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# RHETORICAL MOVES IN THE BACKGROUND SECTIONS OF EFL INDONESIAN VOCATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

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## Abstract
Rhetorical moves in academic writing are interesting topics and strategic issues in linguistics. Many studies have investigated the moves in all sections of research articles for example abstract, introduction, research method, findings and discussion, and conclusion. However, few studies investigated the rhetorical moves found in vocational college students' academic writing, particularly in a background section. Therefore, this current research was aimed at revealing the rhetorical moves and patterns in the background of the study. This study analyzed 29 background sections from final project reports of vocational college students enrolled in the English study program of one of the state polytechnics in Indonesia. The reports were developed based on two major areas namely tourism and journalism. The data were analyzed by referring to the CARS model by Swales (2004). This research revealed that Move 1 and Move 3 occurred in all background sections. However, Move 2 was not used in several background sections although Step 1 in Move 2 is obligatory. Regarding the rhetorical patterns, seven patterns were found with different frequencies. The most used pattern was M1-M3S1. The current study may give implications to pedagogical settings related to the emphasis on establishing a niche in the background section.

Keywords: background section, CARS model, rhetorical move

## Introduction
Rhetorical moves have taken interest in many studies on writings across disciplines. Prior studies have investigated the moves in the sections of research articles or theses/dissertations for example the abstracts (Doró, 2013; Khany & Malmir, 2019; Luthfiyah et al., 2015; Putri & Kurniawan, 2021; Wijaya & Ardi, 2022; Zand-Moghadam & Meihami, 2016), introduction (Lu et al., 2021; Sheldon, 2011), the research method (Cotos et al., 2017; Zhang & Wannaruk, 2016), discussion (Asari et al. 2018; Thanajirawat & Chuea-nongthon, 2022), and conclusion (Zamani & Ebadi, 2021). However, most of the studies focused on investigating the rhetorical moves in the published research articles or those written

by graduate and post-graduate students. Few of the studies talked about the rhetorical moves in the background section written by vocational college students.

Vocational college students can be considered novice writers in the area of academic writing. They need more attention in this area because they do not receive adequate theories and practices compared with university students (Wang & Chen, 2021). The curriculum of vocational colleges is different from that of universities (Wang & Chen, 2021). Vocational colleges have an ultimate goal to prepare the master of employment-oriented skills as the support for shaping skilled workers for industries. The percentage for mastering practical skills is 60% and learning theories is 40%. However, academic writing is still important to master to complete a final project report as one of the requirements for obtaining a Diploma degree and achieving their career.

Regarding the completion of final project reports, it is commonly developed based on a simple qualitative study and organized by following the common structures of undergraduate theses comprising an introduction, literature review, writing method, findings and discussion, and conclusion and suggestion. As part of an introduction, studies on the background section particularly in vocational colleges are inevitably needed to be explored because the section has an important role in academic writing (Piromkij & Phoocharoensil, 2022). It is the initial study that frames the rationale for choosing a certain issue supported by prior studies. Thus, this importance implies the urgent promotion of the significance to develop this section adequately.

In the EFL context, students are inclined to have difficulties in writing this section in a proper way (Nodoushan & Khakbaz, 2011). They have real challenges to elaborate the issues coherently not only with the title and the problems but also with the ideal way of writing a plausible and suasive background of the study. As illustrated by Swales and Feak (2012), writing an introduction is troublesome and results in the writers being slow in completing the section. Indeed, to emphasize the problem of writing an introduction, Swales and Feak took Plato's remark "the beginning is half of the whole". This indicates that a true challenge is when the writers outline their rationale in their introduction section. From time to time, the problems of writing an introduction have been explored widely from the rhetorical move analyses.

Many researchers have conducted studies on the moves and patterns in university students' writing (e.g. Indrian & Ardi, 2019) but the references to rhetorical moves in vocational college students' academic writing are still unknown. Knowing the moves in a more specific context contributes to the variety of results in a similar topic. The findings on the moves, moreover, suggest some issues to discuss the characteristics of students in writing their background. Rhetorical awareness is necessary to be promoted especially when talking about developing a proper background. Students have to understand that some ideas can be categorized into obligatory steps and some can be considered optional steps. By knowing this, they are concerned about arranging paragraphs that can describe the essential ideas of the study and ignoring the non-essential ideas in their background.

