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Writing a MA thesis: The challenges and the relationships among the research questions, the literature review and the methodology

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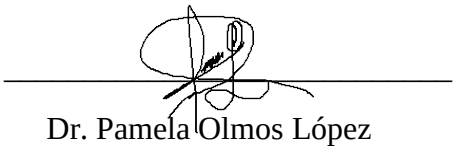

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Abstract

Writing a Master's thesis is often seen by students as a challenging endeavor. This thesis presents a case study which investigates the challenges faced by a group of Mexican master's students when formulating the research questions, and linking the introduction, the literature review, and the methodology chapters of their theses. The study traced the development of these chapters with the use of interviews, observations, and the LMCO (Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual and Ontological) challenge framework which was used to classify the difficulties encountered by students. Additionally, the investigation drew on Move Analysis for this genre along with a Thematic Analysis to gain understanding on how students stated the interrelationship among these chapters. The study reveals that master's students dealt with Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual and Ontological challenges that affected the way they related their thesis chapters. It also shows the need to raise of awareness about Thesis genre and Metadiscourse to strengthen the academic writing and research skills.

Keywords: *master thesis, challenges, genre, academic writing*

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved children,

Leonardo and Avril

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Problem

As a Master's student, I was often required to write research-based papers as part of my evaluation assignments. When I was coursing the second semester, as class practice, my classmates and I were challenged to write a research article following the submission guidelines of an international journal. Back then, I naively thought that my level of preparedness was enough to cope with the expectations, conventions, and requirements for writing a research article at a level of publication. This practice was full of challenges and made me experience the anxiety and frustration of not knowing how to meet all the submission requirements. I spent months reading, writing, and trying to organize and connect the different sections of my paper. Conversing with some of my classmates, I realized that we were all facing similar struggles. We all had difficulties deciding on research topics, formulating research questions, selecting and reviewing the literature, choosing a methodology, and so forth. In addition to the challenge of writing academically in a foreign language, we were trying to cope with unfamiliar writing demands that an article for publication entails. I became aware of the fact that I was not ready to fulfill all the demands of writing a lengthier research paper, and that I needed to learn more about academic writing and research. Immediate to this, I knew a bigger challenge was about to come, which was the writing of a Master's thesis.

When the time to write my MA thesis came, I knew that the challenges for thesis writing would go in a similar direction that for the article assignment experience. I did not have knowledge of the genre and I was unsure if the instruction and guidelines to write my

thesis would be similar to the one I had for the article assignment. I knew my classmates and I were in the same situation of uncertainty, expectancy and ambition for researching something that will lead us to graduation. There were many challenges at the time such as my lack of knowledge and instruction in research and academic writing for this specific genre, so I started researching on challenges of writing a master's thesis.

Fortunately, there is an increasing concern on this topic; for instance, in Iran, Sadeghi and Shirzad Khajepasha (2015) researched on challenges in thesis writing faced by postgraduates, finding difficulties with the use of language, content, style, and methodological issues. Similarly, Shahsavar and Kourepaz, (2020) investigated Turkish postgraduates' problems in writing their theses literature review section. Their study revealed the lack of knowledge to synthesize, critique, or explain the literature. In the same vein, Bakhou and Bouhania (2020) carried out a study with Algerian MA students to learn about the difficulties they encountered in the process of thesis writing, finding the lack of academic writing and research skills, the lack of supervision, and family support apart from linguistic and sociocultural challenges.

All these studies have provided important insights into this global phenomenon experienced by non-native English speakers (NNESs). Since my classmates and I are NNEST's, I decided to narrow down my topic and look into the challenges when writing an MA thesis by NNESs. In this way, I could understand more the process and provide other master's students with the insider perspective as researcher and MA student about these challenges.

Hence, this thesis presents a case study which aims to provide a more holistic and comprehensive view of Master's students' challenges in thesis writing and explores how they make important decisions concerning the formulation of research questions and the

integration of their Introduction, Literature Review (LR), and Methodology chapters. It might also assist to gain an understanding on how students face and fulfill the challenges of this major writing project in English. It also uncovers the level of students' knowledge and awareness of the MA thesis genre.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of the study is to explore Master's students' challenges when formulating the Research Questions (RQs), and linking the introduction, the literature review, and the methodology chapters of their theses. I decided to analyze the connection between the LR and the Methodology chapters because it is where students have to make important decisions that may directly affect and support the coming chapters (the findings and the conclusion chapters), and the introduction chapter since it presents an overview of the whole thesis along with the RQs. Hence, the study is designed to trace and gain an understanding of the possible effects that integrating a Literature Review (LR), the formulation of the research questions (RQ), the selection of the methodology might have on one another as well as how students relate these major elements within their theses. In doing so, we may raise awareness among Thesis Seminar teachers, thesis supervisors and master's students about the importance of thesis genre and challenges of thesis writing.

1.3 Research questions

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do MA thesis seminar students at the Facultad de Lenguas, BUAP, perceive and report the challenges faced when writing the introduction, the literature review, and the methodology chapters?

This first research question attempts to learn about the way MA students perceive the challenges they faced when writing their first three chapters, and how they overcame them.

RQ2. How does the writing of the literature review chapter influence students' research questions?

The second question explores students' perceptions on how the literature review might influence their RQs and how they report the possible rephrasing changes during the crafting of these two elements.

RQ3. How does the writing of the literature review influence selection of methodology?

Similarly, the third question is focused to analyze in what manner their methodological selection was influenced by doing the literature review and whether the methodology also influence the LR.

RQ4. To what extent does the writing of their research questions, literature review, and methodology influence one another?

More importantly, RQ3 and RQ4 attempt to gain an understanding of how LR is linked to their RQs and methodologies as elements of a thesis.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Writing a thesis is a challenging endeavor. This research may promote and enhance MA students' awareness about the challenges of writing a thesis, the importance of having a good literature review chapter that may assist on the formulations of the RQs, and the implementation of suitable methodologies. As stated by Boote and Beile (2005) "a substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is the precondition for doing a substantive, thorough, sophisticated research" (p.3). A good LR advances our understanding

on the current state of knowledge on a topic and assists researchers to contribute to the growing body of knowledge.

Foremost, this study also provides important pedagogical implications not only for the master's programs, Thesis Seminar professors, and thesis supervisors to advance the understanding of challenges faced by MA students, but also for students to learn and take action to improve their research and writing skills before and during the writing of their thesis.

1.5 Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into five distinct chapters. The current Chapter 1 deals with the scope and significance of the study aligned with the research questions to be answered in this thesis. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research, and ties together the common themes related to the research questions as well as the rationale behind the selection of methodologies. To conclude Chapter 2, I also explain the Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological (LMCO) framework (Chen et al., 2015) used to classify the challenges face in thesis writing. Chapter 3 is concerned with the methodology employed for this study, and it describes the research setting, the background of participants as well as the approach and instrumentation utilized in gathering and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 analyses the data gathered and addresses each of the research questions in turn. Chapter 5 provides detailed accounts and interpretations of the findings of the research concerning each of the research questions. The pedagogical implications for stakeholders and suggestions for future researchers are also presented at the end of the current study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

As novice researchers, master's students often face the challenge to meet certain expectations, conventions, structure, and organization of the different sections of their theses. The process of writing a thesis implies knowing the genre and challenges entailed. Thus, this second chapter first aims to look into master's thesis writing as a genre. As my research purpose is to analyze the connection between the research questions (RQs), literature review (LR), and the research methodology (RM), I devote the second section to review the different theories behind the formulation of research questions as a starting point for research and how they evolve as the research advances. In the third section, I discuss the LR, its importance, and its possible effects on different sections of a thesis. In the fourth section, I discuss various assumptions of how students are meant to choose a suitable RM concerning the RQs and the LR. To conclude the chapter, I explain the challenges students face when reviewing and writing the literature using the Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological (LMCO) framework.

2.1 What is Genre?

As master's students, we face a variety of writing tasks throughout a master program such as report, essays, critical reviews, research papers and so forth. All of these types of texts are academic genres, and discussing the concept of genre seems to be a pertinent starting point for the review of the literature review. Genre is a term used to describe the similarities among texts that have been written by members of the same community. According to Swales (1990), genre is "a set of communicative events" expressed in either written, spoken, or both (p.7). The members of a genre community share sets of

communicative purposes and this group is called discourse community. Swales (1990) also explains that as members of a discourse community, we have discourse expectations, a common set of public goals, mechanisms of intercommunication among members, one or more genres, and acquires some specific lexis as well as a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise (pp. 24-27). This suggests that we might recognize in a broader sense, the academic and professional written genres as a conference abstract, a book review, an essay, a grant proposal, a research paper, a letter, and so on, and yet this does not guarantee that we will understand their content and structure. Therefore, not everybody would be able to write an academic text, unless we are familiar with these genres. Simply stated, we can hold a conversation and understand a text because we are part of the same community, and we all affiliate with people that understand and share the same background, cognition and domains.

In the same vein, Hyland (2004) explains that a genre is a way of grouping texts, representing how writers commonly use language to respond to certain situations and readers' expectations. Hence, we know how to read, but we might not be able to understand any text that does not belong to our field. Texts carry meaning and purpose; what is more, they follow certain patterns, meeting specific conventions. Then, genres are conventional since writers followed certain traditions to generate texts. As Johns (2008) explains "conventions are a variety of features such as the text structure, the register, the relationship between the writer and the audience, the use of non-linear materials, the common fonts…" (p.241). Genres are believed to be identified in terms of communicative purposes within a discourse community, achieved through rhetorical structures, following the conventions, and meeting the expectations from members of the target community.

As writers, we try to establish communication with our readers and convince them of our claims. To do so, we need to learn from the metatext or metadiscourse used for a specific genre. Crismore, Markkanen, and Steffensen (1993) define metadiscourse as the linguistic resources used to provide prepositional material and serves to establish the presence of an author. Insightfully, they divided metadiscourse into textual metadiscourse (text markers and interpretive markers) and interpersonal metadiscourse (hedges, certainty markers, attribution, attitude markers, and commentary) (p. 47). In the same manner, Mauranen (1993) claims that besides being a persuasive discourse, metadiscourse, serves to organize the content of a text, discuss it, and interact with the audience (p. 8). Hyland (2005) explains that "metadiscourse embodies the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goods or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes, and assumptions of those who are communicating" (p. 3). In simple words, metadiscourse is the way writers organize and shape their ideas within a text to build their arguments and views on the subject matter with the purpose of establishing a persuasive and coherent dialogue with readers.

Interestingly, Hyland (2005) highlights the significance and benefits that a genre-based writing instruction for ESL writers might bring, when explaining that Genre Teaching is: **explicit** since students are taught how a target text should be structured and why they are written in certain ways; **systematic** because students need to know how different texts are organized and the lexico-grammatical patterns that are typically used on the text genres; **Needs-based** as it helps students to face the demands of various writing contexts according to the target genres; **supportive and empowering** because teachers assist L2 learners until they get the knowledge, and develop the skills and confidence to create texts; **critical** to understand how texts are socially constructed and ideologically shaped; and finally **conscious raising** as teachers reflect and improve their teaching practices by giving better

feedback on their students' writing, and making better choices when selecting material to use in class (pp. 10-16).

Similar to Hyland and based on their teaching experience with nonnative speakers of English, Paltridge, and Starfield (2007) as well as Swales and Feak (2017) also found necessary to develop course books, at both master's and doctoral levels, to assist postgraduate students to improve their academic and research paper writing to eventually become effective writers for Anglophone audiences. The course books they designed also use a genre-based approach with a strong focus on metadiscourse awareness-raising.

All in all, genres are socially constructed, and in consequence, if masters' students want to be part of this discourse community, they need to learn the conventions to meet the communicative purposes, using the adequate structures of this research context.

2.2 Master's Thesis as a Genre

A considerable amount of literature has been published on genres by the New Rhetoric School (Hyton, 1996), the English for Specific Purposes School (ESP) (Swales, 1990; 2004; Hyland 2005), and by the Systemic Functional Linguistic Tradition (SFL) (Webster, 2012; Halliday, 2004), and despite their possible divergent accounts, their overlapping approaches do promote genre awareness and rhetorical flexibility among multilingual writers. This study is focused on exploring the Master's thesis as a genre within the ESP tradition, as a learning tool for English Second Language writers. I am especially using the Australian ESP approach by Paltridge and Starfield (2007) since they study genres based on ESP learners' communicative needs and purposes for writing theses and dissertations.

Previous studies have stated that theses and dissertations are genres as they differ from research articles in the purposes, scales, audiences, writers' roles, assessments and other requirements they need to meet (Johns, 2008; Bhatia, 2004; Paltridge, 2002; Swales, 1990; 2004). Paltridge and Starfield (2007) have considered and studied thesis as a genre per se, suggesting that the main purpose of theses and/or dissertations is to provide students the opportunity to demonstrate: a) a comprehensive understanding of important current knowledge and theories in the field, b) the ability to plan and carry out research, c) the skills to analyze and interpret the results of the research, d) the ability to conclude the research, e) the core writing skills to complete an eloquent and friendly reader paper. At a Ph.D. level, examiners have often asked that students show f) the potential to develop significant research papers for publications, and g) make significant contribution' to knowledge in the particular area.

Insightfully, Nguyen (2017) makes an important contribution, studying the difficulties that non-native English speaking students faced when writing their MA theses in terms of genre. She interviewed Vietnamese MA students and their supervisors, and analyzed 24 masters' theses, using a gender-based model. She reported that these TESOL M.A. theses displayed important issues in terms of the organization of each chapter. Using the ESP approach, the text analysis revealed that students failed to identify and include the expected moves and sub-moves for this genre in various sections of their theses. This study illustrates the importance of Gender awareness and genre-based writing instructions.

2.2.1 The Structure of the MA thesis

Giving thoughtful attention to the organization of a thesis may assist students in their research paper writing. Relevant literature on teaching English for Specific Purposes has

suggested how to organize theses and or dissertations using the extended version of the IMRD model: introduction, method, result, and discussion-conclusion. According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007) and Johns (2008), the simple organization of a MA thesis contains five chapters: an Introduction, a Literature review, a Methodology, a Result, and a Discussion – conclusion chapter.

Paltridge and Starfield (2007) describe the content and purpose of each chapter as follows. The introduction aims to set the background, provides the rationale of the study, and states the research questions and/or hypothesis. In the Literature Review Chapter, relevant past research is used to situate the current study, and to establish the niche. The Methodology Chapter describes how the study was carried out, describing the data collection methods, the procedures to analyze the data with sufficient detail, so it can be reproduced by other researchers. The Result chapter presents and discusses the findings in the light of the LR. In the Discussion and Conclusion Chapter, the researcher(s) attempts to restate the results and discuss them in the context of previous research. It also presents the limitations of the study and the implications for future research. Table 2.1 is a summary of the Thesis organization and the content of individual chapters.

