

ABSTRACT

Sindi Julestri 2026. “STUDENTS DIFFICULTIES IN FORMULATING THESIS STATEMENT IN WRITING ESSAY AT THE THIRD SEMESTER OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH BENGKULU” Thesis, English Language Education Study Program Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu

This study aimed to examine the difficulties experienced by third-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in formulating thesis statements and to identify the factors contributing to those difficulties. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design that involved 19 third-semester students. The data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that students experienced difficulties in identifying the main idea, narrowing the topic, developing a controlling idea, organizing arguments, and expressing ideas clearly in thesis statements. The difficulties were influenced by cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors, with cognitive factors emerging as the most dominant. In particular, students experienced difficulties in analyzing topics, developing ideas, and organizing arguments logically. Linguistic difficulties, including limited vocabulary, grammatical problems, and sentence construction, also affected the clarity of thesis statements, while affective factors such as low confidence, hesitation, and writing anxiety contributed to students' difficulties. The study concludes that effective thesis statement formulation requires not only language proficiency but also critical thinking, systematic idea organization, and confidence in presenting academic arguments. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for students and lecturers in improving academic writing instruction and supporting students in developing clearer and more effective thesis statements.

Keywords: Thesis Statement, Students' Difficulties, Cognitive Factors, Linguistic Factors, Affective Factors, Academic Writing

ABSTRAK

Sindi Julestri 2026. “KESULITAN MAHASISWA DALAM MEMFORMULASIKAN THESIS STATEMENT DI KELAS WRITING ESAI PADA MAHASISWA SEMESTER TIGA PROGRAM STUDI PENDIDIKAN BAHASA INGGRIS UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH BENGKULU.” Skripsi, Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kesulitan mahasiswa semester tiga Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu dalam merumuskan thesis statement serta faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 19 mahasiswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menentukan gagasan utama, mempersempit topik, mengembangkan controlling idea, mengorganisasikan argumen, dan menyampaikan gagasan dengan jelas. Kesulitan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh faktor kognitif, linguistik, dan afektif, dengan faktor kognitif sebagai yang paling dominan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa perumusan thesis statement yang efektif membutuhkan penguasaan bahasa, kemampuan berpikir kritis, pengorganisasian gagasan, dan kepercayaan diri. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat membantu mahasiswa dan dosen dalam meningkatkan pembelajaran academic writing.

Kata Kunci: Thesis Statement, Kesulitan Mahasiswa, Faktor Kognitif, Faktor Linguistik, Faktor Afektif, Penulisan Akademik

PREFACE

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His mercy, blessings, and guidance, which have given the author the strength and opportunity to complete this thesis. This thesis, entitled “STUDENTS DIFFICULTIES IN FORMULATING THESIS STATEMENT IN WRITING ESSAY AT THE THIRD SEMESTER OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH BENGKULU,” is prepared as one of the requirements for obtaining a Bachelor of Education degree in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu.

The author realizes that completing this thesis was not always easy and involved various challenges and difficulties. However, with the valuable assistance, guidance, encouragement, and support from many individuals, the author was able to overcome those challenges and complete this thesis. Therefore, the author would like to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to:

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The author acknowledges that this thesis still has some limitations and may not be perfect. Therefore, any constructive suggestions and criticism are sincerely welcomed to improve this thesis. Finally, the author hopes that this thesis will be useful for the author, future readers, and researchers in the field of English Language Teaching. May Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala grant His abundant blessings and rewards to everyone who has contributed to the completion of this thesis.

Bengkulu, 25 July 2026



Author

CURRICULUM VITAE



Sindi Julestri was born in Bengkulu City on July 18, 2002. She began her educational journey at SD Negeri 24 Kota Bengkulu and completed her elementary education in 2015. She then continued her junior high school education at SMP Negeri 06 Kota Bengkulu and graduated in 2018. After that, she pursued her senior high school education at SMA Negeri 04 Kota Bengkulu and completed it in 2021.

In 2022, she continued her higher education in the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. During her undergraduate studies, she actively participated in student organization activities as a member of the English Student Association of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu (ESAMUB). She was also actively involved in the Student Executive Board (BEM) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu for two years, from 2023 to 2025, serving as the Head of the Women's Empowerment Division.

She successfully completed her undergraduate study by conducting research entitled “Students Difficulties in Formulating Thesis Statement in Writing Essay at the Third Semester of English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu.”

