

## ENHANCING STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY THROUGH CONTEXTUALIZATION PRACTICES

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### Abstract

Writing is one of the macro-language skills that second language learners (SLLs) must achieve in order to communicate their ideas, feeling, and the like in the form of written communication. This study is aimed at improving students' writing ability of junior high school at Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta through contextualization practices. To gain the objective, this study voluntarily involved 32 students of junior high school at Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta as the subjects of this study and one English language teacher serving as the collaborator. This study applied a classroom action research design with the utilization of three cycles during the data collection practices. Techniques of observation, interview, and questionnaire distribution were employed to gather data followed by data condensation, data display, and conclusion making which were meant to qualitatively analyze the gathered data. Quantitative descriptive analysis was also employed to analyze students' writing ability with the employment of writing test. The findings document four issues. First, there was a change of behavior on the part of students in the area of motivation to learn and involvement in writing practices. Second, the majority of students found easier to express their ideas in reference to the contextualization practices applied by English language teachers. Third, mis-conception and grammatical mistakes could be minimized in the process of constructing English texts. Fourth, with regard to quantitative data, the average scores of the content, paragraph organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics increased sharply.

**Key words:** contextualization, schematic knowledge, writing ability

## PENINGKATAN KEMAMPUAN MENULIS SISWA MELALUI PRAKTIK KONTEKSTUALISASI

### Abstrak

Menulis adalah salah satu keterampilan bahasa makro yang harus dicapai oleh pelajar bahasa kedua untuk mengkomunikasikan gagasan, perasaan, dan sejenisnya dalam bentuk komunikasi tertulis. Penelitian ini bertujuan meningkatkan kemampuan menulis peserta didik Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta melalui penggunaan kontekstualisasi pembelajaran menulis. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penelitian ini melibatkan 32 orang peserta didik sebagai subjek penelitian dan seorang guru bahasa Inggris sebagai kolaborator peneliti. Jenis penelitian ini dikategorikan ke dalam bentuk penelitian tindakan kelas dengan menerapkan tiga siklus selama pelaksanaan pengambilan data penelitian. Terdapat

tiga jenis teknik pengumpulan data penelitian yang digunakan, yakni teknik observasi kelas, wawancara, dan penyebaran kuesioner yang selanjutnya diikuti dengan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan yang dimaksudkan untuk mendeskripsikan data kualitatif yang diperoleh dari pengumpulan data di lapangan. Analisis deskriptif kuantitatif juga digunakan untuk menyajikan kemampuan menulis peserta didik yang diperoleh melalui tes menulis teks-teks bahasa Inggris. Berdasarkan hasil analisis, disimpulkan empat temuan utama. Pertama, penggunaan teknik kontekstualisasi pembelajaran menulis mengubah tingkah laku peserta didik dalam hal motivasi belajar menulis teks-teks bahasa Inggris dan keterlibatan peserta didik dalam pembelajaran menulis yang sebelumnya peserta terlihat pasif menjadi aktif. Kedua, sebagian besar peserta didik merasa mudah dalam mengekspresikan gagasan dengan mengacu pada kontekstualisasi tugas-tugas menulis teks-teks bahasa Inggris yang disampaikan. Ketiga, miskonsepsi dan kesalahan gramatikal dapat diminimasi dalam proses mengkonstruksi teks-teks bahasa Inggris. Keempat, dengan mengacu pada data kuantitatif, skor rerata dari isi, pengorganisasian paragraf, pemilihan kosakata, penggunaan bahasa, dan aspek penulisan mengalami peningkatan yang cukup tajam.

