

Improving descriptive writing skills of students through contextual teaching and learning: Exploring the theme of “Home Sweet Home”

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Submitted:
16-04-2025

Accepted:
12-05-2025

Published:
17-05-2025

Abstract: This classroom action research aimed to improve seventh-grade EFL students' descriptive writing skills through the implementation of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) using the theme “Home Sweet Home.” The study applied a quantitative descriptive approach within a two-cycle CAR framework consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. A total of 28 students participated in the study. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests and observation sheets. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and percentage), while qualitative insights from observations supported the interpretation. The average student score improved from 60.10 in the pre-cycle to 79.89 in cycle I, and 82.42 in cycle II. By the end of cycle II, 89.28% of students achieved the minimum mastery standard (≥ 70). Improvements were evident in students' use of vocabulary, grammar (particularly there is/there are and prepositions), punctuation, text organization, and engagement. The results confirm that CTL is effective in fostering contextual understanding and enhancing descriptive writing skills in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Contextualized instruction, descriptive genre task, EFL learners

Abstrak: Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis deskriptif siswa kelas tujuh EFL melalui penerapan *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL) dengan tema “Home Sweet Home.” Studi ini menerapkan pendekatan deskriptif kuantitatif dalam kerangka CAR dua siklus yang terdiri dari tahap perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Sebanyak 28 siswa berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Data dikumpulkan melalui *pre-test*, *post-test*, dan lembar observasi. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif (rata-rata dan persentase), sementara wawasan kualitatif dari observasi mendukung interpretasi. Rata-rata nilai siswa meningkat dari 60,10 pada pra-siklus menjadi 79,89 pada siklus I, dan 82,42 pada siklus II. Pada akhir Siklus II, 89,28% siswa mencapai standar penguasaan minimum (≥ 70). Perbaikan terlihat pada penggunaan kosakata siswa, tata bahasa (terutama *there is/there are* dan preposisi), tanda baca, organisasi teks, dan keterlibatan. Hasilnya mengonfirmasi bahwa CTL efektif dalam mendorong pemahaman kontekstual dan meningkatkan keterampilan menulis deskriptif di kelas EFL.

Kata kunci: Instruksi kontekstual, tugas genre deskriptif, pembelajar EFL

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a crucial skill in language learning that requires mastery of various elements, including sentence structure, vocabulary selection, and coherence, to convey meaning effectively (Huda & Purwanti, 2023). Writing enables students to articulate their thoughts, examine concepts, and present arguments in a structured and cohesive manner (Naufina, 2025). According to Zaki and Miftachudin (2024), language functions as a system of conventional symbols, sounds, gestures, or written marks, enabling individuals to express their thoughts and emotions. Communication with others can occur in spoken or written form. Writing is a problem-solving process that comprises brainstorming, planning, goal-setting, assessing content, and selecting appropriate words to convey meaning (White & Arndt, 1991). Despite its significance, writing remains one of the most challenging skills for

EFL students to master, particularly in constructing descriptive texts (Huda & Purwanti, 2023; Hakim & Sari, 2022). Descriptive text is introduced in the seventh grade of junior high school as part of the Indonesian English curriculum. Writers of descriptive texts often rely on sensory details to provide vivid and thorough descriptions (Hamid et al., 2022).

Preliminary observations at a public junior high school in Bandung revealed that seventh-grade students frequently face challenges when composing descriptive texts, particularly when describing the concept of "Home Sweet Home." Students often encounter difficulties in constructing coherent sentences, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and applying grammatical structures accurately (Damayanti & Azizah, 2024). English language learners face challenges in writing due to differences in grammar and structure between their original language and English. This is consistent with the Huda and Purwanti (2023) assertion that writing is a demanding skill that requires students to generate ideas and arrange words in a way that effectively conveys meaning. These challenges often lead to incomplete descriptions, poor text cohesion, and limited creativity in students' writing.

Several studies have examined strategies to improve students' writing skills, especially descriptive text writing. Moybeka et al. (2023) found that Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) greatly enhanced students' descriptive writing skills. Students developed more excellent writing abilities through the use of instructional aids and contextualized learning activities. However, the study also identified obstacles, such as low student motivation, difficulty arranging descriptive texts, and an unsupportive learning atmosphere. Despite these challenges, CTL was shown to improve engagement and writing performance. Similarly, Windi and Suryaman (2022) explore how CTL connects learning to students' daily lives, fostering active participation in writing tasks. Their qualitative study found that CTL encourages problem-solving, peer discussion, and reflection, which contribute to better writing outcomes. Students showed tremendous enthusiasm and improved text organization when writing descriptive texts. The researcher concluded that CTL is a practical instructional approach that should be integrated into writing classes to support students' language development.

