



THE QUALITY OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERVISORY SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the quality of students' academic writing and the effectiveness of supervisory support in shaping that quality. Academic writing remains a persistent challenge for numerous students, often marked by weaknesses in structure, argumentation, citation practices, and language use. Effective supervision has been identified as a critical factor in addressing these challenges, yet the relationship between supervisory practices and writing outcomes is not fully understood. This research investigates students' perceptions of their writing competence, common writing difficulties, and the extent to which supervisory feedback, guidance, and mentoring contribute to improvement. Using a combination of surveys and document analysis, the study aims to show gaps in current supervisory practices and propose strategies for enhancing academic writing quality through more effective, consistent, and responsive supervisory support.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is an essential component of the learning process in higher education. The ability to produce scholarly work not only reflects students' intellectual

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capacity but also proves their skills in critical thinking, constructing arguments, and applying proper research methodologies. As noted by Filipović & Jovanović, (2016), writing ability is a key indicator of students' academic maturity and serves as the foundation for developing scientific research. Similarly, Juanda et al. (2025) shows that students with strong academic literacy tend to produce writing that is more coherent and analytically structured.

However, observations conducted at the university where this study took place reveal that plenty students continue to struggle with academic writing. These challenges include understanding the structure of scientific papers, formulating research problems, using scholarly references, and applying citation standards correctly. Lane et al. (2004) found that low self-efficacy and limited methodological competence are major factors hindering students from completing their theses. Likewise, Asriyadin et al. (2025) explains that insufficient reference literacy and limited exposure to high-quality academic sources significantly weaken students' research arguments.

On the other hand, the supervisory process plays a significant role in supporting students during the writing of academic work (Atmoko et al., 2022). Effective supervision can improve writing quality, strengthen methodological understanding, and help students grasp the proper structure of academic texts. AbuSa'aleek & Alharbi (2025) emphasize that consistent, iterative, and targeted supervisory feedback strongly predicts prompt thesis completion. Furthermore, Ringo & Ringo (2025) found that the quality of the relationship between supervisors and students significantly influences the structure, analysis, and overall quality of the written work.

Despite its importance, the supervision process often faces challenges not only from students but also from institutional and lecturer-related factors (Tomé et al., 2022). Heavy teaching loads, limited supervisory training, and institutional writing guidelines that are not well socialized can negatively affect the quality of supervision. Kriswantoro & Wulandari (2024) highlights that clear and accessible writing guidelines improve supervisory effectiveness and help students follow academic writing standards more easily. Usman et al. (2023) underscores the need to strengthen lecturers' competencies in method and supervision to ensure a more professional and structured guidance process.

Given these challenges, this study is essential to explore lecturers' perspectives on students' academic writing abilities, the role of institutional guidelines, supervisory practices, and the obstacles encountered during the thesis supervision process. This understanding is expected to offer valuable insights for higher education institutions in improving academic guidance and enhancing student learning outcomes.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of lecturers' experiences, perspectives, and practices related to students' academic writing abilities and the supervision process of thesis writing. This approach enables the researcher to explore meanings and viewpoints naturally, without manipulating variables (Lim, 2025).

A descriptive design was used because the study aims to present the phenomenon as it is, particularly regarding lecturers' views on institutional writing guidelines, students' methodological competence, supervisory practices, the challenges students encounter, and the supervisors' competencies in guiding academic writing.

The research was conducted at a higher education institution where lecturers teach and supervise thesis writing. The site was selected purposively because the institution applies established academic writing standards and implements an active thesis supervision system. The research took place over several months, covering the stages of obtaining permission, preparing instruments, collecting data, analyzing data, and preparing the final research report.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance and competence in providing information related to the research topic. The criteria for informants included lecturers who actively supervise theses, have experience in academic writing supervision, and have been involved in developing or adhering to institutional writing guidelines. A total of 12 lecturers took part, each assigned a code such as Inf.1, Inf.2, Inf.3 etc. to ensure confidentiality.

