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Responses to Earlier Literature in Research Article Introductions: A Rhetorical Study in Applied Linguistics

Warsidi^{1*}
Abd Halim²
Alfiandy Kamal¹
Nur Mutmainna Halim²
Zifirdaus Adnan³
Iskandar Abdul Samad⁴
Andi Muhammad Irawan⁵

¹Department of English Literature, Faculty of Teacher Training, Education, and Literature, Universitas Islam Makassar, Makassar 90245, INDONESIA

²Department of English, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar 90224, INDONESIA

³Department of Indonesian Studies, School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, University of New England, Armidale 2351, AUSTRALIA

⁴Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh 23111, INDONESIA

⁵Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang 25131, INDONESIA

Abstract

Given that researchers aim to publish in prestigious journals, understanding the rhetorical organization of such publications is crucial. While this topic has been extensively studied, existing research has yet to explore how authors in reputable journals engage with prior literature. To fill this gap, the present study intends to analyze how research article authors respond to other earlier literature in their research article introductions (RAIs) published in reputable international applied linguistics journals. This study aims to achieve two objectives: to find out to what extent responding to other earlier literature is important in RAIs, and to discover what types of response authors employ in their RAIs. To achieve these goals, this study employed combined descriptive qualitative and quantitative approaches for analyzing 40 RAIs published in Q1 journals as data sets in the present study. Then, a new analytical framework was designed to respond to the above objectives. The

* Corresponding author, email: warsidi.dty@uim-makassar.ac.id

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results indicated that responding to other earlier literature is obligatory in RAIs published in reputable international applied linguistics journals. In responding to other earlier literature, authors employed three types of response: either extending other earlier studies, modifying other earlier studies, or establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge. This study offers theoretical contributions by expanding the understanding of how research article authors engage with prior literature within their RAIs. Its practical implications include guiding researchers on effectively utilizing prior literature to establish their research agenda when publishing in reputable journals.

Keywords: Reputable applied linguistics journals, research article introductions (RAIs), responding to other earlier literature, setting the current research agenda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since academic authors intend to publish their research articles in reputable journals, comprehending and employing the convention of rhetorical patterns of the journals becomes crucial. The purpose is to make journal gatekeepers accept their academic works for publication. Rhetorical structure is a way of rhetorically organizing texts to achieve authors' communicative purpose (Bazerman, 2004; Swales, 1990). In this regard, studies on the rhetorical structure of research article introductions (RAIs) have been conducted worldwide. For example, rhetorical studies have been investigated in English RAIs (Alharbi, 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2021; Xiaofei et al., 2021) and Indonesian RAIs (Warsidi, 2024). Besides, such studies have also been investigated to discover evaluative stances (Loi et al., 2016; Xu & Nesi, 2019b), engagement resources (Xu & Nesi, 2019a), and research themes (Saeedi et al., 2023). These studies suggest that convincing journal gatekeepers using the convention of the rhetorical structure of the purposive journals is pivotal to getting submitted research papers accepted and published.

However, although the ways of convincing journal gatekeepers have received much scholarly attention (Caputo, 2018; Gilliland & Cortina, 1997), few studies intended their investigation explicitly on how authors responded to other earlier literature within RAIs, while this way is important because it may convince journal gatekeepers that authors' current research has valuable novelties. Considering this need, this paper attempts to investigate how article authors of reputable applied linguistics journals responded to other earlier literature in their current RAIs. To realize this intention, the researchers formulate the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the importance of responding to other earlier literature in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals?
2. If responding to other earlier literature is important, what types of responses do authors replay to other earlier literature in RAIs?

This study offers theoretical contributions by expanding the current understanding of the RAI genre within reputable journals. Practically, the findings may inform researchers' strategic use of prior literature within RAIs, particularly in establishing a compelling research agenda for publication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review aims to scrutinize types of responses to earlier literature and review studies on communicative functions and events within RAIs.

