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Designing dialogic fiction writing through local folklore in Indonesian junior high schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how a local folklore module supports the design of dialogic fiction-writing tasks in multilingual classrooms with uneven technological access. A design-based project involved 168 Grade VIII students and six Indonesian-language teachers in six public junior high schools in Brebes Regency, Indonesia. Development comprised prototyping, classroom implementation, and reflection with redesign. The module combined narrative comprehension, conflict mapping, characterization, dialogue construction, drafting, and collaborative revision through print-compatible and locally available digital media. Evidence comprised student texts, aggregate rubric scores, classroom observations, teacher interviews and group reflection, field notes, and module documentation. The reported mean total writing score rose from 8.9/20 to 16.6/20, while the dialogue mean rose from 1.7/5 to 4.0/5. Close reading distinguished dialogue affirming shared belonging from dialogue challenging a community figure through Javanese expression. Teacher feedback informed clearer dialogue guidance, modular lesson units, and explanations of unfamiliar local idioms. Uneven group participation and differences in cultural familiarity qualified the assumption that local material is equally accessible to all students. Without a comparison group and documented scoring reliability, score changes remain descriptive. The study proposes inclusive localization as a provisional design principle connecting cultural resources, explicit writing instruction, media flexibility, and linguistic support for classroom repertoires.

KEYWORDS: critical dialogue, design-based research, fiction writing, heteroglossia, local folklore, teacher co-design

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1. Introduction

Indonesia's literacy challenge provides a context for examining writing pedagogy. In PISA 2022, Indonesian 15-year-olds obtained an average reading score of 359, compared with the OECD average of 476 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). These reading results do not directly measure fiction-writing competence, but they underscore the importance of literacy practices that develop interpretation and meaning-making. Fiction writing requires students to coordinate narrative structure, characterization, voice, and stylistic choices (Carey, Davidow, & Williams, 2022). Critical literacy adds attention to whose perspectives appear in a text and how characters negotiate social positions (Kim & Yang, 2021). The present study examines this intersection through students' construction of dialogue in fiction.

Cultural relevance and technological access jointly shape the feasibility of such pedagogy. Digital interventions can exclude learners when they assume stable connectivity or individual device ownership; evidence from rural secondary schools documents how these conditions restrict participation (Olanrewaju, Adebayo, Omotosho, & Olajide, 2021). Conversely, culturally sustaining pedagogy treats learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires as resources that education should sustain, while counterstorytelling highlights the importance of whose knowledge is represented (Dutta, Azad, & Hussain, 2022; Paris, 2012). The design challenge is to connect these resources to explicit writing tasks that remain usable through print, oral storytelling, shared devices, or digital media according to classroom conditions.

This study addressed that challenge through a design-based project in six public junior high schools in Brebes Regency, Indonesia. Design-based research (DBR) connects theoretically informed design, classroom implementation, and revision in authentic settings (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Wang & Hannafin, 2005). Teachers contributed practical knowledge about instructional feasibility and cultural accessibility, consistent with a co-design orientation (Mejeh & Sarbach, 2025; Ogata et al., 2024). The module used Brebes folklore, including Telaga Ranjeng, Ki Jaka Poleng, and Tuk Suci and Prince Panjunan, to support plot development, characterization, conflict, and dialogue. Critical dialogue is defined here as written interaction in which characters express distinct positions, respond to others, or negotiate social and moral tensions. It is not a standardized measure of general critical-thinking ability.

The problem addressed is how cultural material becomes an explicit resource for composing dialogue under linguistic and infrastructural constraints. Adding a familiar story does not specify what students should do with its characters, relationships, or conflicts, and familiarity cannot be assumed for every learner. Bakhtinian heteroglossia provides a lens for interpreting socially differentiated voices, while epistemic justice directs attention to recognition of students' linguistic resources (Bakhtin, 1981; Fricker, 2007; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). The contribution is a context-sensitive account linking writing tasks, classroom constraints, and teacher-informed refinement. Three questions guide the analysis: What infrastructural and cultural conditions informed the module design? What descriptive writing patterns accompanied implementation? How did teacher reflection and students' experiences inform revisions to dialogue scaffolding, media delivery, and linguistic accessibility?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Teaching Fiction Texts in Secondary Education

