure of 12 research introductions in two hard knowledge domains: wildlife behavior and conservation biology. Similar to Anthony's study, the results of the analysis demonstrated that there were some important steps which were not included in the CARS' model (1990), yet they were present in the introductions of research articles from both fields. For example, with regard to the second move (i.e.; establishing the niche), it was found that one of the steps followed by writers to achieve this move was by presenting positive reasons that showed the value of the research being undertaken and how it could positively develop the field of interest. Samraj refers to this new step as "positive justification" (p.9). In this regard, Samraj agrees with Anthony who stressed the need to add a new step (evaluation of research) where writers demonstrate the significance of their research. Furthermore, Samraj emphasized the importance of reviewing previous research in that this step should not only appear when establishing territory (move 1), but rather it should be embedded in all moves of article introductions. In this sense, Samraj writes: "discussion of previous research should not be a part of any particular move in the model. Instead, it should be a freestanding sub-step that can be employed in the realization of any step in the introduction" (p.16)

In the light of researchers' suggestions and comments on the CARS' model (1990), Swales came up with an updated model (2004) that accounts for disciplinary variations. In this regard, Biber et al. (2007) state: "His revised model has a broader description of the communicative purposes of Move 1 and Move 2; it also reflects – particularly in Move 3 – the variation that occurs in introductions in different research fields and recognizes the possibility of cyclical patterns of occurrence of the move types within the introduction section" (p.28)

The modified CARS' model has been widely employed in the analysis of introductions of different academic genres (e.g.; articles, dissertations, theses) across various disciplines. Table 1.6. represents a comparison between the revisited version of 1990 and the final version of 2004.

As shown in the table, some modifications were made to the CARS' model so that it can be applied across various disciplines and languages. For example, in the old version (1990), Move 1 (Establishing territory) was accomplished by three steps (claiming centrality, making topic generalizations, and reviewing items of previous research). However, the same move in the amended version (2004) includes only one step which is 'topic generalization of increasing specificity'. Additionally, move 2 in the revised version consists of two steps instead of the four steps which were present in the old version. One of these steps (step 2 presenting positive justification) has been added based on Samraj' comments and suggestions.

**Table 1.6**

***Comparison between the First Updated Version (1990) and the Final Version (2004) of Swales' CARS Model***

| Swales' model (1990)<br>Source: Swales (1990, p.141) |                                                                                                                                         | Swales' model (2004)<br>Source : Kırkgöz & Dikilitas (2018, p.114)       |                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moves                                                | Steps                                                                                                                                   | Moves                                                                    | Steps                                                                           |
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing<br/>a territory</b>      | <b>Step 1</b> Claiming centrality<br><b>Step 2</b> Making topic generalization(s)<br><b>Step 3</b> Reviewing items of previous research | <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing<br/>a territory<br/>(citations required)</b> | <b>Step 1</b> Topic generalization of increasing specificity.                   |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing<br/>a niche</b>          | <b>Step 1A</b> Counter-claiming                                                                                                         | <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing<br/>a niche</b>                              | <b>Step 1a:</b> Indicating a gap<br><br><b>Step 1b:</b> Adding to what is known |

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | <b>Step 1B</b> Indicating a gap<br><b>Step 1C</b> Question-raising<br><b>Step 1D</b> Continuing a tradition                                                                                | (citations possible) via:                       | <b>Step 2 (optional):</b> <i>Presenting positive justification.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the niche</b> | <b>Step 1A</b> Outlining purposes<br><b>Step 1B</b> Announcing present research<br><b>Step 2</b> Announcing principal findings<br><b>Step 3</b> Indicating RA (Research Article) structure | <b>Move 3: Presenting the present work via:</b> | <b>Step 1 (obligatory):</b> announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively<br><b>Step 2 (optional):</b> <i>presenting RQs or hypotheses</i><br><b>Step 3 (optional):</b> <i>Definitional clarifications</i><br><b>Step 4 (optional):</b> <i>summarizing methods</i><br><b>Step 5 (Probable in Some Fields):</b> Announcing principal outcomes<br><b>Step 6 (PISF):</b> <i>stating the value of present research</i><br><b>Step 7 (PISF):</b> <i>Outlining the structure of paper.</i> |

Moreover, in the modified CARS' model, Swales changed the name of the third move from 'occupying the niche' to 'presenting the present work (citation possible)', added four new steps in this move and indicated which steps are obligatory, optional or field-specific. Therefore, unlike the old version (1990) where move 3 was made up of 3 steps (in which step 1 is divided into two sub-steps: indicating the aim of the study or describing the study), move 3 in the adjusted version includes the following 4 additional steps (in italics): step 2 'presenting research questions or hypotheses', step 3 'definitional clarifications', step 4 'summarizing methods' and step 6 'stating the value of present research'. Two of these steps (i.e., steps 2 and 6) were added in response to Anthony's and Samraj' suggestions. Furthermore, Swales responded positively to Samraj' recommendation with regard to the importance of the literature review' status in the whole introduction not only in the first move. He, therefore, removed step 3 (reviewing items of previous research) from move 1 and made it possible to occur in the three moves of the amended model by adding the phrase 'citations required/possible'.

As for theses and dissertations, the CARS' model (1990) was used by Bunton (2002) as a basis to develop his own framework to analyze introductions of Ph.D. theses written in English by Chinese students. Bunton conducted a study which aimed at analyzing 45 multidisciplinary Ph.D. theses (i.e., theses from various fields namely: Arts, education, social sciences, education, engineering, medicine, science, urban planning and environmental management, business and architecture). Considering the differences

between the two genres (i.e., articles and theses) and the length of the theses he analyzed, Bunton concluded that the framework used for the analysis of the introductory sections of the theses should be more detailed than the CARS' model that was created to analyze introductions in research articles.

Hence, as shown in the Table 1.7., the results of the study revealed that the same moves and steps identified in the CARS' model (1990) were found in the introductory sections of the theses that were analyzed. However, Bunton proposed that thesis writers should consider adding other 10 important steps, which were not mentioned in the CARS' model, in their introductions to clearly explain their view points with regard to the problem under discussion. As indicated in Table 1.7., the majority of the new steps (namely: *Chapter structure, aims or objectives, Research Questions/ Hypotheses, Theoretical position, Defining terms, Method, Materials or subjects, and Model proposed*) are found in move 3 which Bunton referred to as 'announcing the present research'.

Regarding the other two steps, Bunton's analysis showed that one of them (defining terms) can occur in both moves 1 and 3 as shown in the table while 'Indicating problem or need' step was found to be one of the steps which occurred more frequently in move 2.

**Table 1.7**

***A Comparison between Swales' Model (1990) for the Analysis of Article Introductions and Bunton's Proposed Model (2002) for the Analysis of Theses Introductions***

| Swales' CARS model for research article introductions (1990)<br>Source: (Swales, 1990, p.141) |                                                                                                                                         | Bunton's modified CARS Model for Ph.D. thesis introductions (2002)<br>Source: (Bunton, 2002, p.74) |                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moves                                                                                         | Steps                                                                                                                                   | Moves                                                                                              | Steps                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing<br/>a territory</b>                                               | <b>Step 1</b> Claiming centrality<br><b>Step 2</b> Making topic generalization(s)<br><b>Step 3</b> Reviewing items of previous research | <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing<br/>a territory</b>                                                    | 1: Claiming centrality<br>2: Making topic generalizations and giving background information<br>3: <i>Defining terms</i><br>4: reviewing previous research |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing<br/>a niche</b>                                                   | <b>Step 1A</b> Counter-claiming<br><b>Step 1B</b> Indicating a gap<br><b>Step 1C</b> Question-raising                                   | <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing<br/>a niche</b>                                                        | 1A: Indicating a gap in research<br>1B: <i>indicating a problem or need</i><br>1C: Question-raising<br>1D: Continuing a tradition                         |

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    | <b>Step 1D</b> Continuing a tradition                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the niche</b> | <b>Step 1A</b> Outlining purposes<br><b>Step 1B</b> Announcing present research<br><b>Step 2</b> Announcing principal findings<br><b>Step 3</b> Indicating RA (Research Article) structure | <b>Move 3: Announcing the present research (Occupying the niche)</b> | 1: <i>Chapter structure</i><br>2: Purpose, aims, or objectives<br>3: <i>Research Questions/ Hypotheses</i><br>4: <i>Theoretical position</i><br>5: <i>Defining terms</i><br>6: <i>Method</i><br>7: <i>Materials or subjects</i><br>8: Findings or Results<br>9: <i>Model proposed</i><br>10: Significance/justification<br>11: Thesis structure |

In 2012, Chen and Kuo employed Bunton's modified CARS' model to analyze the introductions of 20 Master's dissertations in applied linguistics. It is worth pointing out that Chen and Kuo's model was used as the main framework for the analysis of the introductory sections of Master's dissertations in our study. Table 1.8. represents a comparison between the framework of analysis developed by Bunton (2002) and that of Chen and Kuo (2012).

**Table 1.8**

***A Comparison of the Analysis Framework Developed by Bunton (2002) and That of Chen and Kuo (2012)***

| <b>Bunton's modified CARS Model for PhD thesis introductions (2002)</b><br>(Source: Bunton, 2002, p.74) |                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Chen and Kuo's model (2012)</b><br>(Source: Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 47 – 48) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Moves</b>                                                                                            | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                       | <b>Moves</b>                                                                  | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 1: Establishing a territory</b>                                                                 | 1: Claiming centrality<br>2: Making topic generalizations and giving background information<br>3: Defining terms<br>4: reviewing previous research | <b>Move 1: Establishing a territory</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing topic generalization/ background</li> <li>• Indicating centrality/ importance of topic</li> <li>• Defining terms</li> <li>• Reviewing previous research</li> </ul>          |
| <b>Move 2: Establishing a niche</b>                                                                     | 1A: Indicating a gap in research<br>1B: indicating a problem or need<br>1C: Question-raising<br>1D: Continuing a tradition                         | <b>Move 2: Establishing a niche</b>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating gap in previous research</li> <li>• Question-raising</li> <li>• Counter-claiming</li> <li>• Continuing/extending a tradition</li> <li>• Indicating problem/need</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 3:<br/>Announcing<br/>the present<br/>research<br/>(Occupying<br/>the niche)</b> | 1: Chapter structure<br>2: Purpose, aims, or objectives<br>3: Research Questions/<br>Hypotheses<br>4: Theoretical position<br>5: Defining terms<br>6: Method<br>7: Materials or subjects<br>8: Findings or Results<br>9: Model proposed<br>10: Significance/ justification<br>11: Thesis structure | <b>Move 3:<br/>Occupying<br/>the niche</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating purposes/ aims/ objectives</li> <li>• Indicating scope of research</li> <li>• Indicating chapter/section structure</li> <li>• Indicating theoretical position</li> <li>• Stating research questions/ hypotheses</li> <li>• Defining terms</li> <li>• Indicating research method</li> <li>• Indicating thesis structure</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Referring to<br/>other<br/>studies</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing background information</li> <li>• Providing definition of terms</li> <li>• Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

Chen and Kuo found that almost the same rhetorical structure described by Bunton was followed in writing the introductory sections of the dissertations they analyzed. However, slight differences in terms of the number of the moves and steps were noted. For example, in the table above, we notice that a new move ‘referring to other studies’ has been added to all sections and chapters in their model. Chen and Kuo conclude that this move “has different rhetorical functions in different chapters” (p. 31). For instance, in the introduction, the purpose of ‘*referring to other studies*’ is to establish the context by reviewing previous studies related to the topic, inform readers of the research gap that resulted in the topic being investigated and define key terms. Nevertheless, in the literature review chapter, this move (i.e., referring to other studies) serves a different purpose which is detailed analysis and critical evaluation of what has been said and done in the field. As for the number of steps, unlike Bunton’s model which involved a total of 19 steps, Chen and Kuo’s model included 28 steps in total.

Moreover, the results of Chen and Kuo’s study are, to some extent, in accordance with what Bunton found with regard to the frequency of occurrence of some steps, particularly steps in moves 1 and 2, in the introductions. That is, the same steps (namely: providing topic generalizations and reviewing previous research to **establish territory**, indicating a gap and a problem to **establish the niche**, and stating purpose and aims to **occupy the niche**) that were frequently used by writers to write their Ph.D. thesis’ introductions occurred frequently in writing the introductions of Master’s dissertations. However, given the amount of details to be included in Ph.D. thesis’ introductions in comparison with

introductions in MA dissertations, Chen and Kuo noted that various steps that were identified in Bunton's model, particularly steps in move 3, were rarely found in the introductions they analyzed due to the fact that "introductions in master's theses do not have an information structure as complex as that in Ph.D. dissertations" (Chen & Kuo, 2012, p.41).

## **1.4. Writing the Review of the Literature Chapter**

### ***1.4.1. Definition and Purpose***

It goes without saying that the review of the literature is one of the main components of research articles, research projects, theses or dissertations as it is the basis from which the research problem, the research questions, the hypotheses and the research design emerge.

However, although it is agreed by almost all researchers that the primary function of the literature review is to place the researcher's work in context and show its value to the reader (e.g., Garson, 2002; Kumar, 2011; Librero, 2012; Neuman, 2014; O'Hara et al., 2011; Roberts, 2010; Thody, 2006), it is still a complex concept which is not easy to define (Ridley, 2012). This concept has been granted a different emphasis in terms of its role, purpose and the various activities it entails in academic writing. According to Hart (1998), the literature review is an ongoing activity which involves two main processes which are selecting relevant documents to the researcher's topic and evaluating their academic quality. In Hart's words, the review of the literature is a process which consists of:

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed (p.13).

In addition to evaluating relevance and quality of documents, Creswell (2012) claims that the review of the literature is a descriptive summary of scholars and researchers' writings on a particular topic. However, for other researchers, the review of the literature is not only a descriptive summary of previous research, but also an analytical and a critical evaluation of what has been said and done by other researchers in the field of interest. This analytical and critical evaluation involves highlighting the major points of similarities and conflict between the different sources, commenting critically on ideas advanced by other

authors, showing how the literature supports or contradicts the problem under investigation and identifying the gap to be filled. In this sense, O'Hara et al.'s definition (2011) appears to be very useful as it provides a detailed description of what a literature review is. In their words:

The literature review is a discussion of selected items from the range of (mainly) published material available in a given subject area. A literature review is not simply a sequence of short commentaries on each piece of literature that you have read....Instead what you are trying to create is a themed discussion of your topic which sets the context and elaborates on key issues by drawing on the literature available....Literature reviews do involve giving information and pulling together what the different sources say, but they do more than just this. A good literature review will also organize this information into themes or sub-topics so that the content of different materials can be compared or considered together. A good literature review should raise relevant questions and place your own study within the wider context. This involves synthesizing the literature to develop a coherent discussion about the subject and identifying key debates and critical issues within the area. A good literature review will also critique some of the sources that it draws on in terms of their significance or their validity (p. 50).

Almost similarly, Cooley and Lewkowicz (2003) state in their definition the major features that characterize a good literature review. For them, the review of the literature should be directly relevant to the topic under discussion. Also, it should be up-to-date. That is, the researcher is required to be aware of current bibliographies which keep him/her up to date with what is new in his/her field of interest until the submission date. This is because if the researcher does not use up-to-date references, s/he would be asked by the members of the jury to justify why that was the case. Moreover, the literature review should be critical. That is to say, just summarizing the key sources and reporting other studies' findings is not enough. The researcher is supposed to "indicate the relative importance of works [s/he] cites and where conflicts are reported, [s/he] needs to adjudicate on whose findings [s/he] considers the most plausible" (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 2003, p.26). Last but not least, conducting a thorough literature review allows the researcher to identify a knowledge gap (i.e., a research area that has not been yet explored by other researchers in the field) and explain how his/her research has come to fill this gap and provide practical implications.



With regard to the purposes of the literature review, a group of researchers (e.g., Bourner, 1996 as cited in Garson, 2002; Kumar, 2011; Librero, 2012; Lunenberg & Irby, 2008; Neuman, 2014; Roberts, 2010; Thody, 2006) note that we conduct a literature review in order to:

- Become knowledgeable about the leading scholars and researchers in the field and the prevailing theories.
- Clearly conceptualize the research problem and better understand the variables or key concepts (if it is a qualitative research) which are relevant to the context of the problem under discussion.
- Identify the existing gap in the literature.
- Show the relationship between the problem to be studied and past and current research in the field.
- Identify the areas of similarities and differences between previous studies and show how their findings support or contradict our hypotheses and research objectives.

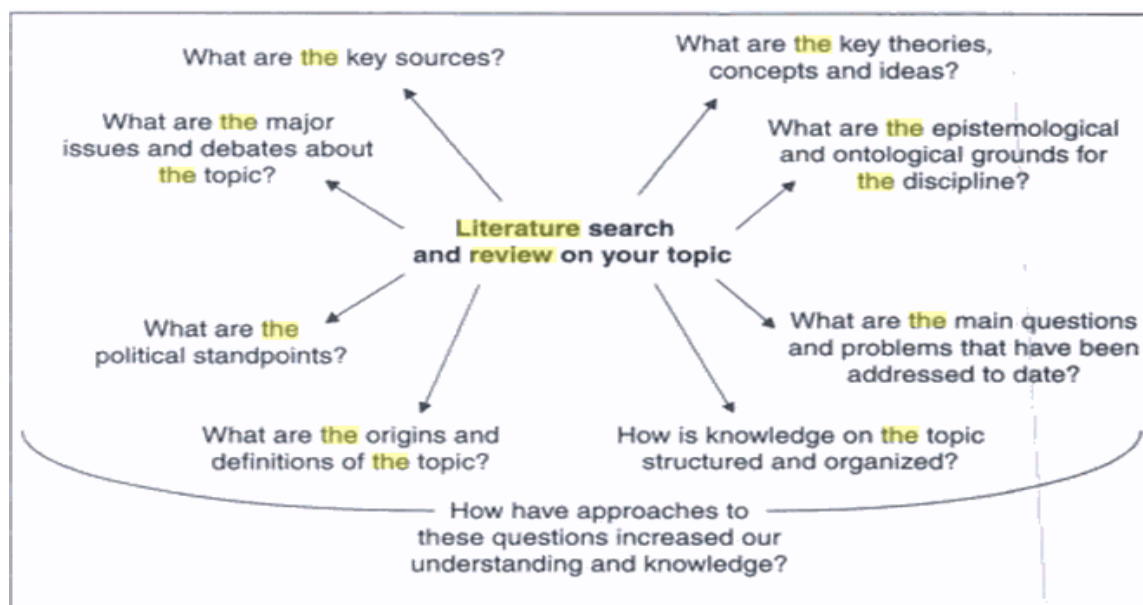
In addition to the aforementioned purposes, Bourner (1996) as cited in Garson (2002), Thody (2006), Lunenberg and Irby (2008), and Roberts (2010) agree on the fact that informing the students of what methodologies and methods are useful and appropriate to provide valid answers to their research questions should be added as another reason why they should conduct a literature review. Furthermore, not duplicating what others have previously done (originality), avoiding past studies' flaws (e.g., methodological pitfalls) (Bourner, 1996, as cited in Garson, 2002; Kumar, 2011) and assisting students in analyzing and interpreting their data and outlining practical implications (Librero, 2012) are additional principal purposes that should be added to the list above.

For these reasons, we can say that conducting a thorough and a comprehensive literature review has become a salient feature of a good dissertation and an important criterion to evaluate students' work and see to what extent students have learnt about their areas of research. This is because "the only way that other researchers can know whether you accurately and thoroughly understand your topic is by having the opportunity to read your literature review" (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017, p.169). Therefore, it is significant to consider the importance of reviewing the literature and its role in promoting one's understanding of his/her own topic and developing his/her analytical and critical skills. In this context, Hart (1998) posits that:

A review of the literature is important because without it you will not acquire an understanding of your topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are. In your written project you will be expected to show that you understand previous research on your topic. This amounts to showing that you have understood the main theories in the subject area and how they have been applied and developed, as well as the main criticisms that have been made of work on the topic (p. 1).

**Figure 1.1**

*Some of the Questions the Review of the Literature Can Answer (Hart, 1998, p.14)*



#### ***1.4.2. Schematic Structure and Content of the Literature Review Chapter: Discussion of the Main Frameworks***

As we have already seen in the definitions, the literature review refers to studying the current state of research by identifying the main variables and the most prominent theories in the field. It is, thus, both a descriptive summary and critical and analytical evaluation of others' studies and theories.

Generally, the literature review has the format of a standard essay which consists of three main parts: introduction, body and conclusion. Writing this chapter has not been given much attention as there are a few studies which have sought to examine its structure and content in theses and dissertations. This is due to the fact that conducting a literature review is the most daunting task for almost all students which requires hard work and competency (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 2003; Mathews & Kostellis, 2011; Oliver, 2012;

Shaw, 1991; Swales & Feak, 2000;). In addition, the reason behind this lack of interest in studying the literature review chapters of theses and dissertations has been clearly stated in Swales and Feak quote (2000) that “the LR [Literature Review] as part of a research paper, proposal, thesis, or dissertation is often thought as being a boring but necessary chore. Such LRs are often criticized but are rarely praised. After all, one rarely hears comments such as “The most brilliant part of your thesis was the literature review”!” (p.116).

Among the few studies which aimed at studying and analyzing the structure of the literature review chapter is that of Kwan (2006). In her research about the rhetorical structure of the literature review chapter in twenty doctoral theses written by a group of native English speakers from five different universities, Kwan (2006) employed the modified version of the CARS model, which was revised by Bunton (2002) for Ph.D. theses introductions, and added new elements.

Actually, although Bunton’s model was developed to analyze the introductory chapters in doctoral theses, Kwan used it in order to analyze the literature review chapters in 20 Ph.D. theses as her study aimed at identifying whether literature reviews and the introductory chapters of the theses shared the same move structure because she believed that the two chapters might belong to the same genre since introductory chapters in dissertations often review previous research relevant to the topic being studied. Hence, it is somehow difficult to distinguish between the two chapters

The results of Kwan’s study revealed that literature reviews could be realized in more than one chapter following an introduction – body – conclusion structure and that the body parts were divided into thematic units which contained moves that were similar to those three moves included in Bunton’s CARS model. Kwan also underlines that despite the fact that the majority of moves and steps that were identified in Bunton’s revised model for theses introductions were present in the literature review chapters of the theses she analyzed, there are also new steps which should be included due to the “sophistication that is involved in the construction of the LR” (p.52) which makes the introductions and literature reviews of a different genre in terms of their roles and functions in academic writing. In Kwan’s words, “the differential roles that these parts of a thesis play, together with the different realizations of the CARS model, suggest that the LR and the introduction chapters in ILrMRD [Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Result, Discussion] theses are not structurally entirely the same” (p.52).

Therefore, Kwan identified the schematic structure of the literature review chapter in which she used the term “strategy” instead of “step”, as shown in Table 1.9, and added the following new strategies in Move 2: **Strategy C**: Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed, **Strategy D**: Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one’s own research, and **Strategy E**: Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or theoretical framework (in italics).

**Table 1.9**

***A Comparison of the Analysis Framework Developed by Kwan (2006) and That of Bunton (2002)***

| <b>Kwan’s Framework (2006)</b><br>(Source: Kwan, 2006, p.51)                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Bunton’s Framework (2002)</b><br>(Source: Bunton, 2002, p.74)         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Moves</b>                                                                       | <b>Strategies</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Moves</b>                                                             | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing one part of the territory of one’s own research by</b> | <b>Strategy A</b> : Surveying the non-related phenomena or knowledge claims<br><b>Strategy B</b> : Claiming centrality<br><b>Strategy C</b> : Surveying the research-related phenomena                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing a Territory</b>                              | <b>1</b> : claiming centrality<br><b>2</b> : Making topic generalizations and giving background information<br><b>3</b> : Defining terms<br><b>4</b> : Reviewing previous research                                                                            |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Creating a research niche (in response to Move 1) by</b>            | <b>Strategy A</b> : counter-claiming<br><b>Strategy B</b> : Gap-indicating<br><b>Strategy C</b> : <i>Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed.</i><br><b>Strategy D</b> : <i>Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one’s own research</i><br><b>Strategy E</b> : <i>Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or theoretical framework.</i> | <b>Move 2:<br/>Establishing a Niche</b>                                  | <b>1A</b> Indicating a gap in research<br><b>1B</b> Indicating a problem or need<br><b>1C</b> Question-raising<br><b>1D</b> Continuing a tradition                                                                                                            |
| <b>Move 3:<br/>Occupying the research niche by announcing</b>                      | <b>Strategy A</b> : research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses<br><b>Strategy B</b> : theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks.<br><b>Strategy C</b> : research design/processes<br><b>Strategy D</b> : interpretations of terminology used in the thesis.                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Move 3:<br/>Announcing the present research (Occupying the Niche)</b> | <b>1</b> : Purpose/ aims/ objectives<br><b>2</b> : Work carried out<br><b>3</b> : Method<br><b>4</b> : Materials<br><b>5</b> : Findings or results<br><b>6</b> : Product of research<br><b>7</b> : Significance/ justification<br><b>8</b> : Thesis structure |

Additionally, she criticized Bunton's model in that the two steps, *1A: indicating a gap in research* and *1B: indicating a problem or need*, involved in Move 2 (i.e.; establishing a niche) were difficult to distinguish because she believed that the two strategies had approximately the same meaning in that ““needs” and “gaps” are in fact alluded to as being semantic attributes – and therefore lexical realizations of gap-indicating” (Kwan, 2006, p.45). This is why Kwan, in the framework she developed, combined the two steps (1A and 1B) of the previous model, which was developed by Bunton (2002), into a single strategy which she included in Move 2 and referred to it as **“Strategy B: Gap-indicating”**.

Another relevant framework to analyze the structure and content of the literature review chapters in theses and dissertations was developed by Chen and Kuo (2012). To note that this framework is adopted in our study to analyze the literature review chapter of Master's dissertations.

In their study, which aimed at analyzing a corpus of 20 master theses in applied linguistics, Chen and Kuo proposed a coding scheme of moves and steps to be included in the literature review chapter based on Kwan's framework (2006). Similar to Kwan's study, the results of Chen and Kuo's analysis revealed that the literature review chapter in the majority of the theses followed introduction – body – conclusion structure. This is why they added the introductory move, in which the researcher should indicate the organization of the body part in the literature review, and the concluding move in which a summary of the reviewed themes should be provided. Moreover, Chen and Kuo revised the model proposed by Kwan and identified a new step, which is ‘Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area’ (in italics), in move 2 (i.e.; creating a research need) as shown in Table 1.10.

Chen and Kuo (2012) share the same view with Kwan (2006) that the introductions and the literature review chapters do not belong to the same genre. According to them, “the introduction steps usually do not combine with Literature Review steps to form sequence patterns. In other words, although the part of Literature Review is embedded in the Introduction chapter in these four theses, Literature Review steps constitute their own moves without mixing with the Introduction steps” (p.34).

**Table 1.10**

***A Comparison of the Analysis Framework Developed by Kwan (2006) and That of Chen and Kuo (2012)***

| <b>Kwan's Framework (2006)</b><br>Source: Kwan, 2006, p.51                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Chen and Kuo's Framework (2012)</b><br>Source: Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 48-49   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Moves</b>                                                                    | <b>Strategies</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Moves</b>                                                                    | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research</b> | <b>Strategy A:</b> Surveying the non-research-related phenomena or knowledge claims                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Introduction</b>                                                             | Indicating organization of the review chapter(s) and justifying the themes (areas) to be reviewed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                 | <b>Strategy B:</b> Claiming centrality<br><b>Strategy C:</b> Surveying the research-related phenomena                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Move 1:<br/>Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveying the non-research related phenomena or knowledge claims centrality</li> <li>• Surveying the research-related phenomena</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Creating a research niche (in response to Move 1) by:</b>        | <b>Strategy A:</b> counter-claiming<br><b>Strategy B:</b> Gap-indicating<br><b>Strategy C:</b> Asserting confirmative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed.<br><b>Strategy D:</b> Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research<br><b>Strategy E:</b> Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or theoretical framework | <b>Move 2:<br/>creating a research need (in response to move 1)</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems)</li> <li>• Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity)</li> <li>• Asserting formative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed.</li> <li>• Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research</li> <li>• Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework.</li> <li>• <i>Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area.</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 3:<br/>Occupying the research niche by announcing</b>                   | <b>Strategy A:</b> research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses<br><b>Strategy B:</b> theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks.<br><b>Strategy C:</b> research design/processes<br><b>Strategy D:</b> interpretations of terminology used in the thesis.                                                                                                                                | <b>Move 3:<br/>occupying the research niche by announcing</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses</li> <li>• Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks</li> <li>• Indicating research design/processes</li> <li>• Interpreting terminology used in the thesis</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Conclusion</b>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

## 1.5. Writing the Method Chapter

### 1.5.1. Definition and Purpose

Another important part of the dissertation is the research method chapter. It comes after the literature review chapter. This chapter can have different titles such as: *research design and procedures*, *research methodology and tools*, *the study*, and *field work*. However, regardless of the title used, this chapter aims at providing a detailed account of the research paradigm, the design and data collection and analysis procedures. Therefore, “knowing how the data were collected helps the reader evaluate the validity and reliability of the results as well as the conclusions that are drawn from them” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007, p.122). Besides, this detailed description might be a departure point for other researchers who want to replicate the study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Murray & Beglar, 2009). In other words, the main objective of this chapter is to answer the following questions: **What?** (what research paradigm is adopted to approach the problem under discussion, what research tools are to be used to collect data and answer the research question(s)), **Why?** (why a particular research paradigm should be adopted, why particular research instruments should be used, why a particular group of people have to take part of your research), and **How?** (this involves the procedures to be followed in collecting the data: how you are going to collect data, how the participants will be selected and how the data will be analyzed).

Unlike the other parts of the dissertation, mainly the introduction, the methods section has not been granted much attention by researchers (Dueñas, 2007; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Peacock, 2011; Swales & Feak, 2012) despite its significant role in writing a successful dissertation. In this sense, Lim (2006) believes that “without a sound Method section, writers will not be able to convince the readership of the validity of the means employed to obtain results” (p.283). Therefore, it is of paramount importance that writers take good care of their methods section because it receives special attention by readers, including examiners and reviewers (Swales & Feak, 2012) to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of data interpretations and the final results displayed in the subsequent chapter (i.e., the Results chapter) (Lim, 2006) “so that other researchers can adequately judge the results you obtain and can validly replicate the study” (Roberts, 2010, p.148).

### ***1.5.2. Content of the Method Chapter: An Overview of the Generic Section Headings***

As far as the content of the method chapter is concerned, almost all researchers (e.g., Biggam, 2011; Garson, 2002; Librero, 2012; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Murray & Beglar, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017) concur that in any dissertation, this chapter should include the following main sections:

**A. A description of Participants and Sampling Techniques:** In this section, writers should provide demographic characteristics of participants such as, gender, age, socioeconomic status, marital status, academic qualification, sample size and geographical location. In addition, they should explain in detail the criteria they followed to select the study participants. In this case, writers should say whether the participants were selected based on random, systematic, stratified or cluster probability sampling techniques; or the selection was based on the participants' availability and other factors (i.e., non-random). This may include convenience, purposive, quota and snowball non-probability sampling methods. In this regard, Lunenburg and Irby (2008) write: "The key is to define your population in sufficient detail so that other researchers may determine how applicable your findings are to their study" (p.168)

**B. Data Collection Instruments:** With regard to this section, writers should describe in detail the research tools used to collect data and achieve the research objectives such as, questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations and experiments. This detailed description includes naming the research tool and stating its characteristics, purpose(s), appropriateness and the rationale behind the choice of a particular tool. Moreover, the aim of this section is to describe questionnaire and interview items and explain the procedures followed by the researcher while administering questionnaires and interviews or conducting the experiment to obtain data from the participants. It also aims at discussing issues of validity and reliability of the research instrument(s) used.

In fact, the necessity to describe the instruments in detail and explain the procedures carefully has been emphasized by Murray and Beglar (2009) who believe that doing so allows

readers to understand more fully your study, replication and operationalization. Readers cannot adequately understand what you have done without fairly detailed knowledge of the instrumentation that you have used. In addition, other researchers cannot replicate your study unless they know



exactly what instruments you used. Finally, the instruments that you use show how you have operationalized your variables (pp. 171-172).

**C. Data Analysis Tools and Procedures:** In this section, writers should clearly present how they develop their analysis framework, explain how they intend to analyze and interpret the data, which method of statistical analysis they intend to use to analyze quantitative data and the rationale behind selecting that method. They should also describe in detail how they intend to organize, code and group their qualitative data into themes and categories for further analysis.

In addition to the aforementioned sections, writers should describe the paradigm (i.e., a worldview which explains how knowledge is acquired: quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) they adopt, the research design and the variables to be examined (Biggam, 2011; Garson, 2002; Librero, 2012; Roberts, 2010; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017), recognize the limitations of their research, and mention the major problems they encountered while conducting their research. Examples of such problems generally include: sample size, methodology constraints and appropriateness of the research tools (Biggam, 2011; Roberts, 2010). Exceptionally, Roberts (2010) makes a distinction between qualitative and quantitative types of research in terms of the content of the method chapter. With regard to quantitative research, the main sections to be included are: “introduction, research design, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis and limitations” (p.148). On the other hand, due to the active role of the researcher in qualitative research where s/he influences the data and gets influenced by the data, there are particular sections that should be included in the method chapter namely: “rationale and assumptions for the qualitative design, type of design, researcher’s role, site selection, data sources, data collection techniques, managing and recording data, data analysis procedures, methods for verification or trustworthiness, and limitations” (ibid.). The following checklist (Figure 1.2.) best summarizes all the elements that should be included in the method chapter (ibid., pp. 163-165)

**Figure 1.2**

***Checklist of Elements to Include in the Method Chapter (Roberts, 2010, pp. 163-165)***

|                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Research Design</b>                                                              |
| -----Type of research                                                               |
| -----Rationale for selection                                                        |
| -----Appropriateness to your study                                                  |
| <b>Population and Sample or Participants</b>                                        |
| -----Description of respondents                                                     |
| -----How many?                                                                      |
| -----Where they are located?                                                        |
| -----Rationale for selection                                                        |
| -----Size of population or sample                                                   |
| -----Criteria for inclusion                                                         |
| -----Specific type of sampling used                                                 |
| -----Step-by-step sampling procedures                                               |
| <b>Instrumentation</b>                                                              |
| -----Detailed description of all instruments                                        |
| -----Type of response categories                                                    |
| -----Appropriateness of instruments to your study                                   |
| -----Information on validity                                                        |
| -----Information on reliability                                                     |
| -----How instruments are administered and scored?                                   |
| -----Inter-rater reliability procedures                                             |
| -----Field test or pilot test                                                       |
| -----Describes test respondents                                                     |
| -----How many?                                                                      |
| -----Feedback questions                                                             |
| -----Reactions of respondents                                                       |
| -----Procedures followed                                                            |
| -----Revisions made to instruments                                                  |
| -----Response rate                                                                  |
| -----Procedures used to increase response rate (e.g., follow-up-methods)            |
| <b>Data Collection Procedures</b>                                                   |
| -----How data were collected?                                                       |
| -----When data were collected?                                                      |
| -----Where data were collected?                                                     |
| -----Procedures stated in order of occurrence                                       |
| <b>Data Analysis</b>                                                                |
| -----Includes how data were reported and displayed                                  |
| -----Provides information on validity and reliability of data (trustworthiness if a |

|                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------|
| qualitative study)-                                  |
| -----Explains methods used to analyze data           |
| -----States rationale for use of analysis techniques |
| <b>Limitations</b>                                   |
| -----Limitations stated                              |

### ***1.5.3. Schematic Structure of the Method Chapter: Discussion of the Main Frameworks***

As previously noted, despite its significant role in establishing trustworthiness and convincing readers of the credibility of the findings, the method section/chapter was not given the importance it deserves in the literature. As far as our field of interest (social sciences) is concerned, only a few studies (e.g., Chen & Kuo, 2012; Lim, 2006; Peacock, 2011) were conducted to analyze the structure of this section/chapter.

In his qualitative study, which aimed at identifying the communicative functions of the Method sections in research articles in terms of rhetorical moves and steps constituting the generic structure of the method sections, Lim (2006) analyzed 20 articles which were selected from two journals in the field of management. The results of the analysis demonstrated that most research method sections in the articles included the following three moves where each move included three steps as shown in Table 1.12.

**a) Describing Data Collection Procedures:** It is where writers provide information about the population, sample selection criteria and explain the steps followed in collecting the data.

**b) Delineating Procedures for Measuring Variables:** It is where writers identify and describe the type of design, define the variables to be measured, describe and justify the research instruments employed to measure the variables and elicit data and discuss issues of validity and reliability.

**c) Elucidating Data Analysis Procedures:** It is where writers describe and justify data analysis procedures and present preliminary results.

Another study, which aimed at analyzing the rhetorical structure of method sections in 288 research articles, was conducted by Peacock (2011). In fact, the researcher's main focus in this study was to identify the interdisciplinary differences between hard knowledge domains (biology, chemistry, physics and environmental science) and soft knowledge disciplines (business, language and linguistics, law and public and social administration)

in terms of the method section' structure in each discipline. The results of the study revealed that the rhetorical structure of the method sections in the majority of articles was composed of seven moves namely: "overview, location, research aims/questions/hypotheses, subjects/materials, procedure, limitations, and data analysis" (p.104). According to Peacock, the most notable moves in the two types of science (i.e., hard and social sciences) were: **procedure** and **data analysis**, which appeared in both disciplines, in addition to providing a detailed description of **materials**, as a third move, in biology, chemistry and physics and "**subjects**", as another important move, in business, language and linguistics, law, public and social administration. Moreover, the results demonstrated that unlike the method sections in hard sciences articles, social sciences articles included a variety of additional moves which differed in terms of the frequency of appearance within and across the disciplines studied. That is, along with the three moves mentioned above, other moves also appeared in the four non-science fields namely: location, limitations, research aims/questions/hypotheses and overview. In this regard, Peacock notes that these differences are mainly related to the genre conventions particular to each discipline in that due to the complexity and absence of common understandings and assumptions among readers in soft/social sciences (as claimed by Hyland, 2004), writers are required to give more details about the study's participants, the rationale behind choosing a particular research setting, an explanation of how data were collected and analyzed, and limitations of the research so that researchers who want to replicate the study in the future will pay particular attention to such methodological problems and work to avoid them (Peacock, 2011). In hard sciences articles, however, except some information about materials, procedures and data analysis, other additional details are not needed as the objects being studied are fixed and conditions of experiments are almost the same. Therefore, people share common knowledge and understandings (as noted by Hyland, 2004) with regard to the topic under investigation. Additionally, Peacock (2011) emphasizes the necessity of considering these differences between across disciplines claiming that since the researchers' main objective is to get their papers read and accepted to be published, they are required to follow the genre conventions (i.e., the methods section structure) particular to each discipline. Otherwise, their papers would be rejected.

In fact, the results of Peacock's study are in accordance with Lim's claim (2006) that paying less attention to the structure of the method sections in hard knowledge domains

did not imply that methodology had become less important to science, but merely showed that interest in methodology by typical readers of journal articles in physics and biology might have become less. However, such changes in terms of font sizes and locations of Method sections have not been reported, to my knowledge, for journal articles in social science disciplines, in which the Method section appears to remain elaborate and significant as far as the readers' interest is concerned (p.283).

Similarly, Swales and Feak (2012) share the same opinion with Lim (2006) and Peacock (2011) that unlike articles in scientific fields (e.g., chemistry, materials science and molecular biology) where the method sections are condensed and do not require writers to provide detailed explanations due to the use of "well-established and standardized procedures" (p.296), soft science articles contain extended method sections due to the amount of information and details provided (ibid.). Table 1.11 summarizes the major differences between condensed and extended method sections (Swales & Feak, 2012, p.296):

**Table 1.11**

***The Difference between Extended and Condensed Method Sections (Swales & Feak, 2012, p.296)***

| <b>Extended method sections (social sciences)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Condensed method sections (hard sciences)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>You can elaborate your methods by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing useful background knowledge (<i>e.g., through definitions and examples</i>)</li> <li>• Using descriptions of procedural steps, rather than citations and/or acronyms.</li> <li>• Including a number of justifications</li> <li>• Using cognitive or volitional verbs (<i>e.g., we believed; we wanted to</i>)</li> <li>• Including by + -ing + verb + how statements (<i>this was done by reversing the order</i>)</li> <li>• Employing a wide range of linking words and phrases (<i>e.g., time expressions, such as next or prior to</i>)</li> </ul> | <p>If your methods are fairly standard you may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assume readers have relevant background knowledge.</li> <li>• Sometimes use citations or acronyms to refer to processes</li> <li>• Have few justifications</li> <li>• Use few or no cognitive or volitional verbs.</li> <li>• Choose to avoid <i>by + -ing + how</i> statements</li> <li>• Employ few linking phrases</li> </ul> |

As for the method sections in theses and dissertations, Lim's model was used by Chen and Kuo (2012) as a basis to develop their own model for the analysis of MA dissertations. However, since research articles and dissertations do not belong to the same genre (Samraj,

2008), they modified and elaborated Lim's schematic structure so as to make it more appropriate for the move and step identification in theses in applied linguistics. It is worth noting that Chen and Kuo's framework is applied in our study to analyze the method chapter in Master's dissertations.

Compared with Lim's framework, as it is shown in Table 1.12, we notice that Chen and Kuo (2012) added a new move in addition to the moves proposed by Lim (2006). This newly added move is '**Introducing the method chapter**', which aims at providing an overview of the study and the chapter's structure. Additionally, we notice that moves 1, 2 and 3 in Lim's model become moves 2, 3 and 4 respectively in Chen and Kuo's model, as shown in the table, because introducing the method chapter comes first. Chen and Kuo also added a new step, which they called "Explaining variables and variable measurement", in move 3 (i.e., Delineating methods of data analysis).

Moreover, unlike Lim's study, which revealed that the three moves were present in the majority of the research articles she analyzed, the findings of Chen and Kuo's study demonstrated that Move 4 (i.e., Elucidating data analysis procedure), compared to the first three moves, was absent in many theses due to the fact that "in some theses, describing data analysis procedure is combined with results and included in the Results chapter. In contrast, the Method chapter emphasizes data collection method/procedure and data analysis method" (p.36).

**Table 1.12**

***Comparison of the Framework of Analysis Developed by Lim (2006) and That of Chen and Kuo (2012)***

| Lim's Framework (2006)<br>Source: Lim, 2006, p. 287 |       | Chen and Kuo's Framework (2012)<br>Source: Chen and Kuo, 2012, pp. 49-50 |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moves                                               | Steps | Moves                                                                    | Steps                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                     |       | <b>Move 1:<br/>Introducing<br/>the method<br/>chapter</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating chapter/section structure</li> <li>• Providing an overview of the study</li> <li>• Indicating theory/approach</li> </ul> |

|                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1:<br/>Describing<br/>data<br/>collection<br/>procedure/s</b>          | <p><b>Step 1:</b> Describing the sample</p> <p>(a) Describing the location of the sample</p> <p>(b) Describing the size of the sample/population</p> <p>(c) Describing the characteristics of the sample</p> <p>(d) Describing the sampling technique or criterion</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Recounting steps in data collection</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> Justifying the data collection procedure/s</p> <p>(a) Highlighting advantages of using the sample</p> <p>(b) Showing representivity of the sample</p> | <b>Move 2:<br/>Describing<br/>data<br/>collection<br/>method and<br/>procedure(s)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)</li> <li>• Describing methods and steps in data collection</li> <li>• Justifying data collection Procedure(s)</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| <b>Move 2:<br/>Delineating<br/>procedure/s<br/>for measuring<br/>variables</b> | <p><b>Step 1:</b> Presenting an overview of the design</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Explaining method/s of measuring variables</p> <p>(a) Specifying items in questionnaires/databases</p> <p>(b) Defining variables</p> <p>(c) Describing methods of measuring variables</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> Justifying the methods/s of measuring variables</p> <p>(a) Citing previous research method/s</p> <p>(b) Highlighting acceptability of the method/s</p>                                                          | <b>Move 3:<br/>Delineating<br/>methods of<br/>data<br/>analysis</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting an overview of the (data analysis) design</li> <li>• Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis</li> <li>• Explaining variables and variable measurement</li> <li>• Justifying the methods of measuring variables or data analysis</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 3:<br/>Elucidating<br/>data analysis<br/>procedure/s</b>               | <p><b>Step 1:</b> Relating (or recounting) data analysis procedure/s</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Justifying the data analysis procedure/s</p> <p><b>Step 3:</b> previewing results.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Move 4:<br/>Elucidating<br/>data<br/>analysis<br/>procedure/s</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relating (or recounting) data analysis Procedure(s)</li> <li>• Justifying the data analysis Procedure(s)</li> <li>• Previewing results</li> </ul>                                                                                                            |

## 1.6. Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter

Right after describing the method adopted and explaining the procedures followed to collect and analyze data in the method chapter, writers move to the third chapter to present

and interpret their results and, hence, establish the significance of the research. In fact, there are two opposing views in regard to the structure and content of this part of the dissertation. Some scholars (e.g., Bui, 2014; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Roberts, 2010) believe that writers should devote two separate chapters to present and discuss their research findings. That is, in one chapter, which is generally chapter 3, writers report the outcomes of their studies, while in the other chapter (chapter 4), they interpret and explain the results. Other scholars (e.g., Biggam, 2011; Fisher & Thompson, 2014; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017), however, see that the two parts can be combined in one chapter. This, as Loan (2017) believes, generally results from writers' fear of "avoiding missing reported results in the discussion....and their insufficient information for discussing their findings" (p. 179). According to Biggam (2011), this chapter can have different titles such as: '*Case study results*', '*Empirical research findings*', '*Findings and discussion*' and '*Survey findings: description, analysis and synthesis*'.

However, whatever the case is (i.e., the results/discussion of the results is a section from a chapter or a whole chapter of its own), the structure and content are the same. In the following sections, we shall look at the structure of the results section/chapter first, then we move the structure of the discussion section/chapter.

### **1.6.1. Writing the Results Section/Chapter**

The main objective of the results section/chapter is to report all the results of the study. Like the other chapters, this chapter is composed of three main parts: introduction, body and conclusion.

In the introduction, writers need to provide their readers with a general overview of what they are expected to read in the results section/chapter. Writers may begin with restating the general aim of the study followed by a brief description of the target population, the context where the study took place and the methods of data presentation (Biggam, 2011; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Regarding the body, researchers (e.g., Bui, 2014; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017) concur that the type of the research approach adopted in the study (i.e., quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods) determines the organization of the body in the results section/chapter. For instance, in quantitative studies, Bui (2014) suggests that the results section/chapter should be organized on the basis of the instruments (e.g., tests and survey questionnaires) used to measure the variables. That is, separate sections should be devoted to present the results of each measurement instrument. Another way to organize the results section/chapter in



quantitative studies is by dividing it into sections or sub-sections that correspond the number of the research questions or hypotheses that were addressed in the introduction (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Murray & Beglar, 2009). In other words, writers should state their research questions or hypotheses, then report the results of each question or hypothesis with the statistical procedure used. They should also describe and explain the types of statistical analysis (descriptive or inferential statistics) they used to investigate the research questions.

As for the methods employed to communicate and display quantitative results, tables and graphs are usually the most dominant forms. With regard to tables, Kumar (2011) identifies three types of tables based on the number of variables: **a)** Univariate tables (i.e., one variable), **b)** Bivariate tables (i.e., two variables), and **c)** Polyvariate tables (i.e., more than two variables). On the other hand, Librero (2012) distinguishes between two types of tables: informal statistical and formal statistical. The former “is one that has no table number and title, usually small, and always part of the textual presentation. The formal table, on the other hand, has a table number, a title, and all the parts of a complete table” (p. 121). The second common form to present quantitative data is graphs. According to Kumar (2011), “graphic presentations can make analyzed data easier to understand and effectively communicate what is supposed to show” (p. 297). He, therefore, identifies nine types of graphs namely: Histograms, Bar charts, Stacked bar charts, The 100 per cent bar charts, Stem-and-leaf display, Pie charts, Trend curves, Area charts and Scattergrams.

In contrast, qualitative studies differ from quantitative studies with regard to the chapter organization and the methods used to communicate data. According to Singh and Lukkarila (2017), the results section/chapter in qualitative dissertations is the longest owing to the nature of the research which requires a detailed narrative description of what each participant said. This section/chapter is organized depending on the major themes that emerge from the different qualitative research instruments such as in-depth interviews and content analysis of documents (Bui, 2014; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Another possible way to organize the results section/chapter in qualitative studies is by only extracting the themes, from interviews for example, that answer a particular research question (Bui, 2014). For example, the aim of our study is to explore Master’s students’ challenges in dissertation writing. To this end, two research questions are addressed: 1) What challenges do students of didactics, at Blida 2 University, encounter in writing their Master’s dissertations? and 2) What factors are believed to be responsible for the challenges

experienced by Master's students in writing their dissertations?. One of the tools we used to collect qualitative data was conducting a semi-structured interview with each participant. Each interview consists of a set of questions which were designed to help us answer the two research questions. Thus, after analyzing the interview transcripts, we extract themes only from the interview questions that answer a particular research question.

Concerning the methods used to report qualitative results, Kumar (2011) states that descriptive/narrative texts are usually the sole mode of communication. These descriptive/narrative formats can be sometimes supplemented by tables and figures.

As far as the organization of the results section/chapter in mixed-methods studies is concerned, writers should think carefully about the order and relevance of the data to be reported. In this sense, Singh and Lukkarila (2017) write:

In a mixed-methods study, you will need to make decisions about not only which qualitative and quantitative results are most relevant to report, but also what the best order is in which to present the findings. We recommend placing priority in terms of chronological flow on the types of data you emphasized in your mixed-methods study (p.212).

### ***1.6.2. Writing the Discussion Section/Chapter***

The overall objective of the discussion section/chapter is to interpret and explain the meaning of the findings that were already presented in the results section/chapter, compare them with the results of the previous related studies and finally, draw conclusions. In addition to the general introduction, this section/chapter is claimed to be the most difficult to write as “it requires bringing together parts of the research project to meld content from the literature review with the design and results of the study at hand. It is a section that students often do not have prior experience of writing” (Basturkmen, 2009, p. 442).

As for the content of this section/chapter, Lunenburg and Irby (2008), Roberts (2010), and Singh and Lukkarila (2017) agree on the presence of the following key elements:

**a. Summary of the study:** Writers should briefly restate their research problem and remind readers of the research objective(s) and the methodology adopted including the sample and data collection tools, and review the main results of the study.

**b. Discussion of the study findings in relation to previous works in the literature:** When discussing results, writers should compare and contrast their research

findings with those that were previously reported in the literature. In case the findings of their research are not consistent with previous works in the literature, writers should explain why.

**c. Conclusions:** According to Roberts (2010), it is in this section that writers show their critical thinking and analysis skills. Conclusions are explanations and inferences made by writers on the basis of their research findings. Also, writers should show the significance of their findings and the extent to which they (i.e., the findings) filled the gap in the literature, answered the research question(s) and confirmed or rejected the hypothesis(es).

**d. Practical implications of the study:** It is in this section that writers state the practical applications of their research results.

**e. Recommendations for further research:** The writers' recommendations for further research can be a source of inspiration for other researchers to find good research topics. These recommendations are based on flaws in the study such as: unstudied variables, unanswered research questions, weak research design and small sample size.

In addition to the aforementioned sections, '**Unexpected results**' (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) or '**Surprises**' (Roberts, 2010) is another key element that should be added to the discussion section/chapter. According to these researchers, in some studies, there are some unexpected results that may surprisingly appear due to three main reasons: **1) sampling issues** such as insufficient number of participants especially in quantitative studies and inappropriate sampling procedures, **2) research instruments issues** such as "lack of validity and reliability of the instruments, unreliable ratings or observations, missing data" (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p.230), and **3) research design issues** which are generally related to the internal validity of the results. Furthermore, at the end of the discussion section/chapter, Singh and Lukkarila (2017) see that writers should acknowledge the 'limitations' that negatively affected the results of the study. This section aims "to help your readers understand what to avoid, consider, and do when seeking to engage in a similar study in terms of research design, study topic, or participant sampling." (ibid. p.216).

Roberts (2010) suggests that writers should ask themselves the following set of questions to better check if they have included the necessary elements in the two sections/chapters:

**Table 1.13**

***Questions to Ask about the Results and Discussion Sections/Chapters*** (Roberts, 2010, pp. 176 – 182)

| <b>Questions to ask about the presentation of findings (results section/chapter)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Questions to ask about summarizing and discussing the findings (discussion section/chapter)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are the findings clearly presented?</li> <li>2. Are the tables and figures (if any) well-organized and easy to understand?</li> <li>3. Does each table stand on its own without narrative explanation?</li> <li>4. Do the tables use the format specified by your required style manual?</li> <li>5. Are the important or notable data in each table and figure described in the text?</li> <li>6. Are the tables and narratives effectively integrated without unnecessary repetition?</li> <li>7. Are the findings reported accurately and objectively?</li> <li>8. Are the data organized by research questions?</li> <li>9. Is there a summary of the key findings at the end of the chapter/section?</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is there a brief summary of the problem, the methodology and the findings?</li> <li>2. Are conclusions clearly stated?</li> <li>3. Are conclusions derived from the findings?</li> <li>4. Are conclusions mere restatements of the findings?</li> <li>5. Are conclusions discussed within the framework of previous studies, theory and the literature base?</li> <li>6. Are generalizations made that are not warranted by the findings?</li> <li>7. Are generalizations confined to the population from which the sample was drawn?</li> <li>8. Are implications for action made that are not justified by the data?</li> <li>9. Are recommendations for future research made?</li> </ol> |

### ***1.6.3. Schematic Structure and Content of the Results and Discussion Chapter: Discussion of the Main Frameworks***

A proliferation of research has been done on the structure of the results and discussion sections in **research articles** in different disciplines including applied linguistics and language teaching. However, in the literature we have found only a few studies (e.g., Basturkmen, 2009; Chen & Kuo, 2012) on the rhetorical structure of the two sections in **applied linguistics theses and dissertations**. In this section, though our focus is not on this genre (i.e., articles), we will first discuss Ruiying and Allison’s framework for the analysis of results and discussion sections in **research articles** because, as we shall see, it is considered as a point of departure for the framework developed to analyze results and discussion chapters in applied linguistics **Master’s dissertations**.

In 2003, Ruiying and Allison conducted a study which aimed at examining the structure of the results and discussion sections of 20 research articles in the field of applied linguistics and language teaching. The results of the study revealed that the results section consisted of two obligatory moves (2 and 3) and four optional moves (1, 4, 5 and 6):

**A. Preparatory Information (Move 1):** It aims at previewing the results section through reminding readers of the aim of the study, research questions, and the design, making connections between sections, showing the location of results and how particular research tools and statistical procedures were used.

**B. Reporting Results (Move 2):** The function of this move is to present the findings of the research.

**C. Commenting on Results (Move 3):** The aim of this move is to establish relationships between the results of the study and the results of the existing literature. It also involves interpreting the findings, explaining what they mean in a particular context and the main factors that contribute to the existence of particular results. Moreover, in this move, the researcher evaluates the results of the study through commenting on strengths and weaknesses and the possibility to generalize and transfer the findings to other contexts.

**D. Summarizing Results (Move 4):** In this move, the researcher summarizes the major findings of the study.

**E. Evaluating the Study (Move 5):** This move serves the purpose of discussing the major problems (limitations) encountered by the researcher while conducting the study as well as the benefits and significance of the research and how the findings contributed to knowledge in the field.

**F. Deductions from the Study (Move 6):** This move involves offering some pedagogical recommendations and proposing future research suggestions to address the limitations of the study.

Regarding the structure of the discussion section, it was found that this section included seven moves namely: **background information** (move 1), **reporting results** (move 2), **summarizing results** (move 3), **commenting on results** (move 4), **summarizing the study** (move 5), **evaluating the study** (move 6), and **deductions from the research** (move 7).

Ruiying and Allison noted that there was overlap between the two sections (i.e., results and discussion sections) in terms of content and structure in that the same moves included

in the results section were also found in the discussion section. However, the fact that each section served a particular communicative function resulted in differences in terms of frequency of occurrence of the moves; mainly ‘reporting results’ and ‘commenting on results’. In this sense, Ruiying and Allison write: “even though the Discussion and Results sections do have these important moves in common, the two sections demonstrably differ, quantitatively and qualitatively, in terms of communicative focus” (p.377). That is, in the results section, writers focus more on ‘reporting the results’ of the study; whereas ‘commenting on results’, explaining what they mean and comparing them with the existing literature is the most important and frequent move in the discussion section.

Due to its significant role, this move (i.e., commenting on results) in the discussion section was the point of interest for many researchers such as Basturkmen (2009) who conducted a study which focused on ‘commenting on results’ as one of the most significant moves in the discussion section and aimed at comparing between the way the students commented on the results of their research in master’s dissertations and how professional writers made this move in research articles. The researcher used Ruiying and Allison’s framework to analyze the fourth move (i.e., commenting on results) in the discussion section of 10 research articles and 10 dissertations in the field of language teaching. The results of the study revealed that, in the discussions section of research articles and dissertations in language teaching, the writers’ focus while commenting on their results was mainly on three steps: (1) explaining the results (what they meant and why particular results came about), (2) referring to the literature to support their arguments, and (3) evaluating the results obtained. According to Basturkmen, among the aforementioned steps, explaining results was the most frequent step in the discussion sections of the articles and dissertations she analyzed. She believed that the status of this step in the discussion sections could, to a great extent, be affected by variations across disciplines (generally, soft knowledge Vs. Hard knowledge disciplines) and the type of research design. With regard to the former (i.e., disciplinary variations), Basturkmen reported that, in contrast to hard disciplines, explaining results was much valued and given great attention by authors of research articles and dissertations in language teaching as a soft discipline. She found that in order to explain their results, authors used three sub-steps: **(a)** providing their own explanations, **(b)** providing alternative explanations for the same result and **(c)** providing explanations by referring to previous findings in the literature. Basturkmen declared that, unlike hard disciplines (e.g., biomedical fields), these sub-steps were used more intensively

in language teaching as a soft-discipline because in hard-knowledge domains, knowledge is value free and acquired through logical reasoning and verified through observations, experimentation and concrete proofs. As a consequence, writers of articles and dissertations often assume that readers are familiar with the field and do not need detailed explanations to understand the message anticipated by the writer. This claim can be supported by what Koutsantoni (2007) says: “such disciplines have unequivocal bases for accepting claims and as it is possible for scientific authors to rhetorically strengthen their claims through the replicability of experimental procedures rather than by entering into arguments with readers and engaging with the audience” (p. 44). On the contrary, knowledge in soft-disciplines is subjective as it is generally context-dependent and influenced by the researcher’s views and past experiences. This is why the notion of shared knowledge is absent in such disciplines as the same point might be interpreted differently by a group of people. Hence, writers are required to explain and support their claims with valid arguments to convince readers that the conclusions they come up with are logical. This is in line with Hyland’s claim (2005) that “writers in the soft fields...must rely far more on focusing readers on the claim-making negotiations of the discourse community, the arguments themselves, rather than relatively unmediated real-world phenomena” (p.146).

Moreover, the results of the study indicated that the position of explaining results’ step in the discussion section could be influenced by the type of the research design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods). That is, unlike qualitative studies, Basturkmen sees that ‘explaining results’ carries more weight in quantitative research as researchers do tremendous efforts to explain why particular results are obtained and provide justifications for the existence of a particular relationship between variables. This claim was confirmed by Dobakhti (2013) in her comparative study which aimed at investigating the importance of the move ‘commenting on Results’ in the discussion section of qualitative and quantitative applied linguistics research articles. The analysis of the articles revealed that the three steps used to realize this move, particularly ‘Explaining Results’, occurred more commonly in the discussion sections of quantitative studies owing to the nature of the quantitative research which requires researchers to examine and explain the cause-effect relationship between variables. Notwithstanding, the findings of both studies (i.e., Basturkmen, 2009; Dobakhti, 2013) are in opposition to Lim’s view (2010) in that

differences in research methods [qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods] do not significantly affect the writers' tendencies to incorporate or exclude comments....the necessity to include comments may be more dependent on the research community (or the targeted audience) involved rather than the research methods employed (p. 291).

As far as the rhetorical structure of applied linguistics Master's dissertations is concerned, Chen and Kuo (2012) employed Ruiying and Allison's framework to analyze the structure of the results and discussion as two separate chapters in 20 dissertations. The analysis indicated some similarities between the two genres (i.e., articles and dissertations) in terms of the structure and the communicative function of each section/chapter.

With regard to the rhetorical structure, the researchers (Chen & Kuo) found that the results chapter in MA dissertations followed the same structure identified by Ruiying and Allison with a more detailed description of steps in the following moves: move 1 (**introducing the results chapter**), move 2 (**reporting results**), move 4 (**summarizing results**), and move 6 (**deductions from the study**) as shown in the following table (Table 1.14).

**Table 1.14**

*A Comparison between Ruiying and Allison's Model (2003) for the Analysis of the Results Section in Research Articles and Chen and Kuo's Model (2012) for the Analysis of the Results Chapters in Master's Dissertations.*

| Ruiying & Allison's framework (2003)<br>Source: (Ruiying & Allison, 2003, p.374) |                                                                                                                                                     | Chen & Kuo's framework (2012)<br>Source: (Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 50-51) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1 : Preparatory information</b>                                          |                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Move 1: Introducing the results chapter</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing background information or how results are presented.</li> <li>• Indicating methods used or statistical procedure applied</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| <b>Move 2: reporting results</b>                                                 |                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Move 2: Reporting results</b>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locating graphics</li> <li>• Reporting major findings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 3: Commenting on results</b>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting results</li> <li>• Comparing results with literature</li> <li>• Evaluating results</li> </ul> | <b>Move 3: Commenting on results</b>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting results</li> <li>• Comparing results with literature</li> <li>• Evaluating results (including strengths, limitations, generalizations, etc. of results)</li> <li>• Accounting for results (giving reasons)</li> </ul> |



|                                             |                                                                                                                      |                                          |                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting for results</li> </ul>                                             |                                          |                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Move 4: Summarizing results</b>          |                                                                                                                      | <b>Move 4: Summarizing results.</b>      | Making conclusions of results                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Move 5: Evaluating the study</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicating limitations</li> <li>Indicating significance/ advantage</li> </ul> | <b>Move 5: Evaluating the study</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicating limitations of the study</li> <li>Indicating significance/ advantage of the study</li> </ul>       |
| <b>Move 6: Deductions from the research</b> | Recommending further research                                                                                        | <b>Move 6: Deductions from the study</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recommending further research</li> <li>Drawing pedagogic implications</li> <li>Making suggestions.</li> </ul> |

Concerning the communicative function of results chapter, the researchers concluded that, just like research articles' results section in Ruiying and Allison's study, the primary aim of this chapter in an MA (Master) dissertation was to report the results of the study. This aim was served by the most frequent, therefore obligatory, move (i.e., Move 2: Reporting Results) followed by two other obligatory moves (1 and 3) which represented "the primary rhetorical functions in the results chapter" (p.37) owing to the fact that all the steps that occurred more frequently in the results sections belonged to the above stated moves. These steps are: *reporting major findings* (move 2: step 2), *providing background information or how results are presented* (move 1: step 1), *interpreting results* (move 3: step 1), *indicating methods used or statistical procedure applied* (move 1: step 2) *locating graphics* (move 2: step 1) and *comparing results with literature* (move 3: step 2). The remaining three moves (4, 5 and 6), however, were seen as optional because they rarely occurred in the results chapter (See Table 1.14).

As for the structure of the discussion chapter, the results of the study also revealed that students followed the same structure proposed by Ruiying and Allison with more details and full description of the steps to be included in each move (See Table 1.15).

With reference to the communicative function, which is determined by the frequency of occurrence of particular moves, the results of the study showed that the most frequently occurring moves in the discussion chapter were Moves 2 and 4 (i.e., Reporting Results and Commenting on Results) followed by Moves 1 and 3 (i.e., introducing the discussion chapter and summarizing results). According to Chen and Kuo, these obligatory moves, particularly Moves 3 and 4, served the key function of the discussion chapter which is interpreting and explaining results. In their words, "the communicative purposes of

Discussions are not merely to report results but also to summarize results, comment on results, and compare them with other studies in the field” (p.38). This result corroborates the aforementioned studies confirming the importance of Move 4 (commenting on Results) status in the discussion sections (Basturkmen, 2009; Dobakhti, 2013; Ruiying & Allison, 2003). The remaining moves, summarizing the study (move 5), evaluating the study (move 6) and deductions from the study (move 7), were found to be optional.

With respect to steps, one step (**reporting major findings** (in Move 2)) was found in all the dissertations that contained discussion sections and, thus, classified as an obligatory step. Furthermore, five steps were regarded as “quasi-obligatory” (p.38) as they appeared in the majority of the discussion chapters. These steps are: **interpreting findings** (step 1 in move 4), **accounting for results** (step 3 in move 4), **providing background information** (step 1 in move 1), **providing support or justification** through ‘reference to other studies’, and **making conclusions of results** (in move 3).

**Table 1.15**

*A Comparison between Ruiying and Allison’s Model (2003) for the Analysis of the Discussion Section in Research Articles and Chen and Kuo’s Model (2012) for the Analysis of the Discussion Chapters in Master’s Dissertations.*

| Ruiying & Allison’s framework (2003)<br>Source: (Ruiying & Allison, 2003, p.376) |                                                                                                                                                     | Chen & Kuo’s framework (2012)<br>Source: (Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 51) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Move 1:<br>Preparatory information                                               |                                                                                                                                                     | Move 1:<br>Introducing the discussion chapter                       | Providing background information (such as purpose, design, research questions/ hypotheses, etc.) or how discussions are presented                                                                                                                          |
| Move 2:<br>Reporting results                                                     |                                                                                                                                                     | Move 2:<br>Reporting results                                        | Reporting major findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Move 3:<br>Summarizing results                                                   |                                                                                                                                                     | Move 3:<br>Summarizing results                                      | Making conclusions of results                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Move 4:<br>Commenting on results                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting results</li> <li>• Comparing results with literature</li> <li>• Evaluating results</li> </ul> | Move 4:<br>Commenting on results                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting results</li> <li>• Comparing results with literature</li> <li>• Accounting for results (giving reasons)</li> <li>• Evaluating results (including strengths, limitations, etc. of results)</li> </ul> |

|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                      |                                                         |                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accounting for results</li> </ul>                                                                             |                                                         |                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Move 5:<br/>Summarizing the study</b>        |                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Move 5:<br/>summarizing the study</b>                | Summarizing the study briefly                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Move 6:<br/>Evaluating the study</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicating limitations</li> <li>Indicating significance</li> <li>Evaluating methodology</li> </ul>            | <b>Move 6:<br/>Evaluating the study</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicating limitations</li> <li>Indicating significance/ advantage</li> <li>Evaluating methodology</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 7:<br/>Deductions from the research</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making suggestions</li> <li>Recommending further research</li> <li>Drawing pedagogic implications.</li> </ul> | <b>Move 7:<br/>Deductions from the (research) study</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making suggestions</li> <li>Recommending further research</li> <li>Drawing pedagogic implications</li> </ul>  |
|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Reference to other studies</b>                       | Providing support or justification                                                                                                                   |

All in all, when looking at the structure of the discussion chapters in the dissertations analyzed by Chen and Kuo, we notice that almost the same moves that are found in the results chapter are also present in the discussion chapter. However, as already noted, the difference lies in the communicative function of each chapter where priority is given to data presentation in the results chapter, while the discussion chapter is mainly concerned with data interpretation and explanation.

It is worth mentioning that Chen and Kuo's model was used as the main framework for the analysis of the results and discussions' chapter of Master's dissertations in our study.

#### ***1.6.4. Schematic Structure of the Pedagogic Implications Section***

In a Master's dissertation or a Ph.D. thesis, 'the pedagogical implications of the study and recommendations for future research' is usually stated as a one of the moves that make up the structure of the discussion chapter (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) or the general conclusion (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Lopes & Avendano, 2008). However, a few studies (e.g., Jalilifar & Shahvali, 2013; Ruiying & Allison, 2003) showed that '*drawing pedagogic implications and recommending further research*' could appear as a separate section which consisted of not only one move but four moves with various steps. According to Jalilifar and Shahvali (2013), this section can have different titles such as: ***suggestions for further research, suggestions for further studies,***

*recommendations for future studies, implications for further research, directions for further research and future research.*

As shown in Table 1.16, the pedagogic implications section consists of four moves namely: *Summarizing the study* (Move 1), *Dealing with pedagogic issues* (Move 2), *Evaluating the study* (Move 3) and *Deductions from the research* (Move 4). Ruiying and Allison pointed out that among the seven moves that were identified in the discussion section, three moves were present in the pedagogical implications and recommendations' section. Nevertheless, the difference lies in the frequency of occurrence of particular moves which determines the main purpose served by this section. The results of the study demonstrated that the most frequent step was 'drawing pedagogic implications'. It is one of the steps (step 3) employed to realize Move 7 (Deductions from the research) in the discussion section (See Table 1.15). Moreover, the fact that the analysis revealed a new step, 'Indicating necessity for pedagogic change', that was absent in the discussion section resulted in creating a new separate, therefore, obligatory move 'Dealing with Pedagogic Issues' instead of involving it as a step in 'Deductions from research'

**Table 1.16**

*The Structure of the Pedagogic Implications Section (Ruiying & Allison, 2003, p.380)*

| Moves                                        | Steps                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Summarizing the study</b>         |                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Move 2: Dealing with pedagogic issues</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating necessity for pedagogic change</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implications</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 3: Evaluating the study</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating limitation</li> <li>• Indicating significance/advantage</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Move 4: Deductions from the research</b>  | Recommending further research                                                                                                           |

Another relevant study in the field of applied linguistics was conducted in 2013 by Jalilifar and Shahvali to examine the rhetorical structure of the pedagogical implications and recommendations sections in Master's dissertations and Ph.D. theses. Though the researchers analyzed both Master's dissertations and Ph.D. theses, our discussion will only concentrate on the structure of MA dissertations as they are the focus of our research.

In comparison with Ruiying and Allison's model, Jalilifar and Shahvali's analysis of 80 dissertations revealed a more detailed framework for the analysis of 'Suggestions for further research' sections. This model, as shown in Table 1.17, consists of the following four moves; one obligatory (Move 4) and three optional (Moves 1, 2 & 3):

**A. Reviewing the Study (Move 1):** In this move, researchers begin with reviewing the objectives of the study as the first arbitrary step. Next, they move to step 2 (***Presenting the review of the literature***) where they underline the limitations of previous studies in the literature and call for research that addresses these flaws. Finally, researchers review the study with regard to the methodology (the sample size, data collection instruments and procedures and data analysis methods) and recommend that other researchers replicate the study and cover the missing parts to, hopefully, obtain new results. Reviewing the methodology is an obligatory step which “usually merged with the second step of move 4 (Recommendations for extending the current study)” (Jalilifar & Shahvali, 2013, p.90).

**B. Significance of the Study (Move 2):** It is where researchers show how the results of their research positively contributed to the literature in the field of interest. This involves stressing the originality of the study (step 1: ***Emphasizing the newness of the present study***), providing positive reasons that show the value of the research being undertaken (step 2: ***Justification of the present study***), and inviting other researchers to do more research (step 3: ***justification for further research***). According to Jalilifar and Shahvali, the two last steps are different in that “in justification for further research, necessity of doing more research is emphasized whereas, in the former [Justification for the present study], writers try to justify their work like they do in the introduction section” (p.92).

**C. Limitations of the Study (Move 3):** The aim of this move is to state the obstacles that faced the researcher while conducting the study and negatively affected the final results. This includes reporting flaws in previous studies and recommending further investigation in the future (Step 1). In addition, researchers need to mention the gap in their research (Step 2). That is, they should mention the areas that were not fully covered and the weaknesses of their research. The latter can be related, for example, to the sample size, the research tools employed or the methods used to analyze the data. Further, one of the limitations of the study is the non-generalizability and transferability of the study results (Step 3). In other words, in case the research findings are ambiguous and lack evidence, researchers need to state that these findings cannot be generalized to other populations and contexts.

**D. Recommendations (Move 4):** This was found to be the most frequent, therefore, obligatory move in ‘suggestions for further research’ sections. It generally aims at recommending particular actions that need to be taken with regard to further research on

the topic. This move consists of six steps. The first step (*Point of departure*) was considered as quasi-obligatory because it appeared in the majority of the dissertations that were analyzed; it “is usually a single sentence that introduces sentences which are often in the form of questions or suggestions for further research” (ibid., p.94). Step 2 (*Recommendations for extending the current study*) was obligatory. In this step, researchers recommended that future works studied the aspects that were not tackled in their studies. The third step (*Suggestions for repetition of the current study*) was regarded as arbitrary in Master’s dissertations; it is where researchers recommended that other people in the field replicated the whole research or part of it in another context, with another population using different research tools. In the fourth step (*Implications of the study*), researchers stated the practical applications of the results in the field of interest. With regard to the fifth step (*Further research questions*), it was marked as arbitrary owing to the fact that it rarely appeared (17%) in the Master’s dissertations that were analyzed. In this step, researchers stated their suggestions for further research in the form of questions. In the sixth, and the last, step (*The researcher’s hopes*), researchers expressed their wishes that their results would be useful to other academics and tackled in other studies.

**Table 1.17**

*The Rhetorical Structure of the Suggestions for Further Research Section (Jalilifar & Shahvali, 2013, p. 85)*

| Moves                            | Steps                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Reviewing the Study</b>       | 1) Reviewing the objectives of the study<br>2) Presenting the review of literature<br>3) Reviewing the methodology                                                                                                              |
| <b>Significance of the Study</b> | 1) Emphasizing the newness of the present study<br>2) Justification of the present study<br>3) Justification for further research                                                                                               |
| <b>Limitations of the Study</b>  | 1) Presenting the limitations of the previous studies<br>2) Reference to the gap(s) in the present study<br>3) non-generalizability of the study.                                                                               |
| <b>Recommendations</b>           | 1) Point of departure<br>2) Recommendations for extending the current study<br>3) Suggestions for repetition of the current study<br>4) Implications of the study<br>5) Further research questions<br>6) The researcher’s hopes |

## **1.7. Writing the General Conclusion**

### **1.7.1. Definition and Purpose**

Unlike the introduction, the conclusion section in the dissertation has not gained much attention in the literature. Only a few researchers have discussed the function and structure of conclusions in research articles, theses and dissertations. Though it is, sometimes, the last section to read, the conclusion section plays a significant role in the dissertation as it provides readers with a summary of the whole project and shapes their attitudes towards the work. In this regard, Luneburg and Irby (2008) assert:

conclusions are assertions based on the findings. By reading your conclusions, readers discover to what extent research questions posed have been answered or to what extent hypotheses are sustained or not sustained. Thus, conclusions address issues that support or fail to support your theoretical framework (p. 240).

Therefore, in order for writers to leave a good impression, they should consider the following functions of the conclusion section as stated by Bitchener (2009), Thomas (2009), and Furseth and Everett (2013):

- Reminding readers of the purpose, objectives of the study and the research questions.
- Restating the main findings of the study (i.e., the findings that answered the research questions and confirmed or rejected the hypotheses).
- Critical evaluation of the whole study by showing the significance of the research findings and how they could contribute to fill the gap in the literature and identifying limitations that have influenced the results of the study.
- Providing new insights and highlighting the need for future research on the topic. That is, at the end of the conclusion, researchers should “identify topics that need further study, concepts that must be elaborated and refined, or gaps in research that should be filled” (Furseth & Everett, 2013, p. 134)

These functions are reflected in the following frameworks (Chen & Kuo, 2012; Ruiying & Allison, 2003) that were developed to study the schematic structure and content of the general conclusion.

### **1.7.2. Schematic Structure and Content of the General Conclusion: Discussion of the Main Frameworks**

In addition to the results and discussion sections, Ruiying and Allison (2003) examined the rhetorical structure of the conclusion sections in twenty research articles. The results of the study revealed that the conclusion section consisted of three moves: **(a)** summarizing the study, **(b)** evaluating the study and **(c)** deductions from the research (See Table 1.18). As shown in section (1.6.3.), these three moves are already found in the discussion section. However, the difference between the two sections lies in the number of moves included in each section (i.e., seven moves in the discussion Vs. three moves in the conclusion) and the communicative focus of each section in that the discussion puts more emphasis on ‘*commenting on results*’ as shown in the majority of the articles that were analyzed, whereas ‘*summarizing the study*’ and ‘*evaluating the study*’ (i.e., significance, strengths and limitations) are the focal points of the conclusion section.