2.1 Types of Response to Other Earlier Literature

Referring to an earlier model, the create a research space (CARS) model (Swales, 1990), as a theoretical base, this study categorized responses toward other earlier literature into three

types: *Extending* other earlier studies or improving the existing knowledge, *Modifying* other earlier studies, and *Establishing* a new method, idea, or knowledge. In this regard, *extending* other earlier studies or improving the existing knowledge is the type of response that uses previous studies to further develop or enhance existing knowledge found in earlier literature. It is in line with Move 3 of the CARS model, where the researcher occupies the niche to expand the scope of current knowledge (Swales, 1990). Then, *modifying* other earlier studies means that authors use previous studies to offer modifications to adjust the existing knowledge base. It corresponds with Move 2 of the CARS model, where authors identify issues in prior research and then modify them in their research (Swales, 1990). Lastly, *establishing* a new method, idea, or knowledge is a type of response that uses other earlier literature to find out what is missing or absent in the literature. It corresponds with both Move 2 and Move 3, because authors both discover research gaps and propose a new method, idea, or approach (Swales, 1990).

These three types of responses are essential for advancing academic research because they may contribute to the evolution of knowledge and reflect the dynamic nature of academic discourse. In genre studies of RAs, these three types of response are important for understanding how new research contributes to or reshapes knowledge development, using rhetorical strategies in academic writing, particularly in constructing and negotiating academic identity (Hyland, 2004). To facilitate the analysis of data using these three response types, Table 1 in the Data Analysis subsection provides detailed descriptions.

2.2 Studies on Communicative Functions and Events within RAs

Studies on rhetorical structures, both specific communicative functions and events, have received much scholarly attention. Our reviews show several scholars investigating a specific communicative function or event, for example, a claiming centrality in RAIs (Abdi & Sadeghi, 2018; Wang & Yang, 2015), promotional discourse in RAs (Afros & Schryer, 2009; Warsidi, 2023), establishing a niche in RAIs (Amnuai, 2021; Lim, 2012), indicating a gap in RAIs (Suryani et al., 2015a), justification of research instruments (Lim, 2014), research questions (Ghanbar & Rezvani, 2023), research keywords (Shokri et al., 2022), and research titles (Hyland & Zou, 2022; Jiang & Hyland, 2023; Kerans et al., 2020). More review details of the investigation on a specific communicative function and event are described in the following paragraphs.

Abdi and Sadeghi (2018) analyzed a claiming centrality in English RAIs published in applied linguistics disciplines, whether article authors tend to use salience, magnitude, topicality, or problematic in making claiming centrality. All the corpora were written in English by two different language background authors, one corpus was written by English native authors (L1), while the other corpus was written by English second language authors (L2). This study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with a specific focus on finding the frequency and type of centrality claims made by each group. The results showed that both data sets tend to employ this communicative event to promote their RAs. In this regard, they tended to employ silence appeals more than the other types of appeal. However, L1 authors employed this type more than L2 authors. This finding is different from RAIs published in reputable journals in the discipline of applied linguistics as authors tend to employ a magnitude type of appeal, which means that authors tended to promote their RAs implicitly (Wang & Yang, 2015). Thus, although these two findings have different types of appeal, they indicate that promoting the importance of current research topics to the audience is very important because the majority of RAIs employed a claiming centrality. These findings imply that to better adjust writing with those of native speakers, instruction in English for publishing purposes (EPP) is needed for non-native English speakers.

Investigation on one communicative function in RAs also has been investigated focusing on promotional discourse in two related disciplines, language and literary studies (Afros & Schryer, 2009). The analytical approaches included systemic functional linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, metadiscourse, evaluation, and genre theory. However, the analysis only focused on finding promotional elements within the corpora. The results revealed that most authors promote their RAIs by claiming centrality, presenting the interestingness of the current

study, and showing the novelty of the current study to their target audiences. Then, they promote their discussion section by either comparing, contrasting, or supporting their findings with literature. In this regard, citations become very important. After that, they promote the conclusion section by presenting their claims, constructing agreements with readers, and concluding their analysis results. These findings indicate that all these communicative strategies are significant in promoting RAs in these two selected disciplines.