Fiction writing combines narrative organization with choices about character motivation, perspective, conflict, and language. Craft-based assessment makes these dimensions explicit rather than reducing writing quality to surface correctness (Carey et al., 2022). In Indonesia, Aryana, Zulaeha, Pristiwati, and Haryadi (2024) identified teachers' demand for writing assessment that includes clear criteria, validity, reliability, objectivity, collaboration, and higher-order thinking. Their needs-analysis study supports the rationale for transparent assessment but does not validate the rubric used in the present study. Evidence on adolescent writing instruction also supports explicit strategies, models, and peer assistance (Graham & Perin, 2007). More recently, Healey (2025) linked imaginative strategies to linguistic choices in a small Year 5 narrative-writing study; its relevance here is the connection between narrative thinking and textual craft, rather than an assumption of equivalent effects in Indonesian Grade VIII classrooms. In this study, dialogue is considered critical when character interaction does more than transmit events and instead articulates positions, responds to competing perspectives, or negotiates values. Critical-literacy work provides a complementary rationale for examining these social dimensions of literary activity (Kim & Yang, 2021).

2.2 Digital Engagement and Literacy

Multimodal literacy involves constructing meaning through combinations of verbal, visual, and other representational resources (Fedorenko, 2019). Khomsiyatun, Andayani, Suwandi, and Anindyarini (2026) developed and validated a digital reading assessment embedded in children's literature textbooks for Indonesian elementary learners. Their combination of expert review, item analysis, and reliability testing highlights the need to examine assessment quality alongside digital presentation. The reading construct and learner age differ from the present fiction-writing context. In schools with limited infrastructure, however, media choice must remain subordinate to access and the writing objective. Research on digital inequality and technology in education cautions against assuming that device provision alone ensures meaningful participation (Olanrewaju et al., 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023; Younus et al., 2024). The module therefore adopts media flexibility: its core writing activities can be enacted through print, teacher-mediated projection, shared screens, or locally available low-tech formats. Combining verbal and visual materials is compatible with dual-coding theory, but neither multimodality nor students' stated preferences establish instructional effectiveness (Paivio, 1991; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2008). Research on modular literature learning and interactive storytelling further supports examining how tasks, guidance, and context work together rather than treating a medium as an intervention in itself (Ambayon, 2020; Loustau & Chu, 2022).

2.3 Decolonizing Literacy through Design-Based Localization

A decolonial approach to literacy asks whose knowledge, language, and experience are recognized in educational meaning-making. Mignolo (2009) examines challenges to dominant knowledge hierarchies, while Fricker (2007) explains how people can be disadvantaged as contributors to knowledge. Counterstorytelling and linguistic-citizenship scholarship extend these concerns to situated narrative and multilingual participation (Dutta et al., 2022; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). For fiction writing, local idioms and community narratives can widen the resources available for characterization and dialogue. An ecocritical study of Banyumas folklore, for example, identified respect for nature, harmonious human–nature relations, and prudent resource use as forms of ecological wisdom (Sultoni, Suwandi, Andayani, & Sumarwati, 2023). Such findings illustrate the ethical content that regional narratives can offer for interpreting characters' relationships and responsibilities. Their use is not, by itself, evidence of resistance or epistemic justice: interpretation depends on how these resources function in texts and whether all students can participate. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is therefore relevant as a commitment to plural repertoires rather than to a single authentic local voice (Paris, 2012).

DBR provides an orientation for examining these propositions through design, implementation, and revision (McKenney & Reeves, 2019; Wang & Hannafin, 2005). The initial proposition was that Brebes folklore would supply meaningful material for character, conflict, setting, and dialogue. Teacher co-design supported revision when this proposition encountered problems of pacing, media access, or cultural comprehension. Contemporary co-design research similarly emphasizes connecting stakeholders' needs to workable prototypes and context-sensitive practice (Mejeh & Sarbach, 2025; Ogata et al., 2024). Inclusive localization is treated here as a provisional design principle: cultural material should broaden the resources for composition, with explicit support for students whose linguistic experience differs. It is not presented as an independently validated theory.

