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Investigating the Application of Thematic Progression in EFL Writing: A Systematic Review

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Abstract. A systematic literature review was conducted to examine the studies on the application of thematic progression (TP) to EFL writing. Based on three criteria of research relevance, coverage and update frequency (Shaheen, 2023), five databases were chosen, covering Web of Science, Scopus, Eric, Google Scholars and ProQuest. A total of 32 research articles published from 2014 to 2023 were categorized and reviewed. The research methodology mainly follows the guidelines of PRISMA to address the three research questions: 1) What are the development trends in TP-based EFL writing studies including research publications, countries and methodologies? 2) How is TP applied to EFL writing? 3) How does TP influence EFL writing performance? It was discovered that in the past decade there was a steady increase and expansion in the number of research articles and the range of research countries and methods. Moreover, different TP patterns were found to have been distributed across six writing types. These TP patterns established stronger relations with and strengthened writing organization, language use, and content. From the above findings, it can be suggested that TP-based EFL writing researches have regained their development momentum. It can also be inferred that the distribution of TP patterns varies from genre to genre and the patterns improve the overall EFL writing performance by enhancing writing organization, content and language use.

Keywords: Thematic progression (TP); thematic choice; five writing components; EFL writing; correlation

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1. Background of the study

Writing in one's mother tongue is a difficult task in itself, and writing in a foreign language – or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) – comes with further challenges. In an EFL setting, English is only taught in the classroom, which forces learners to write in this environment alone (Fernandez, 2019). Due to the restrictive shortage of linguistic environments and language inputs, EFL learners typically regard English writing as a great challenge to their EFL studies. However, the more challenging and obstructive EFL writing has become, the more attention it has garnered from scholars. The past six decades have witnessed the prolonged and rapid development in this field. In particular, the most recent decade between 2014 and 2024 has shown a dramatic increase in articles. An initial combined figure of 755 articles in 2014 has now quadrupled to 3281 in 2024, according to the statistics of SCOPUS.

Abundant research in EFL writing enables scholars to conduct numerous EFL writing reviews and report the current development of this field. The reviews have mainly unfolded from writing instruction (Ugun & Aziz, 2020; Samsuddin et al., 2021; Zhang, 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2023), writing technology (Shak et al., 2023; Wang, 2023; Zou et al., 2020; Shi & Aryadoust, 2024), and writing learners (Uçar, 2023). Moreover, the writing techniques an EFL learner adopts are most likely to correlate with each learner's respective instruction, courses, or classroom (Shak et al., 2023; Wang, 2023; Zou et al., 2020; Shi & Aryadoust, 2024). Furthermore, the reviews related to EFL writing approaches and technology mostly concern the way in which teachers assist students to finish a writing product. Limited studies report how learners go through a writing process in EFL writing or how they convert their ideas into words and sentences, arrange them into paragraphs, and organize the paragraphs into a full text.

Therefore, there is a research gap in reviewing EFL studies from the perspective of the writing process. In light of this, this research will conduct a systematic literature review to examine the existing studies covering the EFL writing process. Thematic progression (TP) was introduced to probe EFL writing performance and originated from two basic concepts: themes and rhemes. Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) in turn defined themes as "the point of departure of the message" (pp.89-90) and what the clause is concerned about and rhemes as "the remainder of the message" (pp.89-90) and the part in which the theme is developed. They later proposed that patterning of themes and rhemes help structure ideas. Based on these two concepts, Danes (1974) defined TP as the mechanism that associates the current themes in a sentence with previous themes in preceding sentences. TP aims at constructing the interrelations between multiple sentences or paragraphs to establish textual coherence. There are four basic patterns of TP: (1) Simple Linear Progression (SLP), (2) constant theme progression (CTP), (3) derived theme progression (DTP), and (4) split rheme progression (SRP) (Danes, 1974).

There are three cogent reasons to investigate TP patterns in EFL writing performance. The first reason is that in the writing process, the conversion of ideas into words and sentences, the arrangement of words and sentences into

paragraphs, and the organization of sentences all rely on sentences. TP patterns also take effect at the syntactic level. A total of 1011 related articles extracted from five mainstream databases reveal that there are sufficient research articles related to TP-based EFL writing for systematic reviews. Thirdly, in order to meet the demands of the EFL writing process, the functions of TP patterns are to structure ideas, connect sentences and organize texts (Danes, 1974; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). In light of the above three reasons, this review presents a systematic literature review of studies that examine the application of TP to EFL writing and answers the following three questions:

- 1) What are the development trends in TP-based EFL writing studies from research publication, countries and methodologies?
- 2) How is TP applied to EFL writing?
- 3) How does TP influence EFL writing performance?

