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## AN INVESTIGATION OF COHESION AND RHETORICAL MOVES IN THESIS ABSTRACTS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating cohesion and rhetorical moves in thesis abstracts of English Education students. This study employed a qualitative research design in which 10 abstracts were chosen as samples. The cohesion is analyzed based on Halliday's and Hasan's concept while rhetorical moves are analyzed based on Swales' and Feak's framework. The results show that all cohesive devices are used except substitution. Among those devices, reference is the most frequently used. The results also show that some cohesive devices are used incorrectly. As a result, seven abstracts (70%) are still in medium category of cohesion level while three abstracts (30%) are in high category of cohesion level. Furthermore, 7 abstracts are organized in different move patterns which do not follow the Swales' and Feak's framework. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that most of the abstract samples achieve medium category level of cohesion, and the rhetorical moves in most of the abstracts samples are not organized well.

**Key Words:** thesis abstracts, rhetorical moves, cohesive devices

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki kohesi dan langkah retorik dalam abstrak tesis mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif di mana 10 abstrak dipilih sebagai sampel. Kohesi dalam abstrak dianalisis berdasarkan konsep kohesi Halliday dan Hasan sementara langkah retorik dianalisis berdasarkan kerangka Swales dan Feak. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa semua perangkat kohesif digunakan dalam 10 abstrak kecuali substitusi. Di antara perangkat tersebut, referensi adalah yang paling sering digunakan. Hasil penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa ada beberapa perangkat kohesif yang digunakan secara tidak benar dalam abstrak. Akibatnya, tujuh abstrak (70%) masih dalam kategori tingkat kohesi sedang sementara tiga abstrak (30%) berada pada kategori tingkat kohesi tinggi. Selanjutnya, 7 abstrak diatur dalam pola langkah yang berbeda yang tidak mengikuti kerangka Swales dan Feak. Dari hasil penelitian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa sebagian besar sampel abstrak mencapai tingkat kategori kohesi sedang, dan langkah retorik di sebagian besar sampel abstrak tidak terorganisasi dengan baik.*

**Kata kunci:** abstrak skripsi, langkah-langkah retorik, perangkat kohesif

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## INTRODUCTION

An abstract as one of the academic genres has its own organizational framework and linguistic features. The abstract describes the important information of work or research as briefly and accurately as possible. The information of the abstract is usually written in some moves such as background, aim, method, result and conclusion. Besides, the abstract should be written in no more than one page and should consist of about 150–300 words. Also, the tenses which are commonly used in abstracts are simple present tense, simple past tense, and present perfect tense. Those tenses can be written in active and passive voice form.

In addition, the abstract has many important roles. One of them is to provide the principle knowledge of an article. The abstract also can be considered as a persuasive rhetorical tool which describes the importance of the text. Besides, the abstract can fulfill an important social function that allows readers to see how individuals work to position themselves within their communities (Hyland, as cited in Afful & Nartey, 2014, p. 93).

Hence, the abstract of research paper has to be well written. There are many important aspects to take into

account in writing an abstract. one of the aspects is cohesion. Chan and Foo (2001) said that according to academic writing handbooks and ESP instructors, cohesive is one of the abstract features which has to be considered beside clear, concise, well-organized, and self-contained (p. 13). Cohesion is a semantic relation that produce connectivity between the ideas in the text through the use of linguistic devices which are mutually dependent in order to generate a text. In this paper, cohesion refers to the use of linguistic devices to indicate the relations between the parts in the abstract. Hence, cohesion is an important tool for producing a text and its meaning. By using cohesion, the writer can join the linguistic items to produce textual continuity that enables the reader to follow the logical or chronological sequence of a text. Therefore, there is a need to know the use of cohesive devices in the process of creating the abstract.

Furthermore, rhetorical move is also important aspect which has to be considered in writing abstract. Abstracts are guided by a series of moves which characterize the flow of the discourse. Swales (as cited in Noguera, 2012, p. 68) used the terms 'moves' and 'steps' refer to the sequential subdivision of each section

of the RAs (Research Articles). Move is also defined as a segment of the abstract. Each move presents a particular intention or purpose which complete to the overall communicative purpose of the text (Swales, as cited by Oneplee, p. 13). The different moves of abstract had been presented in some studies. The studies described the three-move, the four-move, the five-move and the six-move.

