

Improving EFL Students' Paragraph Writing Skills Through Folklore-Based Digital Storytelling

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Abstract

This study investigates how folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) supports paragraph-writing development among EFL university students. Previous research has mainly emphasized learner motivation and multimodal creativity, with limited attention to paragraph-level writing skills. This study aimed to examine how folklore-based DST supports idea generation, organization of supporting details, cohesion, and concluding sentence construction. Using an interpretive qualitative design, data were collected through classroom observations, a folklore-based writing task using the Putri Mandalika digital story, and semi-structured interviews with selected participants. The findings indicate that folklore-based DST served as a cognitive and cultural scaffold, helping students develop clearer topic sentences, organize supporting details logically, and maintain cohesion through appropriate transition signals. The familiar cultural narrative also encouraged reflective concluding sentences incorporating moral and cultural values. These findings suggest that integrating local folklore with digital storytelling can effectively support academic paragraph writing and provide valuable implications for EFL writing instruction and curriculum development.

Keyword: *Digital Storytelling; Folklore-Based Learning; EFL Writing; Paragraph Writing; Cultural Scaffolding*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital Storytelling (DST) has become an increasingly prominent pedagogical approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly in technology-enhanced learning environments. By integrating written text, images, audio, narration, and other multimodal resources, DST enables learners to construct meaning through multimodal experiences rather than relying solely on written language (B. Yu & Zeng, 2026). This approach aligns with contemporary students' digital practices and provides opportunities to connect their everyday digital experiences with meaningful academic learning (Kumar & Wei, 2024; Muhammad et al., 2025). As a result, DST has been recognized as a promising pedagogical tool for promoting active learning, communication, and language development in higher education contexts (Naghdipour, 2022).

Despite these advantages, paragraph writing remains a persistent challenge for many EFL university students. Paragraph writing is a fundamental component of academic literacy because coherent academic texts depend on the effective development and organization of ideas within individual paragraphs (Rahman et al., 2023). However, many learners continue to experience difficulties in generating ideas, organizing supporting details, maintaining cohesion, and constructing meaningful conclusions (Huang & Jun Zhang, 2020). These difficulties often result in fragmented writing, weak logical connections, and limited paragraph development, particularly when writing instruction focuses more heavily on grammatical accuracy than on paragraph construction and organization (Clark & Yu, 2025).

A growing body of research has explored the contribution of DST to writing development. Previous studies have reported that DST supports learners in planning ideas, organizing content, and expressing meaning through multimodal resources. The use of digital planning tools, such as storyboards, allows students to arrange information systematically before writing, while multimodal representation encourages greater awareness of audience and rhetorical purpose (Aris et al., 2025; Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024; S. Yu et al., 2026). Other studies have shown that DST increases learner engagement and contributes to more coherent written production by helping students visualize relationships among ideas and events (Hava, 2021; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2017; Yang & Zhang, 2023).

In addition to DST, folklore-based learning has also received attention as a culturally meaningful instructional resource. Folktales provide learners with familiar narrative structures that can support idea generation and organization during writing activities (Agbenyega et al., 2017). The cultural values embedded in folklore may also assist learners in interpreting meaning and expressing ideas within a second-language context. When integrated into digital storytelling, folklore offers opportunities for students to transform culturally familiar narratives into multimodal texts that combine language, images, and sound, potentially strengthening both linguistic and cultural dimensions of learning (Liang & Hwang, 2023; Wu & Chen, 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Although studies on DST and folklore-based learning have expanded considerably, limited attention has been given to the intersection of these two approaches. Existing DST research has largely focused on learner motivation, engagement, creativity, and digital literacy, while relatively few studies have examined how culturally grounded digital stories support paragraph-level writing development (Tanrikulu, 2022). Similarly, folklore-based studies often emphasize cultural preservation and language learning without investigating how folklore integrated into digital environments may facilitate specific writing components such as topic sentences, supporting details, cohesion, and concluding statements. Consequently, the role of folklore-based DST in supporting paragraph construction remains underexplored.