Jayanti and Rozimela (2022) reported that the CTL successfully improved students' writing performance by integrating real-life contexts into the learning process. Similarly, Hidayat et al. (2025) highlighted that CTL encourages students to connect their learning with personal experiences, improving vocabulary retention and enhancing overall language comprehension. Although these studies have shown CTL's effectiveness in improving general language skills such as speaking and reading, research exploring its impact on descriptive writing skills among junior high school students in Indonesia remains limited. Moreover, previous research has not extensively investigated how CTL strategies can address specific writing challenges, particularly in constructing clear sentence structures, applying appropriate vocabulary to describe objects and environments, and mastering essential grammar elements such as there is/there are and prepositions.

While previous studies have explored the use of CTL in general writing instruction, few have examined its targeted application in developing descriptive writing skills at the junior high school level, particularly using culturally meaningful themes such as "Home Sweet Home." The theme "Home Sweet Home" was selected for its strong cultural and emotional relevance to students' daily lives. It facilitates the contextualization of vocabulary

and allows learners to express their ideas more authentically, making it an ideal anchor for CTL-based instruction. This study offers a novel contribution by integrating CTL with visual aids and collaborative grammar instruction to address specific linguistic challenges faced by EFL learners namely the use of *there is/there are*, prepositions, and descriptive vocabulary. Furthermore, it provides empirical data from an underrepresented educational context in Indonesia, using a dual-cycle Classroom Action Research approach to track both linguistic and engagement outcomes.

Based on the issues described, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the CTL method in improving descriptive writing skills among seventh-grade students at SMPN 31 Bandung. This research also aims to explore students' learning experiences, focusing on the challenges they encounter and the achievements they attain while applying contextual vocabulary in their writing. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes valuable insights into how CTL can enhance descriptive writing in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly for EFL learners facing common writing difficulties.

While previous research has generally examined CTL in the context of overall language learning, few studies have focused specifically on its role in developing descriptive writing skills in junior high school settings. Even fewer have explored the integration of culturally relevant themes such as "Home Sweet Home" with CTL strategies to enhance both writing competence and student engagement. This study is unique in its dual focus: first, on addressing specific linguistic challenges frequently faced by EFL learners, such as the use of *there is/there are*, prepositions, and descriptive vocabulary; and second, on implementing a two-cycle Classroom Action Research framework to track improvements in both language performance and classroom participation. This dual approach allows for a deeper understanding of CTL's pedagogical value in real classroom settings.

CTL is an instruction approach that emphasizes the connection between academic content and real-world situations, enabling students to apply their knowledge to everyday life. Contextual learning, also known as Contextual Teaching and Learning, is based on John Dewey's research (1916), which found that young people learn more successfully when what they learn is relevant to their prior knowledge or experiences (Jubhari et al., 2022). According to Sears (2002), CTL encourages learners to take responsibility for their learning and apply knowledge in personal, civic, and professional contexts. Johnson (2007) further explains that when students organize projects, solve problems, make choices, and take responsibility, they actively engage in composing, arranging, investigating, questioning, and decision-making. This process connects academic content with real-life experiences, making learning meaningful (Mashudi & Azzahro, 2020).

The theme "Home Sweet Home" can be integrated into contextual vocabulary teaching to help students expand their vocabulary related to home, family, and daily life. Theme-based training aims to boost students' motivation, interest, and engagement (Ibrakhimovna, 2024). Engaging in discussions, reading narratives about homes, and writing reflective pieces allow students to deepen their understanding of relevant terminology (Astuti et al., 2025). For instance, students can use an active and deep understanding of relevant terminology. For instance, students can use active and deep-processing skills to describe their homes and associate new vocabulary with personal experiences. Additionally, contextual activities such as reading stories about home and inferring the meanings of new words from their context enhance learning. Combining a thematic approach with CTL not

only improves language comprehension but also fosters an emotional connection between students and the learning material, making it more meaningful and memorable.

Descriptive text is one of the genres that students learn (Fadilah & Gaffar, 2023). A genre is a structured instructional learning material for writing that helps students gather meaningful work (Hitimala et al., 2024). Descriptive writing is a technique aimed at portraying an object, place, or situation in detail to help the reader visualize what the writer is conveying. Descriptive writing employs sensory characteristics such as color, texture, sound, and aroma to create a vivid mental image (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Hyland (2016) highlights that descriptive writing plays a crucial role in language acquisition, as it enhances writing skills and fosters students' critical thinking and creativity. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, descriptive writing is widely used to improve students' writing proficiency. According to Brown (2001), descriptive writing teaches students how to use sentence structures effectively to create cohesive and well-organized paragraphs. Furthermore, Nation (2001) emphasizes that descriptive writing enables students to expand their vocabulary, particularly in selecting appropriate adjectives and adverbs for describing objects or situations.