Furthermore, an analysis of one communicative function also has been conducted to find out how a niche establishment is employed in 30 English RAIs in the management discipline (Lim, 2012). However, the analysis was only focused on two communicative steps: indicating a research gap and adding to what is known according to Swales (2004). For the analysis, this study used linguistic signals highlighting the absence of research, limitations of previous studies, or the need to continue a research tradition. The results showed that to establish a niche, most authors of the corpus tend to use indicating a research gap more than employing adding to what is known; 96.7% of the corpus employed indicating a research gap, while only 20% of the total corpus employed adding to what is known. This finding means that indicating a research gap is quasi-obligatory and more important than adding to what is known to establish a niche in RAs.

A more specific and deeper analysis was conducted to find out rhetorical strategies to realize the research gap in reputable international applied linguistics journals (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). The analysis only focused on the linguistic features used to establish gaps by highlighting, coding, and classifying them according to six strategies to communicate research gaps (Arianto et al., 2021). The findings showed that of six rhetorical strategies, two of them (presenting inadequate previous studies and contrastive previous research findings) are the most dominant in the study. This finding indicates that presenting the weaknesses of other earlier studies is the most employed strategy to discover a research gap. Then, authors of Q1 journals tend to indicate research gaps more than the lower quartile journals, such as Q2, Q3, and Q4. In realizing finding research gaps, they tend to employ adversative conjunctions (such as however, has yet not been detailed, etc.) and adjective modifying conjunctions (such as limited research, less attention, little evidence, etc.). This study may significantly contribute to designing teaching materials and create novice writers' awareness about the ways of writing RAs published in reputable international journals. However, these findings only focused on research gaps in the applied linguistics discipline, so the results cannot generalize other disciplinary RAs.

The reviews above show that rhetorical structures of RAs have been widely investigated, including investigation on particular communicative functions or moves. However, although many scholars have investigated a particular communicative function and event, none of them investigated how authors responded to other earlier literature within RAs. In our point of view, understanding the ways of responding to other earlier literature is very significant because it may show the substantial value of research papers to journal gatekeepers (Lim, 2012; Swales, 1990; Warsidi et al., 2024). Based on this rationale, thus, this study intends to conduct the present study by answering the research questions as presented in the introduction section.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This research used a genre approach or corpus of RAs for the analysis (Swales, 1990) as likely employed in earlier studies (Warsidi, 2022; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024; Zainuddin & Shaari, 2021). However, it used descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches for reporting the analysis results. In this regard, a quantitative approach was used to count any statements indicating authors' responses to other earlier literature in their RAs and to report them in a table form, and it is to answer the first research question. Then, the descriptive qualitative approach was employed to analyze and discover any statements indicating authors' responses to other earlier literature in their RAs, and it is to answer the second research question. The reason for employing these combined approaches is that using all of them together for analyzing and

reporting data can create more convincing results compared to one approach alone (Warsidi & Adnan, 2024).

3.2 Corpus Selection

In this study, 40 RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals are selected as data sets because these numbers are considered to have represented the corpus in this selected discipline as likely in earlier studies (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023; Hilmi & Afifi, 2021). Besides, these numbers are higher compared to earlier studies employing only 20 RAs (Afros & Schryer, 2009) and 8 dissertations as corpus (Zainuddin & Shaari, 2021). For selecting these corpus numbers, selection criteria are employed to achieve high-quality papers. Thus, standard criteria for selecting high-quality journals were employed. Firstly, the journals are published in English and Scopus-indexed journals with Quartile 1 (Q1) because this category is considered high-quality journals. Secondly, the journals with the Scimago Journal Ranks (SJR) of 0.51 or above are indexed in the Web of Sciences (WoS) because these ranks are considered to have a high-quality standard. Thirdly, the journals are in the disciplines of applied linguistics. After employing these criteria for selecting journals, four journals were determined: *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *Applied Linguistics*, and *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

To meet 40 RAIs as corpus studies, 10 articles were selected from each of the above-selected journals. In this regard, standard criteria for selecting articles from the four selected journals were also determined. Firstly, the articles from the above journals were published in the last five years, published from 2018 to 2023. Secondly, the articles are empirical research, not theoretical research. To identify this type, the articles contain a method section. Thus, when an article does not have a method section, it was neglected and not selected in this study. After employing these standard criteria for selecting high-quality journals and articles from the selected journals, 40 RAIs were determined for the data sets in the present study. These data were analyzed using procedures as presented in the following sub-section.