This study was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram, where students are generally familiar with local folklore and frequently engage with digital media but still encounter challenges in transforming cultural knowledge into structured English paragraphs. The Putri Mandalika folklore was selected because of its strong cultural relevance within the local context and its clear narrative structure, making it suitable for examining how students utilize culturally familiar content during writing activities. By focusing on a local cultural narrative within a digital storytelling environment, this study provides a contextually grounded perspective on EFL writing instruction.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how folklore-based Digital Storytelling supports EFL university students' paragraph-writing development, particularly in generating ideas, organizing paragraph structure, maintaining cohesion through transition signals, and constructing culturally meaningful concluding statements. The study contributes to the growing body of EFL writing research by demonstrating how local cultural narratives integrated with digital multimodal platforms can function as cognitive and cultural scaffolds for paragraph-level writing in higher education contexts. Based on these considerations, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does folklore-based Digital Storytelling support EFL university students' idea generation during paragraph writing?

2. How does folklore-based Digital Storytelling support EFL university students' organization of paragraph structure?
3. How does folklore-based Digital Storytelling support EFL university students' use of cohesion through transition signals in paragraph writing?
4. How does folklore-based Digital Storytelling support EFL university students' construction of culturally meaningful concluding statements?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed an interpretive qualitative design to examine how folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) supports EFL university students' paragraph-writing skills. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to capture the depth and complexity of students' meaning-making processes, idea development, and organizational decisions during writing tasks — phenomena that are not adequately captured through numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interpretive orientation enabled close examination of how students interacted with cultural narrative content and multimodal elements, and how these interactions were reflected in the linguistic and structural features of their written paragraphs. This design was appropriate for the research context because it allowed the researcher to document and interpret naturally occurring classroom behaviors, written texts, and students' reflective accounts within their authentic learning environment.

2.2 Research Participants

This study employed an interpretive qualitative design to examine how folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) supports EFL university students' paragraph-writing skills. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to capture the depth and complexity of students' meaning-making processes, idea development, and organizational decisions during writing tasks—phenomena that are not adequately captured through numerical measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The interpretive orientation enabled close examination of how students interacted with cultural narrative content and multimodal elements, and how these interactions were reflected in the linguistic and structural features of their written paragraphs. This design was appropriate for the research context because it allowed the researcher to document and interpret naturally occurring classroom behaviors, written texts, and students' reflective accounts within their authentic learning environment.

Data were collected from multiple qualitative sources, including classroom observations, students' written paragraphs, and semi-structured interviews. The use of these complementary data sources enabled methodological triangulation, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how folklore-based Digital Storytelling supported students' paragraph-writing development.

Table 1. Presents The Detailed Participant Profile And Selection Criteria For Both Groups.

Component	Group 1: General Participants (n= 40)	Group 2: Interview Participants (n=7)
Semester	5th semester	5th semester
Number of Participants	40 students	7 students
Selection Method	Convenience Sampling	Purposive Sampling

Selection Criteria	Enrolled in the English Education Study Program; completed the Paragraph Writing course; actively participating in writing instruction at the time of data collection	Completed the Paragraph Writing course; demonstrated active engagement during writing activities; voluntarily agreed to participate in interviews and share detailed reflections
Role in Study	Classroom observation and folklore-based paragraph writing task	Semi-structured interview
Data Produced	Observation field notes and written paragraphs	Interview transcripts
Rationale	To provide broad observational and textual evidence regarding students' writing behaviors and paragraph construction	To provide rich reflective insights into idea generation, paragraph organization, and perceptions of DST as a writing scaffold

Table 1 presents the two-tiered participant structure of this study. The larger group of 40 students provided observational and written data capturing general patterns of engagement and paragraph construction, while the seven interview participants offered deeper individual perspectives on the writing process. This two-tiered sampling design strengthened the study's capacity to triangulate findings across behavioral, textual, and reflective data sources, enhancing the credibility and depth of the overall analysis.

2.3 Data Sources

Three sources of data were used in this study to ensure that the phenomenon under investigation was examined from multiple perspectives. The first data source was classroom observation field notes, which documented students' behavioral engagement during the DST viewing session and captured naturally occurring pre-writing responses across all 40 participants. The second data source was students' written paragraphs, produced independently by all 40 participants following the DST activity, which provided direct textual evidence of how folklore-based multimodal input was transformed into structured written paragraphs. The third data source was semi-structured interview transcripts obtained from seven purposively selected participants, which provided in-depth reflective accounts of individual writing processes, idea generation strategies, and perceptions of DST as a pedagogical scaffold. Together, these three data sources enabled methodological triangulation, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in convergent evidence across behavioral, textual, and reflective dimensions of students' paragraph-writing experience.