Table 2.1 Thesis organization and content of individual chapters (adopted from Paltridge and Starfield, 2007, p. 76)

Chapter 1 Introduction
● General background information on the project ● The research problem ● Purpose of the study ● Hypothesis or Research questions ● Scope of the study ● Definitions of Key terms ● Organization of the Thesis
Chapter 2 Literature review
● General review of the Literature Review ● Specific topics directly relating to the issue under investigation ● How previews research suggests the study is important to do ● The gap in research that the study will fill
Chapter 3 Methodology
● Research design ● Research instruments ● Methods used to analyze the data ● Details about how, how, when, and why ● For ethnography, description of the setting and participants ● Issues of ethics and consent
Chapter 4 Results
● The findings of the study, described under the themes that emerged from the data, under the research questions, or under the data collection techniques that were used.
Chapter 5 Discussion and conclusion
● A re-statement of the research problem ● A restatement of the result ● Discussion of what was found in relation to previous research on the topic ● Limitation of the study ● Implications for future research ● Consent

Before I started writing my thesis, I had a vague idea concerning the functions of each chapter, yet considering that my research topic is thesis writing, I have found this information very useful to organize the different chapters of this thesis. It also gives me more clarity in the analysis that I am undertaking in this thesis.

2.2.1.1 Moves and Sub-moves within an MA Thesis

There has been an increasing interest in exploring each section of a thesis as a genre per se. Learning about the moves that each section entails in an MA thesis may assist writers

to better organize the information presented in their papers. To understand the content and the structure of the various sections of a thesis, Bitchener (2010) analyses the discourse moves of each part-genre that a well-written MA thesis may have, understanding as moves, the several particular and distinctive functions used to present the units of content. Insightfully, he also provides a comprehensive explanation of the sub-moves or strategies that writers might use to state the units of content. In table 2.2, I condensed all the moves and sub-moves for each thesis chapter.

Table 2.2 Master's Thesis moves and Sub-moves (adapted from Paltridge and Starfiled, 2007 and Bitchner, 2010)

	Moves	**Sub-moves**
Chapter 1 Introduction	1. Establish a research territory	a. Explain the extent to which it is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant b. Provide background information about the area c. Introduce (and review) aspects of previous research in the area d. Define terms and constructs
	2. Establish a niche	a. Indicate a gap in previous literature b. Raise a question about previous research c. Identify a problem or need d. Extend previous knowledge
	3. Occupy the niche	a. Outline purpose, aim and objectives of present research b. Specify the research questions/hypotheses that were investigated c. Outline the theoretical perspectives/positions d. Describe the methodology and design of the research e. Indicate the scope/delimitations of the research f. Explain the contribution and value of the research to the field of knowledge g. Outline the chapter organization of the thesis
Chapter 2 Literature Review	1. Establish some aspect of the knowledge territory relevant to your research	a. A presentation of knowledge claims and statements about theories, beliefs, constructs, and definitions. b. A statement about the centrality, importance, or significance of the theme/topic. c. A presentation of research evidence (e.g. findings, methodology).

	2. Create a research niche/gap in knowledge	a . A critique of knowledge claims, issues and problems associated with Move 1 claims/statements. b. A presentation of research evidence in relation to Move 2a. c. An identification of gap(s) in knowledge and/or research. d. A continuation or development of a tradition that has been established but not fully investigated e. A presentation of arguments for introducing a new perspective or theoretical framework (as a result of Move 1 claims/statements).
	3. Announce how you will occupy the research niche/gap	a. An announcement of the aim of the research study. b. An announcement of the theoretical position(s) or framework(s). c. An announcement of the research design and processes. d. An announcement of how you define concepts and terms in your research.
Chapter 3 Methodology	1. Present the procedures for measuring the variables of your research	a. An overview of the methodological approach underpinning the research project b. An explanation of the methods of measuring the variables i. Defining ii. Describing c. A justification of the approach and methods i. Explaining acceptability ii. Citing previous research
	2. Describe the data collection procedures	a. Describe the sample i. Describe the location of the sample ii. Describe the size of the sample iii. Describe the characteristics of the sample iv. Describe the context of the sample v. Describe the ethical issues b. Describe the instruments used for data collection i. Describe the tools/materials used ii. Describe the validity and reliability measures c. Describe the steps in the data collection process d. Justify the data collection procedures i. Highlight advantage and disadvantages ii. Justify choice in relation to research aims, questions, and hypotheses
	3. Elucidate the data and analysis procedures	a. Outline data analysis procedures b. Justify the data analysis procedures c. Preview
	1. Present meta-textual information	a. Provide background information b. Provide references to methodology detail

Chapter 4 Result Chapter		c. Provide references forward to discussion detail d. Provide links between sections
	2. Present results	a. Restate research questions/hypotheses b. Present procedures for generating results c. Present results i. Present a result
Chapter 5 Conclusion & discussion	1. Provide background information	a. Restatement of aims, research questions and hypotheses b. Restatement of key published research c. Restatement of research/methodological approach
	2. Present a statement of results	a. Restatement of a key result b. Expanded statement about the key result
	3. Evaluate/comment on results or findings	a. Explanation of result – suggest reasons for result b. (Un)expected result – comment on whether it was an expected or unexpected result c. Reference to previous research – compare result with previously published research d. Exemplification – provide examples of results e. Deduction or claim – make a more general claim arising from the result, for example, drawing a conclusion or stating a hypothesis f. Support from previous research – quote previous research to support the claim being made g. Recommendation – make suggestion for future research h. Justification for further research – explain why further research is recommended

Paltridge and Starfield (2007) state that even when the expectation for a thesis may vary from university to university, from supervisor to supervisor in accordance to the field, learning about the moves and sub-moves may assist ESL students to meet the demands of this specific genre. Foremost, I consider that, as MA students and novice researchers, we need to understand the complexity, the scope, and the purpose of theses, and this might assist us to note and solve the challenges we face when writing each chapter of our theses.

2.3 What are Research Questions?

The formulation of questions in research is a reflective and interrogative process that provides researchers the opportunity to refine their inquiries and map out their studies in new ways, being the ongoing process of questioning for qualitative research. According to some studies (White, 2017; Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013; Sunderland, 2010; Agee, 2009; Andrews, 2003), the crafting of research questions starts with some self-questions resulting in the formulation of what several authors have called: subsequent, subordinated, subsidiary or grounded questions that evolve throughout the researching journey to become the final versions or one's overarching questions.

Agee (2009) and Sunderland (2010) claim that there is always a reflective process driven by self-questions such as: *Why do I want to study this? What am I trying to find out in my research project?' What do I want to learn about this topic? What data could I collect to answer my questions or explain a phenomenon?* These self or reflective questions help researchers to find an initial focus, to later start with the formulation of sub-questions which help to narrow the broader focus of the initial RQ, and they might also aid to give direction to the collection of data and analysis. Moreover, Agee (2009) claims that subsequent questions come up and flow every time we understand more the subjects matter. An interactive inquiring process helps researchers to focus on the initial curiosity that leads them to make important decisions to address a problem.

Likewise, Creswell and Creswell (2013) have pointed out that researchers reformulate their questions to reflect an increased understanding of the problem under study. Founded on Stake's work (1995), Creswell (2014) also discuss about central questions and sub-questions. The sub-questions are divided into issue sub-questions; which split the central

phenomenon into subtopics to ease the study; and procedural sub-questions; which means to map out the steps in the research within an approach (p. 114).

Similarly, Maxwell (2013) holds the view that research questions are always present throughout the research, yet they are evolving all the time, going from what he calls provisional questions to become focused questions resulting in an interactive design process. However, he also warns that too focused research questions might lead us to a tunnel vision that does not let us see things that are important for the research, and that can reveal significant information, anticipated phenomena and relationships, leaving out potential gaps for research. Therefore to keep an open mind to constant changing questions is essential in research.

When it comes to formulating research questions, Haynes (2006) points out how important it is to learn where the boundary between current knowledge and ignorance lies. Hence, I believe that increasing our knowledge is essential to determine the uncertainties that can be researched and the rationale needed for the investigation, so a counterintuitive approach may be prudent to write good research questions.

2.3.1 The Importance of Research Questions

This section aims to introduce the significance of Research Questions, to later explore the ways of constructing RQs as well as the effects they may have in subsequent stages of the research.

Research arises from one's curiosity, and this curiosity is normally expressed in questions. According to Kinmond (2012), a research topic might spring from an article we read, something we have studied in a course, a personal experience, an engaging conversation, discussion, or debate with colleagues, peers, or professors (pp. 24-26). Hence,

initial research questions emerge from the researchers' interests, assumptions, and beliefs on a particular topic. Insightfully, Sandberg and Alvesson (2010) highlighted the importance of questions over answers claiming that "questions may open up, encourage reflection and trigger intellectual activity; answers may lead to the opposite: to rest and closure" (p.2). Supporting the importance of formulating innovative questions, Campbell (1982, as cited in Sandberg & Alvesson, 2010) holds that RQs "will open up new research problems, might resolve long-standing controversies, could provide an integration of different approaches, and might even turn conventional wisdom and assumptions upside down by challenging old beliefs" (p. 23).

Likewise, White (2013) maintains that the benefits of conducting question-led research are first, to promote the researchers' curiosity and surprise that might lead them to do authentic research; secondly, to be open to possible answers that might not fit in their bias, yet they may help to generate legitimate theories, and finally to link research questions and research design to choose the pertinent methods for data collection. In his Interactive Model of Research Design, Maxwell (2013) claims that:

> ...the research questions are not the starting point or controlling pieces of the design, to which all other components must conform. Instead, they are the center of the design; they are the heart, of the hub, of the model, the component that connects most directly to all of the other components. They do not only have the most direct influence on the other components, but they are also the component most directly affected by others; they should be informed, and be sensitive to, all the other components. (p. 20)

In the same vein, Fink (2019) claims that research questions bring benefits to our research since they contain the keywords, descriptors, or identifiers, words that are needed to do an online search of applicable studies available in databases.

Research questions are a useful tool within an interactive research process that benefits the focus and importance of one's investigation. Once the role and significance of research questions have been discussed, it is time to explore the nature of the several questions that researchers pose along with their investigations.

2.3.2 Formulation of Research Questions

The revision of the existing literature promotes the reformulation of initial and vague questions into more relevant and focused ones (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2010; 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Kinmond, 2012). Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) claim that "it is in the crafting of the research text that the final research question is constructed, which is the one that specifies the actual contribution of the study" (p.26) Sandberg and Alvesson (2010) identified two methodologies to develop research questions: a) *problematization* and b) *gap-spotting*.

On one hand, Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) explain that problematization is a method to identify and challenge assumptions underlying existing literature to formulate research questions that might lead to more influential theories. They explain that problematization aims "to come up with novel research questions through a dialectical interrogation of one's suggestions, familiar position, other stances, and the domain of literature targeted for assumption challenging" (p.252). The use of this method to formulate research questions demands a deep understanding of the existing theory on behalf of researchers that for novice researchers, it might be difficult to apply.

On the other hand, Sandberg and Alvesson (2010) also claim that gap-spotting is one of the most dominant ways of developing RQs from existing literature, where they mainly identified three versions for gap-spotting named: a) *confusion spotting***,** in which the research

question aims to spot the identified confusion in the literature and provide competing explanations, b) *Neglect spotting* that focuses on an overlooked area, an under-researched area and a lack of empirical support to develop knowledge, and c) *Application spotting* that means to complement, expand and find new applications of the existing literature. They also found instances where researchers combined these gap-spotting modes to construct their research questions. Nonetheless, they also claim that gap-spotting used to formulate questions does not lead to the development of new or innovative theories since they do not challenge the assumptions of existing theories, yet gap-spotting is widely used by researchers. To sum up, gap-spotting is commonly used to formulate questions by exploring and criticizing the existing knowledge on the subject matter, when conducting the text or literature review whereas problematization aims to generate new theories by challenging assumptions, assessing them, and formulating new ones.

In a later study in developing research questions in qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) proposes to use an interesting strategy called "Jeopardy exercise" where the central idea is to take one's tentative results and conclusions or primary data, if there is any, and ask oneself: If these are my answers, what questions are they answering? I think this strategy might be useful to keep an open mind to formulate and get to the final version of our research questions. I share Maxwell's view about the importance of seeing what the information is telling us to better develop research questions.

To conclude this section about research questions, I would like to cite Kinmond's words again (2012) when claiming that research questions "derive from the literature, rather than simply from armchair speculation or anecdotal musing" (p.26), and doing a thorough analysis of the research that has already been conducted in the area may prevent us of asking research questions that have been addressed and answered already. Based on my personal

experience, researching by first formulating the research questions sounds like an intuitive start for a study; nonetheless, I have learned that it is potentially possible that conducting the literature review may assist us to refine our primary inquiries.

2.4 What is a Literature Review?

This section seeks to define literature review to later discuss its significance and its several functions within a thesis. Foremost, it brings together the theories behind a well-written Literature Review Chapter.

The definition of LT has evolved throughout the years, and the American Psychological Association (2019, Section 1.6, p. 8) provides a comprehensive definition of the Literature Review by explaining that it is a group of summaries and evaluations of findings/theories in the research literature of a particular discipline or field; it may include qualitative, quantitative, or a variety of other types of research; it should define and clarify the problem being reviewed; it summarizes previous research to inform readers of where the research stands currently regarding the problem; identifies relationships, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the current literature; it suggests next steps or further research needed to move toward solving the problem.

One of the first researchers to define and write about the importance of the literature review was Hart (1998). He explains that every science and discipline require a literature review to build more knowledge on the subject matter, and that the literature review is a complex and systematic process in research that requires good guidance on how to conduct it.

When writing academic papers, either research articles, proposals, theses, or dissertations, apart from the discipline, scholars need to include the Literature Review (LR)

with the purpose to let the readers know what motivates the study as well as to justify the importance of this. Snyder (2019) claims that literature review "is an excellent way of synthesizing research findings to show evidence on a meta-level and to uncover areas in which more research is needed, which is a critical component of creating theoretical frameworks and building conceptual models" (p. 333).

By the same token, Fink (2019) defines a research literature review as a "systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed, and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners" (p.3). Thus, it can be understood that literature review is an essential component within research due to the need for collective knowledge on certain topics or phenomena.

In other words, the LR places the body of the research in a historical context, it enables researchers to ensure substantial grant funding for the study, identifies the potential gaps in knowledge, and establishes the professionalism of the author as a reliable researcher. Torroco (2005) avers that doing an integrative review means not only to investigate but also to critique the existing knowledge about the topic to be addressed so that researchers might re-conceptualize and expand that knowledge on the topic under study.

Explained in the words of White (2017) "researchers should engage with the existing literature to some extent before proceeding too far with the study" (p. 7), and he explains that apart from setting one's research in a wider context, the lit review can also guide us to possible research methods and designs. More recent attention has been focused on raising awareness on the centrality of the LR, claiming that reviews will never undervalue the literature since it outlines the most important scientific contributions to the subject matter, it guides the decision-making process during the research, and it also facilitates the development, and directions of the research by determining what needs to be done.

In a few words, a literature review is not only a list of detailed summaries of research, it goes beyond a simple collection of papers; it is about a critical assessment of previous research that aims to find the areas of debate that need to be explored and or expanded.

2.4.1 The Importance of the Literature Review

During the crafting of theses, novice researchers face the challenge to integrate the Literature Review chapter. Wisker (2015), explains that writing a sophisticated literature review implies a learning development, acquisition of, and a facility in using the discoursal voices to articulate your views. As researchers, we to prove that have something to offer, a breakthrough, and or an attractive viewpoint. (pp. 64-74). However, it is not surprising that students might underestimate and see it as tedious, time-consuming, and irrelevant instead of a foremost chapter to support and justify other important elements such as the research questions and methodology within their theses.

