


# Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Approaches in Teaching English Writing

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## ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the most challenging skills for junior high school students, who often face difficulties in generating ideas, organizing them into coherent paragraphs, and applying correct grammar and vocabulary. Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers an alternative approach by linking classroom instruction with students' real-life experiences, thus creating more meaningful and engaging learning activities. This study aims to analyze the implementation of CTL in teaching English writing, to identify the challenges encountered, and to explore the strategies used to overcome them. The research was conducted at SMPN SATAP 2 Aikmel with 15 seventh-grade students, consisting of 8 females and 7 males, who were selected through purposive sampling. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, with data collected through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation of students' writing products. The findings indicate that the teacher applied CTL principles such as constructivism, inquiry, modeling, collaboration, reflection, and authentic assessment in teaching recount and descriptive texts. Students responded positively, showing greater motivation and confidence when writing tasks were connected to their personal experiences. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary, grammar weaknesses, and time constraints still emerged. To address these, the teacher implemented scaffolding, modeling, peer collaboration, and authentic tasks, which helped students improve both writing skills and motivation. Overall, the study confirms that CTL is an effective framework for enhancing students' writing ability and engagement in English learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a fundamental component of English language learning, alongside listening, speaking, and reading. Among the four skills, writing is often regarded as the most complex because it requires not only mastery of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to organize ideas coherently and cohesively. For junior high school students in Indonesia, developing writing skills in English presents significant challenges due to limited exposure to the language in daily life.

One of the main difficulties students face is their lack of vocabulary, which makes it hard to express ideas clearly. In addition, many students struggle with constructing grammatically correct sentences, resulting in writing that lacks clarity and accuracy. These difficulties often lead to low achievement in writing tasks and reduce students' motivation to engage in the learning process. Consequently, teachers must search for strategies that make

To address these issues, educators have explored alternative approaches that can make learning English more relevant and engaging for students. One such approach is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), which has been recognized as a promising framework for improving student motivation and achievement. CTL provides opportunities for students to connect classroom learning with real-life experiences, making the writing process more purposeful.

According to Johnson (2002), CTL is an educational process that enables learners to see the relevance of what they study by linking it to practical, everyday situations. Berns and

Erickson (2001) further highlight that CTL prepares students for the real world by emphasizing collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In the Indonesian context, Nurhadi (2004) argues that CTL is particularly suitable because it promotes active learning and integrates students' social and cultural realities.

The theoretical foundation of CTL is grounded in constructivist learning theories. Piaget (1972) and Bruner (1996) assert that learners build new knowledge by connecting it to prior experiences. In this sense, CTL encourages students to make meaningful associations between what they learn in class and their own lives. This connection not only improves understanding but also fosters deeper engagement in learning activities, including writing.

Muslich (2007) outlines several main components of CTL, including constructivism, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment. Each component plays a vital role in the teaching of writing. For example, inquiry stimulates students' curiosity through questioning and exploration, while modeling allows teachers to demonstrate writing strategies step by step. Reflection gives students the opportunity to evaluate their own progress, and authentic assessment emphasizes evaluation of students' actual writing products rather than artificial drills (Wiggins, 1990).

Previous studies have shown that CTL is effective in enhancing student motivation and achievement, particularly in speaking and reading skills. However, research focusing on its impact on writing remains limited, especially in rural schools with fewer resources. Given that writing is one of the most challenging skills for Indonesian learners, examining the role of CTL in this area is both timely and necessary.

This study therefore aims to investigate the implementation of CTL in teaching writing, with a specific focus on recount and descriptive texts. The objectives are threefold: (1) to describe how CTL is applied in writing instruction, (2) to identify the challenges encountered by both teachers and students, and (3) to analyze the strategies employed to overcome these challenges. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how CTL can improve students' writing skills in contexts where traditional methods have proven insufficient.

## METHOD

### Respondents

The respondents of this study were 15 seventh-grade students from SMPN SATAP 2 Aikmel, selected through purposive sampling. The class consisted of 8 female and 7 male students aged between 12 and 13 years. Their English proficiency ranged from beginner to lower-intermediate, as indicated by their performance in classroom tasks and teacher assessment. In general, the students could understand basic vocabulary and form simple sentences, but they experienced difficulties in using grammar correctly and organizing sentences into paragraphs. The English teacher of the class was also involved as a participant to provide information regarding lesson planning, instructional strategies, and challenges during the teaching process.

### Instruments

The instruments used in this research were classroom observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to record the implementation of CTL principles during writing lessons, focusing on how the teacher applied constructivism, inquiry, modeling, collaboration, reflection, and authentic assessment. Interviews were carried out with both the teacher and selected students to gather deeper insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in writing. Documentation was used to collect supporting data such as students' writing products, lesson plans, and field notes. These instruments provided a comprehensive view of both teaching practices and students' responses.