2.4 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out in three sequential stages corresponding to each data source. In the first stage, classroom observation was conducted with all 40 participants during the DST viewing session. The researcher observed and recorded students' behavioral responses to the *Putri Mandalika* folklore video using a structured field-notes checklist prepared in advance. The checklist focused on engagement indicators including sustained visual attention, note-taking behavior, verbal repetition of story events, and gestural responses at scene transitions. Observations were recorded systematically without researcher intervention to ensure that students' natural responses to the multimodal narrative were captured authentically. The complete observation checklist is provided in Appendix A.

In the second stage, following the DST viewing session, all 40 students independently completed a folklore-based paragraph-writing task in which they produced a narrative paragraph of 150–200 words based on the *Putri Mandalika* story. No additional prompts or structural guidance were provided during the writing task in order to examine how students independently transformed narrative content into a coherent written paragraph. The completed paragraphs were collected immediately after the session and retained for

analysis. The written paragraphs were evaluated using an analytic rubric adapted from (Oshima & Hogue, 2006) for paragraph-writing components and expanded by the researcher to include a Cultural Reflection criterion in accordance with the objectives of the folklore-based Digital Storytelling intervention in order to align the assessment with the objectives of the folklore-based Digital Storytelling intervention. The rubric assessed five essential components: (1) topic sentence clarity, (2) supporting detail development, (3) cohesion through the appropriate use of transition signals and logical connections, (4) concluding statement effectiveness, and (5) cultural reflection, referring to students' ability to demonstrate an understanding and meaningful interpretation of the cultural values, moral lessons, or local wisdom embedded in the *Putri Mandalika* folklore. The complete analytic rubric, including its performance levels, scoring descriptors, and assessment criteria, is presented in Appendix C.

In the third stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the seven purposively selected participants. Each interview consisted of nine open-ended questions exploring how students processed the folklore narrative, generated and organized ideas for their paragraphs, selected transition signals, and perceived the role of DST in supporting their writing development. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and private setting, audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and transcribed verbatim immediately following each session to minimize data loss. The complete interview protocol is presented in Appendix B.

Prior to data collection, all 40 participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the research procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without academic consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants for classroom observation and for the use of their written paragraphs as research data. Additional informed consent was obtained from the seven interview participants for audio recording during the interview sessions. To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, all observation records, written paragraphs, and interview transcripts were anonymized using participant codes (e.g., P1–P40) throughout the data analysis and reporting process. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram.

The rubric-based assessment served as an initial analytical framework for examining students' paragraph-writing performance across the five assessed components. The overall patterns identified through the rubric evaluation are presented in the Results section to complement the qualitative interpretation of students' writing development.

Table 2. Analytic Rubric for Paragraph Writing Assessment

Criterion	Description
Topic Sentence	Clarity and relevance of the main idea presented in the paragraph
Supporting Details	Development, relevance, and logical organization of supporting information
Cohesion	Appropriate use of transition signals and connections among sentences
Concluding Statement	Effectiveness of the closing sentence in reinforcing the main idea

Cultural Reflection

Demonstrates understanding and meaningful interpretation of the cultural values, moral lessons, or local wisdom presented in the *Putri Mandalika* folklore and integrates these appropriately into the written paragraph.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles Huberman and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This analytical framework was selected because it allows the integration of multiple qualitative data sources, including classroom observation field notes, students' written paragraphs, and semi-structured interview transcripts. Data collection and analysis occurred as interconnected processes throughout the study. As illustrated in Figure 1, data were collected through classroom observations, students' written paragraphs, and semi-structured interviews before being subjected to data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