A key characteristic of descriptive writing is its emphasis on concrete and specific details. Daulay et al. (2023) explain that description involves systematically organizing attributes, beginning with names, classification, and characteristics such as behaviors and functions. Oshima and Hogue (2007) outline the typical structure of descriptive paragraphs, which include a topic sentence stating the main idea, supporting sentences providing detailed descriptions, and a concluding sentence summarizing the paragraph or leaving a strong impression. Students must understand the generic structure of descriptive text to write effectively. According to Oktafiani and Husnussalam (2021), descriptive text consists of two main parts: introduction and description. The introduction presents the subject of the description while the description elaborates on its characteristics. When writing descriptive texts, students commonly use the simple present tense and adjective clauses to provide detailed descriptions.

Lasmaria, (2021) that descriptive text employs specific language features, including the use of present tense, relation processes, attributive, and identifying processes (such as being verbs, having verbs, and linking verbs). Purnamasari et al. (2021) highlight that students use the simple present tense to describe objects, along with adjectives to modify nouns (e.g., "wonderful places," "endearing woman," "cute dogs"). Additionally, action verbs are used to describe activities, such as "standing," "writing," and "running." Mastery of the simple present tense and descriptive language structures enables students to express their ideas effectively. According to Şaşmaz and Çifci (2023), descriptive writing can be categorized into three types: (1) description of the place, when describing a place, it is essential to highlight its unique features. (2) Describe a person. When describing a person, selecting the most relevant traits is crucial. Writes can include physical attributes and personal characteristics. (3) description of an object: When describing an object, the writer should focus on elements that make it distinct, such as color, shape, texture, and function.

The purpose of this study is to investigate students' understanding of contextual vocabulary usage in descriptive texts on the theme "Home Sweet Home." It also examines how students apply new vocabulary to personal contexts and explores their learning

experiences, including the challenges and achievements they encounter while writing descriptively using contextual language.

METHOD

The research method employs uses is Classroom Action Research (CAR). Classroom Action Research is a systematic and cyclical process that improves teaching and learning outcomes through continuous reflection and action (Arikunto, 2019). According to Arikunto (2019), a classroom action is considered successful if at least 75% of students meet the minimum mastery criteria (≥ 70), and if there is consistent improvement in students' learning outcomes across cycles. This research follows the Kemmis et al. (2013) model, which consists of four stages in each cycle: Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection. The steps are carried out in two cycles, cycle I and cycle II.

Cycle I

Planning

This step involves several activities: the first is creating a lesson plan on descriptive text. The second is creating processes for applying the concept of contextual vocabulary teaching to descriptive writing. The third is preparing materials for descriptive writing. The fourth is compiling classroom observation sheets. Finally, grasping the context of the teaching and learning process when the model is used. These activities ensure that descriptive text teaching is effective and consistent with contextual learning concepts.

Action

The students greeted the teacher enthusiastically and responded to the greeting. The teacher introduced the theme "Home Sweet Home" and explained the importance of this theme in the context of descriptive writing. Students are invited to discuss what they consider as "home." The teacher introduced new vocabulary related to the theme of home, such as comfortable, warm, safe, beautiful, and memories. Students do the exercises the teacher gives, asking them to use the new vocabulary in sentences. The teacher explains what a descriptive text is and its characteristics. The teacher reads an example of a descriptive text about a house. Students are asked to pay attention to vocabulary and sensory details in the text. Students are asked to write a brief description of their own house using the vocabulary they have learned. After completing the exercise, the students submitted their assignment papers before the class. Students and teachers together conclude the descriptive text. The students answer the teacher's closing.

Observation

Observation is used to acquire information about the learning process occurring in the classroom. Teachers and researchers can become observers and record interactions, students' involvement, and the effectiveness of contextual vocabulary instruction in improving students' descriptive writing skills. Observers use indicators with notes: 3 for very good, 2 for good, and 1 for bad. Teachers and researchers can use this assessment scale to objectively evaluate teaching efficacy and student responses to the subject delivered.

Reflection

Reflection is a process of providing feedback on completed acts. Researchers employ reflection to assist them in making judgments. Reflection attempts to comprehend genuine processes, difficulties, and problems in action.

Cycle II

Cycle II must be implemented if, in cycle I, students have not improved significantly. The steps in cycle II are as follows:

Planning

During this planning stage, the researcher refines the lesson plan for teaching descriptive writing with the theme "Home Sweet Home." This lesson plan contains learning objectives, teaching steps, and materials to be used. Once the evaluation instruments are prepared, the learning process using the contextual learning paradigm begins.

Action

The action procedure in this second cycle is similar to the first. Students will be asked to create a description of their own or their ideal house using the contextual terminology they have acquired. Students will be given time to finish the descriptive writing task and then collect it from the teacher.

Observation

Observation is used to collect information about the situation in the classroom during the teaching and learning process. The teacher observes student involvement, comprehension of the subject, and use of contextual terminology in their writing. As in the previous cycle, the assessment uses established indicators to determine whether the students' descriptive writing skills have improved.