3. Methods

The project combined module development with descriptive analysis of writing scores and qualitative interpretation of classroom and textual evidence. Following exploration of learning needs, development comprised prototype design, classroom implementation, and reflection with redesign. These are reported as three development phases. Phase-specific outcome data are not available, so they are not treated as three independently evaluated intervention cycles.

3.1 Research Approach

The exploration informed selection of folklore and the initial task sequence. During prototype design, narrative comprehension, conflict mapping, characterization, and dialogue writing were brought together in a module. Classroom implementation then provided student drafts, observations, and teacher feedback about pacing,

dialogue guidance, media access, and comprehension of local expressions. Reflection and redesign addressed these difficulties through guided dialogue prompts, modular lesson units, and linguistic support. The pre/post comparison summarizes the reported scores before and after implementation; it does not estimate the contribution of each phase or each module component. This developmental interpretation follows DBR's emphasis on relating design decisions to evidence from practice (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; Wang & Hannafin, 2005).

3.2 Context and Participants

The study was conducted in six public junior high schools in Brebes Regency, Central Java. The student cohort comprised 168 Grade VIII students. Six Indonesian-language teachers facilitated implementation and contributed to design reflection, bringing participation to 174 people overall. Schools were selected purposively on the basis of feasibility, willingness to participate, and institutional support. This approach enabled sustained collaboration but may have favored schools and teachers already willing to adopt new practices. The participating schools constitute an implementation sample rather than a statistically representative sample of Brebes schools.

The surrounding communities include Javanese and Sundanese linguistic resources, but students differed in family background and familiarity with local idioms. Cultural homogeneity was therefore not assumed. These differences were analytically important because materials that were familiar to some students required explanation for others.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection combined student writing, classroom evidence, and teacher reflection during module development. The sources served complementary purposes and were compared during interpretation rather than treated as interchangeable measures of learning.

Student fiction produced before and after implementation informed analysis of narrative craft. Observations and field notes documented engagement, group interaction, media constraints, and classroom enactment. Semi-structured teacher interviews, a post-implementation focus-group discussion (FGD), and reflective records informed judgments about feasibility and redesign. Module documentation described the resulting changes. Quantitative reporting uses aggregate rubric means; matched student scripts and individual raters' scores were not available for verification. Media access is discussed through qualitative accounts without estimating the prevalence of infrastructure conditions across Brebes.

3.4 Instruments

The instruments comprised a fiction-writing rubric, an observation checklist, and a teacher interview/FGD protocol. The rubric assesses narrative structure, dialogue between characters, character development, and integration of local cultural elements on a 1–5 scale for each dimension, giving a total range of 4–20. Narrative structure ranges from fragmented writing to coherent development; dialogue ranges from absent or irrelevant interaction to dialogue that develops character and value tension; characterization ranges from flat characters to complex and culturally situated motivations; and cultural integration ranges from no local reference to cultural material shaping conflict and narrative identity. These anchors clarify the intended construct but do not establish scoring consistency.

The dialogue dimension served as a quantitative indicator related to, but not equivalent to, critical dialogue. Qualitative coding examined whether character interactions articulated distinguishable social or cultural positions, responded substantively to another position, negotiated conflict or value disagreement, or used culturally situated language to frame a social relationship. Local expressions were not classified as critical dialogue solely because they were vernacular. The observation checklist addressed engagement, collaboration, media constraints, and adherence to the intended sequence; the interview/FGD protocol addressed writing development, feasibility, cultural accessibility, and redesign. These distinctions align with the need for explicit assessment criteria emphasized by Aryana et al. (2024), while retaining the craft focus of narrative assessment (Carey et al., 2022).

