

Utilizing the Surrounding Environment as a Learning Resource Using a Contextual Approach to Improve the Descriptive Text Writing Skills of Grade IV Elementary School Students

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the use of the surrounding environment as a learning resource through a contextual approach in improving the descriptive text writing skills of fourth-grade elementary school students. The background of this study is that students still find difficulties in writing descriptive texts, such as a lack of ideas, limited word choice, sentences that are not coherent, and a lack of ability to describe objects in detail. Learning that is only centered on books makes students lack real-world experience as writing material. Therefore, the school environment is used as a learning resource so that students can observe objects directly. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, documentation, and assessment of student writing results. The learning steps are carried out through apperception activities, introduction to descriptive texts, observation of objects in the school environment, recording observation results, preparing writing outlines, writing descriptive texts, and improving writing based on feedback. The learning results show that the contextual approach based on the environment helps students more easily find ideas, enrich vocabulary, structure sentences, and describe objects more clearly. In addition, students become more active, enthusiastic, and care about the school environment. Thus, utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource can be an effective, simple, and meaningful learning alternative to improve the descriptive text writing skills of fourth-grade elementary school students. The suggestion that can be given is that teachers should more often utilize the surrounding environment as a learning resource, especially in learning Indonesian which requires real experience.

Keywords

Writing Skills, Surrounding Environment, Contextual Approach, Learning Resources, Descriptive Text



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INTRODUCTION

Learning Indonesian in elementary schools has an important role in developing students' abilities to communicate, think, and convey ideas in writing. Writing is not simply the act of copying words or constructing sentences, but rather the act of conveying ideas, experiences, and information to readers. This aligns with Susanto's statement, which states, "Writing is not merely the act of writing in a book; it must have meaning and convey information" (Susanto, 2016, p. 248). This statement demonstrates that writing needs to be understood as a meaningful activity, not simply a written assignment for students to complete. One of the writing skills learned by fourth-grade elementary school students is descriptive text. Descriptive text requires students to clearly describe an object, place, or atmosphere so that the reader can see, hear, or feel what is being described. In learning descriptive text, students are expected not only to name objects or places, but also to be able to explain the characteristics of objects in detail. Nukman and Setyowati (2022, p. 260) explain that descriptive text is a text that describes events or feelings so that the reader seems to see, hear, smell, and feel what is described. Based on this understanding, the skill of writing descriptive texts really requires students' abilities in observing, choosing words, constructing sentences, and describing objects in a coherent manner.

However, in practical learning in elementary schools, many students still experience difficulties writing descriptive texts. These difficulties are evident in a lack of ideas, limited vocabulary, disjointed sentences, and a lack of ability to describe objects in detail. This situation may occur because writing instruction is often still conducted theoretically. Students are asked to write based on examples in books, but have not been given sufficient opportunity to observe real objects in their surroundings. As a result, students' writing becomes less lively because it is not based on direct experience. In learning Indonesian, particularly in writing descriptive texts, direct experience is essential. Elementary school students are at a developmental stage that still requires concrete examples. Therefore, teachers need to present learning that is relevant to their daily lives. One way to do this is by utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource. The school environment, such as the yard, garden, classrooms, library, cafeteria, prayer room, and school garden, can serve as objects for students to observe before writing descriptive text.

The use of the environment as a learning resource aligns with Sabitin's opinion, which states, "The environment is a forum where students can express all their thoughts and activities in the learning process" (Sabitin, 2022, p. 2). According to

Sabitin (2022, p. 56), the school environment theoretically provides significant benefits in learning as a learning resource. This opinion reinforces the idea that the environment is not just a place for students to play or engage in activities, but can also be a tangible learning resource. By observing the environment, students obtain writing material based on what they see, hear, and feel directly. Furthermore, the surrounding environment also has a significant influence on a child's learning process. Choiri stated that, "The community environment has a significant influence on a child's learning process" (Choiri, 2017). This opinion indirectly indicates that a child's learning process occurs not only in the classroom but is also influenced by the environment outside the classroom. An environment close to students' lives can help them understand the material more easily because students learn from real-life experiences.

The right approach to connecting learning materials with students' real environments is a contextual approach or Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). "The Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) model is a learning strategy that emphasizes the process of full student involvement in discovering the material they are learning and connecting it to real-life situations" (Nababan & Sipayung, 2023). With this approach, students not only receive explanations from the teacher but also experience the process of discovering knowledge themselves. This opinion is also supported by Pudentiana et al. who stated that, "Contextual learning is a learning concept that helps educators link the curriculum material being taught with real-world situations and students make connections between the knowledge they have and its application in their daily lives" (Pudentiana et al., 2024, p. 129). This means that the contextual approach is very suitable for use in learning to write descriptive texts because students are invited to connect the writing material with real objects in the school environment.

Indirectly, Nababan and Sipayung explained that contextual learning helps students connect subject matter to real life, making learning more meaningful. Charles, Mastiah, and Peterianus also stated that the CTL approach helps students understand subject matter by connecting it to everyday life, making the knowledge gained more meaningful. This shows that CTL can be an appropriate approach to help students write descriptive texts because students not only imagine objects but also see and experience the objects they will write about directly. For fourth-grade elementary school students, environments such as the schoolyard, park, classroom, library, cafeteria, prayer room, or school garden can serve as tangible objects for observation. Direct observation helps students generate ideas, choose words, and

construct descriptive sentences more concretely."Using natural environment media as a medium can make the teaching and learning process more meaningful because students can be directly exposed to real objects in nature." (Subarkah, Sulaeman, and Nugraha, 2024).

Based on the description, the problem in this scientific work is aCan the use of the school environment as a learning resource using a contextual approach improve the descriptive text writing skills of fourth-grade elementary school students? And how can the implementation of the use of the school environment as a learning resource using a contextual approach improve the descriptive text writing skills of fourth-grade elementary school students?The purpose of this writing is to determine the improvement of descriptive text writing skills of fourth grade elementary school students through the use of the school environment as a learning resource with a contextual approach. In addition, this scientific paper also aims to describe the implementation of learning to write descriptive texts by utilizing the school environment as a learning resource, starting from object observation activities, recording observation results, compiling writing outlines, writing descriptive texts, to improving students' writing results..

METHODS

This research paper uses a qualitative descriptive approach supported by classroom learning data. This approach was used because the research aims to describe the process of utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource in teaching descriptive text writing. The focus of the research is not only on the final results of students' writing, but also on the process of students observing objects, discussing, developing an outline, writing the text, and revising their writing. The subjects in this study were fourth-grade elementary school students. The learning objects used were the school's surroundings, such as the schoolyard, park, classrooms, library, cafeteria, or other places easily observed by students. These environments were chosen because they are close to the students' daily lives and can help them find writing materials directly.

Data collection techniques included observation, documentation, and assessment of student writing. Observation was used to assess student engagement during learning, including observing objects, asking questions, discussing, and communicating observations. Documentation was used to collect photos of activities, teacher notes, and student writing. Writing assessment was used to determine the development of students' skills in writing descriptive texts. The learning steps are carried out through a contextual approach. First, the teacher conducts apperception

by linking the descriptive text material with students' experiences. Second, the teacher explains the characteristics of descriptive texts in simple terms. Third, students are invited to observe real objects in the school environment. Fourth, students record the results of their observations, such as the shape, color, size, location, atmosphere, and benefits of the object. Fifth, students compile a writing outline based on the results of their observations. Sixth, students develop the outline into a descriptive text. Seventh, students read their writing and receive feedback from the teacher and peers. Eighth, students revise their writing based on the feedback received.

Data were analyzed descriptively. Observation results were analyzed to determine student engagement in the learning process. Student writing was analyzed based on several aspects, including the appropriateness of the content to the observed object, completeness of the description, word choice, sentence structure, paragraph cohesiveness, and use of spelling and punctuation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Utilizing the school environment as a learning resource in descriptive writing provides a more authentic learning experience for students. In previous lessons, students tended to struggle when asked to write descriptive texts based solely on teacher explanations or textbook examples. Some students were unable to develop their ideas broadly because they hadn't directly seen the objects they were writing about. As a result, their writing was short, lacked detail, and didn't clearly describe the objects. These conditions indicate that learning to write descriptive texts needs to begin with direct observation. Students need the opportunity to see, touch, hear, and feel the atmosphere of the object being described. In this regard, the school environment is a very helpful learning resource. According to Sabitin (2022, p. 56), the school environment theoretically provides significant benefits in learning as a learning resource. This opinion suggests that teachers can use the school environment as a tangible medium to help students understand the subject matter.