Reflection

The researcher evaluates the research findings through reflection. During this phase, the researcher will consider the teacher's observations, the concerns that developed during the research, and the students' improvements.

If the students improve during the second cycle, the researcher will opt not to advance to the next round. However, if there are still areas for development, the researcher will arrange more cycles to help students enhance their descriptive writing skills. The research was conducted at a public junior high school in Bandung City, and was planned to take place over one month. The participants in this study were 28 VII-D students selected through purposive sampling. This sampling method was chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). Class VII D was deliberately chosen as the participants had been identified as having relatively low descriptive writing skills, making them suitable candidates for this study's intervention using contextual teaching and learning.

This study measures student achievement based on the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) used in SMP Negeri 31, which is set at 75. Students who score 75 or higher are categorized as complete, while those scoring below 75 are considered incomplete. Therefore, the term success in this study refers to whether a student meets the school's completeness criteria. To get the data, the researchers gave a test. The researcher gave

written tests before and after researching to students. In the pre-test, the researcher gave the topic, describe your bedroom” to students. Meanwhile, in the final test, the researcher asked students to write descriptive text on the topic “My house” in the first cycle and “dream house” in the second cycle. Steps to test and collect quantitative data. After administering the writing tests, the researcher took several steps to analyze the quantitative data. First, each student’s answer was carefully scored using a rubric that evaluated content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Next, the researcher calculated the average score of the entire class to determine the overall level of student achievement. Finally, by reviewing the results and analyzing common patterns of errors, the researcher identified the specific difficulties students face in writing descriptive texts. These findings were used to inform instructional strategies for the following cycle.

Observation sheet is used to observe all situations during the teaching and learning process. The observation sheet was developed by the researcher based on the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) as outlined by Johnson (2002) and the observation instrument structure suggested by Arikunto (2019). The sheet includes indicators related to student attention, participation, contextual responses, and seriousness in completing writing tasks. The observation matrix used in this study is presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Lattice observation sheet students’ activities

No	Aspect observer	Indicators	Row 01	Row 02	Row 03	Row 04	Notes
1	Attention	Focuses on listening attentively, avoiding distractions, and maintaining eye contact.					
2	Participation	Measures student involvement through asking questions, sharing ideas, and participating in discussions.					
3	Response CTL	Observes students' ability to relate the material to real-life experiences and provide relevant examples.					
4	Seriousness in writing	Assesses focus during writing tasks, adherence to text structure, and efforts to improve content quality.					

The scoring rubric used in this study was adapted from analytic models developed by Brown (2004) and Weigle (2002), tailored to meet the specific features of descriptive writing in EFL contexts. The rubric included six criteria: text structure and organization, use of vocabulary and adjectives, grammar accuracy (with focus on “There is/There are” and prepositions), punctuation, clarity and coherence, and creativity. Each item was scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Poor) to 4 (Excellent). Student assessment categories can be seen in the Table 2.

Tabel 2. Rubric assessment

Indicator	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4
Text Structure & Organization	Paragraphs are incomplete and ideas are poorly organized	Paragraphs are present but ideas are not well-connected	Paragraphs are mostly complete and organized	Paragraphs are fully complete, well-organized, and logical
Vocabulary & Adjectives	Very limited use of adjectives; repetitive and inaccurate	Some adjectives are used, but they are limited and not always accurate	A good variety of adjectives used with mostly accurate meanings	A wide variety of adjectives used appropriately and effectively
Grammar (There is/There are + Prepositions)	Frequent errors in grammar and prepositions that disrupt meaning	Several grammar and preposition errors, but the meaning is still understandable	Mostly correct use of grammar and prepositions with minor errors	Consistent use of correct grammar and prepositions
Punctuation	Frequent and serious punctuation that disrupt meaning and make sentences difficult to understand.	Several punctuation errors, including inconsistent capitalization, incorrect use of commas, or missing punctuation marks, but most sentences are still understandable.	Mostly correct punctuation, with only a few minor errors (e.g., occasional misuse of commas or quotation marks) that do not interfere with understanding.	Punctuation is accurate, consistent, and enhances the overall clarity and flow of the text; proper use of periods, commas, capitalization, and other marks.
Clarity & Coherence	Ideas are difficult to understand; lack of logical flow	Some ideas are clear but overall flow is choppy	Most ideas are clearly presented and flow logically	Ideas are clearly presented, flow smoothly, and are easy to follow
Creativity & Engagement	The description is dull, lacks detail, and is unengaging	The description is somewhat interesting but lacks vivid detail	The description is interesting with some creative details	The description is highly creative, vivid, and engaging

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the observation was conducted during both cycles to monitor students' engagement and responses to the CTL-based learning. Four key aspects were observed: attentiveness, participation, contextual understanding, and seriousness in writing. These indicators reflect how students interacted with the learning process beyond test performance.