Based on Ruiying and Allison’s framework for the analysis of the conclusion section in research articles, Chen and Kuo (2012) designed their framework to analyze the structure of conclusions in 20 applied linguistics Master’s dissertations. The analysis showed that the conclusion was found as a separate chapter in 10 dissertations out of 20. Moreover, the conclusion chapters maintained the same moves identified in Ruiying and Allison’s framework in addition to one supplementary move (in italics) as shown in Table 1.18. Therefore, Chen and Kuo’s model included 4 moves in total: Move 1 ‘*introducing the conclusions chapter*’, Move 2 ‘*Summarizing the study*’, Move 3 ‘*Evaluating the study*’, and Move 4 ‘*deductions from the research*’.

With regard to the frequency of occurrence of particular moves and steps in the conclusion chapters, the results of Chen and Kuo’s study were in accordance with Ruiying and Allison’s in that the most frequent move in the conclusion chapter was ‘*summarizing the study*’. As for the steps, Chen and Kuo found one obligatory step ‘*summarizing the study briefly*’ and three frequent “quasi-obligatory” (p.40) steps namely: ‘drawing pedagogical implications’, ‘recommending further research’ and ‘indicating limitations’.



**Table 1.18**

*A Comparison between Ruiying and Allison's Model (2003) for the Analysis of Article Conclusions and Chen and Kuo's Proposed Model (2012) for the Analysis of Master's Dissertations Conclusions*

| Ruiying & Allison's Framework (2003)<br>Source: (Ruiying & Allison, 2003, p.379) |                                                                                                                                                   | Chen & Kuo's Framework (2012)<br>Source: (Chen & Kuo, 2012, pp. 51 – 52) |                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moves                                                                            | Steps                                                                                                                                             | Moves                                                                    | Steps                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Move 1: Summarizing the study</b>                                             |                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Move 1: Introducing the conclusions chapter</b>                       | Restating purpose, design, research questions/ hypotheses, results, or indicating how conclusions are presented.                                              |
| <b>Move 2: Evaluating the study</b>                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating significance</li> <li>• Indicating limitations.</li> <li>• Evaluating methodology.</li> </ul> | <b>Move 2: Summarizing the study</b>                                     | Summarizing the study briefly.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Move 3: Deductions from the research</b>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommending further research.</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implication.</li> </ul>                      | <b>Move 3: Evaluating the study</b>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating significance/ advantage.</li> <li>• Indicating limitations.</li> <li>• Evaluating methodology.</li> </ul> |
|                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Move 4: Deductions from the (research) study</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommending further research.</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implications.</li> <li>• Making suggestions.</li> </ul>  |

It should be highlighted that Chen and Kuo's model was used as the main framework for the analysis of the conclusion sections of Master's dissertations in our study.

## 1.8. Studies on Dissertation Writing Challenges

There is no doubt that writing a dissertation is a challenging task especially when it is written in a foreign language (Wang & Li, 2008) and required from students who know a few things about the research process and genre writing conventions. In this regard, Paltridge (2002) describes the dissertation writing process as:

A difficult process for native speaker students and often doubly so for non-native speaker students. ESL students may have the level of language proficiency required for admission to their course of study, but not yet the necessary textual knowledge, genre knowledge and social knowledge (Bhatia, 1999) required of them to succeed in this particular setting (p. 137).

In this section, we review the few studies we could find on graduate students' challenges in writing dissertations. First, we summarize the key findings of these studies, then we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each.

One of the studies was conducted by Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) in two universities in New Zealand. More specifically, Master's students' challenges in writing the discussion of results chapter was the main focus of their study. To this end, two in-depth interviews were conducted with four participants (4 students and 4 supervisors). The analysis of the supervisors' interviews demonstrated that their students did not know the function of the discussion section and how to discuss their findings in relation to previous studies in the literature. Instead, they relied on their own interpretations and explanations of the results. The students' interview also showed similar results in this regard. That is, students knew less about the function of the discussion section as a genre as well as the main elements to be included in this section. Another challenge reported by the supervisors was students' level of proficiency in English. This included syntactic and lexical issues in addition to unclear ideas, lack of generalizations, inconsistent use of terms, lack of illustrations and creating cohesion in their writings.

The study of Bitchener and Basturkmen has a number of strengths worth mentioning. To begin with, the research problem and the questions were focused, well-defined and enabled readers to clearly understand what the research was about and what the researchers wanted to achieve. The researchers investigated three main questions. the first question was about students and supervisors' perceptions towards the function of the discussion section. The second question looked at students' and supervisors' perceptions towards the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the discussion section. The last question aimed at comparing between students' and supervisors' perceptions towards the problems faced by the students. Moreover, the researchers clearly identified and explained the gap in the literature, showed how their research would address that missing part in the literature and provided good arguments for the significance of the problem. As for the research design section, the researchers described in detail the characteristics (gender, discipline, place) and selection process (protecting anonymity and sending consent forms) of the participants. Also, the researchers provided a detailed description of data collection and analysis procedures. This involved: the content of the interviews, how they were conducted, how much time each interview took and how the recordings were transcribed and data were processed. Furthermore, the validity of the research instrument was

addressed through member-checking or validation. That is, after analyzing and summarizing the data, the researchers sent the summaries to the participants to check if the researchers' interpretations were accurate or not. Another positive point was in the data analysis and discussion section. The researchers used illustrative samples of data from the interviews to support the findings, discussed the results with reference to previous studies results and answered the research questions set in the introduction. Last but not least, recommendations for future research were offered and limitations of the study were discussed.

Nonetheless, the weaknesses of this study are very few compared with its strengths. Only the following three limitations were noted:

- The researchers did not specify the type of the research design (qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods).
- The number of participants (4 students and 4 supervisors) does not seem to be sufficient to reach the saturation point and gain in-depth understanding of the topic under discussion.
- The researchers should have employed another research instrument (document analysis of the discussion sections) to cross-check the findings obtained from the interviews' answers.

In 2008, another research was undertaken by Wang and Li at one Australian university to gain in-depth understanding of international students' experiences with thesis writing and the challenges they encountered during the writing process. To do so, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 non-native speakers of English. The results of the study revealed that the students faced problems in writing a thesis using English as a second language. In other words, "Students exhibited a general sense of inadequacy in regard to writing a thesis in English as a second language" (p.91). Another issue reported by the participants was the difference between English and the cultural backgrounds of the participants' mother tongue in regard to rhetorical conventions and writing style. In addition, the students said that their supervisors' feedback focused much more on written language and linguistic problems instead of structure and content of the thesis. Even when the supervisors gave feedback on the content of the thesis chapters, the students said that the feedback was not really helpful for them to improve their work as the supervisors just put question marks on the mistake without explaining what they meant.

Wang and Li' study has a number of strengths. First, the gap in the literature was clearly identified (lack of studies on international students' challenges in writing their theses) and some expected benefits of the study were highlighted (offering useful insights to inform supervisors engaged in supervision with international students). Second, the type of the research design was specified and the rationale for selecting this type was explained (qualitative approach). Additionally, the researchers provided details about the participants' characteristics (age, country, academic degree and research interests) and the selection process (international research students enrolled in higher degree research programs at one Australian university in 2007). They also described the research instrument used (semi-structured interview) and explained the steps they followed to collect and analyze data (how the interviews were conducted, how anonymity was protected (using codes instead of names), and how interview transcripts were analyzed.). Another strength is considering reliability and validity issues. That is, the researchers analyzed the data independently (inter-rater reliability) before they compared their findings and ensured validity of the data obtained from the interviews through member-checking strategy. Last but important, the researchers used sample from the students' interviews to strengthen their interpretations and provided a detailed presentation of the findings in relation to the aim of the study (identifying the challenges faced by international students in their thesis writing process).

Although this study has many strengths, it also has the following limitations:

- The research problem and the research questions were not stated.
- The study should have a comparative mode. That is, interviewing both students and supervisors seems important to look at the problem from two different perspectives.
- Due to the limited literature on the topic, the researchers referred to three previous studies only to discuss and evaluate their study results. We believe that this limited number of previous studies is not enough to provide solid interpretations and explanations of the research findings.
- Very few implications, compared to the number of identified challenges, were stated at the end of the paper.
- Weaknesses of the study were not addressed by the researchers.

The issue of students' challenges in dissertation writing has been also addressed in the Taiwanese context by Yeh (2010) who carried out an interview-based study to investigate

students' perspectives of research writing and the difficulties they encountered in the research process. To this end, four students were interviewed using their mother tongue. The results of the study demonstrated that selecting a good, interesting and feasible research topic was the first problem identified by the students. The second issue faced by the graduate students was related to reviewing the literature. The students stated that finding relevant sources and synthesizing information from those sources was a challenging task. For them, "reviewing the literature – a task that requires skills such as mining sources, integrating and synthesizing ideas and theories – is often a brand-new experience and constitutes a formidable task" (p. 6). Moreover, students admitted that they lacked library and information literacy skills; they did not know how to use electronic databases to search for relevant references. Also, lack of relevant sources represented another challenge for the students as, in most cases, they were required to pay money in order to get books and articles from the net. Furthermore, some students mentioned lack of academic writing skills (such as paraphrasing, summarizing and synthesizing) as one of the challenges they faced when writing their theses. This study has several strengths listed as follows:

- A detailed description of the research site was provided (i.e., private university in Taiwan, years Master's students spent in studying, academic writing and research methods' courses taken in the master's program and the textbooks used by teachers).
- Sample: Characteristics (gender, educational background and level in writing) and selection process of the participants (random selection of four students from a research methods class) were described.
- Data presentation: Samples of quotations from the interviews were provided to support the results.
- Data discussion: The findings were discussed in relation to previous works. That is, whenever the researcher reports a finding, he compares it with previous findings in the literature.
- Implications: A detailed discussion of the implications was provided. They have been appropriately drawn from the study findings. Examples of implications include using formative assessment instead of summative assessment and holding regular consultations with students to identify their problems in research writing.

- Recommendations for future research were also clearly stated at the end of the paper. Examples of these included: shedding light on other disciplines not only applied linguistics and conducting longitudinal studies to investigate students' perspectives and check if they are open to change over time.

Despite the strengths mentioned above, this study suffers from a number of flaws that deserve to be considered. First and foremost, the fact that the research problem was stated based on the results of the previous studies is not enough; the researchers should have also provided arguments from the context where their study took place. In other words, they should have clearly explained how they knew about the existence of such a problem in the Taiwanese context. Additionally, the research design suffers from some limitations in regard to the sample and the data collection instrument. As for the former, including only four students in the sample is not enough to get in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, the researcher used only one research tool (semi-structured interviews) to gather data. He could have added another tool (document analysis of students' written productions or the supervisors' and examiners' reports on students' work) to validate the findings. Also, for the purpose of cross-verification, he should have interviewed supervisors as well to know about their perspectives towards students' problems in research writing. Another important point worth-stating is the use of the students' mother tongue (Mandarin Chinese) in the interviews. We believe that the interview should have been conducted in English because the participants were graduate Master students and every student is supposed to understand and speak English well. In addition, conducting the interview in one language and then translating the transcripts into another language may result in data analysis bias as the researcher may not be able to report what exactly has been said and meant by the participants especially that the researcher did not provide any information about the data analysis procedures. Finally, the researcher did not acknowledge the limitations of the study and how they affected the quality of the results.

In another context, Zimbabwe, Mafa and Mapolisa (2012) conducted a study which had two main objectives. First, to explore the supervisors' experiences supervising students conducting research in the two types of research programs (faculty based and higher degrees including Master and Doctor of philosophy). The second objective was to investigate students' challenges in conducting research. To this end, the researchers conducted interviews with 25 lecturers from Zimbabwe Open University. The document analysis of the interviews revealed that one of the major problems students faced was

choosing a good and focused research topic as the supervisors reported that the topics their students came up with were either too broad, too narrow, or not interesting topics. Another serious issue was in writing the literature review chapter. Supervisors noted that their students were not even aware of the purpose and the structure of this chapter. Also, they (i.e., students) did not know how to select and identify the most important and relevant ideas. Another problem related to the literature review was the absence of students' critical stance and lack of critical thinking skills. That is, students did not comment on what they wrote nor they discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the studies they reviewed. Other problems in this chapter included plagiarism and citing and referencing issues. Moreover, supervisors declared that their students were unable to formulate the conceptual and theoretical frameworks for their research. As far as methodological issues are concerned, supervisors stated that the type of the research design adopted was not clearly explained by the candidates. In addition, students find difficulties in "translating the concept into its measurable or observable indicators when actually conducting research" (p. 1692). Therefore, there was kind of contradiction between what was proposed by the candidate and what was required. Moreover, with regard to the discussion and interpretation of findings, students found difficulties in making references to previous works to support or refute their research results; they were also unable to analyze and present their data clearly. Other challenges included lack of students' competency in research, students' procrastination, plagiarism and lack of supervision meetings.

Mafa and Mapolisa' study has some strengths that are worth stating. They are as follows:

- The research objectives and questions were clearly stated (exploring supervisors' experiences in regard to students' challenges in research writing and possible solutions).
- The researchers specified the type of research design they adopted (qualitative).
- The sample size is adequate (25 supervisors).
- Appropriate data collection methods were used: interviews with supervisors and document analysis of minutes of evaluation convocation for supervisors, reports from proposal defense sessions and research projects' examiners' reports.
- Information about data analysis procedures were given (recording interviews, coding and categorizing data into themes).

- Several implications for practice (e.g., organizing workshops and seminars on aspects of research and offering accessible databases to supervisors) have been provided at the end of the article.

However, as any empirical studies, this work has some flaws that future researchers who would like to replicate the study should pay attention to in order to get more valid results. To begin with, the statement of the research problem is very short (one sentence) and does not provide a detailed description of the context of the phenomenon under discussion. With regard to the review of related literature, the researchers did not review a sufficient amount of literature. Instead, a very few studies were superficially mentioned (i.e., strengths and weakness of these studies were not discussed). Another limitation concerns the research participants. That is only dissertations' supervisors took part in the study. In fact, since the challenges to be explored concern students in the first place, the researchers should have also included them in the sample. Hence, collecting data from both students and supervisors (i.e., two different perspectives) would have helped the researchers gain in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and, therefore, increase the validity of the results. Last but not least, it is unfortunate that the researchers ignored one of the most important elements of the discussion section (commenting on results through showing similarities and differences between their findings and other related studies'). In other words, they relied on their own interpretations and explanations instead of discussing the results of their study in regard to previous works.

A similar study was undertaken by Loan (2017) to explore Vietnamese Master's students' challenges in dissertation writing. To this end, the researcher used two data collection instruments namely: text analysis of 24 MA dissertations based on Chen and Kuo's framework (2012) and semi-structured interviews with students and their supervisors. The results of the study demonstrated that students did encounter challenges in writing particular sections and chapters of the dissertations. For instance, the analysis of abstracts has shown that most of them were lengthy (5 paragraphs in each) and included some inappropriate elements that should not be there such as research questions and hypotheses. Other problems were identified in writing the literature review chapter. Examples of these problems included students' inability to synthesize and show the relationship between their own studies and previous works. Also, the analysis showed that students were weak at paraphrasing and critically evaluating what they read. For example, when reviewing previous studies, students only described what researchers did without



discussing the strengths and weaknesses of those studies. With regard to the results chapter, it was found that students lack personal interpretations of the research findings reported. That is, students only presented their findings without interpreting them or explaining what they meant.

As for the strengths of Loan's study, the following are some positive points that are worth mentioning:

- The sample size in the study was adequate (24 students and their supervisors + 24 MA dissertations.).
- Ethical considerations: the researcher indicated that before selecting MA dissertations for the analysis, approval was obtained from the writers.
- The researcher used appropriate data collection tools (document analysis and semi-structured interviews) that fit the research objectives (problems in writing dissertations)
- A detailed discussion of practical implications was provided by the researcher. She suggested a detailed genre-based course to teach the rhetorical structure of Master's dissertations.

Nevertheless, this study suffers from some limitations. For example, the first limitation is related to the research problem which is not clearly stated by the researcher. She has just stated that Vietnamese students have not been taught how to write a thesis, yet she did not provide any arguments or evidence that support her claims. Also, she did not state the research question(s). As already shown (see section 1.3.1.5.), research questions are essential to the research process as they help researchers identify the remaining steps they have to take to conduct their research as well as the type of data they should gather. Thus, not stating the research question(s) at the very beginning made things ambiguous and might negatively affect the results of the study. Another limitation concerns the research design and data collection instruments. In this study, the researcher did not provide any details about the research design she adopted (qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods). Regarding the research instruments, the researcher only provided the name of the framework she employed to analyze the dissertations without any further explanations of its characteristics or steps. Also, she neither described the interview items nor explained how the interviews were conducted with the participants. The third shortcoming of Loan's

research is concerned with the limitations of the study. The researcher did not identify the flaws of the study and how they affected the quality of the findings.

A more recent qualitative study was conducted by Peng (2018) to explore supervisors' views with regard to the common difficulties faced by Chinese EFL research students and the causes behind such challenges. Data for the research were collected through conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 supervisors. The results of the study revealed that the major issues that students generally encountered were related to writing the literature review chapter. The first issue reported by supervisors was the inability of the students to identify relevant literature and critically evaluate previous studies related to their research. Another issue related to the literature review was the students' poor ability to formulate research problems and questions on the basis of the gap(s) identified in previous works. Their review of the literature was written in form of narrative summaries without any comments or attempts to explain. As one of the supervisors said, the students' literature review chapter looked like a 'shopping list' of what others said and did. Yet, no logical link between the topic under study and previous research was shown. In addition to the absence of students' critical stance, supervisors noted that students were weak at establishing theoretical and conceptual frameworks for their own research.

There are some positive things to be said about this study. First, the research problem was clearly stated (Chinese students have troubles in writing the theoretical part of their dissertations) and the researcher provided good argument for the significance. Also, the gap in the literature was clearly identified by the researcher (a few studies in the Chinese context and supervisors' perspectives were ignored in all studies). As for the research design, the number of participants who were interviewed is adequate (13 supervisors) and details about data collection and analysis procedures were provided (i.e., where and how the interviews were conducted and the steps followed in the analysis). Another positive point about the research design is that the researcher considered obtaining approval from the participants before involving them in the study. To this end, he sent an interview consent form to invite the supervisors to participate in the study, give them a clear idea about the aim behind involving them in the research and agree on the conditions of participation. Regarding data presentation and discussions, the researcher provided sufficient examples of the data (quotations from the interviews) to support the research findings and interpreted and discussed the identified results in relation to the research questions and objective. Finally, based on the research findings, pedagogical implications

for practice, such as adopting a genre-based teaching approach in English for academic purposes classes and offering intensive training in dissertation writing for graduate students) were discussed at the end of the paper.

As with the majority of studies, Peng's study is subject to the following limitations:

- Design: The research design was not clearly specified by the researcher (i.e., no information about the research paradigm was provided in the methods' section).
- Sample: The researcher's focus was only on the supervisors' perspectives in regard to the problem under discussion. The researcher should have, instead, considered investigating two different perspectives by interviewing students as well to cross-check the answers provided by supervisors.
- The selection process of participants was not described by the researcher.
- Validity: the researcher used only one data collection tool (in-depth interviews with supervisors). It would have been better if he had analyzed the content of some selected dissertations as a means of triangulation. In this way, using two research tools would help the researcher cross-check the findings and lend them more credibility.
- The discussion section: The fact that the researchers discussed the results based on their own interpretations only is not enough. He should have also shown how his research findings support or refute the results of previous works to strengthen his claims.
- The limitations of the study were not acknowledged by the researcher.

In the following section, we review the scarce literature available on the reasons for graduate students' difficulties in writing dissertations. In fact, we found only three studies (**Bitchener and Basturkmen, 2006; Yeh, 2010; Peng, 2018**) on this aspect, yet their focus was on particular chapters of the dissertation namely the literature review and discussion of results chapters. We could not find any study that explored the causes behind students' difficulties in writing the other parts of the dissertation.

As we have already seen, Peng' study (2018) shed light on the problems faced by students in writing the review of the literature chapter of their dissertations. As noted in the previous section, the results showed that writing this chapter is a daunting task for graduate students. According to the supervisors who took part in the study, weaknesses in English writing abilities including grammatical and spelling mistakes were among the most serious

factors that led to students' bad performance in writing the literature review chapter in particular and their dissertations in general. Another cause stated by the participants was the expansion of enrolment in undergraduates and graduate students since 1999 in China. All students, including those who had weak language foundations, got accepted as graduates while the number of supervisors remained the same. Moreover, overcrowded classes where students outnumbered teachers represented another factor which led to lack of opportunities for students to get feedback from their teachers, who had negative attitudes towards grading tasks, on their writing; which in turn resulted in the aforementioned issues.

Moreover, Yeh' study (2010) also demonstrated that the most challenging part in the dissertation was the literature review chapter. Examples of the difficulties encountered by students included reviewing related sources and synthesizing information from them and lack of academic writing skills. These difficulties, according to Yeh, were due to two major reasons. First, students had issues in reading relevant sources due to the language and background factor as some of them declared that they were not familiar with particular words and concepts used in their field of interest. As for the second problem (research writing issues), the results of the study revealed that it resulted from lack of guidance and instruction in research writing. That is, students reported that they received little feedback on the language they used in their writing as their supervisors' main focus was on methodological and general writing issues instead of addressing their students' research writing skills.

Another important chapter (discussion of results) in the dissertation was the focus of Bitchener and Basturkmen' study (2006). As already noted, students faced a lot of difficulties in writing this chapter such as unfamiliarity with the main parts that make up the discussion of results chapter and level of proficiency in English. These difficulties, according to the participants, were due to a number of reasons. First, the feedback provided by supervisors was mainly focused on language and style requirements. Supervisors did not give importance to the overall structure and content of the discussion of results section. In addition, the students were not taught the structure and functions of sections and chapters of the dissertation in the research methods' course. Also, the fact that researchers were still novice made writing the discussion section a demanding task for them as it "makes greater cognitive demands on students than other sections of the thesis so it may be that students need closer supervision when writing the DRS than is necessary for other sections" (p. 13). Last but not least, Bitchener and Basturkmen viewed that if students did not reread the

literature review chapter, they would forget many important things mentioned in previous studies. Hence, they would face challenges in interpreting and discussing their results.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons, Wang and Li in their study (2008) identified diverse cultural backgrounds of the non-native students as an important factor that negatively affected students' dissertation writing performance. For instance, students whose first languages were not English (Arabic and Thai) reported that writing style conventions in English and their first languages were not the same; they said that they were not used to directly criticizing others' claims as English writers often did. For them, doing that was considered as an inappropriate behavior in their mother cultures

Based on the studies we reviewed in this chapter, it is apparent that there is scarcity of literature on graduate students' challenges in writing applied linguistics and didactics Master's dissertations at the international level (New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, Vietnam and China). However, to the best of our knowledge, only one academic work has sought to investigate this problem in the Algerian context (Ghaouar, 2019). Our study, therefore, is undertaken in a new context with didactics students from University of Blida 2 in an attempt to gain in-depth understanding of their experiences with dissertation writing.

Moreover, we have seen that each of the studies reported above suffered from a number of limitations that negatively affected its quality and validity of the findings. Thus, in our study, we will try to address the gaps identified in the literature and, hopefully, overcome the methodological weaknesses of the aforementioned studies (such as: sample size, absence of triangulation, validity and reliability issues) in order to get more valid and reliable data. Details about these aspects are provided in the following chapter (Research design).

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, this chapter reviewed and discussed major analysis frameworks and studies related to the topic under discussion. It was divided into 8 sections. The first was an introductory section which aimed at defining the key concepts related to the topic of our thesis and describing their importance and characteristic features namely: genre, discourse community, schematic structure, move, step and dissertation. In the six sections that followed the introductory section, we discussed in detail the schematic structure and content of each section and chapter in the dissertation as well as the main analysis

frameworks. That is, in the second section (1.2.), we showed how important and useful abstracts were in academic papers and how they acted as screening devices which influenced readers' decision whether the paper was worth reading or not. We also reviewed the main frameworks that were employed to analyze the schematic structure of abstracts (Bhatia, 2013; Hyland, 2004; Lorés, 2004). These models all concurred that the abstract should include four main elements namely: purpose, methods, results/findings and conclusions. The focus of section three (1.3.) was on the structure and content of the general introduction in a dissertation. First, we presented a general overview of the generic section headings that are often required in the guidelines provided by universities in general and Blida 2 University in particular. These headings are: background to/of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, statement of the purpose, research questions and hypotheses and definitions of key terms. Next, we discussed the three versions of Swales' CARS model for the analysis of introductory sections in research articles (1981, 1990, 2004) and showed how this framework was adopted, with some modifications, by Bunton (2002) and Chen and Kuo (2012) to analyze the schematic structure of introductions in theses and dissertations. In the fourth section (1.4.), we shed light on the significant role of the literature review chapter in establishing context for the topic under study, showing its value to readers and guiding researchers to identify the gap and design their research. In this section, we also addressed the two main frameworks, Kwan (2006) and Chen and Kuo (2012), that were developed to analyze the structure of the literature review chapter in theses and dissertations. The main concern of section five (1.5.) was to highlight the primary objective of the methodology chapter which is providing detailed description and explanation of the research paradigm, participants, data collection and analysis tools and procedures. Additionally, as we did in other sections, we discussed the main frameworks that were employed to analyze the structure of the methodology chapter namely: Lim (2006), Peacock (2011) and Chen and Kuo (2012). As far as the function and structure of the results and discussion chapter are concerned, they were addressed in section six (1.6.). We divided this section into four sub-sections. In the first sub-section, we presented the function of 'the results section', which is reporting the research findings, its organization and the methods used to display data. Sub-section two, on the other hand, shed light on the main function of 'the discussion section', which is interpreting and explaining the research findings, and the generic section headings that should be present in this section. In the third sub-section, we discussed the major frameworks for the analysis of the two sections' schematic structure (i.e., results and discussion); more specifically Ruiying and Allison

(2003) and Chen and Kuo (2012). As for the fourth sub-section, though it was always considered as part of the results and discussion chapter as already noted in section 1.6.4., 'the pedagogic implications' could sometimes occur as a separate section that has its own function, which is recommending particular actions that need to be taken with regard to further research on the topic, and schematic structure. The latter was discussed with reference to two main analysis frameworks (Ruiying & Allison, 2003; Jalilifar & Shahvali, 2013). Next, the main focus of section seven was on writing the general conclusion. First, we highlighted the role of the conclusion in summarizing the whole paper and shaping readers' attitudes towards the whole work. Afterwards, we reviewed the major frameworks that examined the schematic structure of the conclusion section namely: Ruiying and Allison (2003) and Chen and Kuo (2012). Last but not least, section eight focused on presenting the findings of some studies related to our research topic (students' challenges in dissertation writing), highlighting their strengths and addressing their limitations. In the light of these studies' findings, we could identify the gap and the need to undertake this research.

# **CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES**



## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we presented the literature review related to our research. As the last section in chapter one showed, works on graduate students' challenges in writing dissertations at the international level are scarce. In the Algerian context, however, we could find only one study (Ghaouar, 2019) that investigated this issue. Hence, this gap in the literature triggered our interest in the topic and oriented our attention towards exploring the challenges encountered by Algerian Master's students, more specifically M2 students at the English Department - Blida 2 University-, in writing their dissertations. This chapter, therefore, aims at addressing the aforementioned gap and the methodological flaws identified in the few studies we reviewed in the theoretical chapter (See section 1.8). It provides a detailed description of the research paradigm adopted, the research setting, participants and data collection tools. It also explains the rationale for the selection of the participants and the research instruments as well as the procedures followed in gathering and analyzing the data. The aim of the last two sections in this chapter is to discuss trustworthiness of our research and ethical considerations.

### **2.1. Objectives and Research Questions**

The primary purpose behind conducting an extensive review of related literature was to show how each part of the dissertation should be structured according to universal frameworks in the field of applied linguistics and didactics. We paid particular attention to showing how these frameworks were used as a basis upon which the analysis framework employed in our study was developed.

Our discussion of the previous studies (Chapter 1, section 1.8) aimed at casting light on the major limitations and, hence, identifying the research gaps and presenting the need for further investigation of the areas that were neglected in those studies. We have also paid particular attention to showing how previous studies gave the lion's share of their focus on the challenges in writing some parts of the dissertation, namely the literature review and the discussion chapters, while the other parts (introduction, the method chapter, and the general conclusion) despite their importance, were totally neglected. Based on these claims, the following objectives are set up:

Our first objective will be to identify the challenges experienced by Master's students in writing and presenting the different parts of the dissertation. This will be

achieved through employing various data collection instruments discussed in section 2.4. We shall limit ourselves to investigating only the challenges that are related to the schematic structure and content of each part in the dissertation. Other challenges related to the students' psychology and socio-cultural context are beyond the scope of this study.

Moreover, to investigate the challenges, we shall use Chen and Kuo's framework (2012) which was developed to analyze the schematic structure of the dissertations parts namely: the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter, and the general conclusion. The rationale for adopting this framework in particular is explained in section 2.4.3. of this chapter.

Our second objective will be to investigate the factors/reasons that lead to the students challenges in writing a successful dissertation. In the theoretical chapter, we noted that there was a very limited number of studies (only 3 studies) that were carried out to find why the students encountered challenges in writing particular parts of the dissertation namely the literature review and the discussion chapters, yet no study focused on the reasons behind students' challenges in writing the remaining parts.

On the basis of these objectives, the following two research questions are formulated:

- **Research Question 1:** What challenges do students of didactics, at Blida 2 University, encounter in writing their Master's dissertations?
- **Research Question 2:** What factors are believed to be responsible for the challenges experienced by Master's students in writing their dissertations?

## **2.2. Research Design**

The main objective of this study is to explore Master 2 students' challenges in dissertation writing and the factors that contribute to these challenges. The research is, therefore, based on the exploratory concurrent-nested (or embedded) design in which priority is given to the qualitative aspect (predominant) over the quantitative strand (secondary). It is concurrent because it involves collecting and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the results and triangulating them. "QUAL + quan", is the notation which

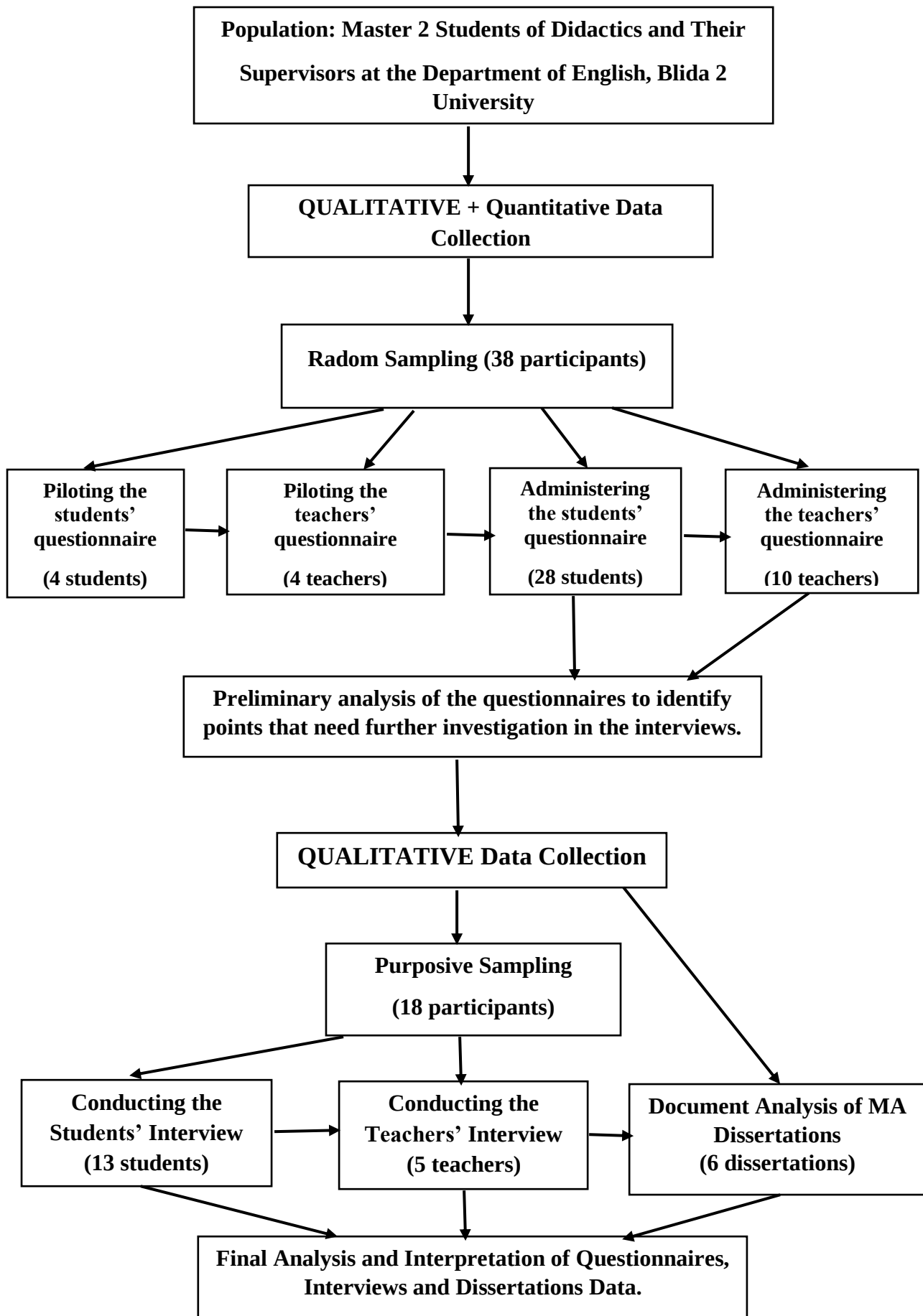
is used by Morse (1991) to refer to this qualitatively-driven mixed methods design (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). According to Tench et al. (2018), one of the advantages associated with this design is that “it enables the researcher to use a research method they are familiar with as the dominant method, so the researcher does not have to spend vast amounts of time developing expertise in a less familiar method (as it is less dominant)” (p. 276). To this end, we decided to employ these qualitatively-driven research tools: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

The quantitative aspect was added as a “supplemental component” (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017, p. 119) as it is only present in the students’ and teachers’ questionnaires. That is, in addition to the open-ended questions which were used concurrently to collect qualitative data, three types of closed-ended questions (dichotomous, multiple choice and Likert-scale questions) were used to gather quantitative data. These questions focused on students’ and teachers’ general attitudes towards the topic under investigation, and the extent to which writing particular sections and chapters of the dissertation was difficult to the students.

As for the qualitative (predominant) data, they were collected by including open-ended questions in the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis of Master’s dissertations. The intent of the open-ended items in the questionnaires is to check the students’ and teachers’ familiarity with dissertation writing requirements and the main parts that make up the dissertation sections and chapters. In the interviews, the open-ended questions aim at addressing the participants’ responses to the closed-ended items (in the questionnaires) which need in-depth exploration and elaborating on the themes obtained from the open-ended responses. Figure 2.1. represents a diagram which illustrates the research design adopted. Details about the two phases and the steps followed are provided in the following sections.

Figure 2.1. *The Research Design*

## Exploratory Concurrent-nested Design



## **2.3. Research Setting and Participants**

This study was conducted in the English Department at Blida 2 University. The researcher chose to carry out the study at this university because she had easy access to the Master's dissertations available at the level of the department's library. In addition, being a member of the teaching staff in the English Department, the researcher could easily contact the participants as the majority of the students who took part in the study were her students and the teachers were colleagues.

The population of this study consisted of 53 Master 2 didactics students and 10 teachers supervising Master's dissertations in the English Department at Blida 2 University during the academic year 2018 – 2019.

At the beginning, the sample selected to answer the students' questionnaire included 28 students (50% of the whole population). However, 4 students were discarded later on because they did not return the questionnaires. Thus, 24 was the final number of the students who took part in our study; more precisely 22 females and 2 males aged between 22 and 36+. These students were randomly chosen based on their willingness to participate. In addition, 10 teachers (3 males and 7 females) were involved in the study. It is worth noting that these 10 teachers make up the whole population of teachers who are qualified to supervise and assess Master's dissertations in didactics.

### ***2.3.1. Choice of the Interview Sample***

Since the main aim of the present study is to get in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (i.e., students' challenges and experiences with dissertations writing), we believe that the most appropriate type of sampling is the purposeful/purposive sampling. That is, the students were selected to take part in this research based on the researchers' personal judgment as whether they (i.e., participants) could best describe the situation, provide them (i.e., researchers) with rich and reliable information, and help them better understand the problem under discussion (Charles et al., 2015; Klenke, 2008; Van Manen, 2014 as cited in Gentles et al., 2015). This type of sampling is defined by Neuman (2014) as: "a valuable sampling type for special situations. It is used in exploratory research or in field research. It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind." (pp. 273 -274).

According to Klenke (2008) and Schneider et al. (2013), sample size in qualitative research is not as important as in quantitative research due to the fact that main focus in the latter is on the representativeness and inclusiveness of the sample whereas, qualitative research aims at gaining in-depth understanding of the problem being explored and the context surrounding it. This is why researchers who conduct qualitative studies usually start without “a pre-determined sample size” (Schneider et al., 2013, p.127) as the answer to “how many people should be included in the study?” is not clear. However, a group of researchers (e.g., Klenke, 2008, Marshall et al., 2013; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) believe that the sample size in qualitative research can be determined when a saturation point is reached. The saturation point is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a “point at which no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated.” (Cited in Guest et al., 2006, pp. 64-65). However, the most important question that should be asked here is “how many participants should be involved in order to reach this saturation point and determine the sample size?”. To answer this question, though “it is virtually impossible to do so” (Guest et al., 2006, p.61), we determined the size of the sample selected for the students’ interview on the basis of the results of some studies and guidelines of a group of scholars who addressed the issue of saturation point and sample size in qualitative research. One of the studies is that of Guest et al. (2006) who used data from a qualitative study they conducted earlier involving 60 in-depth interviews with women from two African countries in order to see how many interviews were needed to reach the saturation point and determine the number of participants to be included in the sample. As a result, they found that saturation was reached in the first twelve **(12)** interviews. In addition, a group of researchers provided some recommendations and agreed on the idea that the most common sample size that would help qualitative researchers reach the point of saturation ranged between **10** and **30** participants. For example, Kuzel (1999) recommended **5** to **8** participants in a homogenous sample and **12** to **20** or more “when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation.” (p.42). Similarly, Morgan et al. (2002) declare that “the first few interviews produce a lot of new data, but by **20** interviews, hardly any new information is retrieved” (Cited in Bernard, 2011, p.154). Bernard (2011) also agrees with Morgan et al. (2002) in that “**10 -20** knowledgeable people are enough to uncover and understand the core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experiences.” (p.154). Last but not least,

Warren (2002) suggested that in qualitative interview studies, “the minimum number of interviews seems to fall in the range of **20 to 30.**” (p.99). Therefore, on the basis of these claims and recommendations, we believed that interviewing **18** participants (**13 students and 5 teachers**) would be fair enough to reach the saturation point and gain in-depth understanding of the topic under discussion.

## **2.4. Data Collection Instruments**

In order to collect data for this research, three data collection instruments were used: (1) Questionnaires, (2) Interviews, and (3) Document analysis of Master’s dissertations.

We chose to use these three data collection tools because we believed that they would allow us to get a large amount of data about the topic under discussion. Additionally, we think that using more than one research method is needed in order to lend credibility to our findings (Eisner, 1991 as cited in Bowen, 2009) and increase their validity and reliability through triangulation. In McNeill and Chapman’s words (2005), “triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to cross-check and verify the reliability of a particular research tool and the validity of the data collected....and means simply that you get a better view of things by looking at them from more than one direction” (p.23).

The questionnaires and the interviews items were designed based on our observations during the oral defenses we attended and our readings in the field of writing theses and dissertations in foreign and second language.

The questionnaires and interviews were piloted before employing them to collect data for the main study in order to check the clarity of items. Details about the pilot study are discussed later in section 2.5.6.

### **2.4.1. Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are the most popular and appropriate instruments which can be used to collect a large amount of data about the topic being studied in a short period of time and with less efforts. Questionnaires have several advantages which are best summarized by Dornyei (2003):

The main attraction of questionnaires is their unprecedented efficiency in terms of (a) researcher time, (b) researcher effort, and (c) financial resources. By administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount

of information in less than an hour, ...furthermore, if the questionnaire is well constructed, processing the data can also be fast and relatively straightforward, especially by using some modern computer software (Gilham, 2000)....They are also very versatile, which means that they can be used successfully with a variety of people in a variety of situations targeting a variety of topics (pp. 9 -10).

#### **2.4.1.1. Description of the Students' Questionnaire**

The students' questionnaire (See Appendices B & C) opens with a short paragraph which briefly states the aim of the study and invites the participants to kindly answer the questions. In this paragraph, the participants are informed that their answers will be only used for research purposes and their identities will remain anonymous. At the end of the paragraph, the participants are thanked for their collaboration.

Since the data sought is about students' challenges in writing the sections and chapters of the master's dissertation, we believe it is appropriate to structure and divide the questionnaire into sections which correspond to each part of the dissertation. Each section includes a set of questions about a specific section/chapter. This structure, we think, would help us in the analysis to better understand and identify the challenges encountered by MA students and compare the data so as to determine which section/chapter, from the students' perspectives, is more challenging and difficult to write.

**Section I: Background Information:** This section includes a set of personal questions about the participants (**Qs: 1, 2, & 3**) and their general attitudes towards dissertation writing (**Qs: 4, 5, 6, 7, & 8**). Table 2.1 presents the aim of each item:

**Table 2.1.**

#### ***Aims of the Items That Make up Section I in the Students' Questionnaire***

| <b>Questions</b>         | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Questions 1 and 2</b> | To determine the gender and age group of the participants. Though the data obtained from these two questions do not serve any research purposes (i.e., they are irrelevant to our research), we included them as warming up (or opening) questions to encourage the respondents' participation in the study. |
| <b>Question 3</b>        | To know if the students encountered difficulties in finding a good topic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Questions 4 and 5</b> | To know whether the students were taught how to write a dissertation in academic writing ( <b>Q 4</b> ) and research skills ( <b>Q 5</b> ) modules.                                                                                                                                                          |



|                                        |                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 6</b>                      | To investigate the students' general attitudes towards the difficulty of writing a dissertation.         |
| <b>Question 7</b><br>(follow-up to Q6) | To determine which sections and chapters in the dissertation were the most difficult to write.           |
| <b>Question 8</b><br>(follow-up to Q6) | To determine the strategies used by the students when they face problems in writing their dissertations. |

The sections that follow the first section (i.e., background information) include more specific questions about writing a particular part of a dissertation.

**Section II 'Writing the Abstract':** This section includes three questions: Q9, Q10, and Q11. Their aims are presented in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2.**

*Aims of the Items That Make up Section II in the Students' Questionnaire*

| Questions          | Aims                                                                                   |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 9</b>  | To check students' understanding of what an abstract is                                |
| <b>Question 10</b> | To assess their familiarity with the main parts that make up the abstract              |
| <b>Question 11</b> | To explore the extent to which the students find writing the abstract a difficult task |

**Section III: Writing the General Introduction:** This section is made up of four questions: Q12, Q13, Q14 and Q15. Their aims are presented in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3.**

*Aims of the Items That Make up Section III in the Students' Questionnaire*

| Questions                  | Aims                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 12</b>         | To assess the students' familiarity with the function of the general introduction in the dissertation.              |
| <b>Questions 13 and 14</b> | To assess the students' familiarity with the main parts that make up the general introduction, and their functions. |
| <b>Question 15</b>         | To explore the extent to which the students find difficulties in writing the general introduction.                  |

**Section IV: Writing the Literature Review Chapter:** This is in fact the longest section in the questionnaire as it includes 9 questions: **Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q22, Q23, and Q24**). Their aims are presented in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4.**

***Aims of the Items That Make up Section IV in the Students' Questionnaire***

| Questions                  | Aims                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 16</b>         | To check the students' understanding of what a review of the literature is                                                                            |
| <b>Question 17</b>         | To check the students' understanding of the purpose(s) served by the literature review chapter.                                                       |
| <b>Question 18</b>         | To check students' understanding of what a gap in the literature is                                                                                   |
| <b>Question 19</b>         | To explore whether the students were able to identify research gaps                                                                                   |
| <b>Question 20</b>         | To assess the students' familiarity with the main parts that make up the literature review chapter.                                                   |
| <b>Question 21</b>         | To determine the extent to which the students experienced difficulties in writing the literature review chapter.                                      |
| <b>Question 22</b>         | To investigate the referencing style followed by the students to write in-text citations and the list of references.                                  |
| <b>Questions 23 and 24</b> | To determine the extent to which the students find difficulties writing in-text citations ( <b>Q 29</b> ) and the list of references ( <b>Q 30</b> ). |

**Section V: Writing the Method Chapter:** This section includes three questions: Q25, Q26, and Q27. Their aims are presented in Table 2.5.

**Table 2.5.**

***Aims of the Items That Make up Section V in the Students' Questionnaire***

| Questions          | Aims                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 25</b> | To check if the students are aware of the function of the research methodology chapter in their dissertations. |
| <b>Question 26</b> | To assess the students' familiarity with the main parts that make up the method chapter                        |
| <b>Question 27</b> | To determine the extent to which the students find difficulties in writing the research method chapter.        |

**Section VI: Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter:** This section consists of seven questions: **Q28, Q29, Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, and Q34**. Their aims are presented in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6.**

***Aims of the Items That Make up Section VI in the Students' Questionnaire***

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 28</b> | To check whether the students are aware of the function of the results section.                                      |
| <b>Question 29</b> | To check whether the students are aware of the content of the results section.                                       |
| <b>Question 30</b> | To assess the students' knowledge of the function of the discussion section.                                         |
| <b>Question 31</b> | To assess the students' knowledge of the content of the discussion section.                                          |
| <b>Question 32</b> | To see whether the students know the function served by the pedagogical implications and recommendations section.    |
| <b>Question 33</b> | To <b>assess the</b> students' knowledge of the content of the pedagogical implications and recommendations section. |
| <b>Question 34</b> | To determine the extent to which the students find difficulties in writing the results and discussion chapter.       |

**Section VII: Writing the General Conclusion:** This section is composed of three questions: **Q35, Q36, and Q37**. Their aims are presented in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7.**

***Aims of the Items That Make up Section VII in the Students' Questionnaire***

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 35</b> | To determine whether students are aware of the function of the general conclusion in the dissertation. |
| <b>Question 36</b> | To investigate the students' familiarity with the main parts that make up the general conclusion.      |
| <b>Question 37</b> | To determine the extent to which the students face difficulties in writing the general conclusion.     |

**Section VIII: The Students' Relationship with Their Supervisors:** The general aim of this section is to elicit information from the students about their relationships with their supervisors. This section is made up of eight questions: **Q38, Q39, Q40, Q41, Q42, Q43, Q44, and Q45**. Their aims are presented in Table 2.8.

**Table 2.8.**

***Aims of the Items That Make up Section VIII in the Students' Questionnaire***

| Questions          | Aims                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 38</b> | To know if the students experienced any difficulties to communicate with their supervisors.                                              |
| <b>Question 39</b> | To inquire about the time the supervisors spent to correct their students' work and give them feedback.                                  |
| <b>Question 40</b> | To know if the students had supervision meetings with their supervisors.                                                                 |
| <b>Question 41</b> | To investigate how often the students met their supervisors when writing their dissertations.                                            |
| <b>Question 42</b> | To ask about the time spent in supervision meetings.                                                                                     |
| <b>Question 43</b> | To know if the supervisor, in his/her feedback, focused much more on the structure of the dissertation, its content, or the methodology. |
| <b>Question 44</b> | To investigate if the students took into account their supervisors' corrections and feedback to improve their work.                      |
| <b>Question 45</b> | To know whether the supervisors provided their supervisees with guidelines of models that would help them write their dissertations.     |

**2.4.1.2. Description of the Teachers' Questionnaire**

The teachers' questionnaire investigated the same points addressed in the students' questionnaire with some differences. The aim behind tackling the same points in the two questionnaires is to cross-check the findings and look at the topic under discussion from two different perspectives (students Vs. teachers). Cross-checking is a strategy which plays a pivotal role in ensuring credibility of the research findings. In this regard, Lee and Cronin (2016) state that "Greater faith may be had in findings that are cross-checked rather than those that are not" (p.81).

Like the students' questionnaire, the teachers' questionnaire (See Appendix D) also opens with a short paragraph that briefly describes the aim of the study and invites the participants to kindly answer the questions. The questionnaire consists of five (5) sections and 30 items.

**Section I: General Background Information:** This section includes 8 questions: **Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q8**. Its general aim is to elicit information about teachers' professional background so as to explore their readiness to supervise master's dissertations. The aims of the items are presented in Table 2.9.

**Table 2.9.*****Aims of the Items That Make up Section I in the Teachers' Questionnaire***

| <b>Questions</b>  | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 1</b> | To determine the gender of the participants. This question is irrelevant to our study, but it is included as an opening question to encourage the participants' participation. |
| <b>Question 2</b> | To investigate the teachers' academic qualifications/degree.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Question 3</b> | To inquire about the years of experience in supervising master's dissertations.                                                                                                |
| <b>Question 4</b> | To elicit information, from the teachers, about the number of Master's dissertations they supervised during the academic year 2018 – 2019.                                     |
| <b>Question 5</b> | To investigate whether the teachers were trained to supervise dissertations and/or theses.                                                                                     |
| <b>Question 6</b> | A follow-up question which asks the respondents to provide details about the training they had in research supervision in case they answered with 'yes'.                       |
| <b>Question 7</b> | To investigate if the teachers had any training in research methodology.                                                                                                       |
| <b>Question 8</b> | A follow-up question which aims at eliciting information, from teachers, on the training they had in research methodology in case they answered with 'yes'                     |

**Section II: Perspectives Towards Research Skills and Academic Writing**

**Courses:** This section consists of 6 questions: **Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, and Q14.** Their aims are presented in Table 2.10.

**Table 2.10*****Aims of the Items That Make up Section II in the Teachers' Questionnaire***

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 9</b>  | To check teachers' familiarity with the content (lessons) of the research skills course.                                           |
| <b>Question 10</b> | To check teachers' familiarity with the content (lessons) of the academic writing course.                                          |
| <b>Question 11</b> | To investigate the teachers' attitudes towards the content of the research skills course (i.e., whether they find it good or not). |
| <b>Question 12</b> | A follow-up Q to Q 11. It asks the teachers to explain their attitudes towards the content of the course.                          |
| <b>Question 13</b> | To investigate the teachers' attitudes towards the content of the academic writing course.                                         |

|                    |                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 14</b> | A follow-up Q to Q 13. The respondents are asked to express themselves and say why they find the course content good or not good. |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Section III: Content of the Dissertation:** This section is made up of 7 open-ended questions **Q15, Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19, Q20, and Q21**. Their aims are presented in Table 2.11.

**Table 2.11.**

*Aims of the Items That Make up Section III in the Teachers' Questionnaire*

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 15</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the main sections and chapters that Master's students should include in their dissertations. |
| <b>Question 16</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the abstract.                                                                 |
| <b>Question 17</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the general introduction.                                                     |
| <b>Question 18</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the literature review chapter.                                                |
| <b>Question 19</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the method chapter.                                                           |
| <b>Question 20</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the results and discussion chapter.                                           |
| <b>Question 21</b> | To check the teachers' familiarity with the content of the general conclusion.                                                       |

**Section IV: Students' Difficulties/Challenges in Writing the Dissertation**

**Parts:** This section is composed of 6 questions: **Q22.a, Q22.b, Q22.c, Q22.d, Q22.e, and Q22.f**. Their aims are presented in Table 2.12.

**Table 2.12.**

*Aims of the Items That Make up Section IV in the Teachers' Questionnaire*

| <b>Questions</b>      | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                            |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question Q22.a</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the abstract.                  |
| <b>Question Q22.b</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the general introduction.      |
| <b>Question Q22.c</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the literature review chapter. |
| <b>Question Q22.d</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the method chapter.            |

|                       |                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question Q22.e</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the results and discussion chapter. |
| <b>Question Q22.f</b> | To investigate whether the students experienced difficulties in writing the general conclusion.             |

**Section V: Supervisor-Student Relationship:** This section includes 8 questions (Qs 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30). Their aims are presented in Table 2.13.

**Table 2.13.**

*Aims of the Items That Make up Section V in the Teachers' Questionnaire*

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 23</b> | To investigate the main aspect(s) (i.e., structure, content, methodology or others) the supervisors focus on when correcting their supervisees' work. |
| <b>Question 24</b> | To know, from the supervisors, whether the students consider the remarks and feedback provided by the supervisors.                                    |
| <b>Question 25</b> | To inquire about the time the supervisors spent to correct their students' work and give them feedback.                                               |
| <b>Question 26</b> | To know how often the supervisors met their supervisees during the academic year 2018 - 2019.                                                         |
| <b>Question 27</b> | To know the time spent during each supervision meeting.                                                                                               |
| <b>Question 28</b> | To investigate whether the supervisors had any communication problems with their supervisees.                                                         |
| <b>Question 29</b> | To explore whether the supervisors provide their students with guidelines or models on dissertation writing.                                          |
| <b>Question 30</b> | The respondents are asked to give examples of the models.                                                                                             |

#### **2.4.1.3. Types of Questions Used in the Questionnaires**

The questionnaires consist of closed and open-ended questions. As for the first category (closed-ended), we used three types of questions:

**A. Dichotomous Questions:** These questions require the respondents to tick only one response such as questions about gender (male or female) and agreement (yes/no).

**B. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs):** Some items in the questionnaire are followed by a set of alternative choices and the respondents are asked to tick one or more options.

**C. Rating Scale Questions:** These questions are used to elicit the respondents' opinions and attitudes towards the subject under investigation. Respondents are provided with a scale of response categories and asked to evaluate the statement by selecting a category that best describes their attitudes. For example, in the students' questionnaire, the respondents were asked to use the following Likert scale to identify:

**a. The Level of Difficulty:** (1. Extremely difficult. 2. Very difficult. 3. Difficult. 4. Slightly difficult. 5. Not at all difficult) and (1. Very difficult. 2. Difficult. 3. Somewhat difficult. 4. Not at all difficult).

**b. Frequency:** (1. Always. 2. Often. 3. Sometimes. 4. Rarely. 5. Never) and (1. Very often. 2. Occasionally. 3. Never).

Regarding the second category (open-ended questions), the questions are not followed by any response options for the respondents to choose from, but rather the respondents are given opportunities to express themselves freely using their own words. Table 2.14. represents the number of closed and open-ended questions as disseminated in the questionnaires:

**Table 2.14.**

***Number of the Closed and Open-ended Items as Disseminated in the Students' and Teachers' Questionnaires.***

| Questionnaire Items |                 | Students' Questionnaire                                                                   | Teachers' Questionnaire                                               |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Closed-ended        | Dichotomous     | Qs: 1, 3, 4, 5, 19                                                                        | Qs: 1, 2, 5, 7, 29                                                    |
|                     | Multiple choice | Qs: 2, 7, 8, 22                                                                           | Q 24                                                                  |
|                     | Rating scale    | Qs: 6, 11, 15, 21, 23, 24, 27, 34, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45                             | Qs: 11, 13, 22.a, 22.b., 22.c., 22.d., 22.e., 22.f., 25, 26, 28       |
| Open-ended          |                 | Qs: 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 42 | Qs: 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27, 30 |

### **2.4.2. Follow-up Interviews**

Due to the length of both questionnaires, the students' and teachers' questionnaires did not include all the questions that should have been included. For example, in some sections in the students' questionnaire (See appendices B & C), we asked some



dichotomous and rating scale questions (e.g., Qs 11, 15, 21, 22, 23, 27, 34, 37, 38, and 44) which, in theory, should have been followed by open-ended questions such as, “please say why?” or “please explain”. However, due to the fact that we already have many open questions, we left this to the interview.

After administering the questionnaires, we thought it would have been necessary to conduct semi-structured follow-up interviews with students and teachers so as to give them a chance to express themselves and say more about the topic under discussion. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), semi-structured interviews “allow depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee’s responses” (cited in Alshenqeeti, 2014, p.40).

The intent of the two interviews is, therefore, to complement the results obtained from the questionnaire and allow the participants to elaborate on their answers. In other words, the interviews aim at getting an in-depth understanding, from students’ and teachers’ perspectives, of the students’ dissertation writing experiences, what kind of challenges they encountered and the factors that negatively affected their success in meeting the requirements of writing a good dissertation.

The students’ interview includes 15 open-ended items (See Appendix F). Their aims are presented in Table 2.15.

**Table 2.15.**

***Aims of the Questions that Make up the Students’ Interview***

| <b>Questions</b>  | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                      |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 1</b> | To investigate the reasons behind the students’ challenges in finding an interesting/good topic. |
| <b>Question 2</b> | To investigate the students’ challenges in writing the abstract.                                 |
| <b>Question 3</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the abstract.                           |
| <b>Question 4</b> | To investigate the students’ challenges in writing the general introduction.                     |
| <b>Question 5</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the general introduction.               |
| <b>Question 6</b> | To investigate the students’ challenges in writing the literature review chapter.                |
| <b>Question 7</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the literature review chapter.          |
| <b>Question 8</b> | To investigate the students’ challenges in writing the method chapter                            |

|                    |                                                                                              |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 9</b>  | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the method chapter.                 |
| <b>Question 10</b> | To investigate the students' challenges in writing the results and discussion chapter.       |
| <b>Question 11</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the results and discussion chapter. |
| <b>Question 12</b> | To investigate the students' challenges in writing the general conclusion.                   |
| <b>Question 13</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in writing the general conclusion.             |
| <b>Question 14</b> | To know about the main points discussed in supervision meetings.                             |
| <b>Question 15</b> | To investigate the reasons for the challenges in communicating with the supervisor.          |

Regarding the **teachers' interview**, it includes 18 items (See Appendix H). Their aims are presented in Table 2.16.

**Table 2.16.**

***Aims of the Questions that Make up the Teachers' Interview***

| <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Aims</b>                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 1</b>  | To investigate the supervisors' perspectives towards the effectiveness of the academic writing course content in improving Master students' academic writing skills. |
| <b>Question 2</b>  | To investigate the supervisors' perspectives towards the effectiveness of the research skills course content in improving Master students' research skills.          |
| <b>Question 3</b>  | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the abstract.                                                  |
| <b>Question 4</b>  | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the abstract.                                                                                     |
| <b>Question 5</b>  | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the general introduction.                                      |
| <b>Question 6</b>  | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the general introduction.                                                                         |
| <b>Question 7</b>  | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the literature review chapter.                                 |
| <b>Question 8</b>  | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the literature review chapter.                                                                    |
| <b>Question 9</b>  | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the method chapter.                                            |
| <b>Question 10</b> | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the method chapter.                                                                               |

|                    |                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Question 11</b> | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the results and discussion chapter. |
| <b>Question 12</b> | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the results and discussion chapter.                                    |
| <b>Question 13</b> | To investigate the challenges encountered by the students, from supervisors' perspectives, in writing the general conclusion.             |
| <b>Question 14</b> | To investigate the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the general conclusion.                                                |
| <b>Question 15</b> | To elicit information on the main points the teachers usually discuss with their students in supervision meetings.                        |
| <b>Question 16</b> | To know the main requirements for writing a good dissertation from the teachers' perspective.                                             |
| <b>Question 17</b> | To know whether the teachers use a common rubric to assess Master's dissertations.                                                        |
| <b>Question 18</b> | To know about the impacts of using a common rubric on the evaluation of Master's dissertations.                                           |

In addition to the aforementioned questions, the students' and teachers' interviews included some questions that emerged from the questionnaires' responses and probing questions based on the ideas that were developed by the interviewees during the interview.

### ***2.4.3. Document Analysis***

In addition to the questionnaires and the interviews, we used document analysis of Masters (MA) dissertations as another means to cross-check the findings obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews with regard to students' challenges in dissertation writing and verify the extent to which the students were able to successfully meet the requirements of writing a good MA dissertation. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define document analysis as

a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic – (computer-based and internet transmitted) material.... document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (cited in Bowen, 2009, p.27).

Given the length of each dissertation and the detailed analysis required, we could not select more than six dissertations submitted at the end of the academic year 2018 – 2019 after getting the students' permission.

Therefore, in order to achieve the aforementioned aim of using a document analysis (i.e., verifying the extent to which students were able to meet the requirements of writing a dissertation successfully), and for a detailed analysis of the various moves and steps included in the sections and chapters of the dissertations selected, Chen and Kuo's Framework (2012) was used. It is worth mentioning that this framework has been taught in M2 academic writing classes during the academic year 2018 – 2019 (See Appendix I).

We chose Chen and Kuo's framework because it was developed based on a number of famous universal frameworks that were used in the move analysis of research articles' sections and dissertations' chapters. That is,

- To analyze the abstract, Chen and Kuo used **Lores' framework (2004)** (See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.4.) which was originally based on Bhatia's framework (1993).
- To analyze the introduction, they used **Bunton's framework (2002)** (See Chapter 1, Section 1.3.2.) which was originally based on Swales' framework.
- To analyze the literature review chapter, they used **Kwan's Framework (2006)** (See Chapter 1, Section 1.4.2.)
- To analyze the methods chapter, they used **Lim's framework (2006)** (See Chapter 1, Section 1.5.3.)
- To analyze the results and discussions chapter and the general conclusion, they used **Ruiying and Allison's framework (2003)** (See Chapter 1, Sections 1.6.4. & 1.7.2.)

Table 1 in Appendix Q represents the moves and steps that should be included in each section/chapter of the Master's dissertation according to Chen and Kuo's framework (2012).

## **2.5. Data Collection Procedures**

### ***2.5.1. Students' Questionnaire***

Due to its length (6 pages long), the students' questionnaire was divided into two parts using the Split-Questionnaire Design (SQD) technique. The latter refers to "dividing questionnaires into parts (or splits) and administering each part to a randomly selected group of respondents." (Adigüzel & Wedel, 2013, p.317).

Because lengthy questionnaires may negatively affect the quality of the findings, SQD has proved to be an effective method to reduce threats to validity and obtain honest and accurate responses from the participants. In this regard, Ahmed et al. (2015) write

Lengthy questionnaires have always been a problem for respondents, increasing the chances of delayed, hasty or slapdash responses. Splitting a long questionnaire into parts reduces the burden on the respondents as also increases the chances of getting prompt and responsible responses (p.211).

The two parts were administered on two separate occasions. We administered the first part (*from Q1 to Q20*) the last week of May (more precisely, from May 24<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019) while the second part (*from Q21 to Q45*) was administered the first week of June (from June 1<sup>st</sup> to June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019). We could not administer the questionnaire in the classroom because it was already the end of the year. Moreover, M2 students had classes in the first semester only. This is why it was not possible to reach all the participants at once. Hence, it took us one week to administer the first part and another week to distribute the second part.

The two parts of the questionnaire were coded to make sure that each participant's answers to the two parts were put together. That is, each participant had a particular code which was written on both parts.

The questionnaire was administered to 28 students. However, 24 copies were returned.

### ***2.5.2. Teachers' Questionnaire***

The teachers' questionnaire is shorter (30 items) compared to the students' questionnaire. Hence, we did not need to use the split method. The questionnaire was administered on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to 10 teachers supervising Master's dissertations in the English Department.

### ***2.5.3. Students' Interview***

Before conducting the interview with the students, they were sent an interview consent form (See Appendix E). The latter aimed at inviting the students to participate in this research and making sure that the target participants clearly understood the aim behind involving them in this research and agreed on the conditions of participation. In

this consent form, the participants were informed that the information they provided would be analyzed by the researcher only. The participants were also informed that their answers would be kept confidential and identities would remain anonymous as the researcher would use pseudonyms. The researcher's email address was provided at the end of the consent form so that the participants could contact her if they had questions about the study.

After agreeing on the conditions stated in the consent form, a semi-structured interview (See Appendix F) was conducted with the students at the end of the academic year (during June and July 2019). This is due to the fact that spending the whole year writing the dissertation, it was assumed that these students would have a lot to say about their experiences with dissertation writing. The interviews were scheduled at a convenient time for the interviewees. Each interview lasted for, approximately, 1 hour and a half and there were some interviews that lasted for 2 hours.

#### ***2.5.4. Teachers' Interview***

Before conducting the interview with the teachers, they were sent an interview consent form (See Appendix G). The latter aimed at inviting teachers, who were supervising Master 2 students in didactics at Blida 2 University, to participate in this research and making sure that they clearly understood the aim behind involving them in this research and agreed on the conditions of participation. In this consent form, the participants were informed that the interview would be audio-recorded and analyzed by the researcher only. They were also informed that their answers would be kept confidential and identities would remain anonymous as the researcher would use pseudonyms. The researcher's email address and phone number were provided at the end of the consent form so that participants could contact her if they had questions about this research.

After reading the consent form and agreeing on the conditions, a semi-structured interview (See Appendix H) was conducted with the supervisors in October 2019. Each interview lasted for 1 hour.

Conducting another interview with the supervisors helped us complement the information obtained through the first interview (students' interview) and look at the topic under discussion from two different perspectives (students Vs. teachers).

### **2.5.5. Document Analysis**

The document analysis began by looking at the general organization of each dissertation (the length, the headings, sections, and chapters included). The following stage was a detailed examination of the schematic structure and content of each section and chapter to verify the extent to which the necessary moves and steps identified in Chen and Kuo's framework were included in the dissertations' sections and chapters written by the students. After that, we tried to identify the order and frequency of the moves and steps that were included by the students in addition to the moves and steps that were missing. The last step in the analysis was identifying and explaining the challenges faced by the students in writing the dissertation parts.

### **2.5.6. Pilot Study**

It goes without saying that piloting (or pretesting) the research instruments before conducting the main study is necessary as it helps researchers detect the weaknesses of the tools and gives them suggestions from the participants to improve their survey methods. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p. 341), piloting the questionnaires serves several functions such as:

- Checking the clarity of the questionnaire items, instructions and layout.
- Gaining feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items, the operationalization of the constructs and the purposes of the research.
- To eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording.
- To gain feedback on the type of question and its format.
- To identify commonly misunderstood or non-completed items.

The students' questionnaire was piloted on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. Both parts of the questionnaire were sent to 4 students, who later on took part in the main study, in order to determine whether the items were clear and correct the typing mistakes (if any). As a result of the feedback provided by the participants, a very few changes were made to the format of some items. For example, in the old version of the questionnaire, Q8 was open-ended. It was written as follows:

*8) When you faced any problems in writing your dissertation, what did you do?*

One of the students said that the question was confusing and she did not know what it was about or how she would answer. She suggested that I had better change the format of that question from an open-ended to a multiple-choice question in order to make things clear for the students. Therefore, in the new version (See Appendix B), Q8 was changed to:

When you faced any problems in writing your dissertation, what did you do?

- a) You discussed the problem with your supervisor to help you find a solution.
- b) You discussed the problem with one of your classmates to help you find a solution.
- c) You read previous works (books, manuals...etc) that provide tips on how to successfully write a dissertation.
- d) You read some completed theses and dissertations and used them as samples to get a clear understanding of what each section/chapter of your dissertation should look like.
- e) Others (please specify).....

Another example is Q43 (an MCQ), in the pilot version, it was written as follows:

43) *in his/her feedback, your supervisor focused much more on:*

Structure ☐      Content ☐      Both ☐

We provided only three options (structure, content or both). However, a student suggested that another option should be added 'Methodology' because his supervisor often focuses on the methodology. As a result, Q43 in the final version of the questionnaire (See Appendix C) looks as follows:

43) *In his/her feedback, your supervisor focused much more on:*

Structure ☐      Content ☐      Methodology ☐      All of them ☐      Other (please specify) .....

As for the teachers' questionnaire, it was sent to 3 teachers on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The teachers were kindly asked to read the items and welcomed to recommend better wording or change in the format of questions, if necessary, to make the questionnaire clear. Overall, the three teachers provided positive feedback on the questionnaire items, yet they recommended adding three open-ended questions (Qs 12, 14 & 30) which required the respondents to explain their answers to some closed-ended questions (Q11, Q13 & Q29).



For example, in Q11, we asked the respondents about their attitudes (good, somewhat good, not good) towards the content of the research skills course without asking them to say why they had such an attitude. One of the teachers suggested that such closed-ended questions should be followed by open questions (e.g., why? Or please explain) to allow the respondents to explain their answers.

## **2.6. Data Analysis Procedures**

**2.6.1. Analysis of Qualitative Data:** This involves the analysis of the interviews' questions, open-ended items in the two questionnaires and content of Master's dissertations.

**Coding and Categorizing Qualitative Data:** In simple terms, coding means attaching specific labels of names to the texts or statements produced by the respondents. In other words, the researcher reads the statements produced by the respondents and organizes them thematically according to what they describe. The aim behind this process is to identify relationships between data sets. In our analysis, in order to gain deep insight into the respondents' statements, we shall use line-by-line coding where we are going to code each line of the text to extract all emerging thematic categories that describe in detail what the respondents said. That is:

- First, we shall start with coding and categorizing the open-ended responses provided by each respondent in the students' questionnaire (detailed analysis of each student's account and identifying relationships between the concepts and themes s/he produced).
- Next, we shall do the same with the teachers' questionnaire.
- Once we identify the thematic categories in each questionnaire, we shall analyze the themes emerged from the teachers' questionnaire in relation to those identified in the students' questionnaire to see if the experiences and claims related to the phenomenon under discussion are specific to single cases or common across all individuals (i.e., students and teachers). The primary aim behind this comparison of data sets is to cross-check the findings (identify similarities and differences) and increase their validity.
- The same process will be followed in coding students' and teachers' interviews.
- As for the dissertations, we shall also analyze the structure of each dissertation separately, use line-by-line coding to identify thematic categories (moves, steps, and

challenges). Once we finish the analysis of each case (i.e., dissertation), we shall identify relationships between themes across different cases (i.e., dissertations) and explain similarities and differences between them.

**2.6.2. Analysis of Quantitative Data:** This is concerned with the analysis of closed-ended items in the students' and teachers' questionnaires. Numerical data will be summarized in tables and analyzed statistically (percentages and frequency distribution).

Table 2.17 presents the timeline of the research process and summarizes data collection and analysis procedures.

**Table 2.17.**

***Timeline of the Research Process and Data Collection and Analysis Procedures.***

| Month/Year                | Phase                                                               | Data Collection Instruments                       | Researcher's Tasks                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May 2019                  | <b>QUALITATIVE+ quantitative</b><br>Pilot Study<br>NS = 4           | Students' Questionnaire (Pilot version)           | Piloting the students' questionnaire                                                                                             |
| May 2019                  | <b>QUALITATIVE + quantitative</b><br>Main Study<br>NS = 28          | Students' Questionnaire (Final version: Part I)   | Administering the first part of the questionnaire                                                                                |
| May 2019                  |                                                                     | Students' Questionnaire (Final version : Part II) | Administering the second part of the questionnaire                                                                               |
| May 2019                  |                                                                     | Students' Questionnaire (Part I)                  | Quick analysis of the students' questionnaire □<br>Aim: To identify the points that need further investigation in the interview) |
| June 2019                 |                                                                     | Students' Questionnaire (Part II)                 |                                                                                                                                  |
| June 2019                 | <b>QUALITATIVE</b><br>NS = 13                                       | Students' Interview consent form                  | Sending the interview consent form to the students.                                                                              |
| June 2019                 |                                                                     | Students' Interview                               | Conducting the interview with the students                                                                                       |
| From June to October 2019 |                                                                     | Students' Interview                               | Transcription and analysis of the students' interview                                                                            |
| July 2019                 | <b>QUALITATIVE + quantitative</b><br>Pilot study (part 2)<br>NT = 4 | Teachers' Questionnaire (Pilot version)           | Piloting the teachers' questionnaire                                                                                             |

|                                         |                                                               |                                         |                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>October 2019</b>                     | <b>QUALITATIVE<br/>+ quantitative</b><br>Main study (NT = 10) | Teachers' Questionnaire (Final version) | Administering teachers' questionnaire                                                                                                |
| <b>November 2019</b>                    |                                                               | Teachers' Questionnaire                 | Quick analysis of the teachers' questionnaire ---<br>□ Aim: to identify the points that need further investigation in the interview) |
| <b>November 2019</b>                    | <b>QUALITATIVE</b><br>NT = 5                                  | Teachers' Interview consent form        | Sending the interview consent form to teachers                                                                                       |
| <b>From December 2019 to March 2020</b> |                                                               |                                         | Preliminary analysis of MA dissertations (identification the frequency of moves and steps)                                           |
| <b>From March to May 2020</b>           |                                                               | Teachers' Interview                     | Conducting online interviews with teachers due to the Covid 19 Pandemic                                                              |
| <b>From May to July 2020</b>            |                                                               | Teachers' Interview                     | Transcription and analysis of teachers' interview                                                                                    |
| <b>From July to September 2020</b>      | <b>QUALITATIVE</b><br>6 MA dissertations                      | 6 MA dissertations                      | A thorough analysis of MA dissertations (analysis of the content and identification of the challenges)                               |

NS: Number of Students, NT: Number of Teachers

## 2.7. Discussing Trustworthiness of our Research

### 2.7.1. Internal Validity through Triangulation

Triangulation is one of the strategies we employed to enhance the internal validity of our findings. This strategy refers to the use of various sources to lend credibility to the research findings (Eisner, 1991 as cited in Bowen, 2009) and increase their validity and reliability. In McNeill and Chapman's words (2005):

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to cross-check and verify the reliability of a particular research tool and the validity of the data collected....and means simply that you get a better view of things by looking at them from more than one direction (p.23).

According to the literature, there are five types of triangulation: **(a)** data sources triangulation, **(b)** investigator triangulation, **(c)** methodologic triangulation, **(d)** theoretical triangulation, and **(e)** data analysis triangulation (Thurmond, 2001). In our study, the following types of triangulation were employed:

#### **2.7.1.1. Methodological Triangulation**

According to Thurmond (ibid.), this type of triangulation is possibly the most difficult type to understand as it is taken to mean either adopting the mixed-methods paradigm (i.e., using both qualitative and quantitative paradigms in one study) or employing more than one research tool (such as, questionnaires, interviews and observations) to collect data.

##### ***2.7.1.1.1. Mixed-methods Approach***

As already mentioned, in order to gain better understanding of the research problem and cross-validate our findings, the research approach adopted in our study is the concurrent (nested) mixed methods where two types of data (qualitative and quantitative) are gathered at the same time with priority given to the qualitative aspect. According to Creswell (2009), the concurrent research design is “advantageous because it is familiar to most researchers and can result in well-validated and substantiated findings.” (p. 213).

##### ***2.7.1.1.2. Data Collection Tools***

As previously noted in section 2.4., three research instruments, namely: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis, were used to collect data. Combining these three tools allowed us to overcome the weakness of employing one single data collection instrument, compare the results obtained and, therefore, ensure their validity.

#### **2.7.1.2. Data Sources Triangulation**

In our study, we included two types of participants: **(a)** main participants (28 students) and **(b)** secondary participants (10 teachers). We believed that collecting data from two different sources, i.e., students Vs. teachers who are expected to have different perspectives towards the research topic under study, and using two different sampling strategies (random and purposive sampling) would help us gain better understanding and enhance validity of the results.

## ***2.7.2. Content Validity in Questionnaires and Interviews***

### **2.7.2.1. Students' and Teachers' Questionnaires**

In order to ensure the content validity of our questionnaires, a careful consideration was given to the categories to be investigated and the order and content of questions. we made sure that all categories and questions in the two questionnaires (see Appendices B, C & D) reflect the study's objective which is exploring students' challenges in writing master's dissertations.

The importance of content validity of the research instruments is stressed by Zohrabi (2013) who notes that before employing the research tools to collect data, the researcher needs to ask experts in the field to check and evaluate the quality of the instrument's format and content. To this end, we arranged a meeting with the supervisor to review the questionnaires' items and check the extent to which their content is relevant to the study's objectives and the literature review before administering the final versions.

### **2.7.2.2. Students' and Teachers' Interviews**

The same procedures were followed to assess the content validity of the two interviews. The questions were designed based on the primary objective of our research (i.e., exploring students' challenges in dissertation writing) and the review of related literature.

## ***2.7.3. Face Validity in Students' and Teachers' Questionnaires***

As far as face validity of the questionnaires is concerned, we had a discussion with the supervisor who provided us with useful suggestions with regard to the layout, the forms of response to some items in both questionnaires, and, particularly, the length of the students' questionnaire (45 items). At first, we were going to administer the whole questionnaire at once, yet with the help of the supervisor, we realized that doing that would result in lack of face validity which, in turn, would threaten the trustworthiness of the data. This is why we have used the Split-Questionnaire Design (SQD) technique (see section 2.5.1.).