**Kata kunci:** kontekstualisasi, pengetahuan skematik, kemampuan menulis

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the macro-language skills that second language learners (SLLs) must achieve in order to communicate their ideas, feeling, and the like in the form of written communication. It is one of the productive language skills which requires two types of knowledge, namely systemic knowledge and schematic knowledge (Margana, 2012). This suggests that teaching writing conducted by second language teachers (here after SLTs) is not only concerned with exploring the units of language such as the exploration of words, phrases, and sentences which are then rendered into paragraphs or larger units of paragraphs, but also presenting the external structure of language called schematic knowledge (Hedge, 2008; Margana, 2012) one of which is socio-cultural knowledge as

one of the contexts of a situation which constrains how texts are constructed. Otherwise, SLLs likely find difficulties in developing ideas to construct texts. To sum up, contextualization practices should become the concern of ELTs at any level of education including junior high school when they are involved in English language teaching and learning (ELTL), including teaching of writing.

In support of the above issue, Brown and Lee (2015: 335) highlight that writing is resulted from thinking, drafting, and revising procedures. It implies that a writer needs to think about the content of the writing first and then arrange the ideas using the appropriate language units. Writing in correct and accurate forms of language involves correct spelling, punctuation, diction, grammar, sentence, and paragraph formation, and the like. However, those writing practices may create difficulties

for SLLs when the context of a situation of the topics that SLLs want to write is not clearly presented. This relies on the fact that the context of a situation could bridge their schematic knowledge that SLLs have already gained and the new language tasks that they want to construct. In short, contextualization practices should be taken into account by SLTs to facilitate SLLs to develop their ideas relevant to the topics that they want to write.

Hedge in McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara (2013: 158) affirms that writing is the process of putting pieces of text by developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs to become a whole structure. In addition, writing is not only a group of words which are neatly arranged. It consists of many constituent parts to consider, namely “unity, support, organization, and error-free sentences” (Langan 2012: 17).

As a matter of fact, SLLs find some problems in writing on the grounds that a great number of micro- and macro skills of writing should be achieved. Langan (2012: 96) argues that writing has four basic skills. They are handwriting or typing, spelling, constructing grammatical sentences, and punctuating. While in the higher level, writing involves cognitive skills, such as gathering ideas relevant to the topic, organizing them into a logical sequence, structuring the sequence into sections and paragraphs, expressing the ideas in a written draft, editing the draft, and writing out a final text. In short, writing comprises five important elements namely content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics and writers should consider the unity or context of writing. It is not merely

the structure of language. Richards and Renandya (2002: 303) claim that the majority of SLLs encounter some problems in getting ideas and developing them into acceptable and appropriate sentences and paragraphs which may also happen at any level of education in Indonesia. This implies that writing is very hard to achieve for SLLs without understanding of the context of the topics.

There are some reasons why it is difficult. First, Richards and Renandya (2002: 303) state that writing is the most difficult skill for second or foreign language learners to obtain. Second, in the theory of second language acquisition, listening becomes the earliest skill and writing becomes the latest skill and the students need to master the sub-skills in order to write well. Students are intended to master micro-skills of writing in order to master good writing. Brown (2004:221) argues that SLLs need to achieve micro-skills and macro-skills that they use to write. Third, it is beneficial for junior high school students in the daily communication but it is not learnt it intensively. This suggests that the teaching of writing skill is a complex activity. SLTs at any level of education including the English teacher of junior high school level should make an effort to solve the problem.

Based on the researchers' classroom preliminary observation, interviews, and questionnaires at VII F class of SMP at Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta, the teacher did not utilize the contextualization scaffolding practices when they were involved in ELTL for receptive and productive language skills including teaching of writing.

The English language teacher tended to apply a product approach in teaching writing giving an emphasis on the product of writing instead of the process approach which stressed on scaffolding engagement by exploring the contexts of the selected topics followed by mind mapping practices.