There are a number of studies on abstracts. Most of these studies have investigated the move analysis or rhetorical variation (e.g. Tseng, 2011; Saboori & Hashemi, 2013), language varieties of the abstracts (Ye and Wang, 2013). Cohesive elements in abstracts also had been conducted by some researchers (e.g. Kai, 2008; Seddigh, Shokrpour & Kafipor, 2010; Afful & Nartey, 2014). However, much less attention has been given to cohesion level in thesis abstract. Also, there is no research yet on rhetorical move with cohesion in thesis abstract. Therefore, the current study will investigate the rhetorical move and cohesion in the undergraduate students' thesis abstracts of English Education Department in UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.

In this study, the abstracts which are investigated are the thesis abstracts of undergraduate students of English

Education in UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. These abstracts are chosen because of the importance of the thesis as one of the requirements in getting bachelor degree. As the development of technology, UIN also publishes the students' thesis on internet to be accessed by others. However, based on her analysis on some abstracts of students' thesis in English Education of UIN syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, the researcher found that there are some cohesive devices which are not used properly in the abstracts. The rhetorical moves of the abstracts are also not organized well. It is because the information in some moves of the abstracts is not successfully presented. Also, some verb tenses and voice forms are not used correctly.

Based on the problem of the study, the researcher formulated the research question as follow:

1. To what extent is the cohesion level achieved in the students' thesis abstract of English Education Department in FITK UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta?;
2. How is the rhetorical move of the students' thesis abstract of English Education Department in FITK UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta organized?

## METHOD

This study is a discourse analysis which uses a qualitative research design to investigate cohesion and rhetorical moves in thesis abstracts. The data of this study are written data about cohesive devices and rhetorical move in the abstracts. The data sources are the students' thesis abstracts of Department of English Education in UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta from the period of 2014. There are 147 abstracts from this period. Then, those abstracts are analyzed about the use of cohesive devices. After that, the researcher chooses 10 abstracts which have the lowest score of cohesion to be data sources.

In collecting and analyzing the data, each abstracts are read carefully to identify the move and the cohesive devices. The moves found are marked and coded following the Swale's and Feak's (2009) move framework while the cohesive devices found are marked and coded following Halliday's and Hasan's (2013) cohesion concept. All moves and all cohesive devices found are classified based on the codes into tables provided. After that, the rhetorical moves and the cohesive devices used in the abstracts are analyzed. Also, the problems which may appear in the rhetorical move and in the cohesive devices in the abstracts

will be considered. Then, the data which have been analyzed are interpreted and concluded by the researcher to answer the research questions.

Furthermore, to know and describe the cohesion level of the 10 abstracts, the parameter assessment is required. In this study, the gradual technique is used to construct that parameter. The parameter is used to know the cohesion level per pair of sentences in the 10 abstracts so that the sentences in the abstract have to be separated first into pairs. Then, each pair is analyzed and given score. After analyzing the cohesion level, the total score from each abstract is categorized into high category, medium category and low category level.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Cohesion

#### *Frequency of Cohesive Devices Used*

The findings of this research show that all devices are used in all 10 abstracts except substitution. From all devices, reference, conjunction, and repetition are used in all abstracts while some other devices such as synonym, hyponym, antonym, and collocation are used in some abstracts. The frequency of each device can be seen in the pie chart below.

As seen in Figure 1, reference is the most dominant devices used in the 10 students' thesis abstracts with 42.6% followed by repetition with 37.2%. In addition, the least dominant device is general word in which occurs only once (0.2%). The next least dominant device is ellipsis with 0.9% followed by antonym (1, 2%) and collocation (1, 7%). While, the other devices such as conjunction, synonym, hyponym and meronym are used frequently in the 10 students' thesis abstracts.

Furthermore, from all the devices found in 10 students' thesis abstracts, there are some devices which are used incorrectly. The incorrect devices are reference, conjunction, repetition, synonym, hyponym, and collocation. Among those devices, reference is the

most dominant incorrect device which consists of 44 incorrect items or 73.3%. Moreover, the findings show that all the 10 students' thesis abstracts use incorrect cohesive devices. There are three abstracts which mostly use incorrect devices; they are abstract 1, abstract 8, and abstract 10. While the abstract which use a few incorrect devices is Abstract 4 with only two incorrect devices. This is the example of the incorrect cohesive device used.

