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(IJEPC)**[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)**EXPLORING THE QUALITY AND STRUCTURE OF THESIS  
STATEMENTS IN DIPLOMA STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE  
WRITING**

Rafidah Amat<sup>1\*</sup>, Nur Syazwanie Mansor<sup>2</sup>, Nor Asni Syahriza Abu Hassan<sup>3</sup>, Zawani Badri<sup>4</sup>, Mas Aida Abd Rahim<sup>5</sup>, Muhammad Shyazzwan Ibrahim Brian<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: rafidah408@uitm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: nursyazwanie@uitm.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: syahriza@uitm.edu.my

<sup>4</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: zawani236@uitm.edu.my

<sup>5</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: masaida@uitm.edu.my

<sup>6</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kedah Branch, Malaysia  
Email: shyazzwan@uitm.edu.my

\* Corresponding Author

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**Abstract:**

Academic Writing is an important skill for tertiary students at higher education. One of the components of academic writing is thesis statement which it established the writer's stance and direction for the essay. However, students are still struggling with writing a good thesis statement or at least a structurally sound. Thus, this study aims to examine the structure and the quality written by Part 3 diploma students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Kedah Branch. There were 26 thesis statements collected from students; written argumentative essay which was a part of their Final Assessment. The thesis statements were analysed based on their quality and their structural patterns. Findings revealed that students relied heavily on the same formulaic stance markers such as "I strongly believe..." and often used simple cause-effect formula. A minority showed the use of generalised sentence structures but most of the students demonstrated the ability to use a higher argumentative potential. In the perspective of quality, the students mostly categorised as medium – high range quality. Hence, these results showed that students relied on memorised structures and have limited linguistics styles when constructing thesis

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statement. It is essential to enhance students' awareness on thesis statement structures in improving their academic writing skills.

**Keywords:**

Thesis Statement, Argumentative Writing, Academic Writing, Diploma Students, English Language Studies

**Introduction**

Higher education acquires students to possess academic writing skills as these will assist them in completing their assignment as well as their assessment. Academic writing skills showcases students' ability in critical thinking, understanding and disciplinary of knowledge. As an ESL learner, errors and mistakes are inevitable. Many ESL students struggle to write correctly and precisely for their academic writing specifically Part 3 diploma students in this research study. The thesis statement is one of crucial components of academic writing which serves a roadmap for the reader in comprehending the writing (Bailey, 2014). It signals the writer's stance, scope, and direction, thereby enabling both the writer and the reader to stay focused (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014). A well-crafted thesis statement is typically clear, specific, arguable, and appropriately placed, usually at the end of the introduction. However, despite its importance, many undergraduate students struggle to formulate effective thesis statements. Students often produce vague, overly broad or descriptive statements that lack the argumentative essay requirements (Stapleton & Wu, 2015). These challenges are influenced by limited instruction, difficulties in comprehending argumentative development as well as broader issues in academic writing proficiency. Specifically, these broader issues often stem from the difficult transition from narrative or descriptive writing styles, which are common in secondary education, to the more complex analytical and persuasive demands of tertiary-level academic writing.

This study analysed written argumentative assessments produced by Part 3 diploma students who mostly enrolled in their final stage of English Language Subjects at diploma level. These students are expected to be able to demonstrate a mature writing competency for academic writing, especially when the Final Assessment was their final benchmark for successfully understanding the knowledge of academic writing. Therefore, assessing their thesis statements quality and structures in the final assessment are seen as a valuable insight for future pedagogical matters as well as the research fields. This study seeks to identify common patterns, evaluate their effectiveness and explore their potential for future pedagogical intervention. Thus, this research study aims to study their structural patterns for its characteristics as well as their linguistics features to distinguish the quality. Based on the issues, these are research questions to address it; (1) What structural patterns are evident in thesis statements written by Part 3 students? (2) What linguistic or rhetorical features characterize effective vs. weak thesis statements?

