

Move-Tense Interactions in Undergraduate Thesis Abstracts: Pedagogical Insights for EFL Writers

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ABSTRACT

Writing effective thesis abstracts remains a significant challenge for many EFL undergraduates, particularly in organizing rhetorical moves and selecting appropriate verb tenses. This study investigates the interaction between rhetorical move structures and tense usage in undergraduate thesis abstracts in English Education Department, offering a combined genre- and language-focused perspective that remains underexplored in EFL genre research. Using a qualitative Genre-Based Discourse Analysis approach, 41 abstracts from an Indonesian Islamic university were analyzed, with questionnaire data from 7 alumni, to identify common writing difficulties. The analysis applied a five-move model adapted from Swales and Feak, Koopman, and Weissberg and Buker, as well as frameworks for tense distribution. The findings show that although most abstracts successfully include the Aim (92.68%), Method (100%), and Results (97.56%) moves, only 36.59% present a complete five-move structure due to the limited presence of the Conclusion move. Tense analysis reveals an overuse of the present tense across moves, including in the Method (73.2%) and Results (80%) sections, where the past tense is typically required. Questionnaire responses indicate persistent difficulties related to understanding move functions, selecting appropriate tenses, and applying academic writing conventions without explicit guidance. Overall, the study demonstrates partial adherence to conventional abstract-writing practices and highlights the importance of explicit instruction in rhetorical organization and tense selection in EFL academic writing courses to support students' development as academic writers.

KEYWORDS:

Academic writing;
EFL;
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Introduction

In academic writing, abstracts play a crucial role by providing concise summaries of research and allowing readers to quickly assess a study's relevance and significance (Huang et al., 2025; Wilman et al., 2024). In the context of undergraduate theses, abstracts also reflect students' proficiency in academic writing, particularly in EFL settings where linguistic and

rhetorical challenges remain prevalent (Nugraha & Mbato, 2022; Simanjuntak, 2022). Previous studies have shown that EFL students frequently struggle with vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, difficulties that are often intensified by limited opportunities to develop academic writing skills (Male, 2018; Taye & Mengesha, 2024). To communicate research effectively, a well-structured abstract should present essential components such as the background, aim, methodology, results, and conclusion, commonly known as rhetorical moves (J. Swales & Feak, 2016). These moves work together to achieve the abstract's communicative purpose by guiding readers through the study's progression (Qi & Pan, 2020). In addition to rhetorical organization, the appropriate use of verb tenses within each move contributes to clarity, coherence, and the accurate representation of research processes and findings (Weissberg & Buker, 1990).

Prior research has documented challenges EFL students face in organizing rhetorical moves and applying appropriate verb tenses in thesis abstracts (Amalia et al., 2018; Malini, 2022; Suwarni, 2021). Studies on Indonesian undergraduate writing consistently report incomplete move structures, particularly in the Introduction and Conclusion sections, as well as inconsistencies in the sequencing and realization of rhetorical steps. For example, Suwarni (2021) identified frequent misplacement of moves in undergraduate thesis abstracts, while Amalia et al. (2018) found that certain rhetorical components were often omitted despite the overall presence of the five-move structure. Similarly, Kosasih (2018) found that only 15% of 40 thesis abstracts fully conformed to Swales and Feak's five-move model, with many adopting a simplified Aim-Method-Result pattern instead. The study also reported inconsistent verb tense usage across rhetorical moves, particularly between the present and past tenses. Comparable patterns have been observed in ELT research article abstracts, where rhetorical structures remain incomplete and tense selection varies inconsistently across sections (Hamdi, 2021; Kholili, 2022). These studies suggest that EFL writers continue to experience difficulties not only in constructing rhetorically complete abstracts but also in aligning tense usage with the communicative purposes of each move.