*Cohesion Level*

Concerning on cohesion level, it is found that there are two categories of cohesion level, which are high and medium, as can be seen in Table 1.

Figure 1. the Frequency of Cohesive Devices in the Students' Thesis Abstracts

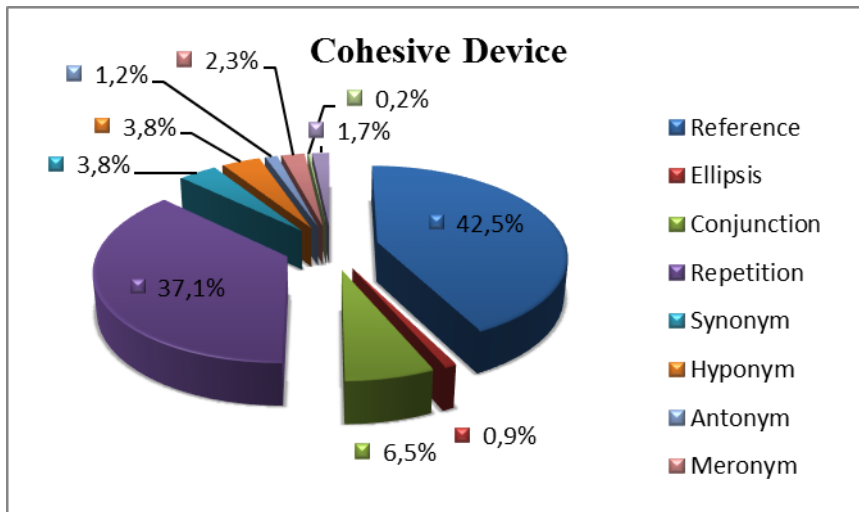


Table 1. Cohesion Category Level of the Students' Thesis Abstracts

| Abstract | Category Level | Score |
|----------|----------------|-------|
| A1       | High           | 84.8  |
| A2       | High           | 80    |
| A3       | Medium         | 76.2  |
| A4       | Medium         | 71    |
| A5       | Medium         | 77.5  |
| A6       | High           | 81.9  |
| A7       | Medium         | 67.3  |
| A8       | Medium         | 50    |
| A9       | Medium         | 75.4  |
| A10      | Medium         | 77.4  |

Table 2. Move Pattern of the Students' Thesis Abstracts

| Moves   | Total | Percentage | Pattern  |
|---------|-------|------------|--|
| 3 moves | 1     | 10%        | AMR= 1   |
| 4 moves | 7     | 70%        | AMRC = 3<br>BAMR = 1<br>AMCR=1<br>AMCRC=1<br>AMCRMRC=1 |
| 5 moves | 2     | 20%        | BAMCRC=1<br>AMBMRMC=1                                  |

Note: B = Background, A = Aim, M = Method, R = Result, C = Conclusion

Table 1 shows that most of the samples of the abstracts are in medium category level. There are 7 abstracts (70%) which are in the medium category of cohesion level and three abstracts (30%) which are in the high category of cohesion level. It can be seen that Abstract 1, Abstract 2, and Abstract 6 reach the high level of cohesion because they have good score of cohesion level. However, all the ten abstracts above have one or more pairs of sentences in which the level is not cohesive. The pairs of sentences which are not cohesive are caused by the

cohesive devices which are not used correctly or even not used at all.

### Rhetorical Moves

#### *Move Pattern*

From the analysis, the pattern of abstract move can be seen in the Table 2.

It can be seen in Table 2 that, from all 10 abstracts, there is no abstract which follows the move pattern proposed by Swales and Feak (2004): Background, Aim, Method, Result, and Conclusion (BAMRC). It might be

because the students were not able to write their ideas in a good order so that they placed some moves in different part (cycling the move). The other possible reason is that the students only know three or four moves which have to be included in the abstract.