The primary objectives of this research are twofold. First, it aims to identify and categorise the common structural patterns present in the thesis statements of argumentative essays written by Part 3 diploma students. Second, the study seeks to evaluate the quality of these thesis statements based on established academic writing criteria such as clarity, specificity, and arguability.

In order to achieve these objectives, the study also delineates its scope by focusing solely on 26 students enrolled in the LCC113 English Language subject at UiTM Kedah Branch during the March–July 2024 semester. This narrow scope ensures depth of analysis while allowing for concrete observations on the challenges of ESL students in Malaysia. The study further adopts Toulmin’s Model of Argumentation and Genre Analysis as its theoretical underpinnings, both of which provide a structured framework for assessing the balance between logic, rhetorical conventions, and academic discourse. By embedding the findings within these frameworks, the study not only highlights existing gaps but also generates practical recommendations for curriculum design. Ultimately, the significance of this research lies in its contribution to improving academic writing pedagogy at tertiary level, strengthening industry training where formal communication is necessary, and aligning with national aspirations to enhance English language proficiency among graduates.

The scope of this study is specifically focused on a cohort of 26 Part 3 diploma students enrolled in the LCC113 English Language subject at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah Branch. The data consists exclusively of thesis statements extracted from their final assessment argumentative essays. This research does not extend to other components of the essays or to students at different academic levels.

The significance of this study is primarily pedagogical. By pinpointing the structural flaws and quality concerns in students' thesis statements, the results can offer useful insights for instructors of English language and those developing curricula. This may guide the creation of focused educational strategies, like direct teaching on argumentative frameworks and the production of better instructional resources to enhance students' writing skills.

### **Literature Review**

The thesis statement is a crucial component of academic writing, commonly characterized as a brief sentence or a group of sentences that convey the primary argument or core assertion of a paper. It fulfills various roles: it expresses the author's stance, offers clarity and guidance for the work, and anticipates the reader regarding the argument's content and framework (Rosenwasser & Stephen, 2011). Typically located at the conclusion of the opening paragraph, the thesis statement serves as a directional structure for the writer and the readers, maintaining clarity and orderly development in the main content (Bailey, 2014; Wingate, 2012).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Theoretical perspectives support this understanding. Toulmin’s Model of Argumentation emphasises the relationship between claim, data, and warrant, thereby framing the thesis as more than a statement of belief, but rather as the foundation of logical reasoning (Toulmin, 2003). Genre Analysis, on the other hand, highlights the disciplinary conventions and expectations of academic writing, positioning the thesis statement as a genre-specific element that signals conformity to academic standards (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Hyland, 2019).

These theories establish the basis for evaluating the thesis statements in this study. Toulmin’s framework allows the analysis of logical depth and argumentative coherence, while Genre Analysis underscores the rhetorical and conventional aspects of writing. Together, they provide a comprehensive lens to examine both the structural and qualitative aspects of students’ thesis statements.

Researchers have suggested various models and analytical frameworks for evaluating the quality and organization of thesis statements. A widely used method highlights four essential characteristics: clarity, specificity, arguability, and relevance (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014; Osana and Seymour, 2004). A solid thesis statement is therefore one that is precise, arguable, and clearly represents the subject. Another significant model is Toulmin's argumentation framework, which emphasizes the relationship among claims, warrants, and evidence in argumentative writing (Toulmin, 2003; Bruce, 2008). These models have been widely used to guide both instruction and assessment in academic writing, particularly in undergraduate contexts.

Despite these frameworks, studies consistently show that many undergraduate students struggle with constructing effective thesis statements. Research has reported that students often produce statements that are overly broad, descriptive rather than argumentative, or disconnected from the essay body (Macbeth, 2010; Stapleton & Wu, 2015; Nesi & Gardner, 2012). These shortcomings compromise the thesis statement's role as a controlling idea and reduce the clarity, cohesion, and persuasiveness of the overall essay (Hyland, 2019; Wingate, 2012).