Fortunately, a considerable amount of literature has been published recognizing the critical role played by the revision of the literature when writing a research paper. For instance, Cooper (1988) was one of the pioneers who discussed about the taxonomy of the LR to help in the assessment of quality reviews. Another important leading author in LR is Hart (1998) who also highlighted the central role of the LR and provide a comprehensive explanation of all the benefits that the LR may bring to a research paper. Built on Hart's seminal text, Boote & Beile (2005) designed a rubric to score the LR chapters for theses and dissertations.

Historically, several researchers have contributed to the list of the primary purposes of a literature review (Caldwell & Bennett, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2013;2014; Hart,

2018; Kiteley & Stogdon, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Torraco, 2005; Cooper, 1988; 1998) which seeks:

a) To identify the experts on the subject matter

b) To describe and explain the current state of knowledge on a topic

c) To refine the study issue

d) To find potential gaps in researching and create new original work

e) To interpret the findings and present a critical review of the findings

f) To associate theories to applications

g) To identify effectively as well as inadequate research methods

h) To map research strategies

i) To make clear research questions and objectives

j) To avoid duplication of studies

k) To use energy, time, and resources effectively

In his seminal book *Doing Literature review*, Hart (1998) explains that "Scholarly activity is about knowing how to: do competent research; read, interpret and analyze arguments; synthesize ideas and make connections across disciplines; write and present ideas clearly and systematically, and use your imagination" (p. 8), therefore one plays different roles when writing a thesis or dissertation such as researcher, reviewer, and writer, and each of these roles demands certain core skills and abilities to reach a successful integration of a comprehensive literature review.

In 2016, Booth, Sutton, and Papaioannou stressed that it is important for a literature review to be question-led, since the question or questions, together with the purpose of the review, the intended deliverables, and audience, determines how the data is identified, collected and presented. Built on the work of Randolph (2009) and Hart (2018), Booth,

Sutton and Papaioannou also claim that it is generally true that most literature reviews are based on the assumption that at least one other researcher has contemplated and or addressed his/her question, and that the nature of the question will be shaped and influenced by the goal and focus of their review.

Notably, Boote and Beile (2005) argue that the importance of having a sophisticated literature review, as a result of a thorough and deep understanding of an area of research, has been ignored in education research. After designing a 12-item scoring rubric, Boote and Beile (2004 cited in Boote & Beile, 2005) analyzed the literature reviews of 12 doctoral dissertations from three U.S colleges of education. Strikingly, the finding revealed that most doctoral dissertations failed in presenting high quality and sophisticated literature reviews since they consisted in "mere disjointed summaries of a haphazard collection of literature" (p. 9); furthermore, it could not be seen an appraisal of methodologies, nor an explanation of the significance of the literature reviews to support the studies. Furthermore, Boote and Beile (2005) highlight the lack of consistent criteria or standards for high-quality literature reviews in the three colleges where they carried out the study.

All in all, the existing theories about LR suggest that researchers should first aim to understand and learn from what has been done before to do substantive, thorough, and sophisticated research, and create a new understanding of the matters under study. As stated by Boote and Beile (2005), "a good literature review is the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication, thereby improving the quality and the usefulness of subsequent research" (p. 4). The questions that come to my mind are: Do all master's students perceive the positive effects that the revision of the literature may bring to their research? Personally, I did not. At the beginning of my master's studies, I underestimated the value of the literature review sections in my research papers. I had a naïve conception

that prevented me from finding a research gap and reformulating my research questions. In the end, to take advantage of literature review to improve the different sections of our research papers is a matter of learning about the functions of this section, and how it is linked to others.

2.4.2 Doing Literature Review

The crafting of the literature review is a challenging endeavor. As stated by Hart (1998), doing extensive searching and reading of the available documents on the topic is essential to learn from the theoretical, methodological aspects, the major issues, and debates about the topic as well as the main questions and problems that have been addressed (p.14). To date, several authors have attempted to provide detailed strategies and steps for writing a literature review. Table 2.3 condenses the steps and strategies for reviewing the literature review proposed by Cone and Foster (2006) in their book *Dissertation and Theses from start to finish*.

Table 2.3 Steps and strategies for reviewing and writing the literature review (adapted from Cone and Foster, 2006)

Step	***STRATEGIES***
Locate relevant information	● Identify key authors and journals ● Avoid the popular press ● Use primary sources ● Use bibliographic reference sources ● Use computerized literature searches ● Scan the tables of contents of key journals ● Use reference list ● Keep track of citations ● Look at literature from other disciplines ● Request for reprints and preprints
Critically read what you found	● Scan the articles and chapters collected

	● Identify themes and commonalities in the methodologies and conceptual frameworks ● Identify strengths and weaknesses of the studies ● Pay attention to unanswered questions ● Keep a record of your observations
Get ready to write	● Investigate length and format parameters for the LR ● Write a preliminary outline ● Limit the scope of your review ● Organize the literature
Start writing	● Write the introduction ● Write the subsections of your LR ● Synthesize and critically analyze the literature ● Introduce the study and the hypothesis ● Write additional subsections ● Be careful to not plagiarize ● Revise and rewrite

As explained by Cone and Foster (2006), researchers need to devote plenty of time to locate the relevant literature. The primary sources help researchers to learn about the main authors and journals in the area of study. They also suggest scanning the reference list of articles, thereby one might find valuable articles and key authors, and keep track of the complete citations into a computer file. Interestingly, I have experienced the value of getting in the habit of working on my reference list since the beginning of the literature review process.

Furthermore, using bibliographic reference sources and computerized databases facilitates the searching of relevant literature and provides reviewers the opportunity to access important studies from other fields that might overlap with their research areas.

As for the second step, *critically read what you found*, I consider it as the researchers' biggest challenge. Most research in literature review has acknowledged the importance of critical analysis in research (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012; Bacha, 2010; Torroco,

2005; Cone & Foster, 2006; Hart, 1998). Thoroughly, Hart (2018) explains the main points of an effective criticism when reviewing and writing the LR as follows:

> "agreeing with, or defending a position, or confirming its usefulness through an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses; conceding that an existing approach or point of view has some merits which can be useful, but that others need to be rejected; focusing on ideas, theories and arguments and not on the author of those arguments, so as to produce careful, considered and justified evaluation; being aware of your own critical stance; identifying your reasons for selecting the work you have criticized and recognizing the weakness in your critique; selecting elements from existing arguments and reformulating them to form a synthesis: a new point of view on some subject matter; finding fault in an argument by identifying fallacies, inadequacies, lack of evidence or lack of plausibility; identifying errors in a criticism made by another to provide correct and balanced criticism thereby advocating the usefulness of the original work and reasons for rejecting the criticism made of it." (p.176).

When it comes to the stages of preparing *for writing and writing the review,* it is advisable to start working by organizing the literature review in sections, mapping a preliminary outline to narrow down the information to be included in each sub-section. When writing each section, paraphrasing is essential to avoid plagiarism.

I would like to conclude this section by saying that research is cyclical since it aims to address research questions through gradual immersion into the topic. This is the connection between what has been done before, found in the literature, and the uniqueness of our research problem. Importantly, as researchers, we do not need to start from scratch because having done the LR, we know the methodologies used by others, so it is worthy to take advantage of this.

2.5 What is Methodology?

This section aims to define Methodology, to discuss the importance of choosing a suitable methodology, and –more importantly- how we can decide the methodology to be

used for our research. As novice researchers, we have to make sure that our RQs are consistent with the research methodology we are adopting, by questioning ourselves how we might answer our RQs, the data we need to collect, the way we have to analyze it, and the assumptions we are going to make about the data we obtain.

To start, what is Methodology? In the Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods (2008), a research methodology is defined as "the assumptions, postulates, rules, and methods—the blueprint or roadmap—that researchers employ to render their work open to analysis, critique, replication, repetition" (p. 516). By the same token, Symeou and Lamprianou (2008) explain that "methodology refers to how the whole research design is deployed through logical, systematic and consistent research decisions so that it withstands critique as to reaching valid and reliable findings" (p. 1) According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007),

> "methodology refers to the Theoretical paradigm or framework in which the student is working … and the argument that is built in the text to justify these assumptions, theoretical framework and /or approaches as well as the choice of research questions or hypothesis". (p. 119)

In simple words, the methodology has to do with researchers' philosophy, assumptions, and beliefs, and with all the decisions and actions researchers take during the study, including the logic that these actions follow to answer the RQs or prove a hypothesis.

In the words of Kothari (2009) research methodology "is a way to systematically solve the research problem" (p. 8). He also states that good research is systematic because it follows logic and specific steps to prevent possible bias, guessing, and intuition when arriving at conclusions. Even when researchers need to know about methods and techniques for data collection and analysis, it is equally important to have clear in mind the logic behind the

selection of those methods, and justify why they are using certain methods and not others so that their results might be evaluated and reproduced by other researchers.

Creswell and Creswell (2013) explain that the planning of research entails important decisions to be taken, defining research approaches to the " plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation"(p. 21) The research approaches are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods and the philosophical assumptions or worldviews are the researcher's beliefs that guide a study such as postpositivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism.

Insightfully, Cresswell (2013) avers that knowing about researchers' philosophical assumptions assist to understand the abstract ideas and beliefs they use to report their research. The philosophical assumptions enable researchers to understand and formulate research questions to study and how they seek information to answer the questions.

Cresswell, (2013), Maxwell, (2013), Paltridge and Starfield, (2007), and Vogt (2008) have established the distinction between *methodology and the research design.* For instance, Vogt (2008) defines research design as "a plan for collecting evidence that can be used to answer a research question" (p. 8), these specific procedures, and methods aligned with researchers' philosophies and accounts of the subject matter under study make possible to understand research the way the researchers want others to understand it.

Methodology involves a deep understanding of the interrelationship between the purpose of the study, the theory, and the research design; it is the master plan to carry out a research to gain new insights and contribute to the existing stock of knowledge of a phenomenon.

2.5.1 The Significance of Methodology

The significance of the methodology chosen lies in the researchers' ability to link their research questions with the existing theories used to investigate the phenomenon under study. Kothari (2008) explains that when planning a study, it is important to consider several factors such as the research questions and objectives, the available means of obtaining information, the availability and skills of the researcher and his staff (if any), the reasoning behind the selection of means of obtaining information as well as the time and costs factors related to research.

As stated by Paltridge and Starfield (2007), the main purpose of the methodology chapter is to state the paradigm or framework, justify the assumptions, theoretical framework, and or approaches used to address the research questions and describe in detail the procedures and methods used in the study to enable other researchers to replicate the study (pp. 114-119).

2.5.2 The Selection of Methodology in Qualitative Research

As Booth et al. (2016) highlight research is question-led. In order to decide the research methodology, we need to reflect on how our research questions can be answered or if the primary focus of the study is the participants' experiences and perceptions. It is in the literature review where we get the theoretical lens that might help us to focus our attention on specific aspects of data that might suggest the pertinent methodology to use for our studies. The selection of a research methodology involves several factors such as the research questions and/or hypothesis, research objectives, the sample, the sitting, the type of data is needed as well as other unforeseen issues such as limited time, economic problems, global public emergencies, etc.

As researchers, we need to bear in mind the following self-questions: What is the study about? Why is the study being made? These two questions have the purpose to remind us of the objectives of the study helping us to keep the primary focus of the study. Where will the study be carried out? This question is a reminder of the scenery where the study will be carried out with all its peculiarities. Moreover, we also need to question ourselves about the sampling by asking: What type of data is required? Where can the required data be found? What periods will the study include? What will be the sample design? What techniques of data collection will be used? How will the data be analyzed? In what style will the report be prepared?

When selecting a research methodology, we need to take into account what we have learned about our research topic while reviewing the literature. As stated in section *2.4.2 Doing a literature review*, we need to make the most of the new knowledge gained to choose a suitable methodology that would help us to give answers to our research questions. Given all that has been mentioned, these three core elements (RQs, LR and Methodology) go hand in hand and the link between them often represents a series of difficulties. In the following section, I seek to explain some of the most common challenges that postgraduate students face under the lens of the LMCO (Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological) challenge framework (Chen et al., 2015).

2.6 Challenges when Writing a Thesis

To start with, the Oxford Dictionary defines a challenge as a task or situation that tests someone's ability, it is a call to prove or justify something. In thesis writing, I consider that challenges are useful to prove to ourselves and others that we have understood our research topic and we are ready to contribute to our field within our context. In recent years

there has been an increasing amount of literature on the challenges faced by the nonnative speakers of English to write the theses and dissertations (Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020; Bokhou and Bouhania, 2020; Sadeghi & Shirzad Khajepasha, 2015; Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2015; Strauss, 2012). I have chosen two recent studies to illustrate the importance of learning about challenges in thesis writing. These studies provide a complete list of challenges that MA students as non-native speakers of English have encountered when writing their theses. To conclude this section, I also explain the LMCO (Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological) challenge framework (Chen et al., 2015) that I decided to use to analyze and study the challenges that my participants encountered when undertaking a thesis writing, paying special attention to the completion of the three first thesis chapters.

The first instance illustrates the importance of researching on challenges. It is a study carried out by Shahsavar and Kourepaz (2020) with postgraduate students, where they tried to identify their problems in writing their theses literature review section. They used a mix-method design and to validate their study, they used a rubric to evaluate 40 complete theses and interviewed 10 students. The finding revealed: a) the lack of knowledge of writing effective LR since they were not aware of its importance, b) problems with the time for completing their theses and publications, c) supervisors and professors' role in writing literature reviews since most students argued that their professors rarely instructed them on how to write their LR effectively, d) the lack of a critical analysis of previous studies, e) students' cultural background which embraces just the positive views in eastern countries, and f) students' literature review section was mainly based on authorial voice and evaluation rather than critical thinking. This study supports the significance of the LR in thesis writing which is one of the main concerns of my study.

Another illustrative example is Bokhou and Bouhania's study (2020), called *A Qualitative Inquiry into the Difficulties Experienced by Algerian EFL Master Students in Thesis Writing: 'Language is not the Only Problem'*. This is an interpretive qualitative research where they used semi-structured in-depth interviews, supported by open-ended questionnaires. They interviewed 30 students and six supervisors, purposely selected from English departments at eight Algerian universities. In this study, they explored both students' and supervisors' perceptions of the difficulties and challenges encountered during the course of thesis writing, with a focus on the non-linguistic factors underlying this academic undertaking. Interestingly, they found socio-cultural difficulties, which are related to the fact that students had to write their theses in a foreign language with insufficient academic writing and research skills. The majority of students stated that they experienced difficulties in the various research stages, including: the formulation of the research questions, the selection of a research methodology, the design of instruments for data collection, and the analysis of data statistically.

Whereas Shahsavar and Kourepaz (2020) researched challenges when writing the LR, Bokhou and Bouhania's study (2020) provides a holistic view of the challenges that students reported when writing a thesis. In the end, it can be seen that the findings reported on both studies are related. After reading these and other research papers on challenges in thesis writing, I understood that researching on this topic, in a Mexican context, would be fruitful to analyze the pedagogical implications and make some suggestions. Immediately after, I started looking for a framework that help me to classify the different challenges, and fortunately I found the LMCO challenge framework (Chen et al., 2015).

To design the LMCO challenge framework, Chen, Wang, and Lee (2015) used a grounded theory-driven analysis and synthesis of the extant publications on literature

reviews. After reviewing 32 papers, they classified the different challenges that novice researchers faced when conducting their literature reviews, and develop the LMCO framework.