Table 2 shows that from 10 abstracts, there is one abstract consisting of three moves with AMR pattern. It means that there are two missing moves in the abstract. Next, there are seven abstracts consist of four moves. The most dominant pattern of four-move abstracts is AMRC. The other four-move abstracts use the pattern of BAMR; AMCR; AMCRC; and AMCRMRC. Also, there are two abstracts consist of five moves with different pattern; BAMCRC; and AMBMRMC. It can be concluded that the most frequent abstract is the four-move abstract with AMRC pattern while the least frequent abstract is the three-move abstract with AMR pattern.

Moreover, there are also some abstracts which contain of move cycles. It means that there is one or more moves in the abstracts which is repeated. It can be seen in Table 2 that the move cycles of Method move (M), Result move (R), and Conclusion move (C) in some patterns such as AMCRMRC.

### *Move Frequency*

Furthermore, all moves in the 10 students' thesis abstracts are distributed in different frequency in which some moves are used in all abstracts and the other moves are not. The frequency of each move can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that: the Background move is the least frequent move in the students' thesis Abstract (30%); the Aim move, the Method move, and the Result move are found in 100% of the analyzed abstracts and the conclusion move are used frequently in abstracts of students' thesis (80%). It means that the Aim move, the Method move, and the Result move are the obligatory moves in the 10 students' thesis abstract while the Background move is optional and the Conclusion move is conventional.

Table 3. the Frequency of the Occurrence of Each Move in the Students' Thesis Abstracts

| Move       | Total | Percentage |
|------------|-------|------------|
| Background | 3     | 30 %       |
| Aim        | 10    | 100 %      |
| Method     | 10    | 100 %      |
| Result     | 10    | 100%       |
| Conclusion | 8     | 80 %       |

### *The Length of Move Content*

The Background move is only presented in 3 abstracts (30%). One abstract provides the general information and the problem of study

while the other two abstracts provide the general information only or the problem only. The information is written in one or two sentences.

Similarly, the Aim move in the abstracts samples are mostly written in one or two sentences. It is about 8 - 25% of the abstract so that it becomes the shortest move in most abstracts (60%). All the abstracts samples describe a general purpose of the study in the Aim move. Besides, some other abstracts add the information of specific purpose or the importance of the study.

Unlike the Aim move, the Methods move is the longest part in almost all abstracts (80%). All abstracts samples describe about method and design of the study, and most of them explain about population and sample of the study, instrument for collecting data, and data analysis techniques. In addition, 20% of abstracts samples add the information of data collecting procedures and research procedures in the method move. However, there is also unclear information in the Method move.

Next, the Result move in most of the abstracts samples describe about the result of statistical calculation and the result of hypothesis. It means that the result move is written in short sentences even it is so short in one abstract that make the information is

not sufficiently presented. There are only two abstracts provide much more information in the Result move.

Furthermore, the Conclusion move is also the shortest move in most of abstracts samples. 60% of the abstracts describe the conclusion of the study in only in one sentence. On the other side, two abstracts add some information of research discussion but one of them provides incomplete sentence. In addition, the problem also appears in this move in some abstracts that the Conclusion move with the same information is written twice in cycling.

#### *The Verb Tense and Voice*

The tense used in the Background move and the Aim move in most abstracts samples is simple present tense in the active voice form. However, inconsistent tense is used in those two moves. In addition, the Method move in the students' thesis abstracts uses simple present and simple past tense. 50% of the abstracts use both the simple present and simple past tenses, 40% of the abstracts use simple past tense, and the rest use simple present. The tenses are used in the form of active and passive voice or even the mix of them. Nevertheless, the Method move which uses both the simple present and simple past tense sometimes seems to be



inconsistent in using the tenses. Some passive verbs are also not successfully used in this move.

Moreover, most of students' thesis abstracts (50%) describe the Result move in simple present tense with the active voice form or the mix form of active and passive voice. While, the other 40% abstracts use both the simple present and simple past tense, and one abstract uses only simple past tense. However, the same as the Method move, the Result move in some abstracts contains of incorrect passive and inconsistent tenses used. Furthermore, the tense used mostly in the Conclusion move is present tense in the form of active voice. However, incorrect passive voice is also presented in two abstracts.

