

The Anatomy Of A Master's Dissertation: Structural Issues In Writing The General Introduction And Methodology Chapter

تحليل مفصل لمذكرة الماستر: المشكلات الهيكلية في كتابة المقدمة العامة وفصل المنهجية

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ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استكشاف نقاط ضعف طلبة الماستر في كتابة المقدمة العامة والفصل المنهجي لمذكرة الماستر، مع تركيز خاص على المشكلات المتعلقة بالهيكل العام والمحتوى. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج النوعي الاستكشافي من أجل التعمق في فهم الظاهرة قيد البحث. ولجمع البيانات قامت الباحثة بتحليل وثائقي لثماني مذكرات ماستر في تخصص تعليمية اللغة الانجليزية تم اختيارها عشوائيا، والمقدمة خلال السنة الجامعية 2024/2025 إلى قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة البلدية 2 - الجزائر. وقد تم إجراء التحليل وفق مجموعة من المعايير مبنية على الأطر الأكاديمية العالمية. كشفت نتائج الدراسة عن عدة نقاط ضعف في كتابة كلا الجزأين. ففي المقدمة، أظهر الطلبة صعوبات في صياغة مشكلة بحث واضحة، وفي تحديد أهداف وأسئلة بحث منسجمة، إضافة الى غياب تبرير واضح لأهمية الدراسة. أما في الفصل المنهجي، فقد لوحظ نقص في تبرير اختيار التصميم البحثي، وعينة الدراسة، وأدوات جمع البيانات. و لمعالجة هذه المشكلات، تم اقتراح مجموعة من التوصيات البيداغوجية، من بينها تنظيم ورشات تكوينية حول كتابة المذكرة لفائدة الطلبة والأساتذة، وإعادة النظر في شبكة التقييم المعتمدة من قبل قسم اللغة الانجليزية لتقييم مذكرات الماستر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كتابة المذكرة، المشكلات المتعلقة بالهيكل، المقدمة، الفصل المنهجي، طلبة الماستر.

Abstract:

The study seeks to explore Master's students' weaknesses in writing the general introduction and methodology chapter, with a particular focus on structure-related issues. Adopting an exploratory qualitative design, the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues students encounter in organizing these key sections. To collect data, the researcher conducted a document analysis of eight randomly selected MA dissertations in didactics, submitted during the academic year 2024/2025 to the English Department at Blida 2 University, Algeria. The analysis was carried out following a set of criteria developed based on universal academic frameworks. The findings revealed several weaknesses in students' writing of both parts. In the introduction, students showed difficulties in a clear and focused research problem, articulating coherent research objectives and presenting a well-developed rationale for their studies. In the methodology chapter, students often failed to justify their research designs, sampling procedures and data collection tools. To address these issues, a set of pedagogical implications are proposed. These include, among others, organizing training workshops on dissertation writing for both students and teachers, and revisiting the rubric used by the English Department to assess Master's dissertations.

Keywords:

Dissertation Writing, Structural Issues, Introduction, Methodology Chapter, Master's Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Algerian universities, including Blida 2, writing a dissertation is a mandatory graduation requirement for Master's students. At the end of the second year (Master 2), students must submit a research project in which they identify and justify a research problem, describe and explain the tools and procedures followed to investigate it, report the main findings, and propose recommendations that may contribute to the development of their field of interest.

However, a review of a few studies that were conducted in EFL (English as Foreign Language) contexts, including Algeria, has shown that writing a dissertation often represents a major challenge and a source of anxiety for the majority of students. Its demanding nature frequently prevents them from fully meeting the expected academic standards (further details are presented in the literature review section).

Through the researcher's experience as a supervisor and a teacher in the English Department, it has been frequently observed that students struggle to structure their dissertations and particularly express uncertainty about how to organize and what to include in the general introduction and methodology chapter despite having received instruction on the schematic structure of the dissertation in academic writing classes. These observations, together with informal discussions with students and supervisors, reveal a noticeable mismatch between what is taught in academic writing courses and students' actual performance. Many students also expressed their worries and lack of confidence in handling the challenging task of writing the two aforementioned parts of the dissertation. As a consequence, these observations and insights from the context of the study triggered our interest to investigate the main structure-related issues Master's students face with a particular focus on the introduction and the methodology chapter.

This study is significant as it aims, theoretically speaking, to expand the existing body of knowledge on dissertation writing, particularly the issues faced by EFL Master's students in research writing. Through a comprehensive analysis of dissertations submitted to the English Department at Blida 2 University, the study provides empirical evidence of the most recurrent weaknesses in structuring the general introduction and the methodology chapter. Moreover, it is hoped that this study will raise both students' and supervisors' awareness of the attributes of a successful dissertation. It also has important implications for Master's students in Didactics, their supervisors, and academic writing teachers as it offers insights that may contribute to improving the dissertation writing process and inform future curriculum and assessment design.

This study aims to identify Master's students' weaknesses in writing the introduction and methodology chapter, with a particular focus on structure and content-related issues, and the extent to which they are able to meet established academic requirements. To achieve this objective, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- What structure-related issues do Master's students in Didactics at the English Department, Blida 2 University, experience in writing the general introduction of the dissertation?
- What structure-related issues do Master's students in Didactics at the English Department, Blida 2 University, experience in writing the methodology chapter?

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. The Importance of Dissertation Writing

The dissertation serves as a fundamental requirement in Master's studies as it allows students to apply the knowledge they acquired during their academic studies and to demonstrate their ability to conduct independent research, present their research findings in an academic way and make a meaningful contribution to their field. According to the literature (Kale et al. 2025; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Vijayakumar & Vijayakumar, 2007), dissertation writing enables novice researchers to develop essential research skills such as: formulating a research problem, collecting and analyzing data, evaluating academic sources, and conducting an effective review of the literature. It also serves as a measure of students' critical thinking skills, their ability to organize and express ideas accurately. Beyond its academic significance, the dissertation equips students with valuable experience and skills that prepare them for professional practice and further research endeavors.

2.2. Attributes of a Successful Dissertation

The literature on genre writing (e.g., Biklen & Casella, 2007; Evans et al., 2014; O'Hara et al., 2011; White, 2002) identifies the following as essential attributes of a high quality dissertation: a significant research problem, originality, relevance to the context of existing knowledge, a thorough command of the literature, clear research objectives and accurate definitions of key terms, a clear relationship between theory and practice, a significant contribution to the development of knowledge in the area of interest, and well-developed conclusion grounded in the research findings and framework. These attributes are also emphasized in universal frameworks (e.g.; Felix & Smith, 2019; Hyatt & Roberts, 2024; Librero, 2012; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Ridley, 2020; Swales, 1990) that were developed to evaluate the schematic structure of dissertations, serving as pedagogical guidelines to assist students in writing each part effectively. However, a detailed discussion of these frameworks is beyond the scope of this section. Instead, they are integrated

into the findings section under the sub-section '*Expected Academic Standards*' where they are presented as practical solutions immediately following the issues identified in each part of the dissertation.