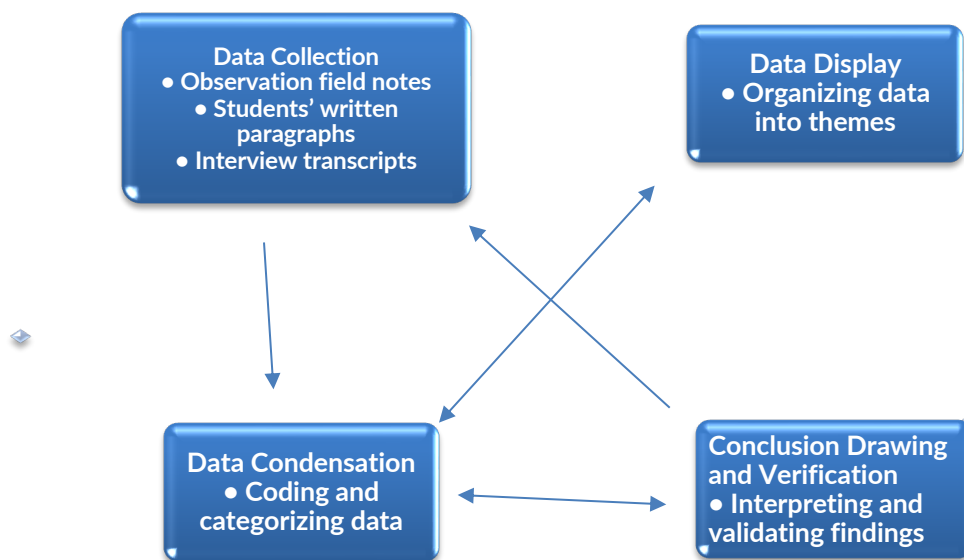


Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis Flow in the Digital Storytelling Study Adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014)

The first stage, data condensation, involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing the raw data obtained from observations, written texts, and interviews. Observation notes were reviewed to identify patterns of student engagement during the Digital Storytelling (DST) activity. Students' written paragraphs were examined using the analytic rubric criteria, including topic sentence development, supporting details, cohesion, and concluding statements. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly and coded to identify students' perceptions of idea generation, paragraph organization, use of transition signals, and reflections on the cultural content of the folklore.

The second stage, data display, involved organizing the condensed data into matrices, tables, and thematic groupings to facilitate interpretation. Evidence from the three data sources was compared and categorized according to recurring patterns and relationships.

This process enabled the researcher to identify areas of convergence and divergence across observational, textual, and interview data.

The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, involved interpreting the displayed data and developing thematic findings. Emerging interpretations were continuously compared across data sources to ensure consistency and credibility. Through this iterative process, four major themes were identified: (1) folklore-based DST as a scaffold for idea generation, (2) paragraph organization and narrative structure development, (3) cohesion development through contextual use of transition signals, and (4) cultural meaning and reflection in students' concluding statements. Data triangulation across observations, written paragraphs, and interviews was employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

To further enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies recommended for qualitative research were implemented (Riazi et al., 2023). Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by comparing findings across classroom observations, students' written paragraphs, and semi-structured interviews. Member checking was conducted by inviting the seven interview participants to review the interview transcripts and the researchers' summaries of their responses to ensure that their intended meanings had been accurately represented. Dependability was enhanced through peer debriefing, in which coding categories and emerging themes were discussed with an experienced qualitative research colleague to improve analytical consistency. An audit trail documenting data collection procedures, coding decisions, theme development, and analytical memos was maintained throughout the study to support the transparency and confirmability of the research process. The researcher also engaged in reflexive practice by maintaining reflective notes throughout data collection and analysis to acknowledge and minimize the potential influence of personal assumptions on data interpretation. These procedures collectively strengthened the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency of the study.

3. Results

3.1 Folklore-Based Digital Storytelling as a Scaffold for Idea Generation

The findings indicate that folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) played an important role in supporting students' idea-generation processes before writing. Classroom observations during the *Putri Mandalika* DST activity showed that students actively engaged with the digital narrative through sustained visual attention, note-taking, and discussion of important story events. In this study, active engagement was operationalized through three predetermined observation indicators: (1) sustained visual attention toward the DST video, (2) note-taking or recording of important narrative information, and (3) verbal responses or discussions related to story elements, including characters, events, conflicts, and resolutions. A student was categorized as demonstrating active engagement when at least two of the three indicators were observed during the DST viewing session.

The observation checklist was completed by the researcher during the activity, and the frequency of students demonstrating each indicator was recorded and summarized to identify overall engagement patterns. Based on these criteria, 38 out of 40 students demonstrated active engagement during the DST viewing session. In addition, 32 students demonstrated post-viewing reflection by expressing interpretations of the moral values or messages embedded in the *Putri Mandalika* folklore. No second observer was involved during the classroom observation; however, the credibility of the observation findings was

strengthened through methodological triangulation with students' written paragraphs and semi-structured interview data.

These patterns indicate that the multimodal presentation successfully attracted students' attention and encouraged them to process narrative information before composing their paragraphs.