## DISCUSSION

### Cohesion

The result of the present research shows that all cohesive devices, except substitution, proposed by Halliday and Hasan (2013) are used in varying proportions. From all devices used, reference is the predominant cohesive device used in the 10 abstracts with 42.6% or 283 items. It is in line with the researches done by Fakuade and Sharndama (2012) and Abusaeedi (2010). In the students' thesis abstracts,

most references occur anaphorically with the dominant reference used is demonstrative reference of definite article 'the'. It is because the abstracts consist of some moves therefore this reference is used to provide the information which has been discussed earlier as clear as well.

However, the definite article 'the' is the most dominant device which is used incorrectly by the students so that it makes the abstracts cannot be interpreted well by the reader. The problem mostly occurs in the use of references without any referent. It can be because the students are confused when they have to use the definite article 'the'. Unlikely, the previous study by Sadighi and Heydari (2012) found that the personal reference is the most dominant incorrect device. It is because the writers are still confused to distinguish the various references.

Next, as it is mentioned before, substitution is the device which is not used in the students' thesis abstracts while ellipsis is found only 6 items (0.9 %). In the previous study by Fakuade and Sharndama (2012), not only the substitution which is not used but also ellipsis. However, Abusaeedi (2010) found that substitution and ellipsis are used in the students essay although they are used in small number. It may be due to the uncommon use of

substitution and ellipsis in written test such as in abstracts.

Then, conjunctions seem to be frequently used in all 10 abstracts with additive conjunction as dominant conjunctions. It may stem from the writers' strong desire to explicitly present their arguments chronologically. Nevertheless, in line with Sadighi and Heydari (2012), some conjunctions are not used correctly. From all incorrect uses of conjunction, most of them are because the writers are unable to stamp explicitly the relation between sentences appropriately. In other words, there are some conjunctions not used as their functions such as some causal conjunctions which are signaled by additive conjunction or temporal conjunctions which are signal by causal conjunction.

Besides, among the lexical cohesive devices, repetition (37.2%) is the most frequently used by the students in their thesis abstracts. It is similar with the researches by Seddigh et al. (2010). However, from all cohesive devices, repetition comes the second of the most frequent devices as in study by Fakuade and Sharndama (2012). Many occurrences of repetition is because the repetition of the same lexical item is the easiest form of reiteration. However, like the previous

study by Sadighi and Heydari (2012), the present study found that there are some repetitions which are not used correctly in the students' thesis abstracts. The incorrect uses of repetition are caused by the interference of students' L1 (native language).

Furthermore, seven abstracts of the students' thesis (70%) are in medium category of cohesion level and three abstracts (30%) are in high category of cohesion level. The abstracts which are in the medium category of cohesion level use more incorrect devices than those which are in the high category of cohesion level. Also, the medium abstracts contain not cohesive pairs of sentences more than the high ones.

### **Rhetorical Moves**

The result of move analysis in the abstracts samples shows that most of the abstracts (30%) fundamentally followed the AMRC pattern which is proposed by Hyland (2000). It is similar with the findings of studies by Tseng (2011), Saboori and Hashemi (2013), and Kang and Lee (2015). It indicates that the students of English Education Department in UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta tend to use the four-move abstract in their thesis and open their thesis abstracts with the Aim move. It may be due to the fact that the AMRC

pattern is commonly used in Language community especially in English Education. It means that AMRC pattern is the conventional structure set by the English academic discourse community.

On the other hand, the other abstracts include moves cycling (repeating the moves). In some previous study, the move cycling is not discussed. However, Saboori and Hashemi (2013) discussed about hybrid move instead of moves cycling. In the present study, the moves which are cycled or repeated are the method move, the result move and the conclusion move such as AMCRMRC (Aim, Method, Conclusion, Result, Method, Result, and Conclusion); BAMCRC (Background, Aim, Method, Result, and Conclusion); and AMBMRMC (Aim, Method, Background, Method, Result, Method, and Conclusion).