2. Methodology

To conduct this systematic review, the PRISMA methodology was mostly adopted. PRISMA is the abbreviation of The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (Page et al., 2021). It offers a series of standardized procedures to report reviews on justifying intervention effects and serves as a basis for reporting systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). This review followed this methodology to determine data resources, formulate Search strategies, and establish inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following this, it went through systematic review and assessment before proposing different methods of data analysis. With the aid of corpus analysis conducting "the systematic study of large bodies of text, spoken or written, to identify patterns, trends, and linguistic features" (Sinclair, 2004, p. 12), this review further adopted the thematic analysis method to code, classify and synthesize qualitative data as this is a widely applied method in qualitative thematic reviews (Serpil, 2023; Riazi et al., 2023; Zhang, 2023).

2.1 Information Sources

In order to review the application of TP to EFL writing and address three research questions, five databases were chosen as data sources, including Web of Science, Scopus, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The selection of databases was based on three criteria: (1) research coverage, (2) upgrade frequency and (3) research relevance. The first criterion confined the databases to be comprehensive enough to include all the desired research types. For this, the Web of Science and Scopus were most used as they provided the largest number of high-quality indexing research papers in a wide range of research types (Samsuddin et al, 2021). The second criterion required databases to continue upgrading new research articles. Undoubtedly, Google Scholar was the best choice as it possesses 400 million records and continually updates its records to reduce the risk of publication bias (Gusenbauer, 2019). The third criterion restricted databases to the research topic relevant to EFL writing education. In light of this, ERIC, as the largest online database for education research and information (Robbins, 2001), met this criterion. In addition, ProQuest was also selected to guarantee adequacy of relevant research articles in this review as it enables scholars to retrieve the full

texts of research papers and obtain the largest periodical resource in a multidisciplinary research database (DiMarco & Fasos, 2020).

2.2 Search Strategies

Before searching in the five databases, all the keywords, synonyms, and variations of this systematic review had to be derived from the research question. According to the previous literature, thematic choices and thematic selection are equivalents to thematic progression. Hence, all the above three phrases all served as the search keywords for researching treatment. In addition, the denotation of EFL writing also contained two equivalent expressions: ESL writing and English writing, as ESL writing and English writing in EFL countries are wholly similar to EFL writing because they shared similar English writing environment restricted to classrooms (Fernandez, 2019). Equipped with three keywords of research treatment (thematic progression, thematic choice, and thematic selection) and those of the research object (EFL writing, ESL writing, and English Writing), corresponding Boolean operators were formulated to search Web of Science, Scopus, ProQuest, ERIC and Google Scholar databases. As is shown in Table 1, though the Boolean operating orders shared the same keywords, they varied from database to database.

Table 1: Keywords used in search strategies

Criteria	Keywords
Web of Science	TI= ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection" AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing")) OR AB= ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection" AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing")) OR KP= ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection" AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing"))
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection" AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English Writing")) AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English"))
ProQuest	("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection") AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing") AND PEER (yes) AND pd (20140101-20231109)
Eric	Abstract: ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection") AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing") OR Title: ("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection") AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing")
Google Scholar	("thematic progression" OR "thematic choice" OR "thematic selection") AND ("EFL writing" OR "ESL writing" OR "English writing")

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

After formulating five Boolean operators, a comprehensive PRISMA-based search strategy was devised. For the strategy implementation, the choice of studies had to meet the following inclusion criteria shown in the left column of Table 2. The first criterion required the chosen studies to maintain their relevance to the application of thematic progression, thematic structure, and thematic choices of

EFL writing. The second criterion was that chosen studies focused on various EFL writing contexts and settings, such as EFL writing classrooms, EFL writing programs, and EFL writing tests. Thirdly, only studies ranging from the beginning of 2014 to the end of 2023 were included. Fourthly, the studies were only accepted if published in English. Fifthly, only research articles were fully included in this research.

The right column of Table 2 presents the subsequent exclusion criteria. The first criterion was that the studies were removed when they failed to investigate the application of thematic progression, thematic structure, thematic choices to EFL writing. Secondly, the studies were also rejected when they implemented this strategy in other EFL aspects such as EFL listening, reading, or speaking. Thirdly, the studies were not accepted if they were issued before 2014. Fourthly, the studies published in non-English languages were excluded. Fifthly, non-research articles, such as reviews, books, chapters, conferences, proceedings, editorials, and theses, were rejected. In short, all the inclusion and exclusion criteria followed the guidelines of PRISMA and applied the Rayyan literature platform, a literature-reviewing platform specializing in systematic literature review to ensure its standard.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2014-2023	<2014
Language	English	None-English
Scope	Related to thematic progression, thematic selection, and thematic choice; Related to applying the above theory to EFL writing	Not related to thematic progression, thematic selection, and thematic choice; Related to applying the above theory to EFL listening, reading, and speaking
Type	Research Articles	Reviews, books, chapters, conferences, proceedings, editorials, and theses
Setting	EFL context	None-EFL context