Chen, et al. (2015) conceptualize the challenges into four types: Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological (LMCO). *Linguistic challenges* are issues related to lexical and syntactical difficulties, challenges in the genre, and challenges in discourse patterns.

Table 2.4 Summary of the LMCO Challenges (adapted from Chen et al., 2015 p. 14)

	Linguistic	Methodological	Conceptual	Ontological
Alton-Lee (1998)			*	
Anisfeld (1987)		*		
Bitchener & Banda (2007)	*			
Bitchener & Busturkmen (2006)	*			
Boote & Beile (2005)		*	*	
Bruce (2001)		*		
Carson (2001)		*		
Cooley & Lewkowicz (1997)	*			
Das (1985)	*			
Franken (2012)	*			
Froese et al. (1998)		*		
Golde (2007)				*
Granello (2001)		*		
Holbrook (2007)			*	
Holbrook et al. (2007)		*		
Johns (1997)	*			
Kamler & Thomson (2006)				*
Kamler & Thomson (2008)				*
Kaplan (1972)	*			
Kaplan (2001)	*			
Kwan (2008)	*	*	*	
Kwan (2009)			*	*
Liu & You (2008)	*			
Mataline (1985)	*			

Methodological challenges are concerned with four different aspects: scoping, analysis, synthesis, and discussion. They claim that *scoping* challenge has to do with the

difficulty to filter high-quality and relevant papers for review. The challenges in the *analysis* are evident when novice researchers have difficulties in extracting and interpreting key findings and ideas from the literature. Once students have analyzed and extracted the key ideas and findings, they should be able to synthesize the information in themes or conceptual categories, comprehensively connecting such information. The fourth aspect is the *discussion* that refers to the ability to present new perspectives, comment on the limitations or significance of various findings and key concepts.

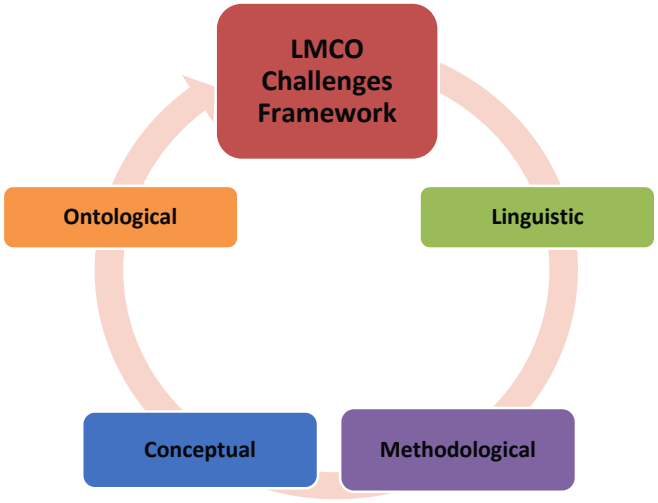


Figure2.1 LMCO challenge Framework (adapted from Chen et al., 2015)

Conceptual challenges have to do with the students' conception of the relevance of the literature review about all the sections of a paper. Interestingly, Bitchener and Banda (2007 cited in Chen et al., 2015) found that "a high proportion of students had little understanding of the various functions of a literature review in a research project, particularly in the areas of identifying gaps, justifying the significance of a project and evaluating published literature" (p.10).

In addition to Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual issues, students may also face *Ontological challenges.* Golden (2007 cited in Chen et al., 2015) explains that these types of

challenges “are mostly related to the difficulty experienced in identifying oneself as a competent and confident reviewer, which is, at its core, an identity issue” (p.11). These are especially problematic since as second language learners and novice researchers, they might not feel confident enough to openly include their own views.

All in all, master’s students face diverse challenges along the thesis writing process which may affect the completion of their studies positively or negatively. I am positive that when we learn from the challenges that thesis writing entails, it is possible to seek for solutions. To do this, I considered necessary to collect and learn from my participant’s experiences and analyze their texts to see how they affect their thesis writing.

To sum up, this chapter has presented the Genre-based theoretical framework for thesis writing, key terms such as: research questions, the literature review, the methodology, as well as previous research in the field of MA thesis writing. It has examined the concepts of the genre in ESP and embedded issues, master’s thesis organization, the formulation of research questions, theories behind the significance and writing of the Literature review, and the methodology. In this chapter, I also described the LMCO challenge framework (Chen et al., 2015) to be used as part of my methodology because it provides a comprehensive classification which is suitable for the aim of this study. It has also brought arguments in support of the concept of the interconnection between LR, RQs, and the selection of pertinent methodologies, and the benefits that may bring an ongoing writing process, when conducting qualitative research. It has contextualized the research. The chapter which follows will present the methodology chosen for the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research strategy that I used to explore the challenges and the effects that writing a Literature review might have on the reformulation of research questions and the selection of methodology when writing a master thesis. In the light of the thesis research questions outlined in Chapter One, this chapter provides further details of the methodology and the fieldwork undertaken to collect and analyze the data. It also describes the research context where this study took place, presents the participants involved in the study, and details of the instruments used to collect the data. At the end, I also explain the analytical frameworks used to analyze the data.

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative study seeks to shed light on the challenges MA students face when writing their theses and explore how they perceive and report the interrelationship and effects that doing the literature review might have on their thesis research questions and methodology. Due to the nature of the research problem, I used a Case Study (CS) as a research method since I wanted to explore and gain an understanding of a real-life case and students' accounts about this specific issue. As I see it, the beauty of a case study is a particularization, the uniqueness that provides an understanding of the case itself, and the thesis writing process may be experienced by students differently, at a professional and personal level.

As explained by Yin (2018) the method should be aligned with the research questions posed, the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. The "how" research questions

proposed for this study are in nature explanatory because it tries to understand and describe how a community copes with this issue during the writing of a thesis. In this case study, I had no control over participants' behaviors, but I had access to direct observations of the events under study, documents as well as the opportunity to interview MA students involved in the event under investigation (pp. 36-41).

3.2 Research Context

This research was carried out at a public university located in central Mexico, where the Language Department offers a two-year MA program in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The students enrolled in this MA program are required to write a thesis and pass a viva voce. They are also required to take two thesis seminars to complete the endeavor of writing this major graduate project. During these thesis seminars, MA students work on their research topic, formulate their research questions, integrate the literature review and theoretical framework, choose methodology, and interpret and report their findings. The seminar classes are small to provide students with more personalized attention, and students have an instructor for the seminar, and at the same time, individual thesis supervisors are assigned, who are specialized in the topic the students are researching.

At the beginning of the research, I meant to carry out my study with the participation of several master's seminar students enrolled in the English Language teaching program. However, the department opened three Thesis Seminars, and students were assigned to one of the thesis seminars based on their field of interest and research topics.

Due to the global emergency for COVID-19, the educational system has been affected, resulting in the rise of online teaching and learning. At the university where this study was carried out and in prompt response to the global health crisis, the authorities

implemented the online learning modality using the Google classroom platform. For my study, I first asked my Thesis Seminar teacher and students for their consent to record the classes and they all agreed. As a result, I had the opportunity to record several sessions where participants presented their thesis reports. This facilitated the analysis and selection of three important moments where students had to report their thesis progress.

3.3 Participants

As a student of this master's program, I thought it would be fruitful to carry out my research within the Thesis Seminar I was enrolled in. This facilitated the selection of my sample since we all underwent the thesis writing task and had the same professor, thereby the same instruction and guidance about thesis writing. In order to protect participants' confidentiality and anonymity, and gain their trust, I refer to them as Robert, Nancy and Carol. Table 3.1 provides their background information that may serve to understand better their cases.

Table 3.1 Participants' Background

Information	**Participant 1**	**Participant 2**	**Participant 3**
Degree	B.A in English Teaching	B.A in Modern Languages	B.A in Modern Languages
Age	27	33	35
Marital status	Single	Married	Married
Children	None	Two	Two
Years of experience	7 years	6 years	10 years
Reasons for studying an MA	Professional development Better job opportunities	Professional development Better job opportunities	Professional development Better job opportunities
Thesis Topic	Personal experience	Personal experience	Personal experience

3.4 Data and Data Collection

Qualitative research explores, describes, and/ or explains a phenomenon in a natural setting, and in this case, the real context for students is their Thesis Seminar classes. Triangulation is essential to increase the confidence in the findings at the stage of data analysis. As Yin (2018) points out, triangulation is the use of various sources of evidence with the purpose of disseminating potential problems of construct validity; moreover, it provides multiple views of the same phenomenon. In the same vein, Stake (1995) notes that researchers need to have protocols to validate their findings and interpretations. The data collection for this study is derived from three main sources: Participatory observations, the analysis of three thesis chapters themselves, and semi-structured interviews.

At the beginning of the thesis writing process, my classmates and I started with vague ideas and questions that could be observed during the research seminar classes. Therefore, I decided to take advantage of the fact that we had no clear ideas on how to write our thesis to research on this topic. Having got my seminar professor and classmates' permission, I knew that recording the classes would help me to later stages to analyze the development and comply with my research purpose.

Once the Thesis Seminar II concluded, I asked my participants to share with me their Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology chapters to analyze and compare them with the information gathered during the observations. The last part of the data collection was the interviews because they provided the opportunity to get participants' accounts and feelings about the whole process itself. Even when Robert, Nancy and Carol had in common the same seminar and setting, they experienced their thesis writing process slightly differenty. Therefore, the interviews served to triangulate the information and validate the findings. I

did the interviews at the end because the findings of the observations and the analysis of the chapters served to formulate the interview questions.

3.4.1 Participatory Observation

According to Yin (2018), participant- observation is when the researcher takes part in the context where the study is being carried, and this technique provides the opportunity to perceive reality from the view of someone inside the case study. This facilitates the participants to feel comfortable expressing themselves in a real setting. However, the major issues related to this technique are the potential manipulation or biases on behalf of the researcher. With the purpose to avoid biases, I used an observation format to note what they reported in each session. In the observation format, I wrote information such as the date and length of the session, the participants' pseudonyms, the purpose of the session, the challenges they mentioned as well as some direct quotes (see Appendix A). Despite recording each session from Seminars I and II, I analyzed only three sessions where relevant moments for the study occurred. These relevant moments for my study were:

Session 1: Literature Review Chapter Challenges

The first recorded online class I analyzed took place on November 19th, 2020. Months before, students had worked on the research problem, the objectives for their research, and the formulation of the research questions. At the time of that class, students had already submitted the first draft of the second chapter. It is worth mentioning that the Seminar professor first instructed students to work on the Literature Review Chapter before the Introduction chapter. I chose that class session because its main purpose was to discuss the

insights from the review of the Literature, and the challenges they faced when writing the Second Chapter. The recording lasted 49.23 minutes.

Session 2: Introduction and Literature Review Challenges

The second class session I observed and analyzed was on December 16rd, 2020. This session occurred once students had completed the first draft of Introduction and Literature Review Chapters. In this session students discussed the overall organizations and challenges related to the First and Second Chapter, it was a closing session for Thesis Seminar I. The class lasted 45:46 minutes.

Session 3: Methodology

The last observation took place on March 23rd, 2021, which lasted 75 minutes. At the time of the observation, students had already started working on the first draft of the Methodology chapter. In this session, they explained and tried to justify their methodology choices regarding their research questions, the research gap, methods to collect the data as well as the Analytic framework used to analyze the data. Additionally, the dynamic for the class was to converse about the challenges faced and the ones to overcome.

3.4.2 Documents: Thesis Chapters

The thesis chapters are also an important source of data since they serve to corroborate or make inferences. As explained by Creswell and Creswell (2013), the advantages of using documents in CS are several, firstly, the researcher has access to the participant's language and accounts at a convenient time; secondly, it represents data to which participants have given attention and finally, they are written evidence.

The data collected from documents had the purpose of gathering written evidence concerning the observable changes in the Introduction, Literature review, and Methodology chapters. The thesis chapters were analyzed using a Move Analysis grounded in Thesis genre theories in Second Language, proposed by Paltridge and Starfield (2007) and Bitchener (2010). These texts contained information about the last versions submitted for their seminar class.

It is important to bear in mind that at the time of the study, students submitted tentative final versions for chapters 1, 2 and 3, as part of the assessment criteria of the Thesis Seminar 2. However, students continued working with their supervisors until the completion of their theses, so these versions of their chapters have probably changed.

3.4.3 Interviews

Interviews provide the opportunity to learn from MA students' perceptions and account about how they experienced their thesis writing process. Interviews were by far the most useful way to collect valuable data concerning participants' perceptions and feelings, as Stake (1995) pinpoints, in a CS not everyone sees and perceives an event in the same way; therefore, qualitative researchers seek to uncover the multiple views of the case. In the words of Patton (2002), interviewing people seek to learn from those things that we cannot be

observed such as feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and intentions. Foremost, he avers that interviews are the opportunities to observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they relate to what goes on in it (p. 342).

Due to the global health emergency experienced at the time of the study, the semi-structured interviews were carried out using the platform Zoom for participants' convenience and safety. This facilitated the recording and transcription of such interviews making the process of collection and analysis more efficient. I utilized an open-source web-based document tagging tool for qualitative data analysis, called Taguette (Version 1.0.0) to label the data into categories.

The interview consisted of 17 open-ended questions. The first five questions were used to collect my participants' background such as their age, education, marital status, working experience, and reasons to enroll in the Master's program. The following 12 questions were designed with the purpose to learn about the challenges faced in writing the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters. Foremost, I wanted to collect their perceptions about the relationships they found between these three chapters. The interview questions are shown in Appendix B.

At the beginning of the interview, I explained the purpose of the interview and addressed the terms of confidentiality. I also told Robert, Nancy, and Carol that they would get access to their answers and how their answers were analyzed, in case they wanted to withdraw part of the information shared. Then, I explained the format of the interview, and that it would last approximately 30 minutes. During the interview, I gave them the freedom to expand on their answers as much as they wanted, so the three interviews lasted more than 30 minutes. I transcribed the interviews for the analysis and utilized the program Taguette (Version 1.0.0) to create a hierarchy of tags, and annotate portions of documents with tags

and notes for a better organization. A sample of the interview transcription is shown in Appendix C.

Personally, I could perceive that my participants were eager to share their experiences, feeling, and accounts, it was like having an individual therapy, where they reflected on how they lived and faced this challenging process of thesis writing, resulting in the collection of rich data for my research.

3.5 Data Analysis

Case study mainly tries to understand the individual stories of each participant, their behaviors, decisions, and individual experiences in relation to a specific event. To start with the data analysis, I first used observations notes. As stated in section 3.4.1 Participatory Observation, my field notes were mainly about the challenges they reported, how they overcame those challenges, and the way they connected the different sections of their research. I used the LMCO (Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological) (explained in section number 2.6) challenge framework to classify their challenges.

I also decided to utilize a Thematic Analysis (TA) because this method allowed me to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes in the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), TA provides a rich thematic description of your entire data set, so that the reader gets a sense of the predominant or important themes. It also provides a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data. (pp.11-12)

Since my first research questions aimed to identify the challenges faced not only in the writing of the LR chapter but also in the writing of the Introduction and Methodology chapters, I used the LMCO challenge framework to seek the specific themes. This facilitated me to answer RQ1 using the interviews and observations.