One explanation for these recurring issues lies in the way academic writing is taught. Writing instruction often assumes that students implicitly acquire academic conventions, yet evidence shows that students benefit more from explicit teaching of argumentative writing and thesis construction (Wingate, 2012; Graff & Birkenstein, 2014). Furthermore, limited exposure to varied thesis models and insufficient feedback from instructors exacerbate students' challenges (Bailey, 2014; Rosenwasser & Stephen, 2011). As a result, many students rely on memorised or formulaic structures, such as "I strongly believe...", which provide a stance but lack academic sophistication (Brown, 2020; Bruce, 2008).

Recent studies in applied linguistics have also highlighted the need to examine thesis statements more closely. Based on findings from studies, feedback from teacher and accuracy of language heavily influence on students' thesis statement effectiveness (Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020), while others believe that argumentative essay persuasiveness and coherence will be impacted upon weak thesis construction (Tasya, 2022). Thus, this notions from scholars confirm earlier observation on a precise and arguable thesis statement depends on the students' writing coherence (Stapleton & Wu, 2015; Nesi & Gardner, 2012).

To illustrate these trends more clearly, previous findings have been synthesised in Table 1, which displays authors, years, study titles, and major outcomes. Presenting the literature in this format not only aligns with reviewer recommendations but also highlights recurring gaps in student writing research.

**Table 1: Summary of Key Findings from Previous Studies**

Author(s)	Year	Title of Work	Key Findings
Macbeth, K. P.	2010	"Deliberate false provisions: The use and usefulness of models in learning academic writing"	Students often produce thesis statements that are descriptive rather than analytical, which weakens the clarity and cohesion of their essays.

Wingate, U.	2012	"'Argument!' helping students understand what essay writing is about"	Argues that students require explicit instruction in argumentative writing conventions and that over-reliance on formulaic phrases hinders the development of sophisticated academic discourse.
Nesi, H., & Gardner, S.	2012	"Genres across the disciplines: Student writing in higher education"	Found that undergraduate students frequently reproduce formulaic structures across different academic genres, which limits their rhetorical flexibility.
Stapleton, P., & Wu, Y. A.	2015	"Assessing the quality of arguments in students' persuasive writing..."	Concluded that students often produce vague, overly broad statements, and their arguments tend to be superficial, lacking critical depth and substantive development.
Hyland, K.	2019	"Second language writing"	Asserts that second language writers often struggle with academic conventions due to a combination of linguistic limitations and a lack of explicit guidance.
Ozfidan, B., & Mitchell, C.	2020	"Detected difficulties in argumentative writing"	Found that both teacher feedback and linguistic accuracy significantly impact the effectiveness of students' thesis statements, highlighting the challenge of crafting arguable claims.
Tasya, M. A.	2022	"Students' Difficulties in Writing an Argumentative Essay"	Demonstrated a direct link between weak thesis construction and the limited coherence and persuasiveness of students' argumentative essays.

Referring to Table 1, these are the summary of previous research with seven academic studies published between 2010 – 2022. The main purpose of these studies is an investigation on common problems among students in academic and argumentative writing. Collectively, these studies point to a significant and recurring challenges which focuses on a strong thesis statement construction and well-supported argument of development.

However, while these studies provide valuable insights, they are largely centred on general undergraduate writing without specific focus on Malaysian diploma students in a final assessment context. This gap underscores the significance of the present study, which contributes new empirical evidence from an ESL Malaysian setting and offers pedagogical implications tailored to local academic needs.

### ***Thesis Statements and Argument Quality***

A key point on which all of the studies focus is the difficulty students have in formulating effective thesis statements. Studies show that students frequently generate thesis statements which either do not move beyond description or which lack definition and excessive broadness. This profound deficiency ripples throughout the rest of the essay. For instance, one study found a direct connection between poorly constructed thesis statements and the limited coherence and persuasive power of the subsequent essay. The very thesis statements which in principle could



be accepted as arguments are utterly devoid of reasoned analysis. The problem of formulating a strong thesis is only made worse by the teacher's feedback and the issue of the statement's grammaticality.

### ***Over-reliance on Formulas and the Need for Explicit Instruction***

Another key issue identified is students' dependence on formulaic structures and phrases. Their progress in developing diverse and sophisticated academic discourse is profoundly challenged. Researchers argue that this issue is the result of insufficient support. Students, and particularly second language writers who have even more language barriers, need far more explicit instruction on the rules and boundaries of polemic written discourse in order to eliminate these rigid, formulaic patterns and cultivate their own voices.

Writing in English as a second language is a well-researched topic (Hyland, 2019; Wingate, 2012). However, the thesis statement is still a neglected area in research, particularly concerning unit culmination assessments in which students demonstrate mastery over the conventions of argumentative writing. Thus, this research aims to fill the gap by examining the thesis statements of Part 3 diploma students in terms of their structure and quality. It aspires to enhance the ongoing discussion of an academic writing pedagogy by macro proposing thesis and the instructions associated with thesis statements in higher education (Bailey, 2014; Tasya, 2022; Ozfidan and Mitchell, 2020).

## **Research Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

The research adopted a qualitative descriptive design and a content analysis approach focused on structural patterns and variation in the quality of thesis statements of diploma students attending the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah Branch. This approach outlines the descriptive patterns of student writing along with the characteristics without a guiding hypothesis. Subsequently, the results are grouped by frequency and classified based on the metrics of the structural patterns and the quality criteria. This approach delineates the specific characteristics and patterns of student writing along with the characteristics without a guiding hypothesis.

This design was chosen because it allows for a detailed examination of textual data while preserving the authenticity of students' actual written work. Content analysis is particularly suited to studies of this nature, as it systematically categorises thesis statements into meaningful patterns, enabling both qualitative interpretation and quantitative frequency reporting (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

### ***Data Collection***

The study involved a purposive sample of 26 Part 3 diploma students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah Branch. Data was sourced exclusively from their final assessment argumentative essays for the LCC113 English Language subject, collected during the March – July 2024 semester. This dataset was then imported into NVivo 15 software, a tool used to systematically manage and code the qualitative data into organised themes. This quantitative step allowed for a clear overview of the most and least common features, directly addressing the research questions regarding structural patterns and quality. The findings are categorised into these themes of structural patterns which are formulaic stance markers, cause-effect

justification, generalised declarations, topic-stance-consequences, balanced patterns and repetition identical structures. While the quality assessment is based on clarity, specificity, arguability and alignment with the essay contents. Qualitative descriptive approaches are frequently used in applied linguistics and education research to capture descriptive patterns within student writing (Sandelowski, 2000; Woolf and Silver, 2017). The analysis adopted elements of content analysis, which is particularly effective in categorising textual data into systematic themes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The selection of students was limited to one intact class to ensure consistency of teaching exposure, curriculum, and assessment conditions. The essays were produced under examination conditions, guaranteeing authenticity and minimising external assistance. Each thesis statement was extracted from the introduction section of the essays and anonymised before analysis to protect participants' identity. Ethical clearance was obtained from UiTM Kedah's research ethics committee, and informed consent was secured from all participants.

### ***Data Analysis***

The analysis was independently coded by two raters who are familiar with argumentative essay. These two raters are selected to ensure its reliability of categorisation between the themes. Independent coding by multiple raters enhances inter-rater reliability and strengthens the trustworthiness of qualitative categorisation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). If there were any discrepancies, discussion was held until the consensus was achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Then, these themes were categorised based on frequencies and percentage was calculated to identify its distribution of structures patterns and quality levels across the thesis statements. Later, only selected representatives were presented to illustrate the key findings. This quantitative step allowed for a clear overview of the most and least common features, directly addressing the research questions regarding structural patterns and quality. Representative examples were selected to illustrate the key findings, reflecting best practices in qualitative reporting (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

The coding process followed three major stages: (1) initial familiarisation with the dataset, (2) categorisation of thesis statements into predefined and emergent structural categories, and (3) verification of categories against theoretical frameworks (Toulmin's Model and Genre Analysis). Statistical calculations of frequencies and percentages were carried out to complement the qualitative categorisation, ensuring a mixed-methods dimension to the analysis. This allowed the study to quantify the prevalence of certain structures while interpreting their pedagogical implications qualitatively.

## Result

Table 2: Patterns of Structures

Structural Pattern	Description	Students (Examples)	Frequency (n)	% of Total
<b>Formulaic stance markers</b>	Most begin with “ <i>I strongly believe...</i> ” or “ <i>I believe...</i> ” → reliance on personal opinion phrasing rather than academic stance.	Almost all (e.g., S1–S26)	24	92%
<b>Cause–effect justification</b>	Use of “ <i>because</i> ” to give a single reason; produces simple, one-dimensional argumentation.	S4, S5, S14, S16, S20, S23, S26	7	27%
<b>Generalised declarations</b>	Broad/vague statements without a clear argumentative focus; more expository than argumentative.	S3, S6, S11	3	12%
<b>Topic + stance + consequence</b>	Clear stance is supported by a specific consequence, giving stronger argumentative direction.	S5, S7, S10, S14, S15, S18, S20, S21, S23, S24, S26	10	38%
<b>Balanced or two-sided claims</b>	Statements that acknowledge both positive and negative aspects, reducing arguability.	S6, S11	2	8%
<b>Repetition of identical structures</b>	Several thesis statements are nearly identical in phrasing (copied formula across students).	S2, S9, S13, S17, S19, S22, S25	7	27%

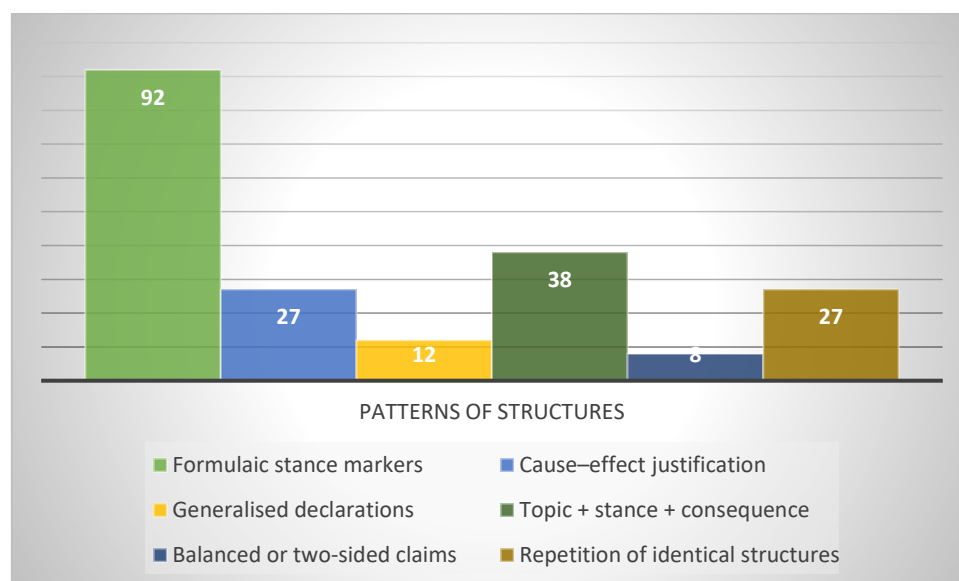


Figure 1 : Patterns of Structures



Table 2 and Figure 1 present the structural patterns observed in the thesis statements produced by 26 Part 3 students. The most prevalent pattern was the use of formulaic stance markers, with an overwhelming 92% ( $n = 24$ ) of the 26 statements beginning with “I strongly believe...” or “I believe...”. This reliance on a memorised formula highlights students’ tendency to express personal opinion in a direct but non-academic manner, rather than employing more formal stance markers such as “This essay argues that...”.

A second notable pattern was the use of cause–effect justification, found in 27% ( $n = 7$ ) of the statements. These thesis statements employed the connector “because” to provide a single justification for the claim. While this structure indicates some awareness of argumentative development, it often results in simple, one-dimensional reasoning rather than nuanced argumentation.

In contrast, only 12% ( $n = 3$ ) of the statements were categorised as generalised declarations, which were broad and vague, offering limited argumentative direction. Examples such as “social media can give advantages and disadvantages” reflect an expository rather than persuasive orientation.

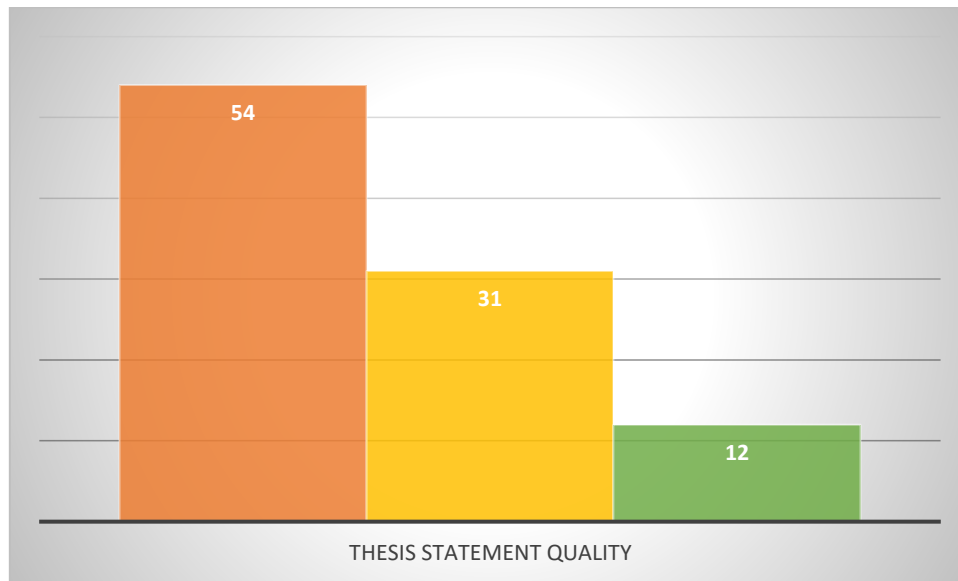
A more sophisticated structure, topic + stance + consequence, was observed in 38% ( $n = 10$ ) of the dataset. These statements demonstrated greater argumentative strength by presenting a clear position supported by a specific outcome. For instance, “involving children in social media will put them in a dangerous condition because it will expose them to paedophiles” integrates both stance and consequence, thereby strengthening the argument.

Less common were balanced or two-sided claims, which occurred in 8% ( $n = 2$ ) of the data. These statements acknowledged both positive and negative aspects of an issue, but this balance often diluted arguability by reducing the clarity of the writer’s stance.

Finally, repetition of identical structures was evident in 27% ( $n = 7$ ) of the statements. Several students produced nearly identical wording, suggesting reliance on memorised templates or shared models rather than independently constructed arguments. This repetition indicates a lack of structural variety in students’ thesis writing.

**Table 3: Thesis Statement Quality**

Quality Level	Description	Examples (Student IDs)	Frequency ( $n = 26$ )	%
<b>High</b>	Clear, specific, arguable, and well-aligned with essay content. Often include precise vocabulary and cause–effect reasoning.	S4, S5, S7, S8, S10, S12, S14, S15, S16, S18, S20, S21, S23, S24, S26	14	54%
<b>Medium</b>	Stance is clear but lacks precision or depth. Statements often repetitive, general, or moderately arguable.	S1, S2, S9, S13, S17, S19, S22, S25	8	31%
<b>Low</b>	Overly broad, vague, or descriptive. Weak arguability and little specificity. Sometimes grammatically awkward.	S3, S6, S11	3	12%



**Figure 2 : Thesis Statement Quality**

Table 3 and Figure 2 present the categorisation of thesis statements according to quality levels, based on clarity, specificity, arguability, and alignment with essay content. The analysis revealed that more than half of the statements (54%,  $n = 14$ ) were classified as high quality. These thesis statements were characterised by precise articulation of stance, strong arguability, and clear alignment with the content of the essay. They frequently employed specific vocabulary and integrated cause–effect reasoning, which enhanced argumentative depth. For instance, statements such as those by S5, S14, and S20 demonstrated a sophisticated ability to combine stance with supporting justification, producing coherent and persuasive claims.

A further 31% ( $n = 8$ ) of the statements were rated as medium quality. These statements displayed a discernible stance but often lacked precision, depth, or specificity. Many were repetitive, general in nature, or only moderately arguable. For example, thesis statements from S1 and S15 presented a position relevant to the topic but failed to advance it into a strong, debatable argument. This indicates partial mastery of thesis construction, where students understand the need to state a position but do not fully refine it into a clear, guiding claim for the essay.

The remaining 12% ( $n = 3$ ) were categorised as low quality. These thesis statements were overly broad, vague, or descriptive, with little argumentative strength. They frequently suffered from weak arguability, minimal specificity, and occasional grammatical awkwardness. For instance, S3's statement "social media can give a big impact to everyone's life" exemplifies a broad and non-committal stance that lacks critical focus. Such weaknesses undermine the statement's role as a controlling idea for the essay and limit its effectiveness in guiding subsequent arguments.

Overall, the distribution of quality levels shows that while many students were able to construct thesis statements that met academic expectations, a substantial proportion still produced statements that were either too general or insufficiently argumentative. This highlights the need

for targeted instructional support in developing specificity, clarity, and argumentative precision in thesis writing.

## Discussion

The findings of this study revealed distinct patterns in the structural composition and quality of thesis statements written by Part 3 diploma students. The overwhelming reliance on formulaic stance markers, such as “I strongly believe...”, indicates that students tend to depend on memorised patterns rather than developing independent argumentative skills. This aligns with Nesi and Gardner (2012), who observed that undergraduate students often reproduce formulaic structures in academic writing, which restricts their ability to adapt their stance for different genres. Taken together, the findings suggest that while the study’s objectives have been achieved, the results reveal uneven mastery among students. This highlights the pedagogical implication that targeted interventions are necessary: (1) explicit teaching of thesis statement functions, (2) scaffolded exercises to move students away from formulaic phrases, and (3) continuous feedback to refine clarity and arguability.

The first research objective, which was to identify structural patterns, has therefore been achieved by categorising students’ thesis statements into six distinct types. The second objective, which was to evaluate quality, has also been met through the classification into high, medium, and low categories supported by statistical percentages. Together, these findings directly respond to the research questions and confirm that while some students demonstrate high-level argumentative competence, many remain reliant on simplified or memorised forms.

While formulaic expressions provide a starting point for expressing position, they reduce rhetorical sophistication and hinder the development of critical academic discourse (Wingate, 2012). This is significant issue because while such phrases provide a simple way to state an opinion, they prevent students from learning the more nuanced and objective language required for sophisticated academic arguments. This reliance ultimately reduces sophistication and hinders the development of critical academic discourse (Wingate, 2012)

The frequent use of cause–effect justification (e.g. using ‘because’) in students’ thesis statements demonstrates partial awareness of argumentative writing conventions. By linking a stance with a reason through connectors such as “because”, students attempted to provide justification, yet the arguments often remained simplistic and one-dimensional. According to Toulmin (2003), effective argumentation requires a balance of claims, warrants, and evidence, but students in this study rarely moved beyond a single-layered cause–effect reasoning.

These findings also reflect broader ESL writing challenges, where linguistic limitations and restricted exposure to advanced writing models constrain students’ argumentative expression (Hyland, 2019). The combination of formulaic reliance and shallow reasoning suggests that instructional emphasis must shift from memorisation to guided practice using diverse thesis models and explicit feedback.