2.3. Studies on the Common Challenges Reported in Previous Research

The expected academic standards of dissertation writing, particularly in structure, the general, often pose challenges for graduate students which may undermine the quality of their work. While a growing body of research has addressed general difficulties in dissertation writing, only a few studies have specifically shed light on, among other sections, the Introduction and the Methodology chapters. In the Palestinian context, for example, Abu Alyan's study (2022) revealed that students frequently struggled to formulate clear and focused research problems and objectives, which affected the logical flow and coherence of their introductions. Similarly, Tran et al. (2025) in Vietnam and Kichou (2025) in Algeria observed that students often failed to justify their research designs and methodological choices, reflecting a limited understanding of how to structure a sound methodology chapter.

Collectively, these limited studies suggest that weaknesses in structuring the Introduction and Methodology chapters remain significant yet underexplored issues in Master's dissertation writing among EFL students. In addition, although most of the studies we consulted, including those cited in this section, offered valuable insights into structure-related issues, they relied primarily on questionnaires and interviews to explore students' perspectives. These studies did not employ direct content analysis which would have provided concrete evidence of how such issues manifest in students' actual work and revealed their real performance. Furthermore, none of the consulted studies offered practical guidelines, based on established frameworks, for writing the various sections of the dissertation in light of the identified issues as we did in the results' section of this article.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology and Academic Writing in the MA Program

The Department of English at Blida 2 University offers research skills and academic writing courses to Master's students over a period of three semesters. These courses introduce students to the fundamentals of research methodology and academic writing, equipping them to conduct successful and independent research in the field of educational research. More specifically, the students are taught the basics of research, qualitative and quantitative research designs, identifying and defining research problems, formulating research questions, citing and referencing using the APA or MLA styles, research proposal and dissertation writing.

3.2. Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative design as its main objective is to get an in-depth-understanding of the issues Master’s students, at Blida 2 University, face in developing and structuring the general introduction and methodology chapter of their dissertations.

3.3. Corpus

The corpus consists of eight (8) randomly selected Master’s dissertations in Didactics; submitted during the academic year 2024/2025 to the English department at Blida 2 University. Considering the detailed analysis required for both the introduction and methodology chapter, including a large number of dissertations was not practical within the limits of a single article. For this reason, eight dissertations were selected. Furthermore, after skimming additional dissertations, we observed that the same recurring issues were present, which indicates that the chosen sample was sufficient to reach saturation.

3.4. Data Collection Instrument

To collect data for this study, document analysis was used as a primary tool because it provides direct access to the students’ final products. Unlike students’ and teachers’ perspectives obtained through questionnaires and interviews, which may be subjective and lack concrete evidence of students’ dissertation writing performance, the document analysis exposes the researcher to the outcomes of their writing and difficulties in meeting the requirements of academic standards (Bowen, 2009). The document analysis was conducted using a set of criteria developed based on established academic frameworks (e.g., Hyatt & Roberts, 2024; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales, 1990). As demonstrated in the following table, these criteria focus on the structure and content of the two parts under investigation (i.e.; introduction and methodology chapter).

Table 1. Criteria for Assessing the Introduction and Methodology Chapters.

Section/Chapter		Criteria
The general introduction	Problem statement	• The problem is clear, detailed and understandable. • The statement describes the issue that the study addresses in relation to the target population and the context of the study. • The statement provides solid evidence to justify the existence of the problem in the context through factual references of a pilot study.
	Research rationale	• The rationale clearly identifies the research gap. • The rationale clearly demonstrates the originality and value of the research and explains why the problem is worth investigating.
	Research objectives	• The Objectives are clear and specific. • The objectives provide details about the target population and context of the study. • The objectives are realistic and researchable. • The objectives strongly align with the problem statement and the research questions.
	Research question (s)	• The research questions are focused and narrow. • The research questions fit logically and consistently with the research problem and objectives. • The research questions are neutrally formulated and do not contain any assumptions about the expected outcomes.
The methodology chapter	Research design	• The research design is clearly defined and well-justified. • The research strongly aligns with the research objectives and the research questions.
	Population and sampling	• Detailed description of the sample and sampling strategies and procedures are provided. • A detailed discussion of the ethical considerations pertaining to participants and how their rights were protected.

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	Data collection tools and procedures	• A detailed description of the research tools and procedures is provided. • The data collection instruments strongly align with the research questions.			
	Data analysis methods and procedures	• Data analysis methods and procedures are well-explained (e.g.; 1. Qualitative: transcription, coding, theme development, interpretation; 2. Quantitative: Data entry, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics) and align with the nature of the data collected.			
	Validity, reliability and ethical considerations	• Sufficient details about ethical approvals, consent processes or data confidentiality are provided. • Clear explanation of the procedures used to ensure validity and reliability is provided.			

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Each dissertation was analyzed chapter by chapter based on the criteria extracted from the previously mentioned academic frameworks. The issues identified were thematically coded and illustrated with detailed examples from the dissertations. A comparison was then made between the identified issues and the academic standards in order to shed light on the core elements that should be included in each section and chapter, as presented in the ‘Results’ section.

4. Data Presentation

The results of the document analysis revealed several weaknesses in writing the general introduction and the methodology chapter. Accordingly, this section is divided into two main parts, each including two sub-sections. The first sub-section highlights and illustrates the issues encountered in writing each of these two parts, while the second sub-section provides basic guidelines for writing them effectively, based on established academic frameworks.

Before presenting the results of the analysis, it is worth noting that, to preserve anonymity, the dissertations analyzed are referred to using the letter ‘D’ followed by a number.

4.1. The General Introduction

4.1.1. Observed Issues

Based on the content analysis, several issues were observed in the general introduction of the eight dissertations. In the following table, each issue is illustrated with examples, followed by a detailed explanation of the problem.

Issues Identified in Writing the *Problem Statement*: Examples and Details

1. **Making Over-generalized Claims and Unsupported Assumptions**

This issue can be observed in six dissertations (D2, D3, D4, D5, D7, D8) as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

a. **D2:** “However, some students don't actively engage in classroom activities, which makes them passive during the sessions, they don't participate in discussion with teachers and they make their thoughts limited....This lack of active participation raises questions about the effectiveness of teachers' instructional strategies in promoting critical thinking skills.”