Also, piloting the two questionnaires was another way to establish their face validity. As already noted in section 2.5.6., we sent the first questionnaire to 4 students and the second was sent to 3 teachers in order to assess the layout, the clarity and readability of

the items and the forms of response included. Hence, the comments and suggestions provided by the respondents were welcomed and used to improve the two questionnaires as shown in section 2.5.6.

#### **2.7.4. Concurrent Validity in Questionnaires and Interviews**

In order to achieve concurrent validity, almost the same questions were asked in the students' and teachers' questionnaires (See Appendices B, C, & D). The same steps were followed in the design of the semi-structured interviews. That is, we included the same questions in both interviews (see appendices F & H).

### **2.8. Ethical Considerations**

In our study, we did our best to make sure that the participants' rights were protected through addressing the possible ethical issues as follows:

- **Sending Questionnaires and Interviews Consent Forms and Requesting Permission to Use MA Dissertations:** Before conducting the study, the researcher contacted the participants (students and teachers) via email and facebook to invite them to take part in the study. She provided them with necessary details related to the research objectives, data collection methods and procedures. Also, the researcher informed the participants that their answers would be used as data that would be recorded, transcribed, analyzed and interpreted.
- **Requesting Permission to Use MA Dissertations:** The researcher randomly selected some MA dissertations; then contacted the actual writers for permission to use their dissertations for the document analysis.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** When administering the questionnaires, the researcher informed the participants that their identity would remain anonymous. That is, the researcher replaced the participants' names using codes ('ST' for students and 'T' for teachers). Furthermore, participants were informed that their answers would be kept confidential and that the data they provided would be only used for research purposes and destroyed after presenting the research findings and submitting the final version of the thesis.
- **Accessibility to Data:** The participants were guaranteed that the information they provided would be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor whenever necessary.

## **Conclusion**

As already mentioned, the present study is designed to explore graduate students' challenges in writing Master's dissertations in the English department, Blida 2 University. In order to accomplish this objective and answer the research questions, we conducted a study based on the exploratory concurrent nested design where the qualitative aspect is predominant. The study was carried out at Blida 2 University, more specifically in the English Department, with 28 Master 2 students of didactics and their supervisors (10). To collect data from the participants, we used three research instruments: a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and document analysis of master's dissertations following these steps: first, we randomly selected 28 students from the whole population and 10 teachers to answer students' and teachers' questionnaire. Next, because it was practically impossible to interview all participants, we used purposive sampling strategy to select the students and teachers who would be interviewed. After conducting the interviews, we randomly selected 6 master's dissertations to do the document analysis which primarily aimed at verifying the extent to which the students were able to meet the requirements of writing a good dissertation. Employing three research tools allowed us to get a large amount of data on the topic under discussion, achieve triangulation and, hence, lend credibility to our findings which will be presented and interpreted in the following chapters.

**CHAPTER THREE:  
THE STUDENTS'  
FINDINGS  
(DISSERTATION  
WRITING  
CHALLENGES  
FROM THE  
STUDENTS'  
POINTS OF VIEW**



## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we provided a detailed description and explanation of the design, the sample, the research instruments and the procedures followed to collect and analyze the data. In this chapter, and the subsequent chapters (4 & 5) of this thesis, we present the results of the investigation.

At first, our intention was to present the results obtained through all the data collection tools (questionnaires, interviews and document analysis) in one chapter. However, we realized that having a very long chapter would be overwhelming for the readers who will, undoubtedly, lose focus and interest and find it difficult to clearly see how the data identified by each instrument relate to the research questions and the key themes and concepts of our research. Therefore, in order to maintain our readers' interest and keep a balance between the lengths of the thesis' chapters, we decided to present the results of our study in three separate chapters where two of them will be structured based on our groups of participants. That is, the present chapter aims at reporting the students' findings obtained from both the questionnaire and the interview. The fourth chapter focuses on the presentation of the teachers' findings, while the fifth chapter aspires to present the results of the content analysis of Master's dissertations written by the students and supervised/examined by the teachers. All the findings presented in the three chapters will be later combined and discussed in the last chapter (i.e., the discussions' chapter).

The primary aim of the present chapter is, thus, to identify the challenges encountered in writing the dissertation from the students' points of view. It is divided into two main parts: 1) Presentation of the questionnaire results, and 2) Presentation of the interview results.

### **3.1. The Students' Questionnaire Results**

As previously mentioned in the method chapter (see section 2.5.1), the students' questionnaire was divided into two parts which were administered on two separate occasions. Each part (part 1: from Q1 to Q21; part 2: from Q22 to 45) was completed and submitted within one week. That is, we needed two weeks to collect both parts. Of the 28 questionnaires distributed, 24 questionnaires were returned.

On the whole, the students' questionnaire included 45 items that were grouped under the following eight sub-sections: General information about the dissertation writing journey, writing the abstract, writing the introduction, writing the literature review chapter, writing

the methodology chapter, writing the results and discussion chapter, writing the general conclusion and the student-supervisor relationship.

### **3.1.1. General Information about the Dissertation Writing Journey (Questions 1 – 8)**

#### **Q 1: Gender**

**Table 3.1. Students' Gender**

| Options   | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Male   | 02                    | 8.33           |
| b. Female | 22                    | 91.66          |

As Table 3.1. indicates, the group of participants who took part in this study is not balanced in terms of gender distribution as there is a clear significant dominance of females (91.66%) over males (8.33%).

#### **Q 2: Age group**

**Table 3.2. Students' Age**

| Options    | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. 20 – 25 | 21                    | 87.5           |
| b. 26 – 30 | 02                    | 8.33           |
| c. 31 – 35 | 00                    | 00             |
| d. 36 +    | 01                    | 4.16           |

As shown in Table 3.2., the average age of most participants (87.5%) ranges between 20 and 25 years, while two students' ages are between 26 and 30 years and one student is more than 36 years old.

It is worth reminding that the two previous questions about age and gender were just included as warming-up questions and did not serve any of our research objectives.

#### **Q 3: Finding an interesting/good topic was easy or difficult?**

**Table 3.3. Difficulty in Finding an Interesting Topic**

| Options      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Easy      | 03                    | 12.5           |
| b. Difficult | 20                    | 83.33          |
| No response  | 01                    | 4.16           |

As Table 3.3 shows, the overwhelming majority of students (83.33%) said that finding an interesting and a good topic was 'Difficult'. Only three students (12.5%) said it was

‘Easy’, while one student (4.16%) gave no answer. Further explanations about the numbers presented in the table and the types of difficulties experienced by the students in finding a good topic were discussed in the students’ interview. They are presented in section 3.2.1. of this chapter.

**Q 4: Did you study how to write a dissertation in the module of academic writing?**

**Table 3.4. Dissertation Writing in the Academic Writing Module**

| Options | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Yes  | 24                    | 100            |
| b. No   | 00                    | 00             |

As Table 3.4. shows, writing a dissertation was tackled in academic writing classes as all the students (100%) confirmed.

**Q 5: Did you study how to write a dissertation in the module of research skills?**

**Table 3.5. Dissertation Writing in the Research Skills Module**

| Options     | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Yes      | 23                    | 95.83          |
| b. No       | 00                    | 00             |
| No response | 01                    | 4.16           |

As Table 3.5. demonstrates, except one student (4.16%) who gave no answer to the question, all the other students (95.83%) affirmed that they were taught how to write a dissertation in research methodology classes.

**Q 6: How did you find writing a dissertation?**

**Table 3.6. Difficulty to Write a Dissertation**

| Options               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Very difficult     | 04                    | 16.67          |
| b. Difficult          | 12                    | 50             |
| c. Somewhat difficult | 08                    | 33.33          |
| d. Easy               | 00                    | 00             |

When asked about the extent to which writing a dissertation was difficult, none of the students said it was easy. Instead, they all concurred that it was not at all easy with differences in the degree of difficulty. As indicated table 3.6., the highest percentage of answers goes to ‘Difficult’ which was mentioned by twelve students (50%), followed by

‘*Somewhat difficult*’ with eight answers (33.33%) and ‘*Very difficult*’ with only four answers (16.66%).

**Q 7: In your dissertation, what were the most difficult sections and chapters to write?**

Answers to Q7 are presented in two separate tables. Table 3.7.a. presents the number of students who experienced difficulties in writing **ONE** particular part of the dissertation. Table 3.7.b, on the other hand, presents the number of students who combined various alternatives as they had issues with writing **SEVERAL** parts of the dissertation.

**Table 3.7.a. The Most Difficult Sections and Chapters to Write (only one option ticked)**

| Options                               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. The Abstract                       | 00                    | 00             |
| b. The General Introduction           | 00                    | 00             |
| c. The Literature Review Chapter      | 06                    | 25             |
| d. The Method Chapter                 | 00                    | 00             |
| e. The Results and Discussion Chapter | 01                    | 4.16           |
| f. The Conclusion                     | 00                    | 00             |
| g. The List of References             | 00                    | 00             |

**Table 3.7.b. The Most Difficult Sections and Chapters to Write (several options ticked)**

| Options                                                                                                                                       | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| The General Introduction + the Literature Review Chapter                                                                                      | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The Abstract + The Method chapter + the Results & Discussion chapter                                                                          | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The Introduction + the Results and Discussion Chapter + the General Conclusion                                                                | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The Literature Review Chapter + the Results & Discussion Chapter                                                                              | 09                    | 37.5           |
| The Literature Review Chapter + the Method Chapter                                                                                            | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The General Introduction + the Literature Review chapter + the Results & Discussion Chapter + the General Conclusion + the List of References | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The Literature Review Chapter+ the Results & Discussion Chapter + the List of References                                                      | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The General Introduction + the Literature Review Chapter + the General Conclusion + the List of References                                    | 01                    | 4.16           |
| The Method Chapter + the Results & Discussion Chapter + the General Conclusion                                                                | 01                    | 4.16           |

In question 7 (Q7), the students were asked to indicate which section(s) and/or chapter(s) of the dissertation were the most difficult to write. From Tables 3.7.a and 3.7.b, it seems that there is a consensus among the majority of students that both the literature review (**option ‘c’**) and the results and discussions (**option ‘e’**) are the most difficult chapters to write. The two chapters were cited by almost all the students either together (37.5%), separately or along with other parts. On the whole, the literature review chapter was mentioned by twenty students (83.33%) while the results and discussions’ chapter was mentioned by fifteen students (62.5%). Following these are **(b) the general introduction** (mentioned four times (16.67%)), **(f) the conclusion** (mentioned four times (16.67%)), **(d) the methodology chapter** and **(g) the list of references** (mentioned three times (12.5% x 2) and **(a) the abstract** (mentioned only once (4.16%)).

**Q 8: When you faced any problem(s) in writing your dissertation, what did you do?**

Answers to Q8 are presented in two separate tables. Table 3.8.a. presents the number of students who selected just **ONE** alternative, while Table 3.8.b presents the number of students who combined **VARIOUS** alternatives as they had issues with writing.

**Table 3.8.a. Solutions Opted for to Overcome Dissertation Writing Problems (only one option ticked)**

| Options                                                                                                                                                                              | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a.</b> You discussed the problem with your supervisor to help you find a solution                                                                                                 | <b>00</b>             | <b>00</b>      |
| <b>b.</b> You discussed the problem with your classmates/ friends to help you find a solution                                                                                        | <b>00</b>             | <b>00</b>      |
| <b>c.</b> You read previous works (such as books and manuals) that provide tips on how to successfully write a dissertation                                                          | <b>00</b>             | <b>00</b>      |
| <b>d.</b> You read some completed theses and dissertations and used them as samples to get a clear understanding of what each section/chapter of your dissertation should look like. | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |

**Table 3.8.b. Solutions Opted for to Overcome Dissertation Writing Problems (various options ticked)**

| Options                                                                                                                                                      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Discussing the problem with the supervisor <b>(a)</b> + With mates <b>(b)</b>                                                                                | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
| Discussing the problem with the supervisor <b>(a)</b> + Reading previous works <b>(c)</b>                                                                    | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
| Discussing the problem with the supervisor <b>(a)</b> + Reading completed theses and dissertations <b>(d)</b>                                                | <b>04</b>             | <b>16.67</b>   |
| Discussing the problem with mates <b>(b)</b> + Reading previous works <b>(c)</b>                                                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| Discussing the problem with mates <b>(b)</b> + Reading completed theses and dissertations <b>(d)</b>                                                         | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |
| Discussing the problem with the supervisor <b>(a)</b> + Discussing the problem with mates <b>(b)</b> + Reading completed theses and dissertations <b>(d)</b> | <b>04</b>             | <b>16.67</b>   |
| Discussing the problem with the supervisor <b>(a)</b> + Reading previous works <b>(c)</b> + Reading completed theses and dissertations <b>(d)</b>            | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
| All of them                                                                                                                                                  | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |

Question 8 (Q8) aimed at determining the most popular strategies the students used to handle the problems they faced in writing their dissertations. Concerning the single and combined use of the strategies, Table 3.8.a. shows that only two students (8.33%) ticked just one-option (d), while a vast majority of the students believed that combining various strategies at once (See Table 3.8.b.) would best help them get rid of their dissertation writing problems. More precisely, thirteen students (54.15%) opted for combining two options (a + b, a + c, a + d & b + c), seven students (29.16%) combined three options (a + b + d & a + c + d), and two students (8.33%) said they used all the four strategies.

With regard to the usefulness of the strategies according to the respondents, if we count the number of times each strategy was mentioned by the students (i.e., either alone or combined with the other strategies), we see that the highest percentage (79.16%) goes to option ‘a’ (*discussing the problem with the supervisor*) which was claimed to be the most popular and useful strategy employed by nineteen students. This was followed by option ‘d’ (*reading completed theses and dissertations*) with fifteen answers (62.5%), then option ‘b’ (*discussing the problem with classmates and friends*) with twelve answers (50%). Finally, option ‘c’ (*reading books and manuals*) came last with nine answers (37.5%).

### 3.1.2. Writing the Abstract (Questions 9 – 11)

#### Q 9: How do you define an abstract?

**Table 3.9. Definition of the Abstract**

| Themes                              | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| A summary of the whole dissertation | 21                    | 87.5           |
| No idea                             | 03                    | 12.5           |

The purpose of this question was to assess students' understanding of the abstract and the communicative function it serves. As indicated in the table, the overwhelming majority of students (87.5 %) could successfully provide right answers in which the abstract was defined as the summary of the whole dissertation, while the remaining few students (12.5 %) declared that they had no idea about the meaning of an abstract.

#### Q 10: Can you list the main parts that make up the Abstract?

**Table 3.10. Main Parts of the Abstract**

| Themes                                                                                | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Purpose, b) Method, c) Main findings, d) Conclusions & implications                | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Background, b) Purpose, c) Method, d) Main findings, d) Conclusions & implications | 05                    | 20.83          |
| a) Purpose, b) Method, c) Main findings                                               | 05                    | 20.83          |
| a) Background, b) Purpose, c) Method, d) Main findings                                | 02                    | 8.33           |
| a) Background, b) Method, c) Main findings, d) Conclusions & implications             | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Methods, b) Findings, c) Conclusions                                               | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Background, b) Purpose, c) Method.                                                 | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Main findings                                                                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| No idea                                                                               | 04                    | 16.67          |

This question tried to find out whether students knew the main parts (background/purpose, method, main findings and conclusions) that make up the dissertation abstract. Table 3.10 shows that there is a little agreement among the students regarding the content of the abstract. On the whole, only Nine students could successfully mention all the necessary parts according to the main frameworks they have seen in class. In more detail, following Hyland's five-move framework (see section 1.2.4 in the review chapter), five students (20.83%) stated that the abstract consisted of an *introduction*, *purpose*, *method*, *findings* (product) and *conclusion*. On the other hand, four students (16.67%) said that the

abstract should include the four main moves highlighted in Bhatia's framework (see section 1.2.4.). These moves are: *purpose*, *method*, *main findings* and *conclusions and implications*.

As for the other students, five of them (20.83%) referred to three parts (*purpose*, *method* and *main findings*) and ignored the fourth part which is 'conclusions'. The latter was also missing in the answers of two students (8.33%) who listed the same aforementioned parts and added a fourth element which is '*background*'. Conversely, two students cited 'conclusions' as one important part in the abstract, yet they disregarded the 'purpose' part. By way of explanation, one student (4.16%) mentioned the following four parts: *background*, *method*, *main findings*, and *conclusions* while the other student (4.16%) stated three parts (*method*, *results* and *conclusions*). Another student (4.16%) also declared that the abstract should comprise three elements, but unlike the previous student's response, 'main findings' and 'conclusions' were replaced by '*background*' and '*purpose*'. Last but not least, while one student (4.16%) listed only one part and claimed that an abstract was a mere summary of the '*main findings*', four students (16.67%) admitted that they had no idea about the abstract content.

**Table 01** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts/sections to be included in the abstract and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### **Q 11: When writing your dissertation, how difficult was it to write the abstract?**

**Table 3.11. Difficulty to Write the Abstract**

| <b>Options</b>                 | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>a.</b> Extremely difficult  | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>b.</b> Very difficult       | <b>02</b>                    | <b>8.33</b>           |
| <b>c.</b> Difficult            | <b>06</b>                    | <b>25</b>             |
| <b>d.</b> Slightly difficult   | <b>10</b>                    | <b>41.67</b>          |
| <b>e.</b> Not difficult at all | <b>06</b>                    | <b>25</b>             |

When asked about the difficulty (or ease) of writing the dissertation abstract, only six students (25%) said it was easy (*Not difficult at all*) for them to write this section, while the vast majority described writing the abstract as '*Slightly difficult*' (41.66%), '*Difficult*' (25%) and '*Very difficult*' (8.33%). The main difficulties encountered in writing the abstract were investigated through the students' interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.2.



### 3.1.3. Writing the General Introduction (Questions 12 – 15)

#### Q 12: What is the function of the introduction in the dissertation?

Table 3.12. Functions of the General Introduction

| Themes                                                                                                                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Giving a general background about the topic,<br>b) Identifying the gap,<br>c) Showing the importance of the research | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Introducing the topic,<br>b) Giving a brief background,<br>c) Outlining the dissertation's structure                 | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Introducing the topic<br>b) Explaining the problem to be studied                                                     | 07                    | 29.16          |
| a) Introducing the topic<br>b) Reviewing related theories and studies                                                   | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Reviewing previous related studies                                                                                      | 04                    | 16.66          |
| Showing the importance of the research                                                                                  | 02                    | 8.33           |
| Giving a general idea about the topic                                                                                   | 06                    | 25             |
| No idea                                                                                                                 | 02                    | 8.33           |

Question 12 sought to assess the students' understanding of the communicative purpose served by the general introduction in the dissertation. As previously stated in the literature review chapter (see section 1.2.3), the introduction should **introduce the topic** and **provide a clear statement of the problem** being studied, **the research aim(s)** and **question(s)**. It should also **explain the rationale and demonstrate the research significance**. Last but certainly not least, the introduction should briefly **review some relevant studies, explain the theoretical framework and outline the dissertation's structure**. However, as shown in Table 3.12, none of the students could fully state the aforementioned purposes. Rather, the answers given by the respondents can be classified into four categories. The first category includes the answers in which the students refer to three functions, the second category is concerned with those answers in which only two functions are stated, the third category involves the answers in which the students mention just one function, and the last category encompasses those vague and general answers which do not exactly show the work done by the introduction.

As far as the first category is concerned, only two students mentioned three functions. One of them (4.16%) believed that the introduction aimed at '*giving a general background about the topic*' through casting light on what has been said and done in relation to the topic under investigation. She further added that this section aspired to '*identify the gap in the*

*literature*’ and *‘show the significance of the research undertaken.’* The other student (4.16%) pointed out that the general introduction served to *‘introduce the topic’* being studied, *‘give a brief background’* about it through reviewing the most relevant theories and studies, and *‘provide an overview of the dissertation’s structure.’*

Concerning the second category, eight students mentioned two functions. More specifically, seven students (29.16%) reported that the aim of the general introduction was *‘to introduce the topic’* and *‘provide a detailed explanation of the research problem to be addressed by the study’*. The other student (4.16%) shared the same view with regard to the first function *‘introducing the topic’*, while she stated *‘reviewing related theories and studies’* as the second function.

With regard to the third category, six students referred to only one function served by the introduction. While four of them (16.67%) said that the section mainly focused on *‘reviewing previous related studies’*, two students (8.33%) noted that it endeavored *‘to demonstrate the importance of the research topic.’*

As for the last category, six students (25%) concurred that the aim of the introduction was *‘to give a general idea about the topic’*, yet they did not go into further details about this too general and vague function.

The rest of the participants (8.33%) frankly admitted that they had no idea about the purpose of the introductory section.

### **Q 13: Can you list the main parts that make up the General Introduction?**

**Table 3.13. Main Parts of the Introduction**

| <b>Themes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>a)</b> Background of the study, <b>b)</b> Statement of the problem, <b>c)</b> Significance of the study, <b>d)</b> Research questions, <b>e)</b> Definitions of key terms, <b>f)</b> Structure of the dissertation.               | <b>07</b>                    | <b>29.17</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> Background of the study, <b>b)</b> Statement of the problem, <b>c)</b> Significance of the study, <b>d)</b> Aim of the study, <b>e)</b> Research questions, <b>f)</b> Hypotheses, <b>g)</b> Structure of the dissertation. | <b>03</b>                    | <b>12.5</b>           |
| <b>a)</b> Background, <b>b)</b> Aim of the study, <b>c)</b> Statement of the problem, <b>d)</b> Research questions, <b>e)</b> The research rationale                                                                                 | <b>02</b>                    | <b>8.33</b>           |
| <b>a)</b> Background of the study, <b>b)</b> Research problem, <b>c)</b> Research rationale, <b>d)</b> Research questions, <b>e)</b> Hypotheses.                                                                                     | <b>02</b>                    | <b>8.33</b>           |
| <b>a)</b> Objective of the study, <b>b)</b> The research rationale, <b>c)</b> Research questions, <b>d)</b> Hypotheses                                                                                                               | <b>01</b>                    | <b>4.16</b>           |

|                                                                                                                 |    |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| a) Background of the study, b) The gap, c) Research questions                                                   | 01 | 4.16  |
| a) Background of the study, b) Research problem, c) Research questions                                          | 01 | 4.16  |
| a) Background, b) Methodology, c) Findings.                                                                     | 01 | 4.16  |
| a) Background of the study, b) Statement of the problem, c) Research questions, d) Results, e) Brief conclusion | 01 | 4.16  |
| a) Background of the study, b) Purpose of the study,                                                            | 01 | 4.16  |
| No idea                                                                                                         | 04 | 16.67 |

The purpose of question 13 was to check whether the students were aware of the main parts that constitute the introductory section of the dissertation. As already noted in the literature review chapter (see section 1.3.1.), the general introduction is made up of ***the background of the study, the problem statement, the research rationale/significance of the study, purpose of the study, research questions*** and/or ***hypotheses, definitions of key terms*** and ***layout of the dissertation***. The results revealed that while four students (16.67%) said they had no idea about the content of the general introduction, ten of them could successfully state nearly all the necessary aforementioned elements. More specifically, seven students (29.17%) mentioned all the parts except ‘the purpose of the study or research objectives’, while three students (12.5%) listed all the parts and ignored the ‘definitions of key terms’. The latter, in addition to ‘the layout of the dissertation’, were overlooked in the answers of two students (8.33%) who mentioned five parts (*Background, statement of the problem, the research rationale, aim of the study and the research questions*). Almost all of these parts were also mentioned by two other students (8.33%) who replaced the ‘aim of the study’ with ‘the research hypotheses’ which is, as we have seen in the review chapter, not an obligatory section in the general introduction. On the other hand, one student (4.16%) ignored four important parts (*background of the study, problem statement, definitions of key terms and layout of the dissertation*) that make up the introductory section and mentioned just *the research objectives, the rationale and the research questions* in addition to an optional part which is ‘the research hypotheses.’

Moreover, it seems that four students (16.67%) were not fully aware of all the key components of the introduction as they disregarded most of them (i.e., components) in their answers. In further detail, three students said that the introduction consisted of only three main parts where each of these students mentioned ‘the background of the study’ as one part. To be more specific, one student (4.16%) mentioned ‘*the background, the research questions and the gap*’, while another student (4.16%) kept the two first parts and mentioned ‘*the research problem*’ instead of the gap. However, in addition to the background of the

study, the answer given by the third student (4.16%) included one part (*methodology*) which is not obligatory in the introduction and another part (*findings*) which is completely irrelevant to this section content. The same mistake was made by one student (4.16%) who, in addition to *the background*, *problem statement* and *research questions*, mentioned two extraneous parts which are '*the results*' and '*the conclusion*'. Last but not least, the fourth student (4.16%) listed only two parts: *the background of the study* and *purpose of the study*.

**Table 02** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the general introduction and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### Q 14: Can you explain the function served by each part?

**Table 3.14. Functions of the Introduction Parts**

| Themes                                                                                                             |                                                                             | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Background of the study</b><br>(mentioned by <b>18</b> students in the previous question)                       | Establishing context for the study                                          | <b>14</b>             | <b>58.33</b>   |
|                                                                                                                    | Introducing the topic                                                       | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | Defining the key concepts                                                   | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>Statement of the problem</b><br>(mentioned by <b>17</b> students in the previous question)                      | Explaining the problem observed by the researcher                           | <b>11</b>             | <b>45.83</b>   |
|                                                                                                                    | Showing the relationship between two or more variables                      | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | <i>Identifying the gap in research</i>                                      | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | <i>Explaining why the problem needs to be studied</i>                       | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | No answer                                                                   | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>Research rationale/ significance of the study</b><br>(mentioned by <b>16</b> students in the previous question) | Demonstrating the importance of the study                                   | <b>12</b>             | <b>50</b>      |
|                                                                                                                    | Identifying the gap in the literature                                       | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | Showing the difference between the research undertaken and previous studies | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
|                                                                                                                    | No answer                                                                   | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |
| <b>Purpose of the study</b><br>(mentioned by <b>7</b> students in the previous question)                           | Describing the aim of the study                                             | <b>04</b>             | <b>16.67</b>   |
|                                                                                                                    | Explaining the reason behind conducting the study                           | <b>03</b>             | <b>12.5</b>    |
| <b>Research questions</b><br>(mentioned by <b>18</b> students in the previous question)                            | Establishing the focus of the study                                         | <b>12</b>             | <b>50</b>      |
|                                                                                                                    | No answer                                                                   | <b>06</b>             | <b>25</b>      |

|                                                                                          |                                                                     |           |              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>Research hypotheses</b><br>(mentioned by 6 students in the previous question)         | Stating the expected answer(s) for the research question(s)         | <b>04</b> | <b>16.67</b> |
|                                                                                          | No answer                                                           | <b>02</b> | <b>8.33</b>  |
| <b>Definitions of key terms</b><br>(mentioned by 7 students in the previous question)    | Defining the meaning of terms according to the context of the study | <b>04</b> | <b>16.66</b> |
|                                                                                          | Defining the difficult key terms                                    | <b>03</b> | <b>12.5</b>  |
| <b>Layout of the dissertation</b><br>(mentioned by 10 students in the previous question) | Presenting the structure of the dissertation                        | <b>09</b> | <b>37.5</b>  |
|                                                                                          | No answer                                                           | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |

Question 14 aimed at eliciting students' knowledge of the functions served by the parts of the introductions they mentioned. Starting with **the background of the study** section which appeared in eighteen answers (see Table 3.14), fourteen students (58.33%) could successfully determine its main function which is '*establishing context for the study*', while the other four students stated two secondary functions accomplished by this section: '*introducing the topic*' (12.5%) and '*defining key concepts*' (4.16%).

As for **the statement of the problem** which was mentioned in seventeen answers, eleven students (45.83%) said that the primary focus of this section was to '*explain the problem observed by the researcher*', while another student (4.16%) believed that it aimed at '*showing the relationship between two or more variables*'. The answers given by the rest of the participants, however, clearly showed that they were not aware of the functions served by the problem statement. This is because four of them mentioned 'identifying the gap' and 'explaining why the problem should be studied' as functions which are specific to another section (i.e., the research rationale), while one student (4.16%) gave no answer.

With regard to **the research rationale/significance of the study**, all the functions served by this section were mentioned by fourteen students, while the two other students gave no answer. More specifically, twelve students (50%) noted that the research rationale aspired to demonstrate *the importance of the topic under investigation*, one student (4.16%) said it aimed at *identifying the gap in the literature*, and another student (4.16%) pointed out that *showing the difference(s) between the research undertaken and previous studies* was the central concern of the research rationale.

Moving to **the purpose of the study** section which was mentioned in seven answers, the students referred to two main functions: ‘*describing the general objective of the study*’ (16.67%) and ‘*explaining the reasons behind conducting the study*’ (12.5%).

As far as **the research questions** section is concerned, it was mentioned by eighteen students. Twelve of them (50%) concurred that it served only one function which is ‘*establishing the study’s focus*’, while the remaining six students (25%) did not mention any function.

**The research hypotheses** section was present in six answers where four students (16.67%) pointed out that it primarily aimed at *stating the expected answer(s) for the research question(s)*, while the other two students (8.33%) mentioned no aim.

Concerning **the definitions of key terms** section, it appeared in seven answers where four students (16.67%) said that it aimed providing operational definitions of key words (i.e., *defining terms in relation to the context of the study*), while three students (12.5%) noted that the focus of this section was towards ‘*defining difficult key terms.*’

Last but not least, **layout of the dissertation** was mentioned by ten students as one of the parts that make up the general introduction. When asked about its main function, nine students (37.5%) said ‘*it presents the structure of the dissertation*’, while one student (4.16%) did not answer.

#### Q 15: How difficult was it to write the introduction of your dissertation?

**Table 3.15. Difficulty in Writing the General Introduction**

| Options                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Extremely difficult  | 00                    | 00             |
| b. Very difficult       | 05                    | 20.83          |
| c. Difficult            | 07                    | 29.17          |
| d. Slightly difficult   | 11                    | 45.83          |
| e. Not difficult at all | 01                    | 4.16           |

Question 15 addressed the degree of difficulty the students experienced in writing the general introduction of the dissertation. As indicated in Table 3.15, only one student (4.16%) said it was easy (*Not difficult at all*), while the overwhelming majority of students concurred that it was a hard task. Nevertheless, their answers differed in terms of the degree of task difficulty where eleven students (45.83%) said it was ‘*Slightly difficult*’, seven (29.17%) said it was ‘*Difficult*’, and five students (20.83%) said it was ‘*Very difficult*’. The main

difficulties encountered in writing the general introduction were investigated through the students' interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.3.

### 3.1.4. Writing the Literature Review Chapter (Questions 16 – 24)

#### Q 16: How do you define a review of the literature?

**Table 3.16. Definition of the Literature Review**

| Themes                                                                                                | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| An account of previous studies                                                                        | 11                    | 45.83          |
| A general background about the topic and the variables                                                | 04                    | 16.67          |
| A critical summary and evaluation of existing materials relevant to the topic                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| A <b>critical evaluation</b> of previous related studies                                              | 03                    | 12.5           |
| The theoretical part of the dissertation which <b>discusses</b> related theories and previous studies | 03                    | 12.5           |
| No idea                                                                                               | 02                    | 8.33           |

As previously noted in the theoretical chapter (see section 1.4.1.), the literature review is defined as a process of summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing and evaluating what has been said and done. Nevertheless, as indicated in Table 3.16, two respondents (8.33%) frankly said they had no idea what a literature review meant, while more than half of them (62.5%) failed to provide a good descriptive definition that encompasses all the aforementioned steps. They rather looked at the literature review as a mere summary that 'describes previous studies' (45.83%) and 'provides a general background about the topic and the variables' (16.67%). The definitions given by the remaining students (25%), as compared with other students' definitions, were acceptable to some extent as they included some of the keywords that could possibly represent part of the literature review process. These keywords (bolded italics in the table) are 'critical evaluation', which came in the definitions of three students (12.5%) and 'discussion' which was also present in three definitions (12.5%).

#### Q 17: What is/are the purpose(s) of the literature review chapter?

**Table 3.17. Purpose(s) of the Literature Review**

| Themes                                                                                                   | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Reviewing related theories and previous studies<br>b) Identifying the gap                             | 02                    | 8.33           |
| a) Reviewing related theories<br>b) Synthesizing knowledge claims (showing similarities and differences) | 01                    | 4.16           |

|                                                                      |           |              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| a) Reviewing related theories                                        |           |              |
| b) Showing the relationship between variables                        | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
| Reviewing related theories and previous studies                      | <b>14</b> | <b>58.33</b> |
| Synthesizing knowledge claims (showing similarities and differences) | <b>02</b> | <b>8.33</b>  |
| Identifying the gap in the literature                                | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
| No idea                                                              | <b>03</b> | <b>12.5</b>  |

As previously noted in the theoretical chapter (see section 1.4.1), the literature review serves several purposes. First, it develops researchers' knowledge about the leading scholars in the field and most relevant theories and studies. Second, it shows the relationship between the topic addressed and previous research through casting light on areas of similarities and differences between them. Third, it allows researchers to identify the gap in the existing research and informs them of the most appropriate methods that can help them obtain valid and reliable results to answer their research questions. Finally, it assists researchers in the analysis and interpretation of their data. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in Table 3.17, none of the respondents mentioned all the purposes. Rather, only four students stated two functions, while the majority (17 students) mentioned just one function.

As for those who mentioned two functions, two of them (8.33%) believed that the review of the literature aspired to *discuss the most pertinent theories and studies* to the research and *identify the problems that have not been addressed* in previous research (research gap). Another student (4.16%) also mentioned *reviewing relevant theories and studies* as the first function and added 'Synthesizing knowledge claims' through establishing relationships (areas of similarities and differences) between previous works and the research topic being investigated. Like the others, the fourth student (4.16%) started with 'reviewing related theories and previous research' as the primary focus of the literature review chapter, followed by 'showing relationship between variables' as a second function.

Concerning the seventeen students who referred to only one function in their answers, fourteen of them (58.33%) said that the literature review aimed at merely *reviewing the major theories and studies* that are relevant to the topic addressed by the researcher. Two students (8.33%), on the other hand, noted that the purpose of the review chapter was to *show the link between the research topic and previous studies* and examine the points of convergence and divergence between them (i.e., synthesizing). Last but not least, one student (4.16%) indicated that the review chapter served to *cast light on the limitations of previous studies and the areas that remained unexplored* (i.e., identifying the gap). The rest of the participants (12.5%) said they had no idea about the function of this chapter.



**Q 18: What is meant by a gap in the literature?****Table 3.18. Definition of a Gap in the Literature**

| Themes                                                | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| An area that has not been tackled in previous studies | 20                    | 83.33          |
| The research problem                                  | 02                    | 8.33           |
| No idea                                               | 02                    | 8.33           |

When asked to explain what a gap in the literature meant, two students (8.33%) said they had no idea, while the vast majority of students (83.33%) provided right answers and defined it (i.e., gap) as an area that has not been explored or tackled in previous studies. The rest of the participants (8.33%) used the term ‘research problem’ as a synonym for the research gap.

**Q 19: Could you identify the gaps in your literature?****Table 3.19. Students’ Ability to Identify the Gap in the Literature**

| Options | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Yes  | 16                    | 66.67          |
| b. No   | 08                    | 33.33          |

The vast majority of students (66.67%) declared that they were able to identify the areas that remained unexplored in the literature and the differences between their own studies and previous studies. The remaining students (33.33%), however, admitted that they were unable to determine the gap.

**Q 20: Can you list the main parts that make up the Literature Review Chapter?****Table 3.20. Main Parts of the Literature Review Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Review of related theories and studies, b) Comparison of the different points of views (synthesizing), c) Research gap indication | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Discussion of the relationship between variables, b) Review of related theories and studies, c) Gap indication                    | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Discussion of the relationship between variables, b) Theoretical framework, c) Conceptual framework.                              | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Review of related theories and studies, b) Discussion of the relationship between variables                                       | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Theoretical framework, b) Conceptual framework                                                                                    | 02                    | 8.33           |
| a) Review of related theories, b) Critical evaluation of previous studies                                                            | 01                    | 4.16           |

|                                                                                             |           |             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <b>a)</b> Synthesis of knowledge claims, <b>b)</b> Critical evaluation of related studies   | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b> |
| <b>a)</b> Review of previous studies, <b>b)</b> Comparison of the different points of views | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b> |
| Critical evaluation of previous studies                                                     | <b>06</b> | <b>25</b>   |
| Discussion of the relationship between variables                                            | <b>02</b> | <b>8.33</b> |
| Review of related theories and studies                                                      | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b> |
| No idea                                                                                     | <b>03</b> | <b>12.5</b> |

Unlike the other dissertation sections and chapters, the main parts that make up the literature review chapter are not explicitly stated in the headings. Rather, they are implied in the text. As noted in the theoretical chapter (see section 1.4.2), the literature review should involve the following parts: **a) significance of the topic, b) review of related theories and studies, c) synthesis of knowledge claims** (showing relationship between ideas), **d) theoretical position/framework, e) evaluation of previous studies' strengths and weaknesses, and f) gap identification.** As shown Table 3.20, almost all of these parts were referred to in the respondents' answers, but none of the students stated them altogether in one answer. Rather, three of them mentioned three parts, nine students stated two parts, while nine other students referred to only one part.

As for the students who mentioned three parts, one of them (4.16%) pointed out that the literature review consists of: **a)** a thorough *review of theories and studies related to the topic* being investigated, **b)** a *synthesis of ideas and points of views* through casting light on areas of convergence and divergence between them, and **c)** *research gap indication* through identifying the flaws in previous research and areas that were not satisfactorily addressed. Nearly the same parts were stated in another answer (4.16%) in which '*review of related theories and studies*' and '*gap indication*' were kept, while the third part (i.e., synthesis) was replaced with '*discussion of the relationship between variables*'. The latter was also mentioned along with '*theoretical framework*' and '*conceptual framework*' in the answer given by the third student (4.16%).

In what concerns those nine students who cited two parts, four of them (16.67%) reported that the literature review involves **a)** '*reviewing related theories and studies* that addressed the research problem' in addition to **b)** '*discussing the relationship between the variables.*' Two students (8.33%), on the other hand, referred to **a)** '*the theoretical framework*' and **b)** '*the conceptual framework*' as the main parts that make up the literature review without providing any further explanations. As for the three other students, two of them mentioned '*critical evaluation of previous studies*' as one important part in the chapter.

Nevertheless, they had different views on the second part as one student (4.16%) stated ‘*review of related theories and studies*’, while the other (4.16%) referred to ‘*synthesis of knowledge claims*’. The latter, along with ‘*review of related theories and studies*’, were also mentioned by the third student (4.16%).

With regard to the students whose answers included only one part, six of them (25%) mentioned ‘*critical evaluation of previous studies*’, two (8.33%) stated ‘*discussion of the relationship between variables*’, while the remaining student (4.16%) referred to ‘*review of related theories*’.

The rest of the participants (12.5%) straightforwardly said that they had no idea about the content of the literature review chapter.

**Table 03** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the literature review chapter and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### **Q 21: How difficult was it to write the literature review chapter?**

**Table 3.21. Difficulty to Write the Literature Review Chapter**

| <b>Options</b>                 | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>a.</b> Extremely difficult  | <b>01</b>                    | <b>4.16</b>           |
| <b>b.</b> Very difficult       | <b>08</b>                    | <b>33.33</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Difficult            | <b>08</b>                    | <b>33.33</b>          |
| <b>d.</b> Slightly difficult   | <b>07</b>                    | <b>29.17</b>          |
| <b>e.</b> Not difficult at all | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

The results demonstrated that none of the students found writing the literature review chapter an easy task. Rather, they all agreed that they experienced different degrees of difficulty. As shown in Table 3.21, the highest percentages were attributed to ‘*Very difficult*’ and ‘*Difficult*’ with eight answers for each (33.33% x 2), followed by seven answers (29.17%) for ‘*Slightly difficult*’, while only one student (4.16%) said that writing the literature review was ‘*Extremely difficult*’. The main difficulties encountered in writing the literature review chapter were investigated through the students’ interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.4.

**Q 22: Which style of referencing did you use for in-text citations and the list of references?**

**Table 3.22. The Referencing Style Used by the Students**

| Options  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. APA   | 16                    | 66.67          |
| b. MLA   | 08                    | 33.33          |
| c. Other | 00                    | 00             |

The aim of question 22 was to know about the referencing style employed by the students to cite sources in their dissertations. The results demonstrated that most students (66.67%) used the APA style, while the others (33.33%) employed the MLA. The answers provided by the students will help us later in the content analysis of the selected dissertations. That is, knowing about the style adopted will allow us to gauge the extent to which students successfully adhered to the requirements of each style.

**Q 23: How difficult was it to cite sources in text?**

**Table 3.23. Difficulty to Cite Sources in Text**

| Options                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Very difficult       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b. Difficult            | 03                    | 12.5           |
| c. Somewhat difficult   | 18                    | 75             |
| d. Not difficult at all | 02                    | 8.33           |

The aim of question 23 was to determine the extent to which citing sources in text was difficult to the students. As shown Table 3.23, only two students (8.33%) did not encounter any issues (*Not difficult at all*) in writing in-text citations. However, the overwhelming majority of students concurred that this task was difficult, yet there was a difference with regard to the degree of the task difficulty. That is, eighteen students (75%) found this task ‘*Somewhat difficult*’, three (12.5%) said it was ‘*Difficult*’ and one (4.16%) declared it was ‘*Very difficult*’.

**Q 24: How difficult was it to write the list of references?**

**Table 3.24. Difficulty to Cite Sources in the List of References**

| Options           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Very difficult | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b. Difficult      | 05                    | 20.83          |

|                         |    |    |
|-------------------------|----|----|
| c. Somewhat difficult   | 12 | 50 |
| d. Not difficult at all | 06 | 25 |

When asked about the extent to which writing the list of references was difficult, only six students (25%) said it was easy (*Not difficult at all*), while the vast majority of students reported different degrees of difficulty in writing this section. That is, the highest percentage goes to ‘*Somewhat difficult*’ which was mentioned by half of the participants (50%), followed by ‘*Difficult*’ which was selected by five students (20.83%). Finally, the remaining option ‘*Very difficult*’ was ticked only once (4.16%).

### 3.1.5. Writing the Method Chapter (Questions 25 – 27)

#### Q 25: What is the function of the Method Chapter in the dissertation?

**Table 3.25. Function(s) of the Method Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Identifying the research paradigm<br>b) Describing the sample<br>c) Describing the data collection tools           | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Describing the sample,<br>b) Describing the data collection tools<br>c) Describing the data collections procedures | 02                    | 8.33           |
| a) Describing the research design<br>b) Describing the data collection tools                                          | 03                    | 12.5           |
| a) Describing the methodology<br>b) Explaining the data collection procedures                                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Describing the methodology                                                                                            | 08                    | 33.33          |
| Describing the data collection tools                                                                                  | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Presenting the practical part of the research                                                                         | 03                    | 12.5           |

As already noted in the theoretical chapter (see section 1.5.1.), the main function served by the method chapter is providing a **detailed description of: the research design, paradigm, population and sample and data collection and analysis tools and procedures**. As shown in the table, while most of the functions were mentioned by the majority of the students, one function (i.e., *describing data analysis tools and procedures*) was totally ignored.

The answers to question 25 can be classified into three categories: the first category includes the answers of those students who mention three functions (25 %), the second category involves the answers in which two functions are stated (16.67 %), and the last category incorporates those answers in which only one function is referred to (58.33 %).

As for the first category, four students (16.67%) pointed out that the aim method chapter was to provide *details about: the research paradigm* adopted by the researcher, *the participants* selected to take part in the study and *instruments* used to collect data. Nearly the same functions were stated by the two other students (8.33%) who just replaced describing the research paradigm with *describing the procedures of data collection*.

Concerning the second category, three students (12.5%) said that the main focus of the method chapter was to describe in detail the research design and the data collection tools, while one student (4.16%) declared that it (i.e., the chapter) aspired to explain the data collection procedures and describe the methodology. This student, however, did not clearly explain what he meant by the second function (describing methodology) which is too general and vague and can be interpreted differently.

In the third category, the same remark applies to the answers given by eleven students who referred to describing the methodology (33.33%) and the practical part of the research (12.5%) as the main and only functions served by the method chapter. Both of these functions remained unclear as no further details were given about them. Last but not least, the three remaining students (12.5%) stated that the method chapter focused on merely describing the data collection instruments.

## Q 26: Can you list the main parts that make up the Method Chapter?

**Table 3.26. Main Parts of the Method Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                        | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Data analysis procedures, <b>b)</b> <i>Data discussion</i>                                                                                          | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Research design, <b>b)</b> Target population and sample, <b>c)</b> Research tools, <b>d)</b> Procedures of data collection.                         | <b>08</b>             | <b>33.33</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Research design, <b>b)</b> Participants, <b>c)</b> Research tools                                                                                   | <b>05</b>             | <b>20.83</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Population and sample, <b>b)</b> Research instruments, <b>c)</b> Data collection procedures.                                                        | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Research design, <b>b)</b> Population, <b>c)</b> Procedures of data collection, <b>d)</b> <i>Data analysis</i> , <b>e)</b> <i>Data presentation</i> | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Research design, <b>b)</b> Population and sample, <b>c)</b> Research methods, <b>d)</b> <i>Data analysis</i>                                        | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Research design, <b>b)</b> Population and sample, <b>c)</b> <i>Data analysis</i> , <b>d)</b> <i>Data discussion</i>                                 | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Research methods, <b>b)</b> <i>Data analysis</i> , <b>c)</b> <i>Data presentation</i>                                                               | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| No idea                                                                                                                                                       | <b>02</b>             | <b>8.33</b>    |

As previously noted in the literature review chapter (see section 1.5.2.), the method chapter is composed of the following six sections: **Research design, population and sample, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis tools** and **data analysis procedures**. The aim of question 26, therefore, was to discover the extent to which students were aware of these main parts/sections. As shown in Table 3.26, one section (data analysis methods) was missing in all the answers given by the students, while another section ‘data analysis procedures’ appeared in just one answer (4.16%) as one of the parts that make up the method chapter along with another irrelevant part (data discussion) which particularly belongs to the discussion section. The remaining sections, on the other hand, were present in some answers and absent in others. In further detail, only eight students (33.33%) mentioned most of the sections including *research design, population and sample, research tools* and *data collection procedures*, while ten students mentioned three sections and two students stated just two sections.

As far as the second category (i.e., ten students) is concerned, seven students stated only the sections that were relevant to the content of the method chapter. More specifically, according to five students (20.83%), the method chapter is mainly comprised of ‘*the research design*’, ‘*participants*’ and ‘*research tools*’. Two other students (8.33%) also mentioned three sections and shared the same view with regard to the ‘*participants*’ and the ‘*data collection instruments*’, yet they referred to ‘*data collection procedures*’ as the third section.

On the other hand, three students referred to three relevant sections along with extraneous sections that belong to the results section. That is, in addition to: ‘*Research design*’, ‘*Population & sample*’ and ‘*Procedures of data collection*’, two students (8.33%) mentioned ‘data analysis’ and data presentation’ as parts of the method chapter. Nearly the same sections were stated by the other student (4.16%) whose answer included ‘*research design*’, ‘*population & sample*’ and ‘*research methods*’ instead of data collection procedures in addition to ‘data analysis’ as an irrelevant section.

Concerning the third category (i.e., two students), the students (8.33%) mentioned only two relevant sections: ‘*research design*’ and ‘*population & sample*’ and added two other sections (data analysis and data discussion) which are specific to the results’ and discussions’ chapter.

As for the remaining three students, two of them (8.33%) clearly stated they had no idea about the content of the method chapter, while one student (4.16%) mentioned only ‘*research methods*’ as one relevant section along with ‘*data analysis*’ and ‘*data presentation*’ which, as already noted, are parts of the results section. **Table 04** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts/sections to be included in the method chapter and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

### Q 27: How difficult was it to write the Method Chapter?

**Table 3.27. Difficulty to Write the Method Chapter**

| Options                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Extremely difficult  | 00                    | 00             |
| b. Very difficult       | 02                    | 8.33           |
| c. Difficult            | 05                    | 20.83          |
| d. Slightly difficult   | 11                    | 45.83          |
| e. Not difficult at all | 06                    | 25             |

When asked how difficult (or easy) it would be for a Master student to write the methodology chapter of his/her dissertation, 25% of the students said that writing the chapter was ‘*Not difficult at all*’, while almost half of them (45.83%) said it was easy to some extent, yet they faced a few difficulties (*Slightly difficult*). The remaining students, on the other hand, said it was ‘*Very difficult*’ (8.33%) and ‘*Difficult*’ (20.83%). The main difficulties encountered in writing the method chapter were investigated through the students’ interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.5.

### 3.1.6. Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter (Questions 28 – 34)

#### Q 28: What is the function of the Results Section?

**Table 3.28. Function of the Results Section**

| Themes                                                                      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Presenting the research findings                                            | 18                    | 75             |
| Presenting the findings and answering the research questions                | 02                    | 8.33           |
| Answering the research questions and confirming or rejecting the hypotheses | 03                    | 12.5           |
| No idea                                                                     | 01                    | 4.16           |

Question 28 attempted to check students’ awareness of the function served by the results’ section. As the table demonstrates, the majority of students (75%) could appropriately determine the main purpose of this section (*presenting the research findings*).



Nevertheless, five students (20,83%) failed to provide the correct answer as the functions they suggested (*answering the research questions and confirming or rejecting the hypotheses*) were rather served by the discussions' section.

**Q 29: Can you list the main parts that make up the Results Section?**

**Table 3.29. Main Parts of the Results Section**

| Themes                                                                                                                                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Data presentation                                                                                                                      | 06                    | 25             |
| a) Data presentation, b) Data analysis                                                                                                 | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Data presentation, b) <i>Data discussion</i>                                                                                        | 03                    | 12.5           |
| a) Data analysis, b) <i>Data interpretation</i>                                                                                        | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data analysis, b) <i>Data interpretation</i> , c) <i>Discussion</i>                                                                 | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data presentation, b) Data analysis, c) <i>Data interpretation</i>                                                                  | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data presentation, b) Data analysis, c) <i>Data interpretation</i> , d) <i>Data discussion</i>                                      | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data presentation, b) <i>Data interpretation</i>                                                                                    | 01                    | 4.16           |
| <i>Discussion of the results</i>                                                                                                       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data analysis, b) <i>Data discussion</i> , c) <i>Implications</i> , d) <i>Limitations</i> , e) <i>Pedagogical recommendations</i> . | 01                    | 4.16           |
| No idea                                                                                                                                | 04                    | 16.67          |

Unlike the structure of the other dissertation sections and chapters, the results section/chapter is composed of two main parts: ‘*data presentation*’ or ‘*presenting the research findings*’ and ‘*data analysis*’. As indicated in Table 3.29, six students (25%) mentioned ‘*data presentation*’ as the only part in the results section, while four students (16.67%) mentioned it along with the second part ‘*data analysis*’. As for the answers given by ten students, it seems that these students are not fully aware of (or do not know at all) the main and appropriate elements to be included in the results section/chapter. In addition to ‘*data presentation and analysis*’, these students mentioned irrelevant elements that should be saved for the next section (i.e., discussions of the results). These elements (bolded-italics) are: *data interpretation*, *discussion of the results*, *implications*, *limitations* and *pedagogical recommendations*. The rest of the participants (16.67%) frankly admitted that they had no idea about the content of the results section.

**Table 05 in Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the results section and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents. Please note that themes in italics refer to the parts that are irrelevant to the results section.

### Q 30: What is the function of the Discussion Section?

**Table 3.30. Function of the Discussion Section**

| Themes                                                                                                                           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Interpreting the findings<br>b) Discussing the findings in relation to the literature<br>c) Answering the research questions. | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Explaining the results<br>b) Evaluating the results,<br>c) Showing how the results are related to the literature review       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Discussing the results,<br>b) Confirming or rejecting hypotheses                                                              | 02                    | 8.33           |
| Discussing the results of the study in relation to previous studies in the literature                                            | 08                    | 33.33          |
| Interpreting the results                                                                                                         | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Answering the research questions                                                                                                 | 02                    | 8.33           |
| <b><i>Presenting the results</i></b>                                                                                             | 02                    | 8.33           |
| No idea                                                                                                                          | 02                    | 8.33           |

As already mentioned in the literature review (see section 1.6.2.), the discussion section/chapter serves four main functions which are: *interpreting/explaining the results, evaluating the results, discussing them with reference to previous studies' results* and *answering the research questions*. As demonstrated in Table 3.30, only five students mentioned most of the functions and ignored one of them. More specifically, four students (16.67%) said that the discussion section aimed at interpreting and discussing the findings and answering the research questions. Nearly the same elements were mentioned by the fifth student (4.16%) who ignored 'answering the research questions' and replaced it with 'evaluating the results'.

Further, two students (8.33%) pointed out that both discussing the results and confirming or rejecting the hypotheses were the main tasks accomplished by the discussion section. On the contrary, thirteen students noted that the discussion section served just one function. In further detail, eight students (33.33%) said it aspired to discuss the research findings in relation to the literature, three students (12.5%) mentioned interpretation of the findings and, finally, two students (8.33%) referred to answering the research questions as the only aim.

As for the rest of the participants, two students (8.33%) mentioned an irrelevant function (presenting the results) which should be rather served by the results section, while the other two students (8.33%) straightforwardly said they had no idea.

### Q 31: Can you list the main parts that make up the Discussion Section?

**Table 3.31. Main Parts of the Discussion Section**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Restatement of the main findings, b) Data interpretation, c) Data comparison with other studies.                                                                    | 03                    | 12.5           |
| a) Explanation of the results, b) Discussion of similarities and differences between the results, c) The importance of the findings.                                   | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Summary of the results, b) Data interpretation, c) Discussion of the results in relation to the literature.                                                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Discussion of the results in relation to the literature                                                                                                                | 05                    | 20.83          |
| a) Discussion of the results in relation to the literature, b) <b>Implications</b> , c) <b>Recommendations</b>                                                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Discussion of the results in relation to the literature, b) <b>Implications</b> , c) <b>Limitations</b> , d) <b>Recommendations</b> .                               | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) <b>Data presentation</b> , b) Discussion of the results in relation to the literature, c) <b>Implications</b> , d) <b>Recommendations</b> , e) <b>Limitations</b> . | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Summary of key findings, b) Data interpretation                                                                                                                     | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) <b>Data analysis</b> , b) Data interpretation                                                                                                                       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Data interpretation, b) <b>Limitations</b>                                                                                                                          | 01                    | 4.16           |
| <b>Data presentation</b>                                                                                                                                               | 02                    | 8.33           |
| <b>Data analysis</b>                                                                                                                                                   | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) <b>The research hypothesis</b> , b) <b>The purpose of the study</b> , c) <b>The research findings</b> , d) <b>Implications</b>                                      | 01                    | 4.16           |
| No idea                                                                                                                                                                | 04                    | 16.67          |

As previously noted in the literature review chapter, the main moves that make up the discussion section/chapter are: **restating the main findings**, **commenting on the findings** through **interpreting**, **comparing them with the literature** and **showing their significance**. As indicated Table 3.31, none of the students stated all the aforementioned elements. Rather, five students mentioned most of them (i.e., elements) where three students (12.5%) mentioned: ‘*restatement of the main results, data interpretation and data comparison with other studies*’; one student (4.16%) mentioned: ‘*explanation of the results, discussion of the similarities and differences between the results, the importance of the findings*’, and one student (4.16%) mentioned: ‘*summary of the results, commenting on the results, data interpretation and discussion of the results in relation to the literature*’. Five students (20.83%), on the other hand, mentioned only one part which is ‘*discussion of the results in relation to the literature*’. The latter was also present in the answers of three students, yet with other parts (bolded-italics) which are irrelevant to the content of the discussion section. More specifically, one student (4.16%) mentioned ‘*discussion of the results*’ with

‘implications and recommendations’, while another student (4.16%) mentioned the same elements and added ‘limitations’. Again, one student (4.16%) listed the same elements and added a fifth part which is ‘data presentation’.

Three students said that the discussion section was composed of only two parts. One of them (4.16%) mentioned ‘*key findings*’ and ‘*data interpretation*’ which are both relevant to the content of the section, while another student (4.16%) mentioned ‘*data interpretation*’ along with ‘data analysis’ which is part of the results section. Similarly, the third student (4.16%) also referred to ‘*data interpretation*’ along with ‘limitations of the study’ which is particularly found in the pedagogical implications’ section.

Last but not least, it is quite clear from the answers given by the rest of the participants that they were not at all aware of what to include in the discussion section. Four of them (16.67%) frankly admitted that they had no idea about its content, while four students (16.67%) mentioned elements that were specific to: the results section (data presentation and analysis), the pedagogical implications section (implications) and the general introduction (purpose of the study and research hypothesis). **Table 06** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the discussion section and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents. Please note that the themes in italics refer to the parts that are irrelevant to the discussion section.

### Q 32: What is the function of the Pedagogical Implications Section?

**Table 3.32. Function of the Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations Section**

| Themes                                                                                                    | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Stating the pedagogical implications of the research findings                                             | 11                    | 45.83          |
| a) Stating the pedagogical implications of the research findings and,<br>b) Recommending further research | 03                    | 12.5           |
| a) Recommending further research and,<br>b) Indicating limitations of the study                           | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Stating the pedagogical implications of the research findings and,<br>b) Stating the limitations       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Indicating limitations of the study                                                                       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Stating the strengths and weaknesses of the study                                                         | 01                    | 4.16           |
| No idea                                                                                                   | 03                    | 12.5           |

When asked about the purpose achieved by the pedagogical implications section, the majority of students (45.83%) said that it aimed at merely stating the implications of the

research findings, while three students (12.5%) added another function which is ‘providing suggestions for (recommending) further research’. This function was also present in the answers of four students (16.67%) along with reporting the flaws of the study (limitations). One student (4.16%) also believed that this section served two main functions which are ‘drawing pedagogic implications’ and ‘acknowledging the study limitations’. The latter was mentioned by another student (4.16%) as the only purpose. Finally, one student (4.16%) declared that the pedagogical implications section aspired to evaluate the study through showing its significance and weaknesses.

The remaining students (12.5%) said they had no idea about the function of the pedagogical implication section.

**Q 33: Can you list the main parts that make up this section (Pedagogical Implications)?**

**Table 3.33. Main Parts of the Pedagogical Implications Section**

| Themes                                                                   | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Limitations, b) Recommendations for further research                  | 04                    | 16.67          |
| a) Pedagogical Implications, b) Recommendations for further research     | 02                    | 8.33           |
| a) Pedagogical Implications, b) Limitations                              | 01                    | 4.16           |
| Recommendations for further research                                     | 09                    | 37.5           |
| a) Implications, b) Recommendations for further research, c) Limitations | 01                    | 4.16           |
| No idea                                                                  | 07                    | 29.17          |

In the literature review chapter, we discussed the position of the pedagogical implications section (see section 1.6.4) as being one of the elements that make up the discussion section and as an independent section which consists of four main parts namely: ***review of the study, the pedagogic implications of the study, the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research***. In the students’ questionnaire, we asked about the pedagogic implications of the study as a separate section. As shown Table 3.33, none of the respondents mentioned all the four parts. Rather, seven students stated only two parts (*limitations and recommendations for future research* (16.66%), *pedagogical implications and recommendations* (8.33%) and *pedagogical implications and limitations* (4.16%)), nine students (37.5%) stated just one part (*recommendations for future research*) and finally, one student (4.16%) mentioned three parts (*implications, recommendations and limitations*). The remaining participants (29.17%) said they had no idea about the content of this section.

**Table 07** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the pedagogical implications' section and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

### Q 34: How difficult was it to write the Results and Discussion Chapter?

**Table 3.34. Difficulty to Write the Results and Discussion Chapter**

| Options                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Extremely difficult  | 04                    | 16.67          |
| b. Very difficult       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| c. Difficult            | 12                    | 50             |
| d. Slightly difficult   | 05                    | 20.83          |
| e. Not difficult at all | 02                    | 8.33           |

As indicated in Table 3.34, almost all the students, except two (8.33%), agreed that the results and discussion chapter was difficult to write, yet they stated different degrees of difficulty. That is, half of them (50%) said that writing this chapter was '*Difficult*', while the other students gave answers ranging between '*Slightly difficult*' (20.83%), '*Extremely difficult*' (16.67%) and '*Very difficult*' (4.16%). The main difficulties encountered in writing the results and discussion chapter were investigated through the students' interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.6.

### 3.1.7. Writing the General Conclusion (Questions 35 – 37)

### Q 35: What is the function of the General Conclusion in the dissertation?

**Table 3.35. Function(s) of the General Conclusion**

| Themes                                                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Summarizing the dissertation's chapters                 | 20                    | 83.33          |
| <b><i>Providing an overview of the dissertation</i></b> | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Summarizing the dissertation's chapters              | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b) Answering the research questions                     |                       |                |
| Answering the research questions                        | 01                    | 4.16           |
| a) Summarizing the main findings                        | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b) Confirming or rejecting the hypothesis(es)           |                       |                |

As previously noted in the review chapter, the general conclusion in the dissertation serves to: **a)** summarize the results of the study, **b)** evaluate the study through casting light on the significance, strengths and weaknesses of the study and **c)** make deductions from the study through drawing pedagogic implications and recommending further research. One can notice that we have repeated almost the same purposes that have been already claimed to be served by the pedagogical implications section. This is because, in our research, the latter is

dealt with as a separate section and part of the results and discussion chapter not as part of the general conclusion, yet this does not mean that the function of the general conclusion is merely limited to restating the research questions and objectives and summarizing the major findings as many students think. Rather, the general conclusion of the dissertation should go beyond that and embrace all the aforementioned functions even if this is considered as repetition. The latter is important as it is expected that many readers would go from the introduction straight to the conclusion to have a general idea about the study without reading the body of the dissertation.

However, as indicated in Table 3.35, none of the students mentioned all the functions. In more detail, the vast majority of them (83.33%) claimed that the general conclusion aimed at merely *summarizing the dissertation chapters*, while another student (4.16%) mentioned an irrelevant function (*providing an overview of the dissertation*) which is specific to the general introduction.

*Summarizing the dissertation* was also referred to by another student (4.16%) along with a second function ‘*answering the research questions*’. The latter, according to one student (4.16%), was thought to be the sole aim served by the general conclusion, while the remaining student (4.16%) stated ‘*summarizing the main findings*’ and ‘*confirming or rejecting hypotheses*’.

### Q 36: Can you list the main parts that make up the General Conclusion?

**Table 3.36. Main Parts of the General Conclusion**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research aims and questions, <b>b)</b> Summary of the main findings, <b>c)</b> Implications, <b>d)</b> Recommendations.                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research aims and questions, <b>b)</b> Summary of the findings, <b>c)</b> Summary of the dissertation’s chapters, <b>d)</b> Recommendations, <b>e)</b> Limitations  | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research aims and questions, <b>b)</b> Summary of the main findings, <b>c)</b> Summary of the dissertation chapters, <b>d)</b> Implications, <b>e)</b> Limitations. | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Summary of the major findings, <b>b)</b> Implications, <b>c)</b> Limitations, <b>d)</b> Recommendations.                                                                               | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research aims and questions, <b>b)</b> Summary of the findings, <b>c)</b> Implications.                                                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Summary of the main findings, <b>b)</b> Recommendations                                                                                                                                | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |
| <b>a)</b> Implications, <b>b)</b> Recommendations                                                                                                                                                | <b>01</b>             | <b>4.16</b>    |

|                                                                                                                              |    |       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| a) Summary of the dissertation's chapters, b) Recommendations                                                                | 01 | 4.16  |
| a) Restatement of the research aims and questions, b) summary of the main results, c) summary of the dissertation's chapters | 02 | 8.33  |
| a) Restatement of the research aims and questions, b) Implications                                                           | 01 | 4.16  |
| Summary of the main findings                                                                                                 | 01 | 4.16  |
| Pedagogical implications                                                                                                     | 01 | 4.16  |
| Summary of the dissertation's chapters                                                                                       | 02 | 8.33  |
| <b>Discussion of the results</b>                                                                                             | 01 | 4.16  |
| No idea                                                                                                                      | 08 | 33.33 |

On the basis of the aforementioned functions, the general conclusion is made up of the following parts: **a) restatement of the problem, b) research objectives and questions (restatement), c) summary of the main findings, d) pedagogical implications, e) limitations, and f) recommendations for further research.** Except the first part (restatement of the problem), all the other parts were present in the students' answers, yet no student mentioned them altogether in one answer. Thus, according to the results presented in Table 3.36, the students' answers can be classified into four categories. The first category involves the answers in which four parts are present. The second category includes the answers in which three parts appear, while three are missing. The third category consists of the answers in which two parts of the conclusion are present, while four are absent. The last category comprises those answers in which only one part is mentioned, while the other parts are missing.

As for the first category, four students listed four of the aforementioned parts to be included in the conclusion and ignored two parts as shown in Table 3.36. More specifically, one student (4.16%) stated: **a) restatement of the research questions and objectives, b) summary of the major findings, c) implications, and d) recommendations for further research**, yet she did not mention '**restatement of the problem**' and '**limitations of the study**'. Another student (4.16%) cited four parts and disregarded '**restatement of the problem**' and '**pedagogical implications**'. The latter, along with other three parts, were referred to in the answer given by the third student (4.16%), while '**recommendations for further research**' and '**restatement of the problem**' were missing. The last student (4.16%) in this category emphasized the inclusion of summary of the findings, implications, limitations and recommendations as the most important parts in the conclusion while he excluded '**the restatement of the problem**' and '**the research questions and objectives**'



Concerning the second category, one student (4.16%) noted that the general conclusion should include three parts: '*restatement of the research objectives*', '*summary of the main findings*', and '*implications*', while she ignored the three other parts (i.e., **restatement of the problem**, **limitations** and **recommendations for further research**).

With regard to the third category in which it was claimed that the conclusion consisted of only two parts, two of the previously mentioned parts namely '**the restatement of the problem**' and '**limitations of the study**' were totally overlooked by the respondents. The other four parts, on the contrary, were present in some answers and absent in others. In further detail, one student (4.16%) mentioned '*summary of the findings*' and '*recommendations for further research*'. The latter was also stated along with '*pedagogical implications*' by the second student (4.16%) and in conjunction with 'summary of the dissertation's chapter' by the third student (4.16%). Further, '*restatement of the research aims and questions*' and '*summary of the major findings*', in addition to 'summary of the chapters', were considered by two students (8.33%) as the only parts that constitute the conclusion. The last student (4.16%) whose answer also included two parts cited '*restatement of the research aims and questions*' and '*pedagogical implications*'.

As far as the last category is concerned, five students claimed that the conclusion was composed of only one part and disregarded the remaining parts. This part, according to one student (4.16%), is '*summary of the major findings*', while another student (4.16%) mentioned '*pedagogical implications*'. Two students (8.33%), on the other hand, mentioned an additional part (i.e., summary of the dissertation chapters) which was not found among the parts listed earlier, while one student (4.16%) referred to an irrelevant part (i.e., discussion of the results) which is specific to the results and discussion chapter. The rest of the participants (33.33%) frankly stated they had no idea about the content of the general conclusion.

**Table 08** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the general conclusion and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents. Please note that themes in italics refer to the parts that are irrelevant to the conclusion.

### Q 37: How difficult was it to write the General Conclusion of your dissertation?

**Table 3.37. Difficulty to Write the General Conclusion**

| Options                 | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Extremely difficult  | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b. Very difficult       | 01                    | 4.16           |
| c. Difficult            | 04                    | 16.67          |
| d. Slightly difficult   | 08                    | 33.33          |
| e. Not difficult at all | 10                    | 41.67          |

When asked about the extent to which writing the general conclusion of a dissertation was difficult, ten students (41.67%) said it was ‘*Not difficult at all*’, while eight (33.33%) said that they faced a few difficulties (*Slightly difficult*). This is not surprising given that most of them looked at the conclusion as just a descriptive summary of the whole dissertation (see Table 3.37). The answers provided by the rest of students ranged from ‘*Difficult*’ (16.66%) to ‘*Very difficult*’ (4.16%) and ‘*Extremely difficult*’ (4.16%). The main difficulties encountered in writing the general conclusion were investigated through the students’ interview. They are presented in Section 3.2.7.

Answers to the questions about the students’ relationship with their supervisors are presented in the next section.

#### 3.1.8. Student – Supervisor Relationship (Questions 38 – 45)

### Q 38: Did you experience any difficulties in communicating and interacting with your supervisor?

**Table 3.38. Difficulties in Communicating with the Supervisor**

| Options          | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. All the times | 04                    | 16.67          |
| b. Most often    | 07                    | 29.16          |
| c. Occasionally  | 07                    | 29.16          |
| d. Never         | 06                    | 25             |

In this question, the students were asked if they encountered issues in communicating with their supervisors. As indicated in Table 3.38, four students (16.67%) said they experienced difficulties ‘*All the times*’, while six (25%) stated that they ‘*Never*’ had problems and everything was going well. As for the other participants, their answers ranged from ‘*Most often*’ (29.17%) to ‘*Occasionally*’ (29.17%). The difficulties experienced by the students are further explored in the students’ interview as we shall see in Section 3.2.9.

### Q 39: How long did s/he spend correcting the work you handed in?

**Table 3.39. The Amount of Time Spent Correcting the Work Handed in by the Students**

| Themes (Amount of time) | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Two days                | 05                    | 20.83          |
| One week                | 04                    | 16.67          |
| Two weeks               | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Four days               | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Five days               | 01                    | 4.16           |
| A long time             | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Only verbal feedback    | 02                    | 8.33           |
| No corrections          | 03                    | 12.5           |

Question 39 aimed at knowing the amount of time the teachers spend on correcting the students' work. As Table 3.39 shows, five students (20.83%) said that their supervisors needed only 'Two days' to read the work and give feedback, followed by four students (16.67%) who answered 'One week', three students (12.5%) who answered 'Four days', three (12.5%) who said 'Two weeks' and only one student (4.16%) who said 'Five days'. The answers provided by the rest of students, however, were vague and did not give a clear idea about the amount of time spent. To be more specific, three students (12.5%) said that their supervisors took 'A long time' to evaluate their work and give feedback, while two students (8.33%) explicitly stated that they did not submit any written drafts to their supervisors for correction. Instead, they had to present their work orally and receive oral comments in return (*Only verbal feedback*). Three students (12.5%), nevertheless, declared that they received neither written nor oral feedback (*No corrections*) from their supervisors. These findings will be confronted to the teachers' answers to the same question (see Chapter 4, Table 4.26) as this will allow us to compare between the students' claims and teachers' claims and check the extent to which they are similar.

### Q 40: Did you have supervision meetings with your supervisor?

**Table 3.40. Supervision Meetings**

| Options         | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Very often   | 09                    | 37.5           |
| b. Occasionally | 15                    | 62.5           |
| c. Never        | 00                    | 00             |

When asked if they had supervision meetings, the majority of students (62.5%) said they 'Occasionally' met their supervisors during their research writing journey, while the

remaining ones (37.5%) said they met them (i.e., supervisors) very frequently (*Very often*). None of the students ticked the third option (*Never*).

**Q 41: How often did you meet your supervisor during the dissertation writing process?**

**Table 3.41. Frequency of Supervision Meetings**

| Options           |                    | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Thrice a month |                    | 09                    | 37.5           |
| b. Twice a month  |                    | 06                    | 25             |
| c. Once a month   |                    | 05                    | 20.83          |
| d. Other          | Four times a month | 01                    | 4.16           |
|                   | Whenever we want   | 03                    | 12.5           |

Through question 41, we wanted to know how often the students met their supervisors during the dissertation writing journey. Nine students (37.5%) said they used to see their supervisors ‘*three times a month*’, while six students (25%) said they had supervision meetings ‘*twice a month*’ and five (20.83%) said only ‘*once a month*’. Unlike the majority, the four remaining students added other options that were not mentioned in the question. That is, while one of them (4.16%) said that she had supervision meetings ‘*four times a month*’, three students (12.5%) said they had a chance to see their supervisors *whenever they had questions* or needed help/guidance.

**Q 42: How long did each meeting last on average?**

**Table 3.42. Average Length of Each Supervision Meeting**

| Amount of time spent | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 15 to 20 minutes     | 03                    | 12.5           |
| Half an hour         | 10                    | 41.67          |
| 1 hour               | 02                    | 8.33           |
| 1 hour 30 minutes    | 03                    | 12.5           |
| 2 hours              | 03                    | 12.5           |
| No answer            | 03                    | 12.5           |

When asked about the amount of time they received from their supervisors to discuss their dissertation writing problems and progress, of twenty-four students, ten (41.66%) stated that each supervision meeting lasted for half an hour. On the other hand, two other students (8.33%) said that they used to have a one-hour meeting with their supervisors, while three students (12.5%) added 30 minutes (i.e., 1h30mins). The longest supervision time according to three students (12.5%) was 2 hours, whereas the shortest amount of time ranged

from 15 to 20 minutes as indicated by three students (12.5%). The rest of the participants (12.5%) provided no answer to this question.

**Q 43: In his/her feedback, your supervisor focused much more on: a) structure, b) content, c) methodology, d) all of them?**

**Table 3.43. Focus of the Supervisor's Feedback**

| Options                       | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Structure                  | 01                    | 4.16           |
| b. Content                    | 00                    | 00             |
| c. Methodology                | 06                    | 25             |
| d. All of them                | 12                    | 50             |
| a + b (structure + content)   | 04                    | 16.67          |
| b + c (content + methodology) | 01                    | 4.16           |

As can be seen from Table 3.43, half of the participants (50%) stated that their supervisors gave equal importance to all the above-mentioned elements (*structure*, *content* and *methodology*) in their feedback. The remaining half of participants was divided between those who noted that their supervisors focused on only one aspect (*methodology* (25%) and *structure* (4.16%)) and those whose supervisors combined two aspects (i.e., *structure and content* (16.67%) or *content and methodology* (4.16%)).

**Q 44: Did you take his/her comments and feedback into consideration?**

**Table 3.44. Students' Reactions to the Supervisor's Feedback**

| Options      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Always    | 18                    | 75             |
| b. Often     | 03                    | 12.5           |
| c. Sometimes | 01                    | 4.16           |
| d. Rarely    | 00                    | 00             |
| e. Never     | 02                    | 8.33           |

When asked if they took their supervisors' comments and feedback into account to improve their work, only two students (8.33%) said they '*Never*' did, while the majority of students (75%) said they '*Always*' considered their teachers' comments. The answers provided by the remaining small proportion of students ranged between '*Often*' (12.5%) and '*Sometimes*' (4.16%). The same question (Q44) was addressed to the teachers (Chapter 4, Q24) so as to cross-check the students' answers with those of their teachers.

**Q 45: Did your supervisor provide you with particular guidelines or models on dissertation writing?**

**Table 3.45. Supervisor's Guidelines for Writing a Dissertation**

| Options      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Often     | 04                    | 16.67          |
| b. Sometimes | 09                    | 37.5           |
| c. Never     | 11                    | 45.83          |

In question 45, our aim was to know if the supervisors provided their supervisees with guidelines or resources that would help them write their dissertations. As shown in Table 3.45, while a few students (16.67%) responded positively to this question and stated that their supervisors '*Often*' gave them useful sources on dissertation writing, the majority (45.83%) said their supervisors actually '*Never*' did. The remaining students (37.5%) said their supervisors '*Sometimes*' offered some guidelines to assist them conduct their research and write dissertations.

In the following section, the results obtained from the interview are presented and further details about the students' answers to some closed-ended items in the questionnaire are provided.

### **3.2. The Students' Interview Results**

As already stated in the method chapter (see section 2.3.1. for further details), of 24, 13 students were purposively selected to be interviewed.

It is worth reminding that the aim of the interview was to complement the results obtained from the questionnaire and give the students the floor to elaborate on their answers and share their dissertation writing experiences. At first, our semi-structured interview included a set of open-ended questions (14) which have been prepared before the data collection process. Yet, after we did a preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses, other clarification questions were added to the list (see section 2.4.2 in the method chapter).

#### **3.2.1. Challenges in Finding/selecting a Good Topic**

When the students were asked, in the questionnaire, whether it was difficult or easy to find an interesting research topic, nearly all of them answered with 'Difficult' (see Table 3.3). Hence, we felt curious to know more about the types of difficulties they faced through asking the 'what' question in the interview. The results revealed the following challenges:

**3.2.1.1. All Topics Were Already Overworked on:** Most students (ST 01, ST 06, ST 07, ST 13, ST 15, ST 17, ST 24 & ST 28) reported that all the topics they thought of were already dealt with and would not add anything new to the academic context. Hence, they had to do intensive readings so as to find new and original topics.