Despite these findings, studies of undergraduate thesis abstracts in Indonesian Islamic universities remain limited, particularly those that examine both rhetorical structure and verb tense usage. Most existing research has focused on postgraduate abstracts, international journal abstracts, or undergraduate abstracts in secular universities, leaving a limited understanding of how students in state Islamic higher education institutions construct academic abstracts in English. This context is important because Indonesian Islamic universities often present distinctive EFL learning environments characterized by diverse linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of exposure to academic writing, and institutional emphases on both disciplinary and religious studies. These contextual conditions may influence students' familiarity with international academic writing conventions, including the organization of rhetorical moves and the use of appropriate verb tenses in English abstracts.

This study addresses the gap by examining both the structural (rhetorical moves) and grammatical (verb tense) features of undergraduate thesis abstracts produced by English Department students at an Indonesian Islamic university, covering the first graduating cohort from June 2021 to January 2023. Drawing on the five-move framework proposed by Swales and Feak (2016), Koopman (1997), and Weissberg and Buker (1990), the study aims to investigate: (1) the extent to which students employ the expected rhetorical moves in their thesis abstracts, and (2) how appropriately verb tenses are used across different moves, including the use of present tense in the Background, past or present perfect in the Aim, past

tense in the Method and Results, and present tense or modal auxiliaries in the Conclusion move.

By integrating both structural and grammatical analyses, this research provides a broader understanding of novice EFL writers' genre competence in thesis abstract writing within the context of an Indonesian Islamic university. The findings offer practical implications for teaching academic writing in EFL contexts, particularly by highlighting the importance of explicit instruction on rhetorical organization and appropriate tense selection across abstract moves. For example, academic writing courses may incorporate move-based abstract analysis and guided practice on tense usage to help students produce more conventionally structured and linguistically accurate abstracts. Such an approach can help students meet disciplinary expectations and international academic writing standards, ultimately improving the quality of undergraduate research dissemination in EFL settings.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design under the framework of Genre-Based Discourse Analysis. As an approach rooted in applied linguistics, genre analysis examines, interprets, and understands texts based on their communicative purposes and structural features. Swales and Feak (2016) assert that genre analysis offers a practical lens for examining academic texts and their underlying rhetorical strategies. This study specifically draws on the work of Swales and Feak (2016), Koopman (1997), and Weissberg and Buker (1990) to analyze the structural patterns and theory of verb tense usage in thesis abstracts.

A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the study aims to identify and interpret rhetorical and grammatical patterns in naturally occurring student texts rather than to measure statistical relationships or build a large-scale corpus comparison. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how English Department students at an Islamic university organize their abstracts and realize verb tenses across different rhetorical moves within their specific academic writing context.

Source of Data

The data for this study consist of 41 English thesis abstracts written by undergraduate students of the English Education Department at a state Islamic university. These abstracts were purposively selected from theses submitted by the first cohort of graduates who completed their studies between June 2021 and January 2023. This study employs purposive sampling (Creswell, 2015), in which data are selected for their relevance to the research objectives. All eligible thesis abstracts from the specified cohort that were written in English and accessible in the university repository were included in the analysis. The abstracts were retrieved from the university's thesis repository with institutional permission.

The analysis focuses on clause-level realizations in the abstracts to identify both structural (move) patterns and verb tense usage across rhetorical sections. In addition to the thesis abstract documents, supplementary data were obtained from questionnaires completed by seven alumni who had written the analyzed abstracts.

Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected from the thesis repository of the English Education Department of an Islamic university. The researcher accessed the repository and retrieved the abstract sections of undergraduate theses submitted by the first cohort of students who graduated between June 2021 and January 2023. From each thesis, only the English-language abstract section was extracted for analysis. The collected abstracts were compiled into a single document corpus and assigned numerical codes (A1-A41) for organizational purposes and anonymity. Clause-level textual units from each abstract were segmented and prepared for subsequent genre and tense analysis. Permission to access and analyze the abstracts was obtained from the department, and all data were used solely for academic research purposes, with participant anonymity maintained.

