

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher presents theories and previous studies related to students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements in academic essay writing. This chapter discusses the concepts of academic writing, elements of writing, the definition and types of thesis statements, Structure of thesis statement and the common challenges students face in constructing them. In addition, this chapter includes relevant previous research, the conceptual framework.

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Writing in Language Learning

in language learning, writing denotes the learner's capacity to convey thoughts, arguments, and data through coherently structured written content in the target language. In second language learning contexts, writing plays a crucial role not only as a final product but also as a process that supports learners' development of academic thinking and language control. When EFL students engage in writing, particularly in formulating thesis statements, they are required to plan ideas, determine a clear stance, and organize their arguments coherently. This process encourages learners to reflect on both content and language use, helping them recognize difficulties in expressing main ideas and controlling ideas in an academic manner. As writing involves continuous interaction between thinking and language, students' limited proficiency and lack of familiarity with academic discourse often result in vague or unfocused thesis statements. Therefore, second language writing becomes a key area where linguistic competence, cognitive processing, and academic awareness intersect, making thesis statement formulation one of the most challenging tasks for EFL learners (Zhang, 2013)

Writing further enhances learners' comprehensive language competence. By engaging in writing exercises, students enhance their vocabulary breadth, grammatical mastery, and discourse skills, all essential for crafting logical academic writings. Current research indicates that writing enables students to link linguistic understanding with practical communication objectives. As pointed out by (Fitriani,

2020), writing deepens comprehension of language structures since learners are required to select exact terms, form correct sentences, and logically sequence ideas aligned with the text's intent. Consequently, writing serves not merely as a communication method but also as a fundamental instructional instrument in EFL classrooms.

1.Essential Elements of Writing in Language Learning

Experts broadly concur that effective writing in a second or foreign language relies on several fundamental components that collaborate to produce clear, impactful, and cohesive written communication. Drawing from the literature and backed by the provided article, the core elements of writing encompass content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

a. Content

Content pertains to the essence of a written piece, specifically how effectively the writer conveys the central idea and expands on it with pertinent, precise, and logically linked details. Superior content showcases the writer's grasp of the subject and skill in elaborating concepts with adequate justification or proof. (A. Fauzan & al., 2022) state that strong content should incorporate applicable knowledge and deliver factual details that explicitly bolster the discussed topic.

b. Organization

Organization deals with the arrangement and structuring of ideas to establish a rational and cohesive progression. This involves employing topic sentences, supporting sentences, and concluding sentences that enhance paragraph cohesion and the overall text's lucidity.(A. Fauzan & al., 2022)highlight that ideas must be arranged methodically to ensure each paragraph exhibits unity and coherence, allowing readers to effortlessly track the writer's reasoning.

c. Vocabulary

Vocabulary concerns the accuracy and suitability of word selection to express meaning. In writing, lexical choices are vital for articulating ideas distinctly. Inappropriate or imprecise vocabulary can result in confusion, needless repetition, or misunderstanding. The research reveals that learners often face challenges in

selecting the right words, encompassing problems like informal language, unwarranted repetition, and errors in word choice (Fauzan et al., 2022).

d. Language Use / Grammar

Language use entails the precise application of grammatical principles to construct structurally sound sentences. This encompasses proficiency in subject-verb agreement, tenses, articles, plural forms, and word structures. Grammatical shortcomings frequently impede clarity and interfere with the text's intended message. Fauzan et al. (2022) discovered that grammatical errors ranked among the most prevalent issues for students, such as mistakes in sentence construction, word formation, and preposition usage.

e. Mechanics (Spelling, Punctuation, Capitalization)

Mechanics refer to the technical facets of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph formatting. Flaws in mechanics can divert readers' attention and diminish the writing's clarity, even if the content and grammar are solid. As noted by Fauzan et al. (2022), numerous students struggle with punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, all of which considerably affect the overall legibility and standard of the written output.

2.1.2 Student Difficulties in Writing

Students' challenges in writing have been widely discussed in recent research, particularly within the context of EFL learning. The following points summarize the key difficulties that students commonly encounter, supported by relevant theoretical perspectives and recent studies.

1. Linguistic Difficulties

Students often struggle with linguistic components such as grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and mechanics. These difficulties hinder their ability to express ideas clearly.

1. Grammar issues, including incorrect tenses, subject verb agreement, article misuse, and sentence fragments, frequently reduce the clarity of students' writing.

2. Limited vocabulary, also makes it difficult for students to select precise and appropriate words when expressing their ideas.
3. Recent studies show that linguistic weaknesses significantly affect the quality of students' written work (Fitriani, 2020)(Fitria, 2020; Fauzan et al., 2022).

This aligns with your thesis statement topic because linguistic weakness directly influences difficulty in formulating clear and accurate thesis statements.