2.4 Systematic Review Process

The whole review process strictly followed the four stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as shown in Figure 1. The first stage of identification was to input Boolean operating orders and search through five databases to collect the total number of pertinent records (1101). Before the second stage of screening, 69 duplicate records were eradicated via the Rayyan literature platform. This reduced the number of possible studies to 942, and these were checked again in the second stage. The screener further removed 437 non-English records and 419 records unrelated to thematic progression. As a result, the number of potentially eligible screened records reduced to 86. Following this, 14 records that did not focus on EFL writing were also filtered out. In the third stage of eligibility, only 62 research articles were downloaded from the databases as a further 10 records were taken away due to their inaccessibility. After a further 30 records were excluded as they took the form of review papers, book chapters, books, editorials, conference proceedings or theses, a total of 32 articles related to

the right research designs, detailed findings, and clear conclusions were eligible for the final stage ready for further research.

When the review process was finished, the CASP systematic review checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018) was implemented to assess the quality of the reviews. By answering ten questions scattered among Part A, B, and C, a review was determined as valid if it contained the right content relevant to TP-based EFL writing studies and addressed a clear question. It could also indicate its applicability to a local population though the precision of findings influenced by small samples.

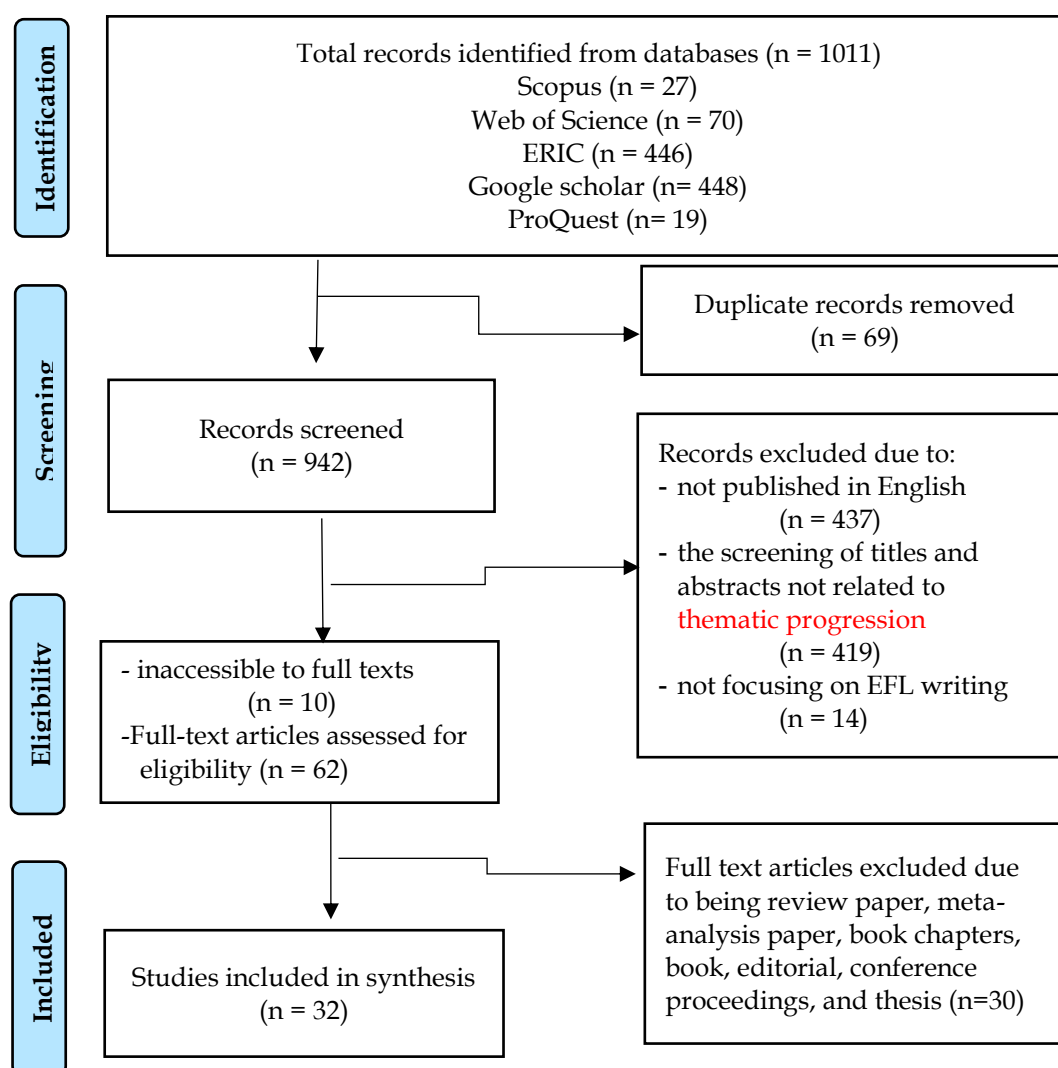


Figure 1: Flowchart of the systematic review process (Page et al., 2021)

2.5 Data Analysis

This study conducted a systematic literature review assisted by corpus analysis and thematic analysis. In other words, thematic analysis was widely implemented across three research questions, while corpus analysis was confined to addressing one part of the third research question. To tackle the first research question, the parameters of research publication, research countries, and research

methodologies were adopted to measure current trends of applying TP to EFL writing. Specific data from these parameters were classified, counted and converted into a pie chart for research methodologies, a line graph for research publication, and a bar chart for research countries to display the overall development of TP-based EFL writing studies.