Tabel 3. Student activity observation results in cycle I and cycle II

No	Indicators	% of Action Success	
		Cycle I	Cycle II
1	Focuses on listening attentively, avoiding distractions, and maintaining eye contact.	92.86%	75%
2	Measures student involvement through asking questions, sharing ideas, and participating in discussions.	57.14%	78.57%
3	Observes students' ability to relate the material to real-life experiences and provide relevant examples.	85.87%	96.43%
4	Assesses focus during writing tasks, adherence to text structure, and efforts to improve content quality.	79.07%	92.86%

A results of student activity across cycle I and cycle II reveals significant shifts in behavioral and cognitive engagement following instructional adjustments. Most notably, student participation in class discussions and collaborative learning increased from 57.14% to 78.57%, suggesting that the introduction of peer interaction strategies and more open-ended questioning in cycle II effectively encouraged verbal engagement and confidence. There was also marked improvement in students' focus during writing tasks, rising from 79.07% to 92.86%. This gain reflects greater familiarity with the writing process and better scaffolding provided through contextual examples and structured peer feedback. Additionally, students demonstrated an enhanced ability to connect lesson content to real-life experiences, with this indicator reaching 96.43% in cycle II. This reinforces the effectiveness of CTL in bridging abstract concepts with personal relevance.

Interestingly, while most indicators showed improvement, the level of attentiveness (listening and eye contact) dropped from 92.86% in cycle I to 75% in cycle II. This decline may be attributed to increased task complexity, cognitive fatigue, or external factors such as exam schedules or time-on-task pressure during the second cycle. Despite this dip, the overall engagement and performance suggest that the interventions made in cycle II successfully addressed the key weaknesses identified in cycle I.

Tabel 4. The classification in writing scoring of pre cycle

No.	Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very Good	85 – 100	2	7,14%
2	Good	75 – 84	3	10,71%
3	Enough	55 – 74	14	50%
4	Fair	40 – 54	4	14,29%
5	Very Fair	< 40	5	17,86%
Total			28	100%

The results of the pre-cycle are presented in this section to provide an overview of the student's initial abilities before the implementation of the intervention. The pre-test was conducted to assess their baseline knowledge and skills related to the given subject matter. By analyzing the pre-test scores, we can identify the strengths and weaknesses of the participants, which will serve as a reference point for measuring the effectiveness of the applied teaching strategies. The classification table used in this study was adapted based on the general assessment criteria outlined in Arikunto (2019). These criteria allow researchers to group student performance into meaningful categories such as "Very Good," "Good," "Enough," "Fair," and "Very Fair." The score intervals were adjusted to reflect the school's minimum mastery standard, enabling a more precise analysis of students' learning progress throughout the cycles. The following data outline the detailed findings from the pre-cycle evaluation.

The pre-cycle results highlight a clear need for instructional intervention. While a small number of students demonstrated initial writing competence, the majority (over 80%) fell into the "Enough," "Fair," or "Very Fair" categories, indicating a general lack of proficiency in descriptive writing. This pattern reflects recurring difficulties in using adjectives effectively, applying basic grammar structures particularly "There is/There are" with appropriate prepositions and maintaining punctuation consistency. The dominance of middle-to-lower performance bands suggests that students cannot translate ideas into structured and expressive writing. These baseline findings justify the application of the CTL approach, which aims to bridge these gaps by making learning more meaningful, relevant, and engaging for students. The learning outcomes of students are grouped based on the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75, as applied in SMP Negeri 31. This grouping can be seen in the Table 5.

Tabel 5 The percentage of student learning outcomes completeness in the pre cycle

Score	Number of Students	%	Category
≥ 75	2	7.14	Complete
< 75	26	92.86	Incomplete
Total	28	100	

Table 5 shows that of the 28 students in the pre-cycle stage, only two students, or 7.14%, were in the complete category, having achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75. Meanwhile, 26 students, or 92.86%, were in the incomplete category because their scores were below the required standard. This indicates that students had not completed the learning successfully in the pre-cycle, individually or classically, since only 7.14% reached the minimum score, which is far below the expected completeness percentage of 80%. The low level of completeness may be caused by students' limited understanding of descriptive text writing, lack of motivation, and unfamiliarity with the writing task assigned in the pre-cycle stage.