Table 3. Classroom Observation Patterns During DST Implementation

Phase of DST Activity	Observational Evidence	Writing-Related Function
Initial exposure	Sustained attention and note-taking behavior (38/40 students)	Generating initial ideas and preparing content
Narrative development	Students discussed characters, events, and conflicts	Organizing and sequencing ideas
Scene transitions	Students focused on changes between story events	Recognizing relationships among ideas
Post-viewing reflection	Students expressed moral interpretations (32/40 students)	Developing concluding ideas and reflections

The observation findings suggest that DST reduced students' difficulty in initiating writing because the digital folklore narrative provided a concrete source of content. Instead of constructing ideas from an unfamiliar topic, students were able to retrieve information from the storyline and transform visual and narrative experiences into written expressions.

Evidence from students' written work further supported the observation findings. Most students were able to generate substantial content immediately after viewing the DST material. For example, one student produced a paragraph recounting the *Putri Mandalika* legend by incorporating several narrative elements, including the setting ("the peaceful kingdom near Seger Beach on Lombok Island"), conflict ("many princes from neighboring kingdoms came to ask for her hand in marriage"), and resolution ("she jumped into the sea and disappeared"). The inclusion of these narrative details indicates that students were able to retrieve information from the digital storytelling material and transform visual and narrative input into written ideas.

This finding also reflects students' attempts to reconstruct cultural narratives based on the information presented through DST. Although students generally captured the main storyline, some variations in factual details were identified in their written texts. Therefore, the written paragraphs were interpreted not only as evidence of idea generation but also as reflections of how students processed, selected, and reconstructed information from multimodal cultural input.

Interview data further confirmed this pattern. Students explained that the digital story helped them overcome uncertainty during the beginning stage of writing.

"Before, I was always confused about where to start. After watching the Mandalika folklore video, the ideas appeared naturally without forcing." (R1, Interview)

"Watching the visuals helped me picture the sequence in my mind, so writing came naturally." (R6, Interview)

These responses indicate that folklore-based DST functioned as a cognitive scaffold by providing both conceptual and visual support. The combination of familiar cultural

content and multimodal representation allowed students to access ideas more easily and develop them into written form. Thus, DST supported students' transition from comprehension to composition by helping them retrieve narrative information, organize ideas, and construct meaningful written paragraphs.

To provide a comprehensive overview of the corpus-level writing performance across all 40 participants, the written paragraphs were evaluated using the five-criterion analytic rubric. Table 4 summarizes the distribution of students' performance levels. Overall, the majority of students demonstrated good to excellent control in formulating clear topic sentences (77.5%) and constructing effective concluding statements (72.5%). Furthermore, 67.5% of the paragraphs successfully incorporated cultural reflection by highlighting the moral lessons of the Putri Mandalika folklore. However, lower proportions were observed in cohesion (65.0%) and supporting detail development (70.0%), where a subset of students relied on repetitive transitional devices or provided limited narrative elaboration.

Table 4. Summary of Corpus-Level Paragraph Writing Performance (N = 40)

Assessment Criterion	Performance Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Key Description / Qualitative Trend
Topic Sentence Clarity	Good to Excellent	31	77.5	Clearly states the main idea using the folklore backdrop.
	Fair to Developing	9	22.5	Main idea is present but overly broad or weak.
Supporting Details	Good to Excellent	28	70.0	Well-developed chronological details reflecting story events.
	Fair to Developing	12	30.0	Retells basic events with limited elaboration or detail.
Cohesion & Transitions	Good to Excellent	26	65.0	Effective use of varied transition signals (e.g., <i>however</i> , <i>eventually</i>).
	Fair to Developing	14	35.0	Relies on repetitive basic temporal connectors (e.g., <i>then</i> , <i>after that</i>).
Concluding Statement	Good to Excellent	29	72.5	Effectively closes the paragraph and connects to the core theme.
	Fair to Developing	11	27.5	Abrupt ending or simple restatement without depth.
Cultural Reflection	Good to Excellent	27	67.5	Integrates moral values, leadership, or local wisdom (e.g., <i>sacrifice</i>).
	Fair to Developing	13	32.5	Focuses strictly on plot resolution without moral/cultural reflection.

3.2 Paragraph Organization and Narrative Structure Development

The analysis of students' written paragraphs indicated that, following the folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) activity, participants generally organized their ideas into recognizable paragraph structures. Most students produced paragraphs containing an opening idea, supporting information, and concluding statements. The organization of many paragraphs reflected the narrative progression presented in the *Putri Mandalika* story, including the introduction of characters, the development of events, the emergence of conflict, and the resolution.