No inter-rater reliability coefficient is available. The reported means therefore summarize rubric judgments rather than precise measurements of a latent ability. A higher cultural-integration score is partly aligned with the module's explicit invitation to use local material; it cannot independently establish broader literary quality or cultural understanding.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative and qualitative evidence were analyzed within the DBR process and brought together at interpretation. Descriptive reporting presents the pre-intervention and post-intervention means, possible score ranges, and absolute mean differences for four rubric dimensions and their total. Component sums were checked against the reported totals. The 168 students constitute the study cohort; the number contributing matched, scorable scripts is not documented in the aggregate records. Accordingly, no paired-analysis sample size or participant-level distribution is inferred from the cohort total.

Qualitative analysis was organized around dialogic construction, local cultural and linguistic resources, teacher-informed redesign, and problems of inclusion. Student passages were read in relation to classroom observations and teacher accounts, with attention to both supporting and limiting cases. Thematic analysis requires an explicit connection between interpretation and the underlying material (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this report, the quoted passages support close readings of the interaction they contain; they do not establish the frequency of an interpretive pattern across the student corpus. Heteroglossia and epistemic participation are used as interpretive concepts, rather than outcomes inferred from the occurrence of local vocabulary alone.

Absolute change was calculated as the post-intervention mean minus the pre-intervention mean and retained to one decimal place, matching the reported precision. The range across the four dimension means describes the score profile; it is not a measure of between-student dispersion. Rubric differences are expressed in points rather than percentage growth because the ordered scale has no meaningful zero for writing ability. Participant-level standard deviations, confidence intervals, paired tests, and standardized effect sizes cannot be recovered from these means. Integration compared the score pattern with textual examples, classroom accounts, and teacher reflection to identify convergences, tensions, and implications for redesign (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

Comparison across sources, teacher reflection, and discussion of design revisions supported the interpretive account. Contextual description enables judgments about transferability rather than statistical representativeness. Contrary evidence included difficulties with unfamiliar idioms and uneven participation in group writing. Without a comparison group, practice, maturation, teacher attention, and other contextual changes remain alternative explanations for the higher post-intervention means. Because the assessment records are aggregated, the results cannot establish that every student improved or that improvement was distributed evenly across schools.

4. Results

The results address the research questions through the relationship between initial conditions, writing evidence, and redesign. Qualitative accounts describe media access and cultural resources. Aggregate rubric means and selected passages then illustrate writing patterns, while teacher reflection and participation difficulties inform the design implications. The different sources are interpreted according to what each can establish.

4.1 Current Use of Learning Media in Fiction Texts

The exploratory material describes a mixed media environment comprising Indonesian textbooks, short-story anthologies, children's novels, teacher-group (MGMP) modules, online comics, digital-story platforms, video, PDFs, role play, and mind mapping. Printed resources provided an accessible route when projection, connectivity, or personal devices were unavailable. This account supports flexibility in delivery, but does not establish how many schools had a particular device or service.

Student comments indicated interest in visual presentation. Such interest is a reason to consider engaging examples, but it does not establish that a medium improves writing or represents a stable learning style (Pashler et al., 2008). A student comment recorded in the exploratory material illustrates this distinction:

> "I enjoy learning by watching because there are pictures. There is sound too, so it is more exciting. I prefer things with pictures to full text." (English translation of the Indonesian excerpt.)

The comment expresses a presentation preference rather than a demonstrated learning advantage. Its practical significance depended on the access and workload constraints reported by teachers.

Teachers described practical restrictions on the use of media, including shared devices and limited preparation time. Student accounts also identified barriers associated with phone capacity and paid access to digital stories. Table 1 groups these constraints by the design response they suggest. It is a qualitative synthesis and does not rank constraints or assign school-level prevalence.

Table 1. Media-access constraints and implications for module design

Reported constraint	Evidence in the exploratory account	Design implication
Shared devices	Projectors and laptops were also used by other teachers or for meetings.	Provide print versions of the core tasks.
Preparation time	Teachers described competing administrative and school duties.	Prepare adaptable examples and manageable lesson units.
Device capacity	Some students lacked phones capable of running story applications.	Keep individual device ownership optional.
Paid content	Students reported that some story episodes required payment.	Use accessible texts and avoid compulsory paid content.

Note. Qualitative synthesis of the exploratory interview and observation material. Design implications are interpretations of the reported constraints, not separately tested interventions.