During the lesson, the teacher first provides an apperception by inviting students to talk about objects or places they frequently see at school. The teacher can ask questions, for example, "What do you see in the school garden?", "How is our classroom?", or "What is in the schoolyard?" Simple questions like these help students recall their experiences and connect them to the descriptive text material. This initial activity aligns with the principles of contextual learning because the material is connected to students' real lives.

After that, the teacher explained the definition and characteristics of descriptive text in simple language. The teacher explained that descriptive text is a text that describes an object so that the reader can imagine the object. This explanation was reinforced by the opinion of Nukman and Setyowati, who stated that descriptive text describes events or feelings so that the reader can see, hear, smell, and feel what is described. With this explanation, students began to understand that writing descriptive text requires careful observation. The next step is to invite students to observe objects in the school environment. Objects observed can be the school garden, school yard, classrooms, library, canteen, prayer room, or school garden. At this stage, students are asked to pay attention to the shape, color, size, location, number, atmosphere, smell, sound, and benefits of the objects. For example, when observing the school garden, students can note that the garden is in front of the classroom, there are red and yellow flowers, the leaves look green, the soil looks wet after being watered, and the atmosphere feels cool. These simple notes become the starting point for writing descriptive text.

This direct observation activity aligns with the opinion of Subarkah, Sulaeman, and Nugraha, who stated, "Using the natural environment as a medium can make the teaching and learning process more meaningful because students can be directly exposed to real objects in a natural way" (Subarkah, Sulaeman, & Nugraha, 2024). This quote is very appropriate to be placed in this discussion because it explains why the surrounding environment can improve the quality of writing learning. Students no longer write based on imagination, but based on the results of observations of real objects. After conducting observations, students write down their findings in the form of a list of words or simple sentences. Teachers can guide students with an observation table containing columns for object name, color, shape, location, condition, and benefits. This table helps students who are still struggling to express their ideas in writing. In this way, students learn that writing can begin with recording small details they observe directly.

The next step is to develop a descriptive text framework. The teacher guides students in determining the beginning, body, and conclusion. In the beginning, students write the name of the object and its location. In the body, students explain the characteristics of the object in detail. In the conclusion, students write their impressions or benefits of the object. This guidance is important because fourth-grade students still need direction to ensure their writing is coherent. Wariani et al. state that, "Teachers not only convey material, but also guide students to actively discover knowledge" (Wariani et al., 2023). This quote aligns with the teacher's role in

contextual learning, namely as a facilitator who accompanies students throughout the learning process. In the writing process, students appear to find it easier to develop sentences because they have concrete material from their observations. For example, before observing, students may simply write, "The school garden is beautiful." After observing directly, students can write in more detail, such as, "My school garden is in front of the fourth grade. In the garden there are red, yellow, and purple flowers. The leaves are green and look fresh. Every morning the garden is watered by the on-duty staff so it looks clean and cool." This change demonstrates that the surrounding environment can help students enrich their ideas and vocabulary.

Indirectly, Sari and Salam (2020) explained that the use of environmental media is expected to make it easier for students to write descriptive texts. This opinion is evident in the learning process, as students who previously had difficulty starting to write find it easier after seeing the object directly. The environment provides writing materials that can be captured by students' senses, such as color, shape, sound, smell, and atmosphere. All of these observations can be transformed into descriptive sentences. Besides helping students write, utilizing the environment also increases student activity. Students don't just sit and listen to the teacher's explanation, but also participate in activities, observing, asking questions, taking notes, and discussing. Charles, Mastiah, and Peterianus stated that, "A contextual learning approach makes experiences more relevant and meaningful for students in building knowledge" (Charles, Mastiah, & Peterianus, 2018). This quote shows that learning becomes more meaningful when students are directly involved in learning activities. In the context of writing descriptive text, the experience of observing the environment helps students better understand what they will write.

Environmentally-based learning also helps develop students' thinking and language skills. Nukman and Setyowati (2022, p. 13) explain that by the end of phase B, students are expected to have the language skills to communicate and reason about interesting things in their environment through various language and literary activities. This opinion aligns with learning to write descriptive texts in fourth grade, as students learn to use language to convey their observations of their surroundings. Thus, writing activities are inseparable from reasoning and communication skills. From an attitudinal perspective, learning through the school environment can also foster a sense of environmental stewardship. When students observe gardens, yards, or classrooms, they not only learn to write but also realize the importance of maintaining the cleanliness and beauty of the school. For example, students can write

about a clean garden, a tidy yard, or a comfortable classroom. Indirectly, this activity instills the values of responsibility, discipline, and a love of the environment. Pudentiana et al. (2024, p. 68) explain that outdoor learning is a variation of learning strategies that directly relate to life and the natural environment while also using it as a learning resource. Thus, learning activities in the school environment not only develop cognitive aspects but also students' attitudes and skills.

The main strength of this learning method is the ease with which teachers can provide learning resources. The school environment is available every day and doesn't require significant costs. Teachers can utilize objects close to students, such as trees, flowers, blackboards, desks, classrooms, the cafeteria, and the schoolyard. For schools in rural or suburban areas, this method is particularly suitable because teachers don't have to rely on expensive media. Even a simple environment can still be a rich learning resource if teachers are able to manage it well. Furthermore, this learning approach aligns with the characteristics of elementary school students, who understand material more easily through concrete objects. Fourth-grade students still need real-world experiences to ensure the concepts they learn aren't simply memorized. By seeing objects directly, students more easily understand the characteristics of descriptive text. They can distinguish between general sentences and sentences that describe objects in detail.

However, this learning approach also has several drawbacks. First, observing the environment takes longer than regular classroom learning. Teachers must manage their time to ensure that the observation, recording, writing, and discussion activities run smoothly. Second, students need to be supervised to ensure they remain disciplined during learning outside of class. Third, not all students are immediately able to translate observations into coherent paragraphs. Therefore, teachers need to provide examples, guide sheets, and gradual guidance. These weaknesses can be overcome with good planning. Teachers can choose objects close to the classroom to minimize wasted time. Teachers can also divide students into small groups to make observation activities more focused. Furthermore, teachers need to provide simple worksheets so students know what to observe and record. Afterward, students are guided to construct sentences based on their observations. With these steps, learning remains orderly, simple, and easy to implement.

Based on the above description, utilizing the school environment as a learning resource through a contextual approach can improve the descriptive text writing skills of fourth-grade elementary school students. This improvement is evident in students' abilities to find ideas, enrich vocabulary, construct sentences, and describe

objects in greater detail. Learning also becomes more active, enjoyable, and meaningful because students learn from an environment close to their lives. Thus, an environment-based contextual approach is suitable for application in Indonesian language learning, particularly in writing descriptive texts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource through a contextual approach can make learning to write descriptive texts more concrete, active, and meaningful. The school environment provides students with hands-on experiences, making it easier for them to find ideas, choose vocabulary, structure sentences, and develop descriptive paragraphs. This approach also helps students understand that writing isn't just about copying or making up meaningless sentences, but rather about clearly communicating observations to readers. In addition to improving writing skills, environment-based learning can also foster caring, responsibility, and cooperation among students.

In addition to improving writing skills, this learning also encourages students' activeness, curiosity, cooperation, and concern for the school environment. Teachers no longer act merely as presenters of material, but also as guides who direct students to observe, take notes, develop writing outlines, write, and revise their writing. Thus, utilizing the surrounding environment as a learning resource through a contextual approach is worthy of being used as an alternative for Indonesian language learning, particularly for writing descriptive texts in fourth grade elementary school. Based on these conclusions, the author's suggestion is that teachers utilize the school environment more often as a learning resource in teaching descriptive text writing, because an environment close to students can help them get real ideas and not just rely on examples in books. Teachers can choose simple objects that are easy to reach, such as the school garden, classroom, yard, library, canteen, or school garden, then direct students to observe the characteristics of these objects before writing.

Teachers should also prepare clear learning steps to ensure that out-of-class activities remain orderly and achieve their objectives. Before students conduct observations, teachers should provide examples of descriptive text, explain the text's components simply, and provide observation sheets containing guidelines on things to note, such as the object's name, color, shape, size, location, atmosphere, and purpose. With observation sheets, students will more easily transform their observations into coherent sentences and paragraphs. Schools are advised to support environment-based learning by maintaining the cleanliness, tidiness, and comfort of

the school grounds, as a positive school environment can be a rich source of learning for students. School support doesn't have to come in the form of expensive facilities, but can include landscaping, classroom cleanliness, the availability of reading nooks, and collaboration between teachers and students in maintaining the school environment. For students, observing their environment needs to be a constant habit to increase their awareness of the objects, places, and events around them. Students should be trained to record the small details they see, hear, and feel, as this habit can enrich their vocabulary and help them write descriptive texts more clearly..

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