Therefore, the current study examined together the rhetorical moves and the patterns shown in the student's background of the study. Analyzing a background is challenging because the writers need to see a text not merely as a text but as its connection with the title, the problems, and the objectives. Moreover, the levels of

higher education also influence the development style of this section which leads to the similarity of the background sections among the students at the same level. Hence, this study enriched the literature on rhetorical moves in the background sections written by EFL vocational college students.

## Literature Review

### *Background sections in final project reports*

Background sections are believed as an obligatory part of the completion of reports or theses. However, the terms background and introduction seem to be defined to avoid misconceptions. The background is located in the first chapter namely the introduction and usually consists of at least two pages. Watson (2018) shared the idea that background is "the place to begin to focus on what, specifically, is investigated." It is significant in this part to do synthesizing which leads to creating new material. The researchers have to show that all of the related literature is well understood which can lead to specific research problems or build a niche. It is also emphasized that the rest sections will reflect on this section. Moreover, the background section presents the issues pertinent to the research at the beginning with statements of some information on the problem (Creswell, 2009). The initial appearance of the section indicates that the ideas leading to the research topic are presented in this space.

Based on a guideline for apprenticeship and final project report (2019), the background section is a part of Chapter I "Introduction" which consists of six subtopics namely background of the report, scope of the report, problems of the report, objectives of the report, significance of the report, and time and place of the report. The background sections typically do not include the statements of the problems as may be provided in some introductions of research articles.

### *Moves in the Background Section*

Amnuai (2019) defined a move as a semantic unit of texts that are linked to the writer's purpose. Semantics deals with the meaning of words/phrases/sentences. The meaning of the words/phrases/sentences cannot stand alone in a text. They should be linked with the writer's purpose. Different types of texts have different ultimate purposes that will influence the different rhetorical moves.

Regarding the typicality and patterns of the moves in writing the background of the study, a Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model from Swales (1990) has been extensively used in various studies (Indrian & Ardi, 2019). It provides a helpful guideline not only for the researchers but also for students. The new version of the rhetorical move framework of the introduction is suggested by Swales (2004). The current CARS model has updated some steps in all moves and makes the concepts of the framework in the introduction more specific and effective.

Swales (2004) provides three moves followed by the steps for fulfilling each move. Move 1 is establishing a territory by citing statements related to the topic in a more general way. Move 2 is establishing a niche by indicating a gap between the previous research and the current research. Move 3 deals with presenting the present work that is necessary to announce the present research descriptively. The moves have been widely used in analyzing introductions of research articles or the background of the study in higher education. From Move 1 to Move 3, some steps are defined and the steps can be either obligatory or optional. The obligatory step

refers to the important ideas that must be written in the background. The optional step denotes the additional explanation that supports more ideas towards the obligatory step. The complete framework suggested by Swales (2004) is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. A revised CARS model by Swales (2004)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Move 1 | | Establishing a territory (citations required) |
| | | Topic generalization of increasing specificity |
| Move 2 | | Establishing a niche (citations possible) |
| | Step 1A | Indicating a gap, or |
| | Step 1B | Adding to what is known |
| | Step 2 | (optional) Presenting positive justification |
| Move 3 | | Presenting the Present work (citations possible) |
| | Step 1 | (obligatory) Announcing present research descriptively and/or purposively |
| | Step 2* | (optional) Presenting RQs or hypotheses |
| | Step 3 | (optional) Definitional clarifications |
| | Step 4 | (optional) Summarizing methods |
| | Step 5 | (PISF**) Announcing principal outcomes |
| | Step 6 | (PISF) Stating the value of the present research |
| | Step 7 | (PISF) Outlining the structure of the paper |

*Steps 2-4 are not only optional but less fixed in their order of occurrence than the others
**PISF: Probable in some fields, but unlikely in others

Move 1 is about establishing a territory by generalizing the research topic. The writers may start the writing by raising the topic being investigated followed by citations. Move 2 is establishing a niche. A researcher needs to show the specific research problem that is different from other studies. There are two steps including indicating a gap and adding to what is known and presenting positive justification. These two steps can be used together respectively or only one step is used. Either indicating a gap or adding to what is known is obligatory in this move. However, a researcher may decide whether she/he presents a positive justification or not because the second step is optional. Different from Move 1 and 2 which only have 1 and two steps, Move 3 has more steps to follow.