From the perspective of **Second Language Writing Theory** (Hyland, 2003), writing performance in a second or foreign language is strongly influenced by learners' linguistic competence. Linguistic difficulties frequently become a major obstacle for students when constructing thesis statements in English. Many students struggle with grammatical aspects, such as incorrect tense usage, subject–verb agreement errors, misuse of articles, unclear sentence structures, and sentence fragments. These grammatical problems often reduce the clarity and effectiveness of a thesis statement, making it difficult for readers to understand the writer's intended argument. A thesis statement that contains frequent grammatical errors may fail to function as a clear guide for the essay.

In addition, limited vocabulary is another linguistic factor that contributes to students' difficulties. Students with insufficient academic vocabulary often find it challenging to choose precise and appropriate words to express their stance or argument. As a result, the thesis statements they produce tend to be vague, overly general, or merely descriptive rather than argumentative. This condition contradicts the function of a thesis statement as emphasized by (Oshima & Hogue, 2007a), who state that a thesis statement should present a clear and specific claim. Previous studies have confirmed that linguistic weaknesses significantly affect the quality of students' written work (Fitria, 2020; Fauzan et al., 2022). In relation to the focus of this study, linguistic limitations directly contribute to students' difficulties in formulating clear, accurate, and well-structured thesis statements.\

2. Cognitive Difficulties

Writing requires higher-order thinking skills such as organizing ideas, synthesizing information, and forming logical relationships. Many students struggle with these cognitive demands.

1. Students often find it difficult to identify the main idea, determine the focus of their writing, or generate relevant supporting points.
2. Research shows that difficulties in critical thinking and idea development lead to unclear thesis statements and poorly structured essays (Salmiati et al., 2024).

Beyond linguistic issues, students also face cognitive difficulties related to the mental processes involved in writing. According to the Cognitive Process Theory in Writing proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981), writing is a recursive process that involves planning, organizing ideas, translating ideas into written language, and revising. Difficulties at the planning stage often result in weak or unclear thesis statements. Many students struggle to identify the main idea of their writing and to determine a clear focus or position. Some students find it difficult to combine the topic with a controlling idea, which leads to thesis statements that lack direction and argumentative strength. This indicates that while students may understand the topic at a surface level, they often have difficulty developing it into a clear and focused argument. Furthermore, students frequently experience problems organizing their ideas before writing a thesis statement. When students are unable to connect the topic with a clear stance, the resulting thesis statement becomes unfocused or incomplete. Cognitive overload during the planning process may cause students to feel confused about what information should be included and how it should be presented concisely.

Research has shown that weaknesses in critical thinking and idea development contribute to unclear thesis statements and poorly organized essays (Salmiati et al., 2024). In the context of this study, cognitive difficulties explain why students may understand the topic but still fail to produce an effective thesis statement that guides the entire essay.

Cognitive difficulties in thesis statement writing may also influence other aspects of writing. When students are unsure about their ideas, they often experience linguistic problems, such as ineffective sentence construction, as well as affective issues, including low confidence and hesitation in expressing arguments. Therefore, cognitive difficulty can be considered a central factor that contributes to students' overall problems in formulating effective thesis statements.

3. Affective or Psychological Difficulties

Psychological factors such as anxiety, low confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes can interfere with writing performance.

1. Students who lack confidence tend to hesitate when formulating a thesis statement or expressing an argument.
2. Writing anxiety may lead students to avoid complex structures and settle for overly simple or unclear statements.
3. Studies have shown that affective barriers significantly influence students' writing performance in EFL contexts (Karim & Tanjung, 2022).

In addition to linguistic and cognitive factors, affective or psychological factors also play an important role in students' ability to formulate thesis statements. Factors such as writing anxiety, low self-confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes can negatively influence students' writing performance. Students with low confidence often hesitate to express their ideas or take a clear position in writing. This hesitation may result in thesis statements that are weak, unclear, or overly cautious. Writing anxiety can also lead students to avoid complex sentence structures and rely on simple or incomplete statements, which reduces the quality of the thesis statement.

In EFL contexts, students frequently worry about making grammatical or lexical errors, which increases their anxiety during the writing process. As a result, students may focus more on avoiding mistakes than on developing a clear and strong argument. Several studies have indicated that affective barriers significantly influence students' writing performance in EFL settings (Karim & Tanjung, 2022). In relation to thesis statement writing, affective difficulties may intensify linguistic and cognitive problems, making it even more challenging for students to formulate a clear, confident, and well-structured thesis statement.

Preliminary Observation of Students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis Statements

Based on the researcher's preliminary observation conducted in the third semester of the English Department, several difficulties were identified in students' thesis statement writing. This initial observation was carried out by examining students' essay drafts, particularly the thesis statements they produced in academic writing tasks.

The analysis shows that students' difficulties can be grouped into three main categories: linguistic, cognitive, and affective difficulties. To provide a clearer overview of these initial findings, the table below presents a summary of students' observed difficulties in formulating thesis statements.

