Qissahconnect: Semai Stories in Arabic – an Innovative Digital Storytelling Tool

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ABSTRACT

QissahConnect is an innovative digital storytelling platform designed to enhance Arabic language acquisition through immersive engagement with Semai indigenous folktales. This study addresses two pressing challenges: the lack of culturally relevant, motivating materials for non-native Arabic learners and the underrepresentation of Malaysia's Semai oral heritage in educational contexts. Employing a mixed-methods approach, learners interacted with QissahConnect over four weeks through narrated audiobooks, vocabulary-targeted tasks, and reflective assessments, accessible via mobile and online formats. Findings indicate a marked increase in vocabulary retention, from 45% pre-intervention to 82% post-intervention, alongside a significant rise in learner motivation and satisfaction. Thematic analysis further revealed enriched cultural awareness, empathy development, and deeper learner connection to indigenous narratives. These results support the pedagogical potential of integrating authentic cultural content with digital tools to foster inclusive, learner-centered experiences. Beyond language gains, QissahConnect serves as a model for culturally responsive education, bridging linguistic proficiency with heritage preservation. Aligned with global education priorities (SDGs 4, 10, and 11), the platform demonstrates strong commercialization prospects through mobile apps, institutional e-learning licenses, and subscription-based audiobook packages. By offering a sustainable, scalable solution, QissahConnect advances Arabic language education while empowering marginalized communities and promoting intercultural understanding through meaningful storytelling.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Arabic language acquisition, Semai oral heritage, cultural preservation, immersive audiobook learning

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and multilingual world, the ability to learn new languages effectively is vital for fostering global communication (Warschauer, 2020), cultural empathy, and equitable access to education. Within this broader educational landscape, Arabic has gained prominence as a global language; however, non-native learners often encounter persistent challenges that hinder their progress. Conventional Arabic language learning tools frequently rely on rote memorization (Jones & Lee, 2018; Hassan & Youssef, 2019), decontextualized drills, and outdated materials that fail to reflect authentic cultural contexts or promote meaningful learner engagement (Jones & Lee, 2018; Hassan & Youssef, 2019). This disconnect limits vocabulary retention, reduces motivation, and contributes to uneven learning outcomes (Smith, 2020) across diverse learner groups.

Simultaneously, Malaysia's rich indigenous oral traditions, particularly those of the Semai community remain largely absent from formal education systems. The neglect of Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020), as highlighted by Ali and Subri (2020), not only threatens the survival of this intangible cultural heritage but also represents a

missed opportunity to infuse language education with locally grounded, culturally resonant content. The dual challenges of ineffective Arabic language instruction and the underrepresentation of indigenous knowledge call for an innovative, inclusive solution.

QissahConnect responds to this need by integrating Arabic language acquisition with authentic Semai storytelling through a digital, audiobook-based learning platform. This innovation aims to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, enhance learner motivation and retention, and preserve valuable oral traditions. By situating language learning within meaningful cultural narratives, QissahConnect offers a model for more engaging, relevant, and sustainable education in a globalized era. Therefore, there is an urgent need for innovative solutions like QissahConnect, which not only integrate authentic cultural storytelling with modern technology but also preserves endangered Semai oral heritage while enhancing Arabic language proficiency in a relevant, motivating, and culturally respectful way.

The significance of this project lies in its dual impact: advancing inclusive language education while safeguarding indigenous heritage through a scalable, learner-centered digital innovation.

Research Objectives

RO1: To assess the effectiveness of QissahConnect in improving learners' vocabulary retention over time.

RO2: To evaluate learners' satisfaction with the QissahConnect digital storytelling experience.

RO3: To examine the impact of QissahConnect on learners' motivation levels throughout the learning period.

RO4 : To explore how integrating Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) into Arabic language learning influences learners' awareness and appreciation of indigenous cultural heritage.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the use of QissahConnect influence vocabulary retention from pre-intervention to four weeks after implementation?

RQ2: What are learners' satisfaction levels with QissahConnect, and which aspects of the program contribute most to their satisfaction?

