



A study of thesis statements in IELTS essay writings band 7

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Abstract

Although studies on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) have received more scholarly attention, including in essay writings, studies focusing on thesis statements are hardly found in the literature. In contrast, the roles of thesis statements are pivotal in writing essays, not only for creating coherences of content structures but also for expanding the creativity of writing. By understanding this need, this study intends to focus on analyzing how thesis statements are constructed in IELTS essay writings band seven. This study used a genre-based approach for analyzing 20 essay writings on band seven as corpus analyses. The results showed that the role of a thesis statement is obligatory in this study, and its positions are located in the last sentence of the first paragraph of each essay. Its length, types of sentences, and the purposes of thesis statements are further reported in the results section and interpreted in the discussion section. These findings imply that writing an IELTS essay must contain thesis statements because its appearance is not only to help test takers control their ideas for cohesive content but also to help examiners examine the structural contents of the essay.

Keywords

Band seven, IELTS essay writings, purposes, syntactic sentences, thesis statement

Introduction

Studies on International English Language Testing System (IELTS) have been widely conducted, either for review (Peltekov, 2021; Read, 2022), validities of the scorings systems (Dang & Dang, 2023; Gagen & Faez, 2024), experiments for improving scores (Nguyen & Le, 2022; Shareef, 2023), rhetorical structures (W. Warsidi et al., 2024) or knowledge for teaching it (Damayanti et al., 2023). Besides, specific focus of IELTS studies also have been carried out in IELTS essay writings for enhancing writing proficiency (Jafary et al., 2023; Nguyen & Le, 2022), students' problems in IELTS essay writings (Ariani & Arham, 2020; Jafary et al., 2023; Nguyen & Le, 2022; Pearson, 2022), and many more. However, although IELTS has been receiving a huge numbers of scholarly attention, specific attention on its rhetorical contents is still hardly discovered to date.

During my review, although corpus studies on IELTS have been carried out (e.g. Divsar & Heydari, 2017; Pham, 2022), their purposes are not to analyze communicative functions or communicative events within IELTS writings. On the other hand, studies on these aspects may contribute to creating content awareness for both students and teachers regarding the IELTS essay contents and structures, and thus, the results may be used to design guidelines for writing instruction because according to an earlier study, providing proper guidelines for students' essay writings may attract students' interests in learning, make students more confident, and improve their writing skills (Bhatti, 2021). Thus, these reviews indicate that investigating one communicative event or more, or even the whole content structure of IELTS essay writing is required to provide more awareness for those who plan to take an IELTS test and for teachers creating and designing materials for their essay writing classes.

However, although understanding the importance of genre-based studies on one or more communicative events has appeared on our grounds, to date, only two studies focused on analyzing rhetorical structures or communicative events within IELTS tests. These two studies are then reviewed in this introduction. First, rhetorical structures were analyzed within the IELTS speaking performance tests band seven and above using a genre-based approach for the analysis (W. Warsidi et al., 2024). Data were compiled from 10 videos accepting band 7 and above. The results revealed that IELTS test takers used two communicative moves: responding to interviewers' requests and supporting statements. However, in supporting statements, test takers used six communicative events or strategies: presenting experiences, presenting idol models, presenting reasons, presenting good results, presenting feelings or opinions, and presenting plans (see W. Warsidi et al., 2024, p. page 437). In this regard, presenting experiences becomes an obligatory strategy to support test takers' statements.

Second, rhetorical structures also have been analyzed in IELTS essay writing bands eight and nine using 60 corpus analyses (Ananda et al., 2018). The purpose is to discover rhetorical structures, elements for setting arguments, and types of arguments. The analysis results responded to the purposes of this study. First, regarding the rhetorical structures, test takers used three communicative functions: lead-in, thesis statements, and deduction. Second, regarding elements for setting arguments, they mainly made claims, data, and warrants. Last, regarding types of arguments, they mainly employed

simple and strong argument structures. These findings may contribute to knowledge of essay writings in the literature and create awareness among those intending to take IELTS tests as knowledge information.

However, although rhetorical structures have been analyzed and these findings contain important contributions to both theory and practices, the findings also still remain questions that need further development and analysis to provide more comprehension to those intending to take IELTS tests. For example, in which parts thesis statements are located in the essay? In which length the thesis statements are constructed? What are their purposes? These questions need further analyses to provide a more comprehensive understanding to new test takers, students, or teachers to create teaching materials because a thesis statement is very important in IELTS essay writings, and thus, this communicative event is obligatory in essay band eight and nine (see Ananda et al., 2018). In this regard, the purposes of presenting thesis statements are to show the main ideas, establish the authors' position, outline the contents, or increase cohesion. By presenting thesis statements, test takers may provide a clear and focused response to the questions, show their position either agree or disagree, and preview the main points that will be discussed. For examiners, understanding thesis statements may guide them in understanding test takers' arguments. Understanding the importance and findings of this gap in the literature has encouraged me to execute this study by answering the following questions to focus on the study.

1. To what extent is a thesis statement employed in IELTS essay writing band 7, and in which part are thesis statements positioned?
2. To what extent is the length of thesis statements, and what syntactic levels do test takers employ?
3. What are the purposes of presenting thesis statements?

Answering the three questions above may contribute to both theory and practice in academic writing, specifically in IELTS essay writing. Theoretically, conducting this study may expand knowledge in essay writing studies to the literature. Practically, this study may provide awareness and comprehension to audiences about how to practically employ thesis statements when writing essays in IELTS tests. Besides, the results may also be employed to design teaching materials for academic writing purposes.

Method

Research design

This study used mixed methods, simple quantitative and qualitative approaches. A simple quantitative approach was employed to identify the number of appearances of thesis statements in IELTS essay writings. Then, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the thesis statement. By employing these combined methods, the analysis results may become more comprehensive and acceptable.

Data collection procedures

This study used 20 IELTS essay writings band 7 because these corpus numbers may be considered to represent IELTS receiving this band. Then, band 7 was used as a corpus because this band has been received as a requirement to apply to universities in English-speaking countries. These 20 essay writings were searched on the internet and uploaded in this link <https://writing9.com/band/7/0>. Essay writings in this link were randomly selected to meet 20 corpus numbers, and this study analyzed these essay writing numbers as data sets.

Data analysis procedures

For analyzing data, this study used a genre-based approach as found in earlier studies (Warsidi, 2021b, 2022; Warsidi et al., 2024; Warsidi, 2024a, 2024b; Warsidi & Maniam, 2024) for analyzing 20 IELTS essay writings by identifying communicative events indicating a thesis statement in each essay. Communicative events in this study refer to strategies to reach functions (Arsyad & Zainil, 2023; Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2016; Lim, 2014; Petrić, 2007; Warsidi, 2021b; Warsidi & Adnan, 2024). To realize this analysis, the author employed several strategies: identifying positions and functions of thesis statements by reading the essays using a top-down approach (Adnan, 2010, 2011; Warsidi, 2023a). In this regard, the location of thesis statements may appear in the first paragraph, and then, since a sentence(s) in the paragraph indicates a thesis statement, their functions are then ensured whether to show main ideas, establish position, outline the contents and create ideas in coherence. If so, the sentence may indicate a thesis statement. Thus, its meaning is then analyzed to determine thesis statements. These series of steps were employed to answer the first research question.

After that, to answer the second research question, the length of thesis statements was counted and reported in a table. Also, their syntactic sentences were also analyzed by referring to earlier studies (Casal et al., 2021; Warsidi, 2021a, 2023b). In this regard, the analysis aims to discover whether the thesis statement is in the form of simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex sentences. Then, to answer the third research question, this study focused on identifying whether the thesis statement is to show the main ideas, establish the authors' position, or outline the contents. By employing these analytical procedures, the analysis results may answer the research questions formulated in this study.

Results

After analyzing data in the present study, the results indicate that the thesis statement appears in all IELTS essay writings. More details regarding its positions, lengths, syntactic uses, and purposes are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Thesis statement in IELTS essay writings band 7, its positions, lengths, syntactic uses, and purposes

Essay No.	The appearances and positions of thesis statements in IELTS essay writings		Length of and syntactic uses		Purposes
	Appearances	Positions	Length (words)	Syntactic uses	
1	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	6	Simple	Outlining contents
2	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	26	Complex	Establishing stance
3	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	25	Simple	Showing main ideas
4	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	26	Complex	Establishing stance
5	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	34	Complex	Establishing stance
6	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	16	Simple	Outlining contents
7	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	12	Simple	Outlining contents
8	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	9	Simple	Showing main ideas
9	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	12	Simple	Outlining contents
10	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	17	Simple	Showing main ideas
11	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	17	Complex	Establishing stance
12	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	14	Simple	Outlining contents
13	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	15	Simple	Outlining contents
14	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	9	Simple	Showing main ideas
15	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	19	Complex	Establishing stance
16	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	11	Simple	Outlining contents
17	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	18	Compound	Outlining contents
18	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	13	Simple	Outlining contents
19	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	26	Complex	Establishing stance
20	Yes	First paragraph (in the last sentence)	26	Complex	Establishing stance