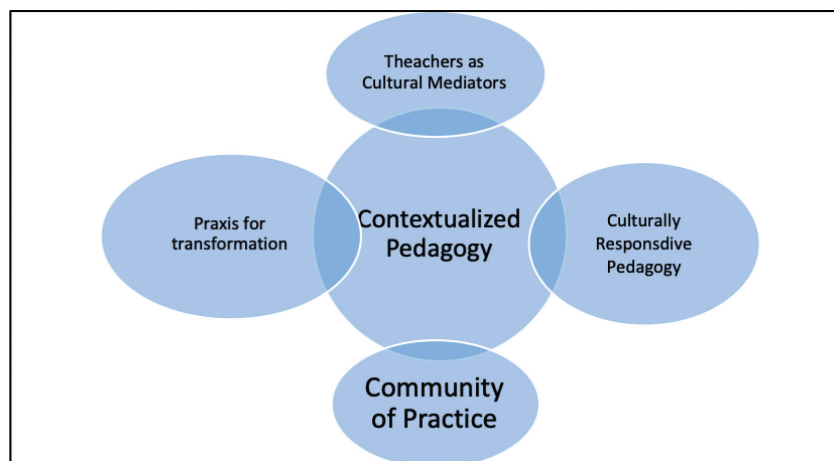
In support of the above issue, the contexts of a situation underlying the selected topics as the writing tasks were not presented to students. Consequently, the majority of students of junior high school at Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta found difficulties in tracking and developing ideas in response to the given topics. They showed unmotivated and unhappy behaviors during the English classroom practices. In addition, the interaction of students did not run well. Most of them tended to be silent were confused of what they wanted to write. They got blank ideas.

With regard to the above problems, it is urgent to make an effort of how to solve those problems. One of the efforts that could be applicable for minimizing the problems above is the utilization of the contextualization

of the writing tasks to students before they do the tasks on the grounds that the utilization of the contextualization of the writing tasks facilitate SLLs to activate their schematic knowledge which directly or indirectly With the employment of the strategy was chosen in order that the action can improve the grade seventh students' writing ability through contextualization practices.

Conceptually, the word "context" here refers to a context of situation. As what Hymes (1974) in Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015:88) said, context is important to make the text meaningful. Those kinds of contexts can be presented in the forms of contextual activities. Those activities are completed with the relevant context of a situation by doing a contextualization. Mazzeo, Rab, and Alssid (2003) in Perin (2011:4) propose it as a teaching strategy which makes a relationship between what the students learn in the classroom and the real life they need to practice.

Lee and Sakamoto (2012:13-19) propose the model of contextualized learning which is concerned with some aspects as presented as follows.



**Fig. 1. Models of contextualized education by Lee and Sakamoto (2012:13)**

In line with the above theory, Margana (2011:84-85) states that ELTs may consider three issues related to the context of a situation which includes participant, topics, and setting. Participant refers to many parties who are involved in communication practices. Setting deals with any situation which can be in the form of time or location which constrain the communication practices. This is important to avoid

students' confusion of constructing English texts. Third, topic refers to the area or focus of communicative events that drive any interlocutors to gain the meaningful context. Those three aspects of the context of a situation scaffold SLLs to recall ideas used to construct English texts.

Further, Margana (2011:85) also proposes the description how context is established as presented below.

**Table 1. The description how context is established**

Participants (P)	Topics (T)	Setting (S)
Who are involved in the communication?	What do they talk about?	Where does the communication take place?
What is the relationship between them?	What is the purpose of the communication?	When do the participants conduct a communication?
What social backgrounds do the participants have?	How is the topic conveyed?	What social environment is it?

In support of it, Perin (2011:1) conducted a study which deals with improving students' learning with the employment of contextualization practices and exploring the nature and effectiveness of contextualization as a way to improve learning outcomes. He found that using relevant contexts facilitates students to maintain students' motivation in order to gain meaningful learning. This suggests that the contextualization of learning can facilitate students to memorize what they have learnt because the teaching and learning process is meaningful, triggering SLLs to lateralize all English learning materials in a long-term memory space. This is different from the decontextualized learning. According to Oxford and Scarcella (1994) in Nemati (2010: 172) (2009:

1), 'de-contextualized learning' via word list may help students memorize vocabulary for doing tests, but students are likely to easily forget words that they memorize from the list of words. This suggests that ELTs should provide SLLs with contextualized learning.