In addition to the textual data, a supplementary questionnaire was distributed to seven alumni whose abstracts were included in the corpus under analysis. The participants were selected purposively based on their availability and willingness to participate in follow-up data collection. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to gather insights into their writing process, decision-making in structuring the abstract, and awareness of language use, particularly regarding verb tense selection. These supplementary responses supported the interpretation of the written abstracts and served as a form of methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed the principles of genre-based discourse analysis. It was conducted in several systematic stages to examine both the rhetorical move structure and verb tense realizations in undergraduate thesis abstracts. After the 41 abstracts were compiled and coded (A1–A41), the texts were segmented into clause-level units to enable a detailed examination of linguistic and rhetorical patterns. The coding process was conducted through repeated close reading and cross-checking of the data to ensure consistency in move identification and tense classification.

The first stage involved identifying the rhetorical moves using the five-move model proposed by Swales and Feak (2016), Koopman (1997), and Weissberg and Buker (1990). Each clause was examined and categorized into one of the five functional components: Background/Introduction, Aim, Method, Results, and Conclusion. In cases where a sentence appeared to realize more than one move, the dominant communicative purpose of the clause was used as the basis for categorization. For example, a sentence combining research purpose and methodological information was classified according to the primary rhetorical focus emphasized in the clause. Frequencies were then calculated to describe the overall distribution, completeness, and typicality of structural patterns in the abstracts.

The second stage focused on analyzing the usage of verb tenses within each move. This analysis was guided by the tense-function relationships described by Weissberg and Buker (1990), who outline conventional tense preferences for specific rhetorical functions in academic abstracts (e.g., present tense for Background and Aim, past tense for Method, and either past or present tense for Results depending on rhetorical intent). Each verb was identified and classified into one of three categories: present tense, past tense, or other forms (e.g., present perfect or past perfect), allowing the researcher to observe how students' tense choices aligned with or diverged from conventional tense functions. In clauses containing multiple verbs, each finite verb was analyzed according to its grammatical realization and

rhetorical function within the clause. This stage was essential for identifying patterns of grammatical consistency and deviations from disciplinary conventions.

The third stage integrated textual analysis with qualitative data from questionnaire responses from seven alumni. The responses were coded thematically using a predominantly inductive approach, in which recurring ideas and experiences emerging from the data were grouped into broader thematic categories. The analysis focused on students' perceptions of challenges in abstract writing, including their understanding of rhetorical move structure, awareness of appropriate tense selection, and factors influencing their writing decisions. These themes were then compared with textual patterns identified in the abstract corpus, as part of a triangulation strategy to strengthen the study's interpretive validity.

Through these stages, the analysis examined how rhetorical moves and verb tense choices interacted across the abstracts. The analytical results were subsequently interpreted alongside the respondents' reported writing experiences to provide a broader understanding of academic writing needs in the EFL context.

Results

Findings on the Generic Structure (Moves)

The analysis of the 41 undergraduate thesis abstracts was conducted using the five-move model proposed by Swales and Feak, and by Koopman, Weissberg, and Buker, which consists of Background, Aim, Method, Results, and Conclusion. This framework was employed to identify the rhetorical organization of the abstracts, with particular attention to the completeness of moves and the variations of structural patterns. The purpose of this section is to provide a descriptive account of the frequency of each move, the extent to which students adhered to the conventional structure, and representative examples from the data.

Table 1. *Distribution of rhetorical moves in undergraduate thesis abstracts*

Move	Frequency (out of 41)	Percentage (%)
Background	30	73.17%
Aim	38	92.68%
Method	41	100%
Results	40	97.56%
Conclusion	15	36.59%

The analysis revealed that all abstracts followed a recognizable rhetorical organization, though with varying levels of completeness. As shown in Table 1, the Method move appeared in all abstracts (100%), indicating that most writers consistently described the research procedure as a core component of their work. The Results move was also highly frequent (97.56%), reflecting students' awareness that summarizing findings is an obligatory element of an academic abstract.