The second part of the analysis was focused to answer RQs 2, 3, and 4. It consisted of the collection of students' chapters one, two, and three of their theses, once they got their more stable version. The purpose was to look for the moves and sub moves concerning students' research questions, the literature review sections, and the methodologies to explore if these three elements were linked accordingly. For the analysis, I used the extended version of Chapters Moves and Sub-moves proposed by Paltridge and Startfield (2007) to illustrate the significance and interrelationship between the various sections of a thesis.

To complement the Move Analysis, I used the data collected from interviews. As a result of the interviews, I could get essential information to conclude and the opportunity to get an expanded and more personal version of how Richard, Nancy, and Carol connected their thesis chapters. Table 3.2 provides a visual explanation of my Methodology decisions to give answers to my research questions.

Table 3.2 Methodological Decisions

	Research Question	**Data needed**	**Data collection**	**Data analysis**
RQ1	How do MA thesis seminar students at the Facultad de Lenguas, BUAP, perceive and report the challenges they faced when writing the introduction, the literature review, and the Methodology chapters?	Perceptions Experiences Feelings Knowledge	Interviews Class observation	Thematic Analysis
RQ2	How does the writing of the Literature Review chapter influence their Research questions?	Empirical Factual information	Class Observations Interviews Thesis chapters 1-2-3	Moves Analysis Thematic analysis
RQ3	How does the writing of the Literature Review influence their selection of the Methodology?	Empirical Factual	Observations Interviews Thesis chapters 1-2-3	Moves Analysis Thematic analysis
RQ4	To what extent do the writing of their Research Questions and Methodology influence each other?	Factual information Perceptions Experiences Feelings Knowledge	Thesis chapters 1-2-3 Interviews	Moves Analysis Thematic Analysis

This chapter has provided an overview of the research design, the setting, the participants, and the methods used to collect and analyze the data. In the following chapter, results obtained from the strategies described in this chapter will be analyzed and discussed in the light of the literature review.

Chapter four: Findings

As stated, the purpose of this Case Study is to explore the challenges that Master's students faced when writing the introduction, the literature review, and the methodology chapters and the existing connection among them to apply, expand and find new applications of existing theories concerning the thesis writing process in English as a Foreign language. The findings may serve to gain an understanding of whether master's students perceive an interrelationship and the possible effects that these three core sections (research questions, literature review, and methodology) may have on one another.

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings in light of the literature. In order to do this, I follow the steps described in the methodology chapter and summarized in Table 3.1 *Documenting Methodological decisions*. I organize this chapter by presenting first the challenges faced by master's students when writing their first, second and third chapters. Then, to better understand the complexities and uniqueness of each case, I present the findings by discussing each case individually, using the data collected by means of the observations, interviews, and the move analysis of each of my participants' thesis chapters. In doing so, I address the stated research questions.

4.1 Challenges when Writing a Thesis

My first RQ addresses the challenge master's students faced when writing the introduction, literature review and methodology chapters. As table 3.2 shows, this question was answered with the data obtained from observations and interviews. To carry out this analysis, I used a theoretical thematic approach. As explained by Braun and Clarke (2006), a Thematic Analysis (TA) is used when researchers want to identify, analyze and report

patterns (themes). I looked for patterned responses in the data to explore student's challenges in the research and writing process of the first three chapters.

My overarching research question is: How do MA thesis seminar students at the Facultad de Lenguas, BUAP, perceive and report the challenges they faced when writing the introduction, the literature review, and the Methodology chapters? The primary data to address the affairs of RQ1 was collected by individual interviews and complemented with my observation notes of the thesis seminar classes. I present the findings by discussing the challenges students reported chapter by chapter.

4.1.1 Challenges when Writing the Introduction Chapter

As a participant and researcher, I would like to start by explaining that before starting the thesis seminar, we had already worked on Chapter 1 as a prerequisite to be assigned a thesis supervisor. The coordination of the master's program provided a general guideline to write the first draft of Chapter 1 which included the following sections: an introduction, the purpose of the study, rationale, research questions and the organization of the thesis. It is worthy to mention that when we finished the first draft of this chapter, we had not reviewed the literature in-depth.

Once the Thesis Seminar I started, as a first assignment we were asked to present our thesis proposal. We explained the draft of Chapter 1 that we had submitted to the coordination. During the presentation, there were three more professors whose role was to give us feedback, and that was the first time we realized the challenges to come because they made us see that our research questions and the purpose of the study were not clear enough and that we did not have a methodology, yet.

When the Thesis Seminar classes started, the professor explained to us that we would start working just on the purpose of the study and the research questions to find the key terms and themes to start with the review of the literature. Our thesis seminar professor told us that we would start working on the Literature review chapter. After completing and sending the first draft of the second chapter in November 2020, we were asked to submit the first draft of Chapter 1 a month later.

Considering this, in the interview when I asked my participants about the challenges they encountered when writing the first chapter, their answers were unexpected because participants 1 and 2 reported that Chapter 1 did not represent a major challenge. They claimed:

> Richard: "It was not so challenging because I have experience writing the thesis of a BA thesis, so it was not so difficult…"
> Nancy: "Well, it was not that hard, because I followed the steps. It was required. I followed the guide, so it was okay.

However, Carol admitted that she had to rewrite it because she had changed the core of the study. She said:

> Carol: "…it was not difficult, but I will say that it is not a good version of it."

It seems possible that Richard and Nancy did not feel the writing of the first chapter challenging since they first worked on researching and understanding their conceptual and theoretical framework as the Seminar professor suggested. Moreover, during the class observations, they mentioned that as they were writing their second chapter, they were also rewriting part of their introductory chapters.

As novice researchers, we could mistakenly believe that we start writing our theses at Chapter 1 and then finish at Chapter 5 when this may not be the case. I agree with Levine's

view (2002) when saying that "the first chapter should be the last chapter" (p.19), he claims that it is important to have the first draft of Chapter 1 as an initial guide to conduct our research. However, the final version of the Introduction Chapter just can be written once we have gained the insights from having drafted a complete thesis. This is the process we went through, and our seminar professor knew that working on the Literature Review Chapter would be fruitful to write the Introduction chapter.

As Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) point out, the Introduction Chapter aims to be informative since it contextualizes the study and provides an introduction to its basic components (p.54). I believe that at the beginning my participants and I were not fully aware of how other chapters would affect our Introduction Chapter. As our Seminar professor foresaw, we likely end up making the pertinent changes to Chapter 1 when we are about to finish our research, once we have a holistic view of all the components of our research.

4.1.2 Challenges when Writing the Literature Review Chapter

As part of the interview, I also asked my participants to describe the challenges they encountered when writing their Literature Review chapter. I decided to use Chen, et al. (2015) framework since they provide a comprehensive description of what Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological challenges are and entail. I could identify that most students experienced the four types of challenges. However, they had more Methodological challenges when scoping, analyzing, synthesizing, and discussing their theoretical framework. Scoping challenges were detected when they commented:

> Nancy: "… at the beginning, when I started to write it, I was like, I focused my attention on the context rather than the literature review. So that's why I have like, I don't know, 15 pages of just context. And then I had to remove too many pages"

> Carol: "So, I could see that my main theory was not all that information, so I simply took off all the second part of the chapter, and I get rid of it."

Similarly, I faced scoping challenges since there was a point where I felt overwhelmed with the readings and it was hard to narrow down my study. I think it was because my research questions were not clear and concise enough. Another instance is when in class, Richard mentioned that his supervisor told him the sections to be included in Chapter 1 and suggested some of the main themes for Chapters 2 and 3. Nancy and Carol also commented that with the help of their supervisors, they were able to select and organize the themes for their second chapter. At this point, we can see the important role played by supervisors in thesis writing process.

In general, all the participants claimed having had problems choosing their conceptual and theoretical framework, resulting in long hours of reading and searching for updated and relevant articles and books. Richard, Nancy, and Carol reported having had difficulties understanding key concepts and themes that they included in their LR chapters. They all needed their supervisors' assistant and advice. There was also an emerging topic that was the difficulties to access physical and virtual libraries due to the COVID-19 pandemic that may have resulted in more hours of searching and gathering relevant literature. As explained by Chen, et al. (2015) these are scoping challenges because it involves not only finding high quality and relevant papers for a study but also deciding the extent of the literature, this means defining a workable scope (p.8).

The interview also revealed Analytical challenges, this means difficulties extracting and interpreting key concepts from the literature; for instance:

> Richard: "The first challenge that I faced was to decide the theory because I didn't understand the critical thinking theory that they suggested to me."

Similar to Richard, Nancy, Carol, and I struggled to understand certain topics. After doing extensive readings, I think we realized that it was necessary to understand some concepts before choosing our conceptual and theoretical framework

In the end, there was a lot of information that we all had to dismiss. I do know to think it was a waste of time because I felt more prepared to explain the theories I was about to use to support my decisions. Interestingly, our Seminar professor once told us that we should be ready to defend our thesis at a viva by displaying a deeper comprehension of the topics linked to our research topic. In the first class observation, Nancy commented:

> Nancy: "I felt I was losing the focus of my study because I started to explain more and more concepts […] but my supervisor reminded me that my readers are experts, and they already know those concepts, and that information was for me…".

During the second-class observation, Nancy also commented:

> "It was difficult for me to leave behind the contextual framework and move to the theoretical one. I got stuck in the conceptual framework for a while."

I experienced something similar to Nancy because, in the beginning, I paid too much attention to the conceptual framework before I started to work on the theoretical one. As Hart (1998) explains, one of the main purposes of the literature review is to get to know the main first-class experts as well as the existing theories related to a subject matter. What is more, it serves to know what has already been done and the methodologies used by others, so we may use, adapt and/ or adopt them.

When it comes to Synthetizing challenges Carol seems to have had problems when sorting and organizing the information by themes, she said:

> Carol: "I mean, from 10 lines, you underline eight because everything is new for you, and you read and you read, and everything seems to be important then you start getting rid of things, and then you have a mess".

There were also Linguistic challenges, as she commented her supervisor made some grammatical and sentence patterns corrections. Moreover, during the class observations, all participants mentioned having used grammar checkers and/or online writing assistants. I also used a grammar checker and an academic phrase bank because I think that regardless of whether we are native speakers of English or not, we need to learn about the expected academic discourse for this genre. Honestly, these academic ready-to-use phrases have been of great assistance to think about the content and the organization of my writing. According to the LMCO framework, these are literal challenges (lexis and syntactical), challenges to understand the genre, and challenges in cultural discourse patterns.

Apart from the Linguistic challenges, Richard reported having had problems including his point of view in his text. Consistent with the literature, this is an Ontological issue. To illustrate this, in the excerpt below Richard used the word *paraphrase* as a means to represent himself, his stance in the text.

> Richard: "... choosing the specific part, the main idea, and I'm paraphrasing and then paraphrasing those paraphrased phrases to give my own voice."

However, paraphrasing is different from giving your point of view. Graff and Birkenstein (2017) point out that quoting and paraphrasing someone else's words is useful to give credibility to our summary. However, they also suggest avoiding the use of a "hit-and-run quotation" where the writer neither elaborates on the quote nor shows his or her agreement, disagreement, or a mix of both. This may mean that the writer does not fully understand the quote or that he or she wants to play safe by not taking a stand (p.44). This is especially challenging for me and it seems that for participant 1 it is too. In my case, I was

taught to keep my academic writing impersonal preventing me from giving my point of view and, unfortunately, this seems to be a deeply-rooted tradition in academic writing.

Concerning conceptual challenges, students reported having faced issues when trying to connect their chapters. This result is likely to be related to the lack of awareness of the thesis genre and its moves, what is expected for each section of a thesis as part of a whole.

> Richard: "And another challenge that I faced was to try to link all when you read all the Chapter two with Chapter three".
>
> Carol: "the first time I had like […] something important here, something important there, but there was not a good connection".

When I was about to end the interview, I asked my participants which section was the most challenging for them and, surprisingly enough, all of them admitted that Chapter 2 was the most difficult to write. They commented:

> Richard: "Well, the section that I considered to write again and again, well more than rewrite, to improve has been, of course, Chapter two".
>
> Nancy: "It was chapter two. I have rewritten it many, many times".
>
> Carol: "Chapter 2, because I had to restructure everything. My chapter 2 is now completely different […] I gave a new path to my research".

During the class observations, participants mentioned the challenges they were facing while writing the different chapters. By November 2020, students had completed their first draft for Chapter Two, so they were asked to reflect on the challenges they had faced. They reported having had difficulties narrowing down the study, they recognized that they have struggled to understand the conceptual and the theoretical framework, have felt overwhelmed with the extensive reading in search of their primary sources and authors, have had difficulties understanding certain concepts and themes as well as to structure the second

chapter to make it flow. These findings provide additional evidence for the methodological issues.

Taking together the data collected during the interviews and the class observation, the findings revealed that students have had experienced more Methodological challenges, followed by the presence of Linguistic, Conceptual, and Ontological challenges that have affected their writing of their Literature review chapters.

4.1.3 Challenges when Writing the Methodology Chapter

Turning now to the challenges participants faced when deciding on and writing the Methodology chapter, during the interview they commented the following:

> Richard: "My first challenge was to decide what kind of methodology to use and of course, looking for the participants, the type of methodology, the survey, look for all participants, that kind of challenges. And another challenge that I faced was to try to link Chapter two with Chapter three…"
>
> Nancy: "I didn't have experience doing research. It was challenging and confusing because, you know, at the beginning, you have different ideas, because different papers, well, I was guided by different papers, they were doing different things"
>
> Carol: "It was hard to relate my research questions and my methodology because at the beginning my instruments had no purpose. Later, I learned that telling stories is the best way to talk about emotions so I chose narrative inquiries"

There are important insights since participants mainly encountered Methodological and Conceptual challenges. I could observe Methodological challenges when they commented that it was difficult to select their literature and to connect it with their methodology. Nancy even mentioned her inexperience in doing research and participant 1 did not know how to connect chapters two and three. The same view was echoed by Carol

who admitted that her RQs would not have been answered using the instruments she considered using at the beginning.

When it comes to Conceptual challenges, I consider that my participants also exhibit a poor notion of the overall objectives of the methodology chapter. They mentioned as main challenges the selection of their methodology in terms of methods, which is different from methodology, but they never mentioned the selection of their methodology in connection with their theoretical frameworks. This may suggest that when they were planning and writing their methodological chapter, they had not understood the link between previous research and their research, yet.

Similarly, in recent studies with EFL Master Students in Thesis Writing (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020) researchers observed the lack of a critical review of the literature, the lack of knowledge of the thesis genre, and the lack of research skills among the most important challenges.

The methodology chapter is meant to provide a rationale and detailed description of the theoretical frameworks, approaches, research questions, and methods that have been chosen for the research. In doing so, researchers provide readers the basis to accept or not the results, conclusions, and recommendations in the coming chapters. Paltridge and Starfiled (2007) point out that writing a sophisticated Methodology chapter entails reviewing the methods used by similar studies and comment on their strengths and limitations (p.120). Therefore, I readily agree that there is strong relationship between the review of the literature and the selection of the methodology. It is very useful to do a critical review of the existing theories and research to find our research gap.

To conclude this first part of the study, the analysis reveals that, at different levels, all participants experienced Linguistic, Methodological, Ontological, and Conceptual

challenges when writing the Introduction, Literature review, and Methodology chapters. These results are likely to be related to a lack of understanding of the thesis genre, the academic discourse used for this genre and the inexperience in research, issues that were gradually solved with interventions on behalf of the Seminar professor, the reflective conversations hold during their Seminar classes and the advice of their thesis supervisors.