Nieder'ee (2015: 4) adds that providing the contexts of a situation in teaching writing or any language skill facilitates SLLs to ensure their long-term interpretation. In other words, with the use of contextualization, it makes easier for SLLs to achieve language data and language constellation as rendered in the form of texts. It also maintains a context evolution and re-contextualization into the current (typically changed) context when they need to call back into active use.



Thus, the strategy of the contextualization of learning English is needed to solve the problem of improving the student' writing abilities. This research is aimed to find how the students' writing ability can be enhanced through the contextualization of learning. At the end of the study it is expected that the contextualization practices can help students improve their writing ability.

## **METHOD**

This study was categorized as a classroom action research which follows the Kemmis and Taggart model (1988) from Burns (2010:9) of action research with some modification. The process of the action research consists of four stages such as planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Three cycles consisting of nine meetings were done. There were 32 students of SMP at Minggir, Sleman, Yogyakarta to be involved as the subjects of this study and another English teacher was the researcher's collaborator. The data were acquired through classroom observations, questionnaire distribution for the students, and interviews with the students and collaborator.

There were four indicators used to indicate the success of the research. They include (1) being able to generate ideas well, (2) employing the correct grammatical features, (3) organizing the paragraph correctly and accurately, and (4) improving motivation on the part of students.

This study used field notes, observation checklist, questionnaire forms, interview transcripts, and documentations as the forms of data. Then, data condensation, data

display, and conclusion making were used to analyze the data qualitatively. Quantitative descriptive analysis was also used to analyze the students' writing ability with the employment of test of writing.

The data were analyzed in three steps, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion making (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014: 10-12). First, researchers selected, focused, simplified, and transformed the data gathered in the form of observation checklist forms, interview transcripts, field notes, and samples of students' writing. Second, researchers, then, sorted, sharpened, focused, and organized the data to get the final conclusion. Third, the data were organized in order to come to the conclusion making and action. Finally, researchers made a conclusion from the data display to know the progress of the implementation and verified it.

In addition, the quantitative data were gathered from assessing students' writing performance by using a writing rubric adapted from Jacobs et al. in Weigle (2002: 116). The rubric consisted of five aspects of writing, namely (1) content, (2) organization, (3) vocabulary, (4) language use, and (5) mechanics in which each of them was scaled from 1 to 4. Hence, the maximum score was 20, while the minimum score was 5. To analyze the quantitative data which were in the form of students' writing performance task scores, the researchers used a descriptive qualitative analysis.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

To identify problems emerging in the field, a preliminary classroom

observation, pre-test and interview were done. The students of VII F and the collaborator were interviewed. Also the teaching and learning process of VII F was also observed. In reference to the classroom observation practices, the English teaching and learning process did not run very well. The students were noisy during the lesson as they were not interested in the English lesson. In addition, they had difficulties in mastering English too, especially writing.

After the implementation, improvements were found during the process of the action with the strategy of a contextualization which was provided contexts of situation as explored below.

In cycle 1, students showed improvements on the idea generation and motivation but they still found some problems in the teaching learning process of writing. They found difficulties in selecting and constructing words, phrases, and sentences. They also encountered difficulties in developing their ideas and organizing them into the good paragraphs. They also felt confused of the notion of contexts of situation so that the teacher should gave more explanation about it.

The improvement laid on students' motivation in writing. By applying group works with contextualization, the students were enthusiastic in learning the materials and doing the writing

tasks. Furthermore, the weakness dealing with the low students' mastery of grammar occurred.

In cycle 2, improvements occurred on students' writing skills, such as students' motivation, generating ideas, and paragraph organization. Afterwards, some questions related to them were asked. There was a better interaction between the researcher and the students. However, the problems of grammar were still emerged.