Details: In this problem statement, the researchers make their strong claims presented as facts not backed up by data from the context of the study or prior research. There is also a false assumption by claiming a direct causal link between students' lack of engagement (participation) and limited thoughts without proving that through empirical research. Moreover, the statement is too general and vague. The researchers do not clarify which strategies are being referred to nor do they justify why they are not fostering critical thinking.

b. **D4:** “However, in Algeria where English is not a first or second language, when English integrated learning as a medium of instruction presents unexpected challenges for students like understanding scientific content. Many L2 students in the Biology Department report difficulties in understanding course materials, specifically in technical subjects. These difficulties impact their abilities to engage fully in their studies, as a result affect their academic performance. This problem is observed in the Biology Department at University of Blida Saad Dahleb, Algeria. After a discussion with a group of students from the same Department about their challenges when English integrated learning, most of them report that they are struggling to understand scientific content.”

Details: After a review of studies from different contexts, the researchers move to the Algerian context without any transition or supporting data to justify their assertion that integrating English as a medium of instruction results in ‘unexpected challenges’. This claim is vague as the researchers do not explain what these challenges are or on what expectations this assertion is based. Moreover, at the end of the problem statement, the researchers attempt to explain how they became aware of the problem; stating that they conducted discussions with a group of students from the context within which their study took place. Nevertheless, they do not provide any details on: the level and number of students involved, how they were selected, what the discussion was about, and what questions were asked.

c. **D5:** “Many Algerian middle school students encounter significant difficulties in developing their English writing and speaking skills. These productive skills are crucial for effective communication, and the existing linguistic commonalities between French and English suggest a potential, yet underexplored, influence of French vocabulary on English language acquisition.”

d. **D8:** “The needs analyses conducted by teachers for course design often result in the selection of modules that lack relevance or connection to the learners’ actual professional contexts. The courses use general topics and traditional lessons that are not always useful for their specific teaching jobs.”

Details: The two problem statements include overgeneralized statements as ‘many Algerian students’ (D5) and ‘teachers’ (D8) that are beyond the scope of the study. Additionally, the researchers assume that middle school learners face difficulties in writing and speaking (D5), and teachers who are in charge of course design fail to meet students’ needs and expectations (D8). However, no data or empirical evidence are provided to support these strong assertions. This, as a result, reduces validity and fails to provide a solid foundation for the study.

2. Referring to Previous Research

The issue is manifested in four dissertations (D4, D6, D7, D8). The problem statements are too lengthy and overloaded with many details and references to earlier studies. They read more like a mini literature review or background sections as they emphasize prior research rather than the actual problem being investigated.

Example from D6: “Teaching speaking has been greatly prioritized at school for many years (Sosas, 2021, p. 958). It has been integrated in every EFL curriculum. However, sometimes, the teaching of speaking is mainly done through rote learning and repetition of drills (Kayi, 2012). Speaking is a challenging practice that requires fluency and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (Brown, 2018). Previous studies (Fajariyah, 2009; Hong, 2006; Luoma, 2004) showed that most EFL learners were ineffective in their speaking performance.”

Details: Including references to previous studies in the problem statement represents a methodological flaw as this section in the introduction should focus on defining the problem within the specific context of the study rather than reviewing works conducted in other settings.

3. Suggesting Solutions to the Problem

This issue is identified in four dissertations (D3, D6, D7, D8) where the researchers provide detailed solutions to the problem being investigated as exemplified in the following excerpts from D7 and D8:

a. **D7:** “....the integration of more developed emotional intelligence could guarantee better resilience, motivation, and even creativity in text production. Accordingly, the use of EI for EFL classes could be a resolution for these challenges....Therefore, EI may be seen as a crucial factor in writing proficiency.”

Details: After presenting the main findings of the preliminary study on students' writing challenges, the researchers reviewed several studies on the role of emotional intelligence in enhancing writing proficiency within the problem statement. Then, they concluded that integrating EI in EFL writing classes is the solution to these challenges, as illustrated in the example. This, therefore, gives the impression that the solution to the research problem is already determined and leads the reader to question the necessity of conducting the study in the first place.

b. **D8:** “....To solve this problem, this study suggests using Occupational Situation Analysis (OSA) as a better way to understand what learners actually need to do with English in their real jobs. OSA focuses on real tasks and situations from the workplace. This study aims to fill the gap by showing how OSA can lead to better ESP course design that is more useful, practical, and relevant to teachers' everyday work. In this way, the research hopes to improve ESP learning and make it more meaningful for second Bachelor's degree teachers.”

Details: After listing various problems that may confuse the reader and make them unable to understand what the central problem is, the researchers suggest a detailed solution to the problem. This may make the study biased, less credible and even unnecessary.

Issues Identified in Writing the *Research Rationale*: Examples and Details

1. Not indicating the Contributions of the Study

The issue is present in five dissertations (**D1**, **D2**, **D4**, **D5**, and **D6**). It is demonstrated in the following excerpts from **D1** and **D6**:

a. **D1:** “Through task-based language teaching that emphasizes the use of authentic materials and real-life situation tasks, EFL students can develop their speaking competencies in real-life situations.”

Details: The researchers do not clearly indicate the original contribution of their study to the field. They point out that their study will suggest solutions and enhance EFL students' speaking skills. However, they do not clarify what these solutions entail and how they will be applied.

Providing insufficient justification for theoretical and practical significance of the study will fail to demonstrate to the reader the originality of the study and its added value to the existing body of knowledge.

b. D6: “The researchers explored how technology may positively impact EFL learners’ speaking skills. Knowledge about such impact might be a motivational reason to integrate technological tools appropriately in developing the speaking skills (Stockwell, 2013). This may help achieve the purpose of English Departments that is to train good English speakers in order to meet the increasing demand for English proficiency in various fields (Crystal, 2003, p. 05)....Thus, as the speaking difficulties faced by EFL students are constant, there is a need to find better teaching practices that can improve speaking performance through the utilization of technological tools. It is also important to evaluate to what extent technology can support education and EFL learners, especially in speaking. Therefore, it is crucial for this study to find out the positive impact of technology on speaking skills.”

Details: The rationale section fails to fulfill its primary communicative function which is to demonstrate the study’s theoretical and practical contributions, highlight the aspects that were overlooked in previous related research, and show the benefits of addressing the identified research gaps. Instead, the section reads more like a mini literature review or background section as the researchers heavily relied on references to other studies rather than presenting their own justification for the significance of the study.

2. Not Indicating the Research Gap

While the research gap is entirely absent in three dissertations (**D4, D7, D8**), the remaining dissertations (**D1, D2, D3, D5, D6**) only provide partial and vague reference to it in the research rationale section as shown in the following examples:

a. D3: “A relatively few studies were conducted to investigate PhD students’ challenges in English language writing precisely in scientific research and dissertation writing in various contexts and fields.”