Analysis of students' written paragraphs further showed that many texts followed a coherent narrative sequence. For example, one student's paragraph began with a topic sentence introducing the *Putri Mandalika* legend, followed by chronological supporting details describing the princess's popularity, the conflict among the princes, and her ultimate sacrifice. The paragraph concluded with a reflective statement: "*The legend teaches us that*

true love and leadership sometimes require great sacrifice." This example illustrates how the student organized ideas by drawing on the narrative sequence presented in the DST material rather than serving as evidence of improvement in paragraph-writing ability.

Although many students produced paragraphs with recognizable organizational patterns, variations were observed in the depth and elaboration of supporting details. Some students expanded the storyline by incorporating additional explanations and reflections, whereas others primarily retold the sequence of events with limited elaboration. These differences reflect variation in how students transformed the folklore narrative into written paragraphs within the context of the DST task.

The interview findings further showed that students perceived the narrative sequence presented through DST as a useful framework for organizing their writing.

"The video already had a clear sequence, so I just followed the storyline when organizing my paragraph." (R3, Interview)

"I usually only focused on grammar, but following the folklore story made writing smooth because I already knew the conflict and resolution." (R4, Interview)

These interview responses suggest that students viewed the narrative structure embedded in the folklore-based DST as a planning resource when composing their paragraphs. The storyline appeared to provide a reference for determining the sequence of information, selecting relevant supporting details, and developing concluding statements. These findings describe students' writing practices and perceptions within the DST activity rather than demonstrating that the intervention improved their paragraph-writing ability.

Given that this study employed an interpretive qualitative design involving a single writing task after the DST activity, and that all participants had previously completed the Paragraph Writing course, the findings should be interpreted descriptively. The study does not establish a causal relationship between folklore-based DST and improvements in paragraph-writing ability. Instead, it illustrates how students organized their paragraphs after engaging with the DST activity and how they perceived the narrative structure as a supportive resource during the writing process.

3.3 Cohesion Development Through Contextual Use of Transition Signals

The analysis of students' written paragraphs indicated that many participants used transition signals to establish logical relationships between events while reconstructing the *Putri Mandalika* narrative. Across the corpus of 40 paragraphs, chronological transition signals were the most consistently observed cohesive devices, although students differed in the variety and complexity of the expressions they employed. Most participants used common temporal connectors such as *first*, *then*, *after that*, and *finally*, whereas others incorporated more varied expressions including *as time passed*, *soon*, *however*, *eventually*, *moments later*, and *to this day*.

The variation in students' use of transition signals can be illustrated through several written texts. For example, Participant A organized the narrative using temporal connectors such as *First*, *As time passed*, *Soon*, *Then*, *Afterward*, and *To this day*, creating a chronological sequence from the introduction of Princess Mandalika to the Bau Nyale tradition. Participant B employed a wider range of cohesive devices, including *As she became older*, *however*, *At first*, *eventually*, *On the twentieth day*, *After saying her final goodbyes*, and *Moments later*, which connected both temporal progression and changes in the storyline. In contrast, Participant C relied primarily on basic connectors such as *Long ago*, *Then*, *After that*, and *Soon after*, resulting in a coherent but less varied pattern of

cohesion. These examples illustrate differences in how students selected and applied transition signals while composing their paragraphs.

Rather than indicating that folklore-based DST improved students' mastery of cohesive devices, these findings describe how students used transition signals when composing paragraphs immediately after engaging with the DST activity. The sequential presentation of events through images, narration, and scene transitions appeared to provide a contextual reference that students drew upon when connecting ideas in their writing.

Interview responses further illustrated students' perceptions of this process.

"When the scenes changed in the video, I automatically knew which transition word should be used." (R3, Interview)

"The storyline helped me decide when to use words like 'however' or 'finally' because the conflict and ending were already clear." (R7, Interview)

These interview responses suggest that students perceived the narrative sequence presented through folklore-based DST as a useful contextual resource for selecting transition signals during writing. Nevertheless, the written paragraphs also revealed variation in students' use of cohesive devices. While some participants incorporated a wider range of temporal and contrastive connectors, others relied repeatedly on a limited set of common transitional expressions. Given the qualitative, one-shot design of this study, these findings should be interpreted as descriptions of students' writing practices and perceptions rather than evidence that DST caused improvement in their cohesive writing ability.