Meanwhile, the Aim move was present in 92.68% of abstracts, suggesting that nearly all writers clearly stated the purpose or objective of their research. However, the Background move occurred less frequently (73.17%), suggesting that some students tended to omit contextual or introductory information, possibly due to a limited understanding of how to establish the research territory effectively. The Conclusion move was the least frequent

(36.59%), showing that more than half of the abstracts lacked a summary of implications or recommendations. This finding suggests that while most students effectively conveyed their research aims and procedures, many omitted evaluative or conclusive remarks that signal the study's contribution.

To provide a clearer picture of how each move was realized, representative excerpts from the abstracts are presented as follows: 1. Move 1 Background: "Small Group Discussion method is an active, constructive, and cooperative learning method in order to improve student learning abilities." (A7), 2. Move 2 Aim: "The purpose of this research was to know students' development in listening comprehension through the English song." (A3), 3. Move 3 Method: "The research method is descriptive qualitative research." (A12), 4. Move 4 Results: "The result of data analysis shows that the students used the person, place, or spatial, time, and discourse deixis in their composition." (A6), 5. Move 5 Conclusion: "It can be concluded that the Pathway to English textbook is feasible based on Graves' Comprehensive Approach." (A10)

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that most undergraduate writers were able to construct a reasonably organized abstract following the five-move model, though many still exhibited partially or incompletely organized structures. The predominance of the Method and Results moves indicates that students were generally aware of the need to describe their research design and findings. However, the relatively low occurrence of Background and Conclusion moves may reflect limited rhetorical awareness in establishing a research context and articulating implications or recommendations.

Further examination of the structural patterns revealed that only 8 abstracts (19.5%) contained all five moves in sequence. The most frequent pattern observed was Background-Aim-Method-Results (BAMR), indicating that many students prioritized presenting background, research purposes, procedures, and findings while omitting the concluding move. In contrast, fewer abstracts employed simplified three-move structures, such as the Aim-Method-Results (AMR) structure, suggesting a tendency toward rhetorical reduction in abstract construction.

Table 2. *Distribution of rhetorical move patterns in undergraduate thesis abstracts*

Patterns of Move	Number of Abstracts	Percentage (%)
3 Moves (AMR)	7 (A04, A23, A27, A29, A37, A39, A41)	17.1%
3 Moves (BMR)	1 (A11)	2.4%
4 Moves (AMRC)	4 (A03, A32, A34, A35)	9.8%
4 Moves (BAMR)	18 (A02, A05, A07, A08, A09, A14, A15, A16, A17, A18, A19, A21, A24, A26, A30, A31, A38, A40)	43.9%
4 Moves (BMRC)	2 (A01, A10)	4.9%
4 Moves (BAMC)	1 (A28)	2.4%
5 Moves (BAMRC)	8 (A06, A12, A13, A20, A22, A25, A33, A36)	19.5%

As shown in Table 2, the four-move BAMR pattern was the most dominant structure, occurring in 18 abstracts, followed by the complete five-move BAMRC structure, which was found in only 8 abstracts. Several abstracts also adopted reduced three-move patterns, particularly AMR, which excluded both contextual background and concluding statements. These findings suggest that, while students generally understood the importance of

presenting research aims, methods, and results, they demonstrated less awareness of the rhetorical functions of introductory and concluding moves.

These findings also highlight that some abstracts lacked clear boundaries between moves. For instance, the Background and Method moves were merged into a single sentence, as in “However, to make YouTube a learning media, content analysis is needed so that the videos used are suitable for the requirements of the education curriculum in Indonesia” (A28). This blending of moves may indicate limited linguistic and rhetorical competence in distinguishing between communicative purposes.

In summary, the students demonstrated a partial mastery of rhetorical structuring in academic abstracts. They appeared to understand the essential components of research reporting but lacked awareness of how each move contributes to creating a cohesive and persuasive text.