Details: The gap statement is too generic and unclear. The researcher just states that few studies exist on the topic without explaining what is exactly missing in previous research, why the gap is significant and how the study would address it. Additionally, the gap identified by the researcher does not clearly connect to the context of the study which focuses on Algerian PhD students and the difficulties they face in learning and using the English language. That is, in the gap statement, the researcher states “various contexts and fields” which is too broad and fails to establish a clear link to the discipline and context of the study.

b. D6: “....It was noticed that there is a lack of research concerning the impact of technology use on EFL learners’ speaking skills at the English Department of Blida 02 University. The researchers found two studies about the topic (Boussahela & Sadji, 2022; Mansour & Lamouri, 2022). Results of Sosas’ study in 2021 revealed that technologies nowadays have become an efficient tool in teaching speaking. Moreover, using technology in teaching speaking is greatly recommended to help learners overcome their speaking

difficulties (Hamad et al., 2019). Many other studies (Elhadi & Elhadi, 2018; Namasiandost & Mehdi, 2019) share the same thoughts.”

Details: The gap is not clear. The researchers simply state that they found just two studies. However, they neither provide any details about the studies nor clarify what is missing. Furthermore, there is a contradiction in the way the research gap is identified. On the one hand, the researchers claim that there is a lack of research on the topic. On the other hand, they cite several studies that emphasize the positive role of technology in enhancing speaking skills. This inconsistency raises important questions: if many studies have already confirmed the role of technology in improving speaking skills, what is the added value of the study? what exactly has been overlooked in the existing body of research? what makes the study original and different from the others?

3. Confusion between the Research Rationale (significance) Section and the Purpose Statement Section.

The issue is evident in four dissertations (D1, D2, D5, D8). It is reflected in the following excerpts from D1 and D2:

a. **D1:** *“In this regard, this study will investigate the role of TBLT in improving specific speaking components.... It will also present some techniques for better use of task-based language teaching to improve the speaking skills By enhancing their speaking skills, EFL students will be better prepared to deliver effective oral presentations, communicate successfully and be competitive in the international job market.”*

b. **D2:** *“For this reason, this study will be done to fill in the gap of how teachers can adapt certain teaching strategies to better support student’s critical thinking, how EFL students perceive and engage with these instructional strategies and how students can face the challenges to be critical thinkers.”*

Details: The research rationale section should demonstrate WHO will benefit from the study (teachers, learners, policy makers...etc) and HOW they will benefit. In the two sections, however, the researchers state what the study will do (aim); which makes them read more like purpose statements as they do not explicitly indicate why the study is needed or what is missing in existing research.

Issues Identified in Writing the Research Objectives Section: Examples and Details

1. Making Predictions about the Results of the Study

The issue is pointed out in **D2** and **D6** as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

a. **D2:** *"This study aims to investigate how teachers' instructional strategies promote critical thinking skills among master one didactic students in the English department at Blida 2 university, Algeria."*

b. **D6:** *"This study seeks to investigate the positive impact of technology use on EFL learners' speaking skills from the perspective of teachers and students in the English Department of Blida 2 University, Algeria."*

Details: In the two objective statements, instead of focusing on what the study aims to achieve, the researchers make predictive claims; taking for granted that instructional strategies do foster critical thinking (D2), and technology use improves speaking skills (D6), while disregarding the possibility that they might fail to achieve the expected outcome.

2. Vagueness and Unclear Scope

The following excerpts from **D5** and **D7** illustrate the issue:

a. **D5:** *"This study seeks to comprehensively explore the influence of French vocabulary knowledge on the development of English language skills among Bouyzoul Mohamed Middle School learners in Tipaza, Algeria. Specifically, it aims to investigate how French lexical competence, encompassing phenomena such as cognates, false friends, and code-switching, either facilitates or obstructs learners' proficiency in English speaking and writing."*

Details: The objectives' section includes too many concepts and variables (French vocabulary knowledge, French lexical competence, cognates, false friends, code-switching, writing proficiency, speaking proficiency). Addressing them in a single study requires a complex research design that goes beyond the scope of a Master's dissertation. As a result, the objectives section may leave the reader uncertain about central focus and scope of the study.

b. **D7:** *"The present study aims at investigating the role of EI in EFL learners' writing performance"*

Details: The objective lacks important details such as the research setting (where?) and the population concerned (who?). Moreover, the objective appears too broad and unfocused particularly in the use of the concept "writing performance". The researchers do not specify which aspects of writing are being involved (grammar, vocabulary, fluency...etc). They could have made it clearer if

they had provided a contextual definition of the concept in 'the definitions of key terms' section. However, this was not done.

Having poorly defined, unfocused and not feasible research objectives that lack the core elements previously outlined. This will negatively affect both the reader and the researcher. The reader may fail to understand the focus of the study and question its credibility, while the researcher will face difficulties in selecting an appropriate research design, collecting and analyzing data, and adequately answering the research question(s).

3. Misalignment with the Research Questions or the Problem Statement

The issue is identified in **D3**. It is exemplified in the following excerpts:

a. Research objective: "*The primary research aim is to explore 3rd year PhD students' challenges in publishing articles and writing dissertations in English language. More specifically, this research concentrates in particular on investigating content-related challenges and the extent to which 3rd year PhD students at University Center of Tipaza can successfully meet the requirements of writing good articles and dissertations using English language as a tool.*"

b. Research question: "*To what extent can Moodle platform tools effectively help PhD students in improving their English academic writing?*"

Details: The research objective does not align with the research question. The latter centers on the extent to which Moodle is effective in improving students' academic writing. However, in the research objective, the emphasis is on exploring the challenges students face when writing theses and scientific papers.

Issues in Formulating the Research Questions: Examples and Details

1. Double- barreled Questions (false dichotomies)

The issue is manifested in six dissertations: **D1, D2, D3, D4, D6, and D7**.

Examples:

a. D1: "*What are the effects of task-based language teaching on EFL students' speaking fluency according to teachers and students?*" (Students Vs teachers)

b. D2: "*What are the challenges that teachers and students face in implementing critical thinking strategies?*" (Students Vs teachers)

Details: The inclusion of two inquiries within one question may create ambiguity and methodological problems as each aspect may require the use of different research instruments and analysis procedures to be addressed adequately. Furthermore, since the students and teachers may face different challenges (D2) or have different perspectives (D1), the reader cannot easily determine which group the answer refers to.

c. **D3:** “How do 3rd year PhD students at University Center of Tipaza perceive the use of Moodle platform tools for English academic writing compared to traditional writing courses, and what impact does this have on their writing proficiency and their ability to publish scientific articles written in the English language?” (**Moodle tools and traditional courses Vs impact of Moodle tools on writing**)

Details: Fallacy of questions: The question includes two distinct inquiries. The first part asks about students’ perceptions of Moodle tools versus traditional writing courses, while the second part asks about the impact of these tools on writing proficiency and scientific publications. This requires the use of different instruments to investigate each aspect: surveys or interviews for perceptions and tests or experiments for impacts.