### Procedures

The research was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher obtained permission from the school and coordinated with the English teacher. Second, classroom observation was conducted during writing lessons that applied CTL. Third, interviews were administered to both the teacher and students after the lessons to clarify the findings. Finally, documents such

as student writing products and lesson plans were collected and analyzed. This sequence ensured that the data were collected systematically and consistently.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was carried out by selecting and simplifying the information obtained from observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents. Data display was done by organizing the findings into thematic categories such as implementation, challenges, and strategies. The last stage was conclusion drawing, in which the researcher interpreted the findings to answer the research questions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation of sources and methods was applied, and member checking was conducted by confirming the interpretation with participants.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of CTL in Teaching Writing (Research Question 1)**

The findings revealed that the teacher implemented the six principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) consistently during writing lessons. Constructivism was reflected when students were asked to write about their own experiences, such as family events or weekend activities, which allowed them to connect prior knowledge with new learning (Piaget, 1972; Bruner, 1996). Inquiry was fostered through guiding questions like "What did you do yesterday?" or "How would you describe your school?", encouraging students to explore ideas and think critically (Johnson, 2002). Modeling was applied when the teacher presented sample texts and demonstrated how to develop sentences into paragraphs, which follows Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. Students also engaged in group discussions and peer review, forming a learning community that supports Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the Zone of Proximal Development. Reflection was facilitated at the end of each lesson, allowing students to evaluate their progress and identify challenges (Dewey, 1933). Authentic assessment was conducted by evaluating students' actual writing tasks rather than isolated grammar drills (Wiggins, 1990). These findings confirm that CTL was implemented as a holistic approach that made writing lessons more meaningful and engaging.

### **Challenges in Applying CTL (Research Question 2)**

Although CTL was implemented effectively, several challenges emerged. First, students' limited vocabulary restricted their ability to express ideas clearly, confirming Brown's (2001) view that vocabulary is central to language production. Second, grammar difficulties were evident, particularly in the use of tenses in recount texts, which often resulted in incorrect sentence construction (Harmer, 2004). Third, many students struggled to organize ideas into coherent paragraphs, which supports Hyland's (2003) argument that writing requires discourse competence beyond linguistic knowledge. Fourth, time management was a significant issue, as CTL activities such as inquiry, group collaboration, and reflection required more classroom time than traditional teacher-centered instruction. Finally, students showed varied levels of motivation: while some were enthusiastic, others were reluctant to participate actively, reflecting Dornyei's (2001) observation that motivation is a key factor influencing second language learning.

### **Strategies to Overcome Challenges (Research Question 3)**

The teacher adopted several strategies to address these challenges. Scaffolding was provided by offering vocabulary lists, sentence starters, and guided questions, which aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding in the Zone of Proximal Development. Modeling was employed consistently to demonstrate how ideas could be developed into sentences and paragraphs, which helped students gain confidence in their writing (Bandura, 1977). Peer collaboration allowed students to exchange drafts, share ideas, and give feedback, which strengthened their writing performance and confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Authentic tasks such as describing local places or writing about family routines connected writing activities to real-life contexts, increasing motivation (Wiggins, 1990). Reflection activities at the end of lessons enabled students to assess their own progress and identify areas for

improvement, supporting Dewey's (1933) view that reflection enhances meaningful learning. These strategies proved effective in improving both students' writing skills and their motivation to learn.

### Pedagogical Implications

The findings provide several pedagogical implications for teachers. Writing tasks should be connected to students' real-life experiences to make learning relevant and engaging. Scaffolding and modeling should be consistently integrated to support students' language development. Collaborative activities such as peer review can encourage idea sharing and cooperative learning. Authentic assessment should be prioritized to evaluate students' actual performance rather than isolated exercises. Finally, reflection should be practiced regularly to build students' self-awareness as learners. By applying these principles, teachers in similar contexts can replicate CTL to improve both writing skills and motivation.

### CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) can be effectively applied in teaching English writing, as the teacher successfully integrated six CTL principles – constructivism, inquiry, modeling, learning community, reflection, and authentic assessment – into the teaching of recount and descriptive texts, creating meaningful and engaging activities that connected classroom tasks with students' daily experiences. Despite challenges such as limited vocabulary, grammar difficulties, time constraints, and varied levels of motivation, these were addressed through scaffolding, modeling, peer collaboration, authentic writing tasks, and reflection, enabling students to gradually enhance both their writing performance and confidence in expressing ideas. The findings confirm that CTL not only improves students' writing skills but also increases their motivation to learn English by linking academic content to real-life contexts, providing dual benefits of linguistic competence and positive learning attitudes, as reflected in the students' scores (ranging from 69 to 92) and the overall improvement shown in Figure 1 on students' writing performance before and after CTL implementation.

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