To handle the second research question, all the data retrieved from the selected articles were classified and numerated under four TP patterns (Halliday, 2004; Danes, 1976). To measure the implication of various TP patterns in EFL writing, the frequency of each TP pattern over six writing types were numerated and transformed into the corresponding percentages. These percentages were later tabulated to clarify the application of each TP pattern to six EFL writing types.

To address the third research question, the research assessed the influence of TP from five writing components: content, vocabulary, language use, organization, and mechanics (Jacobs, 1981). The evaluation process can be divided into two phases. Phase one carried out corpus analysis to disclose the concordance between Thematic progression and five EFL writing components and figure out the strength of their relationships. The corpus analysis of this phase followed a three-step procedure. The first step was to establish a monolingual corpus of selected studies and open the corpus software of Antconc 4.0. The second step was to input the five groups of correlated keywords (thematic progression and content, thematic progression and vocabulary, thematic progression and language use, thematic progression and mechanics, thematic progression and organization), which included the association of their synonyms listed in Table 3. The third step was to run advanced concordance to analyze the strength of thematic progression with five writing components. Phase two adopted a thematic analysis to evaluate the degree of TP's influence upon each of the five components.

Table 3: Synonyms of Concordance Keywords

Thematic Progression	Content	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics	Organization
Thematic Structure	idea/ ideas	word/ words	clause/ clause	grammar	paragraph/ text/textual
Thematic Choice	topic	lexical	sentence/ sentences	spelling	organize/ organizing
				punctuation	coherent/ coherence
				capitalization	cohesive/ cohesion

3. Results

Table 3 displays the selected existing studies ranging from 2014 to 2023. The table reviewed the primary data of research authors, years, countries, research treatments, subjects, EFL writing types, and methods. In accordance with the three research questions, the results were unfolded from development trends in investigating EFL writing under TP, the application of TP to EFL writing and the influence of TP on improving the performance of EFL writing.

Table 4: An overview of the previous study background from 2014 to 2023

(QL=Qualitative QN=Quantitative MM = Mixed Method)

	Author and Year	Country	Treatment	Subject	Writing Types	Method
1	Ebrahimi (2014)	Iran	Theme &TP	30 (IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	QL
2	Ebrahimi and (2014)	Iran	TP	30 (IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	QL
3	Al Bakaa(2014)	Iraqi	Theme &TP	4 (University Assignments)	Academic Writing	MM
4	Li (2015)	China	Theme &TP	22(CET4 Model Essays)	Test Writing	QL
5	Yang (2015)	China	TP	100(University Students)	Argumentation	QN
6	Yuned (2016)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	100(Research Abstracts)	Academic Writing	QL
7	Jalilifar et al. (2017)	Iran	Theme &TP	86 (University Students) & 60(Research Introduction)	Academic Writing	MM
8	Wei(2017)	China	Theme &TP	90(University Students)	Test Writing	QN
9	Yunita (2018)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	6(Senior High Students)	Narration (Recount Texts)	QL
10	Trung and Hoa (2018)	Vietnam	Theme &TP	20 (IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	QL
11	Pangestu et al. (2019)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	9(Grade 11 Students)	Description	QL
12	Dou and Zhao (2019)	China	TP	120(Research Abstracts)	Academic Writing	MM
13	Devira et al. (2020)	Indonesia	TP	24(Grade 11 Students)	Narration (Recount Texts)	QL
14	Utomo et al. (2020).	Indonesia	TP	26(Grade 7 Students)	Exposition	QL
15	Rahayu et al. (2020)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	9(Grade 6 Students)	Narration (Recount Texts)	QL
16	Alyousef et al. (2020)	Saudi Arabia	Theme &TP	117 (Research Introduction)	Academic Writing	MM
17	Nguyen and Nguyen (2020)	Vietnam	TP	24 (IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	MM
18	Bahang et al. (2021)	Indonesia	TP	20(G11 Students)	Exposition	QN
19	Hendrawan et al. (2021)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	6(Term Reports)	Academic Writing	QL
20	Saeed et al. (2021)	Pakistan	TP	40(IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	QN
21	Arientarini et al. (2021)	Indonesia	TP	3 (Research Introduction)	Academic Writing	QL
22	Keskin and Demir (2021)	Turkey	TP	2 Classes (University Students)	Argumentation	QL