Move 3 is about presenting the present research. It consists of one obligatory step to follow and six optional steps. Step 1, as an obligatory step, shows the statement of the present research. It can be in the form of a description or stating the purpose. Steps 2 to 4 are optional and depend on the research methods. Steps 5 to 7 may appear in some research fields for example in Biology but unlikely in others.

In summary, the CARS model can be referred to by researchers to develop introduction or background sections. It covers some sequential techniques for organizing the arguments in the section through generalizing a topic, establishing a niche, and presenting the present research. Therefore, this current research used the CARS model as a reference for analyzing the background sections by considering the popularity of this model in linguistic studies.

## Method

The data in this research were the background sections of final project reports written by six-semester students in the DIII English Study Program in one of the state polytechnics in Indonesia. For accomplishing the process of writing final project reports, each student was guided by two advisors. The consultation focused on the revision both related to the content and the language aspects.

The six-semester students had to complete their final project report within one semester. The topics for their final project report fell within the tourism and journalism areas. The studies on the topics of tourism and journalism were limited to the level of low analysis. The characteristic of the Diploma program has a learning outcome on level 5 that is different from university students. Hence, students are encouraged to use two methods either descriptive qualitative or quantitative to complete their study.

Before writing final project reports, the students received a guideline for developing final project reports. The title of the book is "*Panduan Praktik Kerja Lapangan dan Tugas Akhir*/Apprenticeship and Final Project Report Guidelines" (2019). In the book, five steps that need to follow for composing an effective background are as follows:

1. The description of activities in the institution or companies about the work fields or main activities, products/services chosen by the writer.
2. The description of the appropriateness or the differences with the related review of literature based on the observation results.
3. The reasons for choosing the main materials for discussion are necessary to be presented in detail based on theories.
4. Problems as the basis for taking the title for final project reports.
5. Argumentation by describing the importance of choosing the topic. The significance is described in clear paragraphs.

Data collection was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021. The period of this semester was begun in January to June 2021. The researchers had roles either as the first or the second advisor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the process of consultation was done online by sending a file to the advisors' email, WhatsApp, or Google Classroom. The deadline for completing the final project reports was in July during which the students did a final project report examination. After they had finished the examination and the revision after the examination, the researchers selected 29 background sections from students' final project reports and scored an "A" mark. The researchers coordinated with the coordinator of the DIII English Study Program for access to students' scores and asked the students for the final project report files. Finally, the selected texts were analyzed and displayed as pseudonyms.

The researchers followed the steps initiated by Swales (2004) to analyze the 29 background sections. This study had two main steps for analyzing the data. The first was to analyze the presence of every step in Move 1, Move, and Move 3. As Amnuai (2019) defined a rhetorical move as a semantic unit of texts that are linked to the writer's purpose, in doing this step the researchers connected the ideas in the background with the topic, the problem(s), and the objective(s). As the second step, the researchers determined the patterns used by students in writing their background. The results of the patterns were coded using the initial letter of the moves and the steps of each move followed by the number. For example, M1 refers

to Move 1 which establishes a territory. M2S1A refers to Move 2 Step 1A which indicates a gap. The complete list of the codes is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Codes for rhetorical moves based on Swales (2004)

| Move and step | Code |
|---|---|
| Move 1 | M1 |
| Move 2 Step 1A | M2S1A |
| Move 2 Step 1B | M2S1B |
| Move 2 Step 2 | M2S2 |
| Move 3 Step 1 | M3S1 |
| Move 3 Step 2 | M3S2 |
| Move 3 Step 3 | M3S3 |
| Move 3 Step 4 | M3S4 |
| Move 3 Step 5 | M3S5 |
| Move 3 Step 6 | M3S6 |
| Move 3 Step 7 | M3S7 |

By using the codes shown in Table 2, the researchers did a top-down analysis as used by Indrian and Ardi (2019) in their study. The moves were carefully analyzed and connected with the title and the research problems. To obtain reliability, the process of the analysis was conducted by five lecturers using the guidelines of rhetorical moves. Regular discussion was conducted to reach an agreement for any possibilities of different opinions on the moves and the patterns.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Rhetorical moves in EFL students' background of the study*