In addition, as done by the previous researchers, all moves in the abstracts samples were classified into obligatory, conventional, and optional moves. In line with Tseng (2011), Saboori and Hashemi (2013), and Kang lee (2015), the present study found that the Aim move, the Method move, and the Result move are obligatory moves, the Conclusion move is conventional move and the Background move is

optional move. In detail, the Aim move, the Method move and the Result move are included in all abstracts samples; the Conclusion move is used in most abstracts samples; and the Background move is only used in a few abstracts samples. The different frequency of each move is influenced by the research field. This is as stated by Suntara and Usaha (2013) that the greater frequency of occurrence of the Conclusion move in the field of applied linguistics may be a consequence of the nature of the discipline. And, Kanoksilapatham (as cited by Saeesaw & Tangkiengsirisin, 2014) said that "the presence of the Background move reflects the richness of current literature in the fields and, on the other hand, the absence of the move may be due most likely to the relatively short history in the fields".

Moreover, among the five moves, the Methods move is the longest move in most abstracts samples. It means that the students in the present study tend to provide more information in method move. It is different from the study conducted by Tseng (2013) which found that the Result move was the longest, suggesting that the focus of the abstracts is to provide the informative results. On the other hand, the Aim move is the shortest move among the others. It is also different from the study by Tseng (2013) which found that

the Background move was the shortest, suggesting that it was less attended to the abstracts.

Next, in the case of verb tense, comparing the results of the present study with the previous studies, similarities and differences are found. In line with Tseng (2013) and Saboori and Hashemi (2013), the present tense is used mostly in the Background Move, the Aim move, and the Conclusion move. Those moves are also written mostly in active voice form. Then, both present tense and past tense are used frequently in the Method move and present tense is mostly used in the Result move. Tseng (2013), however, found that the past tense was used more frequently in the Method move and the Result move, and Saboori and Hashemi (2013) found that present tense are used dominantly in the method and the Result move. Tseng (2013) argued about this issue that "verb tense usage is quite a complex issue in that authors may vary their choice of verb tense depending on the overall purpose, the context, the sequence of ideas, or even what is being expressed."

Furthermore, there are some problems appearing in each move of the thesis abstracts. First, in some abstracts, incomplete information of the move content is included in the

Background move, the method move, the Result move, or the Conclusion move. Second, the content move is unnecessarily repeated in the Background move and the Conclusion move. Third, the tense is used inconsistently in the Background move, the Aim move, the Method move, or the Result move in some abstracts. Fourth, the passive form is used incorrectly in the Method move, the Result move, or the Conclusion move in some abstracts.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that from 10 thesis abstracts chosen, most of the abstracts are in the medium category of cohesion level. It is due to the fact that there are some pairs of sentences in the abstracts which are not cohesive. In other words, there are some devices which are not used incorrectly or not used at all so that the pairs of sentences are not cohesive. Then, concerning on rhetorical moves, most of the abstracts samples use various move patterns which do not follow the Swale's and Feak's move pattern. The rhetorical moves in the most abstracts are also organized by using incorrect passive voice and inconsistent tense. It means that the rhetorical moves in most of the students' abstracts samples are not organized well. It can be because the

students are not able to organize their ideas in a good order and they are lack of knowledge about the abstract features.

The findings in this research inform the students and other people that, in writing the abstracts, they have to make sure that cohesive devices are correctly used to connect every sentence in abstract. As the abstract consists of some moves, they can use reference, repetition and conjunction more than the other devices to connect each move. If they use the reference, they have to make sure that the referent is provided and is suitable with the reference. Then, in using conjunction, they have to know the meaning and the function of conjunction in order to avoid misused of the conjunction. The different types of research can also influence the use of conjunction. For example, in abstract of experimental study will use more causal conjunction while in abstract of descriptive study will use more additive or temporal conjunction.

In organizing the rhetorical move of thesis abstract, BAMRC and AMRC pattern can be effectively used based on the content of research paper. If the research paper contains much important information of research findings, using AMRC pattern is more effective than BAMRC. On the other

hand, if there is only little information of research findings in the research paper, it is better to use BAMRC pattern to provide whole information of the research paper.

The findings of this research also inform the students and other people that, before writing the abstracts, they have to separate each moves first or they can write a structured abstract. It is needed to make their ideas organized in good order and avoid repeating the same information. And, the students have to know the language features of each move in thesis abstracts. They have to make sure that they do not use different tenses in the same area of information. Then, the students have to recognize the use of voices in every move in abstracts. They have to be able to differentiate the active voice and passive voice form to avoid misinterpretation.

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