4.2 Linking the Literature Review, Research Questions, and Methodology.

In my view, writing a thesis is a learning process of several layers and each layer affects other layers. Insightfully, Hart (1998) points out that the review of the literature serves to refine the issues under study and to make research questions and objectives clear. This means that, in theory, when we read the literature, we also analyze what it has been done and identify what needs to be done. By doing this, we may spot the research gap and gain a new perspective of how we could give answers to our research questions (p. 27).

This second part of the analysis aims to discuss the case by case, and attempt to answer my research questions concerning the master's students' perceptions about the interrelationship between the research questions and the literature review, literature review and methodology, and methodology and research questions.

In this second phase of the analysis, I integrated the data collected utilizing the class observations, interviews, and the move analysis of my participants' thesis chapters.

4.2.1 Richard's Case

Richard is a single 27-year-old man. He majored as an English teacher and has seven years of teaching experience. He has mainly worked for private language schools with kids and

teenage students. He enrolled himself in the master's program to improve his working conditions as well as his language and teaching skills.

During the interview, one of the first questions I made Richard was how he had chosen his research topic, and he explained that he had witnessed some friends' and classmates' lack of engagement to conclude their BA theses, so he decided to research on this topic for his thesis. It is noteworthy to mention that he did finish and defend his thesis, and this also helped him to make a decision on his research topic. As Kinmond (2012) explains personal experiences serve to formulate RQs, and this was Richard's motivation.

When the time came I asked Richards whether he could see any connection between his research questions and his literature review, and he commented:

> "yes… the first questions are based on what I was going to develop in Chapter two, so first I needed to develop the research questions and then I started writing based on those research questions my literature review".

Richard could see this relation, and it seems that at the beginning his RQs led the search of the literature. However, when I asked if he had needed to reformulate his RQs he said:

> "Yes, because first I needed to change my theory because I needed to write what was going to be the theory that I wanted to use in Chapter two"

When he said "my theory", he was talking about his conceptual and theoretical framework. This makes me believe that once he started reading the existing literature on the subject under study, the process went all the way around because his LR affected his RQs. He added:

> "I also decided to change the research question because it was focused on all academic papers. Then I decided to just narrow the study, just focusing on thesis writing".

This may suggest that the review of the literature made him work on more concrete objectives and finding the niche, which Sandberg and Alvesson (2013) called gap-spotting. Moreover,

I think he realized that researching on academic papers was too much, and this shows again how he was facing scoping challenges.

Conversing with him, I asked whether he could see any relationship between his RQs and the methodology he chose, and he first said:

> Richard: "...based on critical thinking, I developed the questions and the literature review is based on their research questions, it is like a kind of chain, my research questions are focused on Chapter two".

Then, when I asked Richard how he related his LR and methodology chapters he commented:

> Richard: "Well, in Chapter Two, I explained about the critical thinking and then the main challenges students face to write a thesis. So in chapter three, what I did was to make a core analysis and nuclear analysis based on the literature review. So […] what I made to link in Chapter two and Chapter two is based on these categories, I develop the questions for my instrument so we can say that the questions that I'm asking are related to them, with the categories I explain in the literature review."

What I understand from this is that based on his theoretical framework he reformulated his RQs for the first time, and then when he chose his methodology he adjusted his RQs again based on the instruments he could use to collect the data, so his LR and methodology helped with the reformulation of his RQs.

Interestingly, Richard claimed that he had chosen his research methodology and instruments based on his supervisor's advice. The fact that Richard's supervisor instructed him in the selection of the methodology may suggest what Dysthe (2002) identifies in his three models of supervisory relationship as the *teaching model* where "the supervisee sees the supervisor as the authority and the expert whose primary job is to correct the text" (p. 518). This means that the feedback received by his supervisor was directive.

Richard also said that he considered the restrictions that the pandemic could bring to the collection of the data. As we can see, there are two emerging topics on his methodological

decisions: the pandemic experience at the moment of the study and the influence of the thesis supervisor.

During the second-class observation on February 2021, the seminar professor asked us to reflect and justify the selection of our methodologies. Richard explained that he was working with a Case Study, and his method to collect the data was a semi-structured interview and a focus group. Back then, he could not justify the selection of the focus group, but he commented that his supervisor had suggested it. During the presentations, the seminar professor asked us a question that none of us had considered before, she asked "What is your analytic framework?" that was a bucket of cold water over us. Richard admitted that he did not know how to analyze the data.

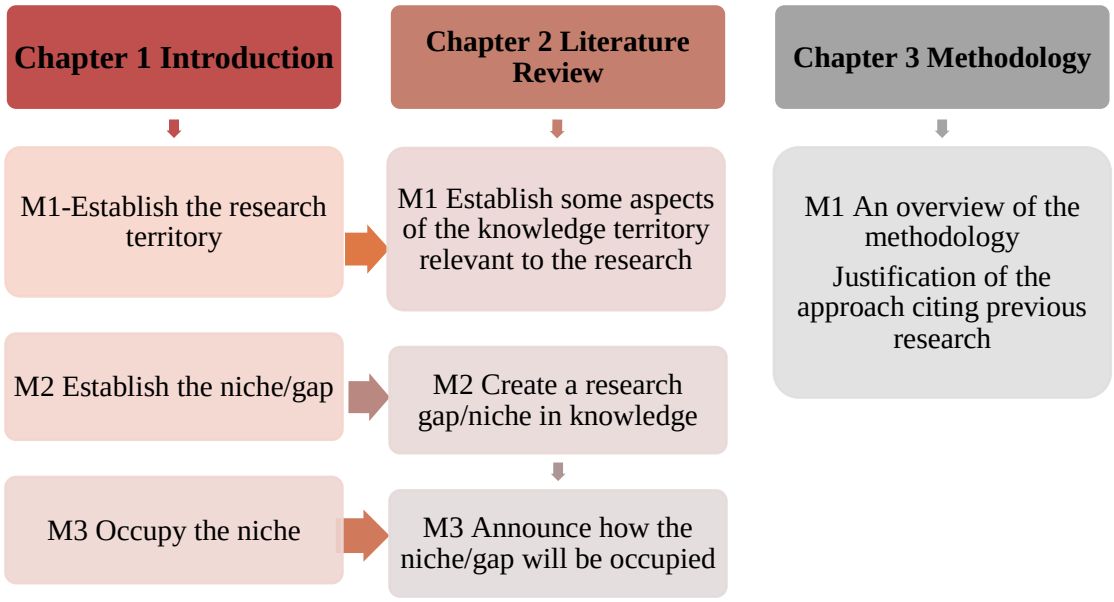
So far, Richard had understood that apart from describing and justifying the approach, in his Methodology Chapter, he needed to explain why we adopted a specific theoretical framework, and that served to back up his decisions and refined his research questions, but there was another challenge to come to the analysis. Richard had lacked in explaining his analytical framework. The seminar professor explained the importance of the analytical framework (AF), gave some instances, and asked Richard and classmates to research and choose an AF.

In the following class, Richard explained that he was planning to use a Content-based analysis. In the end, after listening to his classmates' plans, he changed his mind and decided to use a thematic analysis. This made me think about the importance of collaborative learning, on how we collaborated to learn from each other and grow.

During the interview, Richard had claimed that he could see how his RQs, LR, and methodology had affected one another. However, it was time to check whether these relationships were stated in his Thesis Chapters. When Richard accepted to be part of my

research, he kindly gave me access to his thesis chapters to carry out the Moves analysis I present in this thesis. According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007), certain moves are present and seem to be repetitive in the Introduction, the LR, and the methodology chapters; however, they aim to connect these three chapters. In Figure 4.1, I illustrate the moves that link Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

Figure 4.1 Linked moves for the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters



In Table 4.1, I collected excerpts of Richard's thesis chapters to illustrate better how he linked his thesis chapters.

Table 4.1 Moves Analysis: Linking Richard's Introduction, LR, and methodology chapters

Chapter 1	Richard's thesis
Moves and sub-moves	Instances
Move 1. Establish the territory. b) Introduce aspects of previous research in the area	Even when divers investigations about the factors that influence the thesis development process has been discussed as in Reynolds & Thompson (2011), Dowd, et al (2018), and Dwihandini, Marhaeni, & Suarnajaya's (2013) papers;
Move 2Establish the niche a) Indicate a gap in previous literature b) Raise a question about previous research c) Identify a problem or need d) Extend previous knowledge	…there is still a lack of deeper investigation at the undergraduate level as well as the research is mainly oriented in a foreign context and other areas of study.
Move 3 Occupy the niche a) Outline purpose, aim, and objectives of the present research b) Specify the research questions/ hypotheses. c) outline the theoretical perspectives/ positions d)describe the methodology and design of the research	….this investigation in the area of professional development and research is necessary to understand the challenges that […] Students face to engage with a thesis development based on a critical thinking analysis so it can be made some suggestions to boost students' engagement with the thesis development. This thesis has as the general objective of explaining why Students face challenges to engage with a thesis development … RQ1. What factors influence students' decision to elaborate a thesis as a graduation modality in the …? RQ2. How do critical thinking factors contribute to the students' performance in conducting academic research? RQ3. How can students' engagement be boosted to develop a thesis at…? As it is expected to catch the complexity of a thesis development process, a Case study was chosen for this purpose.
Chapter 2	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 Establish the knowledge territory c. A presentation of research evidence (e.g. findings, methodology).	No instances
Move 2 Create a research gap in knowledge	Several studies have been conducted to know the challenges students face, and most of them agree with the poor or even lack of research knowledge background of the students …

a) A critique of knowledge claims, issues, and problems associated with b) A presentation of research evidence about Move 2a. c) An identification of gap(s) in knowledge and/or research.	
Move 3 Announce how to occupy the research gap or niche a) Aim of the research study c) Research design and process	For this purpose, this study considers a critical thinking analysis of the factors that influence the engagement of thesis development. First, it defines … Then it addresses the student's challenges -internal and external- to write a thesis based on a critical thinking analysis.
Chapter 3	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 An overview of the methodological approach c) a justification of the approach, citing previous research	…the main purpose of this study is to explore the Students' challenges to engage with a thesis development. … a qualitative approach was chosen for this investigation. a case study is suitable for this study to catch the complexity of a thesis development process due to it takes descriptive-interpretive elements more seriously by having an affinity toward descriptive goals

In Chapter 1, Richard established the connection by pairing Moves 2 and 3 from Chapters 1 and 2. However, I found something interesting, Move 1 is present in Chapter 1, but not in Chapter 2. According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007) and Bitchener (2010), in the Literature Review Chapter, sub-move 1-a has the purpose to introduce the theories, concepts, definitions, and constructs related to the topic under investigation, and sub-move 1-b aims to establish the significance of the study. Richard included these first two sub-moves, but he did not include move 1-c which is meant to connect what had been done to what needs to be done by providing a critical analysis of previews research.

In section 2.4.2 Doing Literature Review, I cite Hart's (1998) words highlighting the importance of criticism when reviewing the literature to gain new perspectives and

applications of the existing theories and research on a topic. A critical analysis assists writers to establish their stances. I think Richard needs to elaborate more on his theoretical framework in terms of being more critical. Personally, to be critical of someone's research paper is difficult for me. I think that a cultural issue came up because criticism has a negative connotation in Mexico. When I started writing this thesis, I must say that was playing a very passive role as a researcher and was just presenting information without questioning and judging, and this might be Richard's case, too

Another possible explanation for the omission of sub-move 1.c in Chapter 2 might be the lack of understanding of the thesis genre and the academic metadiscourse for this genre, as stated in the first part of the analysis concerning the challenges. In the end, Richard understood and learned from the existing link between his Introduction, LR, and methodology chapter and how these affect his thesis writing process, and it is just necessary to learn more about the thesis genre and how different the moves or functions serve to connect his chapters, using the appropriate metadiscourse.

4.2.2 Nancy's Case

Nancy is a 33-year old married woman with two children. She has worked for six years as an English teacher mainly with high school and university students. She claimed having enrolled in the master's program to improve her possibilities to get a better job and to develop professionally. Apart from the challenges she faced when writing her thesis, she reported problems coping with her multiple roles as a student-mother.

When conversing with Nancy, she told me that she had chosen her research topic when she read an article related to novice teachers' challenges. Her research topic emerged when she found interesting information that she related to her personal experience. She

commented that when she started reading some other articles on this topic, she paid close attention to the research questions they answered, and formulated her initial RQs.

When she started doing the review of the literature, she realized that she was misunderstanding some terms such as novice, in-service and pre-service teachers so she modified her initial research questions. When I asked her whether she could see any relationship between her RQs and her LR chapter she commented:

> "Yeah, I consider they have because in my literature review, I give some examples of previous papers, and my research questions […] they are trying to answer or they want to know about the same topic, but in the Mexican context"

By November 2020, Nancy had finished her first complete draft of Chapter 2. During the second class observation, she talked about the challenges and insights gained when writing the LR chapter. She said something important that has to do with how she identified the research gap, she said:

> "…it was difficult to find the right articles [...] It was disappointing to see that we haven't done much research on that in Mexico."

This may mean that Nancy found her research gap and started formulating her research questions as she was reading the existing literature on the subject matter. In section 2.3.2 Formulation of Research Questions, I wrote about the techniques to find the gap and express it as RQs, and Nancy used the technique of *Application spotting* because she wanted to complement, expand and find new applications of the existing literature, applied to a new setting (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2013).

As the interview continued, I enquired whether she could perceive any of the relationships between her RQs and her methodology. Then, she took a moment to reflect and said:

> "yeah, I think so, because the methodology goes with the type of my participants, and how I'm going to carry out this investigation and how I'm going to get the information that I need"

The way she answered and the fact that she was reflecting in silence for some seconds, make me believe that she realized the connection between previous studies and her own. Then, when I asked to comment on how she perceived the relationship between her methodology and her LR chapter she claimed:

> "The connection between them is that in chapter three, I wanted to know what is happening here in Mexico, and in my literature review, I have what has been researching. So with chapter three, I have different options. So I can make a comparison between what has been done and what I'm doing, or maybe what has happened in other places, and what is happening in Mexico."

Nancy also mentioned that after choosing her methodology, she reformulated her RQs again, and she was planning to review Chapter Two to make some changes.

When we were talking about her experiences and insights, I feel that Nancy was joining the dots and reflecting on how her thesis chapters were connected. However, it was time to analyze and look for the Moves that state these connections. Table 4.2 shows the instances I found.