2. Vagueness and Unclear Scope

The issue is evident in four dissertations: **D2, D4, D7, and D8**. Each of the following research questions contains vague terms/concepts (underlined) that should have been defined in the ‘*definitions of key terms*’ section, yet this was overlooked.

a. **D2:** “How do master one didactic students in the English department at Blida 2 university perceive the teachers’ instructional strategies in developing critical thinking skills?”

Details: The researchers refer to “instructional strategies”, but they do not specify whether their study focuses on all strategies or just some of them.

b. **D4:** “How does English proficiency impact L2 students’ academic performance in the Biology Department, Saad Dahleb Blida University, Algeria?”

Details: The term ‘English proficiency’ is too broad and open to different interpretations. It may refer to one of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening), or to grammar and vocabulary, or to other aspects of proficiency. The same concern applies to the second term in the question ‘academic performance’ which is too general and may mean students’ progress in one of the four skills, classroom participation, students’ performance in exams...etc.

Including vague concepts/terms in the research question(s) makes the question(s) open to various interpretations, leading to unreliable and invalid results.

c. **D7:** What is the role of emotional intelligence in EFL learners’ writing performance?

Details: The term ‘writing performance’ is too broad and vague. It requires an operational definition. Moreover, the setting (where?) and population of the study (who?) are not identified.

d. **D8:** “What is the role of OSA in identifying skills and knowledge gaps among teachers as their second bachelor degree at BLIDA 2 UNIVERSITY ALI LOUNICI?”

Details: In this question, the researchers do not clarify which English language skills are being referred to: Teaching skills or ESP related skills?!

4.1.2. Expected Academic Standards

The issues identified in the dissertations we analyzed emphasize the importance of outlining the core elements that should be included in the general introduction. These elements are derived from recognized academic writing frameworks and scholarly guidelines for dissertation writing (e.g., Hyatt & Roberts, 2024; Felix & Smith, 2019;; Librero, 2012; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales, 1990)

a. Problem Statement

- The problem statement should offer **a detailed** description and explanation of the research problem.
- The problem should be clearly defined **in relation to the context in which the study is conducted**, with specific **reference to the population concerned**.
- The claims made by the researcher in the problem statement **must be supported by concrete evidence or empirical research**. This can be achieved, for example, by conducting a preliminary study to establish the existence of the problem in the context.

What is a preliminary study?
an investigation that is carried out before the main study in order to confirm the
ence and relevance of the problem in the context.

b. Significance of the Study/Research Rationale

This section answers the question: “Why is my study important?”. This question is addressed by:

- Outlining the **theoretical and practical contributions** of the study to the field of interest (i.e.; the value to be added to the existing body of knowledge),
- Identifying the **shortcomings of existing research (i.e.; research gap(s))** and explaining how the present study seeks to address them.

c. Research Objectives

- In this section, researchers are expected to explain **what they intend to do** and how they plan to address the problem.
- The section should include details on three main elements: **1. the variables or the phenomenon explored in the study**, **2. the research participants**, and **3. the research setting**.
- Researchers may also indicate the type of the research approach adopted in the study.

d. Research Questions

- A good research question should be: **1. feasible** (i.e.; practical and achievable in terms of number of participants, researcher’s skills and experience, and scope), **2. interesting** to the researcher and the readers, **3. novel** (i.e.; it makes

an meaningful contribution to knowledge), **4. ethical** (i.e.; it respects laws and guidelines), **5. relevant** (i.e.; connected to the field of knowledge).

● Like the objective statement, the research question should entail three core elements: **1. the variables or concepts being examined**, **2. the target population**, and **3. the research setting**.

4.2. The Methodology Chapter

4.2.1. Observed Issues

As the following table shows, the methodology chapter represents another significant challenge for many students, with several recurring issues observed.

Issues Identified in Writing the *Research Design* Section: Examples and Details

1. No / Lack of Rationale for the Selection of the Research Philosophy and the Research Design

While it is entirely missing in **D6**, the research design section in five dissertations (**D3, D4, D5, D7, D8**) offers insufficient and vague details as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

a. D3: The research design section is quite long. It is divided into three sub-sections: **a. Research paradigm** (in which the researcher defines and highlights the features and underlying principles of pragmatism with reference to existing research), **b. validity strategies** (such as triangulation and prolonged involvement), **c. Research strategy** (in which the researcher sheds light on the principles of a case study design).

Details: The research design section reads more like a mini literature review, as it defines the mixed methods approach and discusses its characteristics as highlighted in the literature instead of explaining how the approach was applied in the study and why it was appropriate to address the research problem. Also, the discussion of the strategies employed for ensuring validity within the research design section is inappropriate as they should be addressed in a separate section of the methodology chapter.

b. D4: “The suitable philosophy for this research is pragmatism. It is a research paradigm that highlights practical resolutions to research complications. This philosophy aligns well with mixed-methods.... This philosophy involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches, in order to help researchers to address complex issues from different perspectives..... This approach allows for triangulation by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data can help to measure the level of students’ language proficiency and its correlation with their academic performance, while qualitative data can provide a deep view into students’ experiences regarding the integration of English.”

Details: The researchers focus on offering a generic description of the research paradigm and its characteristics instead of clarifying why pragmatism and mixed methods approach are the most appropriate and how they were applied to address the research problem and achieve the research objectives.

2. Misalignment between the Research Strategy and the Research Objectives

This issue is noted in D2.

Example:

Research Design: “This study uses an explanatory design, with a mixture of the qualitative and quantitative methods.”

Research objective: “The purpose of the study is to investigate teachers’ attitudes towards the instructional strategies that promote critical thinking skills among master one didactic students in the English department at Blida 2 university, Algeria.”

Details: Explanatory research is employed to investigate cause-effect relationships. However, this study aims at investigating attitudes and the researchers used questionnaires and interviews to address the problem. Hence, the appropriate research design in this case is either descriptive or exploratory.

Issues Identified in Writing the Population and Sample Section: Examples and Details

1. No details / Unclear Description of the Study Population

This issue is identified in five dissertations (D2, D5, D6, D7, D8), as illustrated by the following excerpts:

a. **D2:** “The researchers have selected the population from Master one Didactic because at the Master one level, students have a higher degree of critical thinking skills compared to those in the first, second, and third years. Additionally, these 35 students are future teachers, responsible for shaping the minds of the next generation.”

