

**A GENRE ANALYSIS OF LIMITATIONS SECTIONS IN MPhil THESES AT  
GOVERNMENT COLLEGE UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD: A SWALES' MOVE-  
BASED STUDY****Amara Javid**

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Email: [muhammadqasim@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:muhammadqasim@gcuf.edu.pk)**Abstract**

*The genre component that is widely recognized as more of a high-stakes element in academic theses, but has been neglected in genre analysis scholarship is the Limitations section. Although the CARS model in introductions, discussion sections and conclusions has attracted a lot of research, the Limitations section as a separate genre has not received sufficient attention and to date, relatively few studies have focused on the limitations section as a separate genre, and none, to the researchers' knowledge, have done so in the context of Pakistani MPhil theses. This gap is significant given the growing number of graduate researchers. The present study offers what appears to be among the earliest genre analyses of the limitations section taken from 42 MPhil theses from Government College University Faisalabad, 2025, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Based on an analogical extension of the CARS model, three corresponding moves were suggested: Move A, Contextualizing the Research Boundary; Move B, Acknowledging the Limitation; and Move C, Responding to the Limitation. The design was a mixed method involving both qualitative move analysis and quantitative frequency calculations, and was aimed at obtaining a range of disciplines, using purposive sampling to achieve a spread of fourteen departments. It was found that there was significant variation in the distribution of moves. Move B was obligatory 90.5%, Move C common 64.3%, and Move A optional 45.2%. Only 33.3% of them had a structurally complete A-B-C configuration, whereas B-C 31.0% and B only 26.2% were the most common patterns. In theory, the study is a confirmation of the analogical extension of the CARS model to this genre. From the pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest limited genre awareness among the GCUF MPhil students sampled, which may point to gaps in explicit genre instruction at this institutional level, which can be used to make recommendations for courses in thesis writing, in supervision practices, and as guidelines for the HEC curriculum.*

**Keywords:** *Academic writing, CARS model, genre analysis, Limitations section, move analysis, MPhil theses.*

**1.0 Introduction**

Genre analysis has proven to be one of the core methodological traditions of applied linguistics research. Since Swales' work, *Create A Research Space* 1990, researchers around the world have focused their systematic analysis on academic genres such as research articles, theses, abstracts, introductions, literature reviews, discussion sections and conclusion chapters. Researchers have found movement patterns for several different genres, including university lectures, research articles from various disciplines, and parts of research articles. This and similar work have examined entire theses and dissertations and examined individual chapters such as abstracts, introductions, literature surveys, discussions and conclusions. Results indicate that cultural norms, disciplinary conventions, and author backgrounds influence rhetorical strategy in consistent ways. However, one component of this tradition has been largely overlooked: the limitations section. The Limitations section is a high-stakes part-genre that lacks exploration and therefore is thought to be vital, yet difficult to write, particularly for the novice thesis writer. The ability to write a well-done Limitations section reflects the writer's ability to critically consider their research and will help establish an expertise in a specific field of study. In the Pakistani context of academic writing this neglect is even greater. The academic

genres created in Pakistan have been focused just a few scholars and no research on Limitations section has been conducted so far in the Pakistani MPhil theses written by Pakistani students as a genre in itself. In this regard the present study focuses specifically on the institutional context of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Government College University Faisalabad GCUF, a HEC-recognized public sector university with an established Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. The Limitations section occupies an awkward position in academic writing. In thesis handbooks and rubrics, on the other hand, taking limitations and recommending further research are tasks that are expected, and are seen as evidence of an author's critical evaluation of his or her own work and as showing an author's authority. On the other hand, due to insufficient pedagogical instructions, novice academic writers are usually unclear about the appropriate rhetorical ways to present limitations while minimizing the risk of losing the validity of their work. The challenge of the Limitations section writer is a communicative one, one that occurs between epistemic humility and scholarly authority. It is especially the case with MPhil students studying in Pakistan who have English as an additional language, are constrained by a highly rigid bureaucracy and a strict, HEC-regulated thesis structure, and seldom receive explicit guidance on the genres they are expected to build in this section. Deviations from genre conventions in the research objectives, methodology, and research questions of the sampled theses suggest that more explicit pedagogical support for genre-based academic writing may be beneficial at this institution. The present study identifies the rhetorical moves used, their absence, and why in the GCUF Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences theses in the Limitations section. It offers the first empirical, genre-theoretical analysis of this under-researched writing style in an academic context in Pakistan. The importance of doing the Limitations section cannot be overemphasized. The section, from a genre theoretical point of view, can be seen as a place where the writers express very clearly their epistemic modesty and at the same time their competence in the field. Successful academic writers realize that identifying weaknesses in a careful strategic manner—by situating them in the context of other research traditions, explaining them as design requirements, or indicating the direction of research to be pursued in the future—can actually strengthen their academic claims instead of weakening them. This is an advanced rhetorical feat that a novice writer will not learn without conscious instruction in the conventions of the genre. In Pakistan, supervising quality is vastly different from one department to another and genre-based pedagogy is still relatively new, students are expected to write the Limitations sections by copying and pasting examples from what they have read, without being told why that particular aspect of rhetoric was chosen. The end product is a body of rhetorically inconsistent, pedagogically non-productive, and structurally incomplete Limitations sections. To address this gap, the present study offers a systematic, empirically-based analysis of the way in which the GCUF students write this section, relying on Swales' 1990/2004 CARS model.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

This study has been conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency and distribution of rhetorical moves and steps in the Limitations sections of MPhil theses in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Government College University Faisalabad?
2. In what ways do the Limitations sections of GCUF MPhil theses in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences manifest the three moves advocated in the analogical CARS model and what are the structural patterns in their use?