Since the organization of moves reflects what writers choose to present in their abstracts, it is also essential to analyze how they linguistically realize these moves. The following section, therefore, focuses on the use of verb tenses across the five moves to reveal students’ grammatical control and their awareness of academic writing conventions.

Findings on Verb Tense Use

The analysis of verb tense distribution across the five rhetorical moves aimed to identify how undergraduate writers used verb tense to convey temporal and rhetorical meanings in their abstracts. Table 3 presents the number and percentage of abstracts containing particular verb tense forms within each rhetorical move. The percentages were calculated based on the total number of abstracts in which each move occurred. As shown in the table, the present tense was the most frequently used form across all rhetorical moves, followed by the past tense and a small number of other forms, including present perfect and past perfect constructions.

Table 3. *Distribution of verb tense across rhetorical moves*

Rhetorical Move	Present Tense (%)	Past Tense (%)	Others (e.g., Present/ Past Perfect) (%)
Background	24 (80%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)
Aim	27 (71.05%)	10 (26.31%)	1 (2.63%)
Method	30 (73.2%)	11 (26.8%)	-
Results	32 (80%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)
Conclusion	13 (86.6%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)

The findings indicate that present tense forms were dominant across all rhetorical moves, including the Method and Results sections, where the past tense is conventionally more common in academic abstracts. The dominance of the present tense in most rhetorical moves reflects students’ awareness of its function in expressing general statements, purposes, and interpretations, features typically associated with academic writing. In the Aim and Results moves, for instance, many writers employed the simple present to indicate ongoing relevance or generalizable findings, as in “The research attempts to describe the moral values...” (A1) or “The result of data analysis shows that the students used...” (A6).

The past tense was used less frequently, yet it was generally appropriate in the Method and Results moves, where writers described procedures or summarized the findings

of a completed study (e.g., “The researcher used a descriptive qualitative design”). Nevertheless, instances of tense shifts within a single move were also found, suggesting partial understanding of academic tense conventions.

Interestingly, the Conclusion move showed a relatively low proportion of present-tense usage (13 abstracts) and minimal overall variation. This indicates that few students extended their abstracts to include implications or recommendations, consistent with the earlier finding that the Conclusion move itself was the least frequent. The limited use of modals or present perfect forms (e.g., “has shown”, “should be improved”) further reveals that students rarely projected broader significance or future directions of their research.

Overall, the data suggest that while the writers demonstrated a basic grasp of tense selection in academic discourse, their grammatical control was often mechanical rather than rhetorical. Many relied on habitual tense use (predominantly present tense) without fully understanding its pragmatic or discourse-level function across moves.

Findings from Students’ Questionnaires

To complement the textual analysis of thesis abstracts, additional data were obtained from a questionnaire administered to seven undergraduate alumni who had recently completed their theses. The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore students’ experiences and perceptions of the challenges of writing thesis abstracts in English, particularly regarding rhetorical structure and verb tense. Table 4 below summarizes the emerging themes and their frequencies among respondents.

Table 4. *Summary of questionnaire findings*

Theme	Specific Issues/Responses	Frequency (out of 7)
Challenges in Move Use	a. Students are unsure about required moves (Background, Aim, Method, Results, and Conclusion). b. Difficulty starting the abstract and determining what information belongs in each move.	3
Challenges in Tense Use	a. Confusion about when to use the present or past tense in different moves. b. Students rely on advisors’ feedback, books, or previous studies. c. Limited exposure to explicit instruction on tense conventions for abstracts.	4
Student Strategies	a. Learning abstracts from previous studies as models. b. Using several applications to help in writing. c. Seeking feedback from advisors	4

The questionnaire responses from seven undergraduate alumni provide additional insights into the challenges and strategies involved in writing thesis abstracts in English. Three major themes emerged from the data: challenges in the use of move and tense, and student strategies. The first theme, challenges in using move, was reported by three respondents. Several students expressed uncertainty about the required rhetorical structure of an abstract, particularly regarding the expected moves: background, aim, method, results, and conclusion.

One respondent noted, “... when I first started writing the abstract, I did not know the characteristics of writing a good abstract. I only studied how to write abstracts from previous

studies, so that I understood the correct sequence of abstract writing concepts that I had to do" (Questionnaire response, SR6). Another respondent shared difficulty in starting the abstract, stating, "I started collecting some data related to my topic" (Questionnaire response, SR4). These responses suggest a limited understanding of abstract structure and indicate that students may not have received sufficient guidance on the conventional move structure of academic abstracts. This also implies that many students rely on trial-and-error processes rather than clear, systematic instruction when composing their abstracts.

The second theme, challenges in tense use, was mentioned by four respondents and represents the most frequently reported difficulty. Students indicated confusion about when to use the present or past tense across different moves in the abstract. Some respondents explained, "Common mistakes are using between the present tense and the past tense" (Questionnaire response, SR3). In addition, a respondent said, "A common mistake that often occurred was when the writer forgot to write a sentence in the past tense, and usually the sentence was written in the simple present" (Questionnaire response, SR6)

Another noted reliance on external sources rather than explicit instruction. "I learned to correct tenses from my advisor/supervisor and references from various studies" (Questionnaire response, SR5). This pattern reflects inconsistent or insufficient exposure to clear explanations about tense conventions in academic abstract writing. These findings also highlight that tense-related problems are not merely grammatical errors but stem from deeper gaps in students' procedural knowledge about how each move should be linguistically realized.

The third theme, student strategies, also appeared in four responses. To address their challenges, students adopted several self-directed approaches. Many relied on previous studies as models, with one respondent stating, "I learned when I studied grammar on campus, from books, and from many sources" (Questionnaire response, SR7). Some also turned to digital tools for assistance. "I studied through writing courses and also several applications that help with writing" (Questionnaire response, SR4). Advisor feedback remained central, with one respondent mentioning, "I asked for advice from my supervisor... and I also asked for corrections to the abstract section" (Questionnaire response, SR6)

These strategies indicate students' initiative in compensating for instructional gaps, though they also highlight a reliance on external models and feedback. This reliance suggests that students tend to adopt reactive rather than systematic approaches to improving their abstract writing skills, addressing challenges only after errors are identified.

In summary, the questionnaire data reveal that while students employ various strategies to support their abstract writing, they continue to face notable challenges, particularly in applying move structure and selecting appropriate tenses. These findings underscore the need for more explicit, structured guidance in abstract writing within the undergraduate ELT program.

Discussion

Discussion on the Generic Structure (Move)

The findings revealed that most undergraduate students' abstracts followed the five-move model proposed by Swales and Feak (2016), Koopman (1997), and Weissberg and Buker (1990). Method and Results appeared as obligatory moves in all abstracts, while Aim was

present in the majority of cases. However, Background and Conclusion moves were sometimes omitted, resulting in incomplete rhetorical patterns. This aligns with previous studies (Amalia et al., 2018; Kosasih, 2018; Malini, 2022; Suwarni, 2021) that reported similar inconsistencies in undergraduate thesis abstracts in Indonesia, in which certain moves, particularly the Background and Conclusion, are often absent or underdeveloped.

The variation in move structures suggests that although students are aware of the fundamental components of an abstract, they may not fully understand the rhetorical significance of each move. For instance, the absence of the Conclusion move in several abstracts indicates limited awareness of how to close research and effectively highlight its contribution. This problem reflects what Swales and Feak (2016) termed the “rhetorical consciousness” gap, in which novice writers struggle to align their texts with disciplinary discourse expectations.

Another noteworthy point is that some abstracts employed simplified patterns, such as the Aim-Method-Result (AMR) format, which resembles what Kosasih (2018) identified in thesis abstracts at Universitas Terbuka (Indonesian Open University). While such simplification may reflect students’ attempts to write concisely, it also shows a lack of genre competence, as it does not fully reflect the rhetorical structure required in academic discourse.

In sum, these results emphasize the pedagogical need for explicit instruction in abstract writing. Undergraduate students, especially in EFL contexts, should be guided not only on how to include all moves but also on how to elaborate them appropriately to meet academic conventions. Without such support, their abstracts risk being perceived as incomplete or lacking scholarly rigor in both local and international academic settings.

Discussion on the Verb Tense Use

The findings indicate that undergraduate thesis abstracts in the English Education Department at the institution studied generally follow the common conventions of tense usage in international academic writing, though with some inconsistencies. The predominance of the simple present tense in the background and purpose moves aligns with Swales and Feak’s (2016) claim that writers typically use the present tense to situate their research within the existing body of knowledge and to highlight its relevance. Similarly, the frequent use of the simple past tense in the method and results moves aligns with Weissberg and Buker’s (1990) observation that the past tense is commonly used to describe completed research activities and findings.

However, some deviations were also observed. In several abstracts, students used present tense forms to describe results or alternated between past and present tenses within the same move. Some abstracts used the present tense to describe completed research activities in the Method move, or the past tense in the Background section. Such variation reflects what Paltridge and Starfield (2007) describe as a marker of novice academic writing, where writers often struggle to maintain consistency in tense choice. These inconsistencies may hinder clarity, as readers rely on tense as a temporal marker to distinguish between established knowledge, research procedures, and research outcomes.

Moreover, the limited use of the present perfect tense, commonly employed in professional academic writing to signal research gaps or link current research with previous studies, indicates that students may not yet fully grasp the rhetorical functions of tense selection. Recent research has demonstrated that expert writers employ a combination of

present, present perfect, and past tenses to construct coherence across abstract moves, whereas EFL student writers tend to rely heavily on simple past constructions (Amnuai et al., 2020; Kholili, 2022; Murti, 2022). This lack of variation reduces the rhetorical depth of the abstracts, making them appear more descriptive than analytical or argumentative.

Overall, these findings reinforce recent studies highlighting the difficulty non-native writers face in applying tense strategically to achieve communicative purposes in academic abstracts. This suggests a need for explicit instruction that emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also the discourse functions of tense in research writing.

Insights from Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire data collected from seven students or alumni provided additional perspectives on the challenges of writing thesis abstracts. Respondents reported uncertainty about both rhetorical structure and tense selection, confirming the patterns observed in the textual analysis. Several students admitted that they had received minimal instruction specifically focused on abstract writing, with most of their guidance coming from supervisors' general feedback rather than from structured classroom practice. This limited exposure helps explain the uneven distribution of moves and the inconsistent use of tenses identified in the corpus.

These reflections align with previous research indicating that many EFL learners perceive abstract writing as a mechanical requirement rather than a rhetorical act (Hamdi, 2021; Suwarni, 2021). Students tend to prioritize completion over communicative effectiveness, leading to formulaic or incomplete abstracts. The data further suggest that while students recognize the importance of abstracts as a "gateway" to their thesis, they lack confidence in aligning their writing with international scholarly standards.

The questionnaire responses also highlight the pedagogical gap between theory and practice. While genre-based approaches to academic writing have been widely recommended (Hyland, 2007; J. M. Swales & Feak, 2012), their systematic implementation in undergraduate curricula remains limited in many Indonesian institutions. As a result, students often rely on peer models or trial-and-error strategies, which may perpetuate inaccuracies in both structure and grammar.

Overall, the questionnaire findings reinforce the need for explicit instruction that integrates rhetorical awareness with grammatical accuracy. By combining model analysis, scaffolded practice, and feedback, EFL writing courses can better prepare students to produce abstracts that meet disciplinary expectations and make meaningful contributions to the broader academic community.