Student	Writing difficulties					
	Linguistic		Cognitive		Affective	
	Grammar	Vocab	Structure	Critical T	Confidence	Anxiety
Siti Anisa S.	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Adinda Zahra	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Oktamaharani	-	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Revi Prasetyo	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-
Heru Setiawan	✓	-	✓	-	✓	-

Based on the table summarizing the findings from the preliminary observation of third-semester students' thesis statement writing, it can be inferred that students' difficulties do not occur in a single dimension but arise from an interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. This initial observation was carried out through an analysis of students' academic essay drafts, with particular attention given to the thesis statements they produced.

The results reveal that cognitive difficulties appear as the most prominent issue among the students. Many students encountered problems in determining a clear main idea, developing a strong controlling idea, and establishing a clear position before composing their thesis statements. Consequently, a number of thesis statements were overly general, lacked a clear argumentative focus, or failed to function as a guide for the overall essay structure. This pattern aligns with the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981), which

highlights planning and idea organization as essential components of effective academic writing.

Besides cognitive issues, linguistic difficulties were also commonly found. These included grammatical errors, limited lexical resources, and weak sentence construction, all of which negatively affected the clarity and academic tone of the thesis statements. This finding supports Hyland's (2003) Second Language Writing Theory, which argues that insufficient language proficiency in EFL contexts can constrain students' ability to convey ideas accurately and effectively in academic texts.

Affective difficulties were also identified, although they were not always directly observable in the written products. Some students demonstrated hesitation in expressing their arguments, which was reflected in vague claims, cautious wording, or unclear positions within their thesis statements. This tendency suggests that affective factors such as low self-confidence and writing anxiety may influence students' ability to formulate strong thesis statements.

It should be noted that students often experience multiple difficulties at the same time. For instance, challenges in organizing ideas cognitively may coexist with linguistic limitations and affective constraints. Therefore, more than one category of difficulty may be marked for a single student in the table, illustrating the complex and multidimensional nature of thesis statement writing.

In conclusion, the findings from this preliminary observation reinforce the theoretical framework of the study by confirming that students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements are shaped by linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. These initial results provide a strong foundation for the development of research instruments and guide the subsequent stages of data analysis in this study.

These findings support the relevance of the Theory of Academic Writing and Thesis Statement (Oshima & Hogue, 2007), Second Language Writing Theory (Hyland, 2003), and Cognitive Process Theory in Writing (Flower & Hayes, 1981). The preliminary observation confirms that students' problems in writing thesis statements are not caused by a single factor, but rather by the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and affective challenges.

4. Limited Knowledge of Writing Principles

Many students are not fully aware of the elements of academic writing, particularly the function and structure of a thesis statement.

1. Some students misunderstand the purpose of a thesis statement, treating it as a general topic rather than a clear argumentative claim.
2. Others do not know how to combine a topic with a controlling idea effectively.
3. Insufficient knowledge of academic writing conventions contributes to weak and incomplete thesis statements (Uçar & Yükselir, 2020).

Limited understanding of academic writing principles is a key factor that contributes to students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements. Many students have not yet fully grasped the role of a thesis statement as the core argument that controls and directs the entire essay. Instead of presenting a clear position, some students tend to treat the thesis statement as a general topic or introductory idea without argumentative focus.

Uçar and Yükselir (2020) explain that students often fail to differentiate between a thesis statement and a topic sentence. This lack of distinction results in thesis statements that are overly broad, lack a controlling idea, or do not clearly reflect the writer's stance. Consequently, the thesis statement does not function effectively as a guide for organizing and developing the essay.

Based on the open-ended questionnaire responses from third-semester students, the findings indicate that students possess a basic understanding of what a thesis statement is; however, their knowledge remains limited, particularly regarding its role as a clear argumentative claim.

Most students described a thesis statement as the main idea of an essay that tells readers what the essay will discuss and guides the content of the writing. For example, one student stated that a thesis statement is *“the main idea of the essay that tells the reader what the writer will talk about and guides the whole essay.”* Another student defined it as *“a clear sentence that states the main idea or argument of an academic essay.”*

Although these responses show awareness of the general function of a thesis statement, they also reveal that students tend to focus on its topic-guiding role rather than its function as a statement of stance or controlling idea. This limited

understanding becomes more apparent when students explain their difficulties in writing a thesis statement. Several students reported that combining ideas into one focused sentence is challenging. One student stated that writing a thesis statement is difficult because *“sometimes I have many ideas and I don’t know how to put them into one sentence.”* Another student mentioned that vocabulary limitations made it difficult to express ideas clearly, simply stating *“in vocabulary”* as the main source of difficulty.

These findings support (Uçar & Yükselir, 2020b), who argue that students’ lack of understanding of thesis statement structure often results in unclear and unfocused statements. Limited knowledge of writing principles, combined with linguistic constraints, significantly contributes to students’ difficulties in formulating thesis statements.

5. Insufficient Writing Practice and Exposure

Writing is a skill that develops through frequent practice. When students receive limited opportunities to write or lack access to good writing models, their writing ability remains underdeveloped.

1. Lack of consistent writing practice affects students’ ability to formulate coherent and focused thesis statements.
2. Several studies emphasize that insufficient exposure to structured writing tasks contributes to writing difficulties in EFL settings (Khusniyah & Ismiatun, 2024).