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

The present study tries to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To determine the frequency and distribution of the rhetorical moves and steps present in the Limitations sections of MPhil theses submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Government College University Faisalabad.

2. To examine the extent to which the Limitations sections of GCUF MPhil theses submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences realize the three moves proposed in the analogical CARS framework and to identify the structural patterns characterizing their deployment.

### 1.3 Research Significance

The study has three levels of significance. First, it is a test to see if the CARS model which was created for research article introductions can be analogically expanded to the Limitations section, widening the model's theoretical reach. Second, it is the first move-structure analysis of Limitations sections in Pakistani MPhil theses which caters to the gap in the literature. Although the higher education sector in Pakistan is strong and the number of English-medium graduate researchers is increasing, academic writing is still not much visible in the realm of international genre scholarship; this study is the first to bring the genre of academic writing onto the map of the genre analysis. Thirdly, the results are directly applicable for the writing of thesis at GCUF and similar institutes. The study focuses on knowing what moves are always in the repertoire, sometimes absent, or sometimes included but not fully developed, in order to provide supervisors and writing teachers with empirically-based knowledge about actual student genre behavior, thus allowing them to intervene more specifically in teaching.

### 2.0 Literature Review

The birth of genre analysis as a branch of linguistic research is the result of the confluence of systemic functional linguistics, English for Specific Purposes ESP and discourse analysis. The basic theories of Swales 1990 and Bhatia 1993 laid the conceptual terminology and methodological framework that would define the discipline for decades. In this tradition, genre is not taken as simply a type of text or a formal category, but as a communicative action that depends upon and is created and sustained by the purposes, values, and norms of a discourse community. Genres are stabilized-for-now kinds of social action, and how they are rhetorically organized is determined by the communicative goals that writers seek in institutional and disciplinary contexts. According to Swales 1990, genre is a set of communicative purpose shared by members of a discourse community, its meaning is not only formal textual features but also knowledge of the social purposes of those features. Bhatia 1993 furthered this by pointing out that the expert writer's use of genre is more complicated than that of the novice, since the expert writer has both genre knowledge and disciplinary knowledge, whereas novice writers do not. The CARS model suggested that the apparently idiosyncratic prose of academic introductions could be traced across a series of three movements, which could be identified across disciplines and cultures. Other genre scholars have used, adapted and challenged the CARS model in many academic genres. The model was modified by Swales 2004 who added more flexibility in the sequencing of moves and recognized the variation across disciplines. Samraj 2002 showed that disciplinary epistemology has predictable influences on the deployment of moves. Kanoksilapatham 2005 adapted and modified the CARS model for biochemistry research articles and Ozturk 2007 applied move analysis to article introductions in educational linguistics. Later work has included corpus-based approaches and comparative cross-cultural approaches, which has shown how genre knowledge is negotiated by the writers who draw on their own cultural, linguistic and institutional repertoire in the act of writing. The Swalesean tradition has also been fruitfully expanded from the academic realm of the West. In the higher education context, researchers in East Asian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian contexts have regularly identified various layers of genre norms affecting the writing of English academic texts as not only disciplinary-based, but also context-bound, through the manifested educational traditions, rhetorical cultures, and institutional contexts of each country. Such inter-cultural explorations have shown that L2 writers are not just creating or not creating western genre templates, but are actively engaging in processes of negotiation between genre expectations of the international scholarly

community and the rhetorical expectations of their own educational traditions. This negotiation process is especially significant in a postcolonial context like Pakistan where English academic writing is used not only as a medium for scholarly participation but also as a site for the negotiation of linguistic and cultural identity.