Tabel 6. The classification in writing scoring of cycle I

No.	Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very Good	85 – 100	15	53,57%
2	Good	75 – 84	7	28,57%
3	Enough	55 – 74	2	0%
4	Fair	40 – 54	3	10,71%
5	Very Fair	< 40	1	3,57%
Total			28	100%

The cycle I post-test results revealed a significant upward shift in student performance, with over 80% achieving at least a “Good” score (Table 6). This outcome reflects a positive initial response to the CTL approach, particularly in vocabulary expansion, improved grammar control, and more transparent text structure. However, the presence of four students (14.28%) still scoring in the “Fair” and “Very Fair” categories indicates that the intervention had not yet reached all learners equally. These remaining gaps suggest issues in sentence development and idea elaboration that require more targeted support. Therefore, the instructional plan for cycle II was refined to include focused grammar instruction and peer-based feedback activities, aiming to address these specific learning needs and ensure a more inclusive improvement across the entire class.

Tabel 6. The percentage of student learning outcomes completeness in the cycle I

Score	Number of Students	%	Category
≥ 75	22	78.65%	Complete
< 75	6	21.43%	Incomplete
Total	28	100%	

Based on the data in the Table 7, out of 28 students who participated in the post-test of the first cycle, 22 students (78.57%) achieved scores equal to or above the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75 and were therefore classified as complete. Meanwhile, six students (21.43%) scored below 75 and were categorized as incomplete. These results indicate a significant improvement compared to the pre-cycle, although the class had not yet fully met the classical completeness target of 80%. This suggests that while most students progressed, further instructional refinement was needed in the subsequent cycle.

Tabel 7. The classification in writing scoring of cycle II

No.	Classification	Score	Frequency	Percentage
1	Very Good	85 – 100	15	53,57%
2	Good	75 – 84	10	35,71%
3	Enough	55 – 74	1	3,57%
4	Fair	40 – 54	2	7,14%
5	Very Fair	< 40	0	0%
Total			28	100%

The results from cycle II indicate a continued upward trend in students’ descriptive writing performance. More than 89% of students scored in the “Good” and “Very Good”

categories, suggesting that the instructional refinements made in cycle II such as grammar reinforcement and contextual modeling effectively addressed the remaining learning gaps. The sharp decline in lower-performing categories, with only three students (10.71%) scoring below “Good” and none falling into the “Very Fair” category, reflects substantial progress in both language accuracy and text organization. While a few students remained in the “Fair” and “Enough” levels, this may be attributed to external factors such as exam fatigue or individual learning pace rather than instructional design. The outcome of cycle II demonstrates that the CTL approach successfully fostered improved vocabulary use, increased writing coherence, and enhanced student confidence in descriptive writing tasks.

Tabel 8. The percentage of student learning outcomes completeness in the cycle II

Score	Number of Students	%	Category
≥ 75	25	89,29%	Complete
< 75	3	10,71%	Incomplete
Total	28	100%	

The results of the second cycle post-test show a notable improvement in students' learning outcomes. Of 28 students, 25 (or 89.29%) achieved scores equal to or above the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75 and were categorized as complete. Meanwhile, only three students (10.71%) remained in the incomplete category. These findings indicate that the class had successfully reached the classical completeness target of 80%, showing that the learning model implemented in the second cycle effectively improved students' writing skills, particularly in descriptive text.

Tabel 9. Comparison of students' learning completeness in pre-cycle, cycle I, and cycle II

Score	Pre-Cycle		Cycle I		Cycle II		Category
	Number of Students	%	Number of Students	%	Number of Students	%	
≥ 75	2	7.14%	22	78.57%	25	89.29%	Complete
< 75	26	92.86%	6	21.43%	3	10.71%	Incomplete
Total	28	100%	28	100%	28	100%	

Table 10 compares students' learning completeness across three phases: pre-cycle, cycle I, and cycle II. In the pre-cycle, only two students (7.14%) were in a complete category, while 26 (92.86%) were incomplete. After the first learning intervention (post-test 1), there was a significant improvement: 22 students (78.57%) achieved completeness, and only six students (21.43%) remained incomplete. The results improved further in post-test II, with 25 students (89.29%) reaching the completeness standard and only three students (10.71%) remaining incomplete. This data demonstrates a steady increase in students achieving the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75, indicating that the applied learning model effectively enhanced students' descriptive writing skills.

The findings of this study confirm that implementing the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) method significantly improved students' descriptive writing skills. Consistent gains were observed across six assessment indicators text structure, vocabulary use, grammar (particularly there is/there are and prepositions), punctuation, clarity, and

creativity demonstrating the method's effectiveness in an EFL classroom. The classroom atmosphere also became more student-centered, with active participation increasing from cycle I to cycle II. This study offers a unique contribution to CTL-based research. While most prior studies focus broadly on CTL's application in reading or speaking, this research specifically targets the development of descriptive writing. This genre demands structural control and expressive accuracy. Furthermore, it addresses less-explored grammar challenges, particularly students' misuse of *there is/there are* and spatial prepositions, offering insights often neglected in CTL discussions.