Table 4.2 Moves Analysis: Linking Nancy's Introduction, LR, and methodology chapters

Chapter 1	**Nancy's thesis**
Moves and sub-moves	Instances
Move 1.Establish the territory. b) Introduce aspects of previous research in the area	
Move 2Establish the niche e) Indicate a gap in previous literature	Unfortunately, in Latin America, there is little research about novice ELT experiences in their first years after entering the profession, especially in Mexico in public education.

f) Raise a question about previous research g) Identify a problem or need h) Extend previous knowledge	
Move 3 Occupy the niche a) Outline purpose, aim and objectives of present research b) Specify the research questions/ hypotheses. c) outline the theoretical perspectives/ positions d)describe the methodology and design of the research	…this research aims to investigate what are the challenges novice teacher encounter in their first years in the ELT profession in secondary schools in the public sector. This research attempts to report the early experiences of novice teachers and the transition phase, how they overcome such situations. RQ 1: What challenges do in-service English Foreign Language teachers face as they transition into the classroom? RQ 2: How do in-service EFL teachers overcome those challenges? RQ 3: What are the factors ….? The research for this investigation will use a qualitative methodology as a multiple case study in order to draw conclusions about novice teachers and their early experiences in the ELT profession.
Chapter 2	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 Establish the knowledge territory c. A presentation of research evidence (e.g. findings, methodology).	…as it is observed in other studies (Cadavid Múnera, Díaz Mosquera, & Quinchía Ortiz , 2011; Sinem GENECa, 2016; Morales Cortés , 2016 ; Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2018) that recall a mismatch between what happens in real context, real language classroom and what is taught about how to teach a foreign language.
Move 2 Create a research gap in knowledge a) A critique of knowledge claims, issues, and problems associated with b) A presentation of research evidence about Move 2a. c) An identification of gap(s) in knowledge and/or research.	In Mexico the research been carried out is mainly about the implementation of teaching English in public primary schools and national program (Davies, 2007…) There are a few studies on teaching English in public secondary systems… The finding is consistent with several related studies…
Move 3 Announce how to occupy the research gap or niche	No instances found

a) Aim of the research study c) Research design and process	
Chapter 3	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 An overview of the methodological approach c) a justification of the approach, citing previous research	It was decided that the best method for this investigation is case studies which are found in a number of different social science disciplines as well as the practicing …

To start with, I could not identify the Move1-c in Chapter 1 because Nancy only used parenthetical citations, defining terms and theories, but the connection between previous research and her study was not clear. A possible explanation is the lack of knowledge on the use of metatext or metadiscourse. As Mauranen (1993) explains metadiscourse is a rhetoric strategy used to organize the content on the text and comment on it; it helps to guide readers through the text.

It is important to consider that during the second-class observation, she commented that it was difficult for her to find the experts as well as relevant articles on her topic. Moreover, in the previous section, 4.1.1 Challenges when Writing the Literature Review Chapter, Nancy said she had struggled to move from the conceptual to the theoretical framework, and this may result in the omission of this Move 1-b. Kivunja (2018) explains that the conceptual framework comprises the concepts, empirical research, principles, constructs, methodologies, and worldviews whereas the theoretical framework is a sub-set of the conceptual framework which serves to make sense of the meaning of the data and to analyze and discuss our findings.

I noted that when she wrote about previous research, she did not discuss the findings in terms of what remains to be done, the research gap. Thus, her theoretical framework seems to be a set of summaries; for instance:

> In another study, Sandoval Flores (2009) explores the different options secondary school teachers (whether normales or universities) choose to become inserted into the public school system and how these options affect their teaching practice. The findings indicate that both profiles encounter the same challenges being group control, discipline, respect. The universitarios faced mostly subject matter problems, as in some cases they have to teach subjects that are not related to their B.A degree.

Nancy failed in including a critical analysis of the theories related to her research topic. In the words of Bacha (2010), critical analysis and evaluation of the relevant studies on the topic are essential to define the gap and occupy the niche. Bacha also highlights the importance of the organizational structure that assists readers to understand the purpose of the study. Thus, I think there are three important issues: the urge to learn more about the thesis genre, the purposes of the theoretical framework, and critical analysis.

With respect to Move 2 in Chapter 2, this was established when she wrote that there is little research on the topic, in Mexico. In Move 3, she occupied the niche by stating the purpose of her research and her RQs. I also could observe that in Chapter 2, she is quoting different authors from the ones in Chapter 1.

Turning now to the link between Chapter 1, 2, and 3, Nancy included the moves that link Chapter 1 and 3; however, she did not announce how she was planning to occupy the research gap in Chapter 2, and how her theoretical framework assisted her to make an important decision when choosing her methodology. Boote and Beile (2005) claim that a good LR is "the basis of both theoretical and methodological sophistication thereby improving the quality and usefulness of subsequent research"(p.4). When conversing with

Nancy, she claimed that her research aimed to apply and expand on others' research, but in a different context; nonetheless, she failed to establish this link in Chapter 2.

4.2.3 Carol's Case

Carol is a 33-year old woman, married and with two children. Having graduated as an English teacher, she has gained ten years of experience, working mainly with junior high school in private institutions. She enrolled in the master's program with the purpose of getting better job opportunities and professional growth. Carol's research is on English Mexican teachers' emotional experiences in private and public schools. Similar to Nancy, Carol also expressed having had difficulties coping with her student-mother role.

During the interview, I could perceive that she was willing and eager to share her experience as we conversed for about an hour. It was the interview that lasted longer than planned. Carol told me that it was difficult for her to choose her research topic since there were several interesting topics that she had learned from during the master's program. She commented:

> "I realized that one of the motivations that made me get out of my previous work was that I was so upset with some situations, with some with some events, emotional events […] And, I didn't …I didn't want to take it like really personal But definitely, it is an issue that we are not aware of, but it is pretty important".

In the end, she decided to research on teachers' emotional events due to her personal experiences. Then, when I asked Carol if she had to reformulate her RQs, and whether she perceived any relationship between her RQs and Literature Review. She mentioned:

> " […] when I restructured my second chapter, I could see the information, like the whole picture, […] I could have an organized content of my chapter. So when I did that, I checked my research questions, and I have to change them again."

Having read her conceptual framework in-depth, Carol was able to narrow down her study and get to more concrete questions. It is word mentioning that by the time she was asked to submit the first draft of her Methodology chapter, Carol was still making important decisions on her theoretical framework. Working on Chapters 2 and 3 simultaneously, she realized that her research questions were then linked to her conceptual framework, but not with the theoretical one. She explained:

> "I was not sure if my instruments were answering my research questions. So when I realized that, I checked my research questions again, and I realized that all my research questions were focused on one single instrument, and then I said: what am I doing than the other two instruments? They have no purpose. So I thought, there is something wrong here. I was missing an important theory from my theoretical framework that was emotional geographies! And as a consequence, my first to instruments were useless".

As novice researchers, I think that one of the nemesis for novice researchers is to understand the differences and purposes of the conceptual and theoretical framework. In Carol's case, these difficulties resulted in the selection of unsuitable instruments to collect her data at the beginning. What is more, in class and during the interview, she accepted that she did not know how to analyze the data. In the words of Kivunja (2018) the theoretical frameworks "comprises the theories expressed by experts in the field into which you plan to research, which you draw upon to provide a theoretical coat hanger for your data analysis and interpretation of results" (p. 46). When I used the terms narrow or poor conception of the literature and methodology chapters, I refer to the lack of understanding of the differences and purposes of these sections, which necessarily affect one another.

When carrying out the Moves analysis, looking for instances, the findings confirm that even when Carol understood the relationships between her RQs, literature review and methodology, she could clearly include the moves that state the connections. Firstly, she did

not introduce aspects of previous research concerning her research topic, raise a question about previous research, nor identify a problem or need. As explained in section 4.2 Challenges when writing a thesis, Carol claimed that she was planning to review Chapter 1 after concluding with the Result chapter because her LR and methodology had suffered several changes. I think that Carol noted that she did not have the information she needed to write the last version of the Introduction Chapter; therefore, she decided to wait. Unfortunately, I was not able to analyze her last version since this investigation was carried out during the time they took the Thesis Seminar I and II.

In Chapter 2, Carol established the knowledge of the territory by including research evidence such as findings and methodologies used in previous research. She also established and occupied the niche, but she failed in announcing the research design and process in connection to her theoretical framework. Even when in Chapter 3, she included Move 1c to justify the methodology in relation to the Theoretical framework, she did not in Chapter 2; therefore, the relationship between these two Chapters is not clear.

Table 4.3 Moves Analysis: Linking Carol's Introduction, LR, and methodology chapters

Chapter 1	**Carol's thesis**
Moves and sub-moves	Instances
Move 1.Establish the territory. b) Introduce aspects of previous research in the area	
Move 2Establish the niche i) Indicate a gap in previous literature j) Raise a question about previous research k) Identify a problem or need	Nevertheless, most of the recent research information in the field of emotions belongs to psychological studies that analyze the emotional influence of the situations on individuals

l) Extend previous knowledge	
Move 3 Occupy the niche a) Outline purpose, aim and objectives of present research b) Specify the research questions/ hypotheses. c) outline the theoretical perspectives/ positions d)describe the methodology and design of the research	I am interesting is studying the most salient emotions that teachers' face from the interactional relationships with others and how they manage these emotions or these, in turn, modify their teaching practice. The current study investigates the most frequent emotions faced by teachers as a result of the sociocultural interpersonal interaction with the individual involved in the teaching-learning process … No instances describing the methodology
Chapter 2	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 Establish the knowledge territory c. A presentation of research evidence (e.g. findings, methodology).	Recent studies established that teaching is also an emotional practice (Hargreaves, 2001; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Golombeck & Johnson, 2013).
Move 2 Create a research gap in knowledge a) A critique of knowledge claims, issues, and problems associated with b) A presentation of research evidence about Move 2a. c) An identification of gap(s) in knowledge and/or research.	Unfortunately, there is little research about the role of emotions in teaching in Mexico (Lengelin & Mora Pablo;2016) and in the way emotions, especially teachers´ emotions are related to teaching performance (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).
Move 3 Announce how to occupy the research gap or niche a) Aim of the research study c) Research design and process	Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify the common situations in secondary in Mexico that trigger to emotional critical moments on teachers considering a sociocultural approach, to further understand the impact of these emotions over the teaching practice itself. No instances were found for research design and process
Chapter 3	
Moves and Sub-moves	
Move 1 An overview of the methodological approach	…considering these previous aspects and the aims of this study, a narrative inquiry design will follow in order to understand the

c) a justification of the approach, citing previous research	perspectives of teachers´ emotions during critical moments and the impact of these emotions over the teaching practice.

Interestingly, the importance of the seminar class as a space to reflect and learn from others' experiences and the role of a thesis supervisor arose over the conversation again. Carol's commented that it was in the thesis seminar classes when she reflected and realized that she was using the wrong methods and she needed to choose an Analytical framework. Concerning her thesis supervisor, she helped Carol to reflect by questioning her decisions and making some suggestions.

When the interview was about to end, Carol rightly said "this is a process, we can't get to our research questions, and go directly to our literature review, and then to our methodology", Carol learned that thesis writing is not a linear process, it is a reflective, learning and iterative process.

In general, the findings of this study showed that Richard, Nancy, and Carol underwent an important number of Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological challenges when writing their Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters that had significant implications in terms of establishing relationships among their chapters.

I would like to conclude this chapter by highlighting that important issues arose from their individual cases such as the importance of raising thesis genre awareness, critical analysis, lack of understanding of the differences between the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, the several functions of the literature review and methodology, lack of knowledge and practice of the academic metadiscourse as well as the importance of the role of the thesis supervisor (see Filippou et. al, 2021; Harwood & Petric, 2018; Strauss, 2012; Li & Wang, 2008 for more).

Thus far, I have studied each case to illustrate how the challenges reported by Richard, Nancy, and Carol affected their thesis writing process. A summary of the findings of this study; together with the implications, is provided in the next chapter. I will also discuss the insights that may contribute to the understanding of the challenges face by master's students and the process of thesis writing.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions

In this chapter, I first summarize and discuss the main findings and conclusions of this research to give answers to the research questions stated in Chapter 1. In the second part, I highlight the pedagogical implications that resulted from the conclusions. I give some suggestions that may result useful to ease the task of thesis writing not only for students but also for Thesis Seminar teachers, thesis supervisors, and the language faculty. In the third section, I comment on the limitations of my study and subsequently make some recommendations for future work. To conclude this chapter, I share my reflections on how I lived the thesis writing process as a master's student and as a researcher.

5.1 Summary of Results

As pointed out in Chapter 1, the main goal of this Case Study was to investigate the challenges that a group of Master's students faced during the journey of thesis writing, and how they overcame them. This study also set out to investigate MA students' perceptions of the relationship between the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters as well as the influence they have on one another. The investigation was carried out during the time students were coursing Thesis Seminar I and II. The research questions were addressed employing class observations, a move analysis of the chapters under investigation, and semi-structured interviews.

5.1.1 Results on Challenges

To answer my overarching question, regarding the challenges that master's students faced when writing the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters, I used the

LMCO challenge Framework (Chen, et al., 2015). The findings revealed that at different levels, all of my participants faced Linguistic, Methodological, Conceptual, and Ontological challenges that affected the writing of these three chapters.

a) Linguistic Challenges

Based on the analysis, the linguistic challenges that my participants faced are more connected with the unfamiliarity with the thesis genre and metadiscourse than with lexical and syntactic problems. Regarding vocabulary, sentence pattern, and accuracy, they reported having used grammar checkers and/or online writing assistants as well as academic phrase banks. However, the Move Analysis of the chapters showed an inadequacy in using metadiscourse for thesis genre to organize some sections of the chapters. Kaplan (2001, cited in Chen, et al., 2015) suggests that these linguistic challenges may be the result of students' native language and cultural influence that prevent them from using a linear and direct form of writing required in English for this genre. Linguistic challenges were observed in the three chapters analyzed which may have affected the connection between them.

b) Methodological Challenges

It seems that students were far more concerned about the Methodological Challenges since all of them reported having problems when scoping, analyzing, synthesizing, and discussing the literature. These types of challenges were mainly reported when students were crafting the Literature Review Chapter. Scoping challenges were observed when students said having had difficulties finding and filtering relevant literature for their studies as well as defining a workable scope. They acknowledged feeling overwhelmed with the extensive readings. Additionally, they had problems extracting and understanding the main concepts

that would serve to choose their theoretical frameworks. These results reflect those of Shahsavar and Kourepaz, (2020) who also found that Turkish postgraduate students were not able to synthesize, critique, or explain the literature and they merely summarized others' research. As I see it, it is the result of what Chen, et al (2015) called conceptual challenges.

c) Conceptual Challenges

In connection with Conceptual challenges, the study unveiled that at the beginning students were not aware of the significance and functions of each chapter. They learned little by little about the several functions of each chapter, and that might have resulted in the long hours of writing and editing, as they reported. For instance, in Chapter 2, sections 2.4 and 2.4.1, I explained that the LR is more than an exhaustive summary of connected topics and described the several functions of this chapter. Boote and Beile (2004) claim that postgraduate students often have a misconception of what literature entails and that "writing a substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive thorough, sophisticated research" (p. 3) When it comes to the Introduction and Methodology chapters, it seems that students' conceptions of the importance and functions for these chapters were misconceived as well.

d) Ontological Challenges

On the subject of Ontological challenges, the study displayed that aligned with methodological and conceptual challenges, students struggled to present a critical analysis on others' research and well as their views. Chen, et al. (2015) highlight that "beginning researchers often find it difficult to differentiate between views of their own and those of the article authors" (p.13). Students' ontological challenges might have stemmed from the lack

of confidence and experience to shape their arguments and stands. In addition to the fact that Academic writing is traditionally perceived as impersonal for many scholars, and this may prevent novice researchers from clearly stating their points of view.

Taken together, these results add to the body of literature on Challenges encountered when writing a master's thesis to better understand the process where not only students are involved but also thesis seminar teachers, thesis supervisors, and the language faculty.