In fact, hedging and epistemic stance marking have turned out to be some of the most fruitful genres for analysis research with clear implications for the Limitations section. Hyland 2005 showed that the use of hedging devices modal verbs, epistemic adverbs, approximators and attribution shields varied markedly across the various sections of academic writing, and that these devices were genre-specific and discipline-specific. Writing about limitations is, of course, a genre that involves a lot of hedging, in which authors have to recognize the limits of their investigations and at the same time defend their epistemic assertions and scholarly stature. Therefore, an understanding of the function of hedging in the Limitations section is not just a stylistic issue, but it is a key issue of genre competence which has implications for the teaching and assessment of student texts in the section. The results of the genre analysis research have been increasingly utilized in the research of English for Academic Purposes EAP to formulate the academic writing teaching model. The genre pedagogy, as proposed by, for example, Hyland 2007 and Flowerdew 2002, recommends explicit presentations of the rhetorical structure of academic genres, with authentic model texts as the major pedagogical resources. This has proven to be especially effective with L2 writers who are provided with clear and explicit rhetorical knowledge that native speakers of academic English might learn more implicitly from the extensive disciplinary reading and writing they have. The findings of the present study directly add to the EAP literature as they represent the first genre description for the Limitations section in a Pakistani university context, as the description was based on empirical evidence, not on intuition, or prescription. Academic theses and dissertations have been subject to a large number of studies for their genre analysis. The abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, discussion, and conclusion are typically the most in-depth areas that are analyzed. The Limitations section, on the other hand, is given only cursory treatment, usually as a subdivision of a larger study of conclusion or discussion chapter and not as a single genre of its own. The studies of thesis introduction have laid foundations for important methodological guidelines: in Hong Kong doctoral thesis introductions, Bunton 2002 found a thesis introduction that follows four moves, while Kwan 2006 studied literature review chapters in doctoral theses. Both directly relevant to the discussion sections because the Limitations section shares some rhetorical concerns with them, Yang and Allison 2003 focused on discussion sections in applied linguistics research articles and Hopkins and Dudley-Evans 1988 suggested an early move model for discussion sections. The cross-cultural genre studies have brought their own useful dimensions: Dong 1998 pointed out some significant differences in the conventions of Chinese graduate theses compared with those from western countries, Al-Zubaidi 2012 revealed some distinctive patterns of L1 Arabic academic conclusions, and Sheldon 2011 showed L2 writers' particular problems in move deployment. The face-saving role of the Limitations section has been identified by Hyland 2004; Mur-Dueñas 2012 identified cultural differences in the process of acknowledging limitations; and Stoller and Robinson 2013 noted that students have problems identifying and framing limitations rhetorically. This study's contribution is original and needed as there very limited academic writing is visible in the international genre scholarship. Previous studies on academic writing in Pakistan have concentrated mainly on the patterns of citation, hedging and organization of undergraduate genres. Mahmood (2017) compared the number of hedging devices used in social sciences research articles written by Pakistani writers with the number of hedging devices used by expert international writers and concluded that the Pakistani writers were using fewer hedging devices than the expert international writers that could be due to the absence of explicit teaching about epistemic stance marking. Iqbal and Fareed 2018 examined the writing

problems faced by Pakistani graduate students and found that structuring the discussion and conclusion parts were the most difficult sections of the writing, as the students were not able to apply the rhetorical moves, they were expected to use during the section of discussion and conclusion, namely limitation acknowledgment and future research recommendation, respectively. In Pakistan, discourse-oriented studies have investigated various linguistic phenomena through analytical frameworks such as Systemic Functional Linguistics (Muneeb et al., 2025). However, little attention has been paid to the rhetorical organization of limitations sections in MPhil theses, particularly through a Swalesian move-based perspective. Although the present study is not specific to the Limitations section, the studies offered herewith offer important contextual evidence of the rhetorical underdevelopment of graduate academic writing in Pakistan as indicated in the present study. Knowledge of genres has been theorized in relevant ways to the current study. Tardy 2009 developed a model of genre knowledge that includes four aspects: formal knowledge of genre textual features, rhetorical knowledge of communicative purposes and audience expectations, process knowledge of how genres are created, and subject-matter knowledge, disciplinary content knowledge. To the Limitations section, this model proposes that GCUF students might bring general formal knowledge but the Limitations section should contain constraints but lack rhetorical knowledge the ability to use constraints in effective strategic ways. The results of the present study corroborate this interpretation and indicate that the most significant need in the instruction of writing a GCUF thesis is the attention to the rhetorical aspect of the Limitations section.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Swales' 1990/2004 Create A Research Space CARS model is the main theoretical model that underlies the present study. It is the most influential, widely used, and empirically tested model of rhetorical move analysis in genre studies. It comprises three rhetorical moves: Move 1 Establishing a Territory claiming centrality and reviewing previous research, move 2 Establishing a Niche counter-claiming, indicating a gap, question-raising, or continuing a tradition, and Move 3 Occupying the Niche outlining purposes, announcing present research, announcing principal findings, and indicating the structure of the article.

Many students find the CARS model most useful because it is designed for research article introductions, but the idea is that academic writers have to place the work in the context of what has been done, what is missing, and what the writer does. The present study uses this model in an analogical manner in relation to the Limitations section. Similarly, writers of Limitations sections will need to situate these limits within the larger methodological context Move A, describe specific limitations or weaknesses Move B, and then address these constraints by explaining how the limitations affect the research, reducing the impact of the limitations, or suggesting possible future research Move C. This rhetorical logic is easily and efficiently mapped onto the Swalesian CARS schema.

**Table 1**

*Analogical Extension of the CARS Model to the Limitations Section*

CARS Move Original	Analogical Function in the Limitations Section	Proposed Move Label
<b>Move 1 – Establishing a Territory</b>	Acknowledging the broader methodological or scope context of the research	<b>Move A – Contextualizing the Research Boundary</b>
<b>Move 2 – Establishing a Niche</b>	Identifying specific constraints, weaknesses, or gaps in the current study	<b>Move B – Acknowledging the Limitation</b>

CARS Move Original	Analogical Function in the Limitations Section	Proposed Move Label
<b>Move 3 – Occupying the Niche</b>	Justifying the limitations' impact, mitigating its severity, or pointing toward future research	<b>Move C – Responding to the Limitation</b>