Thesis statement Employment and its positions

As presented in Table 1, the analysis results revealed that all IELTS essay writings (100%) in this study contain a thesis statement. This finding means that the thesis statement is obligatory in IELTS essay writing band 7 in the present study. Then, all the positions of the thesis statement are located in the last sentence of the first paragraph. The example of thesis statement in the present study is exemplified in Figure 1.

9. Living in a country where you have to speak a foreign language can cause serious social problems, as well as practical problems- To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?	
In recent years, the discourse surrounding <u>speaking a foreign</u> has garnered significant attention, prompting a plethora of viewpoints among scholars, literature, and the general populace. Proponents of speaking any foreign dialect as a native one may argue that it offers numerous advantages, while opponents assert that it may lead to detrimental consequences. <u>However, this essay will elucidate both perspectives before articulating a definitive stance.</u>	 DELL Thesis statement
On one hand, proponents propose that attaining the language of any country leads to substantial merits. For instance, it is often posited that exposure to different languages other than the native one fosters innovation and encourages critical thinking. In countries like the United States, specific programs, which eager pupils to study the language of many countries, and this practice has been established in different continents. By improving the linguistic skills of community individuals, society can harness immigration that in turn will enhance productivity and the quality of life. Moreover, advocates propound that communities that are touching different cultures are able to reinforce social equity by providing access to unlimited essential resources and opportunities that were previously unattainable.	
Conversely, critics suggest that the implications of strict policies to ensure the smooth learning of different world languages are not entirely beneficial. They highlight the potential pitfalls, such as the risk of exacerbating socioeconomic disparities and impeding economic growth. In Germany, a vast amount of voices has been raised to decrease the total number of immigrations by limiting the chances to learn their own mother dialect. They pinpoint the social ramifications of this issue cannot be overlooked, as increased exploitation of resources by non-natives may culminate in irreversible damage to culture and norms.	
In conclusion, the debate surrounding this issue is multifaceted, encompassing both promising merits and significant challenges. Ultimately, it is crucial to approach this issue with a balanced perspective, recognizing that while the risks are considerable, the positive transformation remains an argument for its advancements. In my firm conviction, the government must navigate these complexities judiciously to harness the advantages while mitigating the adverse effects.	

Figure 1. An example of a thesis statement and its positions in IELTS essay writing

As presented in Figure 1, one full essay is presented and the way of taking notes is also presented. In this example, the thesis statement is noted with a track changer (in red highlights). In this regard, a test taker positioned a thesis statement in the last sentence of the first paragraph, and all test takers in this study positioned their thesis statements as likely exemplified in this figure.

The Length of and syntactic uses in thesis statements

As presented in Table 1, the length of thesis statements is varied, between one and another essay. However, the average length is 17.6 words length with a minimum of six words and a maximum of 34 words. The minimum and maximum lengths are exemplified as follows:

Minimum length: "This essay will explain other reasons." Band07-1

Maximum length: "While some argue that the accomplishment of our goals is predominantly determined by how lucky we are, I believe that hard work and perseverance play a more crucial role when it comes to success." Band07-05

Then, regarding the syntactic uses, test takers employed three syntactic types: simple, complex, and compound sentences. However, of these three syntactic types, simple

sentences appear to be the most dominant in the present data sets, with 12 appearances (60%). Then, the complex sentence seems to be the second most appeared in this study (35%). Last, compound sentence is the least employed in presenting the thesis statement in this study because it only has one appearance (5%).

The purpose of presenting thesis statements

As shown in Table 1, a thesis statement may have one of the possible purposes, either for outlining contents (9), establishing a stance (7), or showing main ideas (4). However, of these three possible purposes, outlining purposes has the highest appearance numbers in this study (45%). It is then followed by establishing a stance, with seven appearances (35%). Then, showing main ideas is the least employed in IELTS essay writings in this study, with only used in four essays (20%).