A distinctive element of this study lies in integrating the culturally relevant theme "Home Sweet Home." This theme allowed students to connect language with familiar, personal contexts. Combined with visual aids, peer feedback, and grammar drills, the approach created a multi-dimensional instructional model that enriched both the technical and creative aspects of writing. The research process followed the cyclical framework of planning, action, observation, and reflection, as proposed by Kemmis et al. (2013), which emphasized the importance of continuous reflection and strategic modifications in classroom action research to improve learning outcomes. This cyclical approach allowed the teacher-researcher to not only diagnose and respond to learning challenges in real time but also document sustained improvement across cognitive and affective domains. Compared to static one-shot experimental designs, CAR offered a richer understanding of how CTL functions dynamically within the realities of classroom instruction.

In the planning stage of cycle I, the researcher designed instructional activities that integrated CTL principles to improve students' writing performance. The lesson plan targeted the improvement of paragraph structure, descriptive vocabulary, and grammar usage. To support these objectives, the researcher selected a model text titled "Galang's House" to demonstrate appropriate text organization, effective adjective use, and proper application of *there is/there are* and prepositions. This aligns with Purwati et al. (2019), and Welerubun et al. (2022), who emphasized that contextual learning strategies allow students to connect abstract concepts with real-life experiences, thereby fostering more profound understanding and improved retention. Visual aids were also incorporated to support vocabulary development, as suggested by Dewi and Siregar (2022), who found that visual media significantly enhances students' ability to generate descriptive language. Students will grasp and relate the subjects they study through direct experience (Ambarita & Pohan, 2025; Baransano et al., 2017).

During the action stage, the teacher provided explicit instruction on paragraph organization by guiding students to structure their writing using topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding statements. Vocabulary development activities emphasized the use of varied and context-appropriate adjectives, while grammar-focused tasks targeted the correct application of *there is/there are* and prepositions. Additionally, students engaged in guided writing activities where they described familiar settings, such as their living rooms, to help them connect the learning materials with their personal experiences. This approach aligns with the findings of Jayanti and Rozimela (2022), who emphasized that CTL strategies effectively improve writing skills by encouraging students to draw from their everyday surroundings.

The observation phase in cycle I revealed varying levels of achievement across the assessment indicators. In terms of text structure & organization, most students were

assessed in the fair category, as their paragraphs lacked coherence, and ideas were not well connected. Regarding vocabulary & adjectives, students demonstrated limited word variety, with repetitive and sometimes inaccurate adjective use, resulting in a score that mostly fell within the fair category. In the grammar category, students frequently misused *there is/there are* and prepositions, which often disrupted the clarity of their descriptions; consequently, most students scored in the poor category for this aspect. Similarly, in the punctuation category, students struggled with comma placement, sentence-ending punctuation, and capitalization, which reduced text readability. As a result, most students were categorized as fair. In terms of clarity & coherence, students' ideas were often fragmented and lacked logical connections. At the same time, their descriptive content in the creativity & engagement category was generally limited, resulting in uninspired and monotonous writing. These observations align with the findings of Daulay et al. (2023), who highlighted that EFL students frequently struggle with grammar accuracy and creative expression due to limited vocabulary exposure and insufficient writing practice. Incorrect grammar can impair communication and reading comprehension (Damayanti & Azizah, 2024).

In addition to these performance-based observations, the classroom atmosphere during cycle I reflected varied student engagement levels. While students showed strong focus during teacher explanations (92.82%), their participation in discussions was considerably lower, with only 57.14% of students actively contributing. Furthermore, observations indicated that 85.87% of students successfully related the learning material to their real-life experiences, demonstrating that the CTL method effectively encouraged contextual understanding. However, some students showed signs of disengagement during individual writing activities, indicating a need for improved classroom interaction strategies.

The results of cycle I revealed modest improvement, with the average score increasing from 60.10 in the pre-cycle to 79.89 in cycle I. While some progress was noted in text organization and vocabulary use, persistent weaknesses in grammar, punctuation, and creativity required additional intervention. In the reflection stage of the cycle, I identified key areas for improvement, particularly in grammar, punctuation, and descriptive language. To address these challenges, the cycle II lesson plan incorporated targeted strategies such as explicit grammar instruction, collaborative writing activities, and the use of visual aids to support vocabulary development. These strategies align with Hakim and Sari (2022), who demonstrated that the CTL method, when combined with visual support, significantly enhances students' ability to describe objects and ideas more vividly and accurately.

In the planning stage of cycle II, the teacher introduced additional writing exercises that emphasized paragraph coherence, improved vocabulary use, and accurate grammar. A new model text titled "A Luxurious House" was selected to provide a richer example of descriptive language, organized paragraph structure, and correct punctuation. Collaborative learning activities were also incorporated to encourage peer interaction and foster idea sharing, as recommended by Sears (2002), who emphasized that group work enhances students' ability to refine their writing through discussion and feedback. The small group discussion was successful in positively influencing learning outcomes, particularly students' ability to communicate their viewpoints (Gaffar, Gumelar, et al., 2024).