*Source: Adapted from Swales 1990/2004*

The use of analogical extensions of the CARS model has precedent in the genre studies literature. Yang and Allison (2003) extended move analysis to Discussion sections; Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) applied it to dissertation discussion chapters; and Ozturk (2007) adapted it to applied linguistics article introductions. Each of these studies demonstrates that the tripartite logic of the CARS model establishing context, identifying a gap, and responding to it is not exclusive to introductions but reflects a more general rhetorical logic operative across argumentative academic genres. The present analogical extension is consistent with this body of work. In the present study, the first step was the identification of recurring textual units, followed by the allocation of communicative functions to them then the mapping of the communicative functions onto the CARS logic. For sentences or portion of text that were found to have more than one rhetorical function, the present study selected the most salient move or step. Theories of communicative purpose Bhatia 1993 are also applicable, providing a supplementary theory to account for the different moves that are utilized in the Limitations sections of different departments, depending on the disciplinary culture and methodological tradition.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study is mixed method research. The qualitative aspect of the study is complementary to the quantitative aspect of the study in identifying, labeling and interpreting moves and steps and to calculating their frequencies and percentages. The qualitative component consists of the close reading, rhetorical coding, and labeling of the interpretive moves in each Limitations section. The quantitative part presents the data from the 42 theses analyzed in a systematic way of calculating the frequencies of the moves and steps, and then comparing these frequencies across the various departments and identifying the obligatory, common and optional moves which follow Swales' 1990 conventions. It is a research design that adheres to the principles of small-scale qualitative genre analysis with quantitative frequency counts that focuses on naturally occurring texts in their authentic institutional and disciplinary contexts.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Data for Limitations section were collected from 2025 theses using purposive sampling technique at fourteen departments from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences consisting of 42 theses three from each department. There are 14 departments at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, GCUF namely Applied Linguistics, Applied Psychology, College of Law, Education, English Literature, History, Information Management, Institute of Arts and Design, International Relations, Library and Information Sciences, Mass Communication, Pakistan Studies, Political Science and Sociology. These theses are written in the English language, and have a clearly stated limitations section. The Limitations section of each has been subsequently isolated as an independent text unit to be analyzed.

**Table 2**

*Corpus Composition by Department*

Department	No. of Thesis	Thesis codes
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Applied Linguistics	3	T1–T3
Applied Psychology	3	T4–T6
College of Law	3	T7–T9
Education	3	T10–T12
English Literature	3	T13–T15
History	3	T16–T18
Information Management	3	T19–T21
Institute of Arts and Design	3	T22–T24
International Relations	3	T25–T27
Library and Information Sciences	3	T28–T30
Mass Communication	3	T31–T33
Pakistan Studies	3	T34–T36
Political Science	3	T37–T39
Sociology	3	T40–T42
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>T1–T42</b>

### 3.3 Data Analysis

A systematic four stage procedure for the data analysis has been followed. In the first place, all the Limitations sections of the 42 theses have been identified and documented. Secondly, the texts in each Limitations section have been read as a whole and then the recurring materials with different communicative roles have been found. After that, these units have tentatively been labeled as moves and sub-labeled their strategies as steps. Thirdly, the frequency of each move has been determined in 42 theses, where moves classified as obligatory more than or equal to 60%, common 40-59% and optional less than 40%. It is given that the Limitations section is an emerging or developing genre rather than an establishing one, the present study adopts modified frequency thresholds: obligatory >60%, common 40-59%, and optional <40%. This adjustment follows the precedent set by genre analysts working with nascent or peripheral genres (cf. Yang & Allison, 2003; Ozturk, 2007), who have noted that applying introductory-genre thresholds to less conventionalized genres may obscure meaningful variation. The modified thresholds are applied consistently across all three moves and are not adjusted post hoc to accommodate particular results. It should be noted that the structural move patterns and gaps in move realization were discussed and provided pedagogical implications, the thresholds for which were modified in the original and modified conventions in a way which mainly impacts on the classification of Moves A and C. In order to ensure reliability, 24% N = 10 of the Limitations sections of the corpus were double coded by a second trained analyst, giving a Cohen's Kappa of 0.82. The names of the authors of the thesis have not been mentioned. They have all been labelled T1, T2, etc. up to T42.

Instead of applying the grammatical sentence and the paragraph as the unit of analysis in this study, the unit of analysis that will be used is the functionally defined rhetorical unit. This follows genre analysis research conventions, in which one sentence can have multiple moves or steps and one move can be in multiple sentences or paragraphs. In the corpus analysis of the Limitations sections the boundaries between the moves were not determined by structural boundaries like paragraphs or sentences, but by the communicative function, i.e. the analyst's interpretation of the rhetorical purpose at each point in the text. This functional as opposed to formal analytical criterion is more challenging yet more theoretically apt for genre analysis, since it holds the analysis to the communicative reality of the genre, rather than just the text surface.

It's worth noting the difference between move presence and move quality in the analytical framework too. The frequency measured in Section 4 is only for the occurrence or

not of each move and step in the 42 corpus texts. They do not take into account the 'rhetorical quality', the 'linguistic sophistication' or the 'discoursal effectiveness' of move realization. The frequency tables do not show quality variation among moves because this is dealt with qualitatively in the discussion sections by analyzing representative examples of the corpus. It is important to note this difference when reading the results as a high frequency for a particular move may be a sign that the students know this is a genre expectation but does not necessarily mean that students are using the move effectively. The presence of the two dimensions is required to provide an overall picture of genre competence of students.