RQ3: How does learner motivation change over the four-week use of QissahConnect, and what factors support sustained engagement?

RQ 4 : How does exposure to Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) through QissahConnect affect learners' understanding and appreciation of Semai indigenous culture?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design (Burston, 2015; Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013) to evaluate the effectiveness of QissahConnect. A total of 40 non-native Arabic learners (aged 18–22) from Universiti Teknologi MARA and University Sains Islam Malaysia participated. Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Brown & Smith, 2021), as they were enrolled in beginner-level Arabic proficiency courses and had limited exposure to indigenous cultural content.

The intervention lasted four weeks and comprised narrated Semai folktale audiobooks, interactive vocabulary tasks, and reflective journals. Data collection included:

- Pre- and post-tests of vocabulary retention (30-item multiple-choice test, reliability $\alpha = .82$).

- Motivation Surveys Adapted from the Language Learning Orientation Scale (Noels Et Al., 2000), Administered Weekly.

- Satisfaction Questionnaire (10 Likert-Scale Items, A = .87).

- Reflective Journals and Focus Group Interviews, Thematically Coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006) Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) Framework.
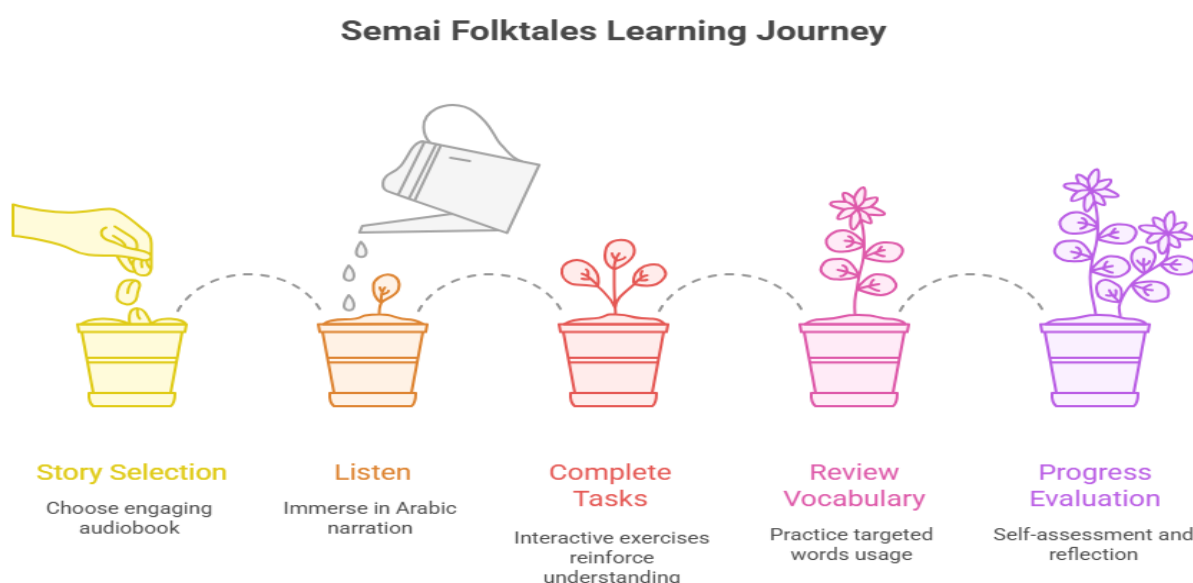
Quantitative Data Were Analysed Using Paired-Sample T-Tests and Repeated-Measures Anova to Measure Vocabulary Retention and Motivation Changes. Qualitative Responses Were Coded Inductively, And Themes Were Validated Through Peer Debriefing. This Approach Provided Triangulated Evidence of Qissahconnect's Pedagogical Effectiveness While Capturing Learner Experiences in Depth.

Product Description

QissahConnect: Semai Stories in Arabic is an innovative digital storytelling platform designed to enhance Arabic language learning through culturally authentic Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020). The product features professionