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Improving Students' Ability to Write Simple and Compound Sentences in Personal Letters through the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) Model

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Keywords

Simple sentences, compound sentences, personal letters, Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL).

Abstract

This study was motivated by the low ability of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Madiun to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters. The study aimed to describe the improvement in this ability through the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. The study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, conducted in two cycles with 30 students as the participants. Data were collected through written tests, classroom observations, and documentation, including students' writing products and photographs of classroom activities, and were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results showed that the class mean score increased from 58.3 in the pre-cycle to 70.5 in Cycle I and 82.4 in Cycle II. The percentage of learning mastery also increased from 30% in the pre-cycle to 56.7% in Cycle I and 86.7% in Cycle II. These findings indicate that the CTL model is effective in improving students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters.

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Introduction

Writing skills play an important role in language learning because writing activities require students to develop their ideas systematically, logically, and creatively in expressing thoughts in written form (Siregar et al., 2025). This is in line with the view of Barus et al. in Haris et al. (2025), who state that writing enables students to organize and transform their ideas into meaningful written texts. Among the various writing competencies that junior high school students are expected to master, the ability to construct sentences serves as a fundamental skill that supports the writing of various types of texts. Good sentence mastery enables students to convey ideas clearly, coherently, and understandably to readers. Therefore, the ability to use simple and compound sentences appropriately should be possessed by students as a foundation for writing activities.

One of the writing skills learned by seventh-grade students is writing personal letters. A personal letter is a form of written communication used to convey messages, feelings, experiences, or information to other people within a personal relationship (Zaki et al., 2024). Mastery of effective personal letter writing not only demonstrates an individual's language proficiency but also reflects the ability to communicate effectively and politely in everyday life (Nasukha et al., 2024). In the Kurikulum Merdeka, personal letter writing is taught in Grade VII as part of the competency that requires students to understand the structure, linguistic features, writing conventions, and vocabulary use (Tobing & Kayati, 2025). The clarity of the message in a personal letter is largely determined by the writer's ability to construct appropriate sentences in accordance with the communicative purpose. Therefore, the appropriate use of simple and compound sentences is one of the important linguistic aspects in producing communicative personal letters.

Theoretically, a simple sentence is a sentence that contains only one basic sentence pattern consisting of a subject and a predicate (Setiawan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, a compound sentence is a sentence consisting of two or more clauses connected by coordinating or subordinating conjunctions (Febrianti et al., 2024). In personal letter writing, the appropriate use of these two types of sentences greatly influences the clarity of the content, the coherence of ideas, and the readability of the letter. Simple sentences can be used to convey information in a straightforward and direct manner, whereas compound sentences allow the writer to develop more complex and detailed ideas according to communicative needs.

However, the actual conditions in the classroom indicate that students' abilities have not yet met expectations. Based on the results of preliminary observations and diagnostic tests conducted on seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Madiun, only 9 out of 30 students, or 30 percent, achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75. The class average score was only 58.3. These findings indicate that students' understanding and skills in writing simple and compound sentences remain low. The most common errors included students' inability to distinguish between simple and compound sentences, inappropriate use of conjunctions in compound sentences, and sentence structures that were not appropriate for the context of personal letter writing. These errors resulted in letters with less coherent content, unclear messages, and reduced readability.

The gap between the ideal condition and the actual condition forms the basis of the problem addressed in this study. The main issue lies not only in students' limited understanding of the material but also in the learning process, which has tended to be abstract and theoretical. Instruction has primarily been delivered through lectures and textbook-based exercises, providing students with limited meaningful experiences in using sentences authentically within the context of personal letter writing.

Based on these problems, a learning approach is needed that is capable of connecting the learning material with students' real-life contexts. One instructional model that can be used to address this issue is the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. This instructional model emphasizes the process of relating learning materials to real-world situations so that students can construct understanding through meaningful experiences (Nababan & Sipayung, 2023). In the context of personal letter writing, CTL is highly relevant because students can relate the learning material to their daily experiences, such as writing letters to friends, family members, or other people to share experiences or convey particular messages.

Several previous studies have also demonstrated that CTL is effective in improving writing skills. A study by Silalahi et al. (2023) showed that CTL significantly improved junior high school students' descriptive writing skills compared with conventional instruction. Another study by Rumoga et al. (2025) found that CTL was able to improve students' official letter writing skills, with a considerable increase in scores from the pre-cycle to the final cycle. In addition, a study by Prasiska and Kristanti (2023) reported that the CTL model was effective in improving students' personal letter writing skills. Aden et al. (2025) further emphasized that the CTL syntax, consisting of constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment, can create active and meaningful learning in writing skills.

Nevertheless, previous studies have primarily demonstrated the effectiveness of the CTL model in improving students' writing skills, such as descriptive writing, official letter writing, and personal letter writing. However, these studies generally evaluated writing performance as a whole without specifically examining students' ability to construct simple and compound sentences as essential linguistic components of personal letters. In fact, the appropriate use of simple and compound sentences plays a crucial role in producing clear, coherent, and communicative personal letters. Furthermore, studies that analyze students' improvement based on indicators of simple and compound sentence use across each learning cycle remain limited. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by specifically investigating the effectiveness of the CTL model in improving students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters. The research gap and the conceptual novelty of the present study are illustrated in Figure 1.

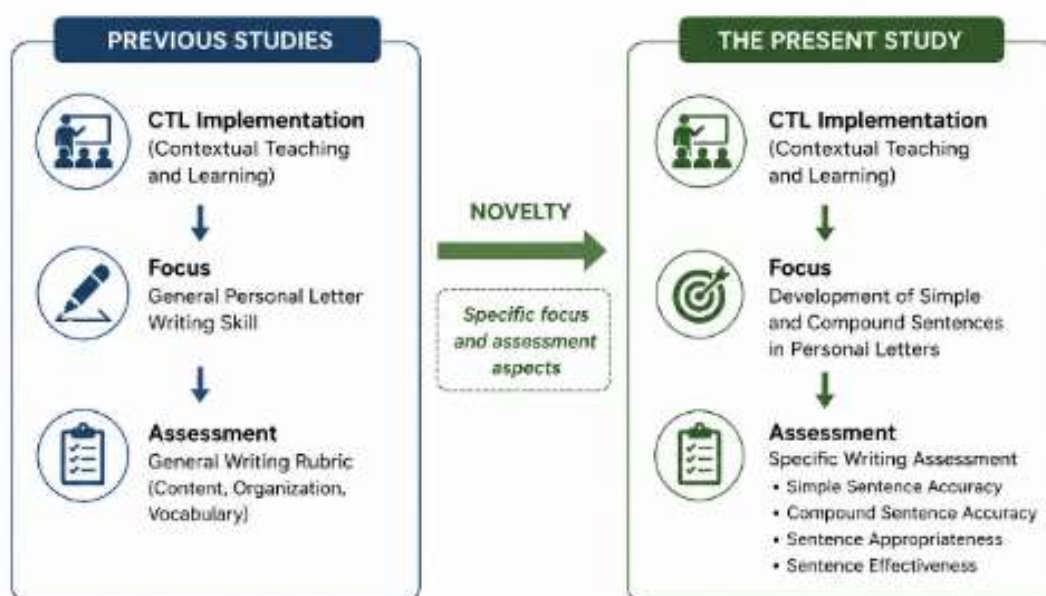


Figure 1. Research Gap and Conceptual Novelty of the Present Study

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to describe the improvement of students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters through the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Madiun.

Method

Research design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kurniawati et al., 2024). The study was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle following these four stages in a systematic manner. The implementation of the actions in each cycle was intended to improve students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters.

Research sample

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Madiun during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research participants were all 30 students of Class VII-D, consisting of 16 female students and 14 male students. The participants were selected based on the results of the preliminary observation, which indicated that most students still experienced difficulties in distinguishing between the use of simple and compound sentences, using conjunctions appropriately, and constructing effective sentences in accordance with the context of personal letters.

Research procedure

The research procedure was carried out in accordance with the stages of the Kemmis and McTaggart Classroom Action Research (CAR) model, namely planning, action, observation, and reflection in each cycle. During the planning stage, teaching modules, instructional materials, research instruments, and learning media were prepared. The action stage was carried out through the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. Subsequently, the observation stage was conducted to observe the activities of both the teacher and the students during the learning process, while the reflection stage was used to evaluate the outcomes of the actions as the basis for improvements in the subsequent cycle.

The implementation of the CTL model in this study was based on its seven main components, namely constructivism, questioning, inquiry, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment.

The implementation of the CTL model remained consistent throughout the study by maintaining its seven core components in each research cycle. Although the learning activities were refined based on the reflection results from the previous cycle, these refinements were intended to improve the implementation of each CTL component without altering its instructional syntax. The implementation of the CTL components in each cycle is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of Learning Activities Based on the CTL Syntax

No.	CTL Syntax	Cycle I Activities	Cycle II Activities
1	Constructivism	Students observed examples of personal letters brought from home or provided by the teacher to activate their prior knowledge about simple and compound sentences in personal letters.	Students revisited their personal letters from Cycle I, identified weaknesses in sentence construction, and activated their prior knowledge to improve the use of simple and compound sentences.
2	Questioning	The teacher posed guiding questions such as <i>"What is a simple sentence?"</i> and <i>"What happens if two sentences are combined into a compound sentence?"</i>	The teacher encouraged students to formulate and discuss questions related to sentence construction errors found in their personal letters during Cycle I.
3	Inquiry	Students investigated sentences in sample personal letters to identify simple sentences, compound sentences, and the conjunctions used.	Students investigated their own personal letters, identified sentence construction errors, and independently revised simple and compound sentences.
4	Learning Community	Students worked collaboratively in small groups to identify and classify simple and compound sentences in sample personal letters.	Students worked collaboratively to review each other's personal letters, identify sentence construction errors, and provide peer feedback for revision.
5	Modeling	The teacher demonstrated how to construct appropriate simple and compound sentences in a personal letter.	The teacher modeled the revision process by demonstrating how sentence construction errors identified in Cycle I could be improved in personal letters.
6	Reflection	Students wrote reflective notes describing what they had learned and the difficulties they experienced in using simple and compound sentences.	Students reflected on their learning progress from Cycle I, evaluated the improvements achieved, and identified

No.	CTL Syntax	Cycle I Activities	Cycle II Activities
			the remaining difficulties in constructing simple and compound sentences.
7	Authentic Assessment	Students wrote a personal letter on a meaningful topic, which was assessed using a rubric focusing on simple and compound sentence construction.	Students wrote another personal letter by applying the improvements from Cycle I, and their work was assessed using the same rubric to evaluate their progress.

Modified from [Sulistyowati \(2019\)](#)

The action variable in this study was the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, whereas the outcome variable was students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters. Data were collected using written tests, observation sheets, and documentation. The written tests were used to measure students' writing ability, observation sheets were used to monitor the implementation of the learning process and students' participation during the intervention, while the documentation consisted of students' writing products, photographs of classroom activities, and lesson plans.

Students' writing ability was assessed using a scoring rubric consisting of four aspects: the completeness of personal letter structure, the accuracy of writing simple sentences, the accuracy of writing compound sentences, and sentence effectiveness and spelling accuracy. Each aspect was assigned an equal weight, resulting in a maximum possible score of 100.

Table 2. Scoring Rubric for Writing Simple and Compound Sentences in Personal Letters

No.	Assessment Aspect	Descriptor	Score	Weight
1	Completeness of Personal Letter Structure	The letter includes all components of a personal letter and is organized appropriately (place/date, recipient's name, address, salutation, body, closing, sender's name, and signature).	1–25	25%
2	Accuracy of Simple Sentences	Simple sentences contain a clear subject–predicate (S–P) structure, do not contain multiple clauses, and are used appropriately according to the context of the letter.	1–25	25%
3	Accuracy of Compound Sentences	Compound sentences demonstrate logical relationships between clauses, use conjunctions appropriately, and have complete sentence structures.	1–25	25%
4	Sentence Effectiveness and Spelling Accuracy	Sentences are easy to understand, unambiguous, and demonstrate appropriate use of spelling and punctuation.	1–25	25%
Maximum Total Score			100	100%

Modified from [Hestuti et al. \(2024\)](#)

Data analysis

The research data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were obtained from the results of the students' writing ability tests and analyzed by calculating the class mean score and the percentage of learning mastery based on the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC) of 75. Qualitative data were obtained through observations and documentation and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The success of the study was determined by the improvement in the students' mean writing ability score in each cycle and the achievement of classical learning mastery, with at least 75% of the students obtaining a score of ≥ 75 . The formulas used to calculate the mean score and the percentage of learning mastery are presented below.

$$\text{Mean Score} = \frac{\text{Total Score of All Students}}{\text{Number of Students}}$$

$$\text{Learning Mastery Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of Students Who Achieved Mastery}}{\text{Total Number of Students}} \times 100\%$$

Results and Discussion

Results

The pre-cycle results obtained through the diagnostic test conducted on April 27, 2026, indicated that students' initial ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters was still very limited. Of the 30 students, only 9 students (30%) achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (MMC) of 75. The lowest score was 35, while the highest score was 78, with a class mean score of 58.3. The most dominant errors identified were the inappropriate use of conjunctions (38.9% of the total errors), followed by incomplete sentence structures (31.7%) and the inappropriate use of sentences in relation to the content and communicative purpose of personal letters (29.4%). Many students still wrote sentences that lacked coherence, combined multiple ideas without clear connections, or used sentences that were inappropriate for the intended context of personal communication.

The Cycle I learning activities were conducted on April 28, 2026, through the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. During this cycle, a considerable improvement was observed. The class mean score increased from 58.3 to 70.5, and the number of students who achieved mastery increased from 9 students (30%) to 17 students (56.7%). Although the results had not yet reached the success criterion of 75%, they indicated that the intervention had begun to produce a positive effect on students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters.

Based on the observation results in Cycle I, a significant improvement was observed in students' participation. During the inquiry and learning community activities, students actively identified simple and compound sentences in sample personal letters, discussed their findings collaboratively, and exchanged ideas to improve their understanding of sentence construction. Nevertheless, some students still experienced difficulties in constructing logical compound sentences and using conjunctions appropriately. In addition, several students continued to write ineffective sentences that were not fully consistent with the intended content of their personal letters. These reflection findings served as the basis for refining the implementation of each CTL component in Cycle II while maintaining the same instructional syntax.

The Cycle II learning activities, conducted on May 4, 2026, with various improvements based on the reflection findings from Cycle I, demonstrated results that exceeded the predetermined success criteria. The class mean score reached 82.4, and the percentage of students who achieved mastery increased to 86.7% (26 out of 30 students), exceeding the minimum target of 75%. These findings indicate that the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model was effective in improving students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters.

The observations in Cycle II revealed substantial changes in students' learning behavior. Students' active participation increased throughout the CTL learning activities, particularly during the learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment stages. Students appeared more confident in writing personal letters by appropriately combining simple and compound sentences. Many students independently reviewed and revised their use of conjunctions, sentence completeness, and sentence effectiveness before submitting their written work. The reinforcement provided during the reflection stage enabled students to identify and correct sentence construction errors more independently, resulting in better-quality personal letters.

Table 3. Summary of Students' Learning Outcomes in Each Cycle

Aspect	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement
Class Mean Score	58.3	70.5	82.4	+24.1 points
Number of Students Achieving Mastery	9 students	17 students	26 students	+17 students
Learning Mastery Percentage	30%	56.7%	86.7%	+56.7%
Highest Score	78	88	96	+18 points
Lowest Score	35	55	68	+33 points

Table 4. Improvement Across Assessment Rubric Aspect

Assessment Rubric Aspect	Pre-cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement
Completeness of Personal Letter Structure	16.8	19.5	22.4	+5.6
Accuracy of Simple Sentences	13.2	17.8	21.5	+8.3
Accuracy of Compound Sentences	11.4	15.6	20.8	+9.4
Sentence Effectiveness and Spelling Accuracy	16.9	17.6	17.7	+0.8
Overall Mean Score	58.3	70.5	82.4	+24.1

As shown in Table 4, the most substantial improvement occurred in the aspects of the accuracy of compound sentences (+9.4 points) and the accuracy of simple sentences (+8.3 points). These findings indicate that the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model successfully helped students understand the appropriate use of simple and compound sentences in personal letter writing. In addition, the aspect of the completeness of the personal letter structure also showed a considerable improvement (+5.6 points), indicating that students developed a better understanding of the essential components of a personal letter. Meanwhile, the aspect of sentence effectiveness and spelling accuracy showed the smallest improvement (+0.8 points), suggesting that students still require further practice in constructing effective sentences and consistently applying spelling and punctuation conventions.

To complement the quantitative findings presented in Tables 3 and 4, an example of one student's writing from Cycle I and Cycle II is provided to illustrate the qualitative improvement in the use of simple and compound sentences after the implementation of the CTL model. This can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of Students' Writing Improvement Across Learning Cycles

Sentence Type	Cycle I	Cycle II	Analysis of Improvement (Impact of CTL)
Simple Sentence	<i>Aku ingin mengajakmu datang ke rumahku.</i>	<i>Aku ingin mengajakmu datang ke rumahku saat liburan nanti.</i>	The student developed a more complete simple sentence by adding a time adverbial “ <i>saat liburan nanti</i> ”, making the information clearer and more contextually relevant to the personal letter.
Compound Sentence (Coordinating)	<i>Kita bisa bermain bersama dan kita senang.</i>	<i>Kita bisa bermain di taman dekat rumahku, dan kita juga dapat belajar bersama.</i>	The student demonstrated improved ability to connect two related ideas using the coordinating conjunction “ dan ”, resulting in a more coherent compound sentence.
Compound Sentence (Subordinating – Cause)	<i>Aku sedih karena kita jarang bertemu.</i>	<i>Aku sangat merindukanmu karena sudah lama kita tidak bertemu.</i>	The student used the subordinating conjunction “ karena ” more appropriately to express a clear cause-and-effect relationship, making the sentence more meaningful.
Compound Sentence (Subordinating – Purpose)	<i>Datanglah ke rumahku supaya kita bertemu.</i>	<i>Aku berharap kamu bisa datang agar kita dapat menghabiskan waktu bersama dan saling berbagi cerita.</i>	The student demonstrated improvement in expressing purpose by using the conjunction “ agar ” to communicate ideas more effectively and naturally.

Discussion

Based on the research findings presented above, the observed improvement cannot be separated from the fundamental characteristic of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model, which connects learning materials with students' real-life experiences (Sriansyah et al., 2025). In the pre-cycle, students learned simple and compound sentences in an abstract manner without meaningful context, resulting in understanding that tended to rely on memorization. When CTL was implemented, students were encouraged to observe and analyze sentences found in personal letters that were closely related to their daily lives, such as letters addressed to friends, close friends, or family members. This approach helped students understand the function of sentence use in authentic communicative situations. Consequently, students not only learned sentence concepts theoretically but also constructed their understanding through contextual experiences.

In addition, the most notable improvement occurred in the aspect of the accuracy of compound sentences. These findings can be explained by the CTL learning process, which

provides students with learning experiences in a gradual manner. Students first observed examples of compound sentence use in personal letters, then discussed the functions of conjunctions and the relationships between clauses in groups, and finally applied their understanding when writing their own personal letters. This step-by-step process helped students understand the use of compound sentences more concretely, thereby significantly reducing errors in the use of conjunctions and interclausal relationships.

The consistent implementation of the seven CTL components across both research cycles contributed substantially to the improvement of students' writing ability. The constructivism stage helped students connect their prior knowledge with the learning material, while the questioning and inquiry stages encouraged them to think critically in identifying and analyzing simple and compound sentences in personal letters. The learning community stage provided students with opportunities to exchange ideas and provide peer feedback on their classmates' writing. Meanwhile, the modeling stage helped students understand appropriate examples of sentence use and sentence revision in personal letters, whereas the reflection and authentic assessment stages encouraged students to evaluate and apply the understanding they had gained through meaningful writing activities.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of [Ansoriyah et al. \(2024\)](#), who reported that the implementation of the CTL approach improved the personal letter writing skills of seventh-grade junior high school students. The study found that learning activities that connected the instructional material with students' real-life experiences increased both students' engagement in learning and the quality of their writing. Furthermore, the findings of this study are also supported by [Arinda et al. \(2024\)](#), who reported that the implementation of the CTL model in personal letter writing instruction had a positive impact on students' learning activities and learning outcomes because it enabled them to participate directly in a contextual learning process. The consistency of these findings indicates that CTL is effective for writing instruction, particularly in teaching personal letter writing, which requires students to develop ideas and use language appropriately according to the communicative context. These findings further strengthen the view that CTL can serve as an effective instructional model for improving students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters.

Beyond confirming the findings of previous studies, the present study offers a specific contribution to writing instruction through the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model. Unlike previous studies, which generally focused on improving students' personal letter writing skills, this study specifically emphasized the development of students' ability to write simple and compound sentences as essential elements of effective personal letter writing. In addition, students' writing progress was assessed using clear writing aspects, including the accuracy of simple sentences, the accuracy of compound sentences, the appropriateness of sentence use in the context of personal letters, and sentence effectiveness. These contributions provide practical evidence that the CTL model supports students in developing simple and compound sentence writing skills within the context of personal letter writing.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model was effective in improving students' ability to write simple and compound sentences in personal letters among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Madiun. This improvement was reflected in the increase in the class mean score from 58.3 in the pre-cycle to 70.5 in Cycle I and 82.4 in Cycle II. The percentage of learning mastery also increased from 30% in the pre-cycle to 56.7% in Cycle I and reached 86.7% in Cycle II, thereby exceeding the predetermined success criterion.

Students' improvement was evident across all assessment aspects, namely the completeness of the personal letter structure, the accuracy of simple sentences, the accuracy of compound sentences, and sentence effectiveness and spelling accuracy. The most notable improvement occurred in the aspects of the accuracy of compound sentences and the accuracy of simple sentences, which were the primary focus of this study. The findings indicate that learning through the CTL model helped students develop a more meaningful understanding of how to construct simple and compound sentences in personal letters because the learning materials were connected to experiences and communicative situations that were closely related to their daily lives. Therefore, the CTL model can serve as an effective alternative instructional model for improving writing ability, particularly in the use of simple and compound sentences in personal letters. However, this study was limited to one class of seventh-grade students in a single junior high school and focused only on personal letter writing through the Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the implementation of the CTL model in different writing genres, educational levels, or broader educational settings involving larger and more diverse participants.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Setiawan contributed to the conception and conceptualization of the research, the development of the research design, the implementation of the classroom action research, data collection and analysis, the preparation of the research findings, as well as the writing and revision of the manuscript. Soleh contributed to the development of the research methodology, supervision of the data analysis and discussion of the research findings, as well as the review and editing of the manuscript. Trisna contributed to assisting the implementation of the research at the school, observing the learning process, and validating the implementation of the intervention.

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