3.3 Data Analysis

Because during our review there was no earlier study on how authors respond to their literature review in their RAIs, a new framework was designed using earlier theoretical grounds (Adnan, 2011; Swales, 1990; Warsidi et al., 2024) to analyze data in this study. In this regard, the framework contains three possible ways to respond to other earlier literature: extending other earlier studies or existing knowledge, modifying other earlier studies, and establishing new methods, ideas, or knowledge. This framework was designed based on genre analysis and observation of literature review within the introduction section of Ras. The results were noted and used to design this framework. More details about this framework are described in Table 1.

Table 1. A framework to identify authors’ responses to literature review in RAIs.

Responses to Literature	Examples	Description of the examples	The processes for identifying responses to literature
Response 1: Extending other earlier studies or improving the existing knowledge	“The literature review above shows However, during my review, none has compared English and Indonesian application letters to date Thus, by conducting the present study, the results will contribute to theoretical and practical genre studies in application letters ” (Warsidi, 2022)	In this regard, studies on application letters have been conducted, but none compares English and Indonesian application letters. This means some similar research has been carried out, but the author of this paper intends to compare application letters in English and Indonesian. Thus, the author extends research that has been carried out previously.	Reading the introduction section focusing on what authors review within the RAIs; Identifying the summary of the reviews , and a research gap statement within the RAIs; Highlighting and coding any signals indicating responses to literature;

Table 1 continued...

			Assuring the meaning and context of the responses that extend other earlier studies
Response 2: Modifying other earlier studies	Most previous studies using one of these techniques for phraseological studies of language tend to generate a list of all the phraseological units (bundles or P-frames, respectively) in a corpus and then proceed to further analyze or classify these into, for example, functional categories. In the present study, we instead combine techniques... 11	The author in this example combines techniques that are commonly used in applied linguistics. The signal word 'combines' means that authors modify the techniques.	Reading the introduction section focusing on what authors review within the RAIs; Identifying the summary of the reviews , and a research gap statement within the RAIs; Highlighting and coding any signals indicating responses to literature; Ensuring the meaning and context of the responses that modify other earlier studies.
Response 3: Establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge	However, no scholar has investigated this issue during our review..... Thus, in this study, we intend to investigate	Note, since there is no description or related research from the review, the study may indicate a study with a new idea, method, or concept.	Reading the introduction section focusing on what authors review within the RAIs; Identifying the summary of the reviews , and a research gap statement within the RAIs; Highlighting and coding any signals indicating responses to literature; Ensuring the meaning and context of the responses that are to establish a new method, idea, or knowledge

To ensure the validity of the above framework, it was tested against the data in the present study. In this regard, the three types of responses in Table 1 were analyzed in the data sets to discover their existence. Then, to determine the levels of importance of types of response in RAIs, this study also employed a standard approach from other earlier studies (Warsidi, 2021, 2022, 2023; Warsidi et al., 2023; Ye, 2019). For example, it is to determine whether a type of response within a corpus is obligatory, quasi-obligatory, conventional, or optional. By employing these standard criteria, a type of response may become easily categorized, and thus, the results may convince readers about to what extent responding to other earlier literature is important in RAIs published in reputable international journals.

Table 2. The classification levels of importance (Warsidi, 2021, 2022, 2023; Warsidi et al., 2023; Ye, 2019).

Levels of importance	Ranges of percentage appearance
Obligatory	100%
Quasi-obligatory	81%-99%
Conventional	61%-80%
Optional	Less than 60%

To ensure that the analysis results are valid and reliable, three researchers (all three are majoring in applied linguistics, and one of them has expertise in genre analysis in RAs) discussed their comprehension regarding the above framework as an analytical guide before conducting the data analysis. After they had agreed with the framework above, one of them analyzed the data using the framework. Then, the other two re-checked and re-analyzed the analysis results to ensure that the results were on the right track until they met an agreement about their analysis results. However, once the results of the analysis were different between them in justifying types of response, a discussion was conducted to reach an agreement. At the end of the analysis, their

differences were measured using comparative statistics of variances. Then, the results of their agreement regarding the analysis revealed that the p-value is lower than the alpha value (0.5), which means that their difference is not significant.

4. RESULTS

After analyzing the data of the present study, the results revealed that responding to other earlier literature is obligatory in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals because it appeared in all data (100%). It is distributed in three different ways: by either extending other earlier studies, modifying other earlier studies, or establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge. However, of these three responses, authors tend to extend other earlier studies more than the other two types of response. For more details of our analysis results, Table 3 and Figure 1 present a summary of the analysis results.

Table 3. The summary analysis results of responding to other earlier literature in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals.

Authors' responses to their literature	Numbers of RAIs	Percentages	Levels of importance
Response 1: Extending other earlier studies or improving the existing knowledge	33	82.5%	Quasi-obligatory
Response 2: Modifying other earlier studies	4	10%	Optional
Response 3: Establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge	3	7.5%	Optional

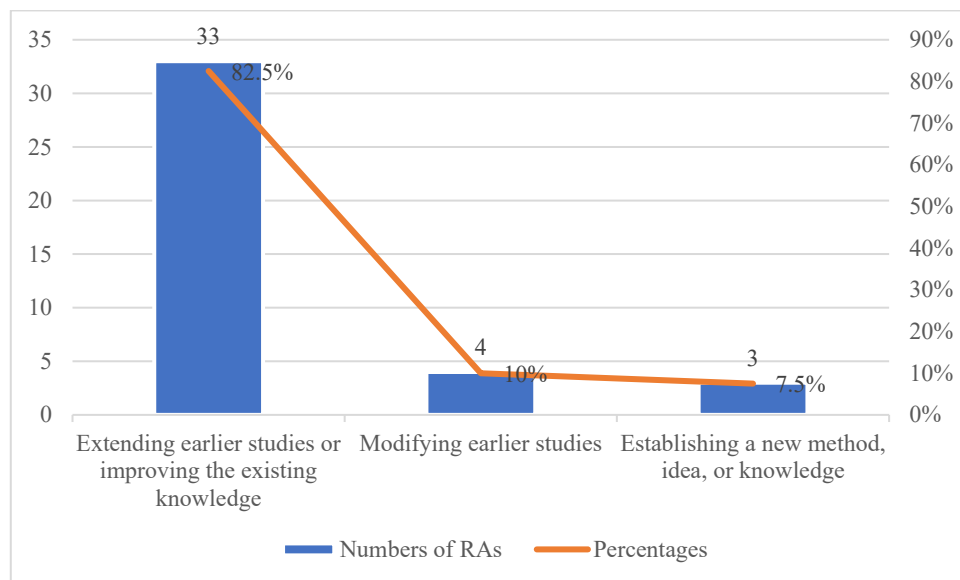


Figure 1. Authors' responses to their literature within their RAIs.

As presented in Table 3 and Figure 1, responding to other earlier literature is obligatory in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals. To respond to other earlier literature, the authors have three possible ways. However, most authors tend to extend other earlier studies (82.5%) and then followed by modifying other earlier studies (10%) and establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge (7.5%). More details about the findings of the authors' responses to their literature review are presented in the following subsections.

4.1 Response 1: Extending Earlier Studies or Improving the Existing Knowledge

Extending other earlier studies or knowledge is the most dominant response to other earlier literature in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals. This response type appears

in 33 of 40 RAs and indicates quasi-obligatory in this study. The ways authors extend knowledge are exemplified in the following findings:

- Ex.1: **There is, however, little empirical work on playful talk in EMI classrooms** (e.g. Jakonen et al. 2018) or playful talk through translanguaging..... **To address this research gap, this study examines how translanguaging is employed by the teacher (male) to create playful talk** in the EMI classroom to accomplish his pedagogical goals in the lessons. 03
- Ex.2: **Although the findings in relation to conversation structure..... There is, then, a need for more data, and a greater focus on multi-person interactions** (conversations between a child and more than one CP) as well as dyadic interactions (conversations with a single CP). **In this study, we were interested specifically in exploring whether the conversational patterns previously reported would stand up to scrutiny in a larger cohort** of children using aided communication and the extent to which these patterns are consistent across dyadic to multi-person interactions. 04
- Ex.3: However, compared with other areas of learner language such as grammar, **the pragmatics of spoken communication is still an under-researched area** in second language acquisition (Bardovi-Harlig 2013; Callies 2013). **This article, therefore, focuses on one of the core pragmatic skills in speaking, the expression of an epistemic stance.** Despite the vital role of epistemic markers (EMs) in everyday communication (Biber et al. 1999; Ka"rkka"inen 2003; Bygate 2009), they have not been studied systematically in L2 spoken production, with studies on the use of pragmatic markers (PMs) by L2 speakers having been typically based on one type of speaking task and carried out with L2 speakers from one linguistic background (cf. e.g. Mu"ller 2005; Fung and Carter 2007). 05

As exemplified in Ex.1 to Ex.3, some signal words are both bolded and underlined to indicate the meanings of extending knowledge that authors employ. In Ex.1, the authors claim 'there is only little empirical work' from other earlier studies, and thus, they intend to examine similar topics in a different context. In this regard, they further investigate the topics in different environments, which means that authors extend other earlier studies. In Ex.2, as underlined, the authors intend to re-examine a previously reported pattern, which indicates extending knowledge. In Ex.3, the authors state that 'pragmatic study on oral communication' is limited, and thus, they focus on investigating pragmatic skills of speaking. Thus, the three examples indicate that the authors respond to other earlier literature to develop knowledge or expand previous studies in their present research. By doing so, they can make their current research agenda and their research may create a contribution both theoretically and practically.

4.2 Response 2: Modifying Other Earlier Studies

This type of response is the second most employed in the present data (four of forty). In this regard, authors modify or revise either concept, design, method, or technique found in other earlier studies. The ways authors modify other earlier studies are exemplified as follows:

- Ex.4: **Most previous studies using one of these techniques** for phraseological studies of language tend to generate a list of all the phraseological units (bundles or P-frames, respectively) in a corpus and then proceed to further analyze or classify these into, for example, functional categories. **In the present study, we instead combine techniques commonly applied** to single-word studies (where a small set of linguistic items are selected for further, detailed analysis) with a phraseological approach, focusing on a small set of phraseological units: in our case, high-frequency discontinuous sequences used for highlighting purposes. That is, this project combines a formulaic approach to analyzing highlighting strategies and a discourse-based perspective on the usage pattern of these discontinuous sequences..... 11
- Ex.5: **Such interactions may seem conflicting with the use of corpora and corpus tools**, as most studies of corpus tools to date have considered **one-on-one interactions between learner and tool** that do not foster communication between learners (e.g., Park, 2012; Park & Kinginger, 2010; Yoon, 2016a, 2016b). **In the current study, corpus-based tasks were designed by the instructor for pair and group work, so that learners could engage with the target language and with each other as they used corpora and concordances to reach conclusions about language patterns** (see Appendices A and B). When used in such ways, corpora and corpus tools could play a key role in the CLT classroom, helping students achieve communicative competence and increase their language awareness. 36

- Ex.6: Note that **many current grammar textbooks have treated only the regular MVS group, ignoring the obvious fact** that MVSs are divided into two groups (e.g., Aarts, 2011; Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002; Huddleston & Pullum, 2005; Swan, 2016). **Our framework for developing the corpus-based grammar textbook adopted here relies on two things:** four corpora and descriptions of English grammar proposed by linguists working in the field of theoretical linguistics. **Based on these two things, this article empirically demonstrates** why the corpus-based grammar textbook about the irregular MVS group is essential for both learners and teachers. 38

As exemplified in Ex.4, authors currently combine techniques of studies, which means that they modify techniques of previous studies. In Ex.5, authors debate other earlier studies that only employ corpus-based studies, and they then modify between corpus-based-study and classroom settings (pair and group works). In Ex.6, the authors modify a grammar framework based on two things: corpora and theoretical description. All these examples imply that authors modify other earlier studies.

4.3 Response 3: Establishing a New Method, Idea, or Knowledge

This way is hardly found in the present data because it appears only in three RAIs, and thus, it is optional. Here are the examples found in the data:

- Ex.7: **To bridge the gap** between internationally oriented ELF research and studies into explaining with a focus on content knowledge in less heterogeneous settings, **we propose an analytical tool called Exploratory Interactive Explaining (EXINTEX)**, which synthesizes research into explaining in mono- or bilingual contexts with insights from multilingual and multicultural learning spaces. This article therefore begins by contrasting educational talk in EMEMUS with bilingual teaching in secondary schools. 06
- Ex.8: To the best of my knowledge, **there are no studies that specifically address the issue of the levels of language proficiency** that teachers and learners need to have if EMI is to be successful. **The current project aims to fill an important gap in our knowledge** about the vocabulary levels that children in EMI primary schools possess, and how these relate to their reading skills. 08

Authors in the Ex.7 above propose a new analytical tool for analyzing research data. In Ex.8, authors claim no earlier study addressing language proficiency, and then, they fill this gap. This example implies that the study is new because there is no earlier study discussing the issue. Thus, these two examples are the ways of establishing a new method or knowledge.

In summary, responding to other earlier literature is pivotal and obligatory in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals because our data analysis showed that all authors propose responding to their literature in their RAIs. Authors employ three possible types of response in their RAIs: either extending other earlier studies, modifying other earlier studies, or establishing a new method, ideas, or knowledge. However, of the three types, authors tend to 'extend other earlier studies or expand knowledge' more than the other two types.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis results revealed that responding to other earlier literature is obligatory in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals. This finding implies that research article authors in reputable applied linguistics journals must review other earlier literature in their RAIs. By responding to other earlier literature, their study may contribute to other earlier studies for knowledge development and become useful for their readers. Besides, their current study may create a sustainable innovation for their research (Cillo et al., 2019). To do so, authors may indicate research gaps found in other previous literature, and they then intend to propose their research topics by filling a research gap, as also found in reputable international applied linguistics journals investigated in Arsyad and Zainil (2023). This finding may be also the reason why long earlier findings in English RAIs, create a research space model (CARS), which aims to create a new opportunity for innovating current research (Swales, 1990, 2004). This communicative step is also common in RAIs in various disciplines, such as in computer sciences journals (Suryani et

al., 2015b), 29 of 30 English RAIs in management journals (Lim, 2012), 34 of 40 English RAIs in international applied linguistics journals (Amnuai, 2021) and mostly appeared in applied linguistics journals (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023), 33 of 40 Scopus-indexed English language teaching journals (Arianto & Basthomi, 2021), etc. To realize a research gap, international authors tend to review inadequate other related research from a certain viewpoint (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023). Concerning this, Chinese and British academic authors set their rhetoric to convince their readers that their RAs are needed by their international community, but while Chinese authors realize this way implicitly by employing some references, British authors realize it explicitly by examining earlier works and phenomena (Xu & Nesi, 2019b). All these other earlier studies indicate that indicating a gap in RAIs is an important communicative step to set future research agendas, and thus, authors can set their current research agenda.

In responding to other earlier literature, our data analysis results revealed that authors realize it using three types of response; they are either extending other earlier studies, modifying other earlier studies, or establishing a new method, ideas, or knowledge. However, our analysis suggested that extending other earlier studies is much a more dominant type used by authors than the other two types. The reason for these findings may be that extending earlier research is much more realistic and reasonable to establish for further research than the other two types. Another reason may be a preference for journal guidelines or journal reviewers. Extending earlier findings also appear in a business model, called the evolutionary business model (Inigo et al., 2017). The present finding seems similar to business innovation, on the one hand, but it is different from the other, on the other hand. For the similarity, it is likely to new product development that extending earlier products may provide more advantages than conducting radical innovation in the context of business collaboration (Bouncken et al., 2018). In contrast, the use of this type of response is not sufficient to achieve sustainable business goals (Cillo et al., 2019). In business, innovation focuses more on reviewing pre-existing literature and then emphasizes producing higher values and creating more collaboration (de Vasconcelos Gomes et al., 2018), and thus, creating radical innovation may be needed by companies to create a fast-growing development to produce more revenues.

Establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge, on the other hand, is only employed in three RAIs in the present study, which means that this type of response is hardly found in the present data. The reason may be that authors face more challenges and struggles. Also, they may need more effort to propose a new method, idea, or knowledge because it is much more complex and needs more imagination to contribute to future research. Because of these concepts, thus, they tend to extend other earlier studies to create their current research agenda rather than proposing a new method, idea, or knowledge. In business industries, establishing a new method is a radical innovation and seems more difficult to establish because while evolutionary innovation aims to improve either propositional values of the existing products or services, this type of response aims to design a new propositional value or a new business model (Inigo et al., 2017), and again, it is also more challenging than extending earlier products. In a new technology for future cars, as another example, establishing a new method, idea, or product is also very complex because it is only realized when it is associated with four variable systems: scientifically and technically accepted by customers, industrially accepted by stakeholders, commercially low prices and maintenances, and politically and socially accepted by government and customers (Chanaron, 2020). All this evidence indicates that establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge is very complex and hard to realize, and it may be also the reason why the authors in the present study tend to avoid establishing a new method, idea, or knowledge in their RAs.

In short, responding to other earlier studies related to the current research topics is obligatory in RAIs. This finding implies that responses to earlier literature must be employed by article authors when writing RAIs. Then, in the ways to respond to other earlier literature, the present research finding is the evidence that most authors tend to extend or improve other earlier studies more than the other two types. In realizing this response, most authors fill the existing gap, such as exemplified in Ex.1. The reason for this finding is possibly that extending or improving other earlier studies is the easiest way to set the current research agenda. This reason is in line with a finding in business industries that improving propositional values of a product or

service is easier than designing a new propositional value or business model (Inigo et al., 2017). Another reason may be the preference of journal guidelines, reviewers, or editors that may require authors to create innovation in their research (Warsidi & Adnan, 2024). Thus, the present finding is logical and consistent with findings in various contexts, such as business industry and engineering technology, and these are the evidence that responding to other earlier literature is more achievable to be conducted by extending other earlier studies rather than establishing a new method, idea or knowledge to set the current research agenda in RAIs, particularly in applied linguistics discipline.

This study offers significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to genre studies by demonstrating the essential role of engaging with prior literature in RAIs for establishing a research agenda and potentially refining applied linguistics frameworks. Practically, it offers valuable insights for researchers, students, and scholars, underscoring the importance of strategically positioning their work within existing literature to effectively contextualize RAIs and guide future research. By clarifying how to establish a research agenda through engagement with prior work, this study empowers researchers to construct more persuasive RAIs, enhancing publication potential and research impact. Finally, it informs pedagogical practices, providing a framework for instructing students on strategically engaging with prior literature and positioning their research.

Based on these findings, this study further offers concrete recommendations for both authors and journal editors. Authors seeking publication in reputable venues should explicitly engage with prior work, employing strategies such as extending existing research, modifying previous findings, or introducing novel methods, ideas, or knowledge. This practice aligns with the conventions and expectations of high-impact journals. Journal editors, in turn, should incorporate explicit guidelines within their submission instructions regarding how authors should engage with prior literature. Furthermore, they should consider developing evaluation templates that specifically address these engagement strategies (extending, modifying, or introducing novel contributions), promoting standardized quality in academic writing and facilitating a more transparent and efficient publication process.

6. CONCLUSION

After analyzing 40 RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals, we finally draw two important conclusions in responding to the research questions of this paper. Firstly, responding to other earlier literature is obligatory in RAIs published in reputable applied linguistics journals because all authors (100%) in the present data responded to their literature, and this way indicates that this functional move is obligatory. Secondly, to respond to other earlier literature, authors employed three possible types of response; they are either extending other earlier studies, modifying other earlier studies, or establishing a new method, ideas, or knowledge. However, the majority of them (82.5%) prefer extending other earlier studies rather than the other two types to set their current research agenda.

While this study offers valuable insights, its scope is limited to 40 RAIs from reputable applied linguistics journals, focusing specifically on how authors utilize prior literature to establish their research agenda. Future research incorporating a larger dataset drawn from diverse disciplines and author language backgrounds is encouraged to broaden our understanding of this crucial aspect of scholarly communication.

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