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Writing is an essential skill in English language learning, particularly in academic contexts where students are required to express ideas clearly, logically, and coherently through essay writing. In this process, the thesis statement plays a crucial role because it serves as the central idea that determines the focus and development of the entire essay. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students experience difficulties in formulating effective thesis statements, such as identifying the main idea, narrowing the topic, and presenting arguments clearly. Previous research by (Salmiati et al., 2024) indicates that although students demonstrate adequate analytical ability in writing thesis statements, they still face challenges in evaluating ideas and creating clear, focused arguments.

At the English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, this problem is particularly noticeable among third-semester students. Based on lecturers' observations, many students fail to construct thesis statements that clearly express the main idea and controlling idea. Most students tend to write only the topic without specifying their stance or supporting points, resulting in essays that lack coherence, unity, and argumentative clarity. This issue is also reflected in their academic performance, as many students receive grades of B or even C in essay writing, while only a few achieve an A. The phenomenon indicates that difficulties in formulating thesis statements remain a significant obstacle in developing effective academic writing skills among EFL learners.

These problems can be viewed from several theoretical perspectives. From a linguistic perspective, limited grammar mastery and vocabulary constrain students' ability to express clear and precise arguments. From a cognitive perspective, thesis statement formulation requires higher-order thinking skills, particularly the ability to analyze topics and construct controlling ideas. From a pedagogical perspective, insufficient explicit instruction and feedback may contribute to students' misunderstanding of the function and structure of thesis

statements. Therefore, students' difficulties are multidimensional and cannot be explained by a single factors.

Previous research supports this finding. A study by (Salmiati et al., 2024) revealed that EFL students face serious challenges in developing higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), particularly in formulating thesis statements that require analytical and evaluative reasoning. Students often demonstrate weak critical thinking and lack understanding of how to combine the topic and controlling idea effectively. Similarly, Mahmudah (2021) found that students' low English proficiency, limited vocabulary, and insufficient knowledge of sentence structure contribute to their inability to create focused and well-structured thesis statements. Moreover, research by (Uçar & Yükselir, 2020a) indicated that students often confuse thesis statements with general essay topics due to inadequate instruction and minimal feedback from lecturers during writing practice.

Several studies conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts also highlight similar problems. A study at Widya Mandala Surabaya University showed that students' main writing difficulties involve selecting and organizing main ideas and formulating appropriate thesis statements in expository essays (Widya Mandala Journal of Education, 2024) Likewise, (Khusniyah & Ismiatun, 2024) reported that linguistic limitations, lack of writing practice, and insufficient exposure to academic writing models hinder students from constructing effective thesis statements. These findings suggest that the difficulties are both linguistic and pedagogical in nature. In other words, students not only lack grammatical and lexical competence but also struggle with understanding the purpose and function of the thesis statement in essay organization.

Considering the importance of thesis statements in determining essay quality, it is necessary to conduct an in depth investigation into the specific problems faced by students in formulating them. Understanding these difficulties will provide valuable insights for lecturers in designing more effective instructional strategies, such as explicit teaching of thesis statement formulation, increased practice opportunities, and constructive feedback. However, although previous studies have discussed writing difficulties extensively, most of them focus on general writing skills rather than specifically examining thesis statement

formulation as the core component of academic essays. In addition, limited studies have systematically investigated how linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical factors interact in influencing third-semester students' ability to construct clear and argumentative thesis statements. This gap indicates the need for a more focused and contextual investigation. Therefore, this research focuses on identifying the difficulties faced by third semester students of the English Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in formulating thesis statements in essay writing, as well as exploring the factors contributing to these difficulties. The results of this study are expected to contribute to improving teaching and learning strategies in academic writing courses and to help students enhance their writing competence

1.2 Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of these issues, the following research questions are proposed:

1. What are students difficulties in formulating a thesis statement in writing essay?
2. What factors to students' difficulties in formulating a thesis statement?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are formulated to provide a clear direction for investigating the difficulties experienced by students in constructing thesis statements when writing essays in the digital era. Based on the focus of the research, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the types of difficulties faced by third semester students of the English Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in formulating thesis statements when writing essays.
2. To analyze the factors that to students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements, including linguistic, cognitive, and digital related aspects.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. The research is carried out only with third semester students of the English Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu 2025, so the results cannot be generalized to students from different semesters, majors, or universities. Each group of students

may have different levels of writing experience, study habits, and academic preparation. The focus of this research is limited to identifying the difficulties students face in formulating a thesis statement when writing an essay. Other aspects of writing, such as developing ideas, organizing paragraphs, using correct grammar, or maintaining coherence, are not examined in detail even though these aspects may also influence students' writing performance.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically Significance