These observations are consistent with evidence that digital inequality involves usable devices, access conditions, and institutional support as well as connectivity (Olanrewaju et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Media flexibility concerns continuity of the composing task: a student should still be able to read the narrative, map a conflict, construct an exchange, and revise it when digital delivery is unavailable. The pedagogical sequence therefore requires attention alongside the medium used to present it.

4.2 Integration of Local Wisdom in Fiction Learning

The exploratory material describes teaching resources drawing on nationally circulated folklore, including Malin Kundang and Tangkuban Perahu, while access to Brebes narratives was limited. These stories all originate in particular traditions; the distinction concerns curricular circulation and access to materials. Limited local representation does not, by itself, establish deliberate exclusion. It identifies an opportunity to broaden resources for writing, consistent with work on local-wisdom content and folklore-based modules (Jumriani, Mutiani, Putra, Syaharuddin, & Abbas, 2021; Masie, Malabar, Mulyanto, & Lantowa, 2025). A teacher explained the availability problem:

> "Books containing local Brebes stories are rarely available." (English translation of an excerpt from the exploratory teacher account.)

The module introduced Telaga Ranjeng, Ki Jaka Poleng, and Tuk Suci and Prince Panjunan as resources for fiction composition. Students worked through narrative comprehension, character mapping, conflict identification, perspective taking, dialogue construction, drafting, and collaborative revision.

Local culture supplied settings, relationships, value tensions, idioms, and social roles that students could reorganize into original fiction. The intended mechanism was the connection between cultural material and specific composing decisions, not the mere inclusion of local story titles. This emphasis is consistent with culturally sustaining pedagogy and research linking explicit narrative strategies to linguistic choices (Healey, 2025; Paris, 2012).

Table 2 summarizes the different writing affordances considered during design. It presents a contextual comparison, not evidence that local folklore is inherently more engaging, linguistically richer, or pedagogically superior. Familiarity and relevance depend on students' experiences and on how teachers develop the tasks.

Table 2. Contextual affordances of nationally circulated folklore and Brebes folklore

Design aspect	Nationally circulated folklore	Brebes folklore used in the module
Access to materials	Readily available through textbooks and other published materials	Drawn from community narratives and locally developed materials
Student familiarity	Familiarity depends on prior reading and exposure	Familiarity varies with family background and local cultural experience
Language resources	Published versions provide models of standard Indonesian	Local idioms and culturally situated expressions require explanation where unfamiliar
Writing opportunities	Plots and characters can be reinterpreted through guided tasks	Local settings, relationships, and conflicts can be reworked through guided tasks
Connection to experience	Teachers can link the narrative to students' experiences	Place-based references can offer direct connections for some students
Design caution	Avoid treating the published story as a fixed template	Avoid assuming that every student shares the same cultural repertoire

Source: Contextual synthesis of classroom materials and the folklore-based module design.

Freire and Macedo (1987) connect textual work with lived experience. In this project, teacher reflection identified students who needed explanations of local expressions, showing that locality did not guarantee accessibility. The proposed response combined glosses, contextual prompts, and alternative linguistic resources. Support should explain an expression's narrative function and social register, rather than merely substitute a dictionary equivalent. Inclusive localization thus treats cultural difference as a resource while preserving access for students with different repertoires. Its value should be assessed through their participation and writing, rather than inferred from the amount of local vocabulary in a text (Paris, 2012; Reath Warren, 2021).

4.3 Changes in Student Fiction Writing

The exploratory account describes student writing that relied heavily on event description, with limited character interaction, and teachers' uncertainty about teaching dialogue explicitly. The development materials report higher post-intervention means in all four rubric dimensions (Table 3). These summaries are considered alongside selected textual examples. Because the retained aggregate data do not identify matched scripts or school-level distributions, the comparison concerns the reported means rather than verified individual trajectories.