Details: The population and sample section offers insufficient demographic details about the population (who they are, their gender, details about the program they are studying...etc). Moreover, the rationale for the selection of the population is vague and based on unsupported assumptions. The researchers claim that M1 didactics students were selected because they had a higher degree of critical thinking skills. However, they do not clarify why M1 students are assumed to be more critical thinkers than BA students.

b. **D7:** “The purpose behind choosing third-year students is because they usually have more exposure to academic research, and they strike a balance between familiarity with academic research, willingness to participate, and practical accessibility, leading to higher quality and more reliable data for research questionnaires”.

Details: The rationale for selecting the population is weak, invalid, and based on unsupported claims. Describing third year BA students as '*experienced in academic research*' is inaccurate as they are just undergraduates who are still learning the basics of research methodology. Additionally, justifying their selection based on '*willingness and accessibility*' gives the impression that the population was chosen because it was available not because it was the most appropriate to address the research problem.

c. D8: "*The participants in this study were teachers enrolled in a second bachelor's degree program in English at Blida 2 University. A total of 38 participants took part in the research. The selection was carried out using purposive sampling, as the study specifically targeted individuals with teaching experience who are concurrently pursuing a second degree in English, making them directly relevant to the research objectives. All participants were adults over the age of 38, representing the three faculties of Blida 2 University. The majority of them reported having more than six years of professional teaching experience, which provided valuable insight into their perspectives on the effectiveness and relevance of ESP course content in relation to their occupational roles.*"

Details: There is a mismatch between the research objective (*identifying the role of using OSA (occupation situation needs analysis) in English course design for teachers*) and the population chosen to address it. The researchers do not explain why this category of people is the most appropriate to identify the role of OSA. Additionally, they do not offer any details about the sample: what they teach, where, their English level, what faculties they belong to, how many teachers from each faculty...etc.

2. No/Weak justification of the sampling method

The issue is present in three dissertations (D6, D7, D8). The following excerpts provide support for this observation:

a. D6: "*We will choose both novice and experienced teachers to have more reliable results.*"

Details: The justification entails a vague definition of experienced and novice teachers. The researchers do not explain what qualifies a teacher as experienced or novice, which creates ambiguity in the sampling process.

b. D7: "*Among nine (09) reading and writing teachers, five (05) teachers have contributed to the present study. Those teachers have been selected purposively in the English Department since the topic is more connected to the module they teach.*"

Details: The researchers state that the teachers were purposively selected on the basis that they teach reading and writing skills. However, the criteria for their selection are not explained, and the justification for the teachers' sample size is missing. Knowing that the total population of reading and writing teachers is only nine, it is unclear why not all of them were interviewed!

c. **D8:** “The selection was carried out using purposive sampling, as the study specifically targeted individuals with teaching experience who are concurrently pursuing a second degree in English, making them directly relevant to the research objectives”

Details: The researchers do not provide sufficient details about the sampling technique. They note that participants were selected based on their teaching experience, but do not clarify the criteria (parameters) they applied to define “teaching experience” in the context of the study.

Issues Identified in Writing the Data Collection Instruments and Procedures Section: Examples and Details

1. No / Lack of Details about the Research Tools and the Rationale for their Selection

This issue is manifested in six dissertations (**D2, D3, D5, D6, D7, D8**). As demonstrated in the following excerpts, the details provided are vague and limited:

a. **D2: 1. Description of the questionnaire:** “According to the data discussed in the literature review, it was divided into three sections. The first section is about background information which incorporates only basic questions ; Age, gender and learners’ perceptions of critical thinking skills in the Algerian EFL context. The second section of the questionnaire includes two (2) multiple choice questions to know the participants’ definition of critical thinking skills and their opinion on how to solve problems. Additionally, three (3) likert scales (Evaluation) to gather information about the importance of critical thinking skills in students’ perspectives, their involvement during the lessons and their self ability to apply critical thinking skills. The third section of this research tool consists of questions related to the instructional strategies used by teachers to promote students’ critical thinking skills.”

2. Data collection procedures: “The questionnaire was distributed online via the Messenger group of Master one Didactics students on April 11, 2025. The researchers were present the same day in the classroom to provide guidance when necessary....Seventy-four (74) students answered the questionnaire which took approximately (15) minutes. The researchers took back the students’ responses after ten (10) days.”

Details: The researchers do not explain the rationale for the selection of the questionnaire and why it seems appropriate to address the problem. Additionally, the section fails to justify the design of the questionnaire or to explain how the literature review informed its structure as stated by the researchers.

Concerning the procedures of data collection through the questionnaire, they are unclear and contain contradictions (underlined) regarding the mode of administration and the time required to complete and submit the answers. As a result, this lack of clarity creates confusion, leaves the reader uncertain about the procedures, and raises doubts about the validity and reliability of the research instrument.

b. D3: The section on data collection instruments is quite lengthy. The researcher mentions using four instruments namely: questionnaire, individual interviews, observation, and document analysis. The section is then divided into four sub-sections addressing the first four instruments while document analysis was left without any description. In the four sub-sections, the researcher's focus is placed mainly on highlighting the advantages of each instrument according to the literature as illustrated in the following extract from the 'research methods' section:

Interviews:

"Yin (2014:239) describes individual interviews as "the mode of data collection involving verbal information from a case study participant". Drawing on Harding (2013:22), interviews are used in qualitative research to enable the researcher to listen and understand the participants' perceptions of the world and also to understand their experiences by probing questions for points that need clarification,...Harding (2013:22) further explains how individual interviews are good instruments for data collection as the researcher is able to spend sufficient time with each participant, asking probing questions for better understanding. It is on these grounds that the researcher of the present study considered individual interviews to be an appropriate data collection method."

Details: The section does not provide any details about the research instruments. For the interview, for example, the researchers neither state its aim nor the rationale for the choice of this instrument. Moreover, many important structural and procedural details are missing including the type of the interview, number and types of questions, themes covered, duration, mode (face-to-face or online), and ethical considerations. Instead, the focus is mainly on the advantages of using interviews in qualitative research as shown in the example.

c. D8: *"The primary data collection tool for this study was a self-developed online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, focusing on teachers' perceptions of the ESP course content and their occupational needs. It included a mix of closed-ended questions, open-ended questions, and multiple-choice questions, allowing for both structured responses and detailed feedback."*

"Data for this study were collected during the month of May 2025, with the distribution of the questionnaire beginning on May 10, 2025. The questionnaire was 34 distributed via email. Participants had five days to respond, and a reminder was sent on the second day to encourage further participation. After the data collection period ended, all responses were carefully reviewed and prepared for analysis"

Details: The researchers do not explain the rationale for the selection of the questionnaire and its appropriateness to address the research objectives and answer the research questions. Furthermore, they fail to provide an adequate description of the questionnaire's structure (i.e.; sections, themes, questions, number and types of items...etc) and administration (i.e.; how the researchers got the emails of the participants, how the questionnaire was sent via email, why the participants were given 5 days to respond).