23	Bangga (2021)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	12(University Students)	Exposition	QL
24	Susilowati et al. (2022)	Thailand	Theme &TP	10 (Research Introduction)	Academic Writing	QL
25	Nurdianti et al. (2022)	Indonesia	TP	6 (University Students)	Academic Writing	QL
26	Munir et al. (2022)	Pakistan	TP	160(Research Articles)	Academic Writing	QL
27	Sari and Agustina (2022)	Indonesia	TP	13(Argumentative Essays)	Argumentation	QL
28	Bi (2023)	China	TP	56(Argumentative Essays)	Argumentation	QN
29	Haji (2023)	Tunisia	TP	20(Personal Statements)	Academic Writing	QL
30	Okta et al. (2023)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	24 (IELTS Writing Task2 Model Essays)	Test Writing	MM
31	Latifa and Kurniawan (2023)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	6(Teachers)	Description	QL
32	Mustofa and Kurniawan (2023)	Indonesia	Theme &TP	1(Recount Texts)	Narration (Recount Texts)	QL

3.1 Development trends in investigating EFL writing under TP

The past decade witnessed a continuous and steady development in EFL writing studies from the perspective of TP. Its developing trends were not only reflected in the variety of research methods and the range of research articles but also in the research scope or country.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the qualitative method dominated in the selected research articles and twenty-one (21) out of the total thirty-two (32) articles chose this method, accounting for 66% of the chart, thus representing a majority. The opposite was true of the quantitative method. It merely attracted five scholars to analyze the effects of TP on EFL writing performance, taking up 15%, the minimum of the chart. In addition, over 15% of research articles (19%) exercised mixed methods to assess the role of TP in the EFL writing domain, and this served as the second largest proportion.

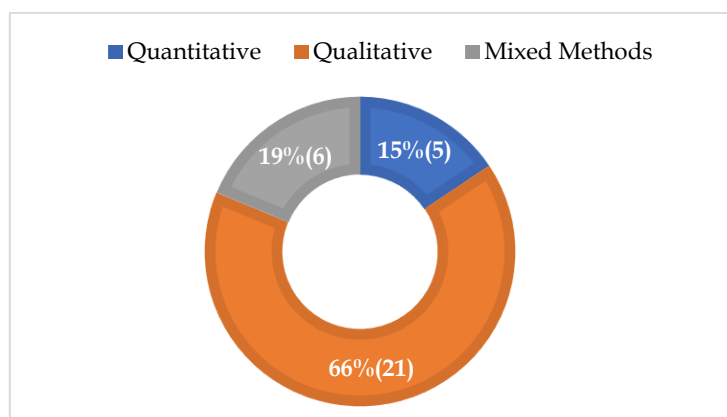


Figure 2: Proportions of Different Research Designs 2014-2023

In terms of research publications, Figure 3 below displays that the past decade has witnessed a steady increase in the number of research articles probing the impacts of TP on EFL writing in all the related countries. Specifically, in 2014, their number only stood at three, which was followed by a modest decline to a minimum of one over the next two years. However, this figure began to regain its rising momentum and grew to two in 2017. Over the next two years, it leveled off at two, but from 2019 onwards the figure saw a continuous boost and reached its peak of six in 2021. Following this, despite a slight dip in 2022, the number of research articles showed a rising trend up to five in 2023. If pertinent research articles continue to be collected until 2024, this figure is likely to reach and even surpass six.