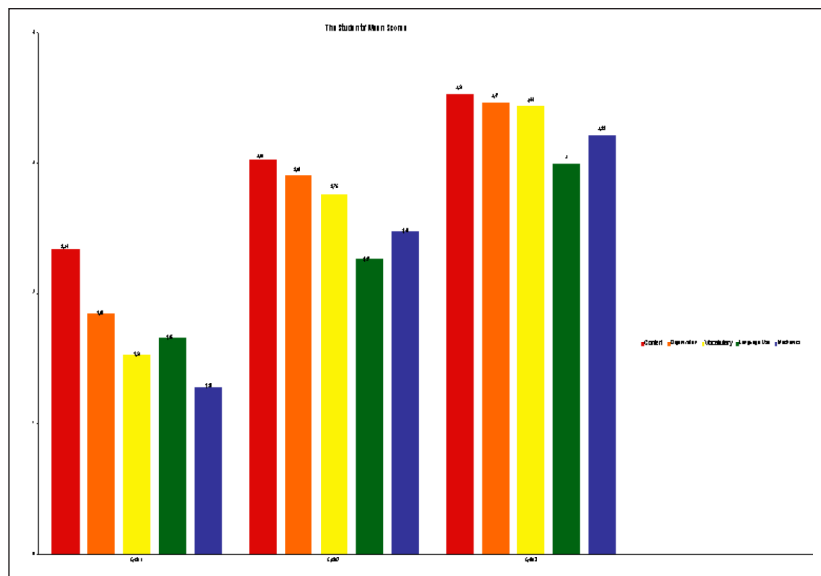
However, students' grammatical mistakes were still found because there was only little explanation on grammar and it needed to be more contextualized. Therefore, the researchers and the collaborator decided to continue the cycle to improve again the students' writing skill especially grammar.

In cycle 3, the result shows that the contextualization of the writing tasks could improve the majority of students' writing skills. The improvement could be seen in the observation sheet.

The students were enthusiastic in writing which affected their writing ability in terms of ideas generation, paragraph organization, as well as grammatical mastery concurrently. The quantitative data to support the qualitative data were also acquired though the classroom observation and also writing assessment. The improvement was also calculated as follows.

**Table 2 The Improvements on the Process**

Aspects	Indicators	Cycle			
		Before the Action	1	2	3
Verbal	1. Students ask questions related to the material.	3	15	18	21
	2. Students comment based on the material.	4	25	28	28
	3. Students talk on different topics with friends.	22	15	11	7
	4. Students answer the question from the teacher.	14	26	25	28
	5. Students joke with friends	18	12	8	6
	6. Students talk by themselves on different topics.	17	9	10	5
	7. Students are not active.	8	4	-	-
Non-verbal	1. Students look enthusiastic on the learning process.	14	21	25	26
	2. Students look confident.	6	16	22	29
	3. Students look shame.	24	12	6	6
	4. The students are ignorant.	8	4	4	2
	5. The students pay attention to their friends.	11	7	4	4



**Chart 1. Mean of writing sub-skills scores in cycle 1-3**

In Cycle 1, the mean score of the students' writing skill was 2.34 for the content, 1.84 for the organization, 1.53 for the vocabulary, 1.66 for the language use, and 2.35 for the mechanics. It implies that the actions

implemented in Cycle 1 were successful to improve students' motivation and students' writing skills in terms of generating ideas. However, there were still some problems occurring dealing with the teaching-learning process and



students' grammatical mastery and paragraph organization. Consequently, the researchers and the collaborator decided to continue cycle 2.

In cycle 2, the mean score of the students' writing skill was 3.03 for the aspect of the content, 2.91 for the aspect of the organization, 2.76 for the aspect of the vocabulary, 2.27 for the aspect of the language use, and 2.48 for the aspect of the mechanics. This suggests that the actions implemented in Cycle 2 were successful to improve students' motivation and students' writing skills in terms of generating ideas and organizing words, phrases, and sentences into paragraph. However, there were still some problems dealing with the teaching-learning process and the students' grammatical mastery. Consequently, the researchers and the collaborator decided to continue the cycle.