Pedagogical Implications for EFL Academic Writing

The findings of this study offer several pedagogical implications for the teaching of academic writing in EFL contexts, particularly in undergraduate programs. Since the analysis revealed incomplete rhetorical moves and inconsistent tense usage, academic writing instructors should explicitly teach both the generic structure of abstracts and the linguistic choices associated with each move. This recommendation aligns with the core principles of genre-based writing instruction, which emphasize explicit modeling, awareness-raising, and scaffolding of rhetorical structures (Hyland, 2007; J. M. Swales & Feak, 2012). Moreover, recent research indicates that digital literacy, while increasingly essential for academic engagement, does not automatically translate into stronger critical thinking skills (Indah et al.,

2022), suggesting that writing instruction must develop these competencies in tandem rather than assuming one will enhance the other.

One practical approach is to design move-identification tasks in which students analyze sample abstracts and highlight key rhetorical moves. Such activities resonate with genre-oriented teaching practices that help learners recognize conventionalized discourse patterns (Bhatia, 2013). These tasks can be complemented by tense-mapping exercises, in which students examine and correct tense mismatches to better align their grammatical choices with the communicative functions of each move.

Additionally, peer-review workshops may be incorporated into writing courses, enabling students to evaluate one another's abstracts. Empirical studies show that EFL learners participating in online peer-review activities not only engage actively but also provide meaningful macro- and micro-level feedback (Febriyanti et al., 2025; Rahayu, 2022). Such practices foster critical evaluation and rhetorical awareness, aligning with findings that peer feedback can positively influence writing organization and quality (Albelihi & Al-Ahdal, 2021).

Finally, these insights suggest that writing instruction should not only focus on the mechanics of grammar but also on the rhetorical purpose of each linguistic choice. Embedding abstract-writing practice in undergraduate curricula, with instructor feedback, can cultivate students' academic literacy and enhance their confidence as novice researchers. In the broader EFL context, such training is intended to enable students to communicate their research effectively, thereby contributing to international scholarly discourse.

Although this study provides useful insights into the structural and grammatical features of undergraduate thesis abstracts, it is not without limitations. First, the data were limited to 41 abstracts from a single Islamic university in Indonesia, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or cultural contexts. Second, although the study complemented textual analysis with a questionnaire administered to a small group of seven alumni writers, the perspectives remain relatively limited in scope and may not fully capture the broader range of student experiences. Third, the analysis employed a descriptive approach, relying solely on simple quantitative counts, and did not explore more advanced statistical or corpus-based techniques that could have enriched the findings.

Future research could expand the dataset to include multiple institutions, compare undergraduate and postgraduate abstracts, or employ corpus linguistics tools to gain deeper insights into linguistic and rhetorical patterns. Additionally, further studies could integrate classroom-based interventions to test how explicit instruction in rhetorical moves and tense usage influences students' performance in abstract writing.

Conclusion

This study examined the structural and grammatical features of undergraduate thesis abstracts, with particular attention to rhetorical moves and verb tense usage. The findings showed that only 8 abstracts (19.5%) demonstrated a complete five-move structure, while the majority employed simplified four-move patterns, especially the Background-Aim-Method-Results (BAMR) configuration. This indicates that many students prioritized presenting the research purposes, methods, and findings but frequently omitted the concluding move. In terms of grammatical realization, the overuse of the present tense across all rhetorical moves, including the Method and Results sections, reflected continuing difficulties in aligning tense choices with conventional academic writing practices. Although students demonstrated

general awareness of abstract organization, variation and inconsistency remained evident in both move realization and tense selection. Questionnaire responses further revealed that limited exposure to explicit genre-based instruction contributed to students' challenges in producing abstracts that fully conform to academic writing conventions.

In terms of contribution, this study enriches genre-based research by providing empirical evidence on how novice EFL writers construct thesis abstracts, particularly regarding the balance between rhetorical organization and tense selection. In practice, the findings highlight the importance of integrating explicit instruction in rhetorical moves, tense functions, and model-based abstract analysis into academic writing courses to better support students' development of academic literacy. More broadly, strengthening students' awareness of genre conventions may help improve the quality and international visibility of undergraduate research writing in EFL higher education contexts.

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