To operationalize the concept of rhetorical quality, a binary coding scheme was followed separately for each move instance that was detected in the corpus. A move instance that was rated as quality-present scored 1 had to satisfy all three of the following criteria: a it was realized with sufficient linguistic specificity i.e., the limitation was named and described, not just a generally gestured at limitation; b it used appropriate epistemic hedging devices, including modal verbs, adverbial qualifiers, or attribution phrases according to the rhetorical demands of the move; and c it served a discernible strategic function within the section, as contextualizing, justifying, or mitigating the limitation, rather than merely filling a formulaic slot. If one of these criteria was not met, a move was considered quality-absent scored 0. The quality score reported for each move Move A = 28.0%, Move C = 38.0% reflects the percentage of theses in which that move where it appears was implemented with quality as per this scheme. Because it is so widespread 90.5% and the three steps that make up Move B are also heterogeneous, quality is judged at the step level and not as an aggregate percentage, and discussed qualitatively in Section 4.3 and Section 4.6. Inter-rater reliability for quality coding was also examined using the same set of 10 thesis subsample, and yielded a Cohen's Kappa of 0.79, which is considered substantial agreement.

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Corpus overview of Move Distribution

Table 3 and Figure 1, respectively, show the frequency and percentage of occurrence of each of the three proposed moves in the 42-thesis corpus, giving the first empirical picture of the structure of the Limitations sections by the GCUF Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences students.

**Table 3**

*Overall Move Frequency Distribution Across 42 Theses*

Move	Frequency n=42	Percentage %
Move A – Contextualizing the Research Boundary	19	45.2%
Move B – Acknowledging the Limitation	38	90.5%
Move C – Responding to the Limitation	27	64.3%

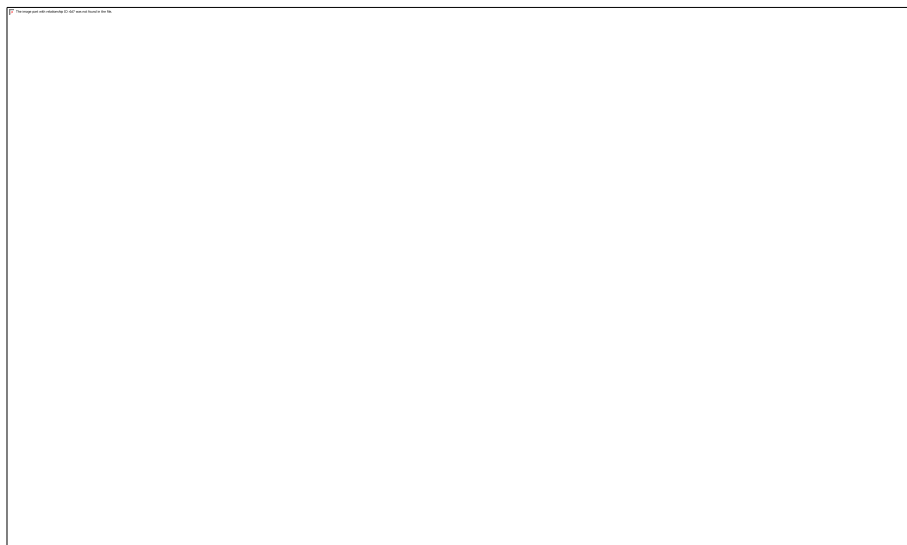


Figure 1: Overall Frequency Distribution of Rhetorical Moves Across 42 MPhil Theses

The data show a highly imbalanced distribution of moves. Move B is obligatory 90.5%, Move C is common 64.3%, and Move A is optional 45.2%.

#### 4.2 Move A: Contextualizing the Research Boundary

Move A appeared in 19 of 42 theses 45.2%. In the 19 theses that were deployed in this way, two strands were identified: Step A1 Acknowledging Scope Constraints as Disciplinary Norms; and Step A2 Referencing Methodological Traditions. Their frequencies are given in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Move A Steps — Frequency and Percentage*

Step	Frequency n=42	Percentage %
Step A1 – Acknowledging Scope Constraints as Disciplinary Norms	13	31.0%
Step A2 – Referencing Methodological Traditions	9	21.4%
Move A Total at least one step present	19	45.2%

Step A1 is to reframe scope constraints as something that is normal for a specific method of research or discipline, using internal community norms to normalize constraints. A representative example from T2 Applied Linguistics highlights the small sample of participants to make the study representative of exploratory qualitative research, thus showing the constraint to exemplify the genre knowledge by situating it within a recognized research tradition. The relatively low frequency of Step A1 (31.0%) indicates that fewer than one-third of the corpus theses employ this contextualizing strategy.

Step A2 is the explicit reference to the methodological tradition to establish limits as 'naturally' following from the principles of the design. Examples are mainly found in applied psychology T4 where the cross-sectional design's limitations in causal inference are noted and in information management T19 where the limitations of self-report data are acknowledged. The very low frequency of Step A2 21.4% indicates that a very small proportion of pupils can articulate limitations in terms of the method.

#### 4.3 Move B: Recognizing the Limitation

In 38 theses 90.5%, Move B was present, making it the required move of this genre. Three distinct steps were identified: Step B1 Enumerating Specific Limitations, Step B2 Explaining the Source and Step B3 Assessing the Impact. The frequencies of these are given in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Move B Steps — Frequency and Percentage*

Stop	Frequency n=42	Percentage %
Step B1 – Enumerating Specific Limitations	38	90.5%
Step B2 – Explaining the Source of Limitation	24	57.1%
Step B3 – Assessing the Impact of Limitation	15	35.7%
Move B Total at least one step present	38	90.5%

All 38 Move B theses 90.5% included Step B1 enumeration of the specific constraints. Sample size and composition 69.0%, geographic or institutional scope 61.9%, choice of data collection instrument 42.9%, time constraints 38.1%, and participant language proficiency 26.2% were the most commonly recognized limitations. The near-universal use of Step B1 demonstrates basic genre understanding, although it is not always well done in every department. In only 15 35.7% theses, the assessment of the impact of limitation was included step B3. Hedges were often used on this step without any analytical reasoning.