In Cycle 3, the mean score of the students' writing skill was 3.53 for the content, 3.47 for the organization, 3.44 for the vocabulary, 3 for the language use, and 3.22 for the mechanics. This implies that the actions implemented in Cycle 3 were successful to improve students' writing skills in terms of generating ideas, paragraph organization, and grammatical mastery. Therefore, the researchers and the collaborator decided to stop the cycle.

The quantitative data were acquired from the gain scores of the five writing aspects. To easily make an interpretation, the researchers present a conversion table consisting of six categories namely "very poor", "poor", "fair", "good", "very good", and "excellent" as presented below.

**Table 3. Conversion Table of Students' Writing Scores**

Class Interval	Categorization	Frequency			
		Pre-Test	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
17.5 – 20	Excellent	0	0	4	17
15.0 – 17.4	Very good	0	0	8	10
12.5 – 14.9	Good	0	1	11	14
10.0 – 12.4	Fair	5	8	9	0
7.5 – 9.9	Poor	8	13	0	0
5.0 – 7.4	Very poor	18	10	0	0

To categorize the level of the ability into groups, the rater used a scale of ability. The conversion of the scale showed that students' scores of writing improved every meeting. Based on the table, it can be interpreted that in the pre-test, the students' scores were categorized into "fair", "poor", and

mostly "very poor". Some students showed the "very poor", "poor", and "fair" and only one student who was "good". In the second cycle, however, the numbers of "good" and "fair" categories increased. Meanwhile, the "very good" and "excellent" scores were achieved and no one got "poor"

and “very poor” scores in this cycle. Finally, in the third cycle, “very poor” and “poor” scores did not exist. The “excellent category” were gained by most students and some others were included into “good” and “very good” category.

In brief, by applying the contextualization of the writing tasks, students have experienced in writing with a purpose. They can apply the communicative purpose in their real life. In addition, the contextualization of writing tasks improved the effectiveness of writing so that students’ task achievement of writing improved. Therefore, the research cycles were terminated.

### Discussion

Since the quantitative and qualitative data were acquired in terms of the process and the products of writing, the aspects of the indicators are presented below.

**Table 4. The Indicators of the Research Success**

Aspects	Cycle		
	1	2	3
Students’ Motivation	√	√	√
Generating Ideas	√	√	√
Paragraph Organization	-	√	√
Grammar	-	-	√

Table 4 shows the improvements on the students’ writing subskills from cycle to cycle. In the initial stage, students felt that English writing practices were not meaningful to learn because they never practiced writing English texts. Because of that reason, a solution should be done. The chosen solution was giving

contextualization on every writing task. The application of the contextualization of writing tasks made them aware of the importance of the practice of writing English. Furthermore, they could get their ideas and change their assumptions that writing was not useful in their life.

The above result was in line with the theory presented by Allwright (1998:72), highlighting that the contextualization of writing tasks can facilitate teachers to create an exciting learning atmosphere so that the activities are not boring in nature. The results of this study were in line with the theory that by providing contexts of situation, students expressed that the teaching-learning process of writing was meaningful which triggered them to have high motivation to learn English writing. Added to this, the meaningfulness of the activity improves their engagement in learning writing.

Besides, the contextualization of the writing tasks can facilitate students to minimize the difficulties of expressing ideas and organizing paragraphs, as what Allwright (1998:123) also argues that the contextualization of writing tasks provides related information which is useful for them to generate ideas. Through use of the contextualization of writing tasks, students can organize their writing in a way that meets its purpose. Thus, after understanding the information of the text, students are triggered to get ideas. Furthermore, they can organize their ideas into a structural text. Moreover, a grammatical mastery was the last emerging problem. The strategy to improve students’ skill of generating ideas by using the contextualization

of the writing tasks appears in cycle 1. The strategy to improve students' skill of organizing paragraphs by the application of the contextualization of writing tasks appears in cycle 2.