**3.2.1.2. Topics Were too General:** According to three students (ST 01, ST 09 & ST 13), the difficulty in finding a good and interesting topic was attributed to the fact that the topics they chose were too broad to be manageable. Therefore, the students were required to narrow their topics and limit their focus.

**3.2.1.3. Lack of Relevant Sources:** In addition to the aforementioned reasons, two students (ST 17 & ST 24) said that selecting an interesting topic to work on was difficult due to the lack of relevant sources. They further noted that even those few sources were so expensive (not for free) that they could not afford them.

### **3.2.2. Writing the Abstract**

#### **3.2.2.1. Challenges in Writing the Abstract**

**a. Unfamiliarity with the Content of the Abstract:** Five students (ST 01, ST 05, ST 17, ST 19 & ST 28) indicated that they did not have a clear vision about the main parts that should be included in an abstract. They explicitly stated that the fact that the abstract should be informative (i.e., providing readers with a summary of the dissertation content), precise and concise at the same time made it difficult for them to decide which parts were necessary to include in their abstracts. The following comment made by ST 05 illustrates this claim:

“It was not difficult to make it informative.... the difficulty was to keep it informative and brief at the same time.... At first, it was too long; I was confused what to omit and what to keep!”

**b. Restating and Summarizing the Main Findings:** Restating and summarizing the main research findings was claimed to be a difficult mission for four students (ST 06, ST 13, ST 19 & ST 24). They declared that it was not easy for them to write a condensed account of a whole chapter (i.e., the results chapter) in just a few lines. Talking about this issue, ST 24 said: “*I found it difficult to summarize the major findings...I mean it’s difficult to make a whole section in one or two lines with results I should focus on!*”

### 3.2.2.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Abstract

According to the interviewees, the most likely causes were the following:

**a. Lack of Practice:** According to four students (ST 05, ST 07, ST 17 & ST 24), lack of practice in academic writing classes was the main reason for their difficulty in writing their dissertations abstracts. They said that their teachers focused predominantly on studying theoretical content and ignored its practice. As a result, the students felt lost as they did not know from where to start and how to apply what they learnt in theory.

**b. Different Format of Abstracts:** Two students (ST 19 & ST 28) attributed the difficulties they experienced to the different models of abstracts they read. The students thought that looking at other sample abstracts would help them better understand how to write theirs. Doing this, however, made things more complicated as those samples were presented in a different format and did not follow the frameworks they have seen in class. The following interview excerpts illustrate this point:

- “Should the abstract should include many information in a brief way or by getting into details?...This was difficult! Also, I was confused whether I should mention some parts like hypothesis or not?... I also read articles and the content was not the same, so I got confused.” (ST 19)
- “It was very hard to write.... there were different versions (models) of writing and we didn’t know what to follow” (ST 28)

**c. Lack of Guidance and Feedback from the Supervisor:** In addition to lack of practice, one student (ST 07) said that the difficulty she faced in writing her dissertation abstract was also caused by lack of guidance and feedback received from her supervisor. She noted that he was so busy that she could hardly find an opportunity to discuss her issues with him.

### 3.2.3. Writing the General Introduction

#### 3.2.3.1. Challenges in Writing the General Introduction

Most students reported that the following four parts were the most difficult to write:

**a. Writing the Background of the Study:** When we asked them about the most difficult part to write in the general introduction, 6 students (ST 07, ST 09, ST 13, ST 17, ST 24 & ST 28) mentioned the background of the study. These students said that they did not exactly know what to include in this section. For example, ST 09 claimed that



establishing context for the study and reviewing studies that were relevant to his research topic were difficult and confusing. In this regard, he said:

When I was about to mention the previous studies about our topic, I was sort of confused... what exactly to include from articles to show that a certain study was already conducted on this concern....I faced problems in reformulating the sentence/statement that shows that this study was conducted previously... After I read an article of a previous study about my concern (study), when it comes to reporting that this study was already conducted, I feel confused what to include exactly.

**b. Writing the Statement of the Problem:** Writing the statement of the problem represented another challenge for 8 students (ST 1, ST 04, ST 05, ST 06, ST 07, ST 15, ST 17 & ST 28). The latter admitted that it was difficult to write a clear, accurate and detailed description of the issue under discussion. As ST 04 put it: *“The statement of the problem.... I felt like it is obvious that this is a problem and a big issue and it is so important to be investigated...so how can I convince them more?”*. Three other students added that they were unable to distinguish the statement of the problem from the background of the study (ST 05), the research objective (ST 07) and the research gap (ST 15).

**c. Writing the Research Rationale:** Another reported problem by 6 students (ST 01, ST 03, ST 04, ST 19, ST 24 & ST 28) concerned writing the research rationale or significance of the study section. These students concurred that formulating a convincing rationale that would attract readers’ interest and show them the importance of the research undertaken was demanding. In this context, ST 19 stated that *“it was difficult to write the significance of the study’s section...we had to convince the reader of the importance of our study, so we had to be very careful of what we should say and how to say it.”*

**d. Formulating the Research Questions:** Another problem expressed by two students (ST 5 & ST 15) was their inability to formulate good research questions. They stated that they had obscure views about the characteristics of good research questions. Hence, it was difficult to write clear, relevant and interesting research questions that would attract readers’ interest, properly address the issue under investigation and help them (students) guide their research and establish a clear relationship between the variables.

### **3.2.3.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Introduction**

The results revealed the following factors:

**a. Lack of Training in Academic Writing:** Eight students (ST 04, ST 05, ST 07, ST 09, ST 15, ST 19, ST 24, ST 28) concurred that lack of practice and training in academic writing was one of the reasons that led to the aforementioned difficulties. According to them, the lesson on writing the general introduction was mainly **theory-based** and the concepts presented during the course were too abstract and difficult to understand without practical exercises. This can be illustrated by the following claims:

- “One of the reasons is lack of training. For me, it was 90% theoretical which was not good at all...Reading handouts without doing much practice!” (ST 05)
- “Lack of practice.... Students at this level can write a clear useful introduction is a serious issue...theoretically, the lesson seemed clear, but as we didn’t put it into practice, it became hard to achieve.” (ST 24)

**b. Different Explanations of the Same Concepts:** Another cause for the difficulties in writing the introduction, as expressed by two students (ST 03 & ST 04), was the different explanations of the same concepts by many teachers. For instance, the two students pointed out that they could not fully understand what a research rationale meant and found it difficult to distinguish between the research rationale and the statement of the problem. According to them, the teacher of academic writing told them that the two concepts were not used interchangeably in the literature and should be considered as distinct components which had different functions. Nonetheless, some supervisors had an opposite view as they told them that the rationale and research problem were synonyms and served the same function. As a result, the students got confused as expressed by ST 04: *“I have been misled by teachers. Some say the statement of the problem is the same as the rationale, others say it’s not!”*

**c. Other Reasons:** In addition to the aforementioned reasons, three students stated **lack of feedback from the supervisor** and **lack of reading about methodology** as hindering factors when they come to write. As for the first factor (lack of feedback), ST 07 reported that their supervisor was not available all the time due to his commitments as a teacher; they had a two hours supervision meeting with him one day a week where all the students he supervised were supposed to present their work. Hence, they did not have enough time to discuss everything related to dissertation writing; the supervisor focused mainly on the research design and research instruments. Moreover, according to two students (ST 09 & ST 17), lack of reading about the dissertation writing process and consulting academic writing books in addition to over-reliance on the teacher as the only source of information

affected their writing performance negatively. In this regard, ST 09 pointed out that students were required, in addition to the content presented by the teacher in the classroom, to go through other resources in order to successfully write a good paper. He said:

“I think the primary reason that lies behind the difficulties we are facing is the limited amount of reading research methodology books or simply we face difficulties due to the lack of consulting sources that afford research methodology lessons and steps like Youtube.”

### **3.2.4. Writing the Literature Review Chapter**

#### **3.2.4.1. Challenges in Writing the Literature Review Chapter**

**a. Summarizing and Paraphrasing Ideas:** It was not surprising to find out that summarizing and paraphrasing were among the main issues cited by the interviewees. Seven students (ST 01, ST 03, ST 04, ST 09, ST 13, ST 19 & ST 28) reported that it was difficult to grasp the meaning of the idea(s) discussed by the original author(s). Thus, they failed to write an accurate summary which should have involved a restatement of those ideas using their (i.e., students) own style and ended-up copying and pasting words as they appeared in the original texts in order to make sure that meaning was effectively conveyed. Commenting on this issue, ST 09 said:

“It was difficult at the level of summarizing and paraphrasing previous quotes.... When I tried to paraphrase, I couldn’t have the most appropriate synonyms for the quotes. When summarizing, it was difficult to find a language similar to the original one.”

**b. Identifying the Gaps in the Literature:** Another challenge pinpointed by seven students (ST 01, ST 04, ST 05, ST 09, ST 17, ST 19 & ST 24) concerned identifying the research gap. These students declared that it was difficult for them to identify the gap in the literature related to their field of research. They stated that the fact that they were not aware of effective strategies or methodologies followed to identify a research gap prevented them from figuring out what significant aspects were overpassed or not satisfactorily addressed in previous research. In this regard, ST 24 noted: “*Identifying the gap was the hardest step...It was so scary (laughing)... I was just wondering how can I know if they worked on the topic or not...Am I a scientist? (laughing)... I’m just a student...So, it was hard.*”

**c. Writing In-text Citations and the List of References:** The majority of students (ST 01, ST 03, ST 05, ST 06, ST 09, ST 13, ST 17, ST 24 & ST 28) concurred that citing

sources in text and the list of references was one of the main issues they experienced when writing their review chapters. For instance, a specific reference to citing secondary sources was made by three students (ST 03, ST 06 & ST 13). While two of them (ST 06 & ST 13) stated that they did have a clear idea about the way a secondary source was cited in text, the other student (ST 03) admitted that she did not even know that she had to acknowledge the main sources in which the secondary sources appeared. She said: *“I had a problem with the secondary sources. I didn’t know that we need to write the whole reference of the primary source then between parentheses we add cited in name of the author and year of publication.”*. Further, ST 05 recognized that there were inconsistencies in terms of the referencing styles as he used both APA and MLA simultaneously to cite sources in text.

As far as the list of references is concerned, three students (ST 09, ST 17 & ST 28) reported that the rules of referencing were so confusing that they could not clearly distinguish particular elements included in the reference entry from others such as the volume number, issue number and place of publication.

The remaining students (ST 01 & ST 24), however, frankly stated that they had no idea how to cite sources in-text and in the list of references and were not even able to make the difference between the two styles of referencing (APA & MLA) though they studied them in academic writing classes.

**d. Resource Constraints:** Five students (ST 01, ST 04, ST 06, ST 15 & ST 19) stated that finding the literature that was directly relevant to their research was one of the hardest tasks. They also noted that they did not have access to most primary sources. Hence, they had to primarily rely on secondary sources to write their review chapters.

**e. Selecting Relevant Information:** Three students (ST 13, ST 15 & ST 24) admitted that the large number of sources they had made it very difficult for them to select the information that were highly relevant to their research topics.

**f. Synthesizing:** Four students (ST 04, ST 06, ST 17 & ST 28) pointed out that it was difficult to identify areas of similarities and differences between sources and establish logical relationships between the ideas/information discussed in previous works and their (i.e., students) studies.

**g. Coherence Problems:** Three students (ST 07, ST 13 & ST 24) admitted that they experienced difficulties related to coherence. These difficulties included writing the

introductions of paragraphs, achieving paragraph unity and smooth flow of ideas. The following excerpts better illustrate this point:

- “I have a problem in coherence.... For example, I was struggling in writing the introduction of each paragraph in the chapter, how to start it and what I should include in it! Another difficulty was how to make a link between each paragraph.” (ST 13)
- “How could I make all my literature review as one unit? Like an essay with coherent ideas?!...We were writing each point separately for each variable one section.... No logical link! This was the main issue even our supervisor said that!” (ST 24)

**h. Writing the Chapter's Outline:** Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, outlining the literature review chapter was a difficult task for two students (ST 15 & ST 24). The latter stated that they were unable to decide what aspects, theories and studies were significant and highly relevant to the topics under discussion. As a result, they had to write and rewrite their outlines several times as expressed by ST 24:

- “Writing the outline was extremely difficult...Which point we should focus on...I know two variables, but how? Definitions? Characteristics? Which theories? .... I remember that we changed the outline 9 times...”

#### **3.2.4.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Literature Review**

According to the interviewees, three factors accounted for the difficulties they faced in writing the literature review chapter. These include:

**a. Lack of Training in Writing the Literature Review Chapter:** Like the aforementioned parts (i.e., the abstract and the introduction), the majority of the students (ST 03, ST 04, ST 05, ST 06, ST 07, ST 09, ST 13, ST 15, ST 17 & ST 24) pointed out that lack of training offered in academic writing and research skills classes was the first factor known to be responsible for the challenges they experienced in writing the literature review chapter. The students said that their supervisors and teachers of academic writing and research skills focused on teaching and explaining theoretical concepts related to the literature review (such as, definitions, characteristics, types and purposes), yet they did not show them (i.e., students) how to transfer what they learnt from theory to real world practice. commenting on this point, ST 03 said:

“Practice is not like theory....Although theory can be memorized, when it comes to practice, you will find like it is something new and barely know from where to start.....even when we say that we know about the theory of how to write a dissertation, we would be lying because in practice, we fail to bring that theory and put it into practice.”

Furthermore, ST 09 said that the lectures they had on the literature review chapter were not very informative and did not provide them with a thorough knowledge of the literature review structure and content. He further added that those lessons were so superficial that they did not allow them to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct and write the literature review. In this regard, ST 09 pointed out:

“Imagine!, concerning the literature review, we had only a table how to collect the opposing views of agreement...We have been told that in the literature review, we have to make a balance between opposing theories and theories of agreement....But the literature review was much bigger than that expression....it is about researching, digging deeper in the researchers’ theories...comparing and contrasting....understanding views from different perspectives and drawing our own conclusions of others’ work.”

**b. Lack of Free Available Sources:** As for the difficulties faced in finding relevant sources, three students (ST 04, ST 15 & ST 19) declared that retrieving sources from online databases was not for free and they had to request codes from digital libraries and, most of the time, pay money to gain access to the resources they needed.

**c. Confusing In-text Citations and Referencing Rules:** The students (ST 01, ST 05, ST 09 & ST 24) who encountered difficulties in citing and referencing complained that each referencing style (APA & MLA) had too many detailed rules that were complicated and difficult to remember and apply. According to ST 09, this resulted in increased stress and fear of being accused of plagiarism which in turn made him look at the literature review as a nightmare.

### **3.2.5. Writing the Method Chapter**

#### **3.2.5.1. Challenges in Writing the Method Chapter**

Unlike the literature review chapter, the themes which emerged from the students’ responses showed that the method chapter was not that difficult.

**a. Unfamiliarity with the Chapter's Content:** Four students (ST 01, ST 07, ST 09 & ST 19) reported that they did not have a clear vision about the main steps to be followed in data collection and analysis in particular, and the schematic structure of the methodology chapter in general.

**b. Questionnaire Design:** Three students (ST 05, ST 09 & ST 15) declared that designing questionnaires to collect data for their research was a hard task to do. The main issues they encountered included question wording, order of questions, structure and content of questions that would satisfactorily address the research objectives and answer the research questions.

**c. Other Challenges:** In addition to the aforementioned difficulties, ST 09 stated that he did not have a clear idea about the different paradigms. Thus, he was unable to decide which paradigm (positivist or interpretivist) was appropriate for his research. Another student (ST 13) added that she confused the term '*data collection procedures*' with the term '*methods of analysis*'. For her, the two terms referred to the same thing and could be used interchangeably.

### 3.2.5.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Method Chapter

**a. Lack of Training in Research Methodology:** Whenever they were asked about the reasons behind their difficulties in writing a particular part of the dissertation, lack of practice/training was always the first factor mentioned by the students. The latter claimed that they were not provided with opportunities to put what they learnt in theory into practice. The methodological concepts they encountered in class were too abstract, confusing, and could not be understood without practical training. ST 04 and ST 09 further added that the limited amount of time they had to finish their dissertations did not allow them to expand their knowledge and improve their research skills.

**b. Other Reasons:** Apart from the above-mentioned factor, ST 01 stated that she could *rarely meet her supervisor* as she was busy all the time. Thus, she (the student) had to do her work without her supervisor's guidance. ST 05, on the other hand, attributed the difficulties he faced in designing the questionnaire to the **complex nature of the topic** he worked on and the abstract concepts used in the study. Commenting on this issue, he said: "*we were investigating perceptions which is something abstract and relative. It was not easy to design the questionnaire to investigate such nature of reality*"

### 3.2.6. Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter

#### 3.2.6.1. Challenges in Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter

**a. Data Interpretation and Discussion:** Nine students (ST 03, ST 04, ST 05, ST 06, ST 07, ST 09, ST 15, ST 24 & ST 28) pointed out that experienced difficulties in interpreting the data, explaining what each result meant and drawing conclusions that would help them answer the research questions. In this context, ST 24 said: *“In some answers I pay attention to some reasons that lead to such answer.... we should explain each result...this is what I found most difficult.”* Three students (ST 03, ST 04 & ST 06) further added that the huge amount of data made it difficult for them to select the most significant results to comment on and discuss. In addition to data interpretation, three students (ST 03, ST 05 & ST 24) stated that it was a challenging task to compare and contrast between their (i.e., students) own findings and previous research findings and highlight areas of agreements and disagreements. Another student (ST 07), however, claimed that she did not know that she had to bring back the studies already mentioned in the literature review chapter and establish the link between them and her study. Rather, she said that she relied on new studies (that were not cited in the literature review) to discuss her research findings.

**b. Data Analysis:** In addition to presenting their data, eight students (ST 05, ST 07, ST 13, ST 15, ST 17, ST 19, ST 24 & ST 28) agreed on the difficulty to analyze the data they obtained from the research instruments. Some of these students, who adopted the experimental research design (ST 07, ST 19 & ST 28), reported that the analysis of the quantitative data required the use of a specific software which they did not know how to use. In this sense, ST 19 said: *“It was difficult to find out how to calculate the data... We had to calculate the level of fear and in order to do that we had to know how to use ‘un logiciel’ and we didn’t know how to use it!”* As for the remaining students who used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data, they declared that the analysis of open-ended questions in particular was hard due to their qualitative nature. In more detail, they noted that since these questions were without explicit response choices like closed-ended questions, each participant freely expressed his/her opinion and provided an answer that was different from others’ answers. As a result, it was difficult for the students to read and code the data and identify emerging themes and categories.

**c. Data Presentation:** Presentation of research data was one of the issues experienced by four students (ST 07, ST 09, ST 13 & ST 17). These students declared that



it was difficult for them to decide which method was most appropriate to display quantitative and qualitative data. We quote, by way of illustration, what ST 13 and ST 17 said in regard to this issue:

- “The results’ chapter is the longest part in the dissertation...It was difficult to start it for example, we had a problem in the organization of the results...how to present them?” (ST 13)
- “It was difficult how to present data.... each question... since there was variation in the type of questions... if we include tables and graphs or tables only?” (ST 17)

**d. Writing the Pedagogical Implications Section:** This was another difficulty encountered by four students (ST 04, ST 13, ST 17 & ST 24) who declared that they did not have a clear idea about the content of the pedagogical implications’ section. One of the students (ST 24) also noted that due to her limited knowledge about the topic she worked on, she was unable to write an implications’ section where she had to offer suggestions that would solve the issues identified and improve the field concerned.

### **3.2.6.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter**

Some students (e.g., ST 05 & ST 13) argued that the aforementioned difficulties primarily stemmed from their unfamiliarity with the content of the results and discussions’ chapter as expressed by ST 13: *“We have not understood well how to write this important chapter.... I think the only problem we had was time.... We did not have enough time to learn more about it.”*

Other students (ST 03, ST 04, ST 05, ST 06, ST 09, ST 17, ST 24 & ST 28), however, expressed an opposite viewpoint that, theoretically speaking, they were aware of all the main parts that made up this chapter, but things became more complicated when it came to practice what was taught as ST 17 noted by *“the issue is how not what...we know what to include but how to write it is the problem.”* They further affirmed that the limited time allotted for each methodology class (3 hours per week) led to lack, not to say absence, of practical training in research methodology in general and data analysis and discussion in particular. By way of explanation, ST 09 said:

“It is easy for the teacher to explain the strategies followed to write this section and it is easy for students to understand how to do it but due to lack of practice in class, students fail to write it.... Even the explanation of teachers is superficial.... They

explain the main steps to write it but they never go deeper in their explanation because of time.”

### **3.2.7. Writing the General Conclusion**

#### **3.2.7.1. Challenges in Writing the General Conclusion**

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the general conclusion of the dissertation proved difficult to write for the majority of students (7) who explicitly stated the following issues:

**a. Unfamiliarity with the Content of the General Conclusion:** Five students (ST 03, ST 07, ST 09, ST 13 & ST 17) declared that they were not aware of what to include in the conclusion. They questioned whether their conclusions should just summarize the whole work or they should go beyond that. Also, this limited knowledge about the communicative function served by this section prevented them from seeing its importance in the dissertation. This claim can be better illustrated by ST 09’s view who believed that there was no need for the general conclusion since it was going to repeat what has been already said in the conclusion of each chapter. He said:

“The main problem was with two big questions in our minds: shall we restate all what we have said right from the general introduction to recommendations?.... We have already written a conclusion for each chapter!... A second question was: shall we restate what we have concluded about each chapter?....we were lost!”

**b. Issues in Summarizing:** Three students (ST 03, ST 19 & ST 24) expressed concern about summarizing the whole dissertation. They admitted that the huge amount of information in each part of the dissertation resulted in their failure to select and summarize the main points. Talking about this issue, ST 03 said:

“It (i.e., the general conclusion) demands a special recapitulation of all the chapters, so I had to know what to put exactly to avoid repetition of certain information.... I had to do it wisely and not to exceed 2 pages was a challenge too (laughing).”

#### **3.2.7.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the General Conclusion**

**a. Lack of Practice in Academic Writing:** Again, four students (ST 04, ST 07, ST 09 & ST 17) clearly stated lack of practice in academic writing as the main factor responsible for their difficulties in writing the general conclusion. These students admitted that they, and

their teachers, did not give the general conclusion the importance it deserved for they always looked at it as a mere summary of the whole dissertation and ignored the other main elements that constituted it. Therefore, very few opportunities were offered to practice writing this section.

**b. Other Reasons:** In addition to lack of practice, ST 07 and ST 09 claimed that their supervisors did not provide them with the necessary guidance that would help them meet the requirements of writing a good conclusion. Two other students (ST 04 & ST 13), on the other hand, mentioned issues related to writing skills and techniques such as paraphrasing, word choice, coherence and cohesion.

### ***3.2.8. Points Discussed in Supervision Meetings***

The last section in the questionnaire included a set of questions about the relationship between the students and their supervisors. In this section, the students were asked three questions about supervision meetings (Qs 40, 41 & 42). The results presented in Tables 3.40, 3.41 and 3.42 triggered our curiosity to further investigate this point (i.e., supervision meetings) in the interview through clarification questions and see the extent to which the main requirements for writing a dissertation that adheres to academic standards were taken into account.

**3.2.8.1. Discussion of the Challenges Encountered in Writing the Dissertation:** The majority of students (ST 01, ST 04, ST 05, ST 06, ST 07, ST 15, ST 17 & ST 24) said that the primary focus of each supervision meeting was on the major difficulties they faced in writing their dissertations. During the meetings, the students used to report their problems to their supervisors who in turn suggested some ways that could help them (i.e., students) overcome those challenges. Commenting on this point, ST 04, ST 05 and ST 24 noted:

- “He did not provide us with solutions. Instead, he asked us to suggest solutions and then helped us choose between those solution....He never gave us the solution right away.” (ST 04)
- “He used to give us ideas and tasks to read and understand ourselves...He does not like giving ready solutions” (ST 05)
- “She used to help us solve our problems...of course not directly. She proposed many solutions and let us choose the appropriate one” (ST 24)

**3.2.8.2. Content of the Method Chapter:** In addition to the above-mentioned point, five students (ST 01, ST 05, ST 06, ST 07 & ST 09) pointed out that their supervisors attached considerable importance to the main parts that made up the methodology chapter. These included research design and paradigms, research questions and objectives, population and sampling and data collection instruments.

**3.2.8.3. Content of Each Chapter in the Dissertation:** According to four students (ST 01, ST 06, ST 13, ST 15 & ST 28), the content of each section and chapter in the dissertation was one of the focal points their supervisors concentrated on during the supervision meetings.

**3.2.8.4. How to Present and Discuss Data:** In addition to dissertation structure and writing challenges, three students (ST 03, ST 09 & ST 17) noted that their supervisors showed them the different methods employed to display their research findings (such as tables, graphs and texts) and explained how data should be interpreted and discussed.

**3.2.8.5. Content of the Literature Review Chapter:** Two students (ST 09 & ST 19) stated that their supervisors, during the meetings, paid a great deal of attention to the highly relevant concepts, theories and studies that should be discussed in the literature review chapter.

### ***3.2.9. Reasons for Challenges in Communicating with the Supervisor***

In the students' questionnaire, we asked the students whether they faced difficulties in their communication and interaction with their supervisors. The answers provided by the overwhelming majority of students (75%) ranged from 'all the times' to 'most often' and occasionally' (see Table 3.38). These results triggered our curiosity to know further about the types of difficulties they encountered and the major reasons behind them.

Overall, eight students (ST 01, ST 05, ST 07, ST 09, ST 15, ST 19, ST 24 & ST 28) out of thirteen complained about their supervisors' busy schedules which in turn resulted in little commitment to supervision and lack of meetings. In other words, the students expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of the supervision time they received from their supervisors. Most of them pointed out that their teachers devoted only fifteen minutes or half an hour which were not at all sufficient to discuss their work progress and challenges.

Most supervisors were available only for two days (their workdays) in the department which means they were mostly committed to teaching and doing other administrative work. This is why some students said that it was fortunate that they could take a few minutes of

their supervisors' time to arrange a face-to-face meeting. Commenting on this issue, ST 01 and ST 09 said:

- “We didn't meet at the beginning of the research process.... we started meeting until the last month.... She teaches only 2 days a week, so she finishes at 13:00... This is why if we meet, not too much.... Only 15 minutes in her break” (ST 01).
- “We had only one single meeting per week from 12:30 to 13:00 as our teacher had to leave at 13:00” (ST 09)

Other students (ST 05, ST 15, ST 19 & ST 28), however, reported that even those few minutes to see their supervisors were not possible as they (i.e., students) were asked to send their work and questions via email. All students showed a negative attitude towards using emails as a means to keep in touch with their supervisors who, most of the time, took so long to respond to their students' questions and give feedback on their work. This, undoubtedly, had negative impacts on the students who felt discouraged and encountered difficulties in completing their tasks without guidance. By way of illustration, we quote what some students said in relation to this matter:

- “Sometimes she disappears ...she doesn't respond to emails.” (ST 19)
- “We haven't received feedback and she didn't give us her phone number....Only email.” (ST 28)
- “She was busy...she was available only two days in the department. We had to talk to her only via email....and sometimes we had a heavy network.” (ST 15)
- “The supervisor was not available...He is hectic.... He hardly ever answered my emails.... Communication was not that easy” (ST 05)

## **Conclusion and Summary of the Chapter**

As far as the difficulties experienced in writing the dissertation parts, the students' questionnaire and the interview yielded interesting findings summarized in the following points:

- **The Abstract:** The majority of students agreed on the difficulty of writing the abstract of their dissertations. Examples of the difficulties as reported by the students during the interview included unfamiliarity with the content of this important section in addition to serious issues in summarizing skills. The difficulties, according to the students, were due to lack of practice and guidance from their supervisors.

- **The General Introduction:** Writing this section also presented a challenging task for most students. The latter mentioned difficulties related to particular sub-sections in the introduction. These included writing the background of the study, writing the problem statement, writing the research rationale section and formulating good research questions. According to the students, these problems resulted primarily from lack of practice in academic writing classes, the teaching methodology adopted and the different interpretations of the particular concepts.
- **The Literature Review Chapter:** Based on the number of the difficulties identified and their answers to the questions about the content and functions, the literature review chapter was believed to be the most difficult part to write by the majority of the students. One of the challenges cited by the students was their inability to critically evaluate previous research and identify the gap in the literature. They also admitted that they had serious issues in summarizing others' ideas and restating them in their own words. Other challenges reported by the students involved synthesizing, citing and referencing, resource constraints and coherence problems. In the students' opinion, most of the difficulties arose from lack of practical activities that would allow them (i.e., students) to transfer what they learnt from theory to real world practice.
- **The Method Chapter:** Unlike the other sections and chapters, only a few difficulties in writing the methodology chapter were pointed out by the students who referred to unfamiliarity with the chapter's content as the main issue, followed by questionnaire design as the secondary issue. These two issues, according to the students, stemmed from lack of practice in research methodology and lack of supervision meetings.
- **The Results and Discussion Chapter:** This was considered as the second most difficult chapter to write after the literature review. The vast majority of students clearly stated that they did not know how to analyze, present, interpret and discuss the data obtained through the various research instruments. These difficulties, as the students noted, were attributed to unfamiliarity with the chapter's content and lack of practice and training in data analysis and interpretation.
- **The General Conclusion:** Contrary to what they thought, writing the general conclusion proved a challenging task for more than half of the participants. The latter straightforwardly stated that they did not know what to exactly include in this section as they thought that the function of the conclusion was specifically limited to wrapping up the main research findings. In addition, some students reported that they did not

even know how to write an accurate summary of the main findings as their summarizing skills were not that good. As for the factors that were claimed to be responsible for these challenges, the students mentioned again lack of practice in academic writing as the main factor along with lack of supervisor's guidance and poor writing skills.

- Though they stated that they studied how to write a dissertation in academic writing and research skills classes, unfamiliarity with the content of a particular part of the dissertation was always considered by the wide majority of the students as the main difficulty they encountered.
- Lack of practice/training was always the first answer provided by the students when asked about the reasons behind the challenges they faced in writing a particular part of their dissertations.
- The content of particular parts in the dissertation was confused with other parts' content (e.g., the results section with the discussion section, the discussion section with the general conclusion, the method chapter with the results section...etc.)
- Most students had declarative knowledge but lacked procedural knowledge. That is, they generally knew what to include in particular sections and chapters of the dissertation, yet they had no idea how to put what they learnt in theory into practice.
- Most students were, to some extent, lazy, passive and dependent on their supervisors and teachers not on their abilities to overcome the issues they encountered. Rather, supervisors and teachers of academic writing and research skills were always considered by the students as the main factor behind their failure in meeting the requirements for writing a good dissertation. In other words, the students got used to the spoon-feeding method which made them passive recipients of knowledge who always relied on others to help them do their tasks.
- Most students are still far from understanding that the dissertation is entirely their OWN work not supervisor's whose role is to guide the supervisee(s) and provide assistance when necessary.

In the next chapter, the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and interview will be presented.

**CHAPTER FOUR:  
THE TEACHERS'  
FINDINGS  
(DISSERTATION  
WRITING  
CHALLENGES  
FROM THE  
TEACHERS'  
POINTS OF VIEW**



## Introduction

This chapter aims at casting light on the challenges faced by Master's students in writing their dissertations from the teachers' point of view. It is divided into two parts: 1) presentation of the questionnaire results, and 2) presentation of the interview results.

### 4.1. The Teachers' Questionnaire Results

As already noted in chapter two (see section 2.3.), the teachers' questionnaire was administered during the academic year 2018 – 2019. At that time, there were only 10 teachers who were qualified to supervise and assess Master's dissertations in the department of English. The questionnaires were, thus, handed to some teachers and sent via email to others with a request to carefully complete and return them as soon as possible. Of the 10 questionnaires distributed, 07 questionnaires were returned either fully or partially completed.

Overall, the teachers' questionnaire consists of 30 items grouped under the following five sub-sections: general information about teachers' qualification and experience, teachers' attitudes towards the content of the academic writing and research skills courses, content of the dissertation, difficulties/challenges in writing the dissertation sections and chapters, and supervisor – student relationship.

#### 4.1.1. General Information about Teachers' Qualification and Experience (Questions 1 – 8)

**Q 1: Gender, Q 2: Academic degree, Q 3: Years of experience in supervising Master's dissertations?**

**Table 4.1. Teachers' Gender/ Academic Degree/ Experience (years of supervision)**

| Teachers  | Gender                |                       | Academic degree       |                       | Experience (Years of supervision)                                                                             |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           | Female                | Male                  | Magister              | Ph.D.                 |                                                                                                               |
| <b>T1</b> |                       | X                     | X                     |                       | 5 years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T2</b> | X                     |                       |                       | X                     | 8 years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T3</b> | X                     |                       | X                     |                       | 4 years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T4</b> | X                     |                       | X                     |                       | 5 Years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T5</b> | X                     |                       | X                     |                       | 4 years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T6</b> | X                     |                       | X                     |                       | 5 years                                                                                                       |
| <b>T7</b> |                       | X                     |                       | X                     | 11 years                                                                                                      |
| Total: 07 | Total: 05<br>(71.43%) | Total: 02<br>(28.57%) | Total: 05<br>(71.43%) | Total: 02<br>(28.57%) | Total: 4 years (2 Ts: 28.57%),<br>5 years (3 Ts: 42.86%),<br>8 years (1 T: 14.28%),<br>11 years (1 T: 14.28%) |

Table 4.1. presents the results of three questions (Q1, Q2 & Q3). These questions aimed at getting information about the teachers' gender, academic qualification (degree) and the number of years spent in supervising Master's dissertations. As for gender (Q1), the table shows that female teachers (71.43%) make up the majority of participants in the study.

Concerning their academic qualification (Q2), five teachers (71.43%) stated that they held a magister degree and were preparing for a Ph.D. in didactics, while the remaining teachers (28.57%) were already doctorate holders specialized in applied linguistics and didactics.

The table also indicates that teachers' experience in supervising Master's dissertations (Q3) varies from four to eleven years. This implies that all of them have a good experience in supervising graduate-level students and, thus, can provide us with the required data to answer the research questions and attain the objectives of the study (i.e., exploring the students' challenges in dissertation writing).

#### **Q 4: How many Master's dissertations did you supervise/ assess during the academic year 2018 - 2019?**

**Table 4.2. Number of the Dissertations Supervised/Assessed**

| Answers         | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 9 dissertations | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 8 dissertations | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 5 dissertations | 02                    | 28.57          |
| 4 dissertations | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 3 dissertations | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 2 dissertations | 01                    | 14.28          |

As shown in table 4.2., the highest percentage (28.57%) goes to those teachers who said they supervised/assessed 5 dissertations. As for the other five teachers, the number of dissertations supervised and assessed ranges between 2 and 9.

We assume that this question is deemed important since the number of dissertations supervised and assessed by each of our participants may affect in a way or another the quality of supervision and feedback. Hence, the responses to this question will later help us cross-check the students' answers and establish the relationship between the teachers' and students' results (triangulation).

**Q 5: Did you have any training in dissertation/thesis supervision?**

**Table 4.3. Training in Dissertation/Thesis Supervision**

| Options | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Yes  | 00                    | 00             |
| b. No   | 07                    | 100            |

Despite its importance in helping teachers overcome the challenges they face in supervising Master's students; table 4.3. demonstrates that none of the teachers benefited from any training in dissertation/thesis supervision. Rather, they all depend on their readings and own experiences as teachers and former students in the field of didactics.

**Q 7: Did you have any training in research skills?**

**Table 4.4. Training in Research Skills**

| Options                                         |                                                                                                                                                                     | Number of occurrences        | Percentage (%)      |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Yes                                          |                                                                                                                                                                     | 04                           | 57.14               |
| b. No                                           |                                                                                                                                                                     | 03                           | 42.86               |
| <b>Q 8: If yes, please fill in the table</b>    |                                                                                                                                                                     |                              |                     |
|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage %</b> |
| <b>Where?</b>                                   | At university during post-graduate studies (Magister)                                                                                                               | 04                           | 57.14               |
| <b>For how long?</b>                            | One semester                                                                                                                                                        | 01                           | 14.28               |
|                                                 | Two semesters                                                                                                                                                       | 03                           | 42.86               |
| <b>Content (what aspects have been covered)</b> | Writing the parts of the thesis                                                                                                                                     | 02                           | 28.58               |
|                                                 | Most of the aspects of MLA and thesis structure.                                                                                                                    | 01                           | 14.28               |
|                                                 | Aspects of research methodology (writing the literature review, research paradigms, triangulation of research instruments, validity and reliability of the results) | 01                           | 14.28               |

When asked if they had any training in research methodology (Q7), three teachers (42.86%) said they did not receive such training neither before nor after their graduation. The other four teachers (57.14%) stated that they had research methodology workshops and seminars at university during their post-graduate studies (Magister). When these teachers were asked about the main aspects covered during their training (Q 8), two of them (28.58%) said that the focus was mainly on writing the parts of the dissertation/thesis. The latter was also mentioned by another teacher (14.28%) in addition to the MLA style guide for citing

and referencing. As for the fourth teacher (14.28%), she said that the content of the methodology seminars revolved around basic aspects of research such as the research paradigms, data collection instruments, review of the literature and validity and reliability of the results.

#### ***4.1.2. Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Content of the Academic Writing and Research Skills Courses (Questions 9 – 14)***

**Q 9: Are you familiar with the content (the main lessons) of the research skills course at your department? If yes, please mention the main lessons**

**Table 4.5. Lessons Covered in the Research Skills Course**

| <b>Themes</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>a)</b> Defining the research problem, <b>b)</b> Writing the literature review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> Choosing a research topic, <b>b)</b> Formulating research questions and hypotheses, <b>c)</b> Writing the dissertation                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> Choosing a research topic, <b>b)</b> Defining a research problem, <b>c)</b> Writing the background of the study, <b>d)</b> Setting the research objectives, <b>e)</b> Writing the dissertation.                                                                                                                                                  | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> Choosing a research topic, <b>b)</b> Formulating research objectives, <b>c)</b> Doing a review of the literature, <b>d)</b> Introduction to research design (appropriate tools)                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> The strategies of writing the literature review, <b>b)</b> Writing the list of references, <b>c)</b> Writing a dissertation                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>a)</b> Research tools, <b>b)</b> Formulating research objectives, <b>c)</b> Formulating research questions and hypotheses, <b>d)</b> Planning for research, <b>d)</b> Collecting and evaluating relevant sources and writing a critical literature review, <b>e)</b> The different research designs and methodologies, <b>f)</b> Citing and referencing | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| No idea                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |

This question, indirectly, aimed at checking supervisors' knowledge of the main lectures delivered to their students in the course of research skills. As shown in table 4.5., it can be said that the lessons stated by the overwhelming majority of teachers (n=6) are quite interesting and could cover, at least, some of the most important aspects of research methodology and dissertation writing. The following are the main lessons mentioned by the six teachers:

**a)** Choosing a research topic, **b)** Defining the research problem, **c)** Formulating the research objectives, questions and hypotheses, **d)** Doing and writing the literature review, **e)** Planning

for research (design and data collection instruments), **f**) Citing and referencing, **g**) Writing the dissertation.

**Q 10: Are you familiar with the content of (the main lessons) the academic writing course at your department? If yes, please mention the main lessons**

**Table 4.6. Lessons Covered in the Academic Writing Course**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Writing parts/chapters of the dissertation                                                                                                                                                                              | 02                    | 28.58          |
| <b>a)</b> Aspects of MLA ( <i>in-text citations and referencing</i> ), <b>b)</b> Types of literature review, <b>c)</b> Academic style conventions, <b>d)</b> Paraphrasing, <b>e)</b> Analyzing, <b>f)</b> Synthesizing. | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>a)</b> Writing parts/chapters of the dissertation, <b>b)</b> Paraphrasing, <b>c)</b> Summarizing.                                                                                                                    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| APA and MLA styles' conventions.                                                                                                                                                                                        | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>a)</b> Writing introductions and conclusions, <b>b)</b> Drawing an outline for the dissertation.                                                                                                                     | 01                    | 14.28          |

As indicated in table 4.6., out of seven teachers, only one teacher (14.28%) did not respond to the question which asked the participants about the content of the academic writing course. On the other hand, almost all the answers given by the six teachers (85,71%) revolved around dissertation writing. More specifically, the main lessons stated by the teachers are: **a)** Writing parts/chapters of the dissertation (introduction, conclusion, review of the literature), **b)** Summarizing, paraphrasing and synthesizing research, **c)** APA and MLA styles format and conventions (citing and referencing), **d)** Academic writing style requirements.

**Q 11: What do you think about the content of the research skills course?**

**Table 4.7. Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Research Skills Course Content**

| Options                                                              | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a.</b> Good in terms of relevance to the students' needs          | 05                    | 71.43          |
| <b>b.</b> Somewhat good in terms of relevance to the students' needs | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>c.</b> Not good in terms of relevance to the students' needs      | 01                    | 14.28          |

Question 11 intended to know teachers' opinions about the content of the research skills course and whether it is good or not in terms of relevance and usefulness. As shown in table

4.7., while one teacher (14.28%) said it was ‘*Not good*’, five teachers (71.43%) praised the course content and concurred that it was ‘*Good*’ and could meet the students’ needs and expectations. The remaining teacher (14.28%) stated that though the course content had some limitations, it was good to some extent (*Somewhat good*) and covered some important aspects in research methodology.

**Q 12: Whatever your answer is, please say why?**

**Table 4.8. Reasons for Teachers’ Attitudes Towards the Research Skills Course Content**

| Themes                                                                     |                                                                                                                                               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Good in terms of relevance to the students’ needs because:</b>          | It covers the main skills needed to do academic research                                                                                      | <b>04</b>             | <b>57.14</b>   |
|                                                                            | Content developed by expert teachers.                                                                                                         | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>Somewhat good in terms of relevance to the students’ needs because:</b> | Interesting lessons in methodology, BUT the same content is taught in research skills and academic writing (no coordination between teachers) | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>Not good in terms of relevance to the students’ needs because:</b>      | Same content is repeated every year and taught in an abstract way                                                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |

When asked to explain why they were/were not satisfied with the research skills course content, the five teachers (71.42%) who praised the content said that it was designed by highly qualified teachers and developed in a way that allowed the students to acquire the necessary skills needed for conducting research. On the contrary, one teacher (14.28%), who showed dissatisfaction with the course content (*Not good*), claimed that almost the same lessons were repeated every year without any updates or improvements and taught in an abstract way (i.e., focusing on theory and ignoring practice). The remaining teacher (14.28%), *who said that the content was somewhat good*, declared that the course content covered most of the basic aspects of research methodology, yet the fact that the same lessons were taught in research skills and academic writing classes made the students feel bored and miss the chance to learn other important aspects that would help them improve their writing and research skills.

**Q 13: What do you think about the content of the academic writing course?**

**Table 4.9. Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Academic Writing Course Content**

| Options                                                       | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Good in terms of relevance to the students' needs          | 03                    | 42.86          |
| b. Somewhat good in terms of relevance to the students' needs | 02                    | 28.57          |
| c. Not good in terms of relevance to the students' needs      | 00                    | 00             |
| d. No answer                                                  | 02                    | 28.57          |

As demonstrated in table 4.9, three teachers (42.86%) showed positive attitudes towards the content taught in academic writing classes and declared that it did satisfy the students' needs (*Good*) and provided them with the necessary guidelines to write a successful dissertation. As for the other four teachers, two of them (28.57%) said it was '*Somewhat good*', while two (28.57%) gave no answer.

**Q 14: Whatever your answer is, please say why?**

**Table 4.10. Reasons for Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Academic Writing Course Content**

| Themes                                                                     |                                                                                                                                     | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Good in terms of relevance to the students' needs because:</b>          | It responds to students' needs and prepares them to write a good dissertation                                                       | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>Somewhat good in terms of relevance to the students' needs because:</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same content is repeated every year</li> <li>Focus on theory and lack of practice</li> </ul> | 01                    | 14.28          |
|                                                                            | Lack of practice                                                                                                                    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>No answer</b>                                                           |                                                                                                                                     | 03                    | 42.86          |

This follow-up question (Q14) was intended to find out the reasons for teachers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the content taught in academic writing classes. As indicated in Table 4.10., the teachers who found the content '*Good*' (28.57%) pointed out that it responded to the students' needs and provided them with the required knowledge to write the dissertation. On the other hand, those teachers, who said that the content was '*Somewhat good*' (28.57%), believed that it (i.e., content) met the students' expectations to some extent, yet it focused much more on the declarative knowledge (what/theory) not the

procedural knowledge (how/practice). One teacher added that the same content was repeated every year without updates. The rest of the participants (42.86%) gave no answer.

### 4.1.3. Content of the Dissertation (Questions 15 – 21)

**Q 15: What are the main sections and chapters that a Master's dissertation should include?**

**Table 4.11. Main Sections and Chapters of the Dissertation**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Abstract, <b>b)</b> General introduction, <b>c)</b> Literature review, <b>d)</b> Research methods, <b>e)</b> Data analysis and discussions, <b>f)</b> General conclusion, <b>g)</b> References, <b>h)</b> Appendices | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>a)</b> Abstract, <b>b)</b> General introduction, <b>c)</b> Literature review, <b>d)</b> Research design, <b>e)</b> Data presentation and discussions, <b>f)</b> General conclusion                                          | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>a)</b> General introduction, <b>b)</b> Literature review, <b>c)</b> Research methodology, <b>d)</b> Data interpretation and discussions, <b>e)</b> General conclusion                                                       | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>a)</b> Introduction, <b>b)</b> Literature review, <b>c)</b> Data analysis, results and discussions, <b>d)</b> Conclusion                                                                                                    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| No answer                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 02                    | 28.57          |

As previously mentioned in the theoretical chapter, the Master's dissertation is composed of **five sections** (the abstract, the general introduction, the general conclusion, the list of references/bibliography, the appendices) and **three main chapters** (the review of the literature, the research design, the results and discussions). The results displayed in Table 4.11 demonstrated that only two teachers (28.57%) referred to all these parts when asked about the dissertation content, while the other five teachers mentioned some parts and ignored others. For example, one teacher (14.28%) stated all the parts except '*the list of references*' and '*the appendices*'. These two sections, along with '*the abstract*', were also overlooked in the answer given by the second teacher (14.28%). Almost the same answer was given by the third teacher (14.28%) who, in addition to three aforementioned sections (i.e., *the abstract*, *the list of references* and *the appendices*), ignored a fundamental chapter in the dissertation (*the research design*). The two remaining teachers (28.57%), however, gave no answer.

**Table 9** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts of the dissertation and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.



### Q 16: What are the main parts that make up the Abstract?

**Table 4.12. Content of the Abstract**

| Themes                                                                                                                                      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Background (introduction), <b>b)</b> Aim, <b>c)</b> Research tools (methods), <b>d)</b> Results, <b>e)</b> Conclusion(s)          | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Background (introduction), <b>b)</b> Purpose, <b>c)</b> Method, <b>d)</b> Findings, <b>e)</b> Conclusion(s)                       | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Background (introduction), <b>b)</b> Aim, <b>c)</b> Design and methodology (methods), <b>d)</b> Findings, <b>e)</b> Conclusion(s) | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Background (introduction), <b>b)</b> Objectives, <b>c)</b> Methods, <b>d)</b> Findings                                            | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Aim, <b>b)</b> The research instruments and participants (methods), <b>c)</b> Main results                                        | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Background (introduction), <b>b)</b> Methods, <b>c)</b> Results                                                                   | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |

According to Bhatia (1993) (see section 1.2.4 in the review chapter), the abstract in academic papers, including theses and dissertations, is made up of four main parts: purpose, methods, results and conclusion(s). In addition to these, writers can also provide a short background on the topic to establish context for the research, briefly state the problem and show its significance at the beginning of the abstract (Hyland, 2004). As demonstrated in Table 4.12, three teachers stated all the necessary parts of the abstract, while the others ignored some parts namely the ‘*conclusion(s)*’, which was absent in four answers, and the ‘*purpose/aim/research objectives*’ which did not appear in two answers.

**Table 10** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts of the abstract and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

### Q 17: What are the main parts that make up the General Introduction?

**Table 4.13. Content of the General Introduction**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                    | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Background of/to the study, <b>b)</b> Research problem, <b>c)</b> Research rationale, <b>d)</b> Research objectives, <b>e)</b> Structure of the dissertation    | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Background of/to the study, <b>b)</b> Research rationale, <b>c)</b> Purpose of the study, <b>d)</b> Research Questions, <b>e)</b> Structure of the dissertation | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |

|                                                                                                                                           |    |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| a) Background of/to the study, b) Research problem, c) Research objectives, d) definitions of key terms, e) Structure of the dissertation | 01 | 14.28 |
| a) Background of/to the study, b) Research problem, c) Research objectives, d) Research questions, e) Definitions of key terms            | 01 | 14.28 |
| a) Background of/to the study, b) Problem statement, c) Structure of the dissertation)                                                    | 01 | 14.28 |

The aim of question 17 was to know if the teachers were aware of all the main parts to be included in the introduction (***Background, problem statement, research rationale/significance of the study, purpose/aim of the study/research objectives, research questions, definitions of key terms*** and ***dissertation structure***). As indicated in Table 4.13, only the ‘background of/to the study’ appeared as the first main part in all the answers given by the participants (100%), followed by ‘the problem statement’, ‘the purpose of the study/research objectives’ and ‘the dissertation structure’ which were present in six answers (85.71%). As for the remaining parts, ‘the research questions’ and ‘definitions of key terms’ were mentioned by only two teachers (28.57%), while ‘the research rationale/significance of the study’ was stated by four teachers (57.14%).

**Table 11** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the general introduction and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### **Q 18: What are the main parts that make up the Literature Review Chapter?**

**Table 4.14. Content of the Literature Review Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                                      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a) Review of related theories, b) A review of relevant studies, c) Critical and analytical evaluation of the literature, d) Research gap(s) | 02                    | 28.57          |
| a) Definitions of key constructs, b) A review of theories, c) A review of studies related to the research topic.                            | 02                    | 28.57          |
| a) A review of previous related studies, b) Research gap(s)                                                                                 | 01                    | 14.28          |
| a) A synthesis of knowledge claims, b) A critical evaluation of previous studies.                                                           | 01                    | 14.28          |
| An account of related studies                                                                                                               | 01                    | 14.28          |

As previously mentioned in the review chapter (see section 1.4.2), perspectives with regard to the structure and content of the literature review chapter may slightly vary from one researcher to another. However, there is a common agreement among almost all genre

analysts on the essential parts that should be present in this chapter. These parts include: **a) definitions of constructs, b) review of related theories, c) review of relevant studies, d) synthesis of knowledge claims, e) theoretical framework(s), f) critical evaluation of previous studies and theories, and g) identification of research gaps.**

As shown in Table 4.14, none of the teachers referred to all of the aforementioned parts in her/his answer. Rather, two of them (28.57%) stated four elements namely: *a) review of relevant theories, b) review of related studies, c) critical and analytical evaluation of the literature, and d) research gap identification.* On the other hand, two teachers (28.57%) said that the literature review was composed of three major parts which are: *a) definitions of key relevant constructs, b) review of related theories, and c) review of relevant studies.*

As for the other teachers, two of them said that the literature review should include only two parts specifically: *a) review of relevant studies and b) research gap(s) as stated by one teacher (14.28%) and a) a synthesis of knowledge claims and b) a critical evaluation of previous studies* as noted by the other teacher (14.28%). The remaining teacher (14.28%), however, pointed out that the literature review involved just one part which is ‘*an account of previous related studies*’.

**Table 12** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts that make up the literature review chapter and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

### **Q 19: What are the main parts that make up the Method Chapter?**

**Table 4.15. Content of the Method Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Research design/paradigm, <b>b)</b> Population and sample, <b>c)</b> Research instruments, <b>d)</b> Data collection procedures, <b>e)</b> Methods of data analysis         | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Research objectives, <b>b)</b> Research questions, <b>c)</b> Research design, <b>d)</b> Participants, <b>e)</b> Data collection tools, <b>f)</b> Data collection procedures | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Research objectives, <b>b)</b> Research design, <b>c)</b> Data collection tools, <b>d)</b> Participants, <b>e)</b> Methods of data analysis                                 | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Tools of investigation, <b>b)</b> Population                                                                                                                                | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Research methods (instruments), <b>b)</b> Data collection procedures                                                                                                        | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| No answer                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |

It is worth reminding that the method chapter is composed of the following main parts (see section 1.5.2): *the research design/paradigm, population and sample, research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis methods* and *procedures*. In addition to these, researchers can also restate their research objectives and questions, though they are parts of the general introduction, at the beginning of the chapter.

As shown in Table 4.15, while ‘*data analysis procedures* section’ was totally ignored by all the teachers, ‘*research instruments/data collection tools*’ was the only part/section that appeared in all the answers (100%). The other parts/sections, however, were mentioned in some answers and overlooked in others. In further detail, the results demonstrated that there was remarkably little agreement among teachers regarding the chapter content. On the whole, only three teachers could successfully state almost all the parts that constituted the method chapter namely: ‘*the research design*’, ‘*population/sample*’ and ‘*research instruments*’ which appeared in the answers of the three teachers in addition to ‘*data collection procedures*’ and ‘*methods of data analysis*’ which were present in two answers.

On the other hand, three teachers mentioned just two parts and disregarded the others. In more detail, the three teachers agreed on ‘*research instruments*’ as the first main section in the method chapter, while the second section was ‘*the population/sample*’ according to two teachers (28.57%), and ‘*data collection procedures*’ for the teacher (14.28%).

The remaining teacher (14.28%), however, gave no answer. **Table 13** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the method chapter and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

## **Q 20: What are the main parts that make up the Results and Discussion Chapter?**

**Table 4.16. Content of the Results and Discussion Chapter**

| Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Data presentation ( <i>section 1*</i> ), <b>b)</b> Data interpretation ( <i>section 2*</i> ), <b>c)</b> Data evaluation ( <i>section 2</i> )                                                   | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Data presentation ( <i>section 1</i> ), <b>b)</b> Interpreting/ commenting on the findings ( <i>section 2</i> ), <b>c)</b> Data discussion in relation to the literature ( <i>section 2</i> ). | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Data presentation ( <i>section 1</i> ), <b>b)</b> Data discussion in relation to the literature ( <i>section 2</i> )                                                                           | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |           |              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>a)</b> Data discussion in relation to the literature ( <i>section 2</i> ), <b>b)</b> Implications ( <i>section 3*</i> ), <b>c)</b> Recommendations ( <i>section 3</i> ), <b>d)</b> Limitations ( <i>section 3</i> ) | <b>01</b> | <b>14.28</b> |
| <b>a)</b> Data interpretation ( <i>section 2</i> ), <b>b)</b> Data discussion in relation to the literature ( <i>section 2</i> ), <b>c)</b> Significance of the study ( <i>section 3</i> )                             | <b>01</b> | <b>14.28</b> |
| <b>a)</b> Data presentation ( <i>section 1</i> ), <b>b)</b> Data interpretation ( <i>section 2</i> ), <b>c)</b> Implications ( <i>section 3</i> )                                                                      | <b>01</b> | <b>14.28</b> |
| <b>a)</b> Data analysis ( <i>section 1</i> ), <b>b)</b> Data interpretation ( <i>section 2</i> ), Implications ( <i>section 3</i> ), <b>d)</b> Limitations ( <i>section 3</i> )                                        | <b>01</b> | <b>14.28</b> |

**Section 1\*** = Results section, **Section 2\*** = Discussions section, **Section 3\*** = Pedagogical implications section.

As previously mentioned in the literature review, the results and discussion chapter is divided into three principal sections. The first section is devoted to analyzing and reporting the research findings (i.e., **data analysis and presentation**), while the second section is dedicated to **data interpretation, data discussion** and **data evaluation**. In the third section, the focus lies on the practical benefits of the study (i.e., **pedagogical implications**), the strengths (i.e., **significance**) and weaknesses (i.e., **limitations**) of the study, and suggestions for further research (i.e., **recommendations**). However, as Table 4.16 indicates, none of the participants could fully state the aforementioned sections with their sub-sections.

Talking of the main sections, unlike the other two sections (i.e., *data presentation and pedagogical implications*) which were present in some answers, while absent in others, *the discussion section* was referred to by all the participants as a main component of the results and discussion chapter.

Regarding the sub-sections that constitute each of the three sections, the results indicated that none of the participants stated them all in their answer. In further detail, those teachers (42.85%) whose answers included **data presentation** and **data discussion** as the only sections that composed the chapter ignored some of their (i.e., the main sections) sub-sections namely: '*data analysis*', '*data interpretation*', '*data discussion*' and '*data evaluation*'.

As for the teachers who mentioned **data discussion** and **pedagogical implications** as the main parts to be included in the chapter, one of them (14.28%) overlooked the following sub-sections: '*data interpretation*', '*data evaluation*' and '*significance of the study*'. The other teacher (14.28%), on the other hand, ignored '*data evaluation*' as part of the

discussion section in addition to most of the pedagogical implications' sub-sections namely: '*implications*', '*limitations*' and '*recommendations*'

In what concerns the teachers who referred to the three main sections in their answers, one of them (14.28%) mentioned just one sub-section from each main section as follows: '*data presentation*' (**section 1**), '*data interpretation*' (**section 2**), and '*implications*' (**section 3**). The other teacher (14.28%) nearly did the same with the first two sections as she just mentioned '*data analysis*' as part of **the results section**, and '*data interpretation*' as part of **the discussions section**, while she cited two sub-sections '*implications*' and '*limitations*' as parts of **the pedagogical implications section**.

**Table 14** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts that make up the results and discussion chapter and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### **Q 21: What are the main parts that make up the General Conclusion?**

**Table 4.17. Content of the General Conclusion**

| Themes                                                                                                                                         | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research problem/ objectives, <b>b)</b> Summary of the dissertation (methodology + research findings)             | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Summary of the work, <b>b)</b> Significance of the study                                                                             | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Summary of the dissertation, <b>b)</b> Recommendations for further research                                                          | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Restatement of the research objectives, <b>b)</b> Summary of the dissertation, <b>c)</b> Significance and implications of the study. | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| <b>a)</b> Summary of the dissertation, <b>b)</b> Implications, <b>c)</b> Recommendations for further research                                  | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
| A summary of the dissertation                                                                                                                  | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |

Contrary to what most people think, the function of the general conclusion in the dissertation/thesis should not be limited to just summarizing what was done (methodological procedures) and obtained (results). Rather, the general conclusion is where the researcher/writer demonstrates how the research objectives were met, evaluates what was done (i.e., methodology), reflects on the results obtained and shows how they answered the questions and contributed to academia and existing literature. To this end, the general conclusion should include the following parts: **a) restatement of the research objectives/problem, b) a brief summary of the work** (methodology adopted and main findings), **c) significance of the study and implications, d) limitations of the study**, and

**e) recommendations for further research.** However, none of the participants listed all the aforementioned parts when asked about the content of the conclusion. For example, the answers of four teachers included only two parts and ignored the rest. More specifically, two teachers (28.57%) stated '**Restatement of the research objectives/problem**' and '**summary of the work (methodology and main findings)**', while they overlooked '*the significance of the study/implications*', '*limitations of the study*' and '*recommendations for future research*'. The third teacher (14.28%) referred to '**summary of the work**' and '**significance of the study**' as the only parts that made up the conclusion, while the fourth teacher (14.28%) mentioned '**summary of the dissertation**' and '**recommendations for further research**'.

On the other hand, two teachers pointed out that the general conclusion was composed of three parts. According to one of them (14.28%) these parts are: '**restatement of the research objectives**', '**summary of the dissertation**' and '**significance of the study/implications**', while for the other teacher (14.28%) the main parts are: '**summary of the dissertation**', '**implications**' and '**recommendations for further research**'. As for the remaining teacher (14.28%), she mentioned just one part which is '**summary of the dissertation**'.

**Table 15** in **Appendix K** summarizes the main parts to be included in the general conclusion and the number of times they were mentioned by the respondents.

#### **4.1.4. Difficulties/Challenges in Writing the Dissertation Sections and Chapters (Questions: 22.a, 22.b, 22.c, 22.d, 22.e, 22.f.)**

**Q 22: Did the students you supervised during the academic year (2018 - 2019) encounter difficulties in writing the following sections and chapters of their dissertations?**

**Table 4.18. Difficulty to Write the Abstract**

| <b>Theme: 22.a. Writing the abstract</b> |                              |                       |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                           | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties              | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties              | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties          | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
| <b>d.</b> None                           | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

The aim of question 22 was to know whether the students who were supervised by the respondents experienced difficulties in writing the sections (abstract, general introduction,

general conclusion) and chapters (review of the literature, methodology, results and discussions) of the dissertation.

Starting with the abstract, it seems from the participants' answers that this is the easiest part to write compared to the other parts of the dissertation. This is because, unlike the other parts where no one or only one teacher ticked 'Very few difficulties' option, three teachers (42.86%) declared that writing the abstract was not a big deal for most students given the 'Very few difficulties' they experienced. On the contrary, three other teachers (42.86%) stated that their students faced 'Many difficulties' in writing this section, while the remaining teacher (14.28%) said they (i.e., students) had 'Some difficulties'. Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the abstract were discussed in the teachers' interview. They are presented in section 4.2.3.

**Table 4.19. Difficulty to Write the General Introduction**

| <b>Theme: 22.b. Writing the general introduction</b> |                              |                       |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                                       | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties                          | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties                          | <b>05</b>                    | <b>71.43</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties                      | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>d.</b> None                                       | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

As far as the general introduction is concerned, the lowest percentages (14.28% x 2) go to 'Many difficulties' and 'Very few difficulties' options, while the highest percentage (71.43%) represents the overwhelming majority of teachers (71.43%) who said that their students encountered 'Some difficulties' in writing the introductory section of the dissertation. Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the general introduction were discussed in the teachers' interview. They are presented in section 4.2.4.

**Table 4.20. Difficulty to Write the Literature Review Chapter**

| <b>Theme: 22.c. Writing the literature review chapter</b> |                              |                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                                            | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties                               | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties                               | <b>04</b>                    | <b>57.14</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties                           | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>d.</b> None                                            | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |



With regard to the literature review, none of the teachers ticked ‘*Very few difficulties*’ option. Rather, their answers ranged from ‘*Many difficulties*’ encountered in writing this chapter with a percentage of (42.86%) to ‘*Some difficulties*’ with a percentage of (57.14%). Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the literature review chapter were discussed in the teachers’ interview. They are presented in section 4.2.5.

**Table 4.21. Difficulty to Write the Method Chapter**

| <b>Theme: 22.d. Writing the method chapter</b> |                              |                       |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                                 | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties                    | <b>02</b>                    | <b>28.57</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties                    | <b>04</b>                    | <b>57.14</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties                | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>d.</b> None                                 | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

Concerning the method chapter, almost half of the participants (n=04; 57.14%) stated that it was somewhat difficult (*Some difficulties*) to write for many students. As for the rest of the participants (n=3), their answers are divided into two distinct perspectives in which two teachers (28.57%) declared that the students had ‘*Many difficulties*’ in writing this chapter, while one teacher (14.28%) said they (i.e., students) faced ‘*Very few difficulties*’. Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the method chapter were discussed in the teachers’ interview. They are presented in section 4.2.6.

**Table 4.22. Difficulty to Write the Results and Discussion Chapter**

| <b>Theme: 22.e. Writing the results and discussion chapter</b> |                              |                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                                                 | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties                                    | <b>05</b>                    | <b>71.43</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties                                    | <b>02</b>                    | <b>28.57</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties                                | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>d.</b> None                                                 | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

Like the literature review chapter, the results and discussion chapter is also considered as one of the most challenging parts to write. This is clearly demonstrated by the results displayed in Table 4.22 where none of the participants ticked ‘*Very few difficulties*’ or ‘*None*’ options. Rather, the overwhelming majority of teachers (71.43%) said that their students had ‘*Many difficulties*’ in presenting and discussing their research findings, while the other teachers (28.57%) pointed out that their students experienced ‘*Some difficulties*’.

Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the results and discussion chapter were discussed in the teachers' interview. They are presented in section 4.2.7.

**Table 4.23. Difficulty to Write the General Conclusion**

| <b>Theme: 22.f. Writing the general conclusion</b> |                              |                       |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Options</b>                                     | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
| <b>a.</b> Many difficulties                        | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
| <b>b.</b> Some difficulties                        | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
| <b>c.</b> Very few difficulties                    | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
| <b>d.</b> None                                     | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |

As for the general conclusion, none of the respondents declared that his/her students did not face any difficulties (*None*) in writing this section. Rather, they all said that this conclusion was difficult to write to most students with three degrees of difficulty. That is, while three teachers (42.86%) stated that their students had '*Many difficulties*', three other participants (42.86%) said their students faced '*Some difficulties*'. The remaining teacher (14.28%), on the other hand, reported that writing the conclusion was not that much hard as the difficulties identified in the students' conclusions were '*Very few*'. Details about the difficulties experienced by the students in writing the general conclusion were discussed in the teachers' interview. They are presented in section 4.2.8.

#### **4.1.5. Supervisor – Student Relationship (Questions 23 – 30)**

**Q 23: When correcting your students' work, do you focus more on: a) structure, b) content, c) methodology, d) all of them?**

**Table 4.24. Focus of the Supervisor's Feedback**

| <b>Options</b>                                       | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>a.</b> Structure (language, cohesion & coherence) | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>b.</b> Content (ideas)                            | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>c.</b> Methodology                                | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
| <b>d.</b> All of them (a + b + c)                    | <b>07</b>                    | <b>100</b>            |

As demonstrated in Table 4.24, all teachers (100%) emphasized the complementary relationship which existed between the three aspects (i.e., structure, content and methodology) and the need to give them equal importance altogether when correcting the students' work.

**Q 24: Did the students you supervised this year (2018 – 2019) take your comments and feedback into consideration?**

**Table 4.25. Supervisees' Reactions to the Supervisor's Feedback**

| Options      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Always    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| b. Often     | 02                    | 28.57          |
| c. Sometimes | 03                    | 42.86          |
| d. Rarely    | 00                    | 00             |
| e. Never     | 00                    | 00             |

Question 24 aimed at determining the extent to which the students take their supervisors' feedback and comments into account. The results, as indicated in Table 4.25, showed that the highest percentage (42.86%) was attributed to the teachers who said that their supervisees '*Sometimes*' used their feedback to improve their work. Two teachers (28.57%) pointed out that their comments and suggestions were '*Often*' considered by the students, while two other teachers (28.57%) announced that their students '*Always*' used every single remark and comment given to them to improve their work.

**Q 25: How long did you spend correcting the work handed in by the students on average?**

**Table 4.26. Amount of Time Spent in Correcting the Students' Work**

| Answers           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 2 to 3 days       | 02                    | 28.57          |
| One day           | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 15 days           | 01                    | 14.28          |
| Hours             | 01                    | 14.28          |
| 20 minutes a page | 01                    | 14.28          |
| No answer         | 01                    | 14.28          |

Question 25 asked about the amount of time the teachers spent in correcting their students' work. As indicated in Table 4.26, four teachers gave the exact time. More specifically, two teachers (28.57%) said that they needed from '*Two to Three days*' to read and give feedback to their students, followed by one teacher (14.28%) who answered '*One day*', and another teacher (14.28%) who said that she spent almost '*15 days*' to correct her students' work. On the other hand, two other teachers gave vague answers which did not specify the amount of time. That is, one teacher (14.28%) said that it took her '*Hours*' to

read and evaluate the students' work, yet she neither specified how many hours nor explained whether those hours were spent in just one day or many days. The same remark applied to the other teacher (14.28%) who stated that reading and assessing one page took her *20 minutes*, but she neither mentioned how many pages she read a day nor how many days she needed to finish all the pages. As for the remaining teacher (14.28%), she gave no answer.

### Q 26: How often do you meet your supervisees on average?

**Table 4.27. Frequency of Supervision Meetings**

| Options |                                         | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a.      | Once a month                            | 02                    | 28.57          |
| b.      | Twice a month                           | 02                    | 28.57          |
| c.      | Thrice a month                          | 01                    | 14.28          |
| Other   | Every week                              | 01                    | 14.28          |
|         | Whenever the students ask for a meeting | 01                    | 14.28          |

The purpose of question 26 was to know about the frequency of supervision meetings the teachers had with their supervisees throughout their research journey and dissertation writing process. As shown in Table 4.27, the answers given by the majority of participants (n=5; 71.42%) range from once to thrice a month. More specifically, two teachers (28.57%) said they met their students just '*One time each month*', two other teachers (28.57%) said '*Twice a month*', while another teacher (14.28%) stated that she generally met her supervisees '*Three times a month*'. As for the remaining two teachers, they did not tick any of the options provided to them. Rather, they added their own options: '*Every week*' (14.28%) and '*Whenever the students ask for a meeting*' (14.28%).

### Q 27: How long does each supervision meeting last on average?

**Table 4.28. Average Length of Supervision Meetings**

| Answers               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| From 15 to 30 minutes | 03                    | 42.86          |
| 45 minutes            | 02                    | 28.57          |
| 2 hours               | 01                    | 14.28          |
| From 3 to 4 hours     | 01                    | 14.28          |

Having known about the frequency of supervision meetings, we wanted to get further details about the amount of time spent at each supervision meeting. As indicated in Table 4.28, the majority of teachers (n=5) stated that, most of the times, their meetings with the supervisees lasted less than one hour (i.e., *from 15 to 45 minutes*). On the other hand, the rest of the participants (n=2) said that their supervision meetings quite often took longer than one hour and a half (i.e., *from 2 to 4 hours*).

**Q 28: Did you have any communication problems with your supervisees this year (2018 – 2019)?**

**Table 4.29. Communication Problems with Supervisees**

| Options      | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Always    | 00                    | 00             |
| b. Often     | 00                    | 00             |
| c. Sometimes | 02                    | 28.57          |
| d. Rarely    | 04                    | 57.14          |
| e. Never     | 01                    | 14.28          |

When asked if they encountered any problems in communicating and interacting with their supervisees, more than half of the participants (57.14%) said they ‘Rarely’ did, while one teacher (14.28%) said he ‘Never’ had communication issues with his students and that everything was going well. The remaining two teachers (28.57%) declared that they ‘Sometimes’ had some issues of communication which stemmed mainly from students’ poor language proficiency and laziness.

**Q 29: Do you provide your supervisees with particular guidelines or models on dissertation writing?**

**Table 4.30. Guidelines on Dissertation Writing**

| Options                                           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| a. Yes                                            | 05                    | 71.43          |
| b. No                                             | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>Q 30: If yes, please mention some examples</b> |                       |                |
| Answers                                           | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
| The APA style                                     | 01                    | 14.28          |
| Research methodology books and articles           | 01                    | 14.28          |

|                                                                                                                                                                  |    |       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------|
| Guidelines on the dissertation structure                                                                                                                         | 01 | 14.28 |
| a) Guidelines on research methodology, b) Titles of some related dissertations and theses                                                                        | 01 | 14.28 |
| a) Guidelines on the dissertation structure, b) MLA style, c) Documents on research methodology, d) Providing the students with related theses and dissertations | 01 | 14.28 |

As indicated in Table 4.30, two teachers (28.57%) said they did not provide their students with any models or guidelines to dissertation writing, while the majority (71.43%) said they often did. For them, these guidelines raised the students' awareness of the dissertation writing requirements. Examples of the guidelines, as reported by the five teachers, included: books and documents on aspects of research methodology and the structure of the dissertation, guides to APA and MLA styles, and examples of completed theses and dissertations.

## 4.2. The Teachers' Interview Results

Given the small number (10) of the participants (i.e., teachers) in our study, we decided to interview all those teachers who answered the questionnaire so as to obtain as many insights as possible from their responses, yet five teachers out of seven accepted to be interviewed.

Like the students' interview, the teachers' interview was designed to complement the data obtained from the questionnaire and gain in-depth understanding, from the teachers' perspectives, of the main challenges faced by the students in writing the Master's dissertation.

### 4.2.1. The Impacts of the Academic Writing Course on Students' Writing Skills

All the teachers showed a positive attitude towards the content of the academic writing course and believed that its effectiveness lies in:

**4.2.1.1. Acquainting Students with Theoretical and Practical knowledge of Dissertation Writing:** The vast majority of teachers (T1, T2, T3 & T5) concurred that the content of the academic writing course was beneficial in that it provided the students with the skills and knowledge (both declarative and procedural) needed to write a dissertation that adhered, to some extent, to the academic standards. The following excerpts better illustrate this point:

- “I can safely say that the course of academic writing has the potential to introduce the learners and hopefully give them some chances to practice all the aspects/tasks of academic/thesis writing.” (T1)
- “In this course, students learn how to construct the different chapters and sections of an academic dissertation.” (T2)
- “I believe that the content of the academic writing course enables students to improve their academic writing skills.... It is good enough to prepare M2 students to write a good dissertation.” (T5)

**4.2.1.2. Developing Students’ Academic Language Skills and Style:** This is another positive impact of the academic writing course on Master’s students according to T3 and T4. They stated that this course helped the students develop their knowledge of the rhetorical structure of essays, the various types of literature reviews and rules of citing and referencing according to a particular style (APA or MLA). Further, the two teachers declared that the course of academic writing increased the students’ awareness of the stylistic conventions of academic writing such as level of formality, objectivity, hedging, clarity and precision, cohesion and authenticity.

**4.2.1.3. Improving Students’ Paraphrasing, Summarizing and Quoting Skills:**

More specifically, two teachers (T2 & T5) stated that the academic writing course played a pivotal role in developing the practical skills that were most needed in writing the dissertation. These included summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting and analyzing. Talking about this point, the two teachers said:

- “Through academic writing, students learn how to write coherent essays and how to properly summarize, paraphrase and quote.” (T2)
- “Academic writing course helps students learn some thesis writing skills. They are taught how to write the different parts of a dissertation and how to summarize and analyze.” (T5)

**4.2.2. The Impacts of the Research Skills Course on Students’ Research Skills**

Unlike the previous question, the answers to this question are divided into positive and negative attitudes towards the research skills course as follows:

#### 4.2.2.1. Positive Impacts

The answers of the vast majority of teachers (n=4) suggest that there are considerable benefits to be gained from the research skills course. These include:

**a. *Preparing Students to Plan their Research:*** Three teachers (T1, T3 & T5) stressed the importance of the research skills course and its effectiveness in addressing the students' basic research needs and improving their abilities to plan and design research, collect and analyze relevant data and write a successful dissertation. The following interview excerpts illustrate this point quite explicitly:

- “I can safely say that the course has the potential to introduce the learners and hopefully give them some practice in some of the aspects/tasks of academic research like selecting a topic, formulating research objectives, compiling a bibliography, reading and note taking, etc.” (T1)
- “This course is very technical.... It prepares the student researchers to plan research and schedule its steps.” (T3)
- “The research skills course provides students with the required baggage in order to initiate research and write a dissertation.” (T5)

**b. *Developing Students' Knowledge of the Research Designs and Methods:*** According to T2 and T3, one of the advantages of the research skills course is that it develops students' understanding of scientific research and knowledge of the various types of research designs (e.g., descriptive and experimental). They further added that the course helped the students learn how to identify and design data collection instruments that were relevant to qualification and quantification and appropriate to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives.

**c. *Developing Students' Analysis and Interpretation Skills:*** T2 and T3 also stated that the research skills course was beneficial as it developed students' abilities to read, analyze, interpret and evaluate data.

**d. *Developing Students' Critical Reading Skills:*** Apart from the aforementioned advantages, T3 pointed out that the research skills course developed the students' abilities to identify, read and critically evaluate pertinent literature sources. This, as a result, helped them identify gaps and problems and indicate how their (i.e., students) studies would fill them.



#### 4.2.2.2. Negative Impact

On the other hand, the remaining teacher (T4) expressed her strong dissatisfaction with the content of the research skills course and said that:

***The Content Does Not Meet the Students' Needs:*** According to her, Master's students are not given what they need to know at their level since most lessons included in the syllabus are repeated every year and taught at different levels (second & third years + Master) with the same learning objectives and same content. Rather, in the teacher's opinion, Master's students are supposed to develop new and relatively complex skills that will facilitate their research journey and enhance the quality of their writing. In her comment on this point, the teacher said:

I think that many of its (i.e., the course) contents are repetitive!! For example, formulation of research questions, research problem, research rationale ... etc. are covered in third year license classes as well as master classes.....I think that we should focus on other important points especially in the master syllabus such as: Research design (experimental and descriptive)....According to my experience with MA students, I can assume that our students are not at all familiar with these points.