Writing ability improves through regular practice and continuous exposure to academic writing activities. However, many students experience difficulties in writing thesis statements because they have limited opportunities to practice academic writing, especially during the early semesters of their study. Without frequent writing tasks, students’ ability to develop focused and coherent thesis statements does not develop optimally.

Khusniyah and Ismiatun (2024) point out that a lack of consistent writing practice can weaken students’ confidence and skills in academic writing. Students who rarely engage in writing activities often face difficulties in organizing ideas, refining arguments, and expressing their thoughts clearly in thesis statements.

Limited exposure to good writing models also makes it harder for students to identify the characteristics of an effective thesis statement.

As a result, students may produce thesis statements that are unclear, repetitive, or not well connected to the content of the essay. This shows that insufficient writing practice is not only a matter of technical skill but also a significant factor influencing students' overall development in thesis statement writing

The questionnaire data also indicate that students experience difficulties due to limited writing practice and exposure, particularly in writing thesis statements. Most students reported that they do not practice writing thesis statements frequently and usually do so only during classroom activities or when assignments are given. One student explicitly stated, *"I feel that I do not have enough practice yet. I only write thesis statements in class, and not very often, so I still feel confused when I have to write one by myself."* Another student similarly mentioned that they still need *"more guidance and repeated exercises to make my ideas clearer and more specific."*

the overall responses indicate that most students feel they need more opportunities to practice writing thesis statements independently. This lack of continuous exposure limits their ability to organize ideas and express them clearly in academic writing.

This finding is consistent with Khusniyah and Ismiatun (2024), who state that insufficient writing practice in EFL contexts negatively affects students' academic writing development. Without repeated and structured practice, students struggle to internalize writing principles, particularly in formulating focused thesis statements

6. Limited Instruction and Feedback from Lecturers

Students often struggle because they do not receive adequate guidance or detailed feedback on how to construct thesis statements properly.

1. Some lecturers focus more on the final essay score rather than the process of developing the thesis statement.
2. Without explicit instruction, students do not fully understand what constitutes an effective thesis statement.

3. Minimal feedback also prevents students from recognizing and correcting their recurring mistakes (Sari & Rahmawati, 2023).

Students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements are also influenced by limited instructional guidance and feedback from lecturers. In some cases, lecturers tend to emphasize the final assessment of essays rather than guiding students through the process of developing a clear and effective thesis statement. When explicit instruction is lacking, students may not fully understand the criteria of a good thesis statement.

According to (Sari & Rahmawati, 2023), insufficient or unclear feedback prevents students from recognizing their weaknesses and making improvements in their writing. When feedback is minimal, students may not realize recurring problems in their thesis statements, such as unclear arguments, weak claims, or inappropriate sentence construction. As a result, these issues often persist in subsequent writing tasks.

Clear instruction and constructive feedback are essential in helping students improve their academic writing skills. Through detailed explanations, examples, and corrective feedback, lecturers can support students in developing stronger thesis statements. Therefore, limited guidance and feedback from lecturers can significantly contribute to students' ongoing difficulties in thesis statement writing.

Another important issue identified from the questionnaire relates to instruction and feedback provided by lecturers. Students generally reported that lecturers explain thesis statements by giving definitions, examples, and explanations of their components. One student stated that the lecturer explains thesis statements by *"giving examples from essays and explaining the parts of a thesis statement and why it must be clear and specific."* Another student similarly mentioned that lecturers explain thesis statements through *"simple definitions and examples and showing how it connects to the introduction and main ideas."*

While these explanations were perceived as helpful, students' responses regarding feedback suggest that it is often limited and lacks specificity. One student stated that the feedback they usually receive is that their thesis statement is *"too general or not strong enough,"* and they are often told to make it clearer and more

focused. However, detailed explanations on how to improve the thesis statement were rarely mentioned.

Other responses imply that feedback sometimes focuses more on general writing ability rather than directly addressing weaknesses in thesis statement formulation. This supports Sari and Rahmawati (2023), who argue that general feedback without detailed guidance may prevent students from understanding their specific mistakes. As a result, limited instructional depth and insufficient feedback contribute to students' ongoing difficulties in writing clear thesis statements.

2.1.3 Definition of Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is generally understood as the core idea that directs the development of an entire essay. Salmiati, Amri, and Syafrizal (2024) explain that a thesis statement functions as the essential guiding concept of a text, though many EFL students struggle to construct it effectively because they have not fully grasped its central role in shaping the essay's direction. Similarly, Saprina (2020) emphasizes that a thesis statement serves as the main claim that organizes the writer's argument, yet many learners find it difficult to formulate due to their inability to express the core idea clearly. In the same line, (Nenotek et al., 2022) describe a thesis statement as the central message that determines the structure and clarity of an essay, but students often fail to articulate it precisely because of limited vocabulary and insufficient mastery of academic writing conventions. Supporting these views, a recent study (2025) defines a thesis statement as the key sentence that frames the overall focus of the essay; however, many sophomores still confuse it with a general introductory remark, leading to thesis statements that lack clarity and direction.