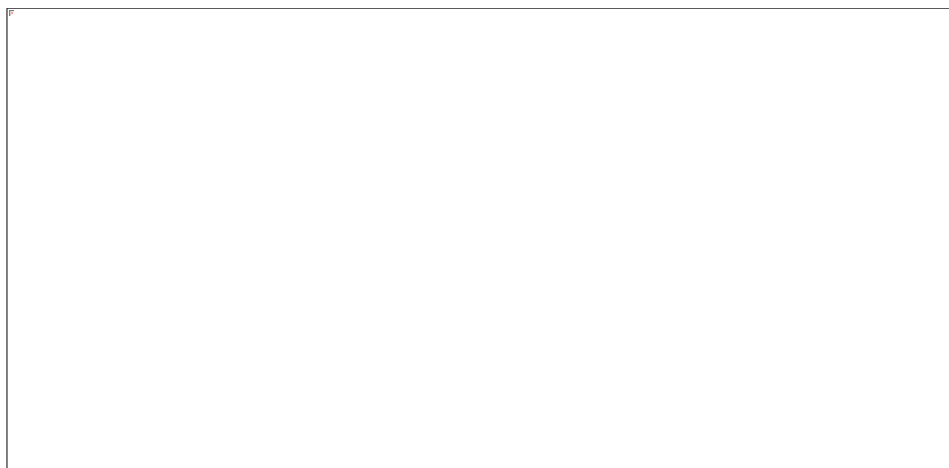
#### 4.4 Move C: Responding to the Limitation

Move C appeared in 27 of 42 theses 64.3%. Three steps were identified: Step C1 Justifying the Limitation, Step C2 Mitigating the Limitation, and Step C3 Recommending Future Research. Their frequencies are given in Table 6. For complete comparison purposes, Figure 2 shows all step frequencies in all three moves.

**Table 6**

*Move C Steps — Frequency and Percentage*

Stop	Frequency n=42	Percentage %
Step C1 – Justifying the Limitation	16	38.1%
Step C2 – Mitigating the Limitation	10	23.8%
Step C3 – Recommending Future Research	25	59.5%
Move C Total at least one step present	27	64.3%



*Figure 2: Frequency Distribution of All Rhetorical Steps Across 42 MPhil Theses*

In 16 theses 38.1% Step C1 justified that a limitation does not spoil the research. There were two types of justifications: appeals to disciplinary convention 9 and pragmatic justifications 7. Mitigating the limitation C2, which was the least common step in the entire corpus 10 theses, 23.8%, was used through triangulation, respondent validation and member-checking. The most commonly used step in Move C was Step C3 25 theses, 59.5 percent, and many of the recommendations for further research were formulaic and generic, not specifically motivated and theoretically based.

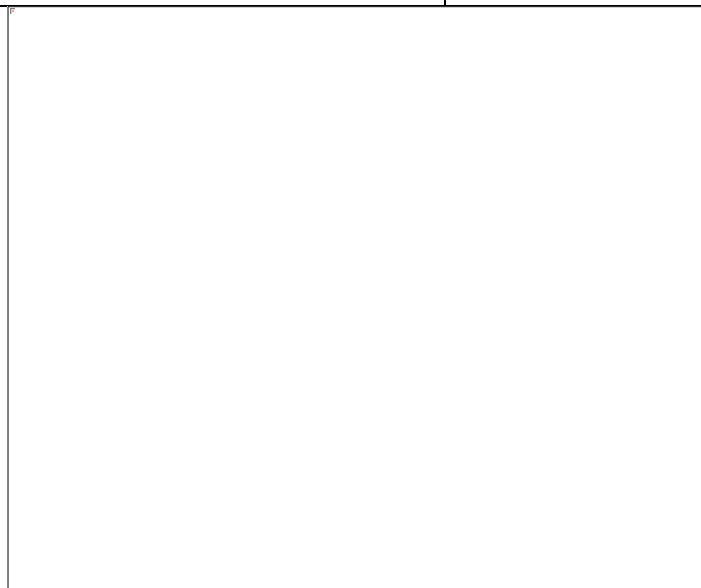
**4.5 Structural Move Patterns and Gaps in Move Realization:**

The individual move findings are summarized into a structural overview of move combination patterns across the corpus in table 7 and figure 3.

**Table 7**

*Move Combination Patterns Across 42 Theses*

Move Pattern	Frequency n=42	Percentage %
A + B + C complete structure	14	33.3%
B + C only no contextualization	13	31.0%
B only acknowledgment without response	11	26.2%
A + B only no response	3	7.1%
Other / incomplete	1	2.4%



*Figure 3: Distribution of Move Combination Patterns Across 42 MPhil Theses*

Only 14 of 42 theses 33.3% contain all three moves in a complete, sequenced A–B–C structure. Two-thirds deviate from this expected structure. Figure 4 further disaggregates the complete A+B+C structure rate by department, revealing important disciplinary variation.