Table 3. Descriptive pre-intervention and post-intervention fiction-writing scores

Rubric dimension	Possible range	Pre mean	Post mean	Difference
Narrative structure	1–5	2.8	4.2	+1.4
Dialogue between characters	1–5	1.7	4.0	+2.3
Character development	1–5	2.5	4.3	+1.8
Integration of local cultural elements	1–5	1.9	4.1	+2.2
Total score	4–20	8.9	16.6	+7.7

Note. Means are reported aggregate values. Difference = post-intervention mean – pre-intervention mean. Each dimension ranges from 1 to 5; the total ranges from 4 to 20. Total means equal the sums of the component means. The study cohort comprises 168 students. The number of matched assessed scripts, standard deviations, and rater-level variation are not available.

All four reported dimension means were higher after implementation, with absolute differences of 1.4–2.3 points. Their sum increased from 8.9 to 16.6 on the 4–20 total scale, a difference of 7.7 points (Table 3). Dialogue increased from 1.7 to 4.0, giving the largest numerical difference (+2.3), followed by cultural integration (+2.2), character development (+1.8), and narrative structure (+1.4). These differences are calculated from rounded aggregate means and do not estimate individual gains or a causal intervention effect.

The profile changed from dimension means spanning 1.7–2.8 before implementation to 4.0–4.3 afterward (Figure 1). The range across dimension means consequently narrowed from 1.1 to 0.3 points. This describes a

more even aggregate profile, not reduced inequality between students. Dialogue remained the lowest-scoring dimension after implementation despite its largest numerical increase; character development had the highest post-intervention mean (4.3). The ranking of differences is descriptive because their sampling uncertainty cannot be estimated. Scores near the upper part of the rubric also warrant inspection of the original distributions before excluding a ceiling effect.

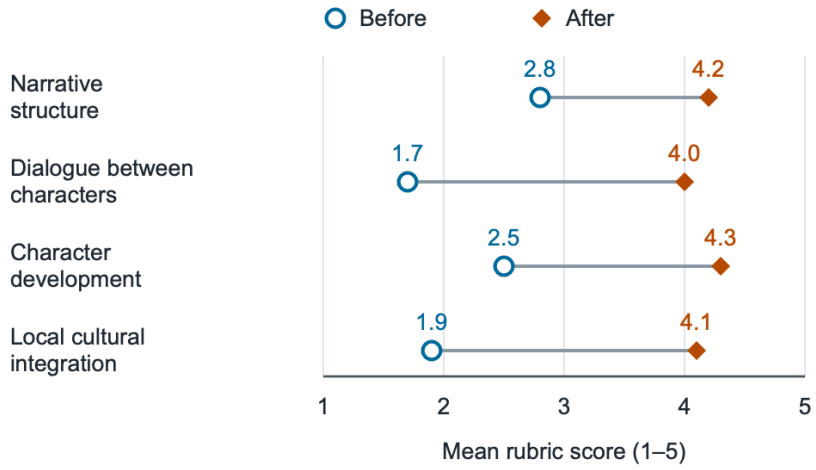


Figure 1. Reported pre-intervention and post-intervention rubric means. Open blue circles indicate pre-intervention means; filled brown diamonds indicate post-intervention means. Connecting lines show the difference between aggregate means, not matched student trajectories. No uncertainty intervals are shown because dispersion and the matched assessment sample are unavailable.

The classroom accounts also describe unequal participation in group writing: some students shaped the storyline while others mainly followed decisions. This qualifies the interpretation of collaborative work. A finished group text may display sophisticated dialogue without showing that every member can compose comparable dialogue independently.

Classroom observations recorded negotiation of storylines, character roles, and dialogue, alongside episodes of unequal participation. The photographic record illustrates students working with books and written materials in a library setting (Figure 2); it documents context rather than the quality of dialogue, the duration of engagement, or learning gains. These interactions can be interpreted through literacy as social practice and socially mediated learning (Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Research on adolescent writing also supports the relevance of peer assistance, although the present design does not isolate its contribution (Graham & Perin, 2007). Turn-taking, explicit peer-feedback roles, and individual accountability remain design implications rather than separately evaluated solutions.



Figure 2. Students working with reading and writing materials in a school library. Three views from the original photographic record illustrate the physical setting and use of print resources. Photographs are contextual documentation and do not establish individual participation, learning gains, or the timing of a particular development phase.