Theoretically, this study will make an important contribution to the field of academic writing, particularly regarding the challenges students encounter when formulating thesis statements. Previous research has tended to emphasize broader writing difficulties such as, grammatical issues, or general organizational problems yet it has not thoroughly explored how EFL university students, especially those in their third semester, struggle with the more specific task of integrating a topic, an argumentative stance, and a clear controlling idea into a coherent and focused thesis statement.

This study offers a distinct form of novelty by presenting a more targeted analysis of these challenges. It will map students' difficulties across linguistic, cognitive, and instructional dimensions, providing a more nuanced understanding of why thesis statement formulation becomes problematic for EFL learners. Additionally, the study will address how exposure to digital writing tools such as grammar checkers and automated writing systems does not automatically lead to improved performance, thereby challenging assumptions commonly held in recent academic-writing practices.

The findings of this research are expected to enrich existing theoretical perspectives by providing sharper insights into the conceptual and structural barriers students face. Ultimately, this study will strengthen the theoretical foundation for future investigations on thesis statement formulation and contribute to clearer conceptual distinctions regarding the types and causes of difficulties experienced by EFL university students.

2. Practically Significance

a) For Students

This study will provide students with a clearer understanding of the specific difficulties they experience when formulating thesis statements. Because previous studies rarely focused on the deeper problems related to constructing a controlling idea or expressing a clear argumentative stance, the practical contribution of this research lies in helping students recognize these weaknesses more accurately. By identifying the precise sources of their difficulties whether linguistic, cognitive, or related to their writing habits students will be better equipped to improve their writing strategies and develop more effective thesis statements in academic essays.

b) For Lecturers

The novelty of this study offers lecturers more targeted insights into the areas in which students struggle most, especially those involving the formulation of main ideas and controlling ideas. These findings can help lecturers refine their instructional approaches, design clearer explanations of thesis statement structure, and provide more focused feedback during writing activities. Such information will be valuable for adjusting teaching methods so that they better align with the real challenges experienced by students at the third-semester level.

c) For Educational Institutions

For institutions, this study offers practical implications for improving academic writing instruction. The research highlights the need for structured support systems such as writing centers, academic writing workshops, or writing mentoring programs that specifically address thesis statement formulation, a skill often overlooked in curriculum design. The findings may also help institutions strengthen their academic-writing curriculum so that writing instruction becomes more systematic and responsive to students' actual needs.

d) For Future Researchers

This study provides a practical foundation for researchers who wish to deepen investigations into thesis statement formulation or other specific aspects of academic writing. The classification of student difficulties and contributing factors

developed in this study can serve as a reference for designing improved research instruments, comparative analyses, or longitudinal studies. This practical contribution supports future academic inquiry and encourages exploration of student writing challenges in various educational contexts.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and to ensure clarity throughout this research, several key terms used in this study are defined as follows:

1. Students' Difficulties

In this study, students' difficulties refer to the obstacles or challenges faced by third-semester students in the process of formulating a thesis statement when writing an academic essay. These difficulties may include a lack of understanding of the function of a thesis statement, problems in generating ideas, inability to express the main point clearly, limited vocabulary, or confusion in distinguishing between general and specific statements. The term also covers challenges related to students' ability to use digital tools effectively in supporting their writing.

2. Thesis Statement

A thesis statement in this study refers to a sentence that expresses the main idea or central argument of an essay. It serves as a guide for both the writer and the reader by indicating the focus and direction of the essay. A well formulated thesis statement should be clear, specific, and relevant to the topic. In the context of this research, the quality of students' thesis statements is examined to identify the types of difficulties they encounter in constructing them.

3. Essay Writing

Essay writing refers to a form of academic writing that requires students to develop ideas in a structured and coherent manner. In this study, essay writing is limited to the type of writing assigned to third-semester students in their academic writing courses. The focus is specifically on the introductory paragraph where the thesis statement is located, rather than on the ent