A thesis statement is a central, guiding sentence in an academic essay that articulates the writer's primary argument, claim, or purpose in a clear and focused manner. It serves not only as a declaration of the essay's main idea but also as a structural blueprint that informs the reader about the logical direction and scope of the discussion that will follow. (Oshima & Hogue, 2020) explain that a thesis statement is the "most important sentence in an essay," because it establishes the controlling idea of the entire text and ensures that every paragraph remains relevant and cohesive. In other words, a strong thesis statement functions as the backbone

of academic writing by unifying the development of ideas and preventing digression.

(Swales & Feak, 2012) further emphasize that a thesis statement performs a rhetorical function: it positions the writer within the academic conversation by signaling how the argument will be developed and what stance the writer is taking. Thus, the thesis statement is not merely a factual statement or a topic announcement; rather, it presents a claim that can be supported, elaborated, or challenged within the body of the essay. A well crafted thesis is therefore analytical and argumentative in nature, providing the reader with an interpretive lens through which the subsequent discussion should be understood.

More recent writing guides reaffirm the importance of a thesis statement in contemporary academic writing. According to Purdue OWL (2020), a thesis statement functions as an organizational tool that allows readers to understand the writer's perspective and anticipate the logical flow of ideas. It operates as a promise to the reader, ensuring that the content of the paper aligns with the claim introduced in the opening paragraphs. This perspective highlights the thesis statement as both a communicative and structural element essential for maintaining coherence and unity throughout the text.

Taken collectively, these views underscore that a thesis statement is foundational to effective academic writing because it provides clarity, direction, and argumentative purpose. Without a clear thesis, an essay risks becoming unfocused and lacking in coherence. With a strong thesis, however, the writer can construct a logically structured and persuasive academic argument that guides readers from introduction to conclusion.

2.1.4 Functions of a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement serves several important functions in academic writing. First, it provides the writer with a clear sense of purpose, helping them stay on track while developing ideas in the body paragraphs. Second, it informs the reader about the main idea of the essay, setting expectations for the content that follows (Hacker & Sommers, 2014) emphasize that a strong thesis statement acts as a roadmap for the entire essay, ensuring logical organization and coherence.

1.Functions

Communicative A thesis statement plays a central role in academic essay writing because it provides direction, focus, and coherence for both the writer and the reader. Several scholars highlight that a well constructed thesis statement acts as the foundation of an academic essay and determines the quality of the writing that follows.

1. Providing Direction for the Writer

One of the main functions of a thesis statement is to guide the writer during the writing process. It helps the writer stay focused on the central idea and prevents the essay from becoming disorganized or off topic. According to(Oshima & Hogue, 2007b), a thesis statement serves as a “planning tool,” allowing the writer to structure ideas logically and maintain unity throughout the essay. When the writer has a clear thesis statement, it becomes easier to choose supporting points and eliminate irrelevant information.

2. Informing the Reader About the Main Idea

A thesis statement also functions as a clear signal for the reader. It tells the reader what the essay will discuss and sets expectations for the arguments or explanations that will follow. (Bailey, 2018) explains that a thesis statement helps readers understand the writer’s position from the beginning, making the essay easier to follow. Without a thesis statement, readers may struggle to identify the essay’s main purpose or direction.

3.Establishing the Scope and Limitations of the Essay

Another important function is defining the boundaries of the essay. A thesis statement indicates what aspects of the topic will be discussed and, indirectly, what will not. Langan (2011) notes that a strong thesis statement narrows a broad topic into a specific focus, helping both writer and reader avoid overly general or irrelevant points. This function is crucial in academic writing because it ensures that the essay remains concentrated and manageable.

4.Creating Coherence and Logical Flow

The thesis statement serves as the backbone of the essay's coherence. Every paragraph in the body should relate directly to the thesis. According (Hacker & Sommers, 2014), the thesis statement functions as the “organizing principle” of the essay, meaning that all supporting details must connect logically to the central argument. This function helps achieve unity and consistency across the entire text.

5.Supporting Critical Thinking and Argumentation

A thesis statement encourages the writer to develop a clear stance on an issue, which then leads to critical thinking and argument development. (Alafnan et al., 2023) states that academic writing requires writers to communicate ideas thoughtfully and analytically, and the thesis statement is where this analytical process begins. It compels the writer to present a position that can be supported with evidence and reasoning.

6.Enhancing Reader Engagement

A clear and well written thesis statement can also help engage the reader by presenting an interesting or meaningful claim. When the thesis is specific and strong, it motivates readers to continue reading because they want to see how the writer supports the claim. This function is highlighted by Zemach and Rumisek (2005), who mention that a clear thesis helps maintain reader interest and improves comprehension.

2.1.5 Types of Thesis Statement

Thesis statements may take different forms depending on the purpose and organization of the essay. Recent writing researchers highlight that academic essays require different types of thesis statements to match whether the writer intends to describe, analyze, or argue a particular issue Similarly,(Swales & Feak, 2012) explain that understanding the variations of thesis statements helps students structure their writing more effectively and maintain coherence throughout the essay.