Data was collected through three primary techniques: interviews, observations, and document analysis. The main research instrument was the researcher, supported by an interview guide, observation sheets for noting supervisory behavior and practices, and documentation checklists to assess the alignment of students' research documents with institutional guidelines. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman (1994) model, consisting of three major stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The discussion section presents an in-depth analysis of the key findings obtained from interviews with supervising lecturers on students' academic writing abilities and the effectiveness of supervision in the preparation of scholarly work. Each finding is examined by connecting empirical data with relevant theories and previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' writing quality. This discussion not only explains how students meet challenges related to method, reference literacy, and argument development, but also highlights the significant contribution of supervisors in shaping the quality of academic writing. In addition, this section emphasizes the role of institutional guidelines, lecturers' competencies, and supervisory dynamics in deciding the success of the academic writing process. Thus, the discussion serves as a bridge between the research findings and their practical implications for improving the quality of academic supervision in higher education.

The Importance of Institutional Guidelines in Academic Writing

The findings of this study show that institutional guidelines serve as a fundamental component of students' academic writing processes. These guidelines ensure consistency in structure, format, and citation standards, enabling students to produce work aligned with scientific norms. This aligns with (Krumsvik, 2022), who emphasize that writing guidelines help students understand academic structures systematically. Mason et al. (2021) further explains that institutional guidelines support supervisors in providing high-quality feedback. In addition, Abdallah (2024) found that clear guidelines enhance students' citation accuracy and overall writing structure.

"Supervisors highlight the importance of adhering to institutional guidelines as the primary reference for structuring proposals and academic writing, ensuring that

students' work follows established standards rather than relying solely on individual lecturer experience. These guidelines also support students in understanding research approaches, including qualitative and quantitative methods, and in organizing their writing according to institutional and departmental manuals" [...] [INF 9, INF 2, INF 4].

"Supervisors stress the importance of students understanding the norms and structure of academic writing, guided by standards such as APA, which regulate citations, formatting, and the overall organization of a thesis. Students are also expected to know how to select an appropriate research topic and method, while supervisors provide guidance strictly based on institutional manuals, requiring lecturers to fully master and consistently refer to these guidelines" [...] [Inf 1, Inf 12].

Mastery of Methode and Theory as Foundation of Academic Argumentation

Students who demonstrate strong understanding of research methodology tend to produce more coherent and logical academic arguments. Muhammad et al. (2025) shows that methodological competence directly influences the quality of scientific reasoning in thesis writing. Similarly, Musthofa et al. (2025) assert that students with a solid methodological foundation are better at formulating research problems accurately. This is reinforced by Pregoner (2024), who concludes that the ability to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches significantly affects the quality of academic analysis.

"Supervisors highlight the importance of students developing a solid foundation in research method, particularly the ability to distinguish various research types, such as descriptive, exploratory, documentary, and both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This understanding enables students to show proper research problems and structure their studies more effectively. In addition, students are expected to prove sufficient writing skills and theoretical knowledge to elaborate their chosen topics, while lecturers monitor their progress to ensure they have the capacity to do so. Throughout this process, supervisors rely on institutional and departmental manuals as the primary reference to support consistency and accuracy in guiding students" [...] [Inf. 1, Inf. 3, Inf. 4].

“Supervisors emphasize that students must understand the norms and structure of academic writing, guided by standards such as APA, which regulate citations, formatting, and the overall organization of a thesis. Although each lecturer may use different supervisory strategies, all guidance must follow the manuals issued by the department, faculty, and institution. Students are expected to choose an appropriate research topic, select a suitable method, and read extensively, while lecturers must master the institutional guidelines to provide accurate and consistent supervision” [...] [Inf.1, Inf.4, Inf.12].

Effectiveness of Supervision and Feedback in Improving Academic Writing

Effective supervision, including the writing-first strategy, in-depth discussions, and iterative revisions, has been proven to help students enhance the quality of their writing. Bahtilla (2022) emphasize that clear, repeated, and targeted supervisory feedback is a strong predictor of timely thesis completion. Enita & Sumardi (2023) also says that dialogic interaction between supervisors and students improves the quality of writing drafts. Furthermore, Yu & Liu (2021) found that repeated revision practices strengthen argument structure and linguistic accuracy in academic work.

“Supervisors emphasize the need to adhere to institutional guidelines, as these serve as the primary reference for helping students structure their proposals and academic writing. Clear standards prevent students from relying solely on individual lecturer experiences and ensure consistency in their work. Supervisors also assess students’ theoretical understanding and writing abilities to decide whether they can develop and articulate their chosen topics effectively” [...] [Inf. 9, Inf. 2, Inf. 3].