5.1.2 Linking the LR, RQs, and Methodology

This thesis was set out to analyze how MA students perceived and stated the relationship between the Introduction, Literature Review, and Methodology chapters. The second research question that led this investigation is: *How does the writing of the Literature Review chapter influence their Research questions?* The findings reported here suggest that at the beginning, students' research questions led to the search of the literature. Nonetheless, not before doing the review of the existing literature could students reformulate their research questions to more stable versions. I observed that students used the method that Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) called gap-spotting since they investigated overlooked areas to contribute to the body of knowledge and/or applied theories to expand them and find new applications. Interestingly, students reported having reformulated their RQs after choosing their methodology, displaying an important connection between the LR and the Methodology with the RQs.

My third RQ aimed to analyze in what manner their methodological selection was influenced by doing the Literature review. Participants acknowledged having perceived a close connection between the LR and the RM. In Chapter 1, it was stated that the literature review is a comprehensive and critical review of the existing published work, and it

incorporates the theoretical framework. As described by Kivunja (2018), the theoretical framework is the summary of all the theories and concepts from the existing knowledge on a subject(s) that assist researchers to have the bases for the analysis and interpretation of the research data. Even when at the beginning, it was challenging to understand the significance of their theoretical framework, they realized that a suitable TF was essential to analyze and discuss their findings. As described in the challenges section, students experienced methodological and conceptual challenges that not only affect the writing of the LR and methodological chapters but also their conceptualization of these chapters.

My last research questions tried to explore to what extent the writing of the research questions, literature review, and methodology influence one another. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that participants reported having found strong correlations between these three elements engaging in the constant improvements of their chapters. Firstly, they reported that their RQs served to start with the review of the literature. Then, the literature review resulted in the reformulation of their RQs. At the time of doing the LR, students also learned about the importance and function of the theoretical framework which assisted them in the selection of their methodologies and to refine the RQs again.

In this research, participants acknowledged that the Literature review chapter was the most challenging to write. In the end, I believe that the writing of these three chapters was a reflection in action over and above a learning-by-doing process.

5.2 Implications

This research provides significant implications for master's students, thesis seminar teachers, thesis supervisors, and the language faculty.

a) For students

Regarding challenges, Master's students are required to commit themselves to play an active role to enhance their academic writing and research skills. It would be advisable to enroll in academic writing workshops or courses to learn about conventions and the metadiscourse used in this specific genre. Additionally, it would be beneficial the use important handbooks on thesis writing for nonnative speakers of English, like the ones written by Swales and Feak (1994) Paltridge and Starfield (2007; 2019), and Bitchener (2010), to assist the process of writing.

b) For the Thesis Seminar Teachers

Writing a master's thesis is not a straightforward task. Nonetheless, the process may be less stressful when students have the appropriate guidance and feedback. Thesis seminar teachers may use a Genre-based approach (GPA) for teaching thesis genre, highlighting the several functions and links among the thesis chapters. In doing so, conceptual challenges may be addressed and prevent misconceptions. Aligned with a GPA, I consider that the reflection-in-action teaching approach may also be beneficial to foresee the challenges, think on future actions, provide and receive feedback, and promote genre awareness.

c) For Thesis Supervisors

An emerging topic was the guidance and influence of thesis supervisors. As Harwood and Petric (2018) state, "supervisors have their own preference and beliefs about appropriate supervisory pedagogies" (p. 2). Indeed, the findings reveal that supervisors play an important role in students' decision-making process, and a timely intervention, and feedback may be crucial to locate the weaknesses and strengths of the study. The commitment and constant

communication between supervisors and supervisees are essential to achieve a common goal, the thesis completion and this is recommended. Existing research recognizes the critical role played by supervisors in thesis writing (Harwood & Petric 2018), how supervisors perceive their roles and the models of supervisory pedagogies (Filippou et al., 2021; Dysth, 2002), the supervisory experiences, challenges and the interaction between supervisors and supervisees (Strauss, 2012). Thus, my recommendation is for the supervisors to be aware of the importance of their role to make the guidance a pleasant learning and a satisfactory experience.

d) For the Master's Program

The Master's program may promote the use of an ESP genre-based approach (GBA) in teaching academic writing to contribute to learners' writing development and increase genre awareness. It would be fruitful to offer an extracurricular GB writing course where master's students would learn about the writing conventions, functions (moves), and metadiscourse for the thesis genre, strengthening their academic writing and research skills. This may help to overcome the linguistic, methodological, conceptual, as well as ontological challenges.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of this study is the small number of participants; which might reduce the generalizability of the study. Although it is based on a small sample, this investigation offers valuable insights into the challenges of writing a master's thesis and a holistic view of individual cases or stories. Thesis writing is unique for the individual and this study allowed me to present a deep panorama of the challenges faced. It would be naive

to pretend that this study serves to make general conclusions; however, it enriches the understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Another limitation of the current study is the lack of the final versions of the thesis chapters under study. Unfortunately, thesis writing is a long-term process and students worked at different paces, so at the time I collected the thesis chapters, participants had not concluded their theses. Thus, I did not have the opportunity to analyze the final versions of their thesis chapters, but their final drafts to be evaluated in their seminar. Results could have possibly been different if I had looked at final versions. However, as I was also an MA student and needed to finish my thesis on time, I could not wait for the final versions. This, however, gives the opportunity to develop further research on final drafts (see coming section).

5.4 Directions for Further Research

The questions raised in this study were focused to study the type of challenges and possible relationships between the Introductory, LR, and Methodology chapters. The results may trigger deeper investigation into the undelying issues.

For instance, concerning challenges, this study revealed that students faced important conceptual challenges related to the significance of several functions of the LR and methodology chapters, which prevented them to clearly state the existing connections of these. Thus, a further exploratory study could be undertaken to learn more about postgraduate students' conceptions on the functions and connections of these two core chapters. A mixed method approach could be used, and data could come from surveys applied to a big sample and supported by in-depth interviews.

Thesis Genre was a second major topic that emerged in this investigation. It would be worthy to investigate and compare MA program authorities, Thesis Seminar teachers' and

master's students' perceptions about the benefits that a Genre-based Instruction may bring to master's program. A qualitative research may serve to gain understanding about the prevalent teaching approach among thesis seminar teachers and students' views on GBI. The data could derive from interviews and surveys.

A further study could also deal with exploring more the supervision practices. To complicate the matters further to my study, it would be interesting to investigate the type of supervisory relationship between my participants and their supervisors to explore how this may have affected their theses writing process. In the end, I insist that further research on MA thesis supervision as part of thesis writing process is recommended.

Last but not least, an autoethnographic study might be an interesting future research deriving from writing this thesis. I did research on thesis challenges at the same time I was experiencing this process. As I mentioned in section 3.5, we may live the same event, and yet the experience is at a personal level and somehow is unique. I have not reported on my own challenges, views, reflection on the process and perhaps doing research on the topic has made me aware of other aspects my participants were not conscious about. Olmos-López, and Tusting (2020) aver that "an authoethnography is both a process of research, and a way of developing new insights into the personal (…) academic literacies processes and events that we have encountered in differing academic and social contexts" (p 266). By looking back and reflect on my own journey, I would share my experience which may serve others in their endeavor of writing their thesis or doing research on thesis writing.

5.5 Personal Reflection

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research emerged from my personal experience and difficulties when writing research papers. I committed myself to learn from the challenges

that thesis writing entails and the effects that these may have on the writing of core MA thesis chapters such as the Introductions, the LR and the methodology chapters.

At the beginning of this research journey, I had several misconceptions about the functions of the thesis chapters under study, plus my lack of knowledge of the thesis genre and other embedded issues. When I first learned about the LMCO challenge framework, I could understand the reasons behind my own challenges, and that helped me make important decisions and changes regarding to the writing of my LR chapter and the selection of my methodology.

When researching about Thesis Genre, I grasped the importance of the metadiscourse to organize and state the moves or functions that connect the sections of this thesis, and I could solve several of my linguistic and methodological challenges. Concerning my ontological challenges, I have to acknowledge that I still have problems expressing my opinion and writing a critical review on someone else's papers. This challenge may be the result of my lack of experience and knowledge of critical analysis. However, being aware of my weaknesses is the first step to address the problems.

As a researcher, the more I read about challenges and the more I learned about how these challenges which in my case, affected my process of thesis writing. I consider that this research may serve to raise awareness on the possible benefits of a genre-based approach to assist master's students to overcome some of these challenges in the future. In the end, this is a reflection-in-action process, and I feel I have become a better writer and researcher.

To conclude, as a novice writer and researcher, I sometimes take for granted that my readers understand my texts, but this is not always the case. Therefore, it was important the constant feedback and guidance on behalf of my supervisors. Personally, I feel fortunate since my supervisor used what Dysth (2002) called, *partnership model*. That is, we worked

together on this thesis, so the supervisory relationship was more symmetric than asymmetric. By holding regular online meeting, she provided me not only insightful feedback, but also a genuine discussion. She helped me to become more critical and independent thinker; moreover, I always retained the sense of ownership of my research. Definitely, this was a journey of self- growth at a professional and personal level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Observation Format

Observation format		
Date of observation: November 19th, 2020 **Number of session:** 1	Duration of the observation 49.23 minutes	Participant: Richard
Purpose of the session: to discuss the insights from the review of the Literature, and the challenges they faced when writing the Second Chapter.		
Challenges in writing the Literature review		
Direct quotes		

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What's your full name?
2. How old are you?
3. What's your marital status? Do you have any children?
4. How long have your worked as an English teacher?
5. Why did your enroll in this Master's program?
6. How did you get to your research topic? Why did you decide to research on that topic?
7. How challenging was to write the introduction chapter?
8. What steps did you follow to write your RQs?
9. Did you have the need to go back and rewrite your research questions, Why?
10. What was the most challenging part when writing your Literature Review, I mean your Second Chapter?
11. How did you overcome those challenges?
12. Do you think there's relationship between your RQs and LR? How are they related?
13. Now, I'd like you to tell me thirst chapter, what were the challenges of writing the methodology chapter?
14. How did you choose your methodology?
15. Do you think there is a relationship your RQ and methodology? How?
16. Do you see your methodology related to your Lit Review?
17. From your first three chapters, was there any section that you have to rewrite the most? Why?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

(FULL INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS UPON REQUEST)

1.	Researcher: What's your full name? Richard: My name's […]
2.	Researcher: How old are you? Richard: 27
3.	Researcher: What's your marital status? Do you have any children? Richard:S ingle, No
4.	Researcher: How long have your worked as an English teacher? Richard: I've been working for almost seven years.
5.	Researcher: Why did you enroll in this Master's program? Richard: Well, we want to upgrade my skills and learn more about English language teaching and, of course, being a master's, I consider that I just have a degree so I can get a better job.
6.	Researcher: How did you get to your research topic? Why did you decide to research on that topic? Richard: Well, I decided to do my research on research about the challenges to why students face challenges, and this is because this is someone issue that I've seen with friends and ex classmates that I considered it's important to make a research. And as I said, I… I saw this problem, I'm really interested to know why they face challenges, why they don't like writing that thesis. So what's the main issue they face? So that's the main reason I am interested to thesis writing. That was my reason
7.	Researcher: How challenging was to write the introduction chapter? Richard: It was not so challenging because I have experience for writing the thesis of a BA thesis, so it was not so difficult and number one was develop at the beginning with professor Michael Written, so it was not so difficult. We have the all the advice and guides also for Professor Fatima and my thesis supervisor. He also guided me during all the process. So it was kind of easy. Chapter one.
8.	Researcher: What steps did you follow to write your RQs? Richard: In order to get my research question, I think what I did with my supervisor was to write first my thesis title and based on that thesis title, I, we decided to make the specific objectives based on that title. So based on those specific objects, I decided to write a research question in all that.
9.	Researcher: Did you have the need to go back and rewrite your research questions, Why? Richard: Yes, because first I needed to change my theory because I needed to write what was going to be the theory that I wanted to use in the Chapter two. So I need to rewrite that part of the … the research question, research questions number two and then in the methodology, I also decided to change the research question because it was focused on all academic papers. Then I decided to just narrow the study, just focusing on thesis writing.
10.	Researcher: What was the most challenging part when writing your Literature Review, I mean your Second Chapter?

	Richard: Well, the first challenge that I faced was to decide the theory, because I didn't understand the critical thinking theory that might suggested me, but also before that I remember, I have to decide what kind of theory, critical thinking or autonomous learning. And it was difficult because they didn't guide me so properly because they were telling one author and then another author. So after reading a lot and understanding that theory in order to start writing Chapter two. Also another challenge that I faced is the updated resources because as we're in the pandemic, we don't have the library, so we have to look for … look for… resources online and some of them are not updated, or they are pulled by another author, so I have to look for the base of studies. That was another challenge because we don't we don't have the. I don't know how to say them, the culture looking deeper for the information.
11.	Researcher: How did you overcome those challenges? Richard: Well, how did I overcome them? Well, the lack of resources, I just have to look deeper, look more pages, and of course, checking in another kind of website, for example, Sitehop, trying to unlock some research that I need it, not take them on what they what they wrote. How did I overcome another challenge of the theory, just reading and using one chart that Professor F… gave us. Reading, choosing the specific part, the main idea, and I'm paraphrasing and then paraphrasing those paraphrase phrases to give my own voice.
12.	Researcher: Do you think there's relationship between your RQs and LR? How are they related? Richard: Well, because, as I mentioned, the first question are based on what I was going to develop in Chapter two, so first I need to develop that research question and then start writing based on those research questions my literature review take into consideration all the research questions.
13.	Researcher: Now, I'd like you to tell me thirst chapter, what were the challenges of writing the methodology chapter? Richard: Academically speaking, my first challenge was to decide what kind of methodology to use and of course, looking for the participants, the type of methodology, the survey, look all that kind of challenges that face. And another challenge that I faced was to try to link if you read all the Chapter two with Chapter two, there was another challenge that I faced because I needed to explain how was related Chapter two and Chapter three with a critical thinking theory.
14.	Researcher: How did you choose your methodology? Richard: Well, I decided my methodology based on my supervisor advice, he guides me a kiss, which I mean, what kind of [illegible], what kind of instrument methodologies and instruments apply that [illegible] . I only try to adapt because of the pandemic, too.
15.	Researcher: Do you think there is a relationship your RQ and methodology? How? Richard: Yes, there's a relation. Well, how is the relation between my research question and Chapter three. Well chapter three is …decided to… focus on the challenges they face, so methodologies trying to answer this question, the question number three on say, what are the challenges that students are facing based on the critical thinking? So, as I mentioned, based on critical thinking, I developed the

	questions and the literature review is based on their research questions is like a kind of chain research question is focused on Chapter two. Chapter two is linked to Chapter three. And that's why my research questions are kind of linked with all these chapters
16.	Researcher: Do you see your methodology related to your Lit Review? Richard: Well, in the Chapter two, I explained about the critical thinking and the the main challenges students face to write a thesis. So in chapter three, what I did is make a core analysis and nuclear analysis based on the literature review. So I took from there to review all these challenges and I put them into categories in two dimensions the internal factors, the factors and institutional factors and those dimensions in into categories that I explained in the literature review. So what I made to link in Chapter two and Chapter two is based on these categories, develop the questions for my instrument so we can say that the question that I'm asking is related with them, with the categories I explain in literature review.
17.	Researcher: From your first three chapters, was there any section that you have to rewrite the most? Why? Richard: Well, I'm a section that I considered to write again and again were more rewrite, improve is, of course, Chapter two, because I consider I need more updated, more known sources more bases for my leader to review and also some kind of structure trying to avoid a run on of sentence in the literature to review.