*Figure 4: Rate of Complete A+B+C Move Structure by Department*

Applied Linguistics, Applied Psychology, and Education had the highest percentages for A–B–C structures, and Pakistan Studies, History, and Political Science had the highest percentages for B-only structures, which were noteworthy in terms of departmental variation. These structural gaps may indicate variation in genre instruction and supervisory support across departments at GCUF, and should be interpreted cautiously given the limited sample of three theses per department, rather than as indicators of individual student failure, and as indicators

of pedagogical and supervisory practices that affect students' genre knowledge in different departments.

#### 4.6 Discussion

The results have implications at two levels. The study shows a theoretical justification for extending analogously the CARS model to the Limitations section. The three moves proposed proved analytically fruitful across the text variety 42 texts, and had a coherent and theoretically defensible range of rhetorical strategies that was appropriate to Swalean frequency-based move classification. Pedagogically, the findings indicate that there should be explicit and systematic genre-based training on the Limitations section of GCUF and similar Pakistani universities. The following three recommendations are presented: explicit genre instruction in thesis writing courses, supervisor development to provide move-specific feedback that specifies rhetorical moves and provides specific strategies, and revision of HEC/GCUF structural thesis instruction to include explicit guidance on the Limitations section of a thesis in the form of annotated model texts.

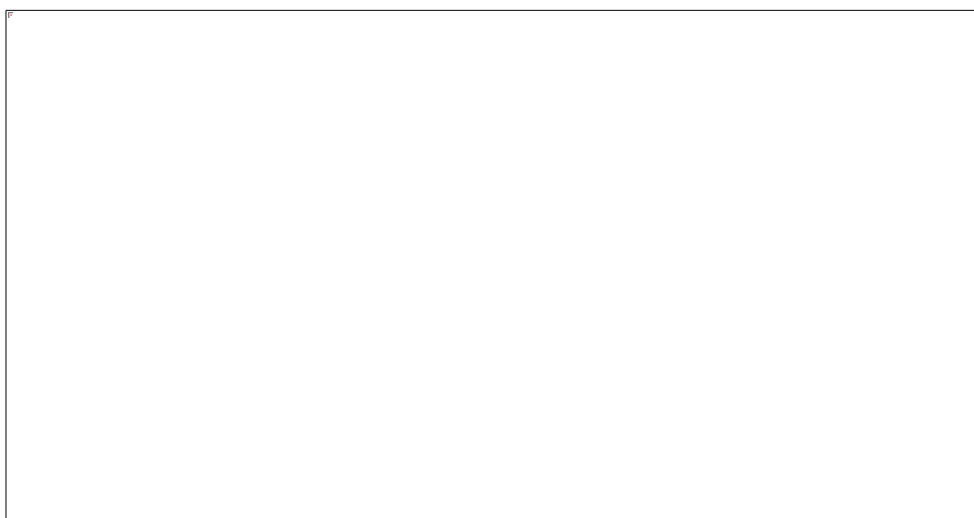
Theoretically, the study also leaves us with questions related to the link between genre knowledge and formation of disciplinary identity in graduate education. The large departmental differences that were found in this study structural completeness of the move being higher in the departments with a stronger empirical focus than in the humanities and social science departments imply that the acquisition of genre competence in academic writing is not a purely linguistic competence that can be learned outside of the context of discipline learning. Instead, it seems to be integrated into the disciplinary socialization that graduate students go through as they become scholars in a particular discipline.

Students in Applied Psychology and Applied Linguistics also have well-developed Limitations sections and more rhetorically complex ones, and the applied disciplines have rich traditions of methodological self-reflection and explicit instruction in research design. The implications for writing instruction are that the most effective pedagogical interventions will be those that incorporate the infusion of genre instruction into the research training within the discipline as opposed to treating writing as a context-free skill to be taught in separate writing courses.

The absence of Move A in the majority over half of the corpus is worthy of specific theoretical discussion. In the CARS model, Move 1 Establishing a Territory has an important rhetorical role to legitimize the research by positioning it in the midst of a recognized scholarly conversation. Move A in the Limitations, which draws the boundaries of research into a larger methodological or disciplinary context, has an analogous legitimizing function: it communicates to the reader that the limitations of the study are not idiosyncratic failures, but are features of a widely recognized research method or level of study. The general absence of Move A in the GCUF limitations sections is therefore not only a rhetorical failure it represents a significant structural gap, as Move A performs legitimizing work that is otherwise absent from the section. The absence of Move A is not merely a rhetorical omission; it reflects an underlying epistemological gap in which students do not recognize that situating limitations within a disciplinary context is part of the scholarly work the section must perform.