The rhetorical moves suggested by Swales (2004) were used to analyze the 29 students' background sections of the study. Based on the findings, it was found that Move 1, 2, and 3 were applied to students' background of the study. There was a tendency that the students to write Move 1 and Move 3 and omitted Move 2 which has the aim of establishing a niche. The complete findings of the frequency of the moves used by students can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Moves in the students' background of the study

| Move and Step | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| M1 | 29 | 100 |
| M2S1A | 2 | 6,89 |
| M2S1B | 12 | 41,37 |
| M2S2 | 10 | 34,48 |
| M3S1 | 29 | 100 |
| M3S6 | 1 | 3,45 |

As seen in Table 3, Move 1 was found in all 29 background sections. The description of the general idea of the topic was the focus of the students in developing the background. For Move 2, Step 1A was only stated in two reports. As another option, Step 1B is favored with 12 occurrences. Although presenting positive justification is optional, the occurrences of Move 2 Step 1 are quite high with 10 occurrences. Finally, in Move 3 all reports showed Step 1 and one report showed step 6.

Based on the data, all students fulfilled Move 1 in the generalizing topic. They developed their ideas in this move in several paragraphs before moving to the next move. Move 1 dominates their background and this is similar to the result of Afrizon, Arsyad, and Zahrida (2018) that in their study Move 1 also dominates the introduction sections. Tarvirdizdeh and Nimehchisalem (2021) also have similar findings that the highest frequency in the occurrence of moves is Move 1. In Move 2, students tended to skip the steps for indicating a gap or adding what is known related to their topic or problems. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Alharbi (2016) on Arabic research articles. The study showed that Move 2 was often neglected and to be more specific the writers did not emphasize indicating the gap. Furthermore, Indrian and Ardi (2019) found that many students did not state the gap in their studies. This current finding shows the necessity to improve students' awareness of establishing a niche. As it was said in Lim (2012) this move is crucial as the space for showing argument and provides the newness of the research. The findings that show all students fulfill Move 3 by announcing their research descriptively and purposively indicate that students have understood well that in writing a background they have to state this idea.

Concerning the findings that students tend to ignore Move 2, it indicates that there was a pattern of the background written by students, especially in the fields of tourism and journalism. It can be connected with the alternative model of the CARS model suggested by Swales (2004). This model is frequently used by mostly non-Anglophone cultures. It has some differences in the point of developing the moves compared with the CARS model. It is called the OARO (Open a Research Option) model. It has four moves that consist of an optional opening, establishing credibility, offering a line of inquiry, and introducing the topic. This model may be used easier by students as they typically have an orientation to do research for fulfilling the requirement.

It can be concluded that Move 1 and Move 3 were typically used in all of the students' backgrounds of the study. However, for Move 2, there was a tendency for students to ignore the idea of establishing a niche by indicating a gap or adding what is known and presenting positive justification.

***Rhetorical patterns in EFL students' background of the study***

This research also found the results of investigating the patterns that were mostly used by students in developing their backgrounds. The complete list of the rhetorical patterns found in 29 students' background sections is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Rhetorical patterns in the students' background of the study

| No | Pattern | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | M1 – M3 S1 | 11 | 37,9 % |
| 2 | M1 – M2 S1B – M3 S1 | 6 | 20,7 % |
| 3 | M1 – M2 S1B- M2 S2 – M3 S1 | 5 | 17,2 % |
| 4 | M1 – M2 S2 – M3 S1 | 4 | 13,8 % |
| 5 | M1 – M2 S1A– M3 S1 | 1 | 3,45% |
| 6 | M1 – M2 S1A- M2 S2 – M3 S1 | 1 | 3,45% |
| 7 | M1 – M2 S1B – M3 S1 – M3 S6 | 1 | 3,45% |

As listed in Table 4, seven patterns were found in developing a background. Pattern M1 - M3S1 was frequently used by students with 37,9%. Both steps are obligatory to be employed in a background section. Excerpts 1 and 2 show the initial sentence of the ideas to illustrate this pattern.