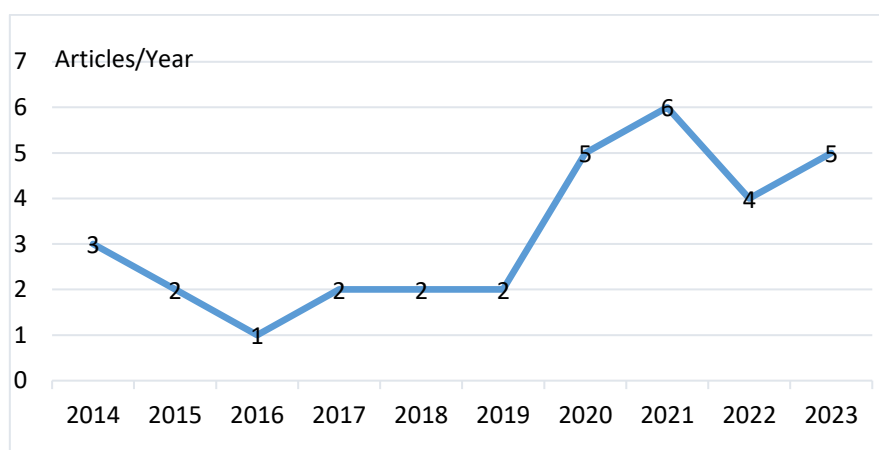


Figure 3: Numbers of Research Articles Published from 2014 to 2023

Similar to the number of pertinent research articles exploring the role of TP in EFL writing, the number of corresponding research countries also experienced an upward trend and grew to ten research articles per year. These countries ranged from Indonesia, China, Iran, Vietnam, Pakistan, Turkey, Thailand, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia to Iraqi. Among them, Indonesian scholars devoted the maximum number of research papers to studying EFL writing under the framework of TP, contributing 15 articles to this field over the past decade. The second largest number of research articles was published by Chinese scholars, with a total of five in the same period. This figure was followed by that of Iran, where three scholars probed the effects of TP on EFL writing. In addition, Vietnam and Pakistan shared the same number of published articles (2). On the contrary, Turkey, Thailand, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq only published as few as one article in this field.

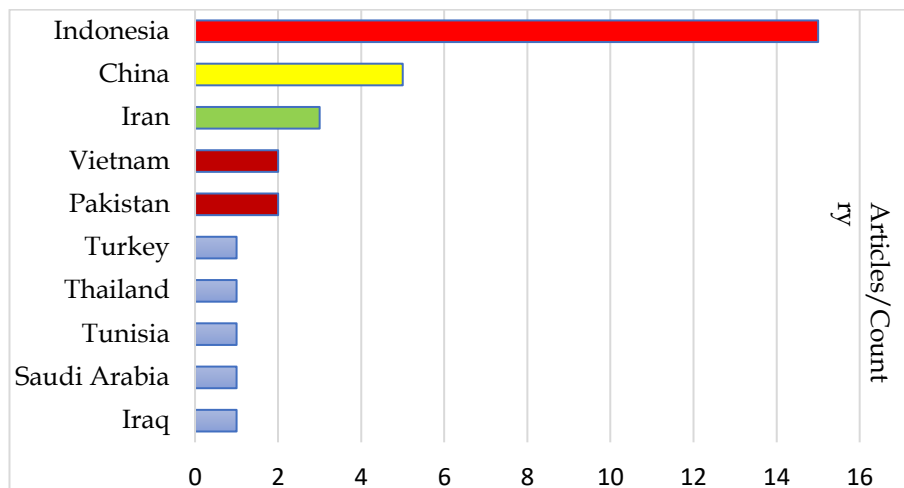


Figure 4: Numbers of Research Articles in Different Countries 2014-2023

3.2 Implementation of TP in EFL writing

As shown in Table 4, four TP patterns were applied to six EFL writing types, namely, test writing, academic writing, exposition, argumentation, description, and narration. In almost all the writing types, constant theme progression (CTP) was employed most frequently, accounting for the largest proportion, ranging from 48% to 91%. Also, the proportions of simple linear progression (SLP) in the writing types were much lower than those of CTP. Further, split rheme progression (SRP) and derived theme progression (DTP) both took up a percentage below 5%. There was an exception in test writing where SLP took up the maximum of (50%) and was slightly higher than that of CTP (48%). Another exception was that only test writing and academic writing contained SRP and DTP patterns, though both proportions in academic writing were higher than those in test writing.

Table 5: Distribution of TP in six writing types

EFL Writing Types	Subject	CTP	SLR	SRP	DTP
1 Test Writing	24	48%	50%	1%	1%
2 Academic Writing	6	56%	18%	17%	9%
3 Exposition	12	53%	42%	5%	N/A
4 Argumentation	117	77%	21%	2%	N/A
5 Description	9	91%	6%	3%	N/A
6 Narration	6	76%	20%	4%	N/A

3.3 Influences of TP on EFL writing performance

According to Table 6, the relations of thematic progression including its synonyms with EFL writing content, vocabulary, language use, mechanics, and organization, varied from component to component. As displayed in Table 6, thematic progression established the strongest relationship with the organization component of EFL writing as their co-occurrence rate accounted for 61.73% and they co-appeared most frequently. Further, EFL writing language use also subjected to thematic progression a larger percentage regarding co-occurrence rate, reaching the second highest percentage of 21%. The third highest percentage

of concordance happened between thematic progression and writing content, constituting 11%. By contrast, the co-occurrence relations of thematic progression with vocabulary and mechanics were not as strong as those relations between thematic progression and the above three writing components because the combination of their co-occurrence rates was merely 6%.