#### 4.2.3. Writing the Abstract

##### 4.2.3.1. Challenges in Writing the Abstract

The teachers were asked what challenges their students encountered in writing the abstract of the dissertation. The results revealed the following:

***a. Unfamiliarity with the Content:*** According to the majority of teachers (T1, T2, T3 & T4), it seems that most students were not fully aware of the essential academic elements that make up the abstract. They said that the abstracts written by most students were often indicative (or descriptive) which were particularly found in review articles. This is because the students just gave a brief overview of the research and its objectives without providing an account of what was done (method) and found (results). In this vein, T4 pointed out:

“For example, they (students) do not include the results of the study or the methodology followed... They mention the objective and the background only!...The majority of students think that the abstract is the last part of the

dissertation to be written....They think that it's not important though it shows the writer's real ability to write in English”

**b. Issues in Summarizing:** This was stated by the remaining teacher (T5) as one of the most daunting tasks for most students. The latter, in her opinion, were still far from writing a good condensed and comprehensive summary (i.e., abstract) which covers the essential parts of their work. In this regard, she said: “*The majority of students are incapable to write a good abstract.... They fail to summarize their work’s main points .... Students are too general and cannot talk about specific points in their work.*”

**c. Other Challenges:** In addition to the aforementioned challenges, T1 said that the abstracts written by the majority of students included wordy, useless and unnecessary sentences (**wordiness**) that spoiled meaning and killed readers’ interest in the work. On the other hand, T3 posited that many students are **unable to distinguish between the abstract and the general introduction** as they (i.e., students) think that the two sections serve the same communicative function and, hence, consist of the same elements.

#### **4.2.3.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Abstract**

According to the interviewees, the following three factors are known to be responsible for the aforementioned challenges:

**a. Lack of Practice:** Two teachers (T2 & T5) blamed the teachers of academic writing for not providing the students with enough opportunities to apply what they learnt through practical activities. They claimed that the teachers’ focus in the classroom was entirely on teaching the students what to do (theory) instead of how to do it (practice). The following interview excerpts illustrate this point:

- “Either they do not receive enough practice on how to write an abstract when studying academic writing or they do not concentrate enough on what they learn” (T2)
- “I personally think that students are not given much opportunity to practice the theory taught in the classroom. Writing a good clear abstract requires a lot of reading and practice...” (T5)

**b. Issues with Language Proficiency:** Two other teachers (T1 & T3) declared that most students failed to write good abstracts because of their poor English language proficiency. According to the teachers, the main issues faced by most students in writing were related to the use of appropriate vocabulary, grammar rules, coherence and cohesion.

c. **Other Reasons:** In addition to language issues, T3 referred to *students' poor basic research skills* and their *full dependence on their supervisors* as other factors that undoubtedly resulted in students' failure to write the dissertation in general and the abstract in particular. As for the first factor (i.e., poor research skills), she mentioned some examples of the skills that the students lacked. These included critical analysis of information from sources, summarizing, paraphrasing, citing and synthesizing.

Concerning the second factor, she said that many students often showed an over-reliance on their supervisors to do most of their tasks and ignored the fact that the supervisor was just an advisor, guide and assistant when necessary. Commenting on this point, T3 noted: "*it is due to heavy dependence on the supervisors and too much tolerance with them.... Teachers have a hand in this in order not to responsabilize the students only.*"

In the following section, the challenges experienced by graduate students in writing the general introduction as well as the leading factors are discussed.

#### **4.2.4. Writing the General Introduction**

##### **4.2.4.1. Challenges in Writing the General Introduction**

When asked about the main challenges encountered by the students in writing the general introduction of the dissertation, the teachers mentioned the following:

a. **Challenges in Writing the Statement of the Problem:** Three teachers (T3, T4 & T5) concurred that most of the students did not know how to write this section. They further added that the problem statements in most of the dissertations they supervised and assessed were neither clear nor convincing and formulated in such a way that did not provide readers with a detailed explanation of the issue under investigation.

b. **Challenges in Stating the Research Objectives:** This was another challenge stated by three teachers (T1, T3 & T5) who pointed out that the research objectives in most of the dissertations they supervised and assessed were not clearly defined (ambiguous) and did not demonstrate what the study exactly focused on. One teacher (T3) further added that most of the research objectives were too ambitious and could not be achieved in the required time frame.

c. **Inability to Distinguish between the Rationale and the Research Objectives:** Two teachers (T2 & T4) maintained that most of their supervisees and the writers of the dissertations they assessed were not aware of the differences between **the research rationale**, which aims at identifying the gap in the literature and demonstrating

the research significance, and **the research objectives** which aim at stating the aim(s) of the study and explaining what the researcher intends to accomplish at the end of the study. The teachers declared that the students confused the research objective(s) with the rationale and used them as synonyms (i.e., interchangeably).

**d. Other Challenges:** In addition to the aforementioned challenges, T3 stated that most students had no idea **what to include in the background of the study** section and how to establish context for their research. She also noted that most students found it difficult to identify unexplored areas in previous research (**research gap**) so as to come up with original ideas for their research projects. Moreover, T2 declared that the **research questions in most of the dissertations she assessed were unfocused** and not well-formulated, while T1 referred to issues of coherence and cohesion. The latter included lack of logical flow, vagueness of ideas and lack of transitions between sentences, paragraphs and sections.

#### **4.2.4.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the General Introduction**

According to the teachers, the challenges experienced by the students in writing the introduction stemmed from the following reasons:

**a. Lack of Practice:** Three teachers (T2, T3 & T5) blamed most of the students for their failure to write dissertations that meet academic standards. The students, as the teachers noted, did not exert their best efforts to regularly practice what they learnt in theory and improve their research writing skills. T3 also blamed the teachers of academic writing and research skills for the lack of opportunities given to the students to apply what they learnt through practical exercises. We quote, by way of illustration, what T2 and T3 said in regard to this issue:

- “Lack of writing practice resulted in students’ inability to write coherent essays in general, not only introductions.” (T2)
- “At class, I think not too much time is devoted to a process dissertation writing.... Also, students do not benefit from their research skills and academic writing courses.... They do not give them importance...They do not know what they are doing in many cases.” (T3)

**b. Lack of Knowledge of the Introduction’s Content:** The other two teachers (T1 & T4), on the other hand, said that most of the students found writing the introductory section a challenging task due to their unfamiliarity with its content. That is, they were not aware of all the necessary parts that constituted this section. Commenting on this point, T4

noted that most of the introductory sections in the dissertations she assessed looked like a mini review of the literature in which the students mainly focused on reporting what happened in previous works, while they ignored directing readers' attention to the problem being studied and providing enough description of the context within which the study was conducted. The following is an example extract from the interview conducted with T4:

“Just like the abstract, the introduction should be approximately written by the student....The introduction doesn't contain many references like the lit review....Students struggle with writing the parts of the introduction because they are not familiar with writing without relying on what others have said.”

The next section sheds light on the challenges faced by the students in writing the literature review chapter.

#### ***4.2.5. Writing the Literature Review Chapter***

##### **4.2.5.1. Challenges in Writing the Literature Review Chapter**

The results of the interview indicated that the following are the most common challenges faced by the students in writing the literature review chapter:

**a. Absence of the Writer's Voice and Critical Stance:** The overwhelming majority of teachers (T1, T3, T4 & T5) reported that the students' voice and authorial position were completely absent or, often, implicit in most literature review chapters. To further elaborate on this point, they stated that most students did not show any attempt to critically evaluate the appropriateness of the sources cited and explain in what ways they (i.e., sources) supported/ did not support their arguments and position as writers. The interviewees further added that the students' focus in most review chapters was on merely reporting, through descriptive summaries, what other researchers said and did without demonstrating how those claims and studies were relevant to their own work. We quote, by way of illustration, what T4 said in regard to this point:

“.... absence of writer's involvement in his own text.... Students focus on other researchers' results without showing what is the link between these results and their own work.... Students seem that they forget about their study's objectives and they seem like they focus on compiling others' work only without evaluating and synthesizing.”

**b. Irrelevant Information:** This issue was referred to by three teachers (T1, T2 & T5) who declared that most students were not good at selecting the most relevant resources and data as many sections in their review chapters included information that were tedious and irrelevant to the problem being addressed in their research. Talking about this issue, T2 and T5 said:

- “They have difficulties being selective; they have this tendency to demonstrate that they read well about their topic and they end up citing unimportant pieces of information such as definitions, theories, studies...etc.” (T2)
- “This chapter is always a challenge for our students because they cannot be that selective to provide the reader with quality literature to understand the context of their work.” (T5)

**c. Challenges in Summarizing, Paraphrasing and Citing:** In addition to the absence of critical stance in the literature review chapters, T1 and T3 pointed out that most students have serious issues in summarizing and conveying ideas in precise, concise and informative way. Further, the teachers reported that most review chapters suffered from problems in using parenthetical citations properly as well as restating others’ ideas in the students’ own words.

**d. Language Proficiency, Coherence and Cohesion Issues:** According to T1 and T4, most of the literature reviews they assessed suffered from serious issues related to coherence, cohesion and the target language in general. Examples of these issues, as mentioned by the teachers, included: the logical link between ideas and sections, clarity, wordiness, vocabulary and word choice, verb tense and sentence structure.

#### **4.2.5.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Literature Review Chapter**

According to the interviewees, the aforementioned challenges are due to the following reasons:

**a. Lack of Practice:** The overwhelming majority of teachers (T2, T3, T4 & T5) referred to the lack of practice as the most likely cause of the difficulties experienced by their students in writing a good literature review. The interviewees blamed the teachers of academic writing and research skills for not giving the students enough opportunities to

apply the course content and engage with it in a more concrete way (i.e., procedural knowledge).

**b. *Unfamiliarity with the Chapter Content:*** T1, on the other hand, indicated that most challenges experienced by the students in writing the literature review were due to the lack of knowledge of the main sections and sub-sections that make up this chapter.

**c. *Students' Readiness to Do Research:*** Apart from lack of practice, T4 referred to students' lack of interest and readiness to engage in research as another reason for the challenges they faced in doing research in general and doing and writing the literature review in particular. She maintained that the majority of students were unfortunately not equipped with the necessary skills that would allow them to undertake research and collect and evaluate resources for quality and relevance.

The focus of the following section is on the most common challenges encountered by Master's students in writing the method chapter.

#### **4.2.6. Writing the Method Chapter**

##### **4.2.6.1. Challenges in Writing the Method Chapter**

A considerable number of challenges in writing the method chapter have been highlighted by the teachers as follows:

**a. *Challenges in Designing Interviews and Questionnaire Items:*** Two teachers (T1 & T4) declared that in most dissertations, the questionnaires and interviews used to collect data for the research suffered from a number of issues related to both structure and content of most items which were unclear and irrelevant and did not serve the research objectives and questions.

**b. *Unfamiliarity with the Chapter's Content:*** According to T1 and T2, one of the barriers that prevent students from achieving a satisfactory work is the lack or absence of knowledge of the chapter's structure and content. They stated that most students were not aware of the sections that make up the methodology chapter such as: research paradigm, participants, research tools, data collection and analysis procedures.

**c. *Incomplete Information, Coherence and Cohesion Issues:*** These challenges were identified by T1. He declared that most method chapters, compared to the other chapters of the dissertations, were very short and incomplete because the students did not provide sufficient and detailed descriptions and justifications of the research designs and the procedures of data collection and analysis. Further, the teacher noted that most students'

writings suffered from issues related to coherence and cohesion such as: wordiness, lack of clarity, lack of transitions between sentences and ideas, lack of vocabulary, and grammatical mistakes.

**d. Challenges in Formulating Research Questions:** In addition to the issues in designing questionnaires and interviews, T4 pointed out that most students failed to formulate research questions that were clear, narrow in focus and feasible. Moreover, the teacher noted that the way the questions were formulated was not the only issue. Rather, issues related to consistency and relevance of the research questions were also identified in many dissertations she assessed. By this she meant that the research questions asked in the method chapter were, most of the times, not the same questions addressed in the general introduction.

**e. Lack of Knowledge of the Research Designs:** T3 stated that most students are not well aware of the defining features, strengths and weaknesses of the basic types of research designs. In this regard, the teacher said:

“They do not have enough knowledge of the various designs, what they allow or not allow, the different methodologies, their limitations. Perhaps what is remarkable in our students is the idea that all studies call for an experimental design and that the latter is the best and others are less important.”

**f. Inappropriate Research Tools:** For T5, one of the most serious challenges faced by most students is using data collection tools that were neither appropriate for the type of the research design adopted nor for answering the research questions and achieving the objectives. The following comment made by the teacher illustrates this point:

“The majority of students use different tools and have some promising objectives, but this chapter is always very confusing and full of contradictions.... Students use research tools anarchically and fail to achieve the purpose(s) of their study.”

#### **4.2.6.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Method Chapter**

When asked to explain the most likely reasons for the students' challenges in writing the method chapter, the teachers stated the following:

**a. Lack of Practice:** This was referred to as the primary reason according to T3 and T5. They claimed that method and academic writing courses were not given the weight they



deserved by most students who did not make any effort to demonstrate to their teachers whether they understood what was taught in these courses or not. T3 also blamed the teachers of the two courses for giving very few opportunities to put what was learnt in theory into practice and develop the skills their students needed to embark on a research journey.

**b. Lack of Supervision:** Two teachers (T4 & T5) reported that the absence of proper guidance from the supervisor was one of the leading causes to the challenges experienced by most students in writing the method chapter. In T4's words: *"As an examiner, I can tell you that when I find problems in the research design, I understand that the students were not well supervised..."*

**c. Irrelevant Course Objectives in Research Skills and Academic Writing:** According to T2, what Master's students need most at this level is to know how to do research and write a dissertation. Nevertheless, most learning objectives in both courses (i.e.; research skills and academic writing) were not relevant to the students' needs and expectations. In her comment on this point, the teacher pointed out:

*"They (students) keep saying to us (supervisors), we do not know how to.... There seems to be a serious problem in motivating students to learn research methodology and academic writing...Teaching objectives are not explicit and relevant to them."*

**d. Lack of Well-trained Teachers of Research Skills:** In addition to the lack of practice, T3 attributed the students' challenges in writing the method chapter to the lack of well-trained and professional teachers in research methodology. She maintained that most research skills teachers in the English Department were not qualified and did not receive any formal training which helped them master the content taught in their classes and improve their students' skills to undertake better research. Commenting on this point, the teacher said: *"Not all teachers are qualified and trained to teach research skills.... Personally, I trained myself through online courses provided by universities or I relied on personal ongoing research."*

**e. Other Reasons:** Apart from the aforementioned reasons, T1 and T4 added **lack of knowledge in research methodology** and **insufficient research skills** namely data analysis and synthesis.

In the section that follows, we present the teachers' perspectives regarding the most common challenges faced by the students in writing the results and discussion chapter.

#### **4.2.7. Writing the Results and Discussion chapter**

##### **4.2.7.1. Challenges in Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter**

The findings showed that there was general agreement among the teachers that, compared to the results section, the discussion section was apparently more challenging for most students. This can be demonstrated by the following challenges identified by the teachers:

**a. *Inappropriate/ Lack of Data Interpretation:*** According to three teachers (T1, T3 & T4), in most results and discussion chapters, the students merely focused on reporting and narrating their research findings without showing any attempt(s) to explain what they meant and how they addressed the research objectives. In her comment on this point, T3 noted: *“Generally, this part is too short and done in the end when they are run out of time. It is quick and it does not translate all the efforts (students and teachers) done in previous chapters....”*

**b. *No Discussion of the Findings:*** Apart from the issues faced in interpreting the data, T1, T4, T5 and T2 declared that most students did not know what to include in the section devoted to discussing the research findings. According to them, most students in this chapter (i.e., results and discussion) primarily focused on reporting the results obtained from the data collection tools, while they totally ignored synthesizing the findings, comparing them with the literature and showing how they answered the research questions. Talking about this issue, T2 and T5 said:

- “An extreme minority knows how to discuss the results of their study.... They just don’t know how to do it.” (T2)
- “This is the most challenging chapter for most students. This chapter is always so general and confusing. It rarely answers the research questions.” (T5)

**c. *Inappropriate Presentation of the Data:*** As far as the results section is concerned, two teachers (T1 & T4) reported that many students did not know how to structure their research findings which were, most of the time, not presented in an informative and convincing way. T4 added that the majority of students did not master the most common data display methods (e.g., texts, tables, graphs) which could facilitate the readers’ understanding of the content and maintain their interest. The teacher noted that

instead of using one method correctly, the students tended to use two (or more) methods (tables and diagrams) to present the **same** data without providing textual explanations of these tables and diagrams content.

#### **4.2.7.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter**

When the teachers were asked to explain the main reasons behind the challenges encountered by the students in writing the results and discussions chapter, they cited the following:

**a. Absence of Interpretation and Discussion Skills:** Three teachers (T1, T2 & T4) reported that many students failed to write a good results and discussion chapter because they did not have that critical eye which allowed them to analyze the data sets, explain and assign meanings to the findings based on the context of their studies and previous studies' contexts, and draw evidence-based conclusions. In T2's opinion, the absence of such critical and analytical skills stemmed mainly from students' laziness, carelessness and unwillingness to make efforts to learn and master them (i.e., the skills). In this vein, she said:

“Although students have at least reviewed study articles during their studies, it seems they never felt the urgent need to really understand what this discussion phase is about. It is only when they start doing their own research that they seriously start considering and grasping all research stages.”

**b. Language and Writing Issues:** In addition to the absence of interpretation and discussion skills, T1 and T4 shed light on language and writing issues as one of the reasons why most students failed to write a good results and discussion chapter. These issues included lack of vocabulary, wordiness, and mechanics of writing and grammar such as: punctuation, spelling, types of sentences, transitions, and verb tense.

**c. Other Reasons:** Apart from the aforementioned reasons, T3 attributed the challenges faced by the students in writing the discussions section to **the lack of guidance** from most supervisors who, in her point of view, were not doing their job appropriately with their students. In addition, T3 stated that the reason why most students were unable to provide adequate interpretations of their research findings lies in the **inefficient readings of the data**. The teacher also blamed the students for devoting most of their time to writing the

literature review chapter at the expense of the other chapters of the dissertation including the results and discussion chapter.

On the other hand, T5 pointed out that the most likely cause of the challenges experienced by the students in writing a good results and discussion chapter was the ***lack of proofreading***. In this regard, she said:

“I personally think that the reason behind writing this chapter is the students’ lack of proofreading. I believe that they never read what they write.... They just collect some information from different sources to reach the required amount of pages.”

The following section discusses the challenges experienced by Master’s students in writing the general conclusion of the dissertation.

#### ***4.2.8. Writing the General Conclusion***

##### **4.2.8.1. Challenges in Writing the General Conclusion**

**a. *Inappropriate Summary of the Dissertation:*** From three teachers’ point of view (T1, T3 & T5), the majority of students tended to be too broad in their summaries and included too many unnecessary details. Hence, they failed to write a satisfactory comprehensive summary which conveyed the most important points of the different parts of their work in a precise and concise way.

**b. *Unfamiliarity with the Content:*** Two teachers (T2 & T4) declared that most students were not aware of the main parts/elements that make up the general conclusion of the dissertation. According to them, the students did not give this section the importance it deserved and looked at it as a mere summary of the main research findings. Hence, they ignored other essential elements such as restatement of the research problem and objectives, pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.

##### **4.2.8.2. Reasons for the Challenges in Writing the General Conclusion**

**a. *Lack of Practice:*** According to T2 and T5, the challenges experienced by the students in writing the general conclusion primarily stemmed from the lack of practice in research methodology classes. They claimed that teachers did not allocate enough time to put theory into practice and evaluate the extent to which the course objectives were achieved and the different skills of dissertation writing were mastered by the students.

**b. Language Proficiency, Coherence and Cohesion Issues:** Two other teachers (T1 & T4) attributed the challenges faced by most students in writing the general conclusion to their poor English language proficiency in addition to coherence and cohesion issues such as lack of clarity, wordiness, grammar, connection of ideas and transitions between ideas.

**c. Less Attention Is Given to the Conclusion:** The remaining teacher (T3) claimed that the general conclusion was often not given the weight it deserved by most students who saw it as merely a summary of the whole dissertation and ended up writing a rushed conclusion which unfortunately left many readers with a negative impression about the students' work. In this vein, the teacher said: "*As the last step, they run out of time and they write it quickly.... I think they do not give it importance.... They do not know that even a conclusion has its own norms and structure!*"

The next section highlights the key points discussed during supervision meetings.

#### **4.2.9. Points Discussed in Supervision Meetings**

Because of the closed-ended nature of most questionnaire items (Qs 24, 26, 27 & 29) in which the number of options to choose from was limited, our participants were not given the chance to express themselves freely and give further details about the aspect of supervision. Therefore, based on the results displayed in tables (4.25, 4.27, 4.28 & 4.30), we found it necessary to investigate the aspect of supervision in an open-ended way and get additional information about the points discussed in supervision meetings. The participants shed light on the following points:

**a. Language Issues, Coherence and Cohesion:** The overwhelming majority of teachers (T1, T3, T4 & T5) said that the primary focus of their meetings with their supervisees was on linguistic issues (e.g., formality, vocabulary, grammar), coherence and cohesion.

**b. Outline of the Literature Review:** In addition to language issues, two teachers (T4 & T5) said that they always paid great attention to the outline of the literature review chapter as well as the content of its sections.

**c. Methodology Issues:** Apart from linguistic issues, T1 and T4 said that they also discussed the main methodological challenges encountered by their supervisees in designing their data collection instruments and tried to suggest some strategies and practices that helped the students overcome those challenges.

**d. Writing the Dissertation:** Two teachers (T2 & T3) stated that discussing the content of the dissertation parts (e.g., *introduction, literature review, research design, data presentation and discussion*) was among the points that were of great importance in their supervision meetings. Talking of this point, T2 said:

Sometimes, I feel I am concerned with the research topic of my students more than they are. Because of their inability, I rationalize everything for them: Research questions, Title, outline of the Literature review and how it will serve them in the next stages, research methodology, and how to discuss results and interpret findings... It is really a huge work!

In the section that follows, we provide an account of the main dissertation requirements.

#### **4.2.10. Requirements for writing a good dissertation**

According to the interviewees, in order to write a good dissertation which conforms to the academic standards, the following requirements should be met:

**a. Cohesive and Coherent Writing:** This, according to T2 and T5, includes the smooth flow of ideas and unity of paragraphs and sections in the text as well as lexical and grammatical relationships between sentences.

**b. Researcher's Willingness:** For T2 and T3, achieving a good work requires the researchers' voluntary will, passion, utmost seriousness and motivation to do research.

**c. Good Research and Writing Skills:** In addition to willingness to do research, T3 says that writing a good dissertation requires that the student researcher should acquire and master the following research and academic writing skills: summarizing, paraphrasing, citing, synthesizing and critical thinking.

**d. Enough Guidance from the Supervisor:** According to T2, a satisfactory work also requires the cooperation and presence of the supervisor who should be always there to guide, advise, and assist the student(s) in their research journey.

**e. Comprehensiveness:** This requirement was mentioned by T1 who pointed out that the good dissertation should be comprehensive and complete. By this he meant that it should include all the necessary chapters, sections and sub-sections (i.e., *general introduction, review of the literature, Methods, data analysis and presentation, discussion and findings, implications of the research, general conclusion, references, appendices and abstract*).

**f. Other Requirements:** Apart from the aforementioned requirements, T1 says that the student researcher is strongly required to choose *appropriate methods and methodologies* to achieve a successful dissertation. On the other hand, T2 stresses the importance of *consulting and critically reading and evaluating enough references* related to the topic under investigation. She further adds that devoting *enough time to reading and proofreading* what they (i.e., students) write is one of the secrets of quality work.

The last section in this chapter focuses on presenting the teachers' perspectives concerning the positive impacts that result from the use of a common rubric of assessment.

#### ***4.2.11. The Effects of Using a Common Rubric of Assessment***

At the end of the interview, the researcher asked the teachers if they used a common rubric to assess and evaluate the students' dissertations (a yes/no question). The results revealed that three teachers (T1, T3 & T4) did use a rubric, while the other two teachers (T2 & T5) did not. This question was then followed by an open-ended one which aspired to know what impacts could the use of a common rubric have on the assessment of Master's dissertations. The teachers who answered with 'yes' stated that the following advantages would be attained when a common assessment rubric was utilized:

**a. Fair and Better-quality Assessment:** The three teachers (T1, T3 & T4) said that using a common rubric and following the same criteria in evaluating the students' works would lead to an accurate, unbiased, objective, consistent and fair assessment. We quote, by way of illustration, what the teachers said about this point:

- "Using a common rubric ensures better quality assessment and feedback leading to better training. Besides, it ensures higher fairness in assessing different dissertations i.e., increasing inter-rater reliability." (T1)
- "... It is a multi-purpose rubric: for a fairer and equitable assessment of all works; for easier job to teachers...." (T3)
- "The common rubric allows us to objectively evaluate and assess students' research works." (T4)

**b. Better Communication between Teachers:** In addition to the aforementioned advantage, T1 pointed out that using a common rubric of assessment could facilitate the communication between teachers as they have the same criteria and requirements to follow when evaluating the students' works.

## Conclusion and Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, we presented the results obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and interview. These are summed up as follows:

- All the teachers, who were interviewed, did not receive any professional training in supervision, while some of them had some training courses in research methodology when they were post-graduate students at university.
- The majority of teachers showed satisfaction with the content taught in research skills and academic writing classes and emphasized its importance in preparing Master's students to plan for research and write a successful dissertation.
- Some teachers were not fully aware of all the essential academic elements that make almost all the parts of the dissertation namely: the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the methodology chapter, the results and discussion chapter, and the general conclusion.
- As for the challenges experienced by the students in writing the parts of the dissertation, the results revealed the following:
  - **The Abstract:** All the interviewees reported that most of the abstracts written by the students were weak and failed to attract the readers' interest in the work as they suffered from the following issues: poor summarizing skills, lack of knowledge of the essential academic elements that make up the abstract and the students' inability to make the difference between the abstract and the introduction which were thought to serve the same communicative function. These issues/challenges, as declared by the teachers, resulted from the lack of practice in academic writing and the students' poor English language proficiency and research skills.
  - **The General Introduction:** With regard to the general introduction, the teachers identified some challenges related to writing most of the sub-sections that make up the introduction namely: the problem statement, the background of the study, the research rationale, the research objectives and questions. These challenges, according to the interviewees, stemmed from lack of practice in research skills and academic writing classes and the students' unfamiliarity with the content of the section.
  - **The Literature Review Chapter:** The literature review was considered as the second most challenging chapter to write according to the interviewees. The latter



stated that most students were still far from being critical writers who could assess, evaluate, discuss and synthesize the sources related to their research topics. Rather, their critical stance and voice remained in the background while others' ideas dominated their writings. In addition, the teachers declared that the majority of students were unable to: write good summaries, restate others' ideas using their own style, and cite relevant sources properly. Other challenges reported by the teachers involved students' inability to select the sources that were most relevant to their research topics in addition to issues related to language proficiency. These challenges, as maintained by the teachers, were attributed to three main reasons: lack of practice in academic writing and research skills classes, lack of knowledge of the main parts that make up the literature review chapter and the students' poor research skills and knowledge of methodology which made them unready to do research.

- **The Method Chapter:** Based on the number of challenges identified, there seems to be a general agreement among all the teachers that the method chapter is the most difficult part to write for the majority of students. The main challenges experienced in writing this chapter, according to the interviewees, were designing questionnaires and interviews items, students' unfamiliarity with the content of the chapter, formulating the research questions in addition to lack of knowledge of the main research designs and using inappropriate research instruments to collect data. Most of these challenges, in the teachers' point of view, were due to the less attention paid to developing the students' procedural knowledge (the how to) since the primary focus of research skills and academic writing classes was on the declarative knowledge and abstract concepts. Further, the objectives of academic writing and research skills courses were claimed to be far from addressing Master's students' needs and meeting their expectations.
- **The Results and Discussion Chapter:** All the teachers concurred that the discussion section was much more challenging than the results section for the majority of students. These students, according to the interviewees, suffered from serious issues in analyzing and interpreting data properly and discussing the results in relation to previous research. All they did, as stated by the teachers, was providing a detailed report of all the findings obtained from the research instruments without any attempts to explain what those findings meant or show how

they (i.e.; the findings) were/were not in accordance with the findings of previous studies. As far as the results section is concerned, the teachers pointed out that the majority of students were not aware of how to present their findings in an appropriate and informative manner. As for the reasons that are responsible for these challenges, the interviewees referred to the lack of the necessary research skills particularly interpretation and critical thinking skills, and lack of guidance from the supervisor.

- **The General Conclusion:** Unlike the other parts of the dissertation, it appears that the general conclusion is the least difficult section to write for the majority of students given the few challenges identified by the teachers. These included poor summarizing skills and students' unfamiliarity with the content of the conclusion. The two challenges, according to the teachers, arose from lack of practice in research skills classes in addition to poor language proficiency and coherence and cohesion issues.
- Lack of practice in academic writing and research skills classes was always identified by the teachers as the primary reason behind most of the challenges encountered by the students in writing all the parts of the dissertation.

In the next chapter, the results obtained from the document analysis of Master's dissertations will be presented.

**CHAPTER FIVE:  
DOCUMENT  
ANALYSIS OF  
MASTER'S  
DISSERTATIONS**

## Introduction

As already discussed in the method chapter, the document analysis was used to cross-check the findings obtained from the questionnaires and the interviews with regard to students' challenges in dissertation writing and verify the extent to which the students were able to successfully meet the requirements of writing an MA dissertation. Our initial plan was to analyze the dissertations written by all the students who took part in the interview. However, owing to the length of each dissertation (50 pages minimum) and the detailed analysis required, only six dissertations were randomly selected for the analysis.

This chapter, therefore, aims at presenting the results obtained from the document analysis of six Master's dissertations. It is divided into six parts each of which is subdivided into two sections: The first section describes and illustrates the schematic structure of the dissertation parts (i.e., abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the research design chapter, the results and discussion chapter and the general conclusion), while the second section focuses on casting light on the major difficulties encountered by Master students in writing the aforementioned parts of the dissertation.

Before presenting the results of the analysis, it is worth explaining what the abbreviations used in the following sections stand for: **Ab** (Abstract), **IN** (Introduction), **LR** (Literature Review chapter), **M** (Method chapter), **RD** (Results & Discussions chapter) and **GC** (General Conclusion).

### 5.1. The Abstract

#### ***5.1.1. The Schematic Structure of the Abstract: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps***

According to Chen and Kuo's framework, the abstract consists of the following moves: introduction, method, results, and conclusions

**5.1.1.1. Move 1: Introduction:** All the abstracts covered this move. In their introductory statements, the students explicitly stated their research objectives using some common linguistic expressions such as: "*The purpose of the current descriptive study is to investigate...*" (**Ab2**), "*The present study aims at discerning...*" (**Ab3**), and "*This study was designed in order to explore...*" (**Ab5**). In addition to the aim of the study, the introductory statements in three abstracts (**Ab1**, **Ab5** & **Ab6**) shed light on the problem under investigation and briefly stated their rationale as shown in the following excerpt from **Ab5**:

“Grade inflation is commonly known as giving students higher grades without an increase in their performance. Grade inflation has become a sensitive topic in the field of education. Thus, it is widely debated among scholars since it affects the students' career (the research problem). Many studies were conducted concerning the issue of grade inflation in higher education but few (not to say any) were carried on grade inflation in the Algerian higher educational context (the research rationale)”

**5.1.1.2. Move 2: Method:** This move was present in all the abstracts. The students provided information mainly on the type of the research design adopted and the research tools used to collect data. In some abstracts, the students added further details about the type of sampling (**Ab3 & Ab4**) and the number of participants who took part in the study (**Ab1, Ab3, Ab4, Ab5 & Ab6**). The following example from **Ab4** is given for illustration:

“This study was conducted by implementing an interpretative research design which embodies both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was collected through a questionnaire distributed to sixty (60) randomly selected M1 literature students and a semi-structured interview conducted with six (6) literature teachers to investigate their perceptions towards the effects of literary texts on students' Intercultural competence.”

**5.1.1.3. Move 3: Results:** This move appeared in all the abstracts. The students highlighted the most significant findings of their research. This move was explicitly signaled by linguistic expressions like: “*The study revealed that.... Results have shown*” (**Ab3**), “*According to the results of the study....*” (**Ab5**), “*The results of the present study indicate that....*” (**Ab6**).

**5.1.1.4. Move 4: Conclusions:** As previously mentioned in the literature review chapter, this move aims at shedding light, briefly, on the implications that were drawn from the research findings. However, this move did not appear in the abstracts we analyzed. The students just pointed out that there were some pedagogical implications offered, but they (students) did not even highlight the most significant ones.

**Table 01** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the abstracts we analyzed.

### 5.1.2. Challenges in Writing the Abstract

As previously noted in the review of the literature (section 1.2.1), the abstract is the heart of academic papers including dissertations as it plays a vital role in shaping the readers' impression about the whole work. Therefore, judging the quality of an abstract (good or weak) is generally based on whether it could fully serve its communicative function and provide readers with a concise and comprehensive summary. The latter is made up of essential elements (i.e., background, method, results and conclusions) that help readers get a clear idea about the work even without having to read the details in the other parts of the dissertation. The reviewed abstracts, however, suffered from some issues that are worth highlighting. These issues include the following:

**5.1.2.1. Not Introducing the Research Problem:** Bearing in mind that not all readers are familiar with the research topic under investigation and that the abstract is generally the first part to read, writers are expected to start their abstracts with introductory statements to acquaint readers with the problem being studied. This aspect appeared in **Ab5** and **Ab6**, yet it was shallowly presented in **Ab1** and **Ab4** and completely disregarded in **Ab2** and **Ab3**. The latter started with the research objectives without any background details about the state of the problem undertaken. The following excerpts illustrate the two cases:

#### **Case 1: Enough background about the problem:**

“Grade inflation is commonly known as giving students higher grades without an increase in their performance. Grade inflation has become a sensitive topic in the field of education. Thus, it is widely debated among scholars since it affects the students' career. Many studies were conducted concerning the issue of grade inflation in higher education but few (not to say any) were carried on grade inflation in the Algerian higher educational context.” (**Ab5**)

#### **Case 2: Insufficient background about the problem:**

“For decades, scholars have been highlighting the crucial role of intercultural competence for EFL learners and the positive impact of literature as a material in teaching EFL students.” (**Ab4**)

By reading the background section in the first example, one can at least have an idea about the nature of the problem under study ‘*grade inflation in higher education*’. First, the student defined the variable. Then, she pointed out that the topic received significant

attention in the academic context. In the last few lines, she identified the gap to be filled by her research.

Unlike the first example, the few lines written by the student in the second example did not provide a clear idea about the research problem. The student should have at least explained the meaning of the term ‘intercultural competence’ as the latter might be ambiguous or unknown to many readers.

**5.1.2.2. Not Explaining What the Results Mean:** Another issue detected in the reviewed abstracts was the absence of the main conclusions drawn from the research findings. All the students ended their abstracts by reporting the main results, but none of them tried to provide brief interpretations or explanations of what those results meant.

**5.1.2.3. Inaccurate Use of Verb Tenses:** According to the APA and MLA styles, the appropriate verb tenses used to report information in the abstract are: the present tense (to state the research objective and the conclusions drawn from the results) and the past tense (to describe the methods and report the main study results). Nevertheless, the analysis revealed that verb tenses were wrongly used in all the abstracts; more specifically in the results section where the students used the present simple tense, instead of the past, to report the results as demonstrated by the following excerpts:

“The **findings** reveal some beliefs and attitudes held by teachers and students.... According to the **results of the study**, a good number of teachers and students believe that grade inflation exists in their department. In addition, the main reason of grade inflation in the English department is students' pressure for higher marks.” (Ab5)

“The **results of the present study** indicate that student absenteeism is a real issue in the department. Besides, learners miss classes due to health and environmental issues as well as other reasons such as personal reasons, lack of interest in studies.... **The findings** of the study also reveal a negative correlation between students’ absenteeism and their grades.” (Ab6)

The next section presents the schematic structure of the six introductions we analyzed and explains the difficulties encountered by the students in writing this section.

## 5.2. The General Introduction

### 5.2.1. Schematic Structure of the General Introduction: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps

In the context where our study took place (i.e., Blida 2 University), Master's students got used to specific terms that are commonly employed to refer to the sections (or parts) of the general introduction in a Master's dissertation. According to what has been taught in the modules of academic writing and research skills, students should include the following main sections in their introductions: background of the study, statement of the problem, research rationale or significance of the study, purpose of the study, research questions and/or hypotheses, definitions of key terms and structure of the dissertation. Therefore, in our analysis, we show how these headings are employed to accomplish the moves and steps that make up Chen and Kuo's framework.

**5.2.1.1. Move 1: Establishing a Territory:** According to the analysis, **step 1** (*providing topic generalization/background*) and **step 4** (*reviewing previous research*) in Chen and Kuo's framework were realized through '**background of/to the study**'s section which appeared as the first heading in the 6 introductions we analyzed while **step 2** (*Indicating centrality/importance of topic*) was accomplished through '**the research rationale/significance of the study**'s section which occurred as the fourth heading in 3 introductions (IN 3, IN 5 & IN 6), third heading in two introductions (IN 2 & IN 4) and sixth heading in IN 1. As for **step 3** (*Defining terms*), it was achieved through '**definitions of key terms**' section which was absent in four introductions (IN 2, IN 3, IN 5 & IN 6) and showed up as the last heading in IN 1 and IN 4.

**5.2.1.2. Move 2: Establishing a Niche:** With regard to the steps employed to achieve Move 2, the analysis of the introductions demonstrated that while **Step 1** (*indicating gap in previous research*) was absent in two introductions (IN 1 & IN 2), it occurred as part of '**the research rationale section**' in three introductions (IN 4, IN 5 & IN 6), while in IN 3 the student included the research gap in '**the background of the study's section**'. **Step 2** (*question-raising*), **Step 4** (*Continuing/Extending a tradition*) and **Step 5** (*Indicating a problem/need*) were realized through a section titled '**the statement of the problem**' which appeared as the second heading in all the introductions. As far as **Step 3** (*counter-claiming*) is concerned, none of the students stated previous studies' flaws.



**5.2.1.3. Move 3: Occupying the Niche:** In the six introductions we analyzed, **step 1** (*indicating aims/purposes/objectives*) in this move was realized through '***purpose of the study or research objectives***' section. The latter appeared as the third heading in four introductions (**IN 2, IN 3, IN 5 & IN 6**), the second heading in **IN 1** and the fourth heading in **IN 4**. With regard to **Step 2** (*Indicating scope of research*), it came as part of the '***purpose of the study's section***' in three introductions (**IN 2, IN 5 & IN 6**). **Step 3** (*Indicating chapter/section structure*) and **Step 4** (*indicating theoretical position*) were absent in the six introductory sections we analyzed. **Step 5** (*stating research questions/hypotheses*) was achieved by '***the research questions***' section' which was present in all introductions except **IN 6** and '***the research hypotheses***' section' which appeared in one introduction (**IN 1**) as the fifth heading after the research questions. Regarding **Step 6** (*Indicating research method*), it was absent in all the introductions, while **Step 7** (*Indicating thesis structure*) was accomplished by '***layout of the dissertation's section***' which occurred as the last heading in two introductions (**IN 1 & IN 2**) or '***dissertation structure***' as the last section in 3 introductions (**IN 3, IN 5 & IN 6**).

**Table 02** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the introductions we analyzed.

## 5.2.2. Challenges in Writing the General Introduction

The analysis of the introductions revealed the following challenges:

**5.2.2.1. Writing the Background of the Study:** As previously mentioned in the review of the literature (section 1.3.1.1), the main function served by the background of the study' section is establishing context and acquainting readers with the topic under investigation. However, the results revealed that writing this section was difficult for almost all the students. To start with, a very important element in this section '***reviewing previous studies on the issue***' was totally disregarded in two introductions (**IN1 & IN2**). In **IN1**, for instance, not only the background section was very short but also the student relied on general statements to, supposedly, introduce her topic. She neither reviewed previous related studies nor identified the context within which her study was conducted. The same issue was identified in **IN4, IN5** and **IN6** where the students did not provide any explanation or description of their research context; they just referred to the EFL context in general and made false assumptions without any corroborative evidence. Moreover, providing

operational definitions of research-related concepts that might be unfamiliar to the target audience was overlooked by the students in **IN2, IN3, IN5** and **IN6**.

Last but not least, in **IN3**, it seems that the student is not fully aware of the specific elements to be included in the background to the study and the research rationale. That is, after he established context for his research and highlighted the key theoretical constructs in the background section, he indicated the gap in the literature and stated why he decided to investigate that topic in particular. These details should rather be mentioned in the research rationale or significance of the study's section.

**5.2.2.2. Writing the Statement of the Problem:** Writing this section represents another challenge that arose from the content analysis of the introductions. Though the statement of the problem's section was present in all the introductions, the students failed to write it appropriately. For instance, in five introductions (**IN2, IN3, IN4, IN5 & IN6**), there was a tendency to overgeneralize the research problem to larger contexts which in turn may misdirect the investigation. In addition, the problem statements were mostly based on assumptions without concrete evidence. That is, the students made their statements appear certain while that was not the case. This can be illustrated by the following excerpts:

- “In EFL learning, reading and writing are always what EFL teachers attempt to develop in their students, listening and speaking are particularly undervalued. This has probably resulted in the EFL student's incapacity to speak fluently especially that teachers are not adopting the appropriate speaking activities in class.... We witnessed that most of Algerian EFL students are facing problems in speaking English fluently.” (**IN2**)
- “In the Algerian context, higher education students seem to have irregular attendance in their classes though attendance is mandatory.” (**IN6**)

In the first example from **IN2**, the student makes three false presumptions without providing any valid arguments to support her claims. First, she assumes that listening and speaking skills are not given the attention they deserve by teachers. Then she declares that EFL students are unable to speak English fluently. Finally, she seems to be certain that teachers are not doing their job properly in their speaking classes. We also notice that the two problem statements (**IN2 & IN6**) suffer from the phenomenon of overgeneralization where the students refer to most/all Algerian students encounter issues in speaking fluently

and miss their classes while their (i.e.; the researchers) studies were particularly limited to the context of the English Department at Blida 2 University.

In addition to making false assumptions, the analysis of the problem statement in **IN5** showed that the student confused the problem statement section with the background of the study. That is, instead of describing the research problem in relation to the context within which her study was conducted, she reviewed previous studies related to the topic under discussion as shown in the following excerpt:

**“Holi Ibrahim (2013)** states that "grade inflation has become a prevalent phenomenon in English language teaching contexts particularly EFL and ESL ones" (p. 93). **Sonner (2000)** stated that "A recent article by scholars at Princeton University (**Farley, 1995**) cited research finding that only 10% to 20% of all college students receive grades lower than B-"(p.05). Based on some previous research, it seems that grade inflation in education maybe an illegal act in grading students. **Boretz (2004)** claims that the wide acceptance in academia of the phrase 'grade inflation' has damaged the academic ethos in general (p.46). Therefore, we need to investigate the teachers and students' beliefs and attitudes towards this issue in the English department at Blida 2 University.”

Another student in **IN1** confused the statement of the problem with the aim of the study. As illustrated in the example below, she wrote only two lines and a half to, supposedly, state the research problem. Nevertheless, this was not the case as she stated the purpose of the study instead.

“This challenging situation is **to know whether first language use in EFL learning and teaching is facilitative or debilitating strategy** taking into consideration the teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards that issue.”

### **5.2.2.3. Writing the Research Rationale/Significance of the Study Section:**

The analysis revealed that writing the research rationale section represented another hurdle for the students. As indicated earlier in the literature review chapter (section 1.3.1.3), this section is made up of two main elements namely the expected benefits of the research and the research gap. Nevertheless, it appeared that the rationale section was not given the weight it deserved in four introductions (**IN1, IN2, IN3 & IN5**). In each of these introductions, the students included one of the aforementioned elements and ignored the

other. For example, there was an attempt to mention the expected outcome(s) of the study in **IN1**, **IN2** and **IN3**, yet the students did not provide further details (just a few sentences) about the practical benefits associated with the solution of the problem addressed in the statement of the problem. In these introductions, however, the second part of the rationale (i.e.; identifying the gap in the literature) was completely ignored. The opposite is true in **IN5** where the student tried to state the research gap but did not show how her study would add to the existing knowledge and contribute to the development of the field of interest.

**5.2.2.4. Formulating Good Research Questions:** As already stated by some students during the interview, formulating good research questions represented a big challenge for them. Indeed, this problem was confirmed by the content analysis which revealed two main issues related to the way the research questions were formulated and the extent to which they were clear to the reader. With regard to the first issue, the analysis of four introductions (**IN1**, **IN3**, **IN4** & **IN5**) showed that the research questions were formulated in such a way that two or more questions were asked at once, and a single answer was required. To illustrate, in **IN1**, the student wrote the following research question:

‘What are the Teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards the effect of first Language on EFL learner’s writing?’

This is a compound question which contains two questions and requires two separate answers because learners’ attitudes might differ from those of teachers. Therefore, the question should have been divided into two separate questions as follows:

- a. What are the Teachers’ attitudes towards the effect of first Language on EFL learner’s writing?
- b. What are the learners’ attitudes towards the effect of first Language on EFL learner’s writing?’

The same problem was identified in the remaining introductions as demonstrated by the following examples:

- **IN3:** What are the most recurrent types of classroom talk produced by both the teachers and the students?

This question should be broken into the following questions: **a).** What are the most recurrent types of classroom talk produced by the teachers? and **b).** what are the most recurrent....by the students?

- **IN4:** What is the view on teaching and learning literature in regard of its effects on students' intercultural competence?

Again, the same remark applies to this question which should be divided into two questions: one about the **view on teaching** and another about the **view on learning**.

As far as the issue of clarity is concerned, the analysis showed that the following research question in **IN4** included an ambiguous and complex term (*theoretical literature*) that might be interpreted differently by the target audience especially that the meaning of the term has not been explained in the **definitions of key terms**' section.

- To what extent teachers' and students' perceptions meet the specifications formulated in the theoretical literature regarding the effects of literature on students' intercultural competence?

Also, as already noted in the review chapter (section 1.3.1.5), it is very important to specify who the participants are and state the research setting in the research question(s). Nevertheless, the research questions in (**IN1, IN3 & IN4**) did not include such information. This point can be clarified by the following example from **IN1**:

- What are the Teachers (*who are these teachers?*) and learners' (*who are these learners?*) attitudes towards the effect of first Language on EFL learner's writing? (*where are these students and learners from? Where did the study take place?*).

The focus of the next section is on the schematic structure of the literature review and the main challenges faced by the students in writing this chapter.

## 5.3. The Literature Review Chapter

### 5.3.1. *The Schematic Structure of the Literature Review Chapter: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps*

According to Chen and Kuo's framework, the literature review is made up of five moves: introduction, establishing one part of the territory of one's own research, creating a research need, occupying the research niche by announcing, and conclusion.

**5.3.1.1. Introduction:** According to Chen and Kuo's framework, the only **Step** employed to accomplish the introductory move consists of two parts: indicating organization of the review chapter and justifying the themes (areas) to be reviewed. While the second

part of the step was absent in all the literature review chapters, the first part was realized by providing a general overview of the sections and elements to be included in the chapter as shown by the following excerpt from LR3:

**“This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section** attempts at defining interaction and its types. Thenceforth, it addresses the main theories of interaction that justify the need of interaction in language learning. **The second section** in chapter one attempts particularly at defining the term “T-S” classroom interaction and its main types.... **The third section** aims at establishing the role of T-S classroom interaction in facilitating language learning.”

**5.3.1.2. Move 1: Establishing One Part of the Territory of One’s Own Research:** The **first step** (*Surveying the non-research related phenomena or knowledge claims centrality*) to establish the territory showed up in three review chapters (**LR2, LR4 & LR5**) in form of statements where the students claimed the need to further review important themes related to their research topics as indicated by the following examples:

- “Summerville et al., (1990) point out that it is clear that the grade point average had climbed farthest in the preceding decade and was now apparently levelling out. Therefore, **more research in this concern** – if the GPA is levelling out - **may yield in a more accurate result.**” (LR5)
- “**If literature teaching** is taken **more methodologically** by teachers and learners, **they will embark on** a change that may enable more awareness about the way they deal with the literary texts they study in the classroom in the regard of developing intercultural competence.” (LR4)

**Step 2** (*Surveying the research-related phenomena*) appeared in all the review chapters where the students defined the constructs, highlighted the main theories and stated the research findings that were relevant to their research topics.

**5.3.1.3. Move 2: Creating a Research Need (in response to move 1): Step 1** (*Counter-claiming*) was absent in all the review chapters. The students did not identify the problems and weaknesses in the studies they reviewed. As for **Step 2** (*Gap-indicating*), it was absent in four chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR3 & LR4**) and present in **LR5** and **LR6**. In these two chapters, there was an attempt to shed light on the fact that the literature related to the

topics under investigation was scarce and there were areas that need further exploration as shown in the following excerpt from LR5:

“There are many studies conducted on various aspects of grade inflation including its causes and the consequences. **However, there have been few studies, if any, which have investigated the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and students** regarding the issue of grade inflation. Thus, it is important to investigate this latter.”

Regarding **Step 3** (*Asserting formative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed*), it is only in some sections of LR3 and LR5 that the students tried to highlight the significance of the theories and approaches related to their research topics as indicated in the following excerpts:

- “The **CBA** is a very recent approach which emphasizes the outcomes of learning....**The CBA is important** since it has become a **privileged matter in education** as it calls the learners to make into action their values, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors to cope appropriately with challenges they might be exposed to.” (LR3)
- “**Normative ethical theory** attempts **to explain morality and righteousness of actions** and **behaviors**. This theory **studies the issue** of how we opt to live and act. It attempts **to find** what is for an action to be **morally acceptable**. Also, it provides a **system of principles, rules and procedures** for determining what a person should do and what he/she should not do.” (LR5)

Like step 3, **Step 4** (*Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research*) was also present in only two chapters; more specifically in some sections of LR3 and LR5 as demonstrated by the following examples:

- “Out of the three above types, **we opted to study teacher-student interaction in particular**, considering that language learning occurs best when the learner and a more knowledgeable other (the teacher) interact with each other, and whereby the latter guides the learner.” (LR3)
- “The inconsistency of grade distribution.... urged the Ministry of Higher Education to develop this grading system to protect the students' grades.... **This can be a tool to mitigate the effect** of grade inflation when it exists in some universities to allow fair chances to students from all universities.” (LR5).

Regarding the two remaining steps utilized to create a research need, while all the chapters we analyzed showed no trace of **Step 5** (*Synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework*), **Step 6** (*Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area*) was signaled by linguistic expressions such as “we conclude that...” and “the following section...” in three chapters (**LR2, LR3 & LR4**). The following excerpts are given for illustration:

- “After considering the importance of fluency in speaking, types of fluency activities will be discussed in the next section” (**LR2**)
- “We conclude that good interaction cannot take place if the teacher does not have the attitudes, skills and willingness to allow for it.” (**LR3**)
- “Since literature is a wide subject that cannot be defined in few lines, this section has so far provided the definitions of literature, that are considered as a starting point for demonstrating the term in the regard that literature can improve EFL teaching in a key number of areas, which will be addressed in the following sections.” (**LR4**)

**5.3.1.4. Move 3: Occupying the Research Niche by Announcing:** While the **first step** (*Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses*) to occupy the niche was only present in the last section of **LR4** as shown in the following excerpt: “Based on the above statement and the fact that our research investigates the teachers' perceptions towards the effect of literary texts on enhancing intercultural competence...”, the remaining steps (**Step 2:** *Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks*, **Step 3:** *indicating research design and processes*; **Step 4:** *Interpreting terminology used in the dissertation*) did not appear in any of the literature review chapters.

**5.3.1.5. Conclusion:** Like the introductory move, the concluding move is realized by a step which is composed of two parts: *Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study*. In the chapters we analyzed, we found that the two parts were present in three conclusions (**LR4, LR5 & LR6**), while only the first part of the step (i.e., summarizing the review) was accomplished in **LR1, LR2 and LR3**. This can be demonstrated in the following excerpts:

**Excerpt 1 from LR5 where both parts are present:**

**Part 1 (Summary of the chapter):** “This chapter was divided into seven sections. It has reviewed the meaning of grade inflation as a first section. The second section



gave a general overview about the rise of grade point average (GPA) through time. As for **the third section**, it summarized some possible factors responsible for grade inflation. As far as **the fourth section** is concerned, the possible effects of grade inflation were stated. **Concerning the fifth one**, the issue of grade inflation in terms of ethics was discussed. **The sixth section** was devoted to the notion of low and high grading departments. Finally, **the last section** stated some grading standards in Algeria to prepare the ground for the practical side of this research.”

**Part 2 (Relating the review to the present study):** “There have been **few studies**, if any, which have **investigated the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and students** regarding the issue of **grade inflation**. Thus, it is important to investigate this latter. **The following part of the study will be practically dealing with grade inflation in Algerian universities**. The study adopts specific tools and targets specific sample in order to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and students towards grade inflation.”

**Excerpt 2 from LR1 where only part one (i.e., summarizing the review) was present:**

“In this chapter **we attempted to give a brief definition** of; L1, EFL, FL in addition to writing skill since we are interested in it as an essential skill, also identifying the effect of using L1 in EFL, **we provided some factors** behind learners’ poor writing. Besides, **we tried to explain** a brief history of using L1 on EFL, **then we defined** language transfer and recognized the types of language transfer, **then discussing** the two approaches used to study language transfer and **tried to find** some examples of using L1 on EFL writing, finally, **the last section is devoted to** teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards the effect of L1 on EFL writing.”

**Table 03** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the literature reviews we analyzed.

### ***5.3.2. Challenges in Writing the Literature Review Chapter***

The analysis of the literature reviews revealed the following challenges:

**5.3.2.1. Paraphrasing Ideas:** Students’ inability to restate others’ ideas in their own words was another challenge experienced by students in three review chapters (**LR1, LR2 & LR4**). The three students relied heavily on direct quotations to support their claims and opened the space for others’ ideas to dominate their texts while their voices and positions

remained unnoticed. Indeed, the overdominance of quotations indicates that the students did not understand the meaning conveyed in the sources they cited. Hence, they kept copying and pasting texts verbatim as they probably were afraid they would change the intended meaning of the original source and steer away from the main topic.

In fact, even when the students attempted to paraphrase some texts, they failed to do so adequately as shown in the table below. Please note that the underlined words refer to the similarities between the original and the paraphrased texts.

**Table 5.1. Comparison between Original and Paraphrased texts**

| Chapter number | Original text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Student's paraphrase                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LR2            | <p>The appropriate use of language forms <u>is important for learner's oral proficiency</u> (Saunders &amp; O'Brien, 2006). <u>Linguistic</u> factors include <u>several</u> features <u>like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary</u></p> <p>Source: Derakhshan, A., Khalili, A. N. &amp; Beheshti, F. (2016). Developing EFL learner's speaking ability, accuracy and fluency, <i>English Language and Literature Studies</i>, 6(2), pp. 177-186.</p>                                      | <p>According to Saunders and O'Brien (2006) as cited in Derakhshan et al, (2016) linguistic knowledge <u>is important for learner's oral proficiency</u>. <u>Linguistic</u> elements consist of <u>several</u> aspects <u>like vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar</u></p>                       |
| LR4            | <p>But it also develops their intercultural competence i.e. <u>their ability</u> to ensure <u>a shared understanding by people of different social</u> identities, and <u>their ability</u> to interact with <u>people as complex human</u> beings <u>with</u> multiple <u>identities and their own individuality</u>.</p> <p>Source: Byram, M., Gribkova, B. &amp; Starkey, H. (2002). <i>Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching</i>. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.</p> | <p>Byram states two vital abilities; <u>the ability</u> of <u>a shared understanding by people of different social</u> backgrounds and <u>the ability</u> of a successful interaction between <u>people as complex humans with</u> many different <u>identities and their own individuality</u></p> |

Despite their reliance on substitution strategies such as using synonyms (e.g., *include = consist of, features = aspects, multiple = different*) to modify a few words in their texts, the students maintained the same writing style and kept almost all the words as they appeared in the original texts. Doing so is not acceptable in academic writing and considered as a bad paraphrase. This inability to re-explain the passages in their own words can be attributed to the fact that the students did not understand the passage or maybe it is due to their low language proficiency and limited vocabulary as they declared during the interview.

**5.3.2.2. Identifying the Research Gap:** Though it is one of the most important steps in research writing, the analysis confirmed the students' claims during the interview and showed that identifying the gap in research was one of the most daunting tasks for them. Actually, the end point of previous related research is the starting point of a new research. In further detail, it is through discussing previous studies' findings and critically evaluating the methodological strengths and weaknesses that the researcher can identify the gap in research and establish the need to investigate a particular issue. However, this was not the case in the review chapters we analyzed. All the sections on previous related studies were just summaries of the main findings and the tools used to collect data; none of the students showed an attempt to cast light on the aspects that remained unexplored or the questions and objectives that were not adequately addressed. In other words, the students did not indicate how the gap identified in existing research would be filled through new research which in turn would contribute to the development of the field concerned as the following lines show:

\*Please note that the statements written in italics are the researcher's comments.

- “However, there have been few studies (*anything to say about these studies? What were their strengths? Weaknesses?*), if any, which have investigated the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and students regarding the issue of grade inflation. Thus, it is important to investigate this latter.” (*Why is it important? How is it related to previous studies? How is it going to solve the problem and add to the existing knowledge?*) (LR5)
- “This problem did not receive attention in the Algerian context particularly in the English Department of Blida 2 University in which studies dealing with absenteeism are not found. Therefore, it is important (*why is it important? what are the benefits?*) to conduct this study. It is hoped that this research will add more to the existing body of literature (*How is the gap going to be addressed? What is new about this research?*).” (LR6)

**5.3.2.3. Synthesizing Knowledge Claims and Establishing a Theoretical Position/Framework:** The analysis revealed that all the students failed to show the relationship (similarities and differences) between the ideas discussed by each author in the field of interest. In other words, there was no attempt from the part of the students to create significant and logical connection between the sources and show how they (i.e.; sources) were relevant to their (i.e.; students) own research topics. Rather, the students' focus was

limited to summarizing different sources instead of showing their positions as writers through interpreting and critically evaluating areas of agreements and disagreements between the ideas presented. As a result, the students did not succeed in establishing their theoretical frameworks (approaches) that would help them specify the relationships among variables and concepts and, later, interpret their research findings.

**5.3.2.4. Interpreting Terminology:** Interpreting terminology means providing operational definitions of the key variables and concepts used in the study. As already noted in the literature review chapter (section 1.3.1.7), these definitions involve a set of characteristic features that describe the key terms and explain how they are defined and applied within a particular context to avoid confusion. However, despite their importance in achieving clarity in writing, they were overlooked in all the review chapters where the students focused on listing other scholars' definitions without showing how they (i.e.; definitions) were related to their research contexts. As a result, this would inevitably lead readers to work hard to find out which of the definitions better reflects the meaning intended by the researcher in a particular context.

**5.3.2.5. Citing and Referencing Sources:** Several issues related to citing and referencing sources were identified in all the review chapters. This section is, therefore, divided into two parts: the first part aims at casting light on the main issues related to citing references in text, while the second part is concerned with issues identified in the lists of references.

#### **5.3.2.5.1. In-text Citations**

**a. Incorrect use of 'et al.':** According to the two referencing styles identified in the literature reviews (APA & MLA), when a source written by three or more authors is cited for the first time in the text, all the authors' names should be fully stated. However, when the same source is mentioned in subsequent citations, the abbreviation '**et al.**' (*which stands for the Latin expression 'et alia.', i.e.; and others*) is used instead. This rule, nevertheless, was not respected by the students in their texts. That is, the abbreviation '**et al.**' was used even when the source was cited for the first time as shown in the following examples:

- “Nunan (2001: 225) as cited in **Farabi et al.**, (2017) argues that...” (LR1)
- “**Nicholas et al.** (2001: 732-733) further state that....” (LR3)

- “**Millman et al.**, (1983) add “Although faculty may still have the same 5-point scale from "A" to "F" to work with, they are effectively using fewer grade categories if only a trivial number of low grades are given.” (LR5)
- “Therefore, **Pudaruth et al.** (2013) argued that classroom attendance eases students interaction through team work...” (LR6)

**b. Writing both the first name and the family name in some citations:**

Though the rule in both styles requires writers to mention only the author(s)’ surname(s)’ when citing others’ ideas in their texts, the students in **LR1, LR2, LR3** and **LR4** did not take it into consideration in their in-text citations. That is, each time they inserted an idea that was not theirs, they mentioned both the family and first names as shown in the examples below.

According to the APA and MLA styles, what the students did (i.e., adding the first name or the initial) is only necessary when citing authors with the same name to avoid confusion.

**LR1 (APA):**

- “Brown (2000:16, as cited in **Mufeed jadallah, fuad Hasan**: 2) argued that “virtually nothing to enhance students’ communication ability in the language”.
- “Larsen-freeman (2000, as cited in **Maedah Alemi and Ehteramsadat Tavakoli**, 2016:2) claims that “Audio –lingual method drills students in the use of grammatical sentence patterns”

**LR2 (APA):**

- **Iswara Abi Andaya, Azid Abdul and Rochsantiningsih Dewi** (2012) investigated how...
- **Noor Sapuan, Apriliaswati Rahayu & Rosnija Eni** (2012) conducted a study....

**LR3 (APA):**

- “In favor, the learner can use such skills not only in examinations or an educational setting....” **Chelli, S.**(2009).
- “Teacher-student classroom interaction is defined by **Malamah-Thomas** (1987) as a classroom interaction model that allows mutual cooperation between the teacher and the students.”

**LR4 (MLA):**

- “language is an integral part of social life, with all its ruses and iniquities, and that a good part of our social life consists of the routine exchange of linguistic expressions in the day-to-day of the social interaction” (**Piere Bourdieu**, 1).

**c. Repeating the same author(s)’ name(s) several times instead of using ‘ibid.’:** This was another common APA and MLA styles’ error identified during the analysis of five review chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR4, LR5 & L6**). As indicated by the examples below, within the same paragraph the students discussed a set of ideas borrowed from a single source. Thus, each time a new idea from the same source was stated, they repeated the name(s) of the author(s). Yet, this should not be the case as the rule says that if writers borrow more than once from the same source in the same section without including ideas from a different source, they are required to mention the name of the author only in the first citation and replace it by the abbreviation ‘ibid.’, which means ‘in the same place’, when citing the same work.

#### **Examples:**

**LR1:** “**Prodromou (2002)** also conducted a famous research to investigate the attitudes towards the use of their native language to learn English. The study aimed to find out whether learners’ proficiency level affected their attitude towards using L1.... **Prodromou (2002)** concluded that the students became....”

**LR2:** “Furthermore, **Khan (2011) as cited in Songbatumis, (2017)** argues that students are demotivated to comprehend English when there is the lack of English purposes.... Moreover, it gets more difficult for teachers to encourage students to be enthusiastic in using English due to the lack of English exposure. **Khan, (2011) as cited in Songbatumis, (2017)**”

**LR4:** The philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society” (Cited in **Frank, 3**).... The surface culture includes Products (the things members of a group create, share, and transmit to the next generation) (**Frank, 3**). This level of culture can be easily identified by EFL learner.... On the other hand, sub-surface culture and deep culture embody: Perspectives (what members think and value) and Practices (how members communicate with one another.) (**Frank, 3**).

**d. Absence of page number in direct quotations:** According to the APA and MLA styles, mentioning the page number is prerequisite when quoting texts verbatim. However, this rule was often ignored by the students in four review chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR3 & LR5**) as illustrated by the following examples:

- **LR2:** Finnocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) as cited in Nurkhasanah, (2011) consider its complexity in “the knowledge of sound, vocabulary and cultural sub-system of English language which are involved” *(page number missing)*
- **LR3:** ...which is defined by Yu (2016) as the “limited participation or lack of participation during classroom interaction. It does not refer to the pause or hesitations that occur during periods of speech”. *(page number missing)*
- **LR5:** Stanoyevitch, (2008) claims that “students rapidly realize instructors who practice grade inflation and seek to choose their classes” *(page number missing)*

**e. Absence of quotation marks:** While the MLA style (8<sup>th</sup> ed.) requires writers to give information about the author(s)’ name(s)’ and page number when they copy others’ words verbatim, the APA style (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) entails adding the year of publication. In addition to acknowledging the source of the material, writers need to put the copied text between inverted commas (quotation marks) if it is made up of less than 40 words (short quotation). However, this rule was not fully respected in four review chapters (**LR1, LR3, LR4 & LR5**) as illustrated by the following examples:

- **LR1 (APA):** Writing is a complex process which demands cognitive analysis and linguistic synthesis (Nunan, 1989, as cited in Aref Nassi Abuduh Nasser, 2016: 136). *(No quotation marks)*
- **LR3 (APA):** Mercer (2003: 74) defines “dialogic talk” as the one in which both the teacher and the students participate significantly and whereby students’ thinking is welcomed. *(No quotation marks)*
- **LR4 (MLA):** Collie and Slater have mentioned that literature is the passport which allows students to travel to any country without leaving their own **(08)**. *(No quotation marks)*

**f. Inappropriate format of long quotations:** Three review chapters included a set of long quotations that were used by the students to support their claims. These quotations, however, were inserted between inverted commas in the three reviews (**LR3, LR4 & LR5**) and written as part of the text in **LR3**. By so doing, the students violated the

rule which says that when writers quote a text that is more than three lines (40 words), the text should be placed as a free-standing block and the quotations marks should be omitted.

**g. Wrong use of round brackets:** Another remarkable error in three review chapters (**LR1, LR2 & LR4**) was the inappropriate use of round brackets or parentheses when citing sources in text. This can be better illustrated by the following examples:

- **LR1 (APA):** They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting. Burns & Joyce, (1997) as cited in Rahim, (2016).

In this example, the student mentioned the source at the end of the citation. That is, the names of the authors are not stated in the sentence. Hence, the student should have included the names between parentheses along with the year of publication as follows: *(Burns & Joyce, 1997 as cited in Rahim, 2016).*

- **LR2 (APA):** Howat in (1984:131, as cited in Karakas, 2019:1-2) states that “Grammar and Translation are actually not the distinctive features of GT, since they were already well accepted as basic principles of language teaching”

In order to show the beginning and end of the citation, it would have been better if the student cited the secondary source at the end of the sentence and the original source at the beginning. Also, she should have neither added the preposition ‘*in*’ after ‘Howat’ nor mentioned the page number ‘*131*’. To put differently, the in-text citation should have been written as follows: Howat (1984) states that “Grammar and Translation are actually not the distinctive features of GT, since they were already well accepted as basic principles of language teaching” (as cited in Karakas, 2019:1-2).

- **LR4 (MLA):** Ghosn (2002) p 175 has mentioned that literature can provide students with the needed language exposure to raise their linguistic competence of the target language. The more they read the more they become knowledgeable.

It is worth reminding that the student in **LR4** used the MLA style. Hence, the first error he did was mentioning the year of publication though it is not required in the style adopted. Rather, he should have only mentioned the author’s name and the page number. Also, we notice that the author’s name was included as part of the sentence (i.e.; in text) not at the end of the sentence (i.e.; in reference). Hence, the student should have mentioned the page number (between round brackets) at the end of the citation as follows: Ghosn has mentioned



that “literature can provide students with the needed language exposure to raise their linguistic competence of the target language. The more they read the more they become knowledgeable.” **(175)**

**h. Other related errors:** In addition to the common aforementioned errors, the following are concerned with specific chapters only:

❖ **Absence of publication year:** This error frequently occurred in **LR1** where most of the secondary sources, as shown in the following examples, were cited without the year of publication though the style followed was the APA:

- Harmer (2007b) stated that *"the main task of the teacher is to motivate and provoke the students"*(cited in Ghodbane, **year of pub.?** pp67).
- As Kharma and Hajjaj's (1989) study stated that *"large number of teachers resort to L1 for explaining grammar"* (cited in, Al-Nofaie, **year of pub.?** pp69).

❖ **Inconsistent use of referencing styles: switching between two styles (MLA & APA):** This issue mainly concerns the fourth review chapter (**LR4**) in which the student, supposedly, used the MLA style. The analysis of this chapter showed that the student used a hybrid method of citing sources in text. That is, while the MLA style (*i.e.; mentioning only the author's name when it is a paraphrased idea and adding the page number when it is a direct quotation*) was dominant in some sections, sources in other sections were cited according to the APA style (*author's name + year of publication + page number when quoting*) as shown in the following examples:

- **MLA: Clanet** stated that intercultural competence represents “all the processes – psychic, relational, group-related, institutional – generated by cultural interactions, in a relationship of reciprocal exchanges and with a view to protecting a relative cultural identity among the partners involved” (**qtd. in Thiéblemont-Dollet, 2**). *(This example was taken from the third section in the chapter).*
- **APA: Byram (1997)** defines attitudes as “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours.” **(34)**. *(This example was taken from the fourth section in the chapter)*
- **MLA:** The word literature means "things made from letters " (**qtd. In A brief overview of literary genres. 30**). *(This example was taken from the sixth section in the chapter)*

- **APA:** For Maley (1989:12), “literature represents universality, by raising issues inspired by life experiences, have been encountered by some people and may encounter some others.” (*This example was taken from the sixth section in the chapter*)

❖ ***Writing the title of the document in text though the author’s name is present:***

In addition to the aforementioned issue, we found that many citations in **LR4** included the title of the document along with the author’s name and page number. By so doing, the rule that requires mentioning the title of the document only when the latter is anonymous was not fully respected by the student. This can be demonstrated by the following examples:

- Byram states that the concept of 'culture' has changed over time from emphasis on literature, the arts and philosophy to culture as a shared way of life (Intercultural dimension, 5)
- Moss writes “The cover-to-cover study of literary texts involves a careful examination of the front and back covers, dust jacket, endpapers, front matter such as the dedication and title pages, author’s notes, and other text and pictures that precede or follow the story text.” (literature literacy & comprehension strategies, 7).

❖ ***Too many direct quotations in LR1 and LR4:*** To add credibility to their writing, students are required to support their claims and arguments by what scholars in the field of interest have said. This is generally accomplished through the three common academic writing methods: summarizing, paraphrasing and quoting. The latter was found to be the most frequently used in **LR1** and **LR4** though it is not always a good way to cite sources. This is because the overuse of direct quotations instead of relying on one’s own style to restate others’ ideas may give a bad impression about the paper which looks like a shopping list. In other words, readers might think that the writer did not fully grasp the gist of the text or s/he lacks the necessary language and critical thinking skills that would allow her/him to use her/his own style and expressions. This is why s/he had this only way to rely on to strengthen her/his claims.

❖ ***Overuse of secondary sources in LR1 and LR2:*** The analysis revealed an overdependence of citing secondary sources in **LR1 (32 sources)** and **LR2 (20 sources)**. According to **Kumar (2019, p. 77)**, over-reliance on secondary sources in research writing is not advisable because:

- The second-hand information may be influenced by researcher's own bias and perception.
- Interpretation of second-hand information is challenging and may lead to errors.
- There is possibility of errors in presentation of findings.
- Sometimes, secondary sources fail to give a detailed description of work.

Indeed, we noticed that the use of secondary sources did not leave enough, not to say any, space for the writers to present their voices assertively and make their positions clear in relation to the source materials being integrated. In other words, the writers in the two chapters gave the floor to the secondary sources to do their job (such as, interpreting ideas of the original authors, showing connections between sources and commenting on similarities and differences between them) instead of doing it themselves. This point can be better illustrated by the following example from **LR1** in which secondary sources dominated the texts and the writer's position remained in the background:

“Accordingly, Woodal (2002, as cited in AbiyYigzaw, 2013:13) claimed that learners who have less knowledge about the second or the foreign language tend to use L1 in their writing more than the second language or FL. The term transfer is a Latin word derived from the Webster's third world international dictionary (1986 as cited in Moklesur Rahman, 2015:805) “transfere” means “to bear” or “to carry” or to “to print”. In the same sense, Jarvis and Odlin (2000:573, as cited in Maria Alonso Vazquez, 2005:25-42) stated that, “learners may retain something from their L1 to aid in coping with new challenges”....To conclude, Faeres and Kaplan (1987, as cited in KhalesKarim, hosseinNassaji, 2013:12), Argued that “transfer is a mental and a communicative process.”

#### **5.3.2.5.2. List of References**

**a. Absence of publication information in some references:** The analysis of the lists of references revealed that many sources were incompletely cited. When citing books, for example, information about the year and place of publication and publisher were not mentioned in **LR1**, **LR2** and **LR4**. As for electronic journal articles, the students in **LR1**, **LR2**, **LR4** and **LR5** did not give details about the year of publication, the volume number, the issue number, the DOI (Digital Object Identifier) or URL (Universal Resource Locator) and the access date. Further, in her list of references (in **LR1**), the student inappropriately cited chapters extracted from different books. That is, in addition to the absence of the

chapters' page number(s) and the publishers, the student just mentioned the names of the chapters' authors without stating the names of the authors or editors of the books where the chapters appeared.

In addition to books, journal articles and book chapters, Master/magister dissertations from institutional databases were cited in the lists of references of **LR1** and **LR2**. However, when citing these dissertations, the students did not fully adhere to the APA style conventions as they ignored important details in their citations. These details include the degree (Master, Magister or Ph.D.), name of the institution, the location, the access date, the URL (i.e.; the link to the university's website).

All the cases highlighted in this section can be better illustrated by the following examples:

**Table 5.2. Cases on Absences of Publication Information in References**

| <b>Cases identified in the literature reviews</b> | <b>Examples</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Case 1: citing books</b>                       | <p><b>Note:</b> phrases and words in italics are the missing information in the reference entry.</p> <p><b>Example from LR1 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Richards, J.C &amp; Schmidt, R. (2002). <i>Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i> (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). (<b>place of publication?</b>): (<b>Publisher?</b>)</p> <p><b>Example from LR2 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Harmer, J. (2001). The practice of English language teaching. (3rd ed). (<b>No publication?</b>): (<b>publisher?</b>)</p> <p><b>Example from LR4 (MLA style):</b></p> <p>Sharifian, Farzad. <i>The Routledge Handbook of Language and Culture</i>. (<b>place of publication?</b>), (<b>publisher?</b>), (<b>year of publication?</b>)</p> |
| <b>Case 2: citing journal articles</b>            | <p><b>Note:</b> phrases and words in italics are the missing information in the reference entry.</p> <p><b>Example from LR1 (APA Style):</b></p> <p>Alonso Vozquez, M. (2005). Transfer and linguistic context in the learning process of English negative structures. "<i>Journal of English and American studies</i>", (<b>volume number?</b>), (<b>issue number?</b>), (<b>page number?</b>), (<b>access date?</b>), (<b>DOI/URL?</b>).</p> <p><b>Example from LR2 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Kayi, H. (2006). Teaching Speaking Activities to Promote Speaking in a Second Language. <i>The Internet TESL Journal</i>, 12 (11), (<b>page number?</b>), (<b>access date?</b>), (<b>DOI/URL?</b>)</p>                                      |

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           | <p><b>Example from LR4 (MLA style):</b></p> <p>Kilickaya, Ferit. «Authentic Materials and Cultural Content in EFL Classrooms.» The Internet TESL Journal, (<i>volume number?</i>), (<i>issue number?</i>), (<i>year of publication?</i>): 1 – 11, (<i>DOI/URL?</i>), (<i>access date?</i>).</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Case 3: citing chapters from books</b> | <p><b>Note:</b> phrases and words in italics are the missing information in the reference entry.</p> <p><b>Example from LR1 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Karakas,A. (2019). “<i>approaches and methods in ELT: Grammar translation method</i>”. (in: <i>editors’ names?</i>), (<i>ed.?</i>), (<i>book title?</i>), (<i>pages of the chapter?</i>), (<i>place of publication?</i>), (<i>publisher?</i>).</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Case 4: citing dissertations</b>       | <p><b>Note:</b> phrases and words in italics are the missing information in the reference entry.</p> <p><b>Example from LR1 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Abiramara, N. (2003). An Analysis of Errors in Arabic Speakers’ English writing, (<i>degree: MA or Ph.D?</i>), American university of Beirut, (<i>location?</i>). (<i>access date?</i>), (<i>URL?</i>) pp.1-66.</p> <p><b>Example from LR2 (APA style):</b></p> <p>Tumova. M, (2012). Speaking activities aimed at developing fluency in EFL classes , (Master thesis), (<i>name of the institution?</i>), (<i>Location?</i>), (<i>Access date?</i>), Retrieved from <a href="https://dk.upce.cz/bitstream/handle/10195/19169/D11785">https://dk.upce.cz/bitstream/handle/10195/19169/D11785</a></p> |

**b. Mismatch between the sources cited in text and those found in the list of references:** Another serious issue detected was the discrepancy between the number of sources cited in the reviews and those referred to in the list of references. In **LR1**, for example, 36 sources appeared in the literature review but were not cited in the list of references. The same problem was identified in the remaining reviews as shown in the table below. This would definitely lead to accusations of plagiarism as it is unknown where the students got the sources cited in their texts from or whether they really consulted those sources.