“Students need a clear understanding of how to select a research topic and a suitable method for their thesis, while guidance from lecturers must follow established guidelines. Lecturers provide supervision based on departmental, faculty, and institutional manuals, yet the creativity and initiative of students in developing their research remain essential”. [...] (Inf. 12, Inf. 4).

Challenges: Reference Literacy, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy

This study reveals that the major challenges faced by students include low reference literacy and lack of self-efficacy in writing. Medaille et al. (2022) highlights that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in students' persistence in completing their theses. Additionally, Teng & Yue (2022) report that strong reference literacy significantly enhances students' ability to formulate academic arguments. This is also supported by Abbas & Herdi (2022), who found that reading motivation and the ability to locate scholarly sources strongly influence the quality of students' academic writing.

"Supervisors emphasize that students must develop a solid foundation in research by understanding different research types, such as descriptive, exploratory, documentary, qualitative, and quantitative, and by learning to show the core problem within their chosen topic. Effective academic writing also requires adherence to institutional guidelines to ensure consistency and prevent reliance on individual lecturer practices. Supervisors assess students' theoretical knowledge, writing skills, and ability to elaborate their topics, guiding them through structured discussions while referring to institutional and departmental manuals" [...] [Inf. 1, Inf. 2, Inf. 3, Inf. 4].

"Supervisors apply different strategies depending on students' creativity and readiness as emerging researchers, but all guidance must follow the manuals provided by the department, faculty, and institution. Students are expected to read widely and continue developing their skills, while lecturers must have sufficient knowledge to guide them effectively. Supervisors also prepare essential academic documents and offer structured guidance to help students strengthen their academic writing" [...] [Inf. 4, Inf. 8].

Supervisors' Competence as a Key Factor

The quality of supervision is strongly influenced by supervisors' competence in research methodology, their research experience, and their ability to provide constructive feedback. Lu et al. (2024) affirm that high-quality supervision improves students' writing cohesion and citation accuracy. Sibiya & Mahosi (2025) further explains that supervisors who are actively involved in research tend to offer more effective guidance due to their

familiarity with current scholarly practices. Similarly, Almusaed & Almssad (2020) show that supervisors with strong pedagogical competencies are better able to provide clear and effective direction to their students.

Supervisors emphasize that students must adhere to institutional writing guidelines to ensure their academic work follows a consistent and standardized structure rather than relying on individual lecturer preferences. Effective supervision also requires assessing students' theoretical understanding, checking their ability to elaborate their chosen topics, and ensuring they possess adequate writing and subject knowledge. To keep the quality of supervision, lecturers themselves must continually develop their skills and engage in research activities so they can provide informed and experience-based guidance [...] [Inf 2, Inf 3, Inf 12].

Supervisors highlight that students must understand how to choose a proper research topic and method while ensuring their thesis follows institutional guidelines, which lecturers must master and consistently apply. Students are also expected to follow established academic writing norms, such as APA standards, to structure their work correctly and meet formal requirements. Although supervisory strategies may vary, all guidance is grounded in departmental and institutional manuals, with students encouraged to read widely and develop their research creativity [...] [Inf 12, Inf 1, Inf 4].

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion regarding students' academic writing abilities and the role of supervisors in guiding the preparation of scholarly work, several key conclusions can be drawn:

Institutional guidelines serve as the primary foundation in academic writing.

Lecturers view writing guidelines as essential standards that students must follow to ensure their academic work meets the required structure and format. These guidelines help keep consistency in writing quality and facilitate a more effective supervision process.

Mastery of method and theory greatly influences the quality of academic work.

Students who understand research typology, methodological reasoning, and appropriate method selection demonstrate stronger abilities in identifying research problems, formulating objectives, and developing coherent academic arguments.

The effectiveness of lecturer supervision significantly impacts students' writing development.

Supervisory strategies such as the first writing approach, in-depth discussions, and iterative revisions have been shown to help students improve their writing. Clear, focused, and consistent feedback is a key factor in successful thesis writing.

Students face challenges related to academic literacy and low self-efficacy.

Many students struggle to find references, interpret literature, cite correctly, and keep motivation throughout the writing process. These challenges contribute to lower confidence in their ability to develop high-quality academic texts.

Supervisors' competence and experience strongly determine the effectiveness of guidance.

Lecturers with research experience, strong methodological understanding, and the ability to provide constructive feedback are more effective in guiding students and have a direct positive influence on the quality of students' academic work.

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