4.4 Teacher Reflection and Media Redesign

Six Indonesian-language teachers contributed to implementation evaluation through semi-structured interviews and focus-group reflection. Their accounts addressed student writing, instructional feasibility, and revisions to the module. These accounts provide evidence of teacher perceptions and design decisions rather than independent measurement of student learning.

The development account identifies difficulties with dialogue instruction, lesson timing, and unfamiliar expressions. Table 4 connects these reported needs to the module adjustments they informed. It presents a synthesis of design decisions, rather than verbatim teacher quotations or a measure of change in teacher competence.

Table 4. Reported classroom needs and corresponding module refinements

Reported need	Module refinement	Purpose
Difficulty composing dialogue	Guided dialogue prompts and examples	Connect speech to character motivation and conflict.
Different lesson timetables	Modular lesson units	Allow teachers to adjust pacing and task grouping.
Unfamiliar local expressions	Glosses and contextual explanation	Make cultural references accessible across repertoires.

Note. Synthesis of the development log and teacher-reflection account. The contribution of each refinement was not evaluated separately.

Teacher feedback prioritized examples of effective dialogue, lesson units that could fit different timetables, and support for unfamiliar local expressions. The development log describes guided dialogue prompts following classroom implementation and stronger idiom support during reflection/redesign. This provides a rationale for the documented refinements. It does not demonstrate sustained adoption or establish that all teachers changed their beliefs to the same extent (Mejeh & Sarbach, 2025; Ogata et al., 2024).

4.5 Dialogic Positioning and Cultural Difference in Student Texts

The following passages are examined for the social positions expressed through character interaction. Bakhtinian heteroglossia informs attention to differentiated voices, while Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, commonly translated as unity in diversity, provides a contextual lens for belonging and difference. It is not treated as a measured learning outcome. The development account attributes the first exchange to the student story Ki Jaka Poleng and the Friends of the North, in which Ki Jaka and Arga discuss belonging and cooperation:

> Ki Jaka: "Even though our origins are different, this sea does not belong to one tribe."
> Arga: "That's right. Waves don't choose names, but we can choose to help each other."

The exchange acknowledges different origins and gives both characters a speaking role. Ki Jaka's reference to the sea rejects exclusive ownership by one group. Arga's reply accepts that position and moves from a natural image, waves that do not distinguish names, to a deliberate human action, choosing mutual help. The reply therefore contributes a practical ethical orientation rather than merely repeating the first statement. Nevertheless, the speakers agree; the excerpt does not sustain opposing ideological positions and is insufficient to establish full polyphony. Its significance lies in the construction of a shared position through successive voices. This is a reading of represented dialogue, not evidence that the student author acquired tolerance as a stable disposition (Bakhtin, 1981).

4.6 Vernacular Language and Epistemic Participation in Student Texts

The vernacular dimension was examined through epistemic participation: whether students' linguistic resources could contribute to classroom fiction writing. Local-language use alone was not equated with resistance. Scholarship on epistemic justice, counterstorytelling, and linguistic citizenship provides a basis for asking which forms of knowledge and expression are recognized (Dutta et al., 2022; Fricker, 2007; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). Within Indonesian literary studies, analysis of Javanese women in postcolonial prose likewise shows

the relevance of cultural positioning to educational interpretation, although it does not establish the classroom outcomes studied here (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

The first clause directly accuses an addressee of deceiving the community. The second turns that accusation into a demand for truthful speech. The temporal expression "now" gives the demand urgency, while reference to the community makes the conflict concern more than a private disagreement. In this excerpt, vernacular language carries accusation and accountability rather than functioning only as a cultural marker. The passage is Javanese; it does not itself demonstrate code-switching between Javanese and Indonesian. Its narrative function supports a bounded interpretation of linguistic agency, not a generalized transformation of language hierarchies.

The two passages perform different dialogic work: the first develops agreement across difference, while the second challenges another figure's conduct. Treating both simply as instances of "critical dialogue" would obscure that distinction. They demonstrate possible functions of character speech but cannot establish how common either pattern was across the corpus. Recognition of vernacular expression also remains compatible with a need for explanation: a meaningful voice must be accessible to readers and classmates with different repertoires. Inclusive localization therefore joins permission to use culturally situated language with contextual support and alternative ways of participating (Paris, 2012; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021).