Another prominent pattern was the presence of generalised declarations and balanced two-sided claims that reduced arguability. Vague statements such as “social media has advantages and disadvantages” offered little direction for essays and weakened argumentative strength.

This indicates that students may confuse descriptive or expository statements with argumentative claims, reinforcing the need for explicit instruction in differentiating between types of writing. The low percentage of students demonstrating balanced or nuanced argumentation further shows that many learners avoid risk-taking in constructing debatable claims.

In terms of quality variation, over half of the thesis statements were categorised as high quality, indicating that some students demonstrated competence in formulating arguable, specific, and relevant claims. High-quality statements often contained precise vocabulary, clear stance, and logical alignment with essay content, echoing the characteristics of effective argumentation described by Graff and Birkenstein (2014) and Rosenwasser and Stephen (2011). However, a substantial proportion of medium- and low-quality statements revealed vagueness, repetition, and lack of argumentative focus.

The recurrence of structural weaknesses and quality variation in this study also highlights the pedagogical implications of thesis statement instruction. Many students appear to lack sufficient exposure to models of effective thesis construction and may not have received explicit feedback on how to refine their arguments. An instructor must provide ongoing support by transitioning students from formulaic expressions to the construction of independent arguments for any writing instruction to be effective (Bailey, 2014). Similarly, there is value in a methodical way of analysing qualitative writing data (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Such data may reveal patterns of persistent deficiencies that warrant pedagogical action.

In the first place, scholars argue that argumentation is not a natural form of communication and, therefore, must be developed through a process of instruction, practice, and constructive feedback (Wingate, 2012; Osana & Seymour, 2004). The findings support the need for systematic teaching of the conventions of argumentation. Students may be offered argumentation models, for instance, Toulmin's, and they may also use more cognitive tools and structured writing rubrics (Brown, 2020; not referenced in the provided readings, which is a gap that needs to be filled). This would help in the constructive feedback, practices, and instructional cycle to resolve common thesis statement problems: clarity, arguability, and specificity. In addition, the benefits of using NVivo technology help educators structure data which identify writing patterns that require specific instructional focus (Silver, 2017). These findings not only inform pedagogy but also contribute to curriculum development in Malaysian higher education and align with national goals of improving English proficiency.

## Conclusion

The research investigated what structural patterns and what quality of thesis statements Part 3 diploma students wrote and identified some achievements as well as some ongoing problems they faced with argumentative writing. The results showed that some students produced high quality thesis statements that exhibited high levels of clarity, arguability, and specificity (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014; Rosenwasser & Stephen, 2011). However, a considerable number of students used formulaic thesis statement constructions dominated by stance markers like "I strongly believe..." a bit too much. This tendency reflects a dependence on memorised structures, which, although functional, restrict rhetorical development and critical engagement with academic discourse (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Wingate, 2012).

The recurring use of cause–effect justification indicated partial awareness of argumentative conventions but highlighted the absence of deeper analytical structures, as described in Toulmin’s (2003) model of argumentation. Many low- and medium-quality statements were overly general or descriptive, confirming earlier findings that undergraduate writers often struggle to refine arguments into precise and debatable claims (Macbeth, 2010; Stapleton & Wu, 2015). These weaknesses were compounded by linguistic limitations, which remain a common challenge for second language writers (Hyland, 2019).

Overall, the study underscores the importance of explicit instruction in thesis statement construction. As Bailey (2014) and Bruce (2008) emphasise, academic writing requires direct teaching of conventions rather than assumptions that students will acquire these skills implicitly. Explicit feedback, scaffolded practice, and the integration of analytical frameworks such as rubrics (Osana & Seymour, 2004; Ozfidan & Mitchell, 2020) and thematic analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017) are necessary to help students move beyond formulaic expression towards independent and critical argumentation. By addressing these gaps, educators can foster stronger thesis-writing practices, thereby enhancing the overall coherence, persuasiveness, and academic maturity of students’ argumentative essays.

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