**Table 5.3. Sources in the List of References**

| Chapter number | Number of sources missing in the list of references |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| LR2            | 12                                                  |
| LR3            | 18                                                  |
| LR4            | 15                                                  |
| LR5            | 03                                                  |
| LR6            | 01                                                  |

**c. The list of references includes sources that do not appear in the literature review chapter:** As opposed to the aforementioned issue where the sources were cited in the text but absent in the lists of references, the analysis also showed that there were some sources stated in the lists of references yet did not appear in the literature reviews as shown in the following table:

**Table 5.4. Sources Absent in Text**

| Chapter number | Number of sources absent in the literature review but cited in the list of references |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LR1            | 25                                                                                    |
| LR2            | 09                                                                                    |
| LR3            | 15                                                                                    |
| LR4            | 09                                                                                    |
| LR5            | 05                                                                                    |
| LR6            | 03                                                                                    |

**d. Inconsistent format of names and year of publication:** The analysis of five review chapters (LR1, LR2, LR3, LR4 & LR6) revealed some inconsistencies between the list of references and the in-text citations in regard to year of publication and author(s)' name(s). In more detail, we found that the publication year of some references cited in text did not correspond with the publication year of the same references in the list. Furthermore, some works cited in text included names of single authors while the same works were referred to in the lists with two or three authors. Examples of each case are presented in the following table:

**Table 5.5. Cases on Incompatible Names Format and Year of Publication**

|                   | Author's name and year of publication in the text                                                                | Author's name and year of publication in the list of references                                                                |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LR1<br>(APA used) | Ghodbane ( <u>year?</u> )<br>Friedlander ( <u>1997</u> )<br>Yigzaw ( <u>2013</u> )<br>Al-Nofaie ( <u>year?</u> ) | Ghodbane, N. ( <u>2010</u> )<br>Friedlander, A. ( <u>1990</u> )<br>Yigzaw, A. ( <u>2012</u> )<br>Al-Nofaie, H. ( <u>2010</u> ) |
| LR2<br>(APA used) | <u>Chaney</u> (1998)<br><u>O'Malley &amp; Pierce</u> (1996)                                                      | <u>Chaney, A. L. &amp; Tamara, L. B.</u> (1998)<br><u>O'Malley, J.M, Valdez pierce, L &amp; Varela, E.</u> (1996)              |

|                          |                                                                              |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                          | <u>Rachmawaty (2015)</u>                                                     | <u>Rachmawaty, N. &amp; Hermagustiana, I. (2010)</u>                                                  |
| <b>LR3</b><br>(APA used) | Krashen <u>(1981)</u><br><br>Ellis <u>(1993)</u><br><br><u>Mackey (2007)</u> | Krashen, S. <u>(2009)</u><br><br>Ellis, R. <u>(1991)</u><br><br>Mackey, A. <u>(1999)</u>              |
| <b>LR4</b><br>(MLA used) | Monfared, <u>Mowhareb</u><br><br>Christine Nordskag                          | Monfared, <u>Abbas et al.</u><br><br><u>Olsen</u> , Christine Nordskag                                |
| <b>LR6</b><br>(APA used) | Sharmin et al. <u>(2016)</u><br><br><u>Mahmood</u> (2017)                    | Sharmin, T. A. Choudhury, S. Kamrun, S. <u>(2017)</u><br><br><u>Khalid, N. and Mahmood, K.</u> (2017) |

**e. Errors in formatting the different types of references:** Because our analysis revealed that two main styles of referencing (APA and MLA) were employed to cite sources in text and the list of references, this section is divided into two parts: the first part highlights the major APA style errors done by the students, while the second part focuses on stating the MLA style errors.

As already noted, the APA style was used in five review chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR3, LR5 & LR6**). Based on the APA style (6<sup>th</sup> edition) guidelines, the following table displays the major errors related to the sources format:

**Table 5.6. Errors in Formatting Sources According to the APA Style**

| Errors | Where did the error appear? | How the student cited the source in the list of references (Examples)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | How s/he should have cited the source in the list of references |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|        | <b>LR2</b>                  | <b>Book:</b><br>Littlewood, W. (1981). <u>Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction</u> . United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press.<br><b>Journal article:</b><br>Nuraini, K. (2016). <u>The Barriers of Teaching Speaking English for EFL Learners</u> . <i>Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching</i> , 1(1), pp.7-14. |                                                                 |
|        | <b>LR5</b>                  | <b>Journal title:</b><br>Miller, G. (2014). " <u>Grade Inflation, Gatekeeping, and Social Work Education: Ethics and Perils</u> ". <i>Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics</i> , 11(1), pp. 12-22.                                                                                                                                           |                                                                 |

|                                                                     |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                     | LR6 | <b>Journal article:</b><br>Ddemir, K. Akman Karabeyoglu, Y. (2016).” <u>Factors Associated with Absenteeism in High Schools</u> ”. <i>Eurasian Journal of Educational Research</i> (62):37-56.                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                          |
| Putting the articles’ and journals’ titles between quotation marks. | LR1 | <b>Journal title between inverted commas:</b><br>Aras Abdelkarim, A. (2017). Linguistic analysis of the phenomenon of language transfer. <u>“IOSR Journal of humanities and social sciences”</u> . Vol.22(4), pp.33.                                                                              | According to the APA style, articles’ and journals’ titles should <b><u>NOT</u></b> be inserted between inverted commas. |
|                                                                     | LR5 | <b>Article title between inverted commas:</b><br>Kolevzon, M. S. (1981). <u>“Grade Inflation in Higher Education: A Comparative Study”</u> . <i>Research in Higher Education</i> , 15(3), pp. 195-212.                                                                                            |                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                     | LR6 | <b>Article title between inverted commas:</b><br>Van Breda, M. (2014). <u>“Schools Truancy: Poor Schools Attenders’ Perceptions of the Impact Regarding Dysfunctional Teachers Learners Relationship on Truant Behaviour Mediterranean”</u> . <i>Journal of Social Sciences</i> 5(23): 1056-1063. |                                                                                                                          |
| Not capitalizing journals’ titles                                   | LR1 | Rahman,M.(2015). Linguistic transfer example from Arabic users of English. <u>“International journal of applied research”</u> . Vol.1 (7), pp 804-806                                                                                                                                             | All content words in the journal title should have been capitalized.                                                     |
|                                                                     | LR2 | Molina, M, & Briesmaster, M. (2017). The Use of the 3/2/1 Technique to Foster Students' Speaking Fluency. <i>i.e.: <u>inquiry in education</u></i> , 9(2), pp. 1-13.                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                          |
| Not italicizing books’ titles and journals’ titles.                 | LR1 | <b>Book:</b><br>Raimes, A. (1994). <u>Techniques in teaching writing</u> . (3rd ed.). Oxford: O.U.P.                                                                                                                                                                                              | According to the APA style, titles of books and journals should be <b><i>ITALICIZED</i></b> .                            |
|                                                                     | LR2 | <b>Book:</b><br>Nunan, D. (1999). <u>Second Language Teaching &amp; Learning</u> . USA: Heinle & Heinle.<br><br>Thornbury, S. (2005). <u>How to Teach Speaking</u> . New York: Pearson Education Inc.                                                                                             |                                                                                                                          |



|                                                                                                                    |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Absence of the ampersand (&)<br><br>OR using the conjunction ‘and’ when citing a source with two authors and more. | LR1 | <b>Two authors:</b><br>Khaled, K <u>and</u> Nassaj,H.(2013). First Language Transfer in Second Language Writing. “ <i>Iranian Journal of Teaching Research</i> ”. Vol.1(1), pp117-134.                                                                    | The students should have used an ampersand (&) instead.                                                                |
|                                                                                                                    | LR6 | <b>Three authors:</b><br><u>Lukkarinen, A. Koivukanges, P. Seppälä, T.</u> (2016). “Relationship between Class Attendance and student Performance”. <i>Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> 288: 341-347.                                        |                                                                                                                        |
| Adding to abbreviation ‘Vol.’ to refer to the volume number in journal articles.                                   | LR1 | Erarslan, A. (2014). Language Interference on English: transfer on the vocabulary, tense and prepositions use of freshman Turkish EFL learners. “ <i>ELTA journal</i> ”. <b>Vol</b> 8 (1) ,pp 11-27.                                                      | The students should have written the volume number without the abbreviation ‘vol’                                      |
|                                                                                                                    | LR3 | Rahman, M. M. (2014). <i>Learning English through interaction in an EFL classroom. Published by American Research Institute for Policy Development. International Journal of Languages and Literatures.</i> June 2014, <b>Vol.</b> 2, No. 2, pp. 203-217. |                                                                                                                        |
| Using ‘et al.’ in the list of references                                                                           | LR6 | <b>Balkis et al.,</b> (2016). “The School Absenteeism among High School Students: Contributing Factors”. <i>Educational Sciences: Theory &amp; Practice</i> 16(6): 1819-1831.                                                                             | The student should have listed all the authors by their family names.                                                  |
| Wrong information about the author, year of publication, book’s title and place of publication                     | LR1 | <b>Walaiporn, C. (n.d).</b> Writing problems and writing strategies of English major and non-English major students in a Thai University. pp 113-136.                                                                                                     | The paper was written by Seensangworn, P and published in 2017                                                         |
|                                                                                                                    | LR2 | Nunan, D. (2004). <b><u>What is task-based language teaching</u></b> ? In Cambridge university press (Ed), Task based language teaching (pp. 1-18). <b><u>United States of America:</u></b> Cambridge University Press.                                   | The title of the book is ‘ <i>Task-based language teaching</i> ’ and the place of publication is Cambridge not the USA |

Turning now to the second part which is devoted to stating the major errors related to the MLA style that was used by only one student (**LR4**). Like the first part, the errors are presented in the following table (Table 5.7):

**Table 5.7. Errors in Formatting Sources According to the MLA Style**

| <b>Errors</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>How the student cited the source in the list of references (Examples)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>How s/he should have cited the source in the list of references</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Not capitalizing all content words in books', articles' and journals' titles                                                     | <b>Journal article:</b><br>Frank, J. (2013). "Raising <u>cultural awareness</u> in the English <u>language classroom</u> ." <i>English <u>teaching forum</u></i> , 4, p.3.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | According to the MLA style, the student should have capitalized all content words in the article's and journal's titles.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Not italicizing book' title and journal title and using the French conjunction 'et' in a book/article with more than one author. | <b>Book:</b><br>Collie, Joanne <b>et</b> Stephen Slater. <b><u>Literature in the Language Classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities</u></b> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.<br><br><b>Journal article:</b><br>Aghagolzadeh, Ferdows <b>et</b> Farzaneh Tajabadi. «A Debate on Literature as a Teaching Material in FLT.» <b><u>Journal of Language Teaching and Method</u></b> (2012): 205 - 210. | The student should have italicized the book and journal titles and used the coordinating conjunction 'and' instead of 'et'                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Giving wrong information about the year of publication and journal title                                                         | Barrett, Martyn. "Intercultural Competence". <b><u>Researchgate</u></b> , vol 106, <b>2016</b> , p. 1., Accessed 28 May 2019.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | The paper was published in 2011 by the European Wergeland Center                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Providing wrong information order when citing a dissertation/thesis                                                              | Olsen, Christine Nordskog (author). <b><u>Promoting Intercultural Competence Through Literature and Film: The Outsiders and Its Adaptation</u></b> (title). <b><u>Thèse de Master</u></b> (degree). <b><u>Hogskolen i Ostfold</u></b> (name of the institution), <b>2018</b> (year of publication).                                                                                                                       | According to the MLA style (8th edition), when citing a dissertation/thesis accessed through an online repository, information in the entry are ordered as follows: name of the author(s), title of the dissertation/thesis (capitalized & italicized), year of publication, name of the institution the author belongs to, and type of the degree (MA or Ph.D.), name of database and order number |

### 5.3.2.6. Grammar and Punctuation Errors

This section sheds light on the grammatical and mechanical errors identified in the literature reviews.

**a. Sentence Fragments:** Sentence fragments was another writing issue identified in two review chapters (**LR2 & LR5**). One of the reasons for these fragments was the absence of verbs as shown in the following example from **LR2**. Please note that the words in italics are the researcher's comments.

The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL) (*Verb?*)  
“different kinds of speaking activities (and consequently assessment task) are appropriate at different levels of proficiency” since as it is asserted by O'Malley & Pierce (1996).

The previous sentence would have been correct if the student used a reporting verb (such as stated, noted, declared, mentioned or reported) after the subject (the American Council) or added the preposition ‘according to’ at the beginning (i.e., According to the American Council) to make the meaning complete.

Further, the use of the dependent part of the sentence alone without the main part is another reason for sentence fragments as demonstrated by the following examples from **LR2** and **LR5**:

- **LR2:** “In a study achieved by Fauzan in Indonesia (2016) where he used the debate technique and peer assessment in order to improve the students’ speaking ability.”  
→ This part of the sentence includes a relative dependent clause, signaled by the relative pronoun ‘**where**’, which aims at giving information about the study conducted by Fauzan.
- **LR5:** “Despite the fact that Juola (1980) claims that “Although there is some evidence that the rate of grade inflation is lessening” (as cited in Millman et al., 1983, p.423)” → These are two concessive dependent clauses signaled by the subordinating conjunctions ‘**despite the fact that & although**’
- **LR5:** “Also, to provide a system of principles, rules and procedures for determining what a person should do and what he/she should not do.” → This is a purpose clause signaled by the conjunction ‘**to**’

Though the dependent/subordinate clauses in the three examples contain subjects and verbs, they still need to be combined with independent/main clauses to express a complete meaning.

**b. Subject-verb Agreement and Verb Tense:** The analysis indicated that subject-verb agreement and verb tense issues occurred quite often in four review chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR4 & LR5**). As for the first issue, we found that many sentences included verbs which did not agree in number (i.e.; singular & plural) with their subjects as the following examples show:

**LR1:** “when a human learn a new language, many interesting obstacles of knowledge and research arise...”

In this sentence, an ‘S’ should have been added to the end of the verb ‘learn’ because the subject ‘a human’ is singular.

**LR2:** “this leads to a great development and enhancement of fluency and aid in constructing interaction in the language classroom...”

In this sentence, the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ is employed to combine two verbs (actions) performed by the same subject. Therefore, an ‘S’ should have been added to the end of the verb ‘aid’ since the subject is singular.

**LR4:** “Moreover, since literary texts deals with a social context that differs from that of students, it requires a huge effort to be interpreted...”

In this sentence, the ‘S’ added to the end of the verb ‘deal’ should be removed because the subject ‘literary texts’ is plural.

**LR5:** “Second, deontological ethics, also known as Kantian ethics, is concerned with the action only...”

In this sentence, ‘are’ should replace ‘is’ because the subject ‘ethics’ is plural.

Regarding the second issue (i.e.; verb tense), we noticed that there were inappropriate shifts in tenses and forms in four review chapters (**LR1, LR2, LR4 & LR5**). They can be better illustrated in the following examples:

**LR1:** After the GTM lose its dominance, the direct method appeared in which it believes that the use of the learners' L1 should be avoided by both the teacher and the learner.

This sentence was taken from a section on the history of L1 and its use in different teaching methods and approaches. The most appropriate verb tense in this case should be the 'past simple tense' because the student is talking about something that happened during a period of time and finished. Thus, instead of 'lose' and 'believes', the student should have written '*lost*' and '*believed*'.

The same remark applies to the following three examples extracted from **LR2** and **LR4**:

**LR2:** Previous researchers noticed that students are motivated by fluency to learn another language, and it is the main thing that leads to language proficiency.

In this sentence, the student is talking about past events; i.e. things that researchers noticed in previous studies. Hence, the underlined verbs should be in the past as follows: *were* motivated, it *was*..., that *led* to....

**LR2:** Students stated that they cannot talk due to the lack of vocabulary and they also do not have any confidence...

The student in this sentence is reporting what the students said in regard to the issue addressed in a particular study. Since the reporting verb 'stated' is in the past, then the tense of the verbs that come after should change. Thus, 'cannot' becomes '*could not*' and 'do not' becomes '*did not*'

**LR4:** The discussion above presents some examples that have shown the efficacy of literary texts.

In this sentence, the student is referring to a previous (finished) section in the chapter. The verb, therefore, should be '*presented*' not 'presents'

Another example from **LR1** portrays the wrong use of verb form. The student wrote:

Many researchers have been investigated students' reasons behind using L1 in their EFL writing.

The verb in this sentence is in the passive form. The latter, according to the grammatical rule, is used when we want to focus on the object not the doer of the action (i.e.; the subject). In the example above, the object is ‘*the students’ reasons behind using L1 in their writing*’. This object was the focus of many researchers (i.e.; the subject) in their studies. Therefore, if the focus of this sentence is on ‘the reasons’, then it should be written as follows: ‘students’ reasons behind using L1 in their EFL writing have been investigated by many researchers.’. Nevertheless, if the focus is on the researchers (i.e. the actor), the verb should be in the active form as follows: ‘Many researchers have investigated students’....’

c. **Wrong Use of Pronoun Referents:** This was another issue pinpointed in five review chapters (LR1, LR2, LR4, LR5 & LR6). The following examples from each chapter are given for illustration:

**LR1:** The process of writing has four stages (*plural*) which are: planning, drafting, editing and final form, the writer goes through it (*singular*) in order to produce its final form.

In this example, the student used the pronoun ‘it’ to, supposedly, refer to the ‘four stages’. However, this pronoun does not agree in number with the referent because it is used to refer to singular words. Thus, the student should have used ‘*them*’ instead of ‘it’.

**LR1:** These findings offered support by cook (*a person*) (2001) which has found that “advanced learners demonstrated good progress...”

The relative pronoun ‘which’ is used to refer to things or objects. Its use in this sentence is inappropriate as the student is referring to a person. Thus, she should have used the pronoun ‘*who*’ instead.

**LR2:** A good speaker should be able to listen well and understand the others then reacts via turn taking. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback.

The pronoun ‘they’ is generally used to refer to a group of people or animals or many things. However, in the sentence above the student should have used the pronouns ‘*she* or *he*’ because the referent is singular ‘a good speaker’.

The opposite is true in the following example from LR4 where the referent is plural while the pronoun referent is singular:

**LR4:** “Moreover, since literary texts deal with a social context that differs from that of students, it requires a huge effort to be interpreted...”

In the sentence above (from **LR4**), the pronoun ‘**they**’ should replace ‘it’ to refer to ‘literary texts’. In this case, even the ‘S’ added to the end of the verb ‘require’ should be removed.

The same problem was detected in the following example from **LR5**:

**LR5:** “When an excellent competent student who scores always As and Bs shares the same grade with less able ones because of inflating grades, this may discourage him from accomplishing his goal.... (Lackey and Lackey, 2006). He adds “grade compression is most unfair to the very best students who share A grades with students...”

In this example, after she presented the researchers’ opinions (Lackey & Lackey) in relation to the topic being studied, the student added a quote said by the same authors using the pronoun ‘He’. The latter, however, does not match the subject (two persons) it is replacing. Thus, the right pronoun to be used is ‘**they**’.

**LR6:** According to Akbasli et al. (2017), ‘Absenteeism’ and ‘Truancy’ are utilized interchangeably. However, they have different connotations, where they used the term Truancy to refer to the learners who intentionally miss school without authorization.

The problem in the sentence above is that the student did not make it clear for readers which word the underlined pronoun ‘**they**’ replaced. In other words, it is not clear whether the pronoun refers to the authors ‘Akbasli et al.’ or the two words ‘absenteeism and truancy’. Hence, to avoid this confusion the underlined pronoun should be either replaced by ‘**the authors**’ if the referent is ‘Akbasli et al.’ or ‘**the term truancy**’ as follows:

- According to **Akbasli et al. (referent)** (2017), ‘Absenteeism’ and ‘Truancy’ are utilized interchangeably. However, they have different connotations, where the authors used the term Truancy to refer to the learners who intentionally miss school without authorization.
- According to Akbasli et al. (2017), ‘Absenteeism’ and ‘Truancy’ are utilized interchangeably. However, they have different connotations, where the term truancy is used to refer to the learners who intentionally miss school without authorization

**d. Parallel Structure (parallelism):** A plenty of sentences with faulty parallel structure were particularly identified in two review chapters (**LR2 & LR1**). However, because it was not possible to state all the cases here, we picked one example from each chapter to illustrate and explain the issue.

**Example 1 from LR2:**

Students try to send messages, share information and exchanging ideas by using the language appropriately.

In the previous example, all actions (**send**, **share**, and **exchanging**) are in the series as they are performed by the same subject (students) and connected with a coordinating conjunction ‘and’. However, this sentence is out of balance because it contains an unparallel mixture of infinitive forms (send & share) and a gerund (exchanging). To achieve parallel structure, the verbs in the series should be in the same form as follows:

Students try to send messages, share information and exchange ideas...

Nearly the same problem was pinpointed in the following example from **LR1**:

Besides, we tried to explain a brief history of using L1 on EFL, then we defined language transfer and recognized the types of language transfer, then discussing the two approaches used to study language transfer.

This example was taken from the conclusion of the review chapter where the student (the subject) provided a summary of what she included in each section. As can be seen, this long sentence is not parallel because the first three verbs in the list (tried, defined, recognized) are in the past tense while the fourth verb (discuss) which was supposed to follow the same form appears as a gerund (discussing). Parallelism, therefore, can be achieved by dividing the long sentence into two sentences and structuring them in the same way as follows:

We explained a brief history of using L1 in EFL, then we defined language transfer and recognized the types of language transfer. Next, we discussed the two approaches used to study language transfer.

**e. Punctuation and Capitalization**

Issues related to punctuation and capitalization are presented in the following table (Table 5.8):



**Table 5.8. Punctuation and Capitalization Issues**

| Chapter number | Examples                                                                                                                                                                                                   | What is the problem?                                                                                                            | What should be done?                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LR1            | According to Mahmoud (2000) one reason students use L1 in their writing, is because the knowledge of L1 is most easily available as a linguistic resource                                                  | A <b>comma</b> should not separate a subject from the verb.                                                                     | A comma should be placed after the year of publication<br>While the comma put before the verb 'is' should be removed.                                                                                                                         |
|                | Kharma and Hajjaj's (1989) study, stated that the <u>arabe</u> students prefer using L1                                                                                                                    | A <b>comma</b> should not separate the subject from the verb.<br>The <b>first letter</b> in the word 'Arab' is not capitalized. | The comma put after the word 'study' should be removed and the first letter in the word Arab should be capitalized.                                                                                                                           |
| LR2            | These last two mentioned elements are considered characteristics of speaking performance but we are going to focus on fluency because of its significance in learning a foreign language.                  | The student did not use a <b>comma</b> to separate the independent clauses in the sentence.                                     | A <b>comma</b> should be placed <b>before</b> the coordinating conjunction ' <b>but</b> '                                                                                                                                                     |
|                | Speaking fluency is also an important component of communication competence, because the ability of speaking fluently can help the speaker to produce continuous speech without comprehension difficulties | The student put a <b>comma</b> after the main clause and before the subordinating conjunction                                   | In a complex sentence, the comma is used to separate the subordinate clause from the main clause if the latter followed the former. However, if the main clause precedes the dependent clause as in the example, the comma should be removed. |
|                | Most of the time, EFL learners avoid making grammatical errors during their speaking production, they often prefer to keep silent rather than producing ungrammatical structure                            | <b>Comma splice:</b><br>A comma is not appropriate to join two independent clauses.                                             | To join these two independent clauses, the student should have used a semi colon or a comma with a coordinating conjunction                                                                                                                   |
|                | Furthermore Savvidou has stated that the reason why                                                                                                                                                        | The student did not use a <b>comma</b>                                                                                          | A <b>comma</b> should be placed right <b>after the transition word</b> (i.e.                                                                                                                                                                  |

|            |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>LR4</b> | the use of literature was rejected                                                                                                              | after the transition word<br>'furthermore'                                          | furthermore) that begins the sentence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|            | Intercultural competence focus on the ability of successfully dealing with the target culture and overcoming difficulties <b>one's</b> can face | The use of an apostrophe + an 'S'                                                   | An apostrophe and an 'S' are added to show the possessive case of a noun.<br>However, this is not the case in the example. This is because the apostrophe and the 'S' are not followed by a noun to show possession. Hence, we should remove both of them or we remove the apostrophe and keep the 'S' so that ' <b>one's</b> ' becomes ' <b>ones</b> ' (plural of one). |
| <b>LR6</b> | Attendance increases the sense of responsibility and commitment of students, they become more responsible for their choices and decisions.      | <b>Comma splice:</b><br>A comma is not appropriate to join two independent clauses. | To join these two independent clauses, the student should have used a semi colon or a comma with a coordinating conjunction.<br>The comma is to be placed before the conjunction.                                                                                                                                                                                        |

It is noteworthy that the aforementioned grammar and punctuation errors occurred in all the dissertations' parts we analyzed. However, to avoid repeating the same issues in each part, we have chosen to highlight them in the literature review chapter as it was generally the longest part in the dissertation. Hence, several examples could be cited to illustrate each issue.

In the section that follows, the schematic structure along with the challenges experienced by the students in writing the method chapter are discussed.

## 5.4. The Method Chapter

### 5.4.1. The Schematic Structure of the Method Chapter: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps

According to Chen and Kuo's framework, the method chapter comprises four moves namely: introduction to the method chapter, describing data collection methods and procedures, delineating methods of data analysis, and elucidating data analysis procedures.

**5.4.1.1. Move 1: Introducing the Method Chapter:** The **first step** in this move (*Indicating chapter/section structure*) appeared as the last step in all introductions except

**M4.** The students presented the sections to be discussed in the body of the chapter. This can be illustrated by the following excerpts:

**M3:** “this chapter first aims at explaining the research paradigm followed in this study, including the mixed method research and the case study. Then, it will reveal the sampling population mainly teachers and students. Third, it will shed light upon the research tools and data analysis procedures.”

**M5:** “Four sections will be described in this chapter. The first section is dedicated to the presentation of the research objectives and questions. After that, we will discuss the sampling of the subjects and describe the research design. The last section will be devoted to present the procedure used to implement the research design.”

**Step 2** (*providing an overview of the study*) in the introductory move was found in all the method chapters except in **M1**. This step was realized through a brief restatement of the research aims and questions in four introductions (**M2, M3, M4 & M5**) in addition to a brief reminder of the previous chapter’s structure (i.e.; the review of the literature) in **M3, M4, M5** and **M6** as shown in the following excerpt from **M3**:

“In the previous chapter, we have introduced the literature review related with our study. We reported what other researchers, theorists and scholars have discussed in regard to our field of interest (reminder of the previous chapter’s content) .... The current study aims at investigating the students’ perceptions towards the role of classroom interaction in facilitating language learning specifically pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary (aim of the study). To this end, we need to deal with the following three questions. The first question tries to show the most recurrent types of classroom talks produced by the teachers and the students. The second question attempts at determining the major factors affecting teacher-student classroom interaction. The last question endeavors to decide the aspects of language learning which are highly promoted by classroom interaction.”

As for the **third step** (*indicating theory/approach*), it was absent in five introductions (**M1, M2, M3, M5 & M6**). It is only in **M4** that the student pointed out to the research design adopted and briefly described the research instruments used to collect data as exemplified through the following excerpt:

“In order to carry out the study, a descriptive research design is used in three steps. First, a structured questionnaire is administered to students alongside with an interview conducted with teachers. As a final step, classroom observation is done to cross check data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews.”

**5.4.1.2. Move 2: Describing Data Collection Methods and Procedure(s):** In the method chapters we analyzed, **Step 1** (*describing the sample*) was realized by a section titled ‘*Participants*’ as the sixth heading in **M1**, ‘*Sample of the study*’ as the second heading in **M2**, ‘*Sampling and population*’ as the second heading in **M3** and second heading in **M6** and ‘*The target population and Sample*’ as the third heading in **M4** and second heading in **M5**.

**Step 2** (*Describing methods and steps in data collection*) was also present in all the chapters. It was accomplished by a section titled ‘*Research instruments*’ as the seventh heading in **M1** and the third heading in **M2**, ‘*Research tools and data analysis procedures*’ as the third heading in **M3**, ‘*Instrumentation and procedures*’ as the fifth heading in **M4** and ‘*The research design*’ as the third heading in **M5** and **M6**. In this section, the students provided a description of the research instruments and how they used them to collect data for their research.

In **M3** and **M4**, we found that **Step 3** (*justifying data collection procedure(s)*) and the previous step (i.e., Step 2) were embedded. That is, in one section the students described the research tools and tried to justify the data collection procedures. However, Step 3 was realized in the remaining chapters by a section titled ‘*Procedures of data collection*’ as the ninth heading in **M1**, the fifth heading in **M2** and the fourth heading in **M5** and **M6**.

**5.4.1.3. Move 3: Delineating Methods of Data Analysis: Step 1** (*Presenting an overview of the data analysis design*) only appeared in one chapter (**M5**) and was disregarded in the remaining chapters. In **M5**, **Step 1** occurred in the introductory section as portrayed in the following excerpt:

“In this section, we explain how we treated and then present the data gathered through the questionnaire administered to teachers and students....The data collected from the questionnaires about teachers and students’ beliefs and attitudes towards grade inflation have been treated quantitatively and qualitatively. We have selected the qualitative approach to treat the data gathered

from one **open-ended** question because it provides us with deeper insights about the topic.... **The responses were analyzed to extract the most significant themes** in the answers provided by the respondents. In addition, **quantitative analysis** was used with **the closed-ended items** of the two questionnaires. This approach is more objective and open to statistical analysis.”

While all the steps of **Move 3** were absent in the fourth method chapter (**M4**), **Step 2** (*Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis*) and **Step 4** (*Justifying the methods of data analysis*) were realized by a section titled ‘**Methods of data analysis**’ as the eighth heading in **M1** and the fourth heading in **M2**. In **M3**, however, these two steps were accomplished by a sub-section titled ‘**Tool administration and analysis procedure**’ as part of a main section titled ‘**Research tools and data analysis procedures**’. That is to say, this main section was divided into two sub-sections where the first was devoted to describe the research tools and the procedures followed in data collection, while the second sub-section focused on the description of the data analysis methods as illustrated by the following excerpt from **M3**:

“As far as the teacher questionnaire is concerned, we have followed the same analysis procedure related to the students’ questionnaire. The teachers’ answers frequencies were counted manually using descriptive statistics. Hence, it is mainly consisted of calculating the percentages. The qualitative analysis of data was about grouping the answered questions for four groups, each group contains students’ answers that share the same theme and the same understanding of the topic under discussion. This can be seen as the process coding and decoding of answers.”

In chapters **M5** and **M6**, **Steps 2** and **4** were achieved by a section titled ‘**Data Treatment and presentation**’. Though the main focus of the method chapter is to provide a detailed account of the research design and data collection and analysis procedures, the students included another part, in the same chapter, to present and interpret the data obtained from the research tools. To be specific, the students divided the method chapter into two main parts: Part one (**Methods and procedures**) and part two (**Data treatment and presentation**) where they explained the methods of data analysis and presented the results. As far as **Step 3** (*Explaining variables and variable measurement*) is concerned, it was absent in all the method chapters.

**5.4.1.4. Move 4: Elucidating Data Analysis Procedure/s:** All the steps in this move were absent in three method chapters (**M1, M2 & M4**) and present in the remaining chapters. In Chapter **M3**, for example, **Step 1** (*Relating/ recounting data analysis procedures*) was embedded in **Steps 2 and 4** in **Move 3** (Delineating methods of data analysis). That is, the student provided a description of the methods used to analyze the data and the procedures followed. As for chapters **M5** and **M6**, **Step 1** was accomplished by a section titled '*Treatment and presentation of data*'. The latter was divided into two main sub-sections: '*Treatment and presentation of quantitative data*' and '*Treatment and presentation of qualitative data*' as shown in the following excerpt from **M5**:

"Data gathered from the closed-ended items of the questionnaires were treated quantitatively; the participants' answers have been turned into numerical values. A quantification of the answers was done as follow: in table 3 below: (SA = Strongly Agree = +2; A = Agree = +1; D = Disagree = -1; SD = Strongly Disagree = -2), and in table 4: 'Never' = 0; 'Rarely' = 1; 'Sometimes' = 2; 'Often' = 3; 'Very often' = 4; 'Always' = 5. These values were then entered in an Excel sheet to calculate the average response for each closed-ended item."

**Step 2** (*Justifying the data analysis procedures*) did not appear in any of the method chapters we analyzed, while **Step 3** (*Previewing results*) was present in two chapters (**M5 & M6**). In these two chapters, **Steps 2 and 3** were incorporated. That is, the students described the research methodology and the analysis procedures and, at the same time, presented their research findings in the '*Treatment and presentation of data's section*'.

**Table 04** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the method chapters we analyzed.

## **5.4.2. Challenges in Writing the Method Chapter**

The analysis of the method chapters revealed the following challenges:

**5.4.2.1. Writing the Research Design Section:** As previously mentioned in the literature review chapter (section 1.5.2), the students are expected to provide a detailed description of the nature of the research design and explain how it was applied. This expectation, unfortunately, was not realized in all the method chapters we analyzed. Though a section titled '*research design*' was present in each chapter, it did not include the necessary details that would allow readers to fully understand the research process. In more detail, the students just referred to the type of the design such as descriptive, exploratory and

experimental, yet they neither explained the rationale for selection nor justified why the design was appropriate to accomplish the research objectives. These flaws can be better demonstrated by the following design section extracted from **M4**:

“To proceed the study and answer the research questions, a mixed approach qualitative and quantitative is suitable to achieve the objectives of the research design. Thus, we have chosen an interpretative paradigm and a descriptive research design, aside from some data that will be treated quantitatively. Because we believe that this suits best investigating perceptions of teachers and students towards the effects of literature on students’ interculturality.”

As shown in the example above, the research design section was hastily and inappropriately written. The student just stated that he chose the descriptive research design because it suited the investigation of the participants’ perceptions towards the topic under study. This information is, however, not sufficient for other researchers who would like to replicate the study in the future.

**5.4.2.2. Writing the Research Setting Section:** As for the research setting, only the name of the academic institution was given. None of the students provided adequate information on the area/the place where the study was conducted and the rationale for selection as shown in the following example from **M1**:

“This research has been conducted at Mohamed Boudiaf secondary school which is located in El-Affroun. At secondary school there are many streams, foreign languages is the interest of this research, their essential subjects are French – English and Spanish.”

**5.4.2.3. Writing the Population and Sample Section:** As noted in the review of the literature (section 1.5.2), researchers are required to provide a satisfactory description of the study’s population and explain the criteria and procedures they followed in selecting the sample. Nevertheless, the analysis revealed that two method chapters (**M1 & M2**) suffer from some flaws in this regard. In **M1**, for example, the student just wrote the following two lines to, supposedly, describe the participants who took part in her study:

“The participants of our study were selected randomly, (30) EFL learners and (07) teachers of English at Mohamed Boudiaf school El-Affroun.”

As we see, this section was not satisfactorily presented as it lacked information about the population of the study and the sample. The student did not explain why she selected secondary school pupils to participate in her study. Also, she referred to the sampling technique used (random) and the number of participants included, but she did not explain how the sample size was established or what sampling procedures she followed.

The same problem was identified in **M2**. The student just stated that she employed a random sampling technique to select the study sample from a population which consisted of students and teachers from the English Department at Blida 2 University. However, she neither showed how the sample size was determined nor elucidated why her sample included only first year students.

**5.4.2.4. Writing the Data Collection Instruments and Procedures Section:** As stated earlier in the review of the literature (section 1.5.2), details about how the study was conducted to address the research question(s) and accomplish the research objectives are of utmost importance. These details include information about the research tools used to collect data, their aims, appropriateness to the nature of the study and the rationale behind the choice of a particular instrument. Some of these details are, however, missing in all the reviewed chapters. To start with, all the students employed questionnaires and interviews as data collection tools in their studies. They have fully described the aims of these tools and the types of items such as Likert scale, multiple choice, dichotomous and open-ended items. Notwithstanding, none of them provided the rationale for the choice of such instruments and how they could help them handle their research questions. Further, it is extremely important to provide details on how aspects of validity and reliability of the research tools were addressed. One way to achieve this is through pilot testing the questionnaires and interviews before employing them in the main study. However, information on this part (such as description of test respondents, procedures followed in the pilot study, reactions of respondents and revisions made to the instruments) were completely ignored by the students in four chapters (**M1, M2, M3 & M5**) and hastily mentioned in chapters **M4** and **M6**.

**5.4.2.5. Writing the Data Analysis Methods and Procedures Section:** The analysis revealed that this section was inadequately presented in all the method chapters. Starting with **M1**, though it included a section titled ‘methods of analysis’, its content was not accurately reflected by the title. That is, instead of providing information on the



statistical methods used and the procedures followed in data treatment and analysis, the student explained what quantitative and qualitative methods meant.

As for chapter **M2**, the student just named the method she used to analyze the data (*descriptive statistics*) and cited a brief definition given by Vetter (2017) to explain the characteristic features of this method as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

**“Descriptive analysis or descriptive statistics** is the most appropriate method to analyze data of student’s’ and teachers’ questionnaire where it demonstrates the percentage that presents the responses of the participants. **According to Vetter (2017: 1797)** ‘Descriptive statistics are specific methods basically used to calculate, describe, and summarize collected research data in a logical, meaningful, and efficient way. Descriptive statistics are reported numerically in the manuscript text and/or in its tables, or graphically in its figures’.”

As shown in the example above, only a few lines were devoted to presenting the data analysis methods and procedures. This presentation, however, lacked so many details which in turn would not allow readers to understand how statistical methods were used to analyze the variables and determine if those methods were appropriate for the type of data (quantitative or qualitative) and the research questions and objectives. Moreover, details about the methods used to analyze qualitative data were totally overlooked by the student though her two questionnaires included a set of open-ended (qualitative) items such as: ‘*According to you, to what extent speaking fluency is important?*’ and ‘*According to you, what are the difficulties that prevent you from speaking fluently?*’

Almost the same problem was detected in chapters **M3**, **M5** and **M6**. In a couple of lines, the students just pointed out that the quantitative data were treated manually using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were coded and thematically divided into groups. Nonetheless, they neither explained in detail how they organized, coded and grouped the qualitative data into themes and categories for further analysis nor described how the descriptive statistics were used to present the data and identify the patterns and relationships as demonstrated by the following excerpt from **M3**:

“The **students’ questionnaire** was **analyzed quantitatively** whereby the students’ answers frequencies were counted manually **using descriptive statistics**. Hence, it is mainly consisted of calculating the percentages. The **qualitative analysis** of data was about **grouping** the answered questions for **four groups**, each group contains

students' answers that share the same theme and the same understanding of the topic under discussion. This can be seen as the process coding and decoding of answers."

The next section sheds light on the schematic structure and the challenges faced by Master's students in writing the results and discussion chapter.

## 5.5. The Results and Discussion Chapter

### 5.5.1. *The Schematic Structure of the Results and Discussion Chapter: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps*

As shown in the review of the literature (section 1.6.3), almost the same moves and steps identified in Chen and Kuo's framework for the analysis of the results section are present in the discussion section. Thus, instead of tackling the two sections separately as we did in the review chapter and repeating the same structure twice, we created a combinatory structure where similar moves and steps were joined together and different moves were kept as they appeared in the framework.

**5.5.1.1. Move 1: Introducing the Results Section/Chapter:** This move is particularly found in the results section and accomplished by two steps. **Step 1** (*Providing background information*) was realized by the introductory section in all the chapters where the students provided an overview of the chapter's structure. Further information about the research objectives and a brief summary of the previous chapter's content (i.e.; the method chapter) were added in the introductory sections of **RD2** and **RD5**.

As far as **Step 2** is concerned, none of the introductions in the chapters included an overview of the methods or statistical procedures applied in data analysis.

**5.5.1.2. Move 2: Reporting Results:** As we have already stated in the literature review chapter, '**reporting results**' is the most important move in the Results section/chapter according to Chen and Kuo's framework as it serves the primary communicative function of this section/chapter. **The first step** (*Locating graphics*) used to realize this move was only present in **RD1** and **RD4**. The students in these chapters used pie-charts and histograms to display the numerical data.

In what concerns **Step 2** (*reporting major findings*), it appeared in all the chapters as a section titled '**research findings**' in **RD1**, '**results' presentation**' in **RD2**, '**results presentation and analysis**' in **RD3**, '**Data presentation**' in **RD4** and '**data treatment and presentation**' in **RD5** and **RD6**. In each of these sections, the students presented the data

obtained from the research tools they used in their studies. These data were presented qualitatively (i.e., in form of texts) and quantitatively (i.e.; numerical data). Reporting major findings was signaled by common linguistic expressions such as: ‘*the results show that*’, ‘*the majority of the respondents reported that*’, ‘*it is observed that*’, ‘*the results demonstrated that*’, ‘*the obtained results revealed that*’.

**5.5.1.3. Move 3: Introducing the Discussions Section:** The only **step** in this move (*Providing background information*) appeared in two chapters (**RD5 & RD6**); more specifically in the introduction. The students provided background information about the research aims and questions and overview of the chapter’s structure as demonstrated by the following excerpt from **RD5**:

“**This study aimed at investigating** teachers and students’ beliefs and attitudes towards grade inflation. In order to answer our research question.... **In the present section, the results of the questionnaires will be discussed.** The findings **will be structured** in **three sub-sections**: 1) the teachers and students’ beliefs about the existence of grade inflation in their department, 2) their beliefs regarding its causes and then 3) its consequences.”

It is worth noting that this move was absent in the remaining chapters because the presentation and discussion of the results occurred in the same chapter. Thus, in each of the four chapters, the students wrote one introduction to provide an overview of how the data were presented and discussed.

**5.5.1.4. Move 4: Summarizing Results** (found in both sections): This move with its one step (*Making conclusions of results*) appeared in three chapters. It was embedded in a section titled ‘*the results interpretation*’ in **RD3**, ‘*discussion of the results*’ in **RD4** and ‘*key findings and discussion*’ in **RD5**. After a detailed presentation of the findings obtained from each research instrument, the students in the three chapters provided a summary of the major findings. This can be illustrated by the following excerpts:

- “**In conclusion**, as reported by the participant teachers and students, **the main consequences of** grade inflation in the English at Blida 2 University are as follow: deteriorating the work ethics of students, causing grades to fail their positive functions of providing feedback on students' performance, causing transcripts and

degrees that provide academic proof of credentials to lose some of their values and demotivating students and preventing them from doing their best.” (RD5)

- “**Moving from a partial** and detailed analysis **to a more global one**, we can note the following points: According to the answers about language definition, **we can conclude that** most of the students did not show the relationship between language and culture in their definitions and did not refer to its cultural aspects and social role as it is presented in the literature review.” (RD4)

**5.5.1.5. Move 5: Commenting on Results** (found in both sections): According to Chen and Kuo’s framework, the overall objective of the discussion section/chapter is to comment on the findings and explain their meaning. The analysis of the chapters revealed that two of the steps (**Step 1** (*interpreting results*) and **Step 3** (*accounting for results*)) utilized to accomplish this move showed up in five chapters; they were embedded in a section titled ‘**Research findings**’ in RD1 and ‘**Key findings and discussion**’ in RD5 and RD6. As for the two remaining chapters, these steps occurred as a section titled ‘**Interpretation and discussion of the results**’ in RD2 and ‘**Results interpretation**’ in RD3. In these sections, the students sought to provide explanations of what the research findings meant as indicated in the following examples:

- “The responses of students regarding whether the purpose behind pestering teachers to give them higher grades is that some students do not want to retake tests; the average frequency was 3.16 ( $\approx$  often). It is remarkable that the reason behind students pestering their teachers to give them higher grades is their fear of or unwillingness to retake examinations. **Students may be afraid** of reducing their chances to carry on their masters or doctorate studies. **It could also be possible that** students invest all their energy and motivation in the exams; **that is why** they worry a lot about retaking examinations with a demotivated soul.” (RD5)
- “The obtained results from students’ questionnaire revealed that the majority of students (46%) agreed on the idea that speaking a language is the best way for learning it. **This may be due to the fact that** students were aware about the importance of speaking precisely in fluency.” (RD2)

**Step 2** (*Comparing results with literature*) was absent in RD1, RD3 and RD4 and was embedded in a section titled ‘**Interpretation and discussion of the results**’ in RD2 and ‘**Key findings and discussion**’ in RD5 and RD6. In these sections, the students endeavored to

show the extent to which their research findings were consistent with or different from the results of the studies already reported in the literature review chapter as the following excerpts demonstrate:

- “The teachers clearly seem more aware of an inflated learners’ self-perception caused by grade inflation. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of studies in the literature. Chowdhury (2018), for instance, asserted that “Grade inflation may delude learners concerning their real level of academic achievement” (p.88)” (RD5).
- “The results of this study show that teachers should use more activities such as reporting, songs and communication games if time allows. The findings in this study support previous mentioned studies such as: Fauzan’s (2016) and Fernandez’s (2016) studies, which show that most of the mentioned speaking activities have a positive extent on students’ fluency.” (RD2)

The **last Step** (*Evaluating results*) in commenting on the results move was absent in all the chapters.

**5.5.1.6. Move 6: Summarizing the Study:** This move particularly appears in the discussion section. According to Chen and Kuo’s framework, this move is accomplished by only **one step** (*Summarizing the study briefly*). This step occurred in all the chapters we analyzed; more specifically in a section titled ‘conclusion’ in **RD1, RD3, RD5** and **RD6**. In each concluding section, the students restated their research objectives, questions and the main research findings, and tried to provide a general conclusion for the study as indicated in the following excerpt from **RD6**:

“This section attempted to interpret and discuss the data gathered from the teacher and student questionnaires in order to answer the main research question “what is the relationship between students’ absenteeism and their grades in the English Department at Ali Lounici Blida 2 University, Algeria?” as well as to reach the secondary research objectives, i.e., “to look for the reasons and consequences of absenteeism among students of the English Department at Blida 2 University”. The analysis of the participants’ responses show that the surveyed students and teachers agreed that .... Besides, there are other factors that were also mentioned such as teachers’ absences and tardiness, personal factors as well as lack of interest and involvement. It is also found that the responses of

teachers and students are consistent with each other especially where they indicate that absenteeism affects negatively students' academic performance, learning, exam performance and grades. **The correlation analysis** of students' absences and grades **confirm** what teachers and students reported about the negative impact of absences on students' grades.

As for the two remaining chapters, the step used to accomplish move 5 appeared at the end of a section titled '***Interpretation and discussion of the results***' in RD2 and '***Discussion of the results***' in RD4.

**5.5.1.7. Move 7: Evaluating the Study** (found in both sections): **Step 1** (*Indicating limitations*) was accomplished by a section titled '***Limitations***' as the fourth heading in RD1 and RD2 and the second sub-heading in the second main section in RD4; '***Limitations of the study***' as the third sub-heading in the second main section in RD3 and the second heading in RD5 and RD6. In this section, the students acknowledged the flaws of their studies and the challenges they encountered while doing their research. Examples of the limitations stated by the students included the research design adopted, time constraints, sample size and generalizability of the findings. This can be illustrated by the following excerpt from RD6:

"There are **three limitations** that need to be acknowledged regarding the present study. The first one is that because of **time constraints** the current study was conducted in one semester only. Besides, the researchers intended to compare the answers of students according to gender and level but they **could not do it because of time constraints**. Finally, the current study is **limited to the English Department** with a **limited number of participants**. Thus, the findings obtained in this study may not be sufficient enough to account for the general tendencies as the number of participants is too small for broad generalizations."

**Step 2** (*Indicating significance*) was only present in one chapter (RD2) where the students tried to highlight the main contributions their studies made as the following example shows:

"Additionally, **the results of this investigation can be beneficial** for the instructors who would prefer to research the same issue in other EFL contexts. Besides, **this research contributes to teacher's awareness** to be selective when it comes to

using speaking activities which makes their students more engaged in the learning process.”

**Step 3** (*Evaluating methodology*) was absent in all the results and discussions’ chapters.

**5.5.1.8. Move 8: Deductions from the (research) Study** (found in both sections): While **Step 1** (*Making suggestions*) and **Step 2** (*Recommending further research*) did not appear in **RD1** and **RD2**, they were accomplished in the remaining chapters by a section titled ‘*Suggestions for further research*’ as the fourth heading in **RD3** and **RD6**, ‘*Advice for further study*’ as the second sub-heading in the second main section in **RD4** and ‘*Recommendations for further research*’ as the fourth heading in **RD5**. After stating the implications and limitations of their studies, the students in the four chapters suggested that their research findings needed to be re-assessed in other contexts and the topics they studied needed further investigation to address the limitations they identified. The following example from **RD6** is given for illustration:

“As a consequence of the limitations of the study discussed under section 3.1.2 above, there is a suggestion which is worth considering for future research. The study may be replicated on a larger sample of teachers and students on a longitudinal basis; that is, the questionnaires can be administered in a pre- and post-test manner to provide a more in-depth investigation about the topic.”

**Step 3** (*Drawing pedagogic implications*) was present in all the dissertations we analyzed. It was realized by a section titled ‘*recommendations*’ as the fifth heading in **RD1**, ‘*Implications for teaching and pedagogical recommendations*’ as the third heading in **RD2**, ‘*implications of the study*’ as the second sub-heading in the second main section in **RD3**, ‘*pedagogical implications*’ as the first sub-heading in the second main section in **RD4** and ‘*some implications*’ as the third heading in **RD5** and **RD6**. In each of these sections, there was an attempt from the part of the students to suggest solutions to the problems that were identified at the beginning of their studies as shown in the following examples:

- “Teachers should update their teaching skills and shift toward attractive teaching. One way to do this is that teachers vary their ways of delivering lessons.... Teachers should create a good, suitable and welcoming atmosphere in the class where mutual respect is shared between students and their teacher and where students feel the sense of community.” (**RD6**)

- **“It is better if** teachers give students writing paragraphs’ rules (for the thesis statement, introduction, conclusion, transition words, etc...) .... **It is preferable if** EFL teachers minimize the use o L1 with EFL students.” (RD1)
- “Students **should be aware** that not apprehending language grammar and vocabulary that allows them to understand literary texts.... **They need to ask** their teacher **to include instructive materials** which teachers utilize in EFL teaching. The materials, indeed, **are supposed to include** receptive and productive tasks and activities that focus the learners’ attention on elements of culture.” (RD4)

**Table 05** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the results and discussion chapters.

### ***5.5.2. Challenges in Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter***

All the problems detected in this chapter are specific to the discussion section. As mentioned earlier in the review of the literature (section 1.6.2), writing the discussion section is one of the most daunting tasks. The significance of this section lies in its intimate connection with the various parts of the dissertation. That is, the discussion section is connected to the general introduction because it answers the research questions already set and shows the extent to which the research objectives were accomplished. Also, there is a strong connection between the literature review chapter and the discussion section. The latter serves to elucidate the relationship (i.e., similarities and differences) between the research findings and the existing research and show how the results of the investigation filled the gap in the literature and contributed to the development of the area of interest. Last but not least, the discussion section is connected to the method chapter and the results section since it indicates the extent to which the methodology followed to collect data was appropriate to obtain valid results that could fully answer the research questions and realize the objectives. However, this relationship between the discussion section and the aforementioned parts was shallowly presented in **RD2** and completely ignored in **RD1, RD3** and **RD4**.

**5.5.2.1. Interpretation of the Results:** The analysis revealed that only two students (**RD5 & RD6**) attempted to explain what their research findings meant. However, though the results/findings interpretation appeared as a title in the remaining chapters, the students focused on merely providing detailed descriptions of all the findings and ignored the importance of providing evaluative comments in helping readers make sense of the findings and see the significance of the research as a whole. In this way, readers would end up doing



the researcher's job. That is, instead of providing critical reflections on the way the research findings were commented on and explained by the researchers, readers would find themselves doing the whole task by themselves through reading and re-reading the results several times to figure out what they meant or why they appeared as they did.

**5.5.2.2. Comparison of the Results with the Literature:** The analysis demonstrated that the section devoted to discussing areas of agreements and disagreements between the research findings and previous studies was unsatisfactorily written in **RD2**. That is, the discussion of results was too short compared to the length of the section where the results were presented; many significant findings presented in the results section were ignored in the discussion. Also, the student just referred to a few sources cited in the review chapter and pointed out that there were similarities between some of her findings and previous studies, yet she did not explain in what way they were consistent.

As for the three remaining chapters (**RD1, RD3 & RD4**), it seems that the students misunderstood or were not at all aware of the function served by the discussion section. All they did was listing the major findings of their studies without explaining how their results fit in relation to the studies reported in the review chapter. In other words, the students neither made synthesis between the findings nor showed whether those research findings complemented or contradicted previous studies. Consequently, if readers are not shown the difference(s) between the student's research and previous researches about the same topic, they will not be able to understand how the research gap was filled.

**5.5.2.3. Evaluating the Study (strengths Vs. weaknesses):** In the discussion section, as already noted in the literature review chapter, writers should devote a part to state the strengths (significance) of the study and discuss the limitations. Concerning the research significance, only one student (**RD2**) stated how her research findings were beneficial to teachers and helped raise their awareness of the need for careful selection of speaking activities to keep their students' motivation high. The remaining students, however, neither stated the strengths of their studies nor discussed the validity and reliability of their research tools and findings. As a result, readers would obviously find themselves unable to understand how those studies positively contributed to the development of the area of interest and determine the extent to which the research objectives and questions were satisfactorily addressed.

On the other hand, the section devoted to addressing the limitations of the study was included in all the chapters, yet it was not properly written as many important details were missing. More precisely, the students acknowledged the problems encountered during the research process such as, time constraints (**all chapters but RD3**), insufficient sample size (**all chapters**), limited context (**RD5 & RD6**) and missing questionnaire items (**RD2**). However, they neither explained the nature of those problems nor showed in what ways they affected the credibility and validity of their findings in particular and their studies in general. Besides, the students did not even explain the rationale behind adopting particular research designs despite the limitations they carried. Only one student (**RD1**) noted that she had to conduct her research with insufficient sample size because of secondary school teachers' strike.

**5.5.2.4. Recommendations for Further Research:** Recommendations for future research are offered based on the limitations of the study and aim at suggesting solutions to improve the situation and raising questions that might be a source of motivation for researchers in the future. The recommendations section, however, was not given the weight it deserved as it was totally ignored in **RD1** and **RD2** and inadequately, not to say wrongly, written in **RD3** and **RD4**. By way of explanation, the students in RD3 and RD4 merely wrote a few lines in which they stated that their topics needed to be studied in different contexts. However, they neither recommended clear ways to overcome the methodological limitations already identified and increase the results' validity nor explained why further research on the topics was necessary.

In the following section, we cast light on the schematic structure of the general conclusion and the major challenges encountered by the students in writing this section.

## **5.6. The General Conclusion**

### ***5.6.1. The Schematic Structure of Conclusions: Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps***

According to Chen and Kuo's framework, the general conclusion is composed of four moves: introducing the conclusions chapter, summarizing the study, evaluating the study, and deductions from the study.

**5.6.1.1. Move 1: Introducing the Conclusions Chapter:** The introductory move with its one **Step** (*Restating purpose, design, research questions/ hypotheses, results, or indicating how conclusions are presented*) was absent in all the conclusions.

**5.6.1.2. Move 2: Summarizing the Study:** The only step (*Summarizing the study briefly*) employed to accomplish Move 2 was present in all the conclusions we analyzed. In their summaries, the students restated their research objectives, the research design, the research tools used to collect data, the major research findings.

**5.6.1.3. Move 3: Evaluating the Study:** While **Step 1** (*Indicating significance/ advantage*) was absent in four conclusions (**GC1, GC4, GC5 & GC6**), there was an attempt in **GC2** and **GC3** to show how the findings of the study were significant and contributed to the development of the area of interest. This can be illustrated by the following excerpts:

“This research can be beneficial also for the instructors to further future researches as well as it can contribute in rising teachers’ awareness when using the appropriate speaking activities to enhance fluency.” (**GC2**)

“Classroom interaction with the teacher can thus be a vital chance for students to improve their linguistic knowledge, through various types of classroom talk that can allow them to receive comprehensible input, produce comprehensible output, negotiate meaning, and receive corrective feedback. All of these processes would eventually allow them to earn new vocabulary, **correct** their pronunciation, and have more grammatical accuracy.” (**GC3**)

**Step 2** (*Indicating limitations*) was absent in three conclusions (**GC1, GC3 & GC4**) and occurred at the end of **GC2, GC5** and **GC6**. This step was signaled by explicit linguistic expressions such as “Finally, there are some limitations in this research” (**GC2**) and “The section concludes with some limitations of the study” (**GC6**). Concerning **Step 3** (*Evaluating methodology*), it was absent in all the conclusions.

**5.6.1.4. Move 4: Deductions from the (research) Study:** As far as the steps in this move are concerned, **Step 1** (*Recommending further research*) and **Step 3** (*Making suggestions*) appeared at the end of two conclusions only (**GC4 & GC6**) and were signaled by explicit linguistic expressions as shown in the following excerpt from **GC6**:

“The section concludes with some suggestions for further research. A longitudinal study would allow for a more in-depth investigation about the topic. In addition,

further research can use more records of students' absences and grades. Finally, further research can be carried out to investigate factors that influence students' grades besides absenteeism....”

**Step 2** (*Drawing pedagogic implications*) was absent in two conclusions (**GC3 & GC6**) and present in **GC1, GC2, GC4** and **GC5**. The students restated the pedagogical implications that were offered, in the discussion section, based on their research findings. This can be illustrated by the following excerpt from **GC1**:

“Some suggestions were introduced based on the findings; teachers are required to try other tools before using L1 with their learners. In addition to, encourage learners to think in English. It is preferable for learners to work on themselves to improve their writing skill through practicing inside and outside the classroom because practice makes perfect performance.”

**Table 06** in **Appendix M** presents the number of times each of the aforementioned moves appeared in the conclusions we analyzed.

### **5.6.2. Challenges in Writing the General Conclusion**

As already noted in the review chapter (section 1.7.1), the general conclusion of the dissertation is of paramount importance in refreshing readers' memories through wrapping up the whole research and shaping their final impression about the work. Many students, as confirmed by the participants (students and teachers) during the interview, take it for granted that the conclusion is one of the easiest sections to write as it merely summarizes the content of the dissertation. However, the conclusion is more than just a summary; it serves other functions that are not taken into account in the conclusions we analyzed. The following lines, therefore, cast light on the weaknesses identified in the conclusions:

- The students mainly focused on providing detailed descriptive summaries of the chapters' contents without any attempt to critically evaluate their studies (i.e.; showing benefits and reflecting on the flaws).
- Four students (**GC1, GC4, GC5 & GC6**) did not provide an answer to the 'so what?' question. That is, none of them explained why their research was significant and how it contributed to the development of the field concerned.

- Though they were already mentioned in the discussion section, the study's limitations should have been **restated** in the conclusions as well. This step was overlooked in four conclusions (**GC1, GC3, GC4 & GC6**).
- Like the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research should have been also restated in the conclusions (**GC1, GC3, GC4 & GC5**). Perhaps the students did not do so as they wanted to avoid repeating the same information. Nonetheless, repetition, using one's own words, is sometimes needed to make sure that readers – who may have just skimmed the recommendations in the discussion section – clearly understood what the writer said.
- The same remark applies to the pedagogical implications that were also disregarded in three conclusions (**GC3, GC4 & GC6**).

### **Conclusion and Summary of the Results**

In this chapter, we presented the findings revealed from the document analysis of six Master's dissertations. The analysis has shown, and confirmed the questionnaires and interviews results, that writing a dissertation was a challenging task for most students. This is due to the fact that the majority of the moves and steps identified in Chen and Kuo's analysis framework were either not incorporated or not properly presented in the sections and chapters of each dissertation. What follows is, thus, a summary of the findings presented in this chapter:

**The Abstract:** From the analysis above, we can clearly see that the abstract was the easiest section to write as almost all the moves, except **Move 4** (conclusions), were present and a few issues were detected in writing this section. The main problems identified included lack, or absence, of necessary background details about the problem under discussion, absence of conclusions (significance & main implications) drawn from the research findings and inaccurate use of verb tense.

**The General Introduction:** Though all the introductions included all the moves and the majority of the steps identified in Chen and Kuo's framework as sub-sections, the latter were not accurately presented. More specifically, the results demonstrated that the students had problems in writing four sections. The first problem was concerned with writing the theoretical background section. The analysis revealed that almost all the students failed to establish clear context for their studies and show how the research problems under discussion came into existence. Put differently, the students neither provided summaries of

relevant studies nor explained key research concepts and theories. As a consequence, it would undoubtedly be hard for readers, especially those who are unfamiliar with the topic, to fully understand the topics investigated. Further, the statement of the problem was another section that was not given due care in all the introductions. Examples of the weaknesses identified in the sections analyzed included reliance on anecdotal evidence to justify the research problems and overgeneralization of the problem to other contexts while the investigations were done at Blida 2 University. Moreover, the students faced difficulties in writing the research rationale/significance of the study's section. The analysis of four introductions demonstrated that the students neither identified the gap in previous research nor showed how their studies would help eliminate that gap, solve the problems and develop the field concerned. Last but not least, the research questions in four introductions were improperly formulated as each question asked about two different things at once. Also, some research questions contained ambiguous/unfamiliar terms that might misdirect readers' interpretation of the intended meaning.

**The Literature Review Chapter:** The analysis confirmed the questionnaires and interviews results and showed that the literature review was the most difficult chapter to write owing to the number of issues identified. The latter can be summed up as follows:

- **Paraphrasing ideas:** In three review chapters, the students were unable to restate others' ideas in their own words and opened the space for long direct quotations to dominate their texts.
- **Identifying the research gap:** All the reviews we analyzed were mere descriptive summaries of what others said/did, how they did it and what they found. None of the students showed an attempt to critically evaluate the flaws of other studies and spotlight on the aspects that were not fully, or at all, addressed.
- **Synthesizing ideas and establishing a theoretical framework:** The absence of the students' critical stance led to their failure to show the relationships between the sources cited and their topic under investigation.
- **Citing and referencing:** A number of issues were pinpointed in citing sources in text. These issues involved incorrect use of 'et al.', writing both the family and first names in some citations, absence of page number and quotation marks in direct quotes, inappropriate format of long quotations and overuse of direct quotations and secondary sources. Besides, the lists of references that were attached to the literature reviews also suffered from some flaws such as: absence of publication

information in many reference list entries, mismatch between the sources cited in text and those found in the lists of references, inconsistent format of names and publication year and errors in formatting different types of references.

- **Grammar and punctuation errors:** Several issues specific to grammar and punctuation were identified in all the review chapters. Examples of these issues included sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, wrong use of pronoun referents, parallel structure, wrong use of comma and comma splice.

**The Method Chapter:** Despite its importance in guiding researchers throughout the research process and demonstrating to readers how data were gathered and analyzed to obtain valid and reliable results that fully address the research questions and, hence, fill the existing gap, the method chapter was not given the weight it deserves in the dissertations we analyzed. First, the students did not provide sufficient description of the research design. They just gave brief definitions of the design adopted without demonstrating in what way it (i.e.; the design) was aligned with their research topics in general and the research questions and objectives in particular. With regard to population and sampling section, in two chapters the students neither justified the appropriateness of the population they selected to address the problem under study nor explained the sampling procedures they followed. Furthermore, in the section devoted to describe data collection tools and procedures, the students neither stated the reasons behind their choice of specific research instruments nor showed the extent to which they (i.e., instruments) were suitable to accomplish the research objectives and answer the research questions. The last challenge was concerned with writing data analysis methods and procedures' section. The latter appeared in just three chapters, yet it was very short and hastily written as the students did not explain the procedures followed in the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

**The Results and Discussion Chapter:** After the literature review chapter, writing the discussion of results section was the second most challenging task for four students. From the analysis, it has become evident that these students misunderstood the communicative function served by the discussions section although it appeared as a title (*'discussion of results'* or *'interpretation and discussion'*) in their chapters. By way explanation, the students' focus in the discussions sections was on summarizing the research findings without:

- A comprehensive discussion of the findings that were relevant to the research questions, hypotheses and objectives.
- Any attempts to interpret the results and explain what they meant.
- Any discussion of the areas of agreements and disagreements between their (i.e., students) findings and the studies cited in the literature review chapter.
- Any attempts to highlight the strengths of their studies and show how the gap in the literature was filled.

**The General Conclusion:** The analysis revealed that the students had limited understanding of the main functions served by the general conclusion as their focus was mainly on summarizing the key points in their studies. Most of them did not:

- Spotlight on the significant contributions made by their studies.
- Show how the gap was filled.
- Acknowledge the flaws of their studies.
- Recommend further investigation to overcome the limitations.

In the next, and the last, chapter, the results obtained from all the research instruments (i.e.; students' questionnaire and interview, teachers' questionnaire and interview, and document analysis of Master's dissertations) will be triangulated and discussed in relation to the literature and the research questions. These results will be, thus, the basis upon which we suggest some pedagogical implications to help the students and teachers overcome, or at least alleviate, the major challenges encountered in writing a Master's dissertation.



**CHAPTER SIX:  
DISCUSSION OF  
THE RESULTS,  
PEDAGOGICAL  
IMPLICATIONS,  
AND  
RECOMMENDATI-  
ONS FOR  
FURTHER  
RESEARCH**

## Introduction

This chapter is divided into the following sections: discussion of the research findings, pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and students, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research. In the first section, we examine how the results obtained from the research instruments responded to our research questions and discuss them in relation to previous related studies. In light of the research findings, the next section aims at offering a number of pedagogical implications to help students and teachers alleviate the identified challenges and write a quality dissertation. The last section in this chapter states the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for further research.

### 6.1. Discussion around the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges experienced by graduate students in research writing and the possible factors that affected their writing performance. It was hoped that gaining an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives towards the difficulties faced in writing the dissertation would help us suggest some useful tips, strategies and methods to help students improve their research writing performance and meet the academic requirements.

In this study, we adopted the exploratory concurrent-nested design in which priority was given to the qualitative approach. Primary data for this research were collected through administering questionnaires and conducting semi-structured interviews, while secondary-supportive data were collected through the document analysis of six (6) Master's dissertations. The discussion section is structured around the following two research questions:

**RQ1:** What challenges do students of didactics, at Blida 2 University, encounter in writing their Master's dissertations?

**RQ2:** What factors are believed to be responsible for the challenges experienced by Master's students in writing their dissertations?

First, we present the leading themes/patterns that resulted from the data triangulation (i.e., the most recurrent themes in the questionnaires, interviews and document analysis). Next, we identify the similarities and differences between the results obtained from each research instrument. Finally, we attempt to explain and discuss these findings in relation to the research questions, and in comparison with the previous studies presented to in the theoretical chapter.

### ***6.1.1. Challenges Faced by Master's Students in Writing the Dissertation***

To reach an answer to the first research question, we relied on students' and teachers' questionnaires, and semi-structured follow-up interviews. We also made use of another research instrument – document analysis of dissertations – to crosscheck the findings obtained from the aforementioned tools. The main challenges identified from the participants' answers and the document analysis are: rhetorical structure and content-related challenges, summarizing and paraphrasing issues, and language proficiency and writing issues

#### **6.1.1.1. Rhetorical structure and Content-related Challenges**

The results of the data collection instruments indicated that not knowing what each part of the dissertation is composed of was the most critical challenge facing graduate students.

As far as the abstract is concerned, the results of the questionnaires and interviews revealed that writing the abstract is less difficult than the other parts of the dissertation (**Chapter 3**, tables 3.7, 3.10. & 3.11, section 3.2.2.1; **Chapter 4**, table 4.18, section 4.2.3.1). Though details on abstract writing were provided in academic writing and research skills classes, some participants (both students and teachers) reported that some students were almost unfamiliar with the main parts that make up this important section of the dissertation. The results of the document analysis, however, did not match the questionnaires and interviews results as most of the abstracts we analyzed fulfilled the informative function and included almost all the necessary elements mentioned in Bhatia's schematic structure of abstracts (2013) (**Chapter 1**, table 1.1). These contradictory results lead us to ask the following question: Why did the majority of students say that they were not fully aware of the content, while the main parts were present in their abstracts? Since the students stated that they used abstracts of previous theses and dissertations as examples to write their own abstracts, we assume that they copied or imitated what they saw in the samples without understanding how they were structured and what they were made up of. This result cannot be discussed in relation to previous works as, to our knowledge, studies on the abstract writing issues are not available. Instead, all the studies we referred to in the literature review were mainly concerned with the study of format and rhetorical organization of the abstract in different disciplines including applied linguistics.

Regarding the general introduction, the results obtained from all the instruments confirmed the difficulty of writing this section (Bunton, 2002; Nygaard, 2015) and indicated that the majority of students faced difficulties in writing four parts of the introduction

namely the background of the study, the problem statement, the research rationale, and the research questions.

The interviews and document analysis findings (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.3.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.4.1; **Chapter 5**, section 5.2.2) revealed the students' inability to establish clear and relevant context for their research and acquaint the target audience with the topic under discussion through referring to a few relevant studies and defining unfamiliar research-related concepts. Moreover, the results of the interviews, confirmed by those of the document analysis, revealed that the majority of students failed to write an accurate, clear and well-evidenced description of the problem related to a particular research context. Besides, many students stated that it was difficult to formulate a convincing rationale that justified the research significance and demonstrated how their studies would help fill in the gap(s) in previous studies. This was confirmed by the results of the document analysis which showed that the research rationale was shallowly presented in many introductions and its main parts (i.e., expected benefits and research gap) were not given the importance they deserved. According to some teachers, students' inability to write a good research rationale strongly suggested that they were unaware of the communicative function accomplished by this section which in turn led them to confuse the research rationale with other parts of the introduction such as the research objectives and purpose statements and use them synonymously. Last but not least, students' inability to formulate good research questions was another deficiency identified in many introductions. The results of the students' and teachers' interviews and the document analysis of some introductions showed that most research questions were unclear, unfocused, double-barreled and formulated in a way that did not show the direction of the investigation. Again, these results cannot be compared or contrasted with previous works as most studies on introduction writing focused on studying the schematic structure of this genre (**Chapter 1**, section 1.3.2). However, though the introduction was considered as one of the most difficult sections to write, none of the previous studies shed light on the issues faced by graduate students in writing the introductory sections of their Master's dissertations.

As for the literature review chapter, the results of this study (**Chapter 3**, table 3.7; **Chapter 4**, table 4.20; **Chapter 5**, section 5.3) supported the commonly held view in previous literature that it is the most difficult part of the dissertation to write (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 2003; Mathews & Kostellis, 2011; Oliver, 2012; Shaw, 1991; Swales & Feak, 2000). Like the other parts, the results of the students' questionnaire and teachers' interview indicated that the overwhelming majority of students were not aware of the essential

elements to be included in the literature review (such as, significance of the topic, review of related theories and studies, theoretical and conceptual frameworks) (**Chapter 3**, table, 3.20; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5); they were not even able to explain what a literature review was (**Chapter 3**, table 3.16) or what purpose(s) it served (**Chapter 3**, table 3.17). The results of the document analysis are congruent with the students' and teachers' claims in that many steps that make up Chen and kuo's schematic structure of the literature review (2012) (**Chapter 1**, table 1.10) were absent or shallowly presented in the chapters we analyzed (**Chapter 5**, sections 5.3.1 & 5.3.2). These results are in line with earlier studies by Mafa & Mapolisa (2012), and Loan (2017) in which students' lack of understanding of the major purpose(s) and importance of the literature review and not knowing how to effectively report related literature were considered among the main issues that prevented students from writing quality literature review.

Concerning the method chapter, though it was believed to be the least difficult chapter to write, not having a clear idea about its content was, however, one of the most frequent challenges faced by the students according to the results of the students' questionnaire (**Chapter 3**, table 3.26) and interview (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1) and teachers' interview (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.6.1). The results of the document analysis corroborated this assertion and revealed that although the students referred to the titles of all the sections that make up the method chapter namely: research design, population and sample, research instruments and procedures, data analysis tools and procedures (Biggam, 2011; Garson, 2002; Librero, 2012; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Murray & Beglar, 2009; Roberts, 2010; Singh & Lukkarila, 2017), those sections were not appropriately presented in our corpus as many important details were overlooked such as **the rationale** for selecting: a particular research design and context, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis instruments and procedures. These results partially conform to Mafa & Mapolisa's (2012) findings which demonstrated that there were remarkable issues in writing the research design section which, according to the supervisors, was not given the weight it deserved in most dissertations. It was difficult for them as readers to understand which methodology was adopted by the students and why it was chosen.

As far as the results and discussion chapter is concerned, the participants (both students and teachers) reached a near consensus in opinion on the fact that this is the second most difficult part to write after the literature review (**Chapter 3**, table 3.34; **Chapter 4**, table 4.22). The students' answers to the questions about the main parts that constitute the results and discussion chapter (**Chapter 3**, tables 3.29, 3.31 & 3.33) and those about the challenges

they experienced (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.6.1) demonstrated that they were not fully aware of the chapter's content as most of them referred to some elements that were irrelevant to particular sections (i.e., results, discussion, pedagogical implications). The students' findings accord with those of teachers (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.7.1) who reported that most students had no clear idea about the communicative function served by the discussion section in particular which in turn made them overpass the core elements to include in this section. These assertions were confirmed by the document analysis in which the discussion sections were poorly presented and lacked the most important parts such as data interpretation, data discussion with previous research and recommendations for future research. These findings are consistent with those of Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006), and Mafa & Mapolisa (2012) who found that many students did not have a clear idea about the rhetorical structure and content of the discussion of results section. Reporting the supervisors' comments on their students' work, Mafa & Mapolisa stated that most students "adopted surface analysis" (p.1692) as their primary concern in the discussion sections was to restate the research findings that were already presented in the results section without any tendency to explain what those results meant (i.e., absence of data interpretation) or discuss them with reference to previous related studies.

In what concerns the general conclusion, though it was thought to be one of the least difficult parts to write, the results obtained from all the instruments (**Chapter 3**, table 3.35, section 3.2.7.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.8.1; **Chapter 5**, section 5.6.2) indicated that the conclusion was primarily devoted to providing a general summary of the whole dissertation without considering the other important functions served by this section such as showing significance of the findings, offering pedagogic implications, acknowledging limitations and recommending further research on the topic (Bitchener, 2009; Chen & Kuo, 2012; Furseth & Everett, 2013; Ruyin & Allison, 2003; Thomas, 2009).

Unfamiliarity with the function and content of the dissertation parts was not the only issue faced by the students, ineffective summarizing and paraphrasing were also among the most remarkable challenges identified in the students' work. These are to be discussed in the next section.

#### **6.1.1.2. Summarizing and Paraphrasing Issues**

The results which were obtained from the interview data analysis revealed that the majority of students were unable to create a condensed account of the text main ideas and restate ideas in their own words. These issues, according to the participants, were mainly

found in particular parts of the dissertation namely the abstract (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.3.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.3.1), the literature review chapter (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5.1), and the general conclusion (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.8.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.8.1). This result could not be checked through the document analysis of the dissertations because we only had the final versions of the students' work; it was not possible to check the works cited and evaluate the students' summarizing and paraphrasing skills. The findings of the students' and teachers' interviews are in line with those reached by Yeh (2010), Taskeen et al. (2014); Loan (2017) showing that most EFL students face serious issues in summarizing and do not have a good command of telling knowledge using their own words. This also affirms the view of Peng (2018) who points out that "the students' literature review is often a shopping list" (p.98) and the fact that the teachers know their students' abilities makes it easy for them to figure out whether it is their (i.e., students) own writing style or they just copied from original texts. Commenting on this point, Peng (ibid.) writes: "In their dissertations, there are two kinds of style: the part of literature review is written smoothly because some parts are borrowed. When it comes to their own things.... There are many mistakes" (p.99).

### **6.1.1.3. Language Proficiency and Writing Issues**

This aspect appeared in some students' answers to the question about the main challenges they encountered in writing the literature review chapter (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1). The students reported that it was a difficult task to create a smooth flow of ideas and establish a logical link between ideas, paragraphs and sections. This result was confirmed by the document analysis of the literature reviews and the teachers' answers in which they pointed out that most of the review chapters they read suffered from poor language proficiency and serious issues in achieving coherence and cohesion (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5.1). However, the results of the document analysis showed that language and writing issues were not only specific to the literature review chapter, but they also concerned all the dissertation parts. Examples of these issues included subject-verb agreement and verb tense, types of sentences, grammar, vocabulary, word choice, spelling, punctuation...etc. This result is in the same direction with previous research which was conducted by Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006) who affirmed that the students' language difficulties were both at the sentence and paragraph levels. Writing in English resulted in students' failure to achieve coherence and cohesion in their texts. Their supervisors stated that the fact that logical connection between paragraphs was absent and transitions between ideas was inappropriate made it hard for readers to understand and interpret the intended

meaning. Our findings also concur with Wang & Li's (2008) study which confirmed the fact that writing a dissertation in English was a difficult task as most students demonstrated lack of confidence in expressing themselves in a foreign language due to lack of vocabulary and inappropriate word choice in particular. However, our research findings do not support previous research done by Yeh (2010) which revealed that most students showed confidence in their writing abilities and declared that they did not experience any difficulties in using English as a foreign language to write their dissertations.