1. Expository (Informative) Thesis Statement

An expository thesis statement presents a neutral explanation of a topic. Its purpose is to inform the reader about the main idea without taking a persuasive stance. Example: *Several factors influence students' success in academic writing, including practice, feedback, and motivation.*

2. Analytical Thesis Statement

An analytical thesis breaks down a topic into several components and evaluates how these components relate to one another. This type is used when students are expected to interpret or examine an issue in depth. Example: *The effectiveness of digital writing tools depends on accessibility, user familiarity, and the type of writing task.*

3. Argumentative Thesis Statement

An argumentative thesis expresses a clear position that can be debated. It states a claim that the writer will defend with evidence throughout the essay. Example: *AI-based writing tools should be integrated into academic writing classes because they help students improve clarity and reduce grammar errors.*

2.1.6 Structure of a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement generally consists of two main components, and this structure remains essential in modern academic writing. According to Swales and Feak (2021), clarity and organization in academic writing depends heavily on how well the thesis statement is structured.

1. Topic (Subject of the Essay)

The topic introduces what the essay will discuss. It establishes the general subject area and prepares the reader for the main idea.

Example:

Students' challenges in academic writing

2. Controlling Idea (Writer's Focus or Point of View)

The controlling idea expresses the writer's specific claim or argument about the topic. It narrows the discussion and shows the direction of the essay.

Example:

are influenced by limited vocabulary and lack of understanding of thesis structure. Swales & Feak (2021) explain that a strong controlling idea makes the thesis more specific and helps readers predict the content of the body paragraphs.

3. Illustrative Example (Complete Structure)

Thesis statement:

Students struggle to formulate effective thesis statements because they lack understanding of essay organization, receive limited writing support, and overly depend on digital tools.

1. Topic: Students' difficulties in thesis statement writing
2. Controlling idea: caused by lack of structure knowledge, limited support, and digital tool overreliance

2.1.7 Rules of Making a Thesis Statement

1. A thesis statement must clearly present the main idea of the essay
A thesis statement should explicitly state the main idea that will be discussed in the essay. It serves as a foundation for the entire writing by informing readers about the focus and direction of the discussion (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).
2. A thesis statement must include a clear controlling idea or position
A thesis statement should not only introduce the topic but also show the writer's stance toward the topic. The controlling idea limits the scope of the essay and helps maintain focus throughout the writing process (University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019).
3. A thesis statement should be specific and focused
A thesis statement needs to be written in a specific and focused manner to avoid ambiguity. General or unclear statements make it difficult for readers to understand the purpose of the essay and weaken the overall structure of the writing (University, 2020).

4. A thesis statement must be arguable rather than merely factual

In academic writing, a thesis statement should present a claim that can be supported by reasons and evidence. Statements that only state facts or commonly accepted ideas do not provide a strong basis for discussion (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

5. A thesis statement should use clear and formal academic language

The use of appropriate grammar, accurate vocabulary, and proper sentence structure is necessary to convey meaning clearly. Language errors may lead to misunderstanding and reduce the clarity of the thesis statement (College, 2021).

6. A thesis statement should guide the development of the essay

The ideas presented in the body paragraphs should be directly related to the thesis statement. A well-formulated thesis helps organize the essay logically and ensures coherence between the introduction, body, and conclusion (University, 2020).

2.1.8 Students' Perception of Thesis Statement

Students' perception of thesis statements describes how learners view, interpret, and evaluate the role of the thesis statement in academic writing. (Winters & Griffin, 2014) explains that students' attitudes toward writing strongly influence the way they construct their thesis statements. When students believe that a thesis statement can help them organize their ideas, they tend to produce essays that are clearer and more structured. However, students who see the thesis statement as confusing or unnecessary often write papers that lack focus and coherence.

(Swales & Feak, 2021) emphasize that many students still misunderstand what a thesis statement is and how it differs from other introductory elements. This misunderstanding affects how they perceive its importance. Some students assume that a thesis statement is simply a general opening sentence, while others confuse it with a topic sentence, which results in unclear or overly broad thesis statements.

Recent work in writing pedagogy also shows that students' perception is shaped by several factors, including their previous writing experiences, the clarity of teachers' explanations, and the feedback they receive. The increasing presence of digital tools has also influenced students' views. According to Li and Hafner (2023), many learners assume that AI tools can generate thesis statements for them,

which may cause them to underestimate the importance of developing their own academic reasoning. This reliance on technology sometimes leads to superficial understanding of how thesis statements actually work in organizing an essay.

Understanding students' perceptions is therefore crucial, especially for EFL learners, because their views can directly shape their writing performance and the quality of their thesis statements.