Table 6: Concordance between TP and five writing components

	Content	Vocabulary	Language Use	Mechanics	Organization
Thematic Progression	4	2	15	2	40
Thematic Structure	3	0	2	0	8
Thematic Choice	2	0	0	1	2
Total	(11.11%)	2(2.47%)	17(20.99%)	3(3.70%)	50(61.73%)

Just as Table 6 demonstrates TP patterns constructed diverse relationships with five EFL writing components, Table 7 reveals that TP exerted various impacts on these writing components. As revealed in this table, TP had the highest positive influence on writing organization as the proportion of the latter above a fair level boosted from 0% before TP to 90% after TP. The positive impact of TP on vocabulary ranked second as the percentage of the latter above a fair level rapidly grew from 15% before TP to 100% after TP. The third largest positive effect of TP was on writing content. Its figure steadily rose above a fair level from 60% before TP to 100% after TP. In addition, TP also enhanced writing language use to some degree as the latter boomed from a poor level before TP at 10% to 100% after TP. On the contrary, writing mechanics was negatively influenced by TP as its percentage at a poor level decreased from 55% before TP to 15% after TP.

Table 7: Performances of five Writing Components before and after TP

Adapted from Bahang et al. (2021)

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Organization before TP				35%	65%
Organization after TP	15%	5%	70%	10%	
Content before TP	20%		40%	40%	
Content after TP	65%	25%	10%		
Language use before TP				10%	90%
Language use After TP				100%	
Mechanics before TP	25%	5%	25%	35%	10%
Mechanics after TP			15%	60%	25%
Vocabulary Before TP			15%	30%	55%
Vocabulary After TP	40%		60%		

4. Discussion

In order to display the current development trend of EFL writing studies under TP, the research methodologies for the first research question, the number of research articles, and the range of research countries were measured and uncovered. By reviewing research methodology, the first finding is that qualitative methods dominated these articles, accounting for 66%. On the contrary, quantitative methods were implemented least in research articles, representing 15%. By calculating the number of research articles, it was also disclosed that during the past decade, there was a steady increase in the number of research articles applying TP in EFL writing from three to five; the number in 2023 doubled that of 2014. By counting the range of publishing EFL countries, the third finding is that the number of pertinent EFL countries totaled ten, ranging from Indonesia, China, Iran, Vietnam, Pakistan, Turkey, Thailand, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia to Iraq and covering two regions of Asia and Middle East. Among these countries, Indonesia published the largest number of articles (15), followed by China and Iran (5 and 3).

From the above three findings, it can be concluded that qualitative methods are most applicable in TP-based EFL writing studies. It can also be suggested that there are a series of qualitative methods fit for analyzing TP's application in EFL writing. The richness of qualitative methods is further justified by four applied qualitative approaches: (1) qualitative content analysis (Okta et al., 2023), (2) descriptive qualitative analysis (Yuned, 2016; Yunita, 2018; Pangestu et al., 2019; Utomo et al., 2020; Hendrawan et al., 2021; Susilowati et al., 2022; Haji, 2023), (3) case study (Bangga, 2021) and (4) qualitative comparative analysis (Al Bakaa, 2014; Munir et al., 2022). Various qualitative methods have not only helped publish two thirds of research articles but also ensured a steady growth in the number of articles and publishing countries. Moreover, the qualitative data in Table 4 also shows that qualitative methodologies were most popular among Indonesian scholars in the past decade. The popularity can further account for why Indonesia became the top publishing EFL country in this field. In short, the increase and expansion in TP-based EFL writing articles displays TP's importance in EFL writing studies and injects multiple research methods to interpret TP's application in EFL writing. However, there still exists a research gap in investigating TP in different academic writing genres because its related studies accounted for one third of research articles and dominated all writing types according to Table 4. More detailed exploration is encouraged to demonstrate various application of TP patterns in these writing genres.

Aiming at reflecting the overall application of TP to EFL writing in the second research question, the research converted the corresponding distributions of CTP, SLP, SRP and DTP patterns in six EFL writing types, as displayed in Table 5. The fourth finding obtained from this table is that CTP, SLP, and SRP patterns were widely applied to all the writing types, but that SRP and DTP patterns were restricted to research writing and test writing. Additionally, the combination of CTP patterns and SLP patterns accounted for three quarters in all the writing types. Moreover, CTP patterns dominated all the EFL writing types except for test writing where SLP patterns became the most prominent patterns.

As can be inferred from the fourth finding, all the writing types carry out CTP, SLP, and SRP patterns, but their distribution varies across different writing types. Moreover, most writing types implement CTP patterns most frequently. It can be further implied that the dominance of CTP patterns allows these EFL writing types to develop the texts easily, maintain the information focus and enhance the logical flow (Yunita, 2018; Utomo et al., 2020; Haji, 2023). Admittedly, it does not mean that CTP patterns have no disadvantage. Since repeating themes in CTP patterns also bores readers and creates less new information (Devira et al., 2020), it is unsuitable for test writing with high complexity. This is why, in test writing, CTP patterns fail to dominate but SLP patterns take the first lead. After all, a high occurrence of SLP patterns allows test writing to manage given and new information, offer more expounded ideas, and strengthen cohesive ties to achieve specific writing success (Okta, 2023; Susilowati et al., 2022; Yunita, 2018). By adopting CTP and SLP patterns, all the writing types can both maintain the focus and manage the flow of new information cohesively. In addition, the application of SRP patterns to various writing types also helps construct the textual structure and coherently increase syntactic variation and transference (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Danes, 1976; Halliday, 1994). Despite TP's advantages in maintaining writing focus, promoting writing coherence and cohesion, and improving syntactic transference, limited studies are conducted in probing DTP patterns in test writing and academic writing. Considering the complexity and importance of DTP patterns in these two writing types, prospective researchers are expected to investigate the application of DTP patterns to EFL writing, based on the relationships among the relevant derived themes.