*Excerpt 1*
*(M1) Based on Indonesian Investment, Indonesia is an archipelago that includes over 17,000 islands which are inhabited by around 255 million people, the variety that produces Indonesia the fourth most populous country in the world.*
*(M3S1) Based on the background above, the title for this final project report is …*

*Excerpt 2*
*(M1) World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020 declared a recent outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS- CoV-2) infection arose in Wuhan, China for the very first time on December 2019 and spread across China and beyond, which known as Coronavirus Disease 2019 … .*
*(M3S1) According to the background above, the title that has been chosen is "… as an Educational Radio Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic" as the final project report.*

Those typical flows were frequently shown by the students in developing their logical ideas for investing in a particular topic. They focused more on describing the topic starting from the broader ideas. After that, the idea jumps into announcing the topic. It is relevant to the claim of Ebadi et al. (2019) that students tend to generalize the topic rather than claim centrality to open an introduction. Then, it was followed by the description of the terms without giving the signals for a niche. After the description of the topic, it was an explicit statement of the present topic initiated by "based on …" and "according to".

The second pattern is M1 - M2S1B - M3S1 which was used 20,7%. It indicates that the reports fulfill the obligatory steps including building a niche. The following excerpt shows an example of this pattern.

*Excerpt 3*
*(M1) Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world, range from Sabang in Aceh to Merauke in Papua, which is made up of thousands of large and small islands, which are connected by the strait and sea.*
*(M2S1B) Not all tourist attractions implement Sapta Pesona at the place, therefore the writer wants to focus on knowing how the Implementation of Sapta Pesona in Tawun Park.*
*(M3S1) Based on the background above the writer chose Tawun Park as the material for this final project report with the Title ….*

Excerpt 3 above contains the fulfillment of the obligatory steps started from M1 that has a broad explanation of the topic of a particular tourism attraction. Then, the writer stated her knowledge of the topic which is important to build a niche in her study. The sentence is begun with the phrase "*not all tourist attractions …"* to sign that there is a problem with the topic discussed. Finally, the background section was closed by announcing the title. The initial signal used is "based on".

The third pattern is M1 - M2S1B - M2S2 - M3S1. This pattern is more complete than the second pattern because M2S2 was also fulfilled even though it is considered an optional step. The moving step is employed for giving a positive justification for the topic. The following excerpt illustrates the example of the pattern.

*Excerpt 4*
*(M1) Tourism is one of the sector that currently to be the center of people attraction.*
*(M2S1B) The writer chooses Raden Sekar Park as the subject of the report because this tourism is new and people by widely still do not know it yet.*
*(M2S2) Moreover, the tourism also offers many interesting potentials and the writer believes that the potentials which exist can be more developed and promoted so it can spread the popularity more widely in order to attract more tourist.*
*(M3S1) Therefore, because this tourism brings many potentials, the writer is also interested to identify the implementation of 5A's components of tourism at ….*

As shown in Excerpt 4, the initial sentence describes tourism in general. Then, it continued with the idea about why the writer chose a particular object and showed additional information about that. Finally, the initial sentence of the last move was indicated with a discourse marker "therefore" to state the reason and to announce the purpose of the study.

In addition, Pattern 4 is M1 - M2S2 - M3S1 with 13,8%. It appears that this pattern has three steps but there is one obligatory step missing namely indicating a gap or adding to what is known. For Patterns 5 to 7 shown namely M1 – M2S1A – M3S1, M1 – M2S1A - M2S2 – M3 S1, and M1 – M2S1B – M3S1 – M3S6, each has 3,45% that is considered a low use in the students' background of the study.

## Conclusion

From the results of the rhetorical moves, it was found that Move 1 and Move 3 were used in all of the student's backgrounds of the study. In stating Move 1, the students tended to write more paragraphs compared to other moves. Move 3 was dominated by the obligatory step for announcing the present research and its purposes. On the other hand, move 2 was frequently neglected in the section. To establish a niche, students tended to add what is known rather than to provide a gap then followed by presenting positive justification. Additionally, the common pattern found was M1-M3S1. Some suggestions are given related to rhetorical moves in developing the background of the final project report. First, establishing a niche is a challenge for students because this move was frequently neglected by the students. Thus, the encouragement to write this part is necessary to improve the students' awareness of the importance of occupying Move 2 through several steps. Second, the move within moves should be signaled by appropriate techniques to make it easier for the readers in understanding the ideas of the research. As the biggest challenge in this current study, the backgrounds analyzed lacked signals within the moves. As the result, this made the content in the background more descriptive rather than argumentative. For future research, it is recommended to conduct studies on the initial signs and the typical development of each move in an introduction section written by novice writers, especially in the Diploma program.

The findings will elaborate on the rhetorical moves and have a practical effect on vocational college students' academic writing.

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