2. Mismatch between the Data Collection Tools and the Research Objectives and Questions

This issue is noted in **D8**. The study aims at investigating the role of using OSA (occupation situation needs analysis) in English course design for teachers as their second bachelor degree, while the tool used to collect data is **a closed-ended questionnaire** as reported in the research methods section.

Details: Studying the role of the OSA requires that the researchers focus on real tasks and communication situations that happen at the workplace. Moreover, the questionnaire is a tool used to investigate attitudes/ perceptions (what people think about the problem/concept; not what they actually do. In this case, using the questionnaire as the sole research instrument is inadequate for providing the necessary data; it should have been followed by semi-structured interviews, observations, and task analysis.

Issues Identified in Writing the Data Analysis Methods and Procedures Section: Examples and Details

1. No / Lack of Details about Data Analysis Tools and Procedures

While the data analysis methods and procedures' section is entirely missing in three dissertations (**D2, D5, D7**), only vague and insufficient details are provided in **D1** and **D3** as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

a. D1: *"The qualitative approach was used to treat the data gathered from the open-ended questions, 21 items from the classroom observation, and 13 items from the speaking program. This approach was chosen because it provides the researchers with deeper data about the topic, allowing respondents to provide justifications. The researchers analyzed the responses to extract the most important themes provided by the participants in both questionnaires and classroom observation. Additionally, the data gathered from the speaking program provided the researchers with a clear view of the use of TBLT in EFL speaking courses."*

Details: The section does not clarify how the qualitative data were analyzed. The researchers point out that they used the qualitative approach to analyze qualitative items/statements, but they neither explain why it is suitable for the analysis nor how themes were identified and coded.

b. D3: *"With insight from Roulston (2014:301), generally the analysis of interview data involves three steps: the reduction of data, re-organisation, and representation of data. These were the steps the researcher of this study followed to arrive at the emerging themes that described the process of using Moodle.... As per Creswell (2013:45), the researcher adopted an inductive approach to data analysis that entailed vigorous analysis of the interview data, working back and forth to identify themes and categories. With insight from Merriam and Tisdell (2016:17), in inductive analysis "the researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research"....Likewise, it was inductive analysis that was employed in the present study to discover the unknown."*

Details: Although the researchers claim to use four data collection tools in the methods section, the analysis of three instruments (questionnaire, observation, document analysis) is completely overlooked in the data analysis section. The section focuses only on interview data, where the researchers state that the inductive approach was adopted. However, most of the text/section is a theoretical description of inductive analysis and its general principles without any details on how this approach is actually applied in the study.

Issues Identified in Structuring the *Ethical Considerations, Validity, and Reliability* Section: Examples and Details

1. No / Insufficient Details about Ethical Approvals, Consent Processes or Data Confidentiality

While the research validity and reliability section is overlooked in five dissertations (**D1, D3, D4, D6, D7**), some insufficient details are offered in **D2, D5, and D8** as shown in the following examples:

a. D2: “Before distributing the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, the researchers piloted them to ensure their correctness and practicality. To test the two instruments, the researchers disseminated them to two (2) teachers and eight (8) Master Didactics students in the English Department at Blida 2 University. The pilot participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and the interview as well as to give feedback on its items particularly if there was any misunderstanding. The pilot participants found that the questions were a bit unclear because the researchers have written in an informal way. The length of both questionnaire and interview was reasonable. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to answer the questions. In contrast, the interview with the teachers took around 7 minutes orally.”

Details: The researchers declare that the questionnaire and the interview were piloted. However, many details are missing:

- Description of the pilot study participants. Are they the same individuals who took part in the main study?
- The feedback process (i.e.; examples of the questionnaire items that the participants found unclear)
- How the researchers processed the feedback (i.e.; how they used it to revise and refine the research tools).

b. D5: “Careful consideration was given to both the reliability and validity of the research tools in order to guarantee the accuracy and quality of the findings. As part of the answer reliability check, the questionnaire was reviewed and pretested to eliminate ambiguity or inconsistency. The interview questions were formulated in a semi-structured manner so that they could be relevant to the research objectives without having a narrowly defined approach. Additionally, the observation checklist captured relevant behaviors systematically so that the observations contributed to valid data from the field. To improve the credibility of the study, triangulation was used. This technique utilized an interview, an

observation, and a questionnaire to collect data from various perspectives simultaneously. In this method, the weaknesses of one tool were balanced by the strengths of another.”

Details: The section shows that the researchers do not clearly differentiate between validity and reliability as the two concepts are blended rather than explained separately. Additionally, the discussion of validity is insufficient. The researchers just state that the interview questions were “relevant to the research objectives”, and that the observation “captured relevant behaviors systematically”; without explaining how specific types of validity (e.g. face validity, content validity and construct validity) are ensured. Moreover, the explanation of the questionnaire reliability is vague. While the researchers declare that the tool was “reviewed and pretested to eliminate ambiguity or inconsistency”, they do not provide details on who conducted the review, how many participants took part in the pretest, and what modifications were made as a result.

c. **D8:** “To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by ESP experts to confirm its alignment with the research objectives. A pilot study was also conducted with a small group of participants to identify potential issues with the wording, structure, and clarity of the questionnaire.”

Details: In this section, insufficient details about the measures taken to increase validity are offered. The researchers state that they conducted a pilot study, but do not mention how many participants were involved nor do they clarify the changes made to the questionnaire items. Moreover, the researchers claim that the questionnaire was reviewed by ESP experts, but do not provide any details about them (i.e.; number, academic qualification, and the feedback they offered).

4.4.2. Expected Academic Standards

The numerous issues identified suggest that most students are not aware of what should be included in the methodology chapter. The following guidelines highlight the core elements recommended by academic writing scholars to ensure that the chapter fulfills its intended purpose (e.g., Hyatt & Roberts, 2024; Felix & Smith, 2019; Librero, 2012; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007).

a. **Research Paradigm and Research Strategy:**

- Researchers should clearly state the research paradigm (i.e.; philosophical stance: positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism) and explain its appropriateness for the research problem.
- They should also specify the research approach (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) and explain how it aligns with the research objective(s) and question(s).
- Researchers should indicate the link between the paradigm, the approach and the research aim(s).