The results of the present study also have relevance to the development of the assessment rubric for thesis and their use at GCUF and other universities in Pakistan. At present, thesis assessment at institutions under the jurisdiction of the Higher Education Commission HEC tends to assess only the Limitations section in the context of the overall assessment of the Conclusion chapter of the thesis and does not specify the rhetorical moves that are expected or the criteria used to assess their presence and quality. In this study we propose a taxonomy of moves and the steps that make up those moves, and it is our hope that this taxonomy will serve as a principled, empirically-based foundation for the creation of more accurate and more pedagogically useful assessment rubrics. Such rubrics would not only inform students of expectations but also

provide a pathway for feedback to be given not only after thesis submission, but at the time of the feedback. The rubrics would help supervisors pinpoint genre-related gaps in student understanding and correct them when they are received. The numbers indicate some limited and uneven knowledge of the Limitations section as a genre on the part of GCUF students. They have a general awareness that constraints need to be recognized but are less confident about the rhetorical effect of incorporating constraints Move A or in responding substantively to constraints Move C. There were only 14 of 42 theses 33.3% that had the moves A–B–C in the correct sequence. The most frequent structural pattern was B–C only 13 theses; 31.0%, followed by the pattern B only 11 theses; 26.2%, which means that the genre is not fully mastered in its full structure across the corpus.



All of the above constitutes a pedagogical finding of this study that is embodied in the chart pictured above in Figure 5: Students at the GCUF exhibit a consistent and significant gap in the deployment of each move between the rate at which they deploy the move at all presence and the rate at which they deploy the move with rhetorical quality. Due to the variability of three steps in Move B, the quality of Move B is not presented in figure 5 as a quality score but rather as a qualitative assessment at the step level in Section 4.3. The smallest presence score 45.2% and the smallest quality score 28.0% occur in Move A, which are the least understood and least well-executed moves of the corpus. Move B, with the highest presence 90.5%, is identified by qualitative analysis which tends to be deployed without sufficient specificity, analytical depth and appropriate hedging strategies. Move C sits in the middle, with a moderate level of presence score 64.3% but a poor-quality score 38.0% due to the high levels of formulaic future research recommendations that are not accompanied with substantive support or mitigation strategies which would make Move C rhetorically productive. These gaps outline the three priority areas for pedagogical intervention in the thesis writing courses of GCUF. Step B2 came in 24 theses 57.1%, and 70.8% of the cases emphasized practical external constraints as limiting, compared to principled design, a rhetorically weaker expression of limitations.

### **Implications**

The present study fully addresses both research questions, and specific evidence can be seen in the analytical sections presented above, as well as in the data tables and figures presented above. The following matrix Table 8 demonstrates how. This matrix can be used as a clear tracking tool connecting research questions to their results and to the parts of the text where the results are presented. The findings reported in Sections 4.1 to 4.6 answer both the research questions of Section 1.3 in a comprehensive way and from an empirical perspective. In response to RQ1, three moves and seven steps are identified with complete frequency data Tables 3–6 and Figures 1–2. The structural pattern analysis, departmental variation data, and

conformity/deviation discussion Table 7, Figures 3-4, Section 4.5 answer RQ2. Thus, the study meets all of its research goals and offers an empirically supported, genre-theoretically well-formed description of the genre of the Limitations section in the context of the GCUF.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores the rhetorical move structure of Limitations sections in 42 MPhil theses from Government College University Faisalabad GCUF, which were submitted in 2025. The study used a mixed-methods genre analysis design based on an analogical extension of Swales' 1990/2004 CARS model with two research questions: First, what is the frequency and distribution of rhetorical moves and steps in the texts? and second, what is the extent of realization of the three moves proposed in the analogical CARS in the Limitation sections? Three rhetorical moves were identified, each comprising two or three identifiable steps realized through specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. The results provide clear empirical responses to both the research questions. The study revealed three moves and seven steps in the rhetorical structure of the Limitations section as used by the students of GCUF MPhil. Move B emerged as obligatory 90.5%, Move C as common 64.3%, and Move A as optional 45.2%. The most widely used step was Step B1 Enumerating Specific Limitations 90.5%, while Step C2 Mitigating the Limitation was the least used 23.8%, indicating students' less developed proficiencies in methodologically addressing limitations. In the case of the second research question, only 33.3% of the corpus texts had a complete three-move structure, and the degree of the move's realization was strongly related to the disciplinary tradition at the level of the department. On a theoretical level, the study confirms the possibility of extending the CARS model analogically beyond the introductory genres, thus widening the empirical basis of genre theory. From a pedagogical perspective, the results indicate a need for explicit instruction of the genre-based section of Limitations at GCUF and similar HEC-controlled schools. The three main recommendations genre instruction through model texts, supervisor training in providing move-specific feedback, revision of HEC and GCUF structural guidelines are presented in Section 4.6, and are grounded in the empirical findings of this study, forming an agenda for institutional curriculum reform.

The study admits its own limitations: the texts studied are limited to a single faculty at a single institution in one year; the analogical CARS framework was inductively constructed for the purposes of this study. Future work should attempt to replicate and expand the results of this study in other institutions, disciplines and academic levels in Pakistan and similar South Asian higher education settings. Comparisons between students' Limitations section writing across the HEC-regulated universities and disciplinary faculties would also be of interest and would provide additional empirical support for the national level development of the curriculum, as would longitudinally studies across the MPhil programs that track student's Limitations section writing through the program. Despite these restrictions, this study has made a genuine and original contribution as the first study focused on the Limitations sections in MPhil theses from Pakistan and the first to suggest and test an analogical extension of the CARS model for it. It fills the gap between the genre analysis research and similar research that has been conducted in the realm of academic writing in Pakistan and has direct applicability in teaching thesis writing, supervision and curriculum design. The three-move framework Move A, Move B, Move C is the first empirically based genre description of the Limitations section in any university context in Pakistan and will offer a replicable analytical schema for future research in this new genre studies field.

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