#### **6.1.1.4. Other Challenges in Writing the Review of the Literature Chapter**

Apart from the aforementioned challenges, data gathered by the interviews and document analysis revealed other recurrent issues in the literature review chapter.

To begin with, the results of the interviews indicated that the vast majority of students were not aware of how to identify the gap in the literature (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5.1). This result is consistent with data obtained from the document analysis which demonstrated that most students did not show any attempt to shed light on the missing aspects in the literature or areas that were not satisfactorily addressed in previous studies (**Chapter 5**, section 5.3.2.2).

Synthesizing ideas is another important issue that emerged from the interviews and the document analysis. It was found that the students' voice and critical stance were totally absent in most literature reviews as the writers' focus was on summarizing what was said and done in previous studies instead of showing how they (i.e., studies) were connected to their own studies (i.e., synthesis), discussing and evaluating their significance and shortcomings, and explaining how the gap(s) identified would be filled (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1; **Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5.1; **Chapter 5**, section 5.3.2.3). This result sustains the findings of Yeh (2010), Mafa & Mapolisa (2012), Loan (2017), and Peng (2018) which showed that many EFL graduate students did not have a clear idea about literature synthesis and were still far from being able to write a critical-evaluative literature review that satisfied teachers' and readers' expectations. The researchers pointed out that the students just reported what they read without discussing the points of convergence and divergence between the works cited in their texts and how the link between ideas and sources paved the way for constructing theoretical frameworks in the students' own research.

Additionally, the results of the students' questionnaire and interview indicated that the majority of students experienced several difficulties in writing appropriate in-text citations and the list of references using APA and MLA styles (**Chapter 3**, tables 3.23 & 3.24; section



3.2.5.1). The students' responses were in accord with the document analysis which revealed a number of issues such as incorrect use of 'et al.', inconsistency in writing the author's family and first names, overuse and inappropriate use of direct quotations, using various referencing styles in the same text, absence of publication information in many sources, incorrect format of authors' names, discrepancy between the number of sources cited in text and those that appeared in the list of references (**Chapter 5**, section 5.3.2.5). This result complies, to some extent, with the findings of one study reviewed in the theoretical chapter in which Mafa & Mapolisa (2012) mentioned citing and referencing sources as one of the most critical problems in most literature reviews. However, they did not provide any example of such problems.

Finally yet importantly, resource constraints and inability to select the most relevant sources and information to their research were further issues that were highlighted during the students' interview. Many students declared that they were unable to access most primary sources (i.e., books and articles) relevant to their research. That is why they had to use, most of the time, secondary sources to write their literature review. Other students further noted that even the availability of the literature did not solve the problem as they experienced difficulties in identifying which sources(s) and information were directly related to their areas of investigation (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.1). Some teachers' answers corroborated this claim in that most students tended to include as many sources as they could just to show off at the expense of the reader, relevance, and quality of their literature review (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.5.1). This result ties well with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Azila-Gbettor et al., 2015; Mafa & Mapolisa, 2012; Tiwari, 2019; Wanasighe, 2020) which revealed that lack of relevant literature, open access resources, and students' inability to determine relevance of documents and information were viewed among the most recurrent challenges experienced by students when writing the literature review chapter. The result is also confirmed by Yeh's (2010) statement that:

English language books and articles are still less available.... While some articles could be downloaded from the internet, others were not available online. In some instances, payment was required to read an article, but the option was considered a luxury that most students could not afford (p.6).

The next section aims at discussing the results that answer the second research question; that is the main reasons for the challenges experienced by novice researchers in writing their dissertations.

### ***6.1.2. Factors Contributing to Students' Challenges in Writing the Master's Dissertation***

The second research question was mainly investigated through students' and teachers' interviews in which the participants were asked about the reasons behind the challenges faced by the students in writing each part of the dissertation. Unlike the results which answered the first research question, the results presented in this section cannot be all discussed in relation to previous studies due to the scarcity of literature on the factors that contributed to the challenges identified in our study. Therefore, we will rely exclusively on the data obtained from the research instruments to explain the results and support our claims.

#### **6.1.2.1. Lack of Practice and Ineffective Training in Academic Writing and Research Skills Classes**

According to the participants, most of the challenges experienced by the students in identifying the content of the dissertation parts, summarizing, paraphrasing, synthesizing, citing and referencing were primarily due to lack of practice. The students said that their teachers of academic writing and research skills focused primarily on theoretical content and teaching abstract concepts, yet they (i.e., teachers) offered very few opportunities to students to put theory into practice. Likewise, some supervisors also blamed the teachers of academic writing and research skills for not focusing their attention on developing students' procedural knowledge and opening the space for the students to apply what they learnt to new learning situations. This finding is consistent with that reached by Peng (2018) that students were exposed to theoretical knowledge about writing, yet opportunities to practice writing were very scarce.

One supervisor (T2) added that there was a problem in teaching academic writing and research skills as the syllabus and the learning objectives were not relevant to students' needs and expectations (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.6.2). This claim contradicts another claim she made earlier when asked about her opinion regarding the content of academic writing and research skills courses (**Chapter 4**, sections 4.2.1 & 4.2.2). The teacher showed satisfaction with the content of the two courses in that the research skills course helped students develop their knowledge of the research designs and methods and analysis and interpretation skills, while the academic writing course improved students' summarizing and paraphrasing skills, and developed their knowledge of dissertation writing. These contradictory views maybe due to the fact that the teacher did not have an idea about the content of academic writing and research skills syllabuses, especially that she explicitly stated that in her answers to Qs 9 and 10 in the teachers' questionnaire. Hence, when she

was asked about the impacts of the two courses, maybe she just referred to their benefits in general not to the content taught in the Department of English.

In fact, the teacher's first claim about the effectiveness of the two courses' content sounds logical to some extent given the answers provided by the students in the questionnaire when asked about the content of the introduction and the functions served by each part in this section. Most of the core elements that make up the introduction were mentioned in the students' answers to question 13 (**Chapter 3**, table 3.13). However, many students failed to state the purpose of many parts (**Chapter 3**, table 3.14) though they studied them in the course of academic writing (See Appendix I). The same applies to the results and discussion chapter. Though it was part of the academic writing syllabus, the results revealed that the majority of students were not fully aware of the chapter's content. This could imply that the teaching process was not effective. That is, maybe the courses on writing the general introduction and the discussion chapter were so difficult that the students did not have a firm grasp of the content. It is also probable that the teaching method and materials made comprehension difficult especially that some students reported that their writing class was teacher-centered and each of the PowerPoint slides used by the teacher included a lot of details. As a result, this way of teaching was likely to reduce the chances of classroom interaction, and lead the students to focus their attention on the text of the slides instead of concentrating on the teacher's explanations. The same applies to the content of the other dissertation parts. Concerning the literature review and the method chapters, the results indicated that the majority of students struggled with identifying the main elements that constituted the two chapters. If we look at the syllabus of academic writing and research skills courses, we notice that the students were not exposed to the schematic structure and content of the two chapters though they are the most important parts of the dissertation. The content of the academic writing syllabus in Master 1, as many students declared, revolved around writing paragraphs and essays on general topics, reading, summarizing and writing reviews of research articles, while in M2 classes the focus was on teaching the rhetorical features and structure of particular parts of the dissertation such as the abstract, the introduction, the discussion section and the general conclusion. As for the research skills course content (see Appendix J), we notice that focus was mainly on teaching a set of theoretical concepts such as research paradigms and designs, types of sampling, types of research instruments and ethics of research. Therefore, the most logical explanation for the students' failure to write successful literature review and research method chapters is their (i.e., the chapters) absence in the syllabuses of academic writing and research skills.

Writing the general conclusion was also a challenging task for the majority of students though it was part of the academic writing syllabus. It was found that the conclusion was mainly devoted to summarizing the main points of the dissertation, while the other parts that constituted this section like the pedagogical implications, limitations and recommendations were overlooked by most students. These parts, as already noted in the literature review of this research (**Chapter 1**, sections 1.6.4 & 1.7.2) are also found in the pedagogic implications section. This, therefore, leads to the assumption that excluding the aforementioned parts from some conclusions was probably because the students wanted to avoid repeating what they already mentioned in the previous part (i.e., the results and discussion chapter). Another assumption is that the course on the general conclusion was difficult to understand and the students were not provided with opportunities to practice writing this section.

In fact, looking at the participants' (students and supervisors) views leads us to wonder:

- *Why did most supervisors blame their colleagues (i.e., teachers of academic writing and research skills) for the challenges faced by their students in writing dissertations?* They should have rather admitted that they were also responsible for that situation due to lack of supervision and timely feedback as reported by their students.

It is therefore worth pointing out that, apart from the teaching method which hinders participation, lack of practice in academic writing and research skills classes can be attributed to other factors. First and foremost, each class is three hours long; one day per week. This puts the teachers between two fires and makes it hard for them to make the best utilization of the limited time they have. That is, they either have to complete the long syllabus (See appendices I & J) in just one semester or devote a large block of time and opportunities for students to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to real-life situations. Besides, the issue of large classes makes scheduling training sessions and giving feedback on each work a heavy burden that teachers often avoid. Last but not least, lack of practice, as two teachers maintained, can be explained by the fact that the majority of students come to class unprepared with no background about the content of the lecture and take a passive approach to learning. Hence, the teachers find themselves spending more time explaining the lesson, repeating things for several times and answering the students' questions (if any).

In addition to lack of practice and ineffective training in academic research writing, the focus of the next section is on the supervisors' negligence which was identified as another factor that led to students' failure in achieving quality work.

#### 6.1.2.2. Lack of Supervisor's Guidance

According to the results of the students' and teachers' interviews, the second most frequent reason for content-related challenges is lack of supervision. This result is inconsistent with that reached by Wang & Li (2008), Mafa & Mapolisa (2012), Azila-Gbettor et al. (2015), Tiwari (2019), and Wanasighe (2020) revealing that lack of supervision was not a challenge in itself, but rather it was one of the principal factors that led students to face most of the aforementioned challenges in writing their dissertations.

Apart from their teachers of academic writing and research skills, many students stated that their supervisors were, to a great extent, responsible for their failure to write a successful dissertation. According to them, their supervisors were busy all the time with other commitments like teaching and fulfilling administrative duties. That is why they devoted a small amount of time to each supervision meeting (**Chapter 3**, table 3.42; section 3.2.9) and rarely gave timely feedback (**Chapter 3**, table 3.39). Similarly, speaking as examiners, some teachers blamed their colleagues (i.e., supervisors) for the students' poor-quality work which, according to them, implied that the supervisors did not do their job properly (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.6.2). These results agree with the findings of other studies (e.g., Azila-Gbettor et al., 2015; Yeh, 2010; Wanasighe, 2020; Wang & Li, 2008) in which most students complained about the insufficient amount of time devoted to supervision meetings and showed their dissatisfaction with the time spent on reviewing their work and giving feedback. In Tiwari's (2019) study, lack of supervision and feedback were, according to the students, attributed to the supervisors' carelessness and lack of professionalism. The students reported that their supervisors were not doing their job properly; their only concern was to earn money and satisfy their personal benefits at the expense of fulfilling their responsibilities as thesis advisors. However, this is far from being the case in the department where our study took place as we trust the teaching staff's personal morals and professional ethics. Hence, we believe that a more logical explanation for the lack of supervision and feedback, as previously stated, is that most teachers had other commitments apart from supervision such as teaching, working in the administration, and pursuing postgraduate studies. It is also probable, as Mafa & Mapolisa (2012) noted, that the majority of students rarely consulted their supervisors during their research journey and left until the last minute to submit a work which was often full of mistakes and required a lot of time and effort to read and correct.

In fact, the students' and teachers' claims suggest that there is misunderstanding of the real role(s) played by the supervisor and, therefore, contradict previous researchers' claims

(e.g., Biggam, 2011; Jones et al, 2007; Fisher & Thompson, 2014; Mafa & Mapolisa, 2012) that the supervisor is not the one who does the work for the students as many of them think. Rather, the supervisor's roles involve providing advice, guidance to follow the right guidelines and procedures, and feedback on the appropriateness of the content and methodology proposed by the student. The supervisor is also a facilitator who assists the students to find relevant reading materials and keep them on track.

Further, in the questionnaire, the students were asked if their supervisors provided them with samples and guidelines on dissertation writing (**Chapter 3**, table 3.45), while in the interview they were asked about supervision meetings agendas (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.8). Likewise, teachers were asked the same questions in the questionnaire (**Chapter 4**, tables 4.29; 4.30) and the interview (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.9). The students' and teachers' interviews revealed similar results concerning the content of the supervision meetings. The participants stated that the main points that those meetings focused on were the content of the dissertation, the problems faced by the students in research writing, and data presentation and discussion. This result leads us to ask the following question: *Why did the students face all the aforementioned challenges in writing their dissertations though they said they used to discuss them with their supervisors who, in turn, used to suggest solutions?* One possible explanation for this might be that the supervisors' feedback and the solutions they proposed were not effective and did not meet the students' needs and expectations. It may be that the insufficient amount of time devoted to supervision meetings did not allow the students to tell their supervisors about all the challenges they encountered. It also seems possible that the students did not take into account the guidelines and feedback given by the teachers during the meetings to address their issues.

On the other hand, the answers given by teachers, when asked if they provided their supervisees with guidelines, were in contradiction with the students' answers in that some teachers said they did, while their supervisees denied that claim. This leads us to ask *why this contradiction? Whose answer would sound more believable and logical?* Based on the data we obtained from our research instruments (questionnaires, interviews and document analysis), three assumptions are made. First, it could be that the students did not tell the truth and wanted to cover up their failure to do their job. Second, maybe the supervisors did not tell the truth and just wanted to save their faces and show that they were doing their job properly. It could be also possible that the teachers did provide their students with resources about dissertation writing and research methods, yet their content was a bit complicated and difficult to understand, or they contained only theoretical knowledge without practical

activities or samples to follow. Thus, it can be concluded that the roles of supervisors and students be redefined and the nature of the supervisor-student relationship be reconsidered at the very beginning of the research journey.

Having discussed how the quality of supervision may affect in a way or another the quality of the students' work, the next section moves on to discuss the third contributing factor.

### **6.1.2.3. Absence of a Common Assessment Framework and Guidelines on Dissertation Format and Content**

Although it was not explicitly stated by the participants yet implied in their answers, most of the content-related challenges were attributed to the absence of unified guidelines on dissertation writing. This can be noticed in the different answers provided by the students to the questions about the content of the dissertation parts (**Chapter 3**, tables 3.10, 3.13, 3.20, 3.26, 3.29, 3.31, 3.33, 3.36). The results of the students' interview also provided hints about the absence of a common framework for dissertation writing. For instance, when asked about the reasons behind their failure to write a good abstract, some students said that they were provided with different formats of abstracts. This, therefore, made things more complicated as they did not know which format was correct (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.2.2). Other indicators of this factor were given by the students when they were asked about the major causes for their difficulties in writing the general introduction and the literature review chapter. As for the introduction, some students stated that writing this section was a challenging task due to the various meanings and interpretations attributed by their teachers to the same concepts such as the research problem and the research rationale (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.4.2). Regarding the literature review, the majority of students referred to the confusing nature of the various rules and different explanations of the referencing styles (APA & MLA) as a leading cause of the challenges they faced in writing in-text citations and the list of references (**Chapter 3**, section 3.2.5.2).

As for teachers, we noticed that there was a contradiction between their answers in the questionnaire when asked about the parts that make up the dissertation (**Chapter 4**, tables 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17) and what they said, during the interview, about the use of a common framework for the assessment of Master's dissertations (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.11). That is, in the interview, some teachers declared that they did use a common framework to assess the dissertations and recognized its main benefits (**Chapter 4**, section 4.2.11) namely: fair and better-quality assessment and effective communication between

teachers. Nevertheless, the results of the questionnaire, which tie well with the students' questionnaire findings, implied that a common framework for assessment was: **a)** totally absent, **b)** present but not used, or **c)** it was used but the criteria were too vague and open to different interpretations. This is because each teacher gave a different answer, while this should not have been the case if a unified framework was really employed as some teachers noted. Again, this result was confirmed through the document analysis which revealed a number of issues related to the content of the dissertation. This might imply that the students did not have an idea about the framework used in the department to assess their dissertations, or their supervisors had different views about the content of the dissertation based on the criteria presented in the proposed rubric (See Appendix N). This, therefore, puts into question the need to review the rubric/framework used in the department and redefine the assessment criteria. Also, there is a need to involve students in the design of this rubric or at least explain what is expected from them and train them on how to use the rubric in the classroom so that they know how a successful dissertation should look like.

#### **6.1.2.4. Language Proficiency and Writing Issues**

Unlike the other teachers who referred to students' poor language proficiency, coherence and cohesion issues as a hurdle that prevented the majority of students from writing successful dissertations, some teachers considered language issues as one of the reasons why students failed to write effective summaries in particular parts of the dissertation namely the results and discussion chapter and the general conclusion. Examples of these issues included level of formality in writing, lack of vocabulary, paragraph and essay structure, tenses, punctuation, coherence and cohesion. These issues do not necessarily imply that the students have poor language proficiency or limited English language skills. Rather, a number of factors could have contributed to the existence of such issues in most dissertations. First, they may be due to stress and writing anxiety. Second, it is very likely that the students did not proofread their work before they submitted it to their teachers. It is also probable that the supervisors rarely provided feedback on their students' work, or they were much more interested in structure, content and methodology and excluded academic language and writing style from their feedback, so the students thought they were on the right track.

#### **6.1.2.5. Other Possible Reasons**



Because the participants did not mention them in their answers, we will try to explain the possible reasons for the challenges related to writing the literature review chapter based on the data from students' and teachers' interviews.

To start with, the results revealed that identifying the gap in literature was a difficult task for the majority of students. This may be explained by the fact that the students did not read sufficient related sources. Thus, they could not come up with original ideas worth investigating. It is also probable that the students had a huge amount of literature relevant to their research areas and this made them confused about which aspect(s) they should focus on in their own studies. Another possible explanation for this result could be that the students did not know how to read and analyze academic/scholarly articles or they lacked the critical skills that allow them to question other researchers' work. A final possibility is that the articles they (i.e.; students) read did not contain the sections in which gaps in research could be identified such as limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

Further, the results showed that the majority of students faced difficulties in finding and accessing sources relevant to their research. One possible reason for this result is that most books and scholarly articles are not accessible for free and the students could not afford them. Besides, considering Algeria as a developing country, it is likely that resource constraints maybe, as Azila-Gbette et al. (2015) pointed out, due to the fact that higher education libraries in such countries are poorly equipped and lack high-quality English books and scholarly publications.

Last but not least, the results of the students' and teachers' interviews demonstrated that many students encountered issues in selecting the most relevant information to their research topics. This challenge maybe attributed to lack of library and research skills such as reading academic papers and evaluating relevance and quality of the literature. It could be also due to the vast amount of information which resulted in difficulty to read them all and made students confused and unable to decide what information were highly important for their topics.

In light of the research findings, a number of practical implications are discussed in the second part of this chapter.

## **6.2. Pedagogical Implications**

Considering the challenges and leading causes discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5, several implications are offered. The latter can prove beneficial for achieving an effective training on dissertation writing at the level of the English Department - Blida 2 University, and

improving the performance of novice student researchers and teachers supervising Master's dissertations.

**6.2.1. Allocating More Time for Practice in Academic Writing and Research Skills Classes:** As already mentioned in the results chapters (Chapters 3 & 4), most of the dissertation writing challenges were attributed to the lack of practice in academic writing and research skills classes which was in turn due to time constraints (3 hours a week). The students declared that most class time was spent on reading handouts, lecturing and explaining theoretical content, while very few opportunities were offered to transfer and apply what was learnt in theory to new learning situations.

It is, therefore, recommended that the stakeholders reconsider the amount of time devoted to teaching the two modules and add at least one hour and a half for each class (total: 4h30mns) so that teachers can in turn provide intensive training in dissertation writing, more opportunities for students to practice, and more corrective feedback on students' writing performance. The aim is to shift from teacher-centeredness to student centeredness where students' status changes from passive receptors of the material to active agents who are involved in critical reflection on their practices and the course content. One way to do this is to send the material (handouts, ppt slides, videos...etc.) to students in advance and ask them to review the course content and prepare their questions, then come to class with a basic understanding of the material to briefly discuss it with their teacher and answer the questions. In this manner, the teacher can have sufficient time to direct more attention towards developing and fostering students' procedural knowledge (i.e., practice writing) through guided practice instead of wasting time on theoretical and declarative knowledge (i.e., talking about writing). As a result, students' engagement in learning and their ability to grasp the course content and retain information will increase. Guided practice alone is, however, not sufficient to guarantee students' learning and improve their writing. Rather, equal importance should be also given to independent practice through individual graded home assignments. The latter are believed to be an effective way to check students' understanding of the material and their ability to properly apply it to their writings without teacher's assistance. Besides, the fact that students' practice at home will be graded is expected to foster a sense of competition between students and, hence, extrinsically motivate them to perform at their best.

**6.2.2. Promoting Coordination and Collaboration Among Teachers:** During the interview, some students reported that they did not have a clear idea about the exact meaning and methodological function of some academic concepts due to the various interpretations

provided by different teachers which in turn led to confusion and misuse of those concepts. That is why we believe it is critical to arrange regular coordination meetings in which teachers of academic writing and research skills take part. Such meetings provide teachers with opportunities to design the syllabus together, review its content in relation to students' needs and expectations, and discuss gaps and areas that need improvement. In this way, teachers of the two modules will avoid repeating the same content and develop common interpretations of the key concepts and aspects so as to avoid students' confusion and misunderstanding of the communicative function served by each of those concepts.

Apart from designing the syllabus, teachers of academic writing and research skills are also recommended to arrange coordination meetings with dissertation advisors in order to:

- Discuss the assessment/evaluation system of the Master's dissertation and work on designing a common analytic rubric for assessment.
- Discuss the problems faced by their students in conducting research and writing the dissertation, and share ideas and strategies to address those problems.
- Conduct a continuing evaluation of students' progress and performance and highlight the areas that need more work.

**6.2.3. Training Workshops on Dissertation Writing, Research Methodology and Supervision:** As already indicated in the results obtained from the research tools, among the most prominent challenges experienced by Master's students were unfamiliarity with the content of most dissertation parts and lack of research skills. That is why we believe that there is an urgent need for higher education institutions to invite academic writing and research methodology experts to organize training workshops on aspects of research writing. According to Lyons and Elmedni (2015), such workshops are beneficial as they play a vital role in helping graduate and post-graduate students better understand what is required in writing a particular genre. In addition, these research writing workshops do not only address the major issues experienced by the students in writing and the reasons behind them, but also tend to suggest effective strategies to eliminate, or at least alleviate, most issues. Likewise, the significance of the writing workshops is also emphasized by Ho (2013), and Lin and Enchelnayer (2014) who concur that they increase students' knowledge of how to write the dissertation parts, remove their (i.e., students) fear and anxiety, and boost their confidence towards their writing and research skills. Lin and Enchelnayer further add that involving students in writing workshops is one of the best ways to increase their motivation, engage them in the writing process and improve their critical thinking skills.

The primary aim of these workshops would be, therefore, to provide students and teachers with the necessary tips and strategies for writing a successful quality dissertation that adheres to the academic standards. They would also offer an opportunity for experts and university teachers to meet with students to discuss and suggest solutions to the research-writing challenges.

As for academic writing workshops, their content may revolve around, but not limited to, the following points/aspects:

- Writing a good research proposal to convince the university that the topic is worthy of approval.
- What a dissertation is (its characteristics and schematic structure).
- The content of each part in the dissertation (what should be included / avoided).
  - Writing the abstract (purpose, characteristics, content).
  - Writing the general introduction (purpose, characteristics, content).
  - Synthesizing and writing a comprehensive literature review (purpose, features, content).
  - Writing the methodology chapter (its purpose, features, content).
  - Writing the results and discussions chapter (purpose, features, content).
  - Writing the general conclusion (purpose, features, content).
- Avoiding plagiarism and general ethical issues.
- Academic writing tips

Regarding research methodology workshops, tutors/trainers may focus their attention on the following aspects:

- Choosing a good research topic.
- Types and attributes of research designs.
- Formulating research questions and objectives.
- Carrying out literature searches.
  - Using the internet to search for relevant material
  - Using library databases
  - Analyzing and evaluating quality and credibility of the literature
- Sampling methods.
- Data collection methods (questionnaires, interviews, experiments...etc.).
- Data analysis methods and software.
- Communicating and disseminating research findings.
- Increasing validity and reliability of research.

- Compiling a bibliography, citing and referencing.
- Integrity and research misconduct.

These workshops should be divided into theoretical and practical phases in which the former involves clearly focused and brief lectures on the aforementioned aspects, while the latter (i.e., practical phase) takes the lion's share of the workshops. Trainers can, for example, set up situations in which students and teachers are required to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in the theoretical phase. Further details about this point are provided in section 6.2.7.

Likewise, seminars and training workshops on dissertation supervision and examination are, undoubtedly, of great importance in supporting and facilitating the work of supervisors/advisors, developing their skills, and guiding them towards providing quality supervision. To this end, it is recommended that workshop facilitators and trainers put emphasis on the following aspects:

- Features of a successful supervision.
- Rights, duties and roles of the dissertation advisor.
- Supervision meetings (frequency, what to focus on, approximate time needed for each meeting).
- How to supervise (supervision phases).
- How to contact supervisees (phone, email, face to face meeting...etc.).
- How to communicate with supervisees.
- Problems faced during the supervision process and strategies to solve them.
- How to give constructive feedback to students.
- Forms of feedback (oral / written).
- How to prepare students to do effective research and write a successful dissertation.
- Strategies to deal with difficulties frequently experienced by the students during writing their dissertations such as stress, anxiety, demotivation, procrastination, delay in submitting the work...etc.

**6.2.4. Providing Timely and Frequent Feedback to Students:** In addition to supervising Master's dissertations, university teachers have other responsibilities and commitments which may prevent them from reviewing their students' work and giving them feedback in a timely and frequent manner. Examples of these commitments may include teaching, occupying administrative positions, doing postgraduate research, writing research papers and articles, taking part in conferences and seminars, and supervising other works. However, though the lion's share of the work is done by the students, the supervisor also

plays significant roles in keeping students on track and guiding them to reach their aspirations and produce a successful dissertation. To this end, monitoring students' research progress through providing immediate feedback on their work is one of the primary missions that dissertation advisors are recommended to focus on.

To start with, providing continuous timely feedback is an effective way to help students know **WHAT** aspects of their work need improvement (i.e., weaknesses) and **HOW** to improve their performance on the basis of their supervisors' comments. Put differently, feedback is considered as a window to the future. That is why when supervisors give immediate feedback, they open the door to their students to develop their skills to instantly reflect on their practices and issues and exert more efforts to reach practical solutions to improve their performance.

Additionally, providing timely feedback triggers students' motivation (Koen, 2011; Morris, 2005; Ragupathi & Lee, 2020) and increases their retention. In further detail, when the period between submitting the work and receiving corrective feedback from the supervisor is relatively short, it is more likely that students will remember the content of the material and even the situation (circumstances) within which the work was done. This will in turn promote students' engagement in a fruitful discussion with their supervisors, increase their abilities to better understand and digest their supervisors' comments, and motivate them (i.e., students) to think again about their work and "act upon the feedback" (Stuart, 2013, p.123) to improve their current and future performance. Conversely, if supervisors do not constantly follow their students' progress, and wait until they (i.e., students) submit the whole work at the end of the year to give them feedback in form of annual performance review, it is more likely that students will find difficulties in understanding what to do and how to do it because they can neither recall all the details nor have sufficient time to reflect on their work. This will in turn dampen their spirit and demotivate them to perform at their best (Ragupathi & Lee, 2020).

In conclusion, to maintain a good working student-supervisor relationship, it is highly recommended that supervisors arrange initial meetings with their supervisees to discuss and agree on the following points: **a)** Supervisee-supervisor roles and expectations, **b)** Conflicts of interest, **c)** Frequency of meetings, **d)** Ways to contact each other (*phone, email or any other means*), **e)** Submission form (*i.e., whether separate chapters or a complete version of the dissertation*), **f)** Submission deadlines, and **g)** Time needed to give feedback on the work.

**6.2.5. Revisiting the Rubric Used to Assess Dissertations:** Though this was not explicitly stated by the participants, the absence of an analytic dissertation assessment rubric is viewed as one of the reasons behind students' challenges in research writing especially

that both students and teachers concurred that most students did not know what they were expected to include in each part of their dissertations.

Actually, the rubric used to assess Master's dissertations in the English Department at Blida 2 University (See Appendix N) has several weaknesses. To start with, the rubric is holistic and the number of criteria listed does not reflect the complexity of the document being assessed (i.e., the dissertation). In other words, the criteria to be considered in the assessment are too general and vague; they do not make precise reference to what constitutes each part of the dissertation. In this way, the students will not be able to understand what is being assessed and why and how a particular score was attributed to their work. Moreover, the holistic nature of the criteria presented in the rubric seems to leave a big space for readers (experts) to think about many important aspects/criteria of quality dissertation that have been left out or hastily stated.

In addition, the rubric used is not reliable given the wording of the statements which is evaluative not descriptive where each criterion is written using value judgment words/terms that can be interpreted differently by each assessor. In this vein, Allen and Tanner (2006) stressed the importance of avoiding the use of such words/terms in rubrics due to the fact that "they are essentially so general as to be valueless in terms of their ability to guide a learner to emulate specific standards for a task and although it is admittedly difficult, they need to be defined in a rubric." (p. 200). This point can be better illustrated by the following examples from the rubric (Table 6.1):

**Table 6.1.: Shortcomings of the Dissertation Assessment Rubric Used in the Department of English – Blida 2 University**

| Examples (criteria)                                                                                               | What is the problem?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | What should be done?                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title of the thesis should be <b>clear</b> , concise <b><u>according to the requirement of each specialty</u></b> | What does 'clear' mean?<br>→ Different meanings may be associated to this word by each assessor)<br><br>What does the designer of the rubric mean by " <b><u>the requirement of each specialty</u></b> "?<br><br>Normally, the rubric was designed to assess MA dissertations in didactics, why is there reference to other specialties? | The designer(s) should state detailed features that define a clear and concise dissertation title so that everybody will understand the criterion in the same way. |

|                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Adequate</u></b><br>description of<br>the background<br>to the problem | What does ‘ <b>adequate</b> ’ mean?<br>→ each assessor will define the term/word<br>according to his own understanding<br><br>What is the background section made up of<br>(content)?                                                                                                                    | The designer(s) should explain<br>what the word “adequate”<br>exactly means through<br>providing details about the<br>main parts that make up the<br>background section so as to<br>ensure a common interpretation<br>by all assessors.                                                                                                                   |
| Research<br>problem <b><u>clearly<br/>defined</u></b>                        | What does ‘ <b>clearly defined</b> ’ mean?<br>→ Readers, assessors and students find it<br>difficult to determine what exactly makes up a<br>‘clearly defined’ research problem.                                                                                                                         | The designer(s) should provide<br>a detailed explanation of the<br>characteristics and main parts<br>that constitute the statement of<br>the problem                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| A <b><u>convincing<br/>justification</u></b> for<br>the research             | What does ‘ <b>convincing justification</b> ’ mean?<br><br>What should be mentioned by the students in<br>this section to convince their readers of the<br>significance of their research?                                                                                                               | The designer(s) should explain<br>how they expect the students to<br>justify their research and what<br>they should include in the<br>rationale section (e.g., the<br>expected benefits of the study,<br>the research gap...etc).                                                                                                                         |
| In-text<br>referencing of<br>sources is<br><b><u>appropriate</u></b>         | What does the word ‘ <b>appropriate</b> ’ mean?<br><br>Which style of referencing is the designer<br>referring to? APA or MLA?<br><br>What characterizes an “ <i>appropriate</i> ” use of in-<br>text citations according to each style?<br><br>What particular rules should be followed?                | Since the didactics team, in the<br>English Department, allows the<br>students to use either APA or<br>MLA styles of referencing to<br>cite their sources, the part<br>devoted for this section in the<br>rubric should entail a detailed<br>explanation of what is expected<br>from the students when they<br>cite sources following a<br>specific style |
| Research<br>method <b><u>clearly<br/>described</u></b>                       | What does ‘ <b>clearly described</b> ’ mean?<br><br>What should this description involve?<br>→ No details about the content of this section<br>are provided                                                                                                                                              | The designer(s) should explain<br>in detail what parts should be<br>included in the research method<br>section                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Data treatment<br>and presentation                                           | This, so-called- criterion was written as a title<br>in the rubric ‘ <i>data treatment and presentation</i> ’<br>No single detail is given to explain what is<br>expected from the students<br>No reference to how this section should be<br>organized or what particular elements it<br>should include. | The designer(s) should specify<br>what they mean by data<br>treatment and presentation,<br>what should be included in this<br>section/chapter, and how<br>qualitative and quantitative data<br>should be presented.                                                                                                                                       |

As shown in the examples presented in Table 6.1., words like: **clear**, **adequate**, **appropriate**, **convincing**, and **clearly** which are, supposedly, used to evaluate the content of the different parts of the dissertation are too general, vague and carry several meanings/interpretations for different people at different times. As a result, neither the teachers (assessors) nor the students will be able to identify what exactly makes up each



section as well as the features that define the quality of the work as excellent, good, fair or poor.

A good rubric should rather be reliable in that it consists of value-free criteria/statements that can be understood in the same way by all assessors and lead to similar approximate scores to be attributed to the work. That is why we highly recommend that teachers (supervisors) design a common analytic rubric for the assessment of Master's dissertations in which they agree on common definitions of concepts and criteria in order to, hopefully, achieve fair and reliable evaluation. To this end, we suggest an analytic rubric (presented in Appendix O) which reflects the essential criteria and academic writing conventions that have been already discussed in the theoretical chapter of this work, provides detailed information of what constitutes each part of the dissertation, and helps teachers/assessors reach shared expectations and give very specific feedback and consistent scoring.

As for the form of the suggested rubric (Appendix O), it is a table which is divided into five (5) columns to indicate the level of students' performance (poor/inadequate, fair/adequate, good, very good, excellent) in addition to the last column on the right in which the final grade for a particular part/aspect is written. Regarding the lines of the table, there are eleven (11) main lines on the left side, each of which concerns a particular part of the dissertation (i.e., *layout/format of the dissertation, the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter, the general conclusion, quality of the writing style/language, and citing and referencing*). Each of these lines is in turn divided into sub-lines/cells which involve a detailed description of the assessment criteria or, in other words, what students are expected to include in each part to meet the requirements of writing a good dissertation.

**6.2.6. Using Rubrics as Instructional Tools in Academic Writing Classes:** In addition to its evaluative function, a rubric can be used as an instructional tool to support and guide students' learning and teach them HOW to assess and look at their and others' writing with a critical eye. An instructional rubric is defined by Andrade (2000) as "a document that articulates the expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria, or what counts and describing levels of quality from excellent to poor." (Cited in Andrade & Du, 2005, p.1). There are many ways in which instructional rubrics can be beneficial to both students and teachers.

To begin with, instructional rubrics provide students with a detailed framework which explains the assessment requirements/criteria and clarifies to the students what their teacher

wants them to do and what important areas/aspects they need to focus on to meet the standards of academic writing.

Moreover, not only that instructional rubrics help students produce quality work, but they also allow teachers to give very specific and informative feedback to their students (Allen & Tanner, 2006) and lead to efficient, consistent and, most importantly, unbiased grading (Andrade, 2005; Sharma, 2019). That is, unlike the traditional method that is adopted by most teachers who rely on their general impression to grade their students' work and, thus, end up giving unclear, vague and imprecise comments which are difficult to interpret by the students, using an analytic-instructional rubric will give diagnostic feedback and a clear picture to the students about merits and flaws of their work. Besides, using analytic rubrics with the same assessment criteria is a good way that teachers can apply to ensure objective, unbiased and efficient evaluation and, hence, avoid any kind of complains and arguments with students.

Further, instructional rubrics enhance students' self-esteem and confidence (Sharma, 2019), increase their interest in writing and develop their writing skills (Andrade, 2000; Andrade, 2001; Sharma, 2019). That is, when students are informed of what counts and clearly understand the criteria that make up a quality work, this will result in increased self-confidence, motivation (Hyland, 2007) and interest in the assigned task which then leads to better writing performance. On the contrary, when students have no idea what they are doing (i.e., plan) or what is required from them, they will lose interest, feel anxious, and show reluctance to write. Besides, providing a detailed explanation of the criteria will help students expand their knowledge and understanding of effective writing (Andrade, 2001) which goes beyond merely focusing on grammatical/structural forms and mechanics to include more complex aspects of writing such as meaning, the rhetorical purpose of writing, the intended audience, tone, word choice and clarity.

Additionally, instructional rubrics encourage both teachers' and students' reflective practice (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade, 2000; Andrade, 2005; Sharma, 2019). In further detail, having students check their work against the criteria set in the rubric will allow them to assess their learning progress, the extent to which they learnt what they were required to learn and what they still need to learn to improve their writing and submit a quality work. On the other hand, teachers can employ instructional rubrics as informative tools to have a clear picture (feedback) about their students' performance (Hyland, 2007), strengths and weaknesses and use that feedback as a basis upon which they refine their instructional practices and strategies to address their students' needs and meet their expectations.

It is also worth noting that inviting students to take part in the design of instructional rubrics and make decisions about the assessment criteria proved effective in paving the way for students to develop efficient strategies that would help them address their learning needs and knowledge gaps. This will gradually lead to autonomy and self-directed learning (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Sharma, 2019) especially that students are aware of the quality work expectations and how they can be met independently with less assistance from the teacher.

**6.2.7. Encouraging Peer-Assessment/Feedback:** Given the issue of large classes and limited time devoted to academic writing and research skills classes (3 hours per-week for each) which may negatively affect the assessment process and students' writing performance, we believe that encouraging peer assessment assignments as part of group work in and outside the classroom would lead to better results.

To start with, peer assessment proved effective in paving the way for students to critique, evaluate and provide constructive feedback on others' work (Lin & Enchelmayer, 2014). It is also a great opportunity for students to develop their reflective thinking skills (Somervell, 1993 as cited in Orsmond et al., 1996). That is, the feedback given by their peers will prompt students to better understand their problems, reflect on their own practices, progress and needs and decide on the action to be taken to address their weaknesses and improve performance. Pursuing approximately the same line of the thought, Topping (2009) stresses the role of peer assessment in promoting metacognitive awareness and "increasing reflection and generalization to new situations." (p. 23). This is because sharing and discussing ideas and assessing others' work with peers help students look at things with a critical eye, think about what they are doing (i.e., the steps followed in the evaluation process) and how they are doing it, and identify which strategies are appropriate to address each situation. Further, Astin et al. (2011) add that peer assessment develops students' self-regulatory skills and empathy towards others. In their words, "giving students responsibility for evaluating each other's work is self-empowering.... [It] helps students develop an understanding of others and a sense of responsibility and caring" (p.74).

Besides, peer assessment builds students' confidence in their abilities, promotes their engagement with the task and motivates them to perform at their best since they know that their work will be assessed and evaluated by others.

Another benefit associated with peer assessment is that it develops students' communication and negotiation skills (Topping, 1998). It creates an effective learning environment for students to communicate with peers, actively listen to others, share ideas and suggestions in a diplomatic manner, respect and accept individual differences. This will

therefore create a sense of community where all members are active participants in the learning and assessment processes and work for the common good and success of the group.

Moreover, peer assessment is thought to be one of the best techniques to prepare and train students to use instructional rubrics and get familiar with the assessment criteria. This can be done through **organizing a mock viva**. The latter is viewed as one of the best ways to develop reciprocity and collaboration among students, promote active-independent learning (Orsmond et al., 1996), help students rehearse their dissertation and assessment skills, provide students with an authentic viva experience and ensure a good preparation for the real viva. To this end, a mock viva can be implemented through the following steps:

- At the beginning of the academic year, in collaboration with the teacher of research skills, the teacher of academic writing divides the class into two large groups and gives each group a research topic to practice writing the dissertation parts.
- Each of the two large groups is then subdivided into small teams of five students where each team is required to work on the topic assigned to the large group and write a particular part of the dissertation (i.e., the abstract, the general introduction, a preliminary review of the literature, a mini research design chapter, a mini results chapter (e.g., presenting the results of a questionnaire or an interview), implications and conclusion).
- For each session, the teacher selects two teams from each group to present a part of the dissertation (presenters) and six examiners (from students) to assess their peer's work.
- Next, the teacher asks the teams concerned with the presentation to send a copy of their work to the assessors and another copy to the teacher at least three or four days before the presentation so that they can have sufficient time to assess the work and give written feedback.
- On the day of the presentation, each team presents their work orally for 15-20 minutes in front of a jury of three students. The teacher can also invite the supervisors to attend the presentations.
- After listening to each presentation, the members of the jury (i.e., students) give their comments and discuss the extent to which their peers' work was satisfactory and met the criteria listed in the instructional rubric already designed by the teacher and the students in class.
- After the members of the jury give their feedback on the presenters' performance, the teacher can invite the supervisors to comment on the work presented and the way the work was assessed by the students.

In addition to mock vivas, peer assessment technique can be used by teachers to develop their students' research skills through mini-workshops on aspects of methodology such as sampling and designing data collection instruments. As an example, a group of students can be asked to practice interviewing skills in class (*e.g., Asking and answering questions, Types of questions to ask, Points to be discussed first in the interview, Being an engaged/active listener, Time needed to answer questions, The language to be used according to the interviewees, Probing deeper into a subject to get more detailed responses...etc.*), while the other students (the audience) are required to observe what is happening in front of them and provide comments and suggestions based on a set of criteria already discussed in the lecture.

As another form of peer-assessment, supervisors can encourage their supervisees to share their work with their friends to proofread it and give feedback before submitting it to the teacher/supervisor.

All these forms of peer assessment not only help students develop their critical thinking and writing skills, but also reduce the burden of assessment for teachers who have large classes and heavy workload.

**6.2.8. Encouraging Self-Assessment:** Like peer assessment, self-assessment is another method used to develop assessment practices in EFL classrooms and improve students' performance. It refers to a process in which students are invited to give feedback on their own work, competence, progress and performance and evaluate the extent to which they could successfully meet the criteria that define quality work. It is defined by Grob (2017) as "a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria and revise accordingly." (p.33). There are many advantages associated with self-assessment in EFL contexts. First, it develops students' metacognitive awareness (McMillan & Hearn, 2008; Stoker, 1994 as cited in Stuart, 2013), critical thinking and reflective skills. In further detail, providing students with opportunities to assess and evaluate their work helps them develop a better understanding of themselves, their knowledge, abilities, skills, strengths, weaknesses, needs and performance (i.e., self-awareness). Besides, it assists students to critically reflect on the task assigned to them, its rationale, content and demands, and the extent to which they were able to successfully meet the task requirements (i.e., task awareness). Moreover, encouraging students to assess their own work increases their strategic/strategy awareness as it helps them evaluate and reflect on the appropriateness of the strategies used to accomplish the task and their applicability to other learning contexts in the future. Last but not least, self-assessment increases students' abilities to assess and

evaluate more complex situations, identify problems, think thoroughly about solutions and necessary actions to be taken to address their problems and evaluate the effectiveness of those solutions.

Second, self-assessment is a method which focuses on promoting autonomy and self-regulated learning (Grob, 2017) through engaging students as active agents in learning and assessment processes. That is, when students understand themselves and their abilities, they become able to control their learning, reflect upon their practices and make decisions about appropriate ways to address their needs and improve their performance without an over-reliance on the teacher.

Further, using self-assessment turned out to be an effective method for enhancing students' motivation (McMillan & Hearn, 2008; Gipps, 1994 as cited in Stuart, 2013), boosting their self-confidence, and increasing their interest and engagement in the learning process. By way of explanation, giving students the opportunity to assess their own work and design criteria of assessment is likely to create a sense of power, control, demonstrate an appreciation of students' participation in the learning process, and, hence, help students maximize their potential to improve their performance and achieve better results.

Finally, yet importantly, self-assessment is also a powerful tool to train students use rubrics and develop their knowledge of the assessment criteria and procedures. This will in turn increase students' participation in the learning process and decrease teachers' assessment workload.

One of the most common and effective tools to develop self-assessment practices is journal writing which is discussed further in the next section.

**6.2.9. Encouraging Students to Write Dissertation Logs/Reflective Journals:** In the literature, various names were assigned to the process of journal writing such as: *dissertation logs, diaries, reflective journals, journal writing, notebooks and workbooks*. Yet, they all share the same features and refer to a strategy which is used by students to record and reflect on important events related to their own learning and experiences. In their description of this strategy, Hashemi and Mirzaei (2015) state that it “involves a reflective process that is initiated when the learner documents the experience encountered, return to the experience recollects what has taken place and replays the experience and re-evaluation takes place.” (p.104). This description implies that journal writing is a process which goes beyond just noting down observations. It is rather a strategy which involves students in a “serious reflection, analysis, and self-critique” (Maxwell, 2005, p.13). In more detail, in their dissertation logs/reflective journals, students are encouraged to write about their ideas,

plans, experiences with research, dissertation writing and future decisions. Hence, the content of these journals is not only about answering the ‘*what happened*’ question, but rather, writers should respond to the following questions: *What happened? Why (reasons) it happened? In what circumstances? What went/did not go well? What challenges were faced while conducting research and writing the dissertation? How did those challenges affect their research and dissertation writing performance? What was done in a particular situation? How did the student(s) react to improve the situation?*

Journal writing, therefore, opens the door for a more comfortable communication of the students’ needs and expectations (Casanave, 2014) in that it provides students, especially those who are shy and quiet, with opportunities to reduce their stress and anxiety, express themselves freely and react positively to their experiences and challenges.

Journal writing is also a great way which provides students with more opportunities to practise writing outside the classroom and improve their writing skills and fluency (Arar, 2015; Casanave, 2014). In further detail, journal writing allows students to get into the habit of regular writing, which in turn paves the way for them to explore and develop their writing techniques particularly synthesizing ideas, commenting on, analyzing and evaluating their output. Additionally, since this technique (i.e., journaling) contributes to developing cognitive skills as the ones previously mentioned, it is also likely that it has positive impacts on linguistic skills, which are less complex, such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, spelling and punctuation.

In addition, this technique promotes students’ critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Hashemi & Mirzaei, 2015; O’connell & Dymont, 2013) by allowing them to assess their strengths and weaknesses, evaluate their progress and learning development, and propose solutions that are thought to be appropriate to alleviate the challenges experienced and improve their performance. In this sense, O’connell & Dymont (2013) point out that “journals provide a forum for students to ask questions, propose answers and solutions, and receive feedback about their decisions.... Journals permit students to step outside those actions/learning and take a critical look at the how, what, why and when of that experience.” (p. 25).

Moreover, journal writing, which is referred to by Maxwell (2005) as **research memos**, proved to be an effective tool that can be used by researchers throughout their research journey. In these memos, researchers can document all details about the research process including their observations, ideas, plans, interpretations, emerging hypotheses, decisions made about data collection and analysis, sampling techniques in addition to the researchers’ assumptions and impressions regarding a particular situation/event. Besides, the function of

these memos is not limited to just documenting/recording events. Rather, they serve as reflective-evaluative tools that are used by researchers to reflect on their readings, assess and evaluate their performance, the work achieved so far, the way research was done and data were collected, the strengths and weaknesses of the research design and methods, the extent to which a particular event/situation contributed to their research, and the necessary measures to improve the situation and the researchers' performance in light of what emerged from this evaluation. In this regard, Casanave (2014) praises the vital role played by research memos in that they "are intended to help researchers respond to and think through issues and decisions in a research project. They also help researchers connect ideas from readings with a particular project and speculate about findings and interpretations" (p.23).

Last but not least, journal writing allows students to keep in constant communication with their teachers (Arar, 2015) and supervisors. Students can be encouraged to write journals in which they tell teachers about their performance/progress and difficulties. Teachers, afterwards, read the journals and show the students what went well (i.e., what areas of learning have improved) what did not go well (i.e., what needs more work and efforts). Thus, having been informed of what students need through journal writing will in turn help teachers reflect on their teaching performance and strategies and identify what aspects of the course need more focus and attention.

**6.2.10. Using Exemplars in Writing Classes:** The results of the study also revealed that the overwhelming majority of students were not fully, or at all, aware of the content of most dissertation parts. This is why it is believed that reviewing sample dissertations and using exemplars can be a powerful way to familiarize students with the schematic structure and content of academic papers and help them successfully meet the standards of academic writing (Flores & Lopez, 2019; Foster & Marasco, 2007; Handley & Williams, 2011). A simple definition of the term 'exemplar' is a good model, sample or example that reflects academic writing conventions.

Using exemplars as a teaching tool is beneficial in that it increases students' motivation, attention and interest in writing (Moreno & Ortegado-Layne, 2007) and enhances their awareness of quality writing. Additionally, exemplars encourage the application of theory into practice and enable students to better understand what is expected from them (Handley & Williams, 2011). That is, teachers can use exemplars to familiarize students with various aspects of academic writing presented in other people's work, such as organization and presentation of ideas, text structure and content, vocabulary, word choice and level of



formality, which in turn are applied to new classroom writing situations. To employ this tool (i.e., exemplars) in the classroom, the teacher can proceed as follows:

**Step 1: Presenting and Noticing:** The teacher divides the session into two parts: theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part, s/he introduces a particular part of the dissertation to the students, **the general introduction** for example, and explains its function, characteristics, schematic structure and content. To better illustrate her/his explanations, the teacher is recommended to expose students to examples of introductions extracted from previously marked Master's dissertations along with examiners' feedback. These examples are expected to help students notice the difference between the qualities of strong and weak introductions, and avoid previous mistakes and errors.

**Step 2: Guided Practice:** Once the theoretical part is done, the teacher moves to the practical part in which s/he provides students with opportunities to apply what they learnt in theory to their **own** research topics or topics suggested by the teacher who should be present as a guide and facilitator when necessary. In this guided practice, the teacher can have students work in pairs (*if they work on their own topics*) or in groups (*if they work on topics proposed by the teacher*). Whatever method is chosen, students are supposed to carefully read the exemplars, then try to follow the same steps in their writings. For instance, if the whole task is about writing the general introduction, the teacher can divide it into several parts each of which is concerned with writing a particular part of the introduction (i.e., background of the study, statement of the problem, research rationale, purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses). Hence, once the students finish working on each part, they present their work to their peers and teacher to give them feedback in relation to the exemplars given. The students can be also asked to review and comment on the weak exemplars provided by the teacher, and suggest how they can be improved.

**Step 3: Independent Practice:** When the teacher sees that the students started to become aware of the writing criteria and qualities of a good work, s/he can move toward an independent practice in which students do home assignments using exemplars to rehearse what they learnt in the classroom. These steps can be also followed to teach summarizing and paraphrasing skills.

### **Suggested YouTube Channels on Dissertation Writing and Research Methodology**

Given the fact that most of today's students integrate technology in all aspects of their lives and spend much of their time on the internet, we thought of suggesting a list of YouTube channels (see Appendix P) that, we believe, will help students, researchers and teachers as well expand their knowledge and develop their academic and research skills.

In the following, and last, part of the chapter, we present the limitations of the study and propose further research suggestions to address them.

### **6.3. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Research**

Despite our efforts to produce the best possible thesis, our study has, by no means, its inevitable limitations and shortcomings which should be acknowledged.

The first limitation concerns the lack of previous studies relevant to our research topic which in turn made the discussion of the study's findings challenging for the researcher. Most of the previous studies we found were about thesis writing challenges faced by postgraduate students (Ph.D.), while only a few studies (discussed in the literature review chapter) tackled the difficulties experienced by graduate applied linguistics and didactics students in writing. Hence, we suggest that future genre studies should consider this shortcoming and thoroughly examine this critical issue.

Another limitation relates to the small sample size and the limited context. It is unfortunate that the opinions and perspectives expressed by the limited number of participants who took part in our research could not be representatives of Algerian students and teachers in other contexts as our study was limited to Blida 2 University context. Thus, we believe that replicating this study and including more students and teachers from several Algerian universities will allow the researchers to achieve generalizability, widen the scope of the findings and get more valid and strong conclusions about the challenges, particularly, experienced by graduate didactics students in writing their dissertations.

Additionally, given the amount of time available and the number of pages required, we had to choose between randomly selecting a few samples and doing a detailed analysis of all the dissertation parts or including all the dissertations of the students who took part in our research and doing a less comprehensive and brief analysis. We, therefore, opted for the first choice and, thoroughly, analyzed only six dissertations. However, we believe that in order to lend more credibility to the findings (challenges in dissertation writing), a larger number of dissertations should be included in the corpus to be analyzed in future studies.

Moreover, the time and availability of the teachers who took part in this research were among the main challenges we experienced when collecting data for our research. As already noted in the method chapter, all the teachers who make up the population of our study were included (N=10). Though we had to send them endless follow-up reminders to answer the questionnaire and arrange meetings to do the interview, it took us almost eight months (from October 2019 to June 2020) to collect data from most teachers who claimed

that they were busy with heavy workload and could hardly find time to participate in our research. Some teachers even accepted and promised to take part in the study, yet they withdrew from the study without any prior notice or explanation.

One last limitation is the fact that our study only focused on the challenges experienced by Master's students in relation to the schematic structure of the dissertation and methodological issues, yet we overlooked other challenges related, but not limited, to the students' psychology, personality, and socio-cultural context. Therefore, it is our hope that this exploratory research will lay the foundation for future studies to investigate these challenges (e.g., students' readiness, motivation, anxiety, attitudes, family and cultural background) and the way(s) in which they affect dissertation writing performance.

## **Conclusion and Research Contribution**

In this chapter, we explained and discussed the research findings, presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5, in relation to the literature review chapter and the research questions. We also presented the practical implementations of the research findings, to improve students' and supervisors' performance at the level of the English Department at Blida 2 University, and acknowledged the limitations that constrained our research.

In order to answer the first research question and highlight the main challenges faced by Didactics students in writing their dissertations, we summarized and discussed the main findings obtained from the students' and teachers' questionnaires, the students' and teachers' semi-structured interviews, and the document analysis of six Master's dissertations. Merging data from the different instruments revealed three main common themes: a) content-related challenges, b) summarizing, paraphrasing and synthesizing issues, and c) language proficiency and writing issues.

According to the data obtained from the interviews which were used to answer the second research question about the leading causes, it was found that the aforementioned challenges were mainly attributable to: a) lack of practice and ineffective training in academic writing and research skills classes, b) lack of supervisor's guidance and support, c) absence of a common assessment framework, and d) language proficiency and writing issues.

Our research findings, hopefully, make contribution to the field of research writing and supervision by:

- Contributing to the literature on graduate EFL students' challenges in writing a Master's dissertation.
- Raising students' and supervisors'/teachers' awareness of the schematic structure and content of the main parts that make up a dissertation namely: the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter and the general conclusion.
- Casting light on the different types of challenges that can be associated with writing each part of the dissertation through investigating the viewpoints of students and supervisors and providing a detailed analysis of sample dissertations written by graduate didactics students from the department of English at Blida 2 University – Algeria.
- Highlighting the need for the English Department at Blida 2 University – Algeria – to **revisit** the so-called rubric used to assess Master's dissertations, **rethink/reflect on** the feedback practices of academic writing and research skills teachers and dissertation advisors, **redefine** the student-supervisor relationship, and **evaluate** the quality of guidance and supervision.
- Emphasizing the need for organizing research writing training workshops and research methodology seminars to promote students' writing and research skills and teachers' supervision skills.
- Highlighting the need for engaging students in the development of assessment rubrics.
- Revisiting the teaching methodology adopted in academic writing and research skills classes, in the English Department – Blida 2 – and stressing the importance of incorporating student-centered techniques that promote their autonomy and self-regulated learning such as self-assessment, peer assessment and journal writing.

# **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

## **The General Conclusion**

Motivation and interest in this research emerged primarily from the researcher's observations during the dissertation oral defenses she attended in the English Department at Blida 2 University. During those vivas, the oral presentations and examiners' comments demonstrated that the majority of students were still unable to write a dissertation that conforms to academic requirements. In order to find out whether there was a need to conduct further research, the researcher carried out a preliminary investigation of the issue. To this end, informal interviews were conducted with Master 2 students and teachers from the department where the study took place to get an idea about the students' experiences with research writing and the extent to which they could successfully achieve a quality work. The results of the investigation revealed common agreement among the majority of students that writing a Master's dissertation was a daunting task. This perspective was confirmed by the teachers' claims that most dissertations suffered from improper presentation of the different sections and chapters.

The literature review set the stage for the study by providing the theoretical background and casting light on the key research concepts. This chapter provided a detailed review and discussion of the principal parts that compose a dissertation namely the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter, and the general conclusion. That is, it shed light on the features, importance, communicative function, and the main frameworks that were employed to analyze the schematic structure of the aforementioned parts. In addition, findings, significance and shortcomings of previous related studies were discussed to identify the gaps and establish a basis for the next chapters of this work.

In fact, in addition to the results of the pilot study, reviewing the related literature revealed the scarcity of studies on the schematic structure of Master's dissertations and research writing and, hence, reflected the need for further in-depth investigations of the challenges that might be faced by novice researchers when writing their dissertations. This doctoral research, therefore, aimed primarily at exploring graduate students' challenges in writing a Master's dissertation. Additionally, this research also investigated the main factors that prevented Master's students from writing a dissertation that adheres to universal academic writing requirements. To achieve these objectives, two research questions were raised: **1)** What challenges do the students of didactics, at the English Department - Blida 2 University- encounter in writing their Master's dissertations? and **2)**

What factors are believed to be responsible for the challenges experienced by Master's students in writing their dissertations?.

To answer the two questions, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, exploratory research was conducted in the English Department at Blida 2 University during the second semester of the academic year (2018-2019). The population of the study consisted of 53 Master 2 students majoring in didactics and 10 teachers supervising and assessing Master's dissertations. 28 students were randomly selected from the population to answer the students' questionnaire, while the sample concerned with answering the teachers' questionnaire included all the ten teachers. As for the semi-structured follow-up interviews, 13 students and 5 teachers were purposively selected.

To collect data from the participants, a triangulation method was adopted through employing the following data collection tools: questionnaires administered to both students and teachers, semi-structured follow-up interviews conducted with students and teachers, and a document analysis of six Master's dissertations using Chen and Kuo's framework (2012) for the analysis of dissertations in applied linguistics. All the aforementioned tools were used to investigate the challenges and, thus, answer the first research question, while only the semi-structured interviews were employed to explore the leading factors and answer the second research question.

As far as the process of data collection is concerned, the researcher started with administering questionnaires to students and teachers to check their awareness of the function served by the main parts that make up the dissertation (i.e.; the abstract, the general introduction, the literature review chapter, the method chapter, the results and discussion chapter and the general conclusion), assess their familiarity with the content of each part, and investigate the extent to which writing the aforementioned parts was difficult for Master's students. The questionnaires were followed by semi-structured interviews to obtain more insights from students and teachers about students' experiences with dissertation writing, the challenges they encountered and the leading factors. After reviewing the questionnaires and interviews findings, the researcher decided to conduct a document analysis of some randomly selected Master's dissertations, written by some of the students who were already interviewed, in the perspective of cross-checking the findings obtained from the aforementioned tools.

The results of the study revealed that the most recurring challenge was students' unfamiliarity with the content of the dissertation main parts. In particular, most students did not have a clear idea about the schematic structure of the general introduction, the literature review chapter, and the results and discussion chapter. Besides, it was found that the majority of students were not able to write effective summaries which significantly condensed the text into a shorter form and preserved its essential meaning and main points. The results also showed that the students lacked paraphrasing and synthesizing skills as they faced difficulties in formulating others' ideas in their own words and establishing relationships between the various sources cited in the literature review and the research topics being studied. Furthermore, a number of issues were particularly identified in writing the literature review chapter such as inability to select relevant literature and identify the research gap, absence of students' critical stance, and inappropriate writing of in-text citations and the list of references. The last most recurring challenges experienced by the majority of students were their poor language proficiency and inability to construct coherent and cohesive texts.

According to the participants, the aforementioned challenges were mainly due to three factors. First and foremost, the participants declared that the primary focus of the academic writing and research skills courses was primarily on teaching theoretical concepts and promoting students' declarative knowledge. In this way, as the participants claimed, very few opportunities were provided to the students to apply their theoretical knowledge to practice and, thus, enhance their procedural knowledge. The second leading cause for the students' challenges in dissertation writing, as reported by the majority of students and some teachers, was the lack of supervisor's guidance. The participants' claims suggested that the majority of supervisors were not doing their job properly in what concerned arranging supervision meetings with their students and providing timely-feedback on their work. The last cause, implicitly stated by the participants, was the absence of a unified framework/rubric that should state the dissertation writing requirements and the assessment criteria followed by the English Department.

Concerning the reasons for the challenges faced in writing the literature review chapter, they were not explained by the participants. That is why the researcher tried to provide possible explanations based on the participants' statements and claims during the interviews. For instance, difficulty in identifying the research gap was possibly attributed to the lack of reading and analysis skills or insufficient relevant resources. On the other



hand, difficulty in selecting relevant materials could be explained by the fact that the students lacked the necessary library and research skills or the students had a huge amount of information which made it difficult to choose the most important and relevant material to their research topics.

Drawing on the findings of this study, a number of implications were offered to, hopefully, help students and teachers achieve effective learning and teaching of dissertation writing and research skills. First and foremost, it was recommended that teachers should allocate more time for practice in academic writing and research skills courses and shift from teacher-centered approach to student-centered approach so as to open the space for the students' interaction in the classroom and critical reflection on the course content and their own performance. Moreover, in order to avoid students' confusion and misinterpretation of the key concepts in research and the communicative function served by each part of the dissertation, it was recommended that teachers of academic writing and research skills should arrange regular coordination meetings to design the syllabus together, design a unified framework for the assessment of the students' work, discuss the challenges faced by the students in research writing and evaluate their progress. Further, the fact that the majority of students were not aware of the communicative function and schematic structure of the various parts that make up the dissertation led us to recommend organizing training workshops on aspects of research writing so as to help novice researchers better understand what was exactly required from them when writing a particular genre, and open the space for them to meet with experts and university teachers to discuss the difficulties faced in research writing and suggest solutions to address them. Such workshops were also believed to be effective for developing teachers' research skills and achieving quality supervision. In addition, given the students' complaints about the lack, not to say absence, of feedback from their supervisors, it was recommended that supervisors should constantly follow their students' progress and give immediate (timely) feedback on their work so as to allow them (i.e.; students) to reflect on their issues and exert more efforts to solve them and write a good dissertation that adheres to scholarly writing principles. Besides, due to the holistic nature of the rubric used by some teachers to assess Master's dissertations in the English Department, vagueness of some criteria and total absence of others, it was recommended that all members of the teaching staff should revisit the rubric used and take part in the process of designing a common analytic rubric which clearly defines what is expected from the students to include in their dissertations

and helps teachers give informative feedback and achieve fair and consistent evaluation. In addition to its evaluative function, the researcher saw that a rubric could be used as an instructional tool in academic writing classes given its effectiveness in informing the students of the assessment criteria and the aspects they need to concentrate on to meet the requirements of writing a successful dissertation. Actually, the use of rubrics as instructional tools can be also encouraged through peer and self-assessment techniques. The latter are believed to enhance students' reflective and critical thinking skills, promote their abilities to assess and give feedback on their own and peers' work, reduce students' stress and anxiety, decrease teachers' assessment workload and help them reflect on their teaching practices and performance. Finally, yet importantly, it was recommended that teachers should use exemplars (i.e.; sample dissertations) as a way to overcome the issue of students' unfamiliarity with the schematic structure and content of the dissertation parts. This technique has several benefits such as increasing students' motivation and interest in writing, enhancing their awareness of the features of quality writing, and improving their critical thinking and writing skills.

Like any study, our research was subject to some limitations such as the scarcity of literature on the topic under investigation, teachers' and students' reluctance to participate in the study, and the particular focus on structure and methodology-related challenges. The latter are definitely not the only hurdles that may prevent students from writing a successful dissertation. Rather, the students' psychology, personality, financial and professional status, socio-cultural context, and time are expected to affect in way or another the students' research writing performance. We may also add the number of participants who took part in the study and the dissertations (6) we analyzed which was probably not enough to arrive at conclusive and credible results.

In light of the aforementioned limitations, the researcher invites prospective researchers who intend to replicate this study to consider including more participants (students and teachers) from different Algerian universities so as to have a more representative sample of the target population, reach more valid findings, draw strong conclusions, and cross-check the findings of this study. Besides, the researcher recommends the inclusion of a large number of dissertations in the corpus for the purpose of lending credibility to the results and conclusions. Furthermore, the researcher invites future researchers to investigate the problem in other specialities and compare/contrast between the dissertation writing challenges experienced by Didactics students and other

students majoring in Literature-civilization, comparative literature, and translation. It is also interesting that future studies focus on exploring other challenges, which were not raised in this thesis (social, cultural, psychological...etc.), that may be experienced by novice researchers during the dissertation writing process.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Samples of Examiners' Comments on Some Master's Dissertations

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>019 Intensive Review.doc Open with 2 Students' Questionnaire The purpose of the Students' questionnaire is to provide insights into the autonomous learning strategies the learners use while learning English (But, this is not related to your RQ), and then to investigate some of the teaching strategies that may thwart the development of learner autonomy. This questionnaire consists of twenty eight (28) close-ended items about the autonomous learning strategies the learners use while learning English (But, this is not related to your RQ). What about teaching strategies used as perceived by learners? The participants can choose one of the six scales (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often, and always). The questionnaire ends with an open-ended question for collecting qualitative data</p> | <p>various extracurricular activities. These studies have shown the worth of ECAs. However, it is important to investigate what Algerian students think about the use of ECAs to enhance their soft skills. Although Bahdi (2014) conducted a research about the effects of ECAs on oral proficiency, this area of study remains unclear under researched and researchers can still investigate and convey further studies. Therefore, the objective of this study is clearly to focus on the way students view this contribution and how it can help them develop their soft skills. Belongs in objectives</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p>development of students' soft skills.</p> <p><b>Conclusions:</b> Some readers might read your conclusion sections only. Therefore, a good conclusion must contain the outline of the section/chapter (like the introduction). And it adds to that the synthesis of important information or 1-2 key pieces of information from each section/sub-section.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Eastlake, M. (2015). The Link between Extracurricular Activities and Soft Skills. <b>Source?</b> Retrieved April 26th, 2015. <a href="https://www.td.org/newsletters/the-buzz/the-linkbetween-extracurricular-activities-and-soft-skills">https://www.td.org/newsletters/the-buzz/the-linkbetween-extracurricular-activities-and-soft-skills</a></p> <p>Esa, A, Siti, M,&amp; Azman, N. (2015). Do Extra-Curricular Activities Effect Student Leadership in Institutions: Sport? <i>Asian Social Science</i>. 11(16) p294.</p> <p><b>Author?</b> Extracurricular Activities Participation: a Perception of King Abdulaziz University Medical Students. <i>Medical Sciences</i>, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 3-24. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.kau.edu.sa/Files/320/Researches/63695_34862">https://www.kau.edu.sa/Files/320/Researches/63695_34862</a></p> <p>Gerencer, T. (2020). Soft skills vs. hard skills. <b>Source?</b> Retrieved July, 27th 2020. <a href="https://zety.com/blog/hard-skills-soft-skills">https://zety.com/blog/hard-skills-soft-skills</a></p> |
| <p><b>10. Language: (Grammar, cohesion, coherence, word choice, etc.):</b><br/>Too many issues that you could easily correct;<br/>Check language correctness (Grammar, cohesion, coherence, etc.)<br/>Sentences: Write full/complete (S+V+), simple and short sentences for better clarity.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <p><b>6. Data Treatment and Presentation</b><br/><b>Add how you treated the data</b><br/>When the number of participants is smaller than 20, no need to calculate %<br/>To avoid repeating what reader can see in the tables/figures, in the text presentation of data, combine similar data (like 'agree' with 'strongly agree' and 'disagree' with 'strongly disagree').<br/>Tables 05, 07, 10 and 12 – add meaning of numbers and the items to allow readers to understand</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Sarantakos (1989) defined to population as "the whole set of object of objects and events or group of people which are the objects of research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics" (Cited in? add page for a direct quote otherwise omit Senyametor et al., 2018) period The target population of this study consists of teachers of English and students enrolled in the English</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>improve their communication with others say they see the importance of communicating and probably just need more time to work on certain aspects of personality. For example, like shyness, lack of self-confidence, or introversion).</p> <p><b>Do not interpret data in the data presentation section</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>May 2019 to fifty (50) students and ten (10) teachers. After they have accepted to answer the questionnaires, the students and teachers were given full explanation about the purpose of the questionnaire why they are invited to answer it (purpose) and how to answer the questions. Also, the students and teachers were</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <p><b>In the text presentation of data, do not repeat every piece of information presented in a table.</b></p> <p><b>To avoid repeating what readers can see in the tables/figures, in the text presentation of data, combine similar data (like 'agree' with 'strongly agree' and 'disagree' with 'strongly disagree').</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>and 'strongly disagree') were used. The second one is a frequency table which consists of seventeen (17) items and six (6) choices ('never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often', 'very often' and 'always') were used, where the participants are invited kindly to put (x) on the column that best corresponds to their answer.</p> <p><b>Did you do any piloting?</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p>the research questions and reach the objective of the study; the questionnaire consists of three important sections including varied questions easy to understand and to answer your assessment? . Most of the questions were multiple choices, in addition to</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>the researchers to reach objective results.</p> <p><b>It is a good idea to pilot (pre-test) the tools before you implement them.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <p>EFL students at different levels at the university are required and encouraged to develop some personal skills in order to get good grades that would help them achieve their overall academic and future professional goals. However, in the academic curriculum where? there seem to be no space for students to develop the needed skills. On one hand, students are not able to improve these skills alone since they do not have enough opportunities and requires more sufficient guidance. On the other hand, teachers work within limited pedagogical hours given to them for each subject and thus, cannot provide their students with extra activities that allow them to discover new skills and know how to use them for a better academic success. <b>Now, you should narrow down the problem underlying your research: exploring students' attitude. What aspect of the problem leads to attitudes?</b></p> | <p><b>As much as you can refer to the other studies (you cited in your Literature Review) and say how your findings relate to theirs (compare and contrast)</b></p> <p>Extracurricular activities are an opportunity for university students to develop their soft skills and other important competences needed for their academic and professional success. It can be said that ECAs and the training they provide complement what the students receive in class so as to become more capable and more proficient individuals.</p> <p><b>02 pages of discussion vs. +22 pages of data treatment and presentation! This might suggest you have little to say about the data you have collected.</b></p> |

## Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire (Part I)



University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah

Department of English

Student's  
Code:

Dear student,

This questionnaire is part of a doctoral research project which aims at exploring Master 2 students challenges in dissertation writing.

I would be very grateful if you spare a few minutes of your time to fill in this questionnaire. Please tick appropriate box(es) or write full statements where necessary. Be assured that your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous as a pseudonym will be used instead. Your participation will be of great help to me.

If you have any question about this study, please feel welcome to ask me. Thank you very much for your collaboration 😊

### Section I: General Information about the Dissertation Writing Journey

**1) Gender :**

Male ☐

Female ☐

**2) Age Group :**

20 - 25 ☐

26 - 30 ☐

31 - 35 ☐

36 + ☐

**3) Finding an interesting/ good topic was:**

Easy ☐

Difficult ☐

**4) Did you study how to write a dissertation in the module of academic writing?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**5) Did you study how to write a dissertation in the module of research skills?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**6) How did you find writing a dissertation?**

Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Somewhat difficult ☐ Easy ☐

**7) In your dissertation, what were the most difficult sections and chapters to write? (you may tick more than one answer)**

- a) The Abstract
- b) The Introduction
- c) The Literature Review Chapter
- d) The Method Chapter
- e) The Results and Discussion Chapter
- f) The Conclusion
- g) The List of References
- h) Other (please specify) .....

**8) When you faced any problem(s) in writing your dissertation, what did you do? (you may tick more than one answer)**

- a) You discussed the problem with your supervisor to help you find a solution
- b) You discussed the problem with one of your classmates/friends to help you find a solution
- c) You read previous works (books, manuals...etc) that provide tips on how to successfully write a dissertation.
- d) You read some completed theses and dissertations and used them as samples to get a clear understanding of what each section/chapter of your dissertation should look like.
- e) Others (please specify).....

**Section II: Writing the Abstract**

**9) How do you define an abstract?**

.....  
.....

**10) Can you list the main parts that make up the Abstract?**

.....  
.....

**11) When writing your dissertation, how difficult was it to write the Abstract?**

(please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

### **Section III: Writing the General Introduction**

**12) What is the function of the General Introduction in the dissertation?**

.....  
.....

**13) Can you list the main parts that make up the General Introduction?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**14) Can you explain the function served by each part?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**15) How difficult was it to write the General Introduction of your dissertation?** (please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

### **Section IV: Writing the Literature Review Chapter**

**16) How do you define a review of the literature?**

.....  
.....

**17) What is/are the purpose(s) of the Literature Review?**

.....  
.....

**18) What is meant by a gap in the literature?**

.....  
.....



**19) Could you identify the gaps in your literature?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**20) Can you list the main parts that make up the Literature Review Chapter?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**End of part I**

## Appendix C: Students' Questionnaire (Part II)



University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah  
Department of English

Student's  
Code :

21) How difficult was it to write the Literature Review Chapter? (please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

22) Which style of referencing did you use for in-text-citations and the list of references:

a) APA ☐ b) MLA ☐ c) Other (please specify) .....

23) How difficult was it to cite sources in text? (please tick the appropriate box)

Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Somewhat difficult ☐ Not at all difficult ☐

24) How difficult was it to write the list of references? (please tick the appropriate box)

Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Somewhat difficult ☐ Not difficult at all ☐

### Section V: Writing the Method Chapter

25) What is the function of the Method Chapter in the dissertation?

.....  
.....

26) Can you list the main parts that make up the Method Chapter?

.....  
.....  
.....

27) How difficult was it to write the Method Chapter? (please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

## Section VI: Writing the Results and Discussion Chapter

28) What is the function of the Results Section?

.....

29) Can you list the main parts that make up the Results Section?

.....  
.....  
.....

30) What is the function of the Discussion Section?

.....  
.....

31) Can you list the main parts that make up the Discussion Section?

.....  
.....  
.....

32) What is the function of the Pedagogical Implications Section?

.....  
.....

33) Can you list the main parts that make up this section (Pedagogical Implications)?

.....  
.....  
.....

34) How difficult was it to write the Results and Discussion Chapter? (please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐    Very difficult ☐    Difficult ☐    Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

## Section VII: Writing the General Conclusion

35) What is the function of the General Conclusion in the dissertation?

.....

36) Can you list the main parts that make up the General Conclusion?

.....  
.....  
.....

**37) How difficult was it to write the General Conclusion of your dissertation?**

(please tick the appropriate box)

Extremely difficult ☐ Very difficult ☐ Difficult ☐ Slightly difficult ☐  
Not difficult at all ☐

### **Section VIII: Student-Supervisor Relationship**

**38) Did you experience any difficulties in communicating and interacting with your supervisor?**

All the time ☐ Most of the times ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never ☐

**39) How long did s/he spend correcting the work you handed in?.....**

**40) Did you use to have supervision meetings with your supervisor?**

Very often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never ☐

**41) How often did you meet your supervisor during the dissertation writing process?**

Once a month ☐ Twice a month ☐ Three times a month ☐ Other  
(please specify).....

**42) How long did each meeting last on average? .....**

**43) In his/her feedback, your supervisor focused much more on:**

Structure ☐ Content ☐ Methodology ☐ All of them ☐  
Other (please specify).....

**44) Did you take your supervisor' comments and feedback into consideration?**

**Always** (All the comments) ☐ **Often** (most of the comments/ 80%) ☐  
**Sometimes** (60% of the comments) ☐ **Rarely** (15% of the comments) ☐  
**Never** ☐

**45) Did your supervisor provide you with particular guidelines or models on dissertation writing?**

Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Never ☐

**End of Part II**

*Thank you very much for your collaboration 😊*



## Appendix D: Teachers' Questionnaire

University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah

Department of English

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire is part of a doctoral research project which aims at exploring Master 2 students challenges in dissertation writing.