5. Discussion

The findings connect three kinds of evidence with different interpretive limits. Accounts of media use and cultural access explain design requirements; aggregate rubric means summarize writing judgments; and selected passages illustrate the functions of character speech. Teacher reflection identifies adjustments to guidance and delivery. The higher post-intervention means are consistent with development during implementation, but neither the aggregates nor selected passages isolate a module effect. The design contribution lies in relating a practical constraint to a task or scaffold, rather than in estimating intervention effectiveness. This emphasis is consistent with educational design research, while retaining the need for transparent implementation and assessment records (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012; McKenney & Reeves, 2019).

Local folklore supplied characters, settings, relationships, and value tensions that could be transformed into writing decisions. This interpretation connects local-wisdom and storytelling research to the craft of characterization and dialogue (Jumriani et al., 2021; Masie et al., 2025; Melzi, Schick, & Wuest, 2023). Explicit task sequencing and peer response may also have contributed to the observed changes, consistent with writing-instruction research (Graham & Perin, 2007; Healey, 2025). The present design cannot separate these contributions from the effect of cultural content. Bakhtinian and critical-literacy perspectives help interpret differentiated social voices, but they do not convert selected passages into evidence of a general change in critical-thinking ability (Bakhtin, 1981; Kim & Yang, 2021; Reath Warren, 2021).

The strongest design implication is that cultural relevance must be paired with access. Students with familiarity with local narratives could draw on them readily, whereas others needed explanations, glosses, and opportunities to use different repertoires. Inclusive localization thus extends the available resources for writing while avoiding a requirement to perform one preferred cultural identity. This proposition connects culturally sustaining pedagogy with epistemic participation and teacher co-design (Dutta et al., 2022; Mejeh & Sarbach, 2025; Paris, 2012; Stroud & Kerfoot, 2021). Three practical principles follow: retain print-compatible versions of core tasks; teach the composing work of dialogue explicitly; and provide linguistic and participation scaffolds. These are provisional principles for further testing in comparable multilingual settings, not validated prescriptions for national implementation.

6. Conclusion

The project links Brebes folklore to explicit fiction-writing tasks and identifies conditions affecting their use in six junior high schools. Aggregate rubric means were higher after implementation, while two passages illustrated agreement across social difference and a vernacular demand for accountability. Teacher reflection supported clearer dialogue guidance, flexible lesson units, and explanations of unfamiliar expressions. These findings address the research questions through design requirements, descriptive writing evidence, and implications for refinement. They do not establish a causal improvement in general critical thinking or equal benefit for every

learner.

Inclusive localization is proposed as a provisional principle for connecting cultural material to explicit composing tasks while supporting different linguistic repertoires. The interpretation is limited by purposive participation, one regional setting, aggregate rather than auditable matched assessment records, absent inter-rater reliability estimates, and selected textual examples. Prospective evaluation should document exposure and successive prototypes, preserve participant- and rater-level scores, compare individual with group writing, and examine access across cultural backgrounds. These steps are needed to determine whether the proposed refinements support durable and broadly shared writing development.

Author Contributions

Ririn Setyorini: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing—original draft.

Sarwiji Suwandi: Conceptualization, methodology, supervision, and writing—review and editing. **Andayani**: Methodology, supervision, and writing—review and editing.

Data Availability

The aggregate rubric values and illustrative passages used in this article are presented in the results and tables. Figure 2 reproduces photographs from the study materials as contextual illustrations; no participant names or assessment identities are assigned to the depicted students. Raw student scripts and individual score records are not reproduced. Further sharing of participant-level material depends on documented consent and applicable institutional requirements. No public repository deposit or unrestricted access to identifiable source material is asserted.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage Statement

ChatGPT assisted with language editing, structural revision, consistency checking, reference checking, and document preparation. It also assisted with comparison of study materials, checking aggregate arithmetic, and preparation of Figure 1. The authors remain responsible for the study record, analysis, interpretation, references, and final manuscript.

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