3.4 Cultural Meaning and Reflection in Students' Concluding Statements

The final finding revealed that folklore-based DST influenced not only the organization of students' paragraphs but also the quality of their concluding statements. Many students developed conclusions that extended beyond simple summaries of the story events. Their concluding sentences often reflected interpretations of cultural values, including sacrifice, responsibility, loyalty, and identity.

Students' concluding statements frequently moved beyond simple story summaries and reflected broader cultural interpretations. For example, one student concluded that *"The legend teaches us that true love and leadership sometimes require great sacrifice."* Rather than merely restating the ending of the story, the student interpreted the cultural and moral significance of Putri Mandalika's actions.

Similar reflective conclusions appeared across multiple student texts, indicating that folklore-based DST encouraged students to engage with cultural values and transform narrative experiences into personal interpretations.

Students' reflections during interviews demonstrated that the cultural dimension of the folklore influenced how they constructed meaning in their writing.

"My conclusion was not only about ending the story, but also about the moral lesson from Mandalika's decision." (R7, Interview)

"The folklore made me think about cultural values, so the ending of my paragraph felt more meaningful." (R5, Interview)

These findings indicate that folklore-based DST encouraged students to engage with writing as a process of meaning construction rather than merely reporting information. The

cultural familiarity of the Putri Mandalika story allowed students to connect academic writing with personal interpretation and cultural understanding.

4. Discussion

This study examined how folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) supported EFL university students' paragraph-writing development. The findings revealed that the integration of the Putri Mandalika digital folklore narrative facilitated idea generation, supported paragraph organization, promoted the use of cohesive devices, and encouraged cultural reflection in students' written texts. While previous research has established the pedagogical value of DST in language learning, the present study provides additional evidence that combining digital storytelling with culturally familiar folklore can support specific aspects of paragraph-level writing in EFL contexts.

The first finding showed that folklore-based DST facilitated students' idea generation during the pre-writing stage. Observation data indicated that students actively engaged with the visual and narrative elements of the folklore video through note-taking, discussion, and attention to story events. Interview responses further revealed that students experienced fewer difficulties in initiating the writing process because the storyline provided readily accessible content for development. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that DST supports writing preparation by providing multimodal input that stimulates learners' imagination and content development (Chen & Yeh, 2025; Hava, 2021; Y. T. Ma, 2026). However, the present study extends these findings by suggesting that the effectiveness of DST may be strengthened when learners engage with culturally familiar narratives. Unlike many DST studies that employ personal experiences or general stories as writing prompts, the use of local folklore appeared to activate students' existing cultural knowledge, enabling them to generate ideas more confidently and efficiently. This finding suggests that cultural familiarity may function as an additional cognitive resource that complements the multimodal support provided by digital storytelling.

The second finding demonstrated that students were generally able to organize their paragraphs according to the narrative sequence embedded in the Putri Mandalika story. Most participants successfully developed topic sentences, arranged supporting details logically, and concluded their paragraphs appropriately. This finding supports previous research indicating that DST enhances learners' awareness of narrative structure and improves writing organization (Chen & Yeh, 2025; Liang & Hwang, 2023; Tanrikulu, 2022).

Nevertheless, the current study offers a more specific explanation for how such improvement occurs. The findings suggest that students relied on the familiar orientation–conflict–resolution sequence of the folklore narrative as an organizational framework during writing. Rather than generating ideas from abstract prompts, students were able to transform an already structured narrative into a coherent paragraph. This result highlights the importance of narrative familiarity in supporting writing organization and suggests that the effectiveness of DST may depend not only on digital multimodality but also on the nature of the narrative content itself.

The third finding concerns students' use of transition signals and cohesive devices. Analysis of the written paragraphs revealed frequent use of temporal connectors such as first, then, after that, and finally, which reflected the sequence of events presented in the DST narrative. Similar findings have been reported by studies demonstrating that multimodal storytelling environments help learners understand relationships between

events and transfer those relationships into written discourse (Gunawan et al., 2025; Y. Ma & Stapa, 2024).

The visual progression of scenes in the folklore video appeared to provide contextual cues that guided students in establishing logical connections between ideas. However, the findings also revealed that some participants relied heavily on repetitive transitional expressions. This suggests that while DST can support the contextual use of cohesion, it does not automatically lead to a sophisticated repertoire of cohesive devices. Therefore, the pedagogical value of DST may be enhanced when combined with explicit instruction on transition signals and paragraph cohesion.