During the action phase of cycle II, the teacher employed explicit grammar drills to reinforce the correct use of there is/there are and prepositions. Writing tasks encouraged students to incorporate varied adjectives and more engaging descriptions, while peer feedback sessions allowed students to exchange ideas, critique each other's work, and strengthen their writing strategies. This collaborative approach reflects the findings of Gaffar et al. (2024), who demonstrated that peer feedback significantly improves writing accuracy and content development. Students may find writing assignments difficult since proficient writing necessitates the mastery of multiple skills (Yuliana & Sahayu, 2024). In the reflection phase of cycle II, the researcher concluded that the revised instructional strategies particularly the integration of visual aids, peer collaboration, and grammar-focused tasks were effective in addressing the weaknesses identified in cycle I. The observation results strongly supported this conclusion, showing consistent improvement across all writing indicators.

Students produced more logically sequenced paragraphs with clear topic sentences and relevant supporting details in the text structure and organization category. For vocabulary and adjectives, most students demonstrated increased precision and variety in word choice. A notable improvement was also seen in grammar usage, especially in the correct application of there is/there are and prepositions areas previously identified as significant challenges. In punctuation, errors in capitalization, comma use, and sentence-ending punctuation were significantly reduced. Furthermore, students' writing showed better clarity and coherence, with smoother transitions and more cohesive ideas. Finally, students' descriptions became more vivid and original in the creativity and engagement category, incorporating imaginative language and personal perspectives.

These outcomes validated the researcher's pedagogical decisions and confirmed that the instructional revisions based on cycle I reflection were well-targeted. However, the reflection also noted that while technical accuracy improved, some students' writing lacked elaboration, likely due to time constraints or cognitive fatigue. This insight informs future instructional planning, where additional emphasis on sentence expansion and idea development will be incorporated. During the action phase, grammar-focused tasks were reinforced through drills. Observations showed improved classroom dynamics: participation rose to 78.57%, writing focus improved to 92.86%, and students demonstrated stronger connections between text and real-life experience. Although attentiveness dropped slightly (to 75%), likely due to exam-related fatigue (Mashudi & Azzahro, 2020), most students were more expressive and engaged.

The results of post-test II confirmed sustained improvement in students' descriptive writing skills. The average score increased from 79.89 in cycle I to 82.42 in cycle II, and 89.28% of students achieved scores within the "Good" and "Very Good" categories. According to (Arikunto, 2019), a classroom action is considered successful when at least 75% of students reach the minimum mastery level (≥ 70) and show consistent improvement both of which were achieved in this study. These improvements were evident across key writing indicators: paragraph structure became more coherent, vocabulary use more varied, grammar application more accurate, and ideas were presented with greater clarity. However, observation and writing samples revealed that some students' descriptions in cycle II were less detailed than in cycle I, potentially due to time pressure or academic fatigue. This finding aligns with Moybeka et al. (2023), who noted that learners under

pressure may simplify content rather than elaborate. It also highlights the need for future instructional cycles to emphasize sentence development and idea expansion.

In the reflection stage of cycle II, the researcher concluded that combined visual media, collaborative writing strategies, and grammar-focused instruction successfully addressed the weaknesses identified in cycle I. This conclusion was reinforced by observation data, which showed consistent improvement across all writing indicators from organization and grammar to creativity. As supported by Gayatri and Gaffar (2023), and Irwayu and Gaffar (2023), integrating visual and interactive elements into instruction enhances students' linguistic output and fosters a more engaging and motivating classroom environment.

These findings demonstrate that when carefully adapted to the specific demands of descriptive writing and integrated with culturally relevant themes, the CTL approach can significantly enhance students' writing proficiency. The study provides compelling evidence of CTL's effectiveness in supporting both the cognitive and affective aspects of learning through a combination of assessment scores, classroom observations, and reflective teaching practices. The method improved students' technical writing skills such as structure, vocabulary, and grammar and fostered greater motivation, creativity, and participation. These results affirm the value of implementing contextual learning strategies responsive to students' real-life experiences and individual learning needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) method effectively improved students' descriptive writing skills in vocabulary, grammar accuracy, coherence, creativity, and text structure. Using familiar themes, real-life contexts, and interactive strategies enabled students to connect their experiences with learning materials, increasing engagement and performance. Improvements were observed in test results and student participation, writing behavior, and contextual understanding throughout the two action cycles. Furthermore, the study met the criteria for successful classroom action research, with over 89% of students achieving scores above the minimum mastery threshold. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical value of integrating CTL into writing instruction, particularly in addressing everyday challenges EFL learners face. The study recommends the continued use of CTL-based instruction to foster meaningful learning and suggests further research to explore its application across other genres and educational levels.

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