I would be very grateful if you spare a few minutes of your time to fill in this questionnaire. Please tick appropriate box(es) or write full statements where necessary. Please be assured that your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous as a pseudonym will be used instead. Your participation will be of great help to me. Thank you very much for your collaboration 😊

### Section I: General Information about Teachers' Qualification and Experience

**1. Gender:**

Male ☐

Female ☐

**2. Academic degree:**

Magister ☐

Ph.D. ☐

Other (please specify).....

**3. Years of experience in supervising Master's dissertations? .....years.**

**4. How many Master's dissertations did you supervise/assess during the academic year 2018 – 2019? .....**

**5. Did you have any training in dissertation/thesis supervision?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**6. If yes, please fill in the following table:**

| Where? | For how long? | Content (what aspects have been tackled?) |
|--------|---------------|-------------------------------------------|
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |

7. Did you have any training in research skills?

Yes ☐

No ☐

8. If yes, please fill in the following table:

| Where? | For how long? | Content (what aspects have been tackled?) |
|--------|---------------|-------------------------------------------|
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |
| .....  | .....         | .....                                     |

## Section II: Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Content of the Academic Writing and Research Skills Courses

9. Are you familiar with the content (the main lessons) of the research skills course at your department? If yes, please mention the main lessons

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. Are you familiar with the content of (the main lessons) the academic writing course at your department? If yes, please mention the main lessons

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

11. What do you think about the content of the research skills course?

Good in terms of relevance to the students' needs ☐ Somewhat good in terms of  
relevance to the students' needs ☐ Not good in relevance to the students' needs ☐

12. Whatever your answer is, please say why?

.....  
.....  
.....

**13. What do you think about the content of the academic writing course?**

**Good** in terms of relevance to the students' needs ☐ **Somewhat good** in terms of  
relevance to the students' needs ☐ **Not good** in relevance to the students' needs ☐

**14. Whatever your answer is, please say why?**

.....  
.....  
.....

### **Section III: Content of the Dissertation**

**15. What are the main sections and chapters that a Master's dissertation should include?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**16. What are the main parts that make up the Abstract?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**17. What are the main parts that make up the General Introduction?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**18. What are the main parts that make up the Literature Review Chapter?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**19. What are the main parts that make up the Method Chapter?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**20. What are the main parts that make up the Results and Discussion Chapter?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

**21. What are the main parts that make up the General Conclusion?**

.....

.....

.....

#### **Section IV: Difficulties/Challenges in Writing the Dissertation Parts**

**22. Did the students you supervised during the academic year 2018 – 2019 encounter challenges/difficulties in writing the following sections and chapters of their dissertations?**

|                                      | <b>Many difficulties</b> | <b>Some difficulties</b> | <b>Very few difficulties</b> | <b>None</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>22.a.</b> Abstract                |                          |                          |                              |             |
| <b>22.b.</b> General Introduction    |                          |                          |                              |             |
| <b>22.c.</b> Literature Review       |                          |                          |                              |             |
| <b>22.d.</b> Research Design         |                          |                          |                              |             |
| <b>22.e.</b> Results and Discussions |                          |                          |                              |             |
| <b>22.f.</b> General Conclusion      |                          |                          |                              |             |

#### **Section V: Supervisor – Student Relationship**

**23. When correcting your students' work, do you focus more on:** (you may tick more than one answer):

**a. Structure** (language, cohesion & coherence) ☐

**b. Content** (ideas) ☐

**c. Research Methodology** ☐

Other (please specify) .....



**24. Did the students you supervised this year (2018 – 2019) take your comments and feedback into consideration?**

**Always** (All the comments) ☐ **Often** (most of the comments/ 80%) ☐

**Sometimes** (60% of the comments) ☐ **Rarely** (15% of the comments) ☐

**Never** ☐

**25. How long did you spend correcting the work handed in by the students on average? .....**

**26. How often do you meet your supervisees on average?**

Once a month ☐ twice a month ☐ thrice a month ☐ Other (Please specify).....

**27. How long does each supervision meeting last on average? (.....)**  
minutes/hours

**28. Did you have any communication problems with your supervisees this year (2018 - 2019)?**

**Always** ☐ **Often** ☐ **Sometimes** ☐ **Rarely** ☐ ☐

**Never**

**29. Do you provide your supervisees with particular guidelines or models on dissertation writing?**

**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

**30. If yes, please mention some examples**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

*Thank you for your cooperation 😊*

## Appendix E: Students' Interview Consent Form



University of Algiers 2 – Abou el Kacem Saadallah

Department of English

### Description and Purpose of the Consent Form

The aim of this consent form is to invite Master 2 students of didactics, from Blida 2 University, Department of English, to participate in this research that aims exploring the challenges encountered by Master 2 students of didactics in writing their dissertations.

This study is important as it will raise students' and supervisors' awareness of the possible challenges that might be encountered by Master students in writing the different chapters and sections of their dissertations as well as the main factors that contribute to students' failure in writing a successful dissertation. Through this exploratory research, we can, hopefully, suggest solutions and techniques that would alleviate students' challenges and facilitate the dissertation writing process in the future.

This consent form is important for the researcher to make sure that the participants fully understand the aim behind involving them in this research and agree on the conditions of their participation. I would be very grateful if you accept to voluntarily take part in this research as the information you provide will be of great help to me.

Dear student, please note that:

- You can ask the researcher any question you might have about this study either face to face or contact me via email ([ablaben460@gmail.com](mailto:ablaben460@gmail.com))
- The interview transcripts will be analyzed by the researcher only.
- Your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous as I will use a pseudonym instead.
- Some of your words and statements will be quoted directly without identifying your name (a pseudonym will be used).
- The interview recordings will be destroyed one year after presenting the results of my research and submitting the final version of my thesis.

*Thank you for your cooperation 😊*

## Appendix F: Students' Interview



**University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah**

**Department of English**

Dear student,

Thank you for participating in this study. As previously stated, the aim of this study is to explore Master 2 students' challenges in dissertation writing. During the interview, we will discuss your experience with the dissertation writing process, the challenges that you encountered while writing your master's dissertation and the possible factors behind those challenges.

Please remember that there is no right or wrong answer and everything you say will be very important to me and contribute to reaching the objectives of this study.

If you have any question before we start the interview, please do not hesitate.

- 
1. What are the reasons behind the challenges in finding an interesting/good topic?
  2. What kind of challenges did you experience when writing the abstract of your dissertation?
  3. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
  4. What kind of challenges did you experience in writing the introduction of your dissertation?
  5. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
  6. What kind of challenges did you experience in writing the literature review chapter?
  7. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
  8. What kind of challenges did you experience in writing the methodology chapter?
  9. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
  10. What kind of challenges did you experience in writing the results and discussion chapter?
  11. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
  12. What kind of challenges did you experience in writing the general conclusion of your dissertation?

13. What could be the reason(s) for each challenge/difficulty?
14. What were the main points you used to discuss in each meeting? (Could you give me examples?)
15. What are the reasons for the challenges in communicating with the supervisor?

***Thanks again for your time and collaboration 😊***

## Appendix G: Teachers' Interview Consent Form



University of Algiers 2 – Abou el Kacem Saadallah

Department of English

### Description and Purpose of the Consent Form

The aim of this consent form is to invite teachers, who are supervising Master 2 students in didactics at Blida 2 University, Department of English, to participate in this research that aims exploring the challenges encountered by Master 2 students of didactics in writing their dissertations.

This study is important as it will raise students' and supervisors' awareness of the possible challenges that might be encountered by Master's students in writing the different chapters and sections of their dissertations as well as the main factors that contribute to students' failure in writing a successful dissertation. Through this exploratory research, we can, hopefully, suggest solutions and techniques that would alleviate students' challenges and facilitate the dissertation writing in the future.

This consent form is important for the researcher to make sure that the participants fully understand the aim behind involving them in this research and agree on the conditions of their participation. I would be very grateful if you accept to voluntarily take part in this research as the information you provide will be of great help to me.

Dear teacher, please note that:

- You can ask the researcher any question you might have about this study either face to face or contact me via email or phone (email: [ablaben460@gmail.com](mailto:ablaben460@gmail.com)).
- The interview transcripts will be analyzed by the researcher only.
- Your answers will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous as I will use a pseudonym instead.
- Some of your words and statements will be quoted directly without identifying your name (a pseudonym will be used).
- The interview recordings will be destroyed after presenting the results of my research and submitting the final version of my thesis.

*Thank you for your cooperation 😊*

## Appendix H: Teachers' Interview



University of Algiers 2 – Abou El Kacem Saadallah

Department of English

Dear teacher,

Thank you for participating in this study. As previously stated, the aim of this study is to explore Master 2 students' challenges in dissertation writing. During the interview, we will discuss your experience as a supervisor of M2 students' dissertations, the challenges that students encounter while writing their master's dissertations and the possible factors behind those challenges.

If you have any question before we start the interview, please do not hesitate.

---

1. In your opinion, what are the impacts of the academic writing course on Master's students' academic writing skills?
2. In your opinion, what are the impacts of the research skills course on Master's students' research skills?
3. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the abstract**?
4. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the abstract?
5. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the most common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the general introduction**?
6. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the general introduction?
7. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the most common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the literature review chapter**?
8. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the literature review chapter?

9. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the most common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the method chapter**?
10. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the method chapter?
11. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the most common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the results and discussion chapter**?
12. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the results and discussion chapter?
13. With reference to the dissertations you supervised/examined this year (2018 – 2019), what are the most common challenges/difficulties encountered by the students in **writing the general conclusion**?
14. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the students' challenges in writing the general conclusion?
15. What are the main points you usually discuss in each supervision meeting?
16. In your opinion, what are the requirements of writing a good dissertation?
17. Do you use a common rubric to assess master's dissertations?
18. If yes, what are the impacts of using a common rubric on the evaluation of Master's dissertations?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

*Thanks again for your time and collaboration 😊*

## **Appendix I: Academic Writing Syllabus (Semesters 1, 2, & 3)**

### **Academic Writing (Semesters 1 & 2)**

#### **Course objectives**

1. Identify and implement rhetorical models and other basic writing strategies in the major sections of the research paper
2. Use score writing techniques, including clarity, cohesion, and concision
3. Review and correctly use grammar, sentence structure and mechanics in conjunction with any academic writing you generate
4. Choose appropriate style, vocabulary, and level of formality
5. Use editing techniques to improve self-editing.

#### **Course contents**

In this course, students engage in the following:

1. The analysis of rhetorical and linguistic features in research articles in their field
2. the composition of the various sections of research articles as well as one complete research articles and the analysis, revision and discussion of their own writing



## **Academic Writing Syllabus (Semester 03)**

### **Course Objective:**

The main objective of this course is to help master students develop the skills and understandings necessary for successful dissertation writing. The lessons to be covered during the third semester (S3) focus on aspects of language use particular to dissertation writing. The sequencing of the lessons follows the stages of carrying out research and writing a dissertation:

- ✚ Writing the General Introduction
- ✚ Citing and Referencing (APA & MLA)
- ✚ Designing Questionnaires and Interviews.
- ✚ The Style of Academic Writing: Guidelines
- ✚ Data Presentation and Discussion
- ✚ Writing the General Conclusion
- ✚ Writing the Abstract

| <b>Weeks</b>                                                  | <b>Courses + Learning Goals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 1</b><br><br><b>Session 1</b><br><br><b>Session 2</b> | <b>1. Writing the General Introduction (part 1)</b><br><br><b>1.1.Introduction to the main frameworks for the analysis of introductions:</b> Swales' CARS model (1981, 1990) and Chen and Kuo's Framework (2012)<br><b>1.2.Writing the Background of the Study</b> (the evidence and relevance from the literature and published or archival data showing the problem)<br><b>1.3.Writing the Statement of the Research Problem</b> (what specific aspects are you interested in?) |
| <b>Week 2</b><br><br><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b>                | <b>Writing the General Introduction (part 2)</b><br><b>1.4.Writing the Research Question(s)</b><br><b>1.4.1.</b> Evaluate your research questions<br><b>1.4.2.</b> Purpose-led typologies (types of research questions)<br><b>1.4.3.</b> Problems in research questions                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Week 3</b><br><br><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b>                | <b>Writing the General Introduction (part 3)</b><br><b>1.5.Writing the Research Hypotheses</b><br><b>1.5.1.</b> What makes a good hypothesis?<br><b>1.5.2.</b> Advantages/ disadvantages of stating research hypotheses<br><b>1.6.Significance/Importance of the study</b> (what impact can the study have?)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Week 4</b><br><br><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b>                | <b>2. Questionnaire and Interview Design</b><br><b>2.1.Questionnaire Design (part 1)</b><br><b>2.1.1.</b> Characteristics of a good questionnaire<br><b>2.1.2.</b> Types of questionnaire items (closed-ended and open-ended questions)<br><b>2.1.3.</b> Questions wording (types of questions to be avoided)<br><b>2.1.4.</b> Layout                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Week 5</b></p> <p><b>Session 1</b></p> <p><b>Session 2</b></p> | <p><b>2.1. Questionnaire Design (part 2)</b></p> <p>2.1.5. Piloting then administering the questionnaire</p> <p>2.1.6. Advantages/disadvantages of questionnaires.</p> <p><b>2.2. Interview Design (part 1)</b></p> <p>2.2.1. Types of interviews (structured, semi-structured, unstructured, group and focus-group interviews)</p> <p>2.2.2. Question formats (types of questions)</p> |
| <p><b>Week 6</b></p> <p><b>Session 1</b></p> <p><b>Session 2</b></p> | <p><b>2.2. Interview Design (part 2)</b></p> <p>2.2.3. Response modes</p> <p>2.2.4. Conducting the Interview</p> <p>2.2.5. Advantages/disadvantages</p> <p><b>3. Citing and Referencing (Part 1)</b></p> <p><b>3.1. The APA Style (Part 1)</b></p> <p>3.1.1. Using in-text citations in APA style</p>                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Week 7</b></p> <p><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b></p>                | <p><b>Citing and Referencing (Part 2)</b></p> <p><b>The APA Style (Part 2)</b></p> <p>3.1.2. Writing the list of references</p> <p><b>3.2. Avoiding plagiarism</b></p> <p>3.2.1. <b>Common knowledge</b> (when you don't need to acknowledge authors?)</p> <p>3.2.2. Correctly borrowing from a source</p>                                                                              |
| <p><b>Week 8</b></p> <p><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b></p>                | <p><b>Citing and Referencing (Part 3)</b></p> <p><b>3.3. The MLA Style</b></p> <p>3.3.1. Using in-text references in MLA style</p> <p>3.3.2. Writing the list of references</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Week 9</b><br><br><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b>  | <b>4. The Style of Academic Writing: Guidelines</b><br>(clarity, level of formality, avoiding clichés, keeping your writing gender-neutral, supporting your statements, general points on style (verb tenses, double negatives, paragraphing, sentences and vocabulary), common errors (overuse of parentheses, Run-on sentences, misuse of commas)                                                              |
| <b>Week 10</b>                                  | <b>5.Data Presentation and Discussion</b><br><b>5.1.</b> Processing Questionnaire and Interview Data<br><b>5.2.</b> Coding<br><b>5.3.</b> Methods of Communicating and Displaying Analyzed Data (Texts, tables, graphs...etc)                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Week 11</b>                                  | <b>6.Writing the Discussion Section</b><br><b>6.1.</b> Introduction to the main frameworks for the analysis of discussions' section/chapter: <b>Chen and Kuo's model (2012)</b><br><b>6.2.</b> Functions of the Discussion Section<br><b>6.3.</b> The Structure of the Discussion Section                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Week 12</b><br><br><b>Sessions 1 &amp; 2</b> | <b>1. Writing the General Conclusion</b> (Chen and Kuo's Framework, 2012)<br><br><b>2. Writing Abstracts</b><br><b>2.1. Introduction to the main frameworks for the analysis of abstracts:</b> Hyland's model (2004), Bhatia's model (2013), Chen & Kuo (2012)<br><b>2.2.</b> Features of a good abstract<br><b>2.3.</b> What makes an abstract?<br><b>2.4.</b> How is an abstract different to an introduction? |

## **Appendix J: Research Skills Syllabus**

**Institution :** Facultés des lettres et des langues étrangères

**Département:** Anglais

**Semestre:** 01, 02 and 03

**Intitulé de PUE:** UE méthodologie

**Intitule de la matière:** Research skills

**Crédits:** 04    **Coefficients:** 02

**Course objectives:** By the end of this course, the students should be able to:

1. Develop a basic understanding of types of research and methodologies
2. Describe the general steps and components of the research process
3. Describe process of identifying a research problem
4. Identify appropriate research tools
5. Identify and reformulate researchable questions
6. Construct and implement an appropriate research design
7. Prepare a research proposal
8. Organize and conduct research
9. Write a research report

**Course contents:**

1. Introduction to the process of conducting research
2. Research design introduction
3. Steps in the process of research
4. Ethics of research and informed consent
5. Introduction to qualitative research
6. Essence of qualitative research
7. Sampling
8. Data collection techniques
9. Grounded theory
10. Ethnography
11. Case study
12. Interpreting qualitative data
13. Qualitative data analysis procedures
14. Coding
15. Thematic development
16. Introduction to quantitative research
17. Quantitative data collection technique and analysis techniques
18. Analyzing and writing research articles
19. Writing a research proposal

## Appendix K: Summaries of the Main Parts of the Dissertation According to the Students and Teachers (Chapters 3 & 4)

### Summaries from Chapter 3

**Table 1: Summary of the Main Parts of the Abstract (Chapter 3, Q10)**

| Themes                              |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Background</b>                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>09</b>             | <b>37.5</b>    |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 15                    | 62.5           |
| <b>Purpose of the study</b>         | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>17</b>             | <b>70.83</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 07                    | 29.16          |
| <b>Method</b>                       | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>19</b>             | <b>79.16</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 20.83          |
| <b>Main findings</b>                | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>19</b>             | <b>79.16</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 20.83          |
| <b>Conclusions and implications</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>11</b>             | <b>45.83</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 13                    | 54.16          |

**Table 2: Summary of the Main Parts of the General Introduction (Chapter 3, Q13)**

| Theme                                    |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Background of the study</b>           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>18</b>             | <b>75</b>      |
|                                          | Not mentioned    | 06                    | 25             |
| <b>Statement of the problem</b>          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>17</b>             | <b>70.83</b>   |
|                                          | Not mentioned    | 07                    | 29.17          |
| <b>Research rationale (significance)</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>16</b>             | <b>62.5</b>    |
|                                          | Not mentioned    | 09                    | 37.5           |
| <b>Purpose of the study</b>              | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>29.16</b>   |
|                                          | Not mentioned    | 17                    | 70.83          |
| <b>Research questions</b>                | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>18</b>             | <b>75</b>      |
|                                          | Not mentioned    | 06                    | 25             |

|                                      |                  |           |              |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>Research hypotheses</b>           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b> | <b>25</b>    |
|                                      | Not mentioned    | 18        | 75           |
| <b>Definitions of key terms</b>      | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b> | <b>29.16</b> |
|                                      | Not mentioned    | 17        | 70.83        |
| <b>Structure of the dissertation</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>41.66</b> |
|                                      | Not mentioned    | 14        | 58.33        |

**Table 3: Summary of the Main Parts of the Literature Review Chapter (Chapter 3, Q20)**

| <b>Themes</b>                                                    |                  | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Theoretical framework</b>                                     | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>12.5</b>           |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 21                           | 87.5                  |
| <b>Conceptual framework</b>                                      | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>12.5</b>           |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 21                           | 87.5                  |
| <b>Review of related theories and studies</b>                    | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>09</b>                    | <b>37.5</b>           |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 15                           | 62.5                  |
| <b>Critical evaluation of previous related studies</b>           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>08</b>                    | <b>33.33</b>          |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 16                           | 66.67                 |
| <b>Discussion of the relationship between the variables</b>      | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>08</b>                    | <b>33.33</b>          |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 16                           | 66.67                 |
| <b>Synthesis of knowledge claims (comparing points of views)</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>12.5</b>           |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 21                           | 87.5                  |
| <b>Research gap indication</b>                                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>                    | <b>8.33</b>           |
|                                                                  | Not mentioned    | 22                           | 91.66                 |

**Table 4: Summary of the Main Parts of the Method Chapter (Chapter 3, Q26)**

| Themes                                               |               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Research design                                      | Mentioned     | 18                    | 75             |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 06                    | 25             |
| Research tools/ instruments or data collection tools | Mentioned     | 16                    | 66.67          |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 08                    | 33.33          |
| Population and sample / or participants              | Mentioned     | 20                    | 83.33          |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 04                    | 16.67          |
| Data collections procedures                          | Mentioned     | 12                    | 50             |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 12                    | 50             |
| Data analysis procedures                             | Mentioned     | 01                    | 4.16           |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 23                    | 95.83          |
| Data analysis                                        | Mentioned     | 06                    | 25             |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 18                    | 75             |
| Data presentation                                    | Mentioned     | 03                    | 12.5           |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 21                    | 87.5           |
| Data discussion                                      | Mentioned     | 03                    | 12.5           |
|                                                      | Not mentioned | 21                    | 87.5           |

**Table 5: Summary of the Main Parts of the Results Section (Chapter 3, Q29)**

| Themes              |               | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Data presentation   | Mentioned     | 16                    | 66.66          |
|                     | Not mentioned | 08                    | 33.33          |
| Data analysis       | Mentioned     | 09                    | 37.5           |
|                     | Not mentioned | 15                    | 62.5           |
| Data interpretation | Mentioned     | 05                    | 20.83          |
|                     | Not mentioned | 19                    | 79.16          |



|                                 |                  |           |              |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <i>Data discussion</i>          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b> | <b>29.16</b> |
|                                 | Not mentioned    | 17        | 70.83        |
| <i>Pedagogical implications</i> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                 | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83        |
| <i>Recommendations</i>          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                 | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83        |
| <i>Limitations</i>              | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                 | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83        |

**Table 6: Summary of the Main Parts of the Discussion Section (Chapter 3, Q31)**

| Themes                                       |                                                            | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |              |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|
| <i>Data presentation (research findings)</i> |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>04</b>      | <b>16.67</b> |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 20             | 83.33        |
| <i>Data analysis</i>                         |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>01</b>      | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 23             | 95.83        |
| <b>Restatement of the main findings</b>      |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>05</b>      | <b>20.83</b> |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 19             | 79.17        |
| <b>Commenting on results</b>                 | <b>Data interpretation</b>                                 | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>08</b>      | <b>33.33</b> |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 16             | 66.66        |
|                                              | <b>Data discussion (Comparing results with literature)</b> | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>13</b>      | <b>54.16</b> |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 11             | 45.83        |
|                                              | <b>Significance of the findings</b>                        | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>01</b>      | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 23             | 95.83        |
| <i>Limitations of the study</i>              |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>03</b>      | <b>12.5</b>  |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 21             | 87.5         |
| <i>Implications</i>                          |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>04</b>      | <b>16.66</b> |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 20             | 83.33        |
| <i>Recommendations</i>                       |                                                            | <b>Mentioned</b>      | <b>03</b>      | <b>12.5</b>  |
|                                              |                                                            | Not mentioned         | 21             | 87.5         |

|                             |                  |           |             |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <b>Research hypotheses</b>  | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b> |
|                             | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83       |
| <b>Purpose of the study</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b> |
|                             | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83       |

**Table 7: Summary of the Main Parts of the Pedagogical Implications Section (Chapter 3, Q33)**

| <b>Themes</b>                               |                  | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Pedagogical implications</b>             | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>04</b>                    | <b>16.66</b>          |
|                                             | Not mentioned    | 20                           | 83.33                 |
| <b>Recommendations for further research</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>16</b>                    | <b>66.66</b>          |
|                                             | Not mentioned    | 08                           | 33.33                 |
| <b>Limitations of the study</b>             | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>                    | <b>25</b>             |
|                                             | Not mentioned    | 18                           | 75                    |

**Table 8: Summary of the Main Parts of the General Conclusion (Chapter 3, Q36)**

| <b>Themes</b>                                         |                  | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Objectives of the study and research questions</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>                    | <b>29.17</b>          |
|                                                       | Not mentioned    | <b>17</b>                    | <b>70.83</b>          |
| <b>Summary of the main findings</b>                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>09</b>                    | <b>37.5</b>           |
|                                                       | Not mentioned    | 15                           | 62.5                  |
| <b>Implications</b>                                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>                    | <b>29.17</b>          |
|                                                       | Not mentioned    | 17                           | 70.83                 |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                                | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>                    | <b>25</b>             |
|                                                       | Not mentioned    | 18                           | 75                    |
| <b>Limitations</b>                                    | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>12.5</b>           |
|                                                       | Not mentioned    | 21                           | 87.5                  |

|                                        |                  |           |              |
|----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Summary of the dissertation's chapters | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b> | <b>29.17</b> |
|                                        | Not mentioned    | 17        | 70.83        |
| <i>Discussion of the results</i>       | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>4.16</b>  |
|                                        | Not mentioned    | 23        | 95.83        |

## Summaries from Chapter 4

**Table 9: Summary of the Main Dissertation Sections and Chapters (Chapter 4, Q15)**

| Themes                                     |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| <b>Abstract</b>                            | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |
| <b>General introduction</b>                | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>             | <b>71.43</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>Literature review</b>                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>100</b>     |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 00                    | 00             |
| <b>Research design and methodology</b>     | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| <b>Data interpretation and discussions</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>             | <b>71.43</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>General conclusion</b>                  | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>             | <b>71.43</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| <b>References</b>                          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |
| <b>Appendices</b>                          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                            | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |

**Table 10: Summary of the Main Parts of the Abstract (Chapter 4, Q16)**

| Themes                    |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Background (introduction) | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                           | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.29          |
| Purpose/aim /objectives   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>             | <b>71.43</b>   |
|                           | Not mentioned    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| Method(s)                 | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>100</b>     |
|                           | Not mentioned    | 00                    | 00             |
| Results                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>100</b>     |
|                           | Not mentioned    | 00                    | 00             |
| Conclusion(s)             | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                           | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |

**Table 11: Summary of the Main Parts of the General Introduction (Chapter 4, Q17)**

| Themes                                            |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Background of the study                           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>100</b>     |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 00                    | 00             |
| Statement of the problem                          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| The research rationale/ significance of the study | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>04</b>             | <b>57.14</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 03                    | 42.86          |
| Purpose of the study/ Research aims/ objectives   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| Research questions                                | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |
| Research hypotheses                               | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 06                    | 85.71          |
| Definitions of key terms                          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |
| Structure of the dissertation                     | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                                                   | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.28          |

**Table 12: Summary of the Main Parts of the Litarture Review Chapter (Chapter 4, Q18)**

| Themes                                    |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Definitions of key relevant constructs    | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |
| A review of related theories              | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>04</b>             | <b>57.14</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 03                    | 42.86          |
| A review of previous related studies      | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>06</b>             | <b>85.71</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 01                    | 14.28          |
| A synthesis of knowledge claims           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 06                    | 85.71          |
| A critical evaluation of previous studies | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |
| Research gap(s)                           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                                           | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |

**Table 13: Summary of the Main Parts of the Method Chapter (Chapter 4, Q19)**

| Themes                              |                  | Number of occurrences | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Research objectives                 | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>             | <b>28.57</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 05                    | 71.43          |
| Research questions                  | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>             | <b>14.28</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 06                    | 85.71          |
| Research design                     | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |
| Population and sample/ Participants | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>             | <b>71.43</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 02                    | 28.57          |
| Data collection tools/instruments   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>             | <b>100</b>     |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 00                    | 00             |
| Data collection procedures          | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>             | <b>42.86</b>   |
|                                     | Not mentioned    | 04                    | 57.14          |

|                                 |                  |           |              |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
| <b>Methods of data analysis</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b> | <b>28.57</b> |
|                                 | Not mentioned    | 05        | 71.43        |

**Table 14: Summary of the Main Parts of the Results and Discussion Chapter (Chapter 4, Q20)**

| <b>Themes/Categories</b>                                |                                                      |                  | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>The Results Section (section 1)</b>                  | <b>Data analysis</b>                                 | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 06                           | 85.71                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
|                                                         | <b>Data presentation</b>                             | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>04</b>                    | <b>57.14</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 03                           | 42.86                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
| <b>The Discussions Section (section 2)</b>              | <b>Data interpretation</b>                           | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>05</b>                    | <b>71.43</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 02                           | 28.57                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
|                                                         | <b>Data discussion in relation to the literature</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>04</b>                    | <b>57.14</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 03                           | 42.86                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
|                                                         | <b>Data evaluation</b>                               | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 06                           | 85.71                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
| <b>The Pedagogical Implications Section (section 3)</b> | <b>Implications</b>                                  | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 04                           | 57.14                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
|                                                         | <b>Limitations</b>                                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>                    | <b>28.57</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 05                           | 71.43                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |
|                                                         | <b>Significance of the study</b>                     | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b>                    | <b>14.28</b>          |
|                                                         |                                                      | Not mentioned    | 06                           | 85.71                 |
|                                                         |                                                      |                  |                              |                       |

|  |                                             |                  |           |              |
|--|---------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------|--------------|
|  | <b>Recommendations for further research</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>01</b> | <b>14.28</b> |
|  |                                             | Not mentioned    | 06        | 85.71        |

**Table 15: Summary of the Main Parts of the General Conclusion (Chapter 4, Q21)**

| <b>Themes</b>                                                 |                  | <b>Number of occurrences</b> | <b>Percentage (%)</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Restatement of the research objectives/ problem</b>        | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
|                                                               | Not mentioned    | 04                           | 57.14                 |
| <b>Summary of the dissertation (methodology and findings)</b> | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>07</b>                    | <b>100</b>            |
|                                                               | Not mentioned    | 00                           | 00                    |
| <b>Significance/Implications of the study</b>                 | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>03</b>                    | <b>42.86</b>          |
|                                                               | Not mentioned    | 04                           | 57.14                 |
| <b>Limitations of the study</b>                               | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>00</b>                    | <b>00</b>             |
|                                                               | Not mentioned    | 07                           | 100                   |
| <b>Recommendations for further research</b>                   | <b>Mentioned</b> | <b>02</b>                    | <b>28.57</b>          |

## Appendix M: Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the Dissertation Parts

### 1. The Abstract

**Table 1: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the Abstracts**

| Moves                                                                          | Number of occurrences in each dissertation |      |      |      |      |      | Number of occurrences in all dissertations |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                | Ab 1                                       | Ab 2 | Ab 3 | Ab 4 | Ab 5 | Ab 6 |                                            |
| <b>Introduction</b> (brief overview of the research problem studied + purpose) | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                         |
| <b>Method</b>                                                                  | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                         |
| <b>Results</b>                                                                 | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                         |
| <b>Conclusions</b> (drawing inferences + implications)                         | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                         |

P= Present, A= Absent

### 2. The General Introduction

**Table 2: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the General Introductions**

| Moves/Steps                                               | Number of occurrences in each dissertation |      |      |      |      |      | Total number of occurrences in all dissertations |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                                           | IN 1                                       | IN 2 | IN 3 | IN 4 | IN 5 | IN 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Move 1: Establishing a Territory</b>                   |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Providing topic generalization/ background | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Indicating centrality/ importance of topic | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Defining terms                             | P                                          | A    | A    | P    | A    | A    | 02                                               |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Reviewing previous research                | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 2: Establishing a Niche</b>                       |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Indicating gap in previous research        | A                                          | A    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 04                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Question-raising                           | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Counter-claiming                           | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                               |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Counting/extending a tradition             | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 5:</b> Indicating problem/need                    | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the Niche</b>                        |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Indicating purposes/ aims/ objectives      | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |



|                                                       |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Step 2:</b> Indicating scope of research           | <b>P</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>02</b> |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Indicating chapter/ section structure  | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>00</b> |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Indicating theoretical position        | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>00</b> |
| <b>Step 5:</b> Stating research questions/ hypotheses | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>05</b> |
| <b>Step 6:</b> Indicating research method             | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>00</b> |
| <b>Step 7:</b> Indicating dissertation structure      | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>A</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>P</b> | <b>05</b> |

**P= Present, A= Absent**

### 3. The Literature Review Chapter

**Table 3: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the Literature Review Chapters**

| <b>Moves/Steps</b>                                                                                               | <b>Number of occurrences in each dissertation</b> |             |             |             |             |             | <b>Total number of occurrences in all dissertations</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                                                              | <b>LR 1</b>                                       | <b>LR 2</b> | <b>LR 3</b> | <b>LR 4</b> | <b>LR 5</b> | <b>LR 6</b> |                                                         |
| Indicating organization of the review chapter                                                                    | <b>P</b>                                          | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>06</b>                                               |
| <b>Move 1: Establishing One Part of the Territory of One's own Research</b>                                      | <b>LR 1</b>                                       | <b>LR 2</b> | <b>LR 3</b> | <b>LR 4</b> | <b>LR 5</b> | <b>LR 6</b> |                                                         |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Surveying the non-research related phenomena or knowledge claims centrality                       | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>03</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Surveying the research-related phenomena                                                          | <b>P</b>                                          | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>06</b>                                               |
| <b>Move 2: Creating a Research Need (in response to move 1)</b>                                                  | <b>LR 1</b>                                       | <b>LR 2</b> | <b>LR 3</b> | <b>LR 4</b> | <b>LR 5</b> | <b>LR 6</b> |                                                         |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Counter-claiming                                                                                  | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>00</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Gap-indicating                                                                                    | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>02</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Asserting formative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed.                        | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>02</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research                              | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>02</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 5:</b> Synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position                                 | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>00</b>                                               |
| <b>Step 6:</b> Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>03</b>                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the Research Niche by Announcing</b>                                                        | <b>LR 1</b>                                       | <b>LR 2</b> | <b>LR 3</b> | <b>LR 4</b> | <b>LR 5</b> | <b>LR 6</b> |                                                         |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses                               | <b>A</b>                                          | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>P</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>A</b>    | <b>01</b>                                               |

|                                                                                              |      |      |      |      |      |      |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----|
| <b>Step 2:</b> Indicating theoretical positions/ theoretical frameworks                      | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00 |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Indicating research design and processes                                      | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00 |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Interpreting terminology used in the dissertation                             | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                                                                            | LR 1 | LR 2 | LR 3 | LR 4 | LR 5 | LR 6 |    |
| Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study | pP   | pP   | pP   | P    | P    | P    | 03 |

**P= Present, A= Absent, pP= Partially present** = Only the first part (summary of the review) is present

#### 4. The Method Chapter

**Table 4: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the Method Chapters**

| Moves/Steps                                                                   | Number of occurrences in each dissertation |     |     |     |     |     | Total number of occurrences in all dissertations |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the Method Chapter)</b>                                | M 1                                        | M 2 | M 3 | M 4 | M 5 | M 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Indicating chapter/ section structure                          | P                                          | P   | P   | A   | P   | P   | 05                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Providing an overview of the study                             | A                                          | P   | P   | P   | P   | P   | 05                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Indicating theory/approach                                     | A                                          | A   | A   | P   | A   | A   | 01                                               |
| <b>Move 2: Describing Data Collection Method and Procedure(s)</b>             | M 1                                        | M 2 | M 3 | M 4 | M 5 | M 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)     | P                                          | P   | P   | P   | P   | P   | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Describing methods and steps in data collection                | P                                          | P   | P   | P   | P   | P   | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Justifying data collection procedures                          | P                                          | P   | P   | P   | P   | P   | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Delineating Methods of Data Analysis</b>                           | M 1                                        | M 2 | M 3 | M 4 | M 5 | M 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Presenting an overview of the (data analysis) design           | A                                          | A   | A   | A   | P   | A   | 01                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis                 | P                                          | P   | P   | A   | P   | P   | 05                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Explaining variables and variable measurement                  | A                                          | A   | A   | A   | A   | A   | 00                                               |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Justifying the methods of measuring variables or data analysis | A                                          | A   | A   | A   | P   | P   | 02                                               |
| <b>Move 4: Elucidating Data Analysis Procedure/s</b>                          | M 1                                        | M 2 | M 3 | M 4 | M 5 | M 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Relating (or recounting) data analysis procedures              | A                                          | A   | P   | A   | P   | P   | 03                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Justifying the data analysis Procedure(s)                      | A                                          | A   | A   | A   | P   | P   | 02                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Previewing results                                             | A                                          | A   | A   | A   | P   | P   | 02                                               |

**P= Present, A= Absent**

## 5. The Results and Discussion Chapter

**Table 5: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the Results and Discussion Chapters**

| Moves/Steps                                                         | Number of occurrences in each dissertation |      |      |      |      |      | Total number of occurrences in all dissertations |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the Results Section/Chapter</b>              | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Providing background information                     | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> An overview of the methods or statistical procedures | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                               |
| <b>Move 2: Reporting Results</b>                                    | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Locating graphics                                    | P                                          | A    | A    | P    | A    | A    | 02                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Reporting major findings                             | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Introducing the Discussion Section/ Chapter</b>          | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Providing background information                     | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | P    | P    | 02                                               |
| <b>Move 4: Summarizing Results</b>                                  | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Making conclusions of results                        | A                                          | A    | P    | P    | P    | A    | 03                                               |
| <b>Move 5: Commenting on Results</b>                                | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step1:</b> Interpreting results                                  | P                                          | P    | P    | A    | P    | P    | 05                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Comparing results with literature                    | A                                          | P    | A    | A    | P    | P    | 03                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Evaluating results                                   | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                               |
| <b>Move 6: Summarizing the Study</b>                                | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Summarizing the study briefly                        | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 7: Evaluating the Study</b>                                 | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Indicating limitations                               | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Indicating significance                              | A                                          | P    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 01                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Evaluating methodology                               | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                               |
| <b>Move 8: Deduction from the (research) Study</b>                  | RD1                                        | RD 2 | RD 3 | RD 4 | RD 5 | RD 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Step 1:</b> Making suggestions                                   | A                                          | A    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 04                                               |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Recommending further research                        | A                                          | A    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 04                                               |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Drawing pedagogic implications                       | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |

P= Present, A= Absent

## 6. The General Conclusion

**Table 6: Number of Occurrences of Chen and Kuo's Moves and Steps in the General Conclusions**

| Moves/Steps                                                                                                      | Number of occurrences in each dissertation |      |      |      |      |      | Total number of occurrences in all dissertations |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                  | GC 1                                       | GC 2 | GC 3 | GC 4 | GC 5 | GC 6 |                                                  |
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the Conclusions Chapter</b>                                                               |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| Restating purpose, design, research questions/ hypotheses, results, or indicating how conclusions are presented. | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 2: Summarizing the Study (steps)</b>                                                                     |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step1:</b> Summarizing the study briefly                                                                      | P                                          | P    | P    | P    | P    | P    | 06                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Evaluating the Study</b>                                                                              |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step1:</b> Indicating significance/ advantage.                                                                | A                                          | P    | P    | A    | A    | P    | 03                                               |
| <b>Step2:</b> Indicating limitations                                                                             | A                                          | P    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 01                                               |
| <b>Step3:</b> Evaluating methodology                                                                             | A                                          | A    | A    | A    | A    | A    | 00                                               |
| <b>Move 4: Deductions from the Study</b>                                                                         |                                            |      |      |      |      |      |                                                  |
| <b>Step1:</b> Recommending further research.                                                                     | A                                          | A    | A    | P    | A    | P    | 02                                               |
| <b>Step2:</b> Drawing pedagogic implications.                                                                    | P                                          | P    | A    | P    | P    | P    | 05                                               |
| <b>Step3:</b> Making suggestions                                                                                 | P                                          | P    | A    | P    | P    | P    | 05                                               |

P= Present, A= Absent

## Appendix N: Master Dissertation Assessment Rubric (English Department – Blida 2 University)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية<br/> <b>Republique Algerienne Democratique et Populaire</b><br/> <b>Ministry of Higher Education<br/> and Scientific Research</b><br/> <b>University of Blida 2</b><br/> <b>Faculty of Arts and Languages</b><br/> <b>Department of English</b></p> |  | <p>وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي<br/> <b>جامعة البليدة 2</b><br/> <b>كلية الآداب واللغات</b><br/> <b>قسم اللغة الإنجليزية</b></p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Master Thesis Assessment Rubric 2018-19

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                  |                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Names of Candidates:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                  |                                                             |
| <b>Chair:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Examiner:</b> | <b>Advisor:</b>                                             |
| <b>Please Note: 1. '0.25', '0.75', '1.25', etc. can be used for more precise marking</b><br><b>2. Meaning of Marks: 0.25/2 = Very Poor; 0.5/2 = Poor; 0.75/2 = not sufficient yet;</b><br><b>01/2 = Acceptable; 1.25/2 = Fairly Good; 1.5 = Good; 1.75 = Very Good; 2/2 = Excellent</b>                                                                                                                                                                                 |                  |                                                             |
| <b>1. Thesis Layout</b><br>1.1 <b>Cover Page:</b> Full information provided in required format ..... / 2<br><br>1.2 <b>Title of the Thesis:</b> Clear, concise (according to the requirements of each specialty) ..... / 2<br><br>1.3 <b>Table of contents</b> outlines <b>all</b> the different parts of the thesis ..... / 2<br><br>1.4 <b>List of references:</b> Necessary information for cited sources provided in a consistent academic format ..... / 2         |                  | Divide / 4<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>..... / 2 |
| <b>2. Abstract:</b> clear; outlines the central problem, significance, method, conclusions, etc. .... / 2<br><b>Abstract in Arabic:</b> clear, outlines the central problem, significance, method, conclusions, etc. + Accurate translation of abstract in English..... / 2                                                                                                                                                                                             |                  | Divide / 2<br><br>..... / 2                                 |
| <b>3. General Introduction</b> Sets the context; gives an outline of the thesis<br>3.1 <b>Research problem</b> clearly <b>defined</b> ..... / 2<br>3.2 Adequate description of the <b>background to the problem</b> ..... / 2<br>3.3 The <b>research objectives</b> are stated clearly ..... / 2<br>3.4 A convincing <b>justification</b> for the research ..... / 2<br>3.5 The <b>basic terms</b> and concepts are defined ..... / 2<br>3.6 Thesis Structure ..... / 2 |                  | Divide / 6<br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br>..... / 2 |
| <b>4. Literature Review:</b><br><b>Provides a good summary of quality literature about the research topic</b><br>4.1 Does the literature review correspond to the aims of the research? ..... / 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                  | Divide / 4<br><br><br>..... / 3                             |

|                                                                                                                                         |                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 4.2 Are major studies cited? ..... / 2                                                                                                  |                   |
| 4.3 The review reads like a coherent/logical presentation ..... / 2                                                                     |                   |
| 4.4 Is there evidence of critical review (Comparison, contrast and assessment of various arguments, theories, methodologies)? ..... / 2 |                   |
| 4.5 In-text referencing of sources is appropriate ..... / 2                                                                             |                   |
| 4.6 Does the candidate synthesise well the literature (avoiding unnecessary repetition)? ..... / 2                                      |                   |
| <b>5. Research Method</b>                                                                                                               | Divide / 2        |
| 5.1 Research method is clearly described / justified / appropriate to the research ..... / 2                                            | ..... / 2         |
| 5.2 Data treatment and presentation ..... / 2                                                                                           |                   |
| <b>6. Discussion and Conclusions</b>                                                                                                    | <b>Divide / 4</b> |
| 6.1 Thorough discussion of relevant points related to the research ..... / 2                                                            | ..... / 3         |
| 6.2 Synthesis and reference to data from RL and study to answer RQs ..... / 2                                                           |                   |
| 6.3 The conclusions follow logically from the analysis and discussion ..... / 2                                                         |                   |
| 6.4 Attempts to interpret data ..... / 2                                                                                                |                   |
| 6.5 Implications: follow logically from the findings, useful ..... / 4                                                                  |                   |
| <b>7. General Conclusion</b>                                                                                                            |                   |
| Summarizes well the whole thesis: Reiterates the research purpose, significance, research method and key conclusions                    | ..... / 1         |
| <b>8. Language:</b> (Grammar, cohesion, coherence, word choice, etc.)                                                                   | ..... / 1         |
| <b>9. Oral Presentation</b>                                                                                                             | <b>Divide / 2</b> |
| 9.1 The content of the thesis presented in a clear academic way ..... / 2                                                               |                   |
| 9.2 The candidates responded to criticism and questions appropriately ..... / 2                                                         | ..... / 4         |
| 9.3 Fluency of delivery (no reading, etc.) ..... / 2                                                                                    |                   |
| 9.4 Accuracy of the contents ..... / 2                                                                                                  |                   |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                            | <b>..... / 20</b> |

**NB:** Maximum length 65

## Appendix O: A Suggested Assessment Rubric for Master's Dissertations in Applied Linguistics and Didactics

**Examiner's name:** ..... **Date:** .....

**Names of the other members of the examining committee:** 1..... / 2.....

**Title of the dissertation:** .....

**Submitted by (name(s) of the student(s)):** .....

**Submitted to (name of the supervisor/advisor):** .....

| <i>Layout/format of the dissertation</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate</b><br>(0.25 pt) | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate</b><br>(0.5 pt) | <b>Good</b><br>(1 pt) | <b>Very<br/>good</b><br>(1.5pt) | <b>Excellent</b><br>(02 pts) | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>layout</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| The dissertation includes all the preliminary pages (title page, copyright page, dedication and acknowledgements, list of tables, figures and abbreviations/acronyms/symbols, table of contents)                                                         |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              | Divide/ 7<br><br>...../ 02               |
| The title page includes all the necessary information: Name of the university, name of the faculty and the department, degree (Master), names of candidates on the left side, name of the supervisor on the right side, and month and year of submission |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |
| The title is clear, concise and informative (i.e., it includes information about the variables/concepts under investigation as well as the population of the study)                                                                                      |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |
| The table of contents includes a listing of all items in the dissertation and their respective pagination                                                                                                                                                |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |
| The headings and sub-headings in the table of contents are consistent with those in the body of the dissertation.                                                                                                                                        |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |
| The tables and figures in the list of tables and figures are consistent, in terms of captions and numbers, with those in the body of the text.                                                                                                           |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |
| The dissertation includes all the necessary parts (abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussions, conclusion).                                                                                                         |                                          |                                       |                       |                                 |                              |                                          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| <b>Content of the dissertation main sections &amp; chapters</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| <b>The Abstract</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>abstract</b>     |
| The abstract is presented in a well-developed, coherent and concise paragraph                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide /4<br><br><br>...../ 02                 |
| The abstract covers all the essential academic elements namely: the purpose, the method, the results/findings, conclusions/implications?<br>In other words, the abstract answers the following questions: <b>WHAT</b> did the researcher/author do?, <b>HOW</b> did the researcher/author do it?, <b>WHAT</b> did the researcher/author find?, <b>WHAT</b> did the researcher/author conclude? |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| The student uses the appropriate tenses?<br>(the <b><u>PRESENT</u></b> tense is used to state the purpose and the conclusions/implications, while the <b><u>PAST</u></b> tense is used to describe the method and report the main findings)                                                                                                                                                    |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| The abstract is followed by the necessary/relevant key words?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |
| <b>The General Introduction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>introduction</b> |
| The general introduction includes all the necessary parts ( <i>background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study/research rationale, purpose of the study, research questions and/or hypotheses, definitions of key terms, layout of the dissertation</i> )                                                                                                         |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| The background of the study section establishes context for the study through, briefly, reviewing related theories and studies and showing their relationship with the topic under discussion                                                                                                   |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide / 9<br><br><br><br><br><br><br>..... / 02        |
| The statement of the problem section provides a detailed, clear, and a well-supported (based on concrete evidence) description of the problem being investigated                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The research rationale section provides a convincing justification of the research significance/importance<br>The student(s) identify(ies) the gap in the literature and show(s) how their research would fill that gap (i.e., There a link between what is already known and what is not known |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The student(s) clearly state(s) their objectives and explain(s) what they want to do in their research                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The research questions are formulated in a way that is clear, focused, feasible/researchable, and relevant to the research undertaken                                                                                                                                                           |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The student(s) provide(s) clear definitions and explanations of the key terms                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The student(s) provide(s) a brief description of the dissertation content                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| <b>Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....</b><br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                    |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| <b><i>The Literature Review Chapter</i></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>literature<br/>review</b> |
| The literature review demonstrates the students’ understanding of and familiarity with the key sources, the key theories, concepts and ideas, and the major issues and discussions about their topic                                                                                            |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide /4<br><br><br><br>...../ 03                      |
| The student(s) provide(s) a comprehensive summary and critical/analytical evaluation of previous related studies                                                                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The student(s) could successfully synthesize/establish relationships between sources and identify areas of similarities and differences                                                                                                                                                         |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |
| The student(s) clearly show(s) the link between previous studies and their (i.e., students) research questions and objectives                                                                                                                                                                   |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                         |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| The student(s) discuss(es) the limitations of previous studies and identify(ies) the gap(s) in the literature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                    |
| The student(s) use(s) up-to-date sources                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                    |
| <b>Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....</b><br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                    |
| <b><i>The Methodology Chapter</i></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>methodolog<br/>y</b> |
| The student(s) describe(s), in detail, the type of research adopted in their study and justify(ies) its appropriateness to the research objectives and questions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide / 6                                         |
| The student(s) provide(s) a detailed description of the population and sample<br>➔ This description should include:<br>a) Characteristics of the participants,<br>b) Number of the participants included in the sample,<br>c) The rationale for choosing a particular population to take part in the study,<br>d) The type of sampling employed to select the participants (random/ non-random).<br>e)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                    |
| The student(s) provide(s) a detailed description of the data collection tools and procedures<br>➔ The description involves details about each research instrument.<br>For example, if the student(s) used a <b>questionnaire</b> or an <b>interview</b> , they:<br>a) <b>State</b> the aim of the instrument, <b>b) Justify</b> its appropriateness to obtain the expected data,<br>c) <b>Mention</b> the number of questions/items, their aims and types (closed or open-ended) and, <b>d) Explain</b> how the questionnaires and interviews were piloted and administered to the participants as well as the procedures followed in collecting data. |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | ..... / 02                                         |

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| If the main tool used to collect data for the study is the <b>experiment</b> , the student(s) describe(s) and explain(s) in detail:<br><b>a)</b> The way(s) followed in selecting the variables, <b>b)</b> Assignment of the variables into conditions, <b>c)</b> The manipulation of the independent variable, <b>d)</b> Measurement of variables, <b>e)</b> The program of the treatment, <b>f)</b> The content of the pre- and post-tests. |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| The student(s) discuss(es) in detail the validity and reliability of the research instruments and data                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| The student(s) provide(s) a sufficient description of the data analysis tools and justify(ies) their appropriateness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| The student(s) explain(s) the procedures followed in the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| <b>Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....</b><br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| <b><i>The Results and Discussion Chapter</i></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       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| <b><i>The Results Section</i></b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>results<br/>section</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 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| The methods (tables, figures, texts) used to display the data are appropriate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide 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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                                                      |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| <b>The Discussion Section</b>                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>discussions<br/>section</b>  |
| The student(s) provide(s) a comprehensive summary of the main research findings.                                                                                                                           |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide /10<br><br>..... / 01                               |
| The student(s) interpret(s) and explain(s) the main findings.                                                                                                                                              |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| All the interpretations are backed up with valid results from the study.                                                                                                                                   |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| The student(s) discuss(es) (show similarities and differences) their research findings in relation to the studies already referred to in the literature review.                                            |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| The student(s) discuss(es) the research findings in relation to the research objectives and the research questions<br>In other words, the objectives are achieved and the questions are properly answered. |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                                                      |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| <b>The Pedagogical Implications Section</b>                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>implications<br/>section</b> |
| The student(s) draw(s) conclusions and state(s) the practical applications/contribution of their study on the basis of the research findings.                                                              |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide / 6<br><br>..... / 01                               |
| The student(s) acknowledge(s) the flaws and weaknesses of their research (limitations)<br>The student(s) indicate(s) the weaknesses that mostly affected their conclusions.                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |
| The student(s) propose(s) future research suggestions to address the limitations of their own research (recommendations for further research)                                                              |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                            |

|                                                                                                                                                                      |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| <b><i>The General Conclusion</i></b>                                                                                                                                 | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>conclusion</b>    |
| The student(s) restate(s) the research objectives, questions and the main findings of the study                                                                      |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide /6<br><br><br><br><br><br>..... / 02     |
| The student(s) demonstrate(s) the significance of the research findings and show(s) how they filled the gap.                                                         |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) restate(s) the implications of the study and show(s) how they contributed to the development of the field of interest.                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) identify(ies) the limitations that negatively influenced the research findings.                                                                       |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) evaluate(s) the methodology adopted in their research.                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) restate(s) future research recommendations.                                                                                                           |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....<br>.....<br>.....                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| <b><i>Quality of the writing style/language</i></b>                                                                                                                  | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for the<br/>writing style</b> |
| In general, the language used is clear and easy to understand.                                                                                                       |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide / 10<br><br><br><br><br><br>...../ 02    |
| There is smooth transition between sentences, paragraphs and sections.                                                                                               |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| There are no spelling mistakes which make the text difficult to understand.                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) use(s) correct capitalization and punctuation.                                                                                                        |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) use(s) correct grammar (e.g., subject-verb agreement, verb tense, complete sentences, pronoun reference, appropriate word usage, parallel structure). |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The ideas are fully defined, explicitly stated and sufficiently clear to the readers who do not know much about the topic addressed.                                 |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |
| The student(s) support their ideas with illustrative examples and further details where necessary.                                                                   |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                 |

| There is a tendency to use informal language/terms/forms (e.g., unconventional spelling, overuse of color, contractions, emotive language, biased language, too much use of abbreviations, casual forms of language ...etc). |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| The student(s) use(s) various types of sentences (simple/ compound/ complex/ compound-complex).                                                                                                                              |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
| The student(s) use(s) correct sentence and paragraph structure.                                                                                                                                                              |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
| <b>Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....</b><br>.....<br>.....                                                                                                 |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
| <i>Citing and referencing</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                |                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Poor/<br/>inadequate<br/>(0.25 pt)</b> | <b>Fair/<br/>adequate<br/>(0.5 pt)</b> | <b>Good<br/>(1 pt)</b> | <b>Very<br/>good<br/>(1.5pt)</b> | <b>Excellent<br/>(02 pts)</b> | <b>Final mark<br/>for citing &amp;<br/>referencing</b> |
| The sources cited in text adhere to the style guide formats and conventions                                                                                                                                                  | <b>In-text citations</b>  | Primary sources cited in text are more than secondary sources                                                                                                                                            |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | Divide / 8                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | Direct quotations are stated properly (i.e., short quotations are put between inverted commas/quotation marks, while long quotations should be placed as a free-standing block without quotations marks) |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | Sources in direct quotations are acknowledged appropriately (author's name + year of publication + page number in APA or author's name + page number in MLA)                                             |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | Consistent formats of names and years of publication in in-text citations and the list of references.                                                                                                    |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | Consistent use of the referencing style (i.e., the student follows ONE style throughout the whole dissertation.)                                                                                         |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>List of references</b> | The same sources that appear in text are found in the list of references.                                                                                                                                |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               | ..... / 02                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | All works cited in text appear in the list of references                                                                                                                                                 |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                           | The reference entries include all the necessary publication information (e.g., author's name, year of pub., title of the book/article...etc)                                                             |                                           |                                        |                        |                                  |                               |                                                        |

**Please comment on the sections/parts where you ticked: poor, fair or good. Say what is missing.....**  
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**Recommendations:**  
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## Appendix P: Suggested YouTube Channels on Dissertation Writing and Research Methodology

| Channel/<br>website              | Link                                                                                                                              | Description & Aim                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Main content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Grad Coach</b>                | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-Hac4-z13FBSD-ue8Jt40Eg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-Hac4-z13FBSD-ue8Jt40Eg</a> | It was created in April 2017<br><br>It covers everything related to dissertation and thesis writing. Academic specialists deliver very interesting lectures and provide useful tips to assist researchers and undergraduates, Masters and doctoral (Ph.D.) students in their research and dissertation/thesis writing journey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to choose a research topic for a dissertation or thesis.</li> <li>• How to develop a research proposal for a dissertation or thesis.</li> <li>• How to write a dissertation/thesis.</li> <li>• Dissertation structure and layout.</li> <li>• Qualitative content analysis.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                  | <a href="https://gradcoach.com/">https://gradcoach.com/</a>                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Research proposal writing, doing and writing the literature review, designing research, analyzing data and referencing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Research with Dr. Kriukow</b> | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0p1Se97kOF--RARybzPqcbA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0p1Se97kOF--RARybzPqcbA</a> | It was created in November 2012, by Dr. Jaroslaw Kriukow; an academic tutor at the University of Edinburgh and a research assistant/consultant at the University of Oxford, UK.                                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major differences between qualitative and quantitative research.</li> <li>• Paradigms and mixed methods research.</li> <li>• The basics of qualitative coding for beginners.</li> <li>• Sampling in qualitative research.</li> <li>• Transcribing interview data.</li> <li>• Presenting qualitative findings.</li> <li>• Doing the literature review in grounded theory studies.</li> <li>• The structure of dissertations and theses.</li> </ul> |
|                                  | <a href="https://drkriukow.com/">https://drkriukow.com/</a>                                                                       | The content of the lectures revolves mainly around qualitative research (design, data collection methods, and data analysis) in addition to other lectures on research methodology in the field of education and social sciences.                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Doc Ed Padama</b>             | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmb5uVwUO">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmb5uVwUO</a>                               | It was created in March 2018, by Dr. Edward Padama; a research professor at Arellano University, Philippines                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting a research topic</li> <li>• Formulating research titles and questions</li> <li>• Types of research</li> <li>• Designing research</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |



|                                |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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|                                | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1OR7zHJ82szazg">1OR7zHJ82szazg</a> )                                                 | This channel aims at providing students and novice researchers with the necessary guidance and useful tips in research methodology and academic writing.                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing theoretical and conceptual frameworks</li> <li>• Sampling in qualitative and quantitative research</li> <li>• Analyzing data</li> <li>• Writing research proposals and research papers.</li> <li>• Writing using the IMRAD format</li> <li>• Writing dissertation/thesis parts (abstract, introduction, literature review chapter, methods chapter, results and discussions chapter, general conclusion).</li> </ul>                                                                                        |
| <b>Dr. Muhammad Ilyas Khan</b> | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnwNszHsar-I0ztyagrKkqQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnwNszHsar-I0ztyagrKkqQ</a> | <p>It was created in November 2010, by Dr. Muhammad Ilyas Khan; an assistant professor and a research supervisor at the Department of Education, Hazara University, Pakistan</p> <p>The aim of this YouTube channel is to develop students', teachers' and researchers' academic writing and research skills in the field of education and social sciences.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research types in social sciences.</li> <li>• Research design, research methods and research methodology.</li> <li>• Formulating research questions and hypotheses.</li> <li>• Interview design.</li> <li>• Data analysis and discussion.</li> <li>• Reliability and validity in qualitative and quantitative research.</li> <li>• Writing the research proposal.</li> <li>• Writing the dissertation/thesis parts: abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, discussions, general conclusion.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Educational Hub</b>         | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM8qphOM0s6ZS9yFjTB9AIg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCM8qphOM0s6ZS9yFjTB9AIg</a> | <p>It was created in December 2015</p> <p>It provides lectures on research methodology and designs and academic writing</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative and quantitative research designs.</li> <li>• Types of research.</li> <li>• Analyzing data using SPSS.</li> <li>• Research article publishing guidance.</li> <li>• Steps to avoid plagiarism.</li> <li>• Teaching summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting and citing skills.</li> <li>• Writing research proposals.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                               |

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| <b>Tamuwriting Center</b>                                        | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx4ZRP8E8UGV4poLm3HSeYQ">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx4ZRP8E8UGV4poLm3HSeYQ</a> | <p>It was created in September 2009, by The Texas A &amp; M University Center</p> <p>It Provides academic writing assistance to undergraduate and graduate students</p>                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing counter-arguments</li> <li>• Writing clearly and concisely</li> <li>• Designing writing assignments</li> <li>• Evaluation strategies in qualitative research</li> <li>• Writing the research proposal and literature review</li> <li>• Writing introductions and conclusions.</li> <li>• Writing with integrity (avoiding plagiarism)</li> <li>• Writing for publication</li> </ul> |
| <b>Research Beast</b>                                            | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtar4zw34YsvxS-y9OijKlg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtar4zw34YsvxS-y9OijKlg</a> | <p>It was created in March 2019, by Dr. Faizan Ali (Assistant professor in the school of hospitality and tourism management in Sarasota-Manatee, South Florida)</p> <p>It provides advice on research methods, software tutorials and interviews/ webinars with leading scholars.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting a systematic literature review</li> <li>• Planning and conducting qualitative interviews.</li> <li>• Mastering google scholar: tips and tricks</li> <li>• Identifying and presenting research gaps</li> <li>• Finding original research ideas</li> <li>• Basics of experimental research designs.</li> </ul>                                                                          |
| <b>University of Liverpool Online Centre for Student Success</b> | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCphdzQ5c4D6KuuCOP0qwOAA">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCphdzQ5c4D6KuuCOP0qwOAA</a> | <p>It was created in December 2017, by The University of Liverpool, England</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to research methods and methodologies</li> <li>• Ethical issues for practitioner researchers.</li> <li>• Research ethics in project design.</li> <li>• Summarizing, paraphrasing and synthesizing.</li> <li>• Evaluating secondary sources</li> <li>• Citing and referencing</li> </ul>                                                                                             |
| <b>Research Tube</b>                                             | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMMkVHzQCBS2wKKFN0cXxAg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMMkVHzQCBS2wKKFN0cXxAg</a> | <p>It was created in May 2019</p> <p>It provides interactive videos on research related concepts, data analysis techniques and publishing</p>                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophy of research: research paradigms</li> <li>• Sampling issues in qualitative research</li> <li>• Common ways of displaying qualitative data</li> <li>• Types of qualitative data analysis</li> <li>• Types of case study research</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             |



**Appendix Q: Chen and Kuo's Framework for the analysis of MA dissertations in Applied Linguistics (2012, pp. 47 – 52)**

| <b>Abstract</b>                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Moves</b>                            | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 1 : Introduction</b>            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Move 2 : Method</b>                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Move 3 : Results</b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Move 4 : Conclusions</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>The General Introduction</b>         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Moves</b>                            | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 1: Establishing a territory</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing topic</li> <li>• Generalization/background</li> <li>• Indicating centrality/importance of topic</li> <li>• Defining terms</li> <li>• Reviewing previous research</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 2: Establishing a niche</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating gap in previous research</li> <li>• Question-raising</li> <li>• Counter-claiming</li> <li>• Counting/extending a tradition</li> <li>• Indicating problem/need</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the niche</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating purposes/aims/objectives</li> <li>• Indicating scope of research</li> <li>• Indicating chapter/section structure</li> </ul>                                                |

|                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating theoretical position</li> <li>• Announcing research/work carried out</li> <li>• Describing parameters of research</li> <li>• Stating research</li> <li>• Questions/hypotheses</li> <li>• Defining terms</li> <li>• Indicating research method</li> <li>• Indicating findings/results</li> <li>• Indicating models proposed</li> <li>• Indicating applications</li> <li>• Indicating value or significance</li> <li>• Providing justification</li> <li>• Indicating thesis structure</li> </ul> |
| <b>Referring to other studies</b>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing background information</li> <li>• Providing definition of terms</li> <li>• Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>The Literature Review Chapter</b>                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Moves</b>                                                                | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating organization of the review chapter(s) and justifying the themes (areas) to be reviewed</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Move 1: Establishing one part of the territory of one's own research</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveying the non-research related phenomena or knowledge claims centrality</li> <li>• Surveying the research-related phenomena</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter-claiming (weaknesses and problems)</li> <li>• Gap-indicating (paucity or scarcity)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Move 2: creating a research need (in response to move 1)</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asserting formative claims about knowledge or research practices surveyed.</li> <li>• Asserting the relevancy of the surveyed claims to one's own research</li> <li>• Abstracting or synthesizing knowledge claims to establish a theoretical position or a theoretical framework.</li> <li>• Concluding a part of literature review and/or indicating transition to review of a different area.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 3: Occupying the research niche by announcing</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating research aims, focuses, research questions or hypotheses</li> <li>• Indicating theoretical positions/theoretical frameworks</li> <li>• Indicating research design/processes</li> <li>• Interpreting terminology used in the thesis</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Conclusion</b>                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a summary of the review of the themes and relating the review to the present study.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>The Methodology Chapter</b>                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Moves</b>                                                      | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the method chapter</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating chapter/section structure</li> <li>• Providing an overview of the study</li> <li>• Indicating theory/approach</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Move 2: Describing data collection method and procedure(s)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing the sample (participants, location, time, etc.)</li> <li>• Describing methods and steps in data collection</li> <li>• Justifying data collection</li> <li>• Procedure(s)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Move 3: Delineating methods of data analysis</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting an overview of the (data analysis) design</li> <li>• Explaining specific method(s) of data analysis</li> <li>• Explaining variables and variable measurement</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justifying the methods of measuring variables or data analysis</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Move 4: Elucidating data analysis procedure/s</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relating (or recounting) data analysis</li> <li>Procedure(s)</li> <li>Justifying the data analysis</li> <li>Procedure(s)</li> <li>Previewing results</li> </ul>                                                              |
| <b>Referring to other studies</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing background information</li> <li>Providing definition of terms</li> <li>Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                                               |
| <b>The Results and Discussions of the Results Chapter</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>The Results Section</b>                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Moves</b>                                              | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the Result chapter</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing background information or how results are presented</li> <li>Indicating methods used or statistical procedure applied</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 2: Reporting results</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locating graphics</li> <li>Reporting major findings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Move 3: Commenting on results</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpreting results</li> <li>Comparing results with literature</li> <li>Evaluating results (including strengths, limitations, generalizations, etc. of results)</li> <li>Accounting for results (giving reasons)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 4: Summarizing results</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making conclusions of results</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Move 5: Evaluating the study</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicating limitations of the study</li> <li>Indicating significance/advantage of the study</li> </ul>                                                                                                                       |

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|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| <b>Move 6: Deductions from the (research) study</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommending further research</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implications</li> <li>• Making suggestions</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Referring to other studies</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing background information</li> <li>• Providing definition of terms</li> <li>• Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Discussion of the Results Section</b>                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Moves</b>                                               | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the discussions chapter/section</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing background information (such as purpose, design, research questions/hypotheses, etc.) or how discussions are presented.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Move 2: Reporting results</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting major findings</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Move 3: Summarizing results</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making conclusions of results</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Move 4: Commenting on results</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting results Providing background information (such as purpose, design, research questions/hypotheses, etc.) or how discussions are presented.</li> <li>• Comparing results with literature</li> <li>• Accounting for results (giving reasons)</li> <li>• Evaluating results (including strengths, limitations, etc. of results)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 5: Summarizing the study</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarizing the study briefly.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Move 6: Evaluating the study</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating limitations</li> <li>• Indicating significance/advantage</li> <li>• Evaluating methodology</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |



|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <b>Move 7: Deductions from the (research) study</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making suggestions</li> <li>• Recommending further research</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implications</li> </ul>           |
| <b>Reference to other studies</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                              |
| <b>The General Conclusion</b>                       |                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Moves</b>                                        | <b>Steps</b>                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Move 1: Introducing the conclusions chapter</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restating purpose, design, research questions/hypotheses, results, or indicating how conclusions are presented.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Move 2: Summarizing the study</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarizing the study briefly</li> </ul>                                                                                   |
| <b>Move 3: Evaluating the study</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicating significance/advantage</li> <li>• Indicating limitations</li> <li>• Evaluating methodology</li> </ul>           |
| <b>Move 4: Deductions from the (research) study</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommending further research</li> <li>• Drawing pedagogic implications</li> <li>• Making suggestions</li> </ul>           |
| <b>Referring to other studies</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing support or justification</li> </ul>                                                                              |

## الملخص

يُعد إعداد مذكرة التخرج شرطاً أساسياً للحصول على درجة الماجستير. ومع ذلك، ورغم أن طلاب مستوى الماجستير في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - جامعة البليدة 2 - يتعرفون على أساسيات كتابة البحث والمنهجية في دروس الكتابة الأكاديمية ومهارات البحث، لا يزال العديد منهم بعيدين عن القدرة على كتابة مذكرة ناجحة يلتزمون فيها بمعايير كتابة البحث الأكاديمي. ويُعتقد أن هذا يرجع إلى عدد من التحديات المتعلقة ببنية المذكرة ومنهجية البحث. لذلك، نحاول من خلال بحثنا هذا استكشاف التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب التدرج، من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة البليدة 2، في كتابة مذكرات الماجستير. وبشكل أكثر تحديداً، يهتم هذا البحث أساساً بالتحديات المتعلقة بالمحتوى والهيكل التخطيطي للأجزاء التالية: الملخص، والمقدمة العامة، وفصل مراجعة الدراسات السابقة ذات الصلة بالموضوع، وفصل المنهجية، وفصل عرض النتائج ومناقشتها، والخاتمة العامة. كما يلقي هذا البحث الضوء أيضاً على أسباب فشل معظم طلاب الماجستير في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كتابة مذكرة ناجحة، ويقترح إطاراً وتقنيات أكاديمية نأمل أن تساعد الطلاب والمشرفين في تجاوز أو على الأقل التخفيف من المشاكل ذات الصلة بالمحتوى وتحقيق جودة في نوعية العمل. ولبلوغ هدفنا، تم اعتماد تصميم استكشافي متداخل متزامن باستخدام طرق استقصائية مختلفة وهي: استبيانان موجهان إلى 28 طالب يدرسون تخصص تعليمية اللغة و 10 مدرسين، ومقابلتين شبه منظمتين للمتابعة أجريت مع الطلاب والمعلمين، بالإضافة إلى - تحليل معمق للوثيقة لست (6) مذكرات ماجستير تم اختيارها عشوائياً. وأظهرت نتائج البحث أن معظم الطلاب لم يكونوا على دراية كاملة بمحتوى أجزاء الرسالة. وأظهرت البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من أدوات البحث أن مراجعة الأدبيات كانت أصعب فصل في الكتابة، يليها فصل النتائج والمناقشة، ثم المقدمة العامة، وفصل المنهجية، والخاتمة العامة، بينما كان الجزء الأقل صعوبة هو الملخص. وعلاوة على ذلك، توصلنا إلى أن غالبية الطلاب يفتقرون إلى مهارات التلخيص وإعادة الصياغة، ويواجهون تحديات خطيرة في جعل كتاباتهم متسقة ومنسجمة. ووفقاً للمشاركين، ترجع التحديات المذكورة أعلاه في المقام الأول إلى أربعة عوامل رئيسية هي: نقص الممارسة والتدريب غير الفعال في حصص الكتابة الأكاديمية ومهارات البحث، ونقص توجيه المشرَف، وغياب إطار تقييم مشترك. على أساس هذه النتائج، يتم تقديم عدد من التوصيات البيداغوجية. حيث تدعو الدراسة إلى مزيد من الاهتمام بتطوير الكتابة البحثية للطلاب من خلال تنظيم ورش عمل تدريبية حول جوانب كتابة المذكرة ومنهجية البحث، وتخصيص الوقت والفرص الكافية لممارسة مهارات الكتابة والبحث، وإظهار ما يجب فعله بدلاً من إخبار الطلاب

به (على سبيل المثال، استخدام النماذج)، ودمج الأنشطة التي تتمحور حول الطالب مثل التقويم الذاتي والتقييم الذاتي وتصميم نماذج التقييم. يُعتقد أن هذه الأنشطة مفيدة للطلاب لتعزيز مهارات التفكير التأملي النقدي والتنظيم الذاتي. إلى جانب ذلك، فإن التوصيات البيداغوجية لهذا البحث لديها القدرة على دعم وتحسين الإشراف البحثي وعملية التقييم من خلال التأكيد على الحاجة إلى تصميم نموذج شبكة تحليلية مشتركة لتقييم مذكرات الماستر وإعادة التفكير في كيفية تقديم المشرفين لتصويباتهم وتوجيهاتهم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحديات، مذكرة الماستر، التركيب التخطيطي، اللسانيات التطبيقية والتعليمية، طلبة التدرج (طلبة الماستر)، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، جامعة البليدة 2.

## Résumé

La rédaction d'un mémoire est une condition préalable à l'obtention du diplôme de Master. Cependant, malgré le fait que les étudiants à la maîtrise en éducation (didactique de l'anglais) du département d'anglais - à l'Université de Blida 2 - soient initiés aux principes fondamentaux de la rédaction et de la méthodologie de recherche dans les cours de rédaction académique et de compétences en recherche, de nombreux étudiants sont encore loin de pouvoir rédiger une thèse réussie qui adhère aux normes de rédaction de la recherche universitaire. On pense que cela est dû à un certain nombre de défis liés à la structure schématique de la thèse et à la méthodologie de recherche. Cette recherche doctorale tente donc d'explorer les défis rencontrés par les étudiants diplômés, du Département d'anglais de l'Université de Blida 2, dans la rédaction du mémoire de maîtrise. Plus précisément, cette recherche porte principalement sur les défis liés à la structure schématique des parties suivantes : Le résumé, l'introduction générale, le chapitre de revue de la littérature, le chapitre de méthodologie, le chapitre des résultats et de discussion et la conclusion générale. Cette recherche met également en lumière les raisons pour lesquelles la plupart des étudiants à la maîtrise du département d'anglais n'ont pas réussi à rédiger une thèse réussie et suggère un cadre et des techniques académiques qui, espérons-le, aideront les étudiants et les superviseurs à surmonter, ou au moins à atténuer, les problèmes liés au contenu et réaliser un travail de qualité. À cette fin, une conception imbriquée simultanée a été adoptée à l'aide de diverses méthodes d'enquête, à savoir : deux questionnaires administrés à 28 étudiants se spécialisant en didactique et 10 enseignants, deux entretiens de suivi semi-structurés menés avec les étudiants et les enseignants, et un autre en -analyse approfondie des documents de six thèses sélectionnées au hasard. Les résultats de la recherche ont montré que la plupart des étudiants n'étaient pas pleinement conscients du contenu des parties de la thèse. Aussi, Les données obtenues à partir des outils de recherche ont montré que la revue de la littérature était le chapitre le plus difficile à rédiger, suivi du chapitre résultats et discussion, puis de l'introduction générale, du chapitre méthodologie et de la conclusion générale, tandis que la partie la moins difficile était le résumé. De plus, il a été constaté que la majorité des étudiants manquaient de compétences en résumé et en paraphrase, et avaient de sérieux défis à relever pour rendre leur écriture cohésive et cohérente. Selon les participants, les défis susmentionnés étaient principalement dus à

quatre facteurs principaux, à savoir: le manque de pratique et une formation inefficace dans les cours de rédaction académique et de compétences en recherche, le manque de conseils du superviseur et l'absence d'un cadre d'évaluation commun. Sur la base de ces résultats, un certain nombre d'implications pédagogiques sont proposées. L'étude plaide pour une plus grande attention au développement de la rédaction de recherche des étudiants en organisant des ateliers de formation sur les aspects de la rédaction de thèse et de la méthodologie de recherche, en allouant suffisamment de temps et d'opportunités pour pratiquer les compétences en rédaction et en recherche, en montrant aux étudiants ce qu'il faut faire (c'est-à-dire en utilisant des exemples ), et en incorporant des activités centrées sur l'apprenant telles que l'évaluation par les pairs et l'auto-évaluation, et en concevant des rubriques d'évaluation. Ces activités sont censées être bénéfiques pour les étudiants afin de promouvoir leurs compétences de réflexion critique et leur autorégulation. En outre, les implications pédagogiques de cette recherche ont le potentiel de soutenir et d'améliorer la supervision de la recherche et le processus d'évaluation en soulignant la nécessité de concevoir une rubrique analytique commune pour évaluer les thèses de maîtrise et de repenser les pratiques de retour d'information des directeurs de thèse.

**Mots clés :** Défis, Mémoire de Master, Structure Schématique, Linguistique appliquée et Didactique, étudiants diplômés, EFL, Université de Blida 2

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ABOULKACEM SAADALLAH UNIVERSITY OF ALGIERS 2  
FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



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Writing: The Case of Master 2 Didactics Students at Blida 2  
University – Department of English**

استكشاف التحديات التي تواجه طلاب الدراسات العليا في كتابة المذكرة: دراسة حالة طلبة  
الماستر - تخصص تعليمية بجامعة البليدة 2 - قسم اللغة الانجليزية

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctorate LMD in Applied Linguistics and TEFL**

**Submitted by:**

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