The final finding revealed that students frequently incorporated cultural and moral reflections into their concluding statements. Instead of merely summarizing the narrative, many participants interpreted the story's values and connected them to broader themes such as sacrifice, loyalty, responsibility, and cultural identity. This finding contributes to existing literature on culturally responsive language learning by demonstrating that folklore-based DST can support not only linguistic development but also reflective meaning-making (Riazi et al., 2023; Zhang & Hyland, 2023).

Previous DST studies have largely focused on outcomes such as writing performance, motivation, engagement, and digital literacy. In contrast, the present findings indicate that culturally grounded narratives encourage students to move beyond factual retelling and engage in deeper interpretation of textual meaning. As a result, the conclusions produced by students were not simply narrative endings but also reflections of cultural understanding and personal interpretation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of folklore-based DST arises from the interaction between multimodal learning resources and culturally familiar content. The digital format provided visual and auditory support that facilitated comprehension and idea development, while the folklore narrative offered a meaningful cultural framework that guided organization, cohesion, and reflection. This study therefore extends existing DST research by demonstrating that local folklore can function as both a cognitive scaffold and a cultural scaffold in EFL writing instruction. By focusing specifically on paragraph-level writing, the study addresses a gap in previous literature that has largely emphasized general writing performance, motivation, or digital literacy. The findings imply that integrating local cultural narratives into digital storytelling activities may provide a contextually relevant and pedagogically effective approach to supporting writing development in higher education EFL classrooms.

4.1 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study was conducted at a single institution and involved one intact class of fifth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram. Consequently, the findings reflect the experiences of a specific learning context and may not be readily transferable to other EFL settings or student populations.

Second, the study employed only one folklore narrative, namely *Putri Mandalika*, and one writing genre, namely narrative paragraph writing. Although the findings demonstrate how folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) supported students during this particular writing task, they should not be generalized to other genres, such as argumentative, expository, or academic paragraph writing, without further investigation.

Third, the study adopted an interpretive qualitative design involving a single writing task following the DST activity. Because no baseline measurement, pre-test, post-test, or

comparison group was included, the findings should be interpreted as descriptions of students' writing practices and perceptions within the study context rather than evidence of causal improvement in paragraph-writing ability.

Fourth, the interview participants were selected through purposive sampling and volunteered to participate in the interview sessions. Their reflections therefore represent in-depth individual perspectives and may not fully represent the experiences of all participants in the classroom.

Finally, classroom observations were conducted by the researcher during the implementation of the DST activity. Although observations were supported through triangulation with students' written paragraphs and interview data, the researcher's role in the classroom may have influenced the interpretation of classroom interactions. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation, an audit trail of data analysis, and researcher reflexivity were employed throughout the study.

These limitations also provide directions for future research. Further studies are encouraged to involve multiple institutions, a wider range of folklore narratives, different writing genres, longitudinal or comparative research designs, and more diverse participant groups to further examine the role of folklore-based Digital Storytelling in EFL writing instruction.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that folklore-based Digital Storytelling (DST) served as a meaningful pedagogical resource that supported EFL university students during the paragraph-writing task. The findings indicate that the integration of the *Putri Mandalika* folklore narrative within a digital storytelling environment provided students with a cognitive and cultural framework for generating ideas, organizing paragraph structures, using cohesive devices, and constructing culturally meaningful conclusions.

This study addresses the gap in previous research, which has predominantly examined Digital Storytelling in relation general writing, learner motivation, engagement, and digital literacy. By focusing specifically on paragraph-level writing processes, this study provides qualitative evidence of how culturally grounded DST supported idea generation, textual organization, cohesion, and reflective meaning construction within the context of the writing task. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of local folklore with digital storytelling as a writing instructional approach in an EFL higher education context. Unlike conventional DST activities that often rely on personal narratives or general multimedia content, the use of *Putri Mandalika* folklore provided students with a culturally familiar narrative framework that supported both linguistic production and cultural interpretation. These findings highlight the potential of combining digital innovation with local cultural resources to create more meaningful writing experiences for learners.

The implications of this study suggest that EFL educators may consider incorporating folklore-based DST activities into writing instruction, particularly when teaching paragraph development and organization. Such integration may help learners overcome difficulties in idea generation while encouraging deeper engagement with cultural knowledge.

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