The fifth finding was obtained in light of the third research question regarding the influences of TP on EFL writing. The finding shows that TP possessed the strongest link to writing organization, with a correlation rate of 61.73%. TP exerted the highest positive influence on this component with organization proportion above a fair level increasing from 0% to 90%. The second strongest relation TP established was with language use. Its percentage boomed above a poor level at 10% to 100%. In addition, the relation of TP with writing content was also cogent and represented the third strongest connection with 11.11% of correlation rates. TP had the third largest positive impact on writing content and the content proportion above a fair level grew from 60% to 100%. By contrast, the relationships of TP with writing mechanics and vocabulary were weak and only had correlation rates of 3.70% and 2.47%. Nonetheless, TP's impacts on these two components represented a sharp contrast. TP boosted the percentage of vocabulary above fair level from 15% to 100% while decreasing its percentage of writing mechanics to a poor level, from 55% to 15%.

Based on the fifth finding, it can be summarized that TP is strongly interrelated with writing organization, writing content and language use. To some degree, it helps improve these three EFL writing components and finally enhance the overall performance of EFL writing. First of all, writing organization is often measured by writing coherence and cohesion between sentences or paragraphs. This is in line with the function of TP which connects preceding clauses or

sentences with subsequent counterparts but also links ideas and sets up the relationship between paragraphs or texts (Danes, 1974; Halliday, 2013). Language use is often evaluated from word order, simple and complex sentence construction, or clausal construction (Jacobs, 1981). This also conforms to the role of thematic structure which first determines themes based on TP patterns and then arranges word order in a clause or complex sentence (Hendrawan et al., 2021; Mustofa & Kurniawan, 2023). As for writing content, it is often evaluated regarding the adequacy of ideas, full development of the main idea, and relevance to a given topic. TP can enhance writing content to some degree as various TP patterns help learners organize their ideas, develop their ideas, and connect ideas with prior brainstorming to ensure the smoothness of understanding an argument and textual coherence (Devira et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2020; Bi, 2023). In terms of vocabulary and writing mechanics, they are not in forms of sentences or above sentences, which is a prerequisite of TP. As such, they should be excluded from this review. As has been said, by clarifying the relationships and effects of TP with five EFL writing components, researchers can limit their EFL writing studies to the writing component of a strong connection with TP and adopt different strategies according to each writing component. The above analysis has provided a clear picture on the application of TP patterns to five different writing components, but it still lacks detail that reflects how four TP patterns influence writing organization, language use, and writing content respectively. This shortage will encourage more scholars to establish TP's influencing models with these components and investigate these patterns in one component independently.

5. Conclusion

The review examined 32 studies on applying TP to EFL writing and addressed three research questions from three aspects of development trends in this field, distribution of four TP patterns in EFL writing and influences of these patterns on five writing components. In terms of development trends in field, TP-based EFL writing studies obtain a cogent driving force since more research methodologies are applied to this field. As for distribution of four TP patterns in EFL writing, they vary from writing type to writing type though most writing types share similar top TP patterns. In addition, test writing and academic writing types feature more complicated TP patterns and gain more and more popularity. As far as the influence of these patterns on five writing components, TP indirectly improves the overall performance of EFL writing by strengthening writing content, language use and organization components.

The research outcomes add significant value to TP-based EFL writing studies in the following aspects. Firstly, they provide researchers with multiple research designs of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to unfold TP-based EFL writing studies. Secondly, they enable policymakers to update their EFL writing teaching curriculum to tackle EFL writing challenges in writing content, language use and writing organization. Thirdly, they allow teachers to adopt different TP patterns to teach six EFL writing types and students to implement different TP patterns to compose these writing types.

Notwithstanding several advances mentioned above, the review cannot be immune to limitations. One prominent limitation encountered in this review is that the researcher had to simultaneously classify, analyze, and integrate research articles in quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, which caused a huge difficulty in synthesizing raw data and analyzing processes and results. In addition, EFL writing studies were usually restricted to two EFL regions of Asia and the Middle East. Therefore, there is a shortage of research articles in European and Latin American EFL countries. For this reason, it was difficult to present global development trends TP applications on EFL writing. Future scholars are expected to adopt more integrated methods to synthesize various data and work with other researchers from European and Latin American EFL countries to obtain more samples to enrich this review.

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