- They should **specify the research strategy** adopted (e.g.; descriptive, exploratory, experimental...etc) and **justify their choice** with reference to methodological literature.
- b. ***Population and Sample:***
 - Researchers should provide **a detailed description of the demographic characteristics** of the target population such as, gender, age, socioeconomic status, academic qualification, and cultural background.
 - Researchers should **explain the criteria** applied in the selection of the sample when non-random sampling is employed.
- c. ***Research Instruments and Procedures:***
 - Researchers should provide **a detailed description of the tools** used to collect data and **explain** how they serve the research objectives. The description should include naming the research tool, and explaining its characteristics, purpose(s), appropriateness, and the rationale for its selection.
 - In the description of the instruments used for data collection, it is advisable to **cite reputable scholars to justify the choice of a particular method**. This demonstrates that the selection is based on validated and effective practices rather than on the researcher's personal preference. However, avoid turning this section into a detailed theoretical review of the research instrument as this may divert attention from the main focus which is clarifying how the tool was implemented to collect data in the specific context of the study.
 - Researchers should **clearly justify the procedures** followed in data collection.
- d. ***Data Analysis Methods and Procedures:***
 - Researchers are expected to **clearly present** how they develop their analysis framework and **explain** how they plan to analyze and interpret the data.
 - They should **specify the methods** to be used for the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and provide **the rationale** for selecting those methods.
 - Researchers should **clearly explain the procedures** followed in the data analysis.
- e. ***Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations:***
 - Researchers are expected to discuss ethical considerations related to the research participants. These include:
 - Ensuring data confidentiality and anonymity,
 - Informing the participants of all the details related to the study (aim, procedures, benefits, risks...etc).
 - Obtaining institutional approval from relevant authorities.
 - Researchers should provide a detailed explanation of the steps taken to enhance validity (e.g., piloting the research instruments and triangulation) and improve reliability (e.g., giving clear instructions, using validated research tools...etc).

5. Data Discussion

The results of the document analysis indicated that lack of awareness of the expected structure and content of the dissertation's key parts represented a major issue encountered by Master's students at Blida 2 University. In particular, significant issues were observed in the General Introduction and methodology chapters.

As far as the general introduction is concerned, the findings align with previous research (e.g.; Abu Alyan, 2022; Tran et al., 2025; Kichou, 2025) showing that most students failed to clearly define and contextualize the research problem. Many introductions lacked a coherent rationale and gave only superficial attention to essential elements such as the identification of the research gap(s) and the statement of the study's contributions. Furthermore, the research objectives and questions were frequently vague, unfocused, and poorly aligned with the direction of their research. This, consequently, indicated students' limited understanding on how to logically frame their studies.

Similarly, the methodology chapter in all the dissertations was inadequately structured and insufficiently justified. Consistent with the findings of Abu Alyan (2022), Tran et al. (2025) and Kichou (2025), the analysis showed that students provided incomplete or unclear descriptions of their research design, population and sampling procedures. Most of them failed to justify their methodological choices and explain the use of particular data collection tools and analysis techniques, which, as a result, weakened the overall credibility and transparency of their research.

Several factors might explain the aforementioned issues encountered by students in structuring the two key parts of the Master's dissertation. One possible reason may be the limited practice provided in academic writing and research methodology courses. Since these two modules are taught for only one semester at Master 2 level, the allotted time is barely sufficient to cover the theoretical content. Consequently, teachers often struggle to maintain a balance between theory and practice. This observation is in line with Abu Alyan's (2022) findings which emphasize students' lack of knowledge and training in research methodology as a major factor that hinders students from producing high quality dissertations. Moreover, the large class size and lecture hall settings make it almost impossible to devote time to procedural training or to provide individualized feedback to students.

Another factor might be the lack of supervisory guidance and timely feedback on students' work. As a member of the teaching staff in the department, I have received numerous complaints from the students who reported that their supervisors were often unavailable to schedule regular meetings to discuss their progress and the challenges they encountered. Many supervisors, according to students' accounts, explained that they were occupied with other responsibilities such as

teaching, administrative duties and pursuing their own post-graduate studies. As a consequence, supervisors were sometimes unable to provide continuous feedback and tended to review their students' dissertations only after the complete draft was submitted at the end of the year. This lack of ongoing supervision and immediate feedback often left students uncertain of how to proceed, as they could neither recall specific details nor had sufficient time to revise and reflect on their drafts.

A final contributing factor may concern the absence of a common dissertation assessment framework which was reflected in the inconsistent ways students presented the two parts under investigation. This would not have been the case if students had been provided with a detailed analytical rubric instead of holistic and vague criteria that are open to different interpretations. This view is supported by Abu Alyan (2022) who emphasized the need to provide students with an official manual outlining the different steps in dissertation writing.

6. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications

This exploratory qualitative study provided an in-depth understanding of the most recurrent issues in structuring and developing two key parts of the Master's dissertation namely the general introduction and the methodology chapter. Drawing exclusively on her experience as a teacher of academic writing, and as a supervisor and examiner of several dissertations, the researcher reflected on the main factors contributing to these issues. These factors included limited research writing training, insufficient supervision and guidance, and the absence of a clear assessment framework. To address the identified issues, the following pedagogical implications are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of dissertation writing training and improve Master's students' research writing performance:

- Organizing training workshops that aim at providing both students and supervisors with essential guidance on writing high quality dissertations that meet academic standards and promote effective supervision.
- Providing timely feedback to students: Given the fact that supervisors play a significant role in keeping students on track, guiding them towards their goals, and helping them produce a successful dissertation, monitoring students' progress and providing timely feedback on their work are among the primary responsibilities that dissertation advisors are recommended to focus on. Doing this enhances students' motivation and increases their abilities to better understand and digest their supervisors' comments.
- Revisiting the rubric used to assess Master's dissertations in the English Department: This is because the current rubric is holistic, and the criteria considered in the assessment are too general and vague; they do not clearly specify what constitutes each part of the dissertation. As a consequence, students

may not fully understand what is being assessed and why a particular score has been attributed to their work. Moreover, the holistic nature of the existing rubric gives a considerable room for examiners to interpret certain aspects differently as many indicators of a quality dissertation are either overpassed or superficially stated. Therefore, it is highly recommended that teachers, supervising and examining MA dissertations, collaboratively design a common analytic rubric that consists of objective, reliable and value-free criteria that can be interpreted consistently by all assessors.

- Using exemplars (good models/samples) in academic writing classes: Reviewing sample dissertations and well-written exemplars is an effective way to familiarize students with the schematic structure and content of academic papers and help them successfully meet the standards of academic writing.

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