2. Understanding of Academic Writing Conventions (Genre Awareness)

Another crucial factor influencing thesis statement formulation is students' awareness of academic writing conventions. Many learners still confuse the function of a thesis statement with a topic sentence or introductory remark because they do not fully understand how an academic essay is structured. This confusion affects their ability to identify where the thesis belongs and what it should accomplish. (Idris & Yusuf, 2024) state that "students with higher genre awareness demonstrate a clearer understanding of how an argument should be introduced in academic writing" (p. 90). Their findings show that when students understand the expectations of the essay genre such as the need for a controlling idea they are more capable of crafting thesis statements that guide the direction of their writing. Without this awareness, students often produce statements that are too broad, descriptive, or disconnected from the essay body.

3. Quality of Instruction

The clarity and effectiveness of instruction also significantly influence students' ability to write thesis statements. When teachers do not provide detailed explanations or concrete examples, students tend to misunderstand the purpose of a thesis statement. They may believe that any general sentence about the topic can serve as a thesis. (U. Fauzan et al., 2022) highlight that "explicit instruction and clear modeling of academic writing features lead to noticeable improvement in students' ability to construct focused and logically organized statements" (p. 118). This suggests that instruction plays a foundational role: when teachers provide structured guidance, students are better equipped to develop thesis statements that reflect the central argument of their essays.

4. Feedback Practices

Instructor feedback plays a key role in improving students' academic writing, particularly in revising and developing thesis statements. Constructive and timely feedback helps students recognize weaknesses such as unclear focus or weak argumentation, while limited feedback often causes students to repeat the same mistakes. Therefore, feedback functions as a guiding tool that supports students in improving the clarity and coherence of their academic writing (Alghamdy, 2023).

5. Critical Thinking Skills

Formulating a thesis statement requires students to analyze a topic, take a position, and express an argument clearly skills closely linked to critical thinking. Students with limited critical thinking ability often produce thesis statements that merely describe a topic rather than argue or claim something specific. (Liu et al., 2024). note that "students with stronger critical thinking skills are more capable of articulating precise and well reasoned arguments in their writing". Because a thesis statement must express the writer's stance or purpose, students who lack analytical thinking tend to produce unclear or overly broad statements. Thus, weak critical thinking directly affects their ability to formulate a strong, argumentative thesis statement.

6. Students' Writing Experience

Students' prior writing experience also influences their ability to construct a thesis statement. Learners who have limited exposure to academic writing tasks often lack awareness of how a thesis functions within an essay. In many EFL contexts, students are rarely asked to write argumentative essays, which leads to unfamiliarity with thesis formulation. (Mustroph & Steinbock, 2024) found that "EFL students' writing weaknesses frequently result from insufficient practice with academic writing genres" (p. 52). This lack of exposure makes it difficult for students to understand the purpose of articulating a central idea and organizing an essay around it. Experienced writers, in contrast, tend to produce more precise and structured thesis statements because they are familiar with academic writing conventions.

7. Overreliance on Technology

Overreliance on technology has become a growing issue in students' academic writing, particularly in formulating thesis statements. Findings from the uploaded journal indicate that frequent dependence on digital writing tools can reduce students' active involvement in critical thinking processes, such as analyzing topics and constructing arguments independently. When students rely too heavily on technological assistance, they tend to accept generated ideas without fully understanding how a thesis statement should function as the central argument of an essay. As a result, their thesis statements often appear weak, less coherent, and insufficiently argumentative. This suggests that although technology can support writing activities, excessive reliance may hinder students' ability to develop clear and well structured thesis statements in academic writing contexts (Demirel, 2024).

8. Motivation and Writing Attitude

Motivation and writing attitude are important affective factors influencing students' academic writing performance in EFL contexts. Learners with higher motivation tend to show greater confidence and engagement in writing activities, which supports better planning and idea development. In contrast, low motivation often leads to limited effort and weak organization in writing task.

Writing attitude also affects how students approach the writing process. Students who hold positive attitudes toward writing are more likely to apply writing strategies, revise their work, and structure their ideas clearly. Conversely, negative attitudes reduce students' willingness to engage deeply in writing, resulting in unclear and underdeveloped thesis statements. This indicates that motivation and attitude play a key role in students' ability to formulate clear and focused thesis statements in academic writing (Robertson, 2005).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is developed to provide the theoretical basis for understanding the factors that influence students' ability to write effective thesis statements in academic writing. This study is motivated by challenges commonly observed among EFL university students, where thesis statements often

appear vague, overly broad, or lacking argumentative clarity. These difficulties suggest that thesis statement construction is shaped by multiple interacting factors rather than a single isolated issue (U. Fauzan et al., 2022).

From the linguistic dimension, students' thesis statement quality is closely linked to their mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence construction. Limited linguistic resources often lead to unclear or imprecise thesis statements, indicating that language proficiency directly affects students' ability to articulate a focused argument. Studies show that students with stronger linguistic competence produce more coherent and academically appropriate thesis statements (Fitriani, 2020).

(Daud, 2012) views academic writing as a cognitively demanding activity that is closely connected to the development of critical thinking skills. Writing is not treated merely as a linguistic task, but as an intellectual process that requires students to analyze ideas, evaluate arguments, and organize thoughts logically. Within this framework, instructional strategies such as rubric-based guidance and peer evaluation play an important role in supporting students' awareness of argument quality, coherence, and clarity in academic texts.

Furthermore, the framework emphasizes that improvement in students' academic writing results from the interaction between cognitive processes and instructional practices. Systematic and reflective feedback helps students develop metacognitive awareness of their writing strengths and weaknesses. Through continuous practice, peer assessment, and structured guidance, students are encouraged to engage more deeply in critical thinking processes. As a result, their ability to construct clear central ideas and well-developed arguments in academic writing can gradually improve (Daud, 2012).

Students' perceptions toward academic writing play a crucial role in shaping their performance, particularly in formulating thesis statements. When students perceive thesis statement writing as meaningful and manageable, they are more likely to invest effort, engage actively in the writing process, and produce clearer and more focused arguments. However, negative perceptions often emerge when students experience high cognitive demands or receive limited and unclear instructional guidance. These conditions may reduce students' confidence and lead to hesitation in expressing a clear stance in their thesis statements. Consequently,

unfavorable perceptions can negatively affect the organization, clarity, and overall quality of academic writing (Quynh Trang & Thi Mai Hoa, 2008).

The ability to produce a well-developed thesis statement is influenced by the interaction of several interconnected factors, including linguistic competence, affective conditions, and the learning environment. From a linguistic perspective, limited mastery of grammar, academic vocabulary, and paraphrasing skills constrains students' ability to express a clear and coherent central argument. In addition, affective factors such as low self-confidence, writing anxiety, and inconsistent motivation often reduce students' engagement in developing and refining their thesis statements. These difficulties are further shaped by contextual elements, particularly the lack of explicit instruction, limited feedback, and insufficient opportunities for guided academic writing practice. Consequently, challenges in formulating thesis statements should be understood as the result of multiple overlapping influences rather than language proficiency alone, reflecting the complex nature of academic writing development in EFL higher education settings (Aldayel et al., 2026).

Review of Previous Studies

Research on students' difficulties in formulating thesis statements has been widely conducted in the fields of academic writing and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Previous studies consistently indicate that constructing a clear, focused, and arguable thesis statement remains one of the major challenges faced by university students. These difficulties are influenced by linguistic limitations, lack of conceptual understanding, insufficient writing instruction, and students' affective factors such as anxiety and low confidence. Together, these studies provide a broad understanding of the complexities involved in thesis statement construction and help situate the present research within a wider academic context.

A study by (Muhayyang & Ariyani, 2023) investigated the challenges faced by EFL university students in writing academic essays. The findings revealed that many students struggled to formulate thesis statements due to limited vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, and an inability to express a central argument clearly. The study emphasized that students often produced thesis statements that were too broad or descriptive, showing that they had not yet mastered how to narrow down topics

or establish a clear stance. Ariyanti's research offers important evidence that linguistic and cognitive factors significantly affect the quality of students' thesis statements.

Another relevant study conducted by (U. Fauzan & Author, 2022) examined undergraduate students' difficulties in identifying and writing thesis statements. Their research found that students frequently confused thesis statements with topic sentences or general background statements. This misunderstanding caused many of them to produce introductions lacking direction and coherence. The study also highlighted that insufficient instruction and limited exposure to academic writing models contributed to students' poor performance in constructing effective thesis statements.

A further study by (Athanasopoulos et al., 2023) explored students' challenges in generating and organizing ideas before producing thesis statements. The results indicated that students lacked the critical thinking skills necessary to synthesize ideas and articulate them into a focused claim. Many students struggled during the prewriting stage, which ultimately affected the clarity and argumentative strength of their thesis statements. This study reinforces the importance of cognitive readiness in academic writing.

In another Indonesian context, (Putri & Sari, 2022) analyzed students' perceptions of their own writing difficulties, specifically focusing on thesis statement formulation. Their findings showed that students believed writing a thesis statement was the most difficult part of the essay because it required clarity, precision, and logical focus all of which demanded higher level thinking. The study also found that students' writing anxiety contributed to their difficulty in committing to a single argument or opinion, leading to vague or unfocused thesis statements.

From an international perspective, (Fadda, 2012) conducted research on EFL students' academic writing challenges at a university level. The study found that many students lacked confidence in expressing arguments in English, resulting in weak thesis statements that did not clearly guide the essay. Limited familiarity with academic writing conventions and insufficient feedback from instructors were identified as key obstacles. This international perspective helps illustrate that thesis

statement difficulties are not only experienced by Indonesian students but are common across EFL contexts.

Overall, these previous studies demonstrate that students face persistent challenges in constructing thesis statements, including linguistic limitations, misunderstanding of academic writing conventions, weak critical thinking skills, and affective barriers such as writing anxiety. However, despite the extensive research available, only a few studies have specifically examined the difficulties encountered by third-semester students in formulating thesis statements within the essay-writing context. Therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by exploring the particular challenges faced by third semester students in writing effective thesis statements, focusing on the nature of their difficulties, the factors contributing to them, and how these affect their overall essay quali