Moreover, contextualization can solve this problem through giving contextual grammatical input. It is supported by Shin (2006) in Margana (2012:107). He states that language structures should be presented within a context that is meaningful and communicative. Therefore, contextualization which is meaningful and communicative can facilitate students to learn structure of English. In conclusion, by using contextualization, the students' motivation and generating ideas skill could be improved only in 1 cycle while the paragraph organization skill needed 2 cycles to improve. Meanwhile, the grammar aspects could be improved in 3 cycles. Thus, the grammatical mastery was most difficult skill to improve by using contextualization than three other skills.

The results match the final qualitative data in the last cycle that every aspect of the assessment is included in the category of "good" at least. The mean score of the students' writing skill was 3.53 for the content, 3.47 for the organization, 3.44 for the vocabulary, 3 for the language use, and 3.22 for the mechanics. Therefore, either the qualitative or the quantitative data show significant improvement on the students' writing ability.

As the final reflection, the result of this research was discussed by the researcher and the English teacher as the collaborator. Furthermore, they drew a conclusion that contextualization can

be the effective tool to help students in doing the writing. Therefore, after the result of the last cycle had shown a significant improvement in students' writing skills, the researcher and the collaborator decided to stop the cycle.

## CONCLUSION

This study is about improving students' writing ability through contextualization practices. Contextualization is providing intermediate setting which constrains the communication. It is useful to make tasks meaningful to students. The contexts used to improve students' writing ability were contexts which were familiar and relevant to students' real life and based on the goal. Since contextualization was used in the teaching writing combined with group work, the students were enthusiastic in the class. Moreover, by applying contextualization, students and teacher considered that teaching and learning processes are meaningful. In addition, their writing ability improved. They could express their ideas and develop them to be relevant to the topic and supporting sentences. Their grammatical mistakes also minimized. The students' improvement in writing ability has been presented in the form of a mean scores table.

In terms of the process, there are some improvements on the verbal and non-verbal aspects. In the verbal aspect, the number of students who asked questions based on the material, commented based on the material, and their response improved. Meanwhile, that of students who talked on different topics with friends, joked with friends, talked by themselves on different topics,

and kept silent and did not answer the teacher's question decreased. In terms on non-verbal aspect, moreover, the number of students who looked enthusiastic on the learning process and looked confident increased. Meanwhile, that of students who looked shame, did not pay attention to the teacher's explanation, paid attention to their friends, played something in the classroom, read other books, and did the task of other subjects decreased.

The results of the research give some implications to the research members. Theoretically, the researcher expects that the result of this study can strengthen the theories on education, especially on the use of contextualization as a method in the teaching and learning processes of writing. In the theoretical review, there are the theories stated by Allwright that the contextualization can help students to motivate, create interest, and combat boredom during the writing process. The researchers expect that the result of this study can strengthen the theories on education, especially on the use of contextualization as a method in the teaching and learning processes of writing. In the theoretical review, there are the theories stated by Allwright that the contextualization can help students motivate, create interest, and combat boredom during the writing process. This teaching strategy can be used to create a non-threatening environment, which encourages students and promotes positive social interaction that can support to develop students' motivation.

Besides his theory also states that contextualization is useful for students to generate ideas. Through the use of contextualization, students can

structure and organize their writing in a way that fits its purpose.

Moreover, Shin's theory that contextualization can facilitate students to learn grammar in contexts is also applicable. The grammar the students learn can be applied meaningfully in the daily life. Thus, language structures should be presented within a context that is meaningful and communicative. In order to gain the goal of learning English, in this case, developing the students' writing achievement.

Practically, the research findings can be used by English teachers as a consideration in choosing strategies for the English teaching and learning processes to achieve students' writing achievement. They can be references for teachers to involve their students in the classroom through confronting real-world issues and problems and acting in a collaborative fashion to create problem solution.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We would like to express our gratitude to all parties who have been involved in facilitating us to do research and data making.

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