In short, the data analysis results have provided evidence that the thesis statement appears in all IELTS essay writings band 7 in the present study (100%), and it is positioned in the last sentence of the first paragraph of each essay. Its length is in a range of six to 34 words, written in three types of sentences, but simple sentences appear to be the most dominant in this study. Last, it has three purposes, but outlining contents is the most dominant one in the present data sets.

Discussion

After analyzing data and reporting the results, this study revealed that the thesis statement appears in all IELTS essay writings in the present study. This finding implies that writing a thesis statement in essay writing is obligatory. The reason why test takers employ it in their essay writing is probably that a thesis statement is a writing framework to manage and control their ideas, and thus, the essay may become coherent from one paragraph and the other paragraphs. This finding seems to support earlier literature that a thesis statement is to set sub-divisions of topics and to maintain cohesion (Oktavianti et al., 2021). In contrast, disability or unfamiliarity with thesis statement may lead to difficulties in writing essays, as likely found in earlier literature that students still find it difficult to write essays and they are unfamiliar with thesis statement uses (Asari & Maruf, 2022; Nenotek et al., 2022; Saprina et al., 2021). This discussion implies that employing a thesis statement in essay writing is obligatory and needs to share the ways of employing a thesis statement in essay writing with students. Thus, this study may become a guide on how to construct a thesis statement for writing an essay, particularly in IELTS essay writings.

The position of a thesis statement as found in the present study is strictly located in the last sentence of the first paragraph in each essay. This result means that test takers employed their thesis statement in this position intending to show what ideas need to be explored in their paragraphs. By employing a thesis statement in this position, they may manage and control their next ideas in the next paragraphs. However, this study seems to contrast an earlier study by just providing a topic that may help students develop their ideas and essay organization (Asari & Maruf, 2022). For this contradiction,

I still recommend authors or test takers to learn, comprehend, and apply a thesis statement because it may help us to manage and control ideas in essay writing.

Regarding the length of thesis statements, each essay may have a different length. However, the present data revealed that their thesis length is in a range of six to 34 words. This length means that the thesis statement is very short, containing one sentence. Then, their sentence types are mostly in simple forms. However, although a thesis statement is short and simple, its appearance in IELTS essay writing is obligatory. This fact means that the role of a thesis statement is very important in IELTS essay writing because all data sets in the present study employed it. Thus, this finding suggests that essay authors or IELTS test takers need to employ it. Then, although an earlier study recommended English instructors employ inquiry-based writing instruction in teaching essay writing (Wale & Bogale, 2021), this study also recommends that they provide comprehension of thesis statements when they teach essay writing to their students.

Lastly, thesis statements in this study aim mainly to outline their contents. In this regard, test takers announced their ideas or contents that would be presented in the next paragraphs. For example, one of the test takers wrote a thesis statement "However, this essay will elucidate both perspectives before articulating a definitive stance" Band7-07. This thesis statement indicates that a test taker will elaborate two perspectives on the topic 'science and technology'. There are two functions of presenting a thesis statement in essay writing: one function for test takers and another function for examiners. For test takers, it may help test takers control and organize their contents, and thus, their essays may have cohesive meaning and contents. For examiners, it may help them to identify the structural contents of the essay, and thus, examiners may easily examine the contents of the essay.

Conclusion

After analyzing data and discussing the results, this study finally concludes three important findings in answering the three research questions. First of all, the data analysis has proved that a thesis statement is obligatory in IELTS essay writings, and its position is located in the last sentence of the first paragraph. Second, its length is in the range of six to 34 words within a sentence. However, the majority of them are written in the simple simple sentence form. Third, the thesis statement mainly aims to outline contents.

This study may contribute to theoretical knowledge in the literature that a thesis statement in essay writing is obligatory and indicates the importance of controlling ideas or contents. Besides, it may also contribute to practical writing for students who write essays or take IELTS tests. Also, the findings of this study may also be used to design teaching materials for essay studies. Unfortunately, this study has limitations as it only analyzed essay band 7 and ignored the above bands. Then, it only limits its analysis to a thesis statement and ignores the whole contents of the essay writing. Thus, the results cannot be justified as complete and do not provide a complete comprehension. Because of these limitations, this study recommends further analyses or studies to fill these gaps

by addressing these limitations, and thus, the results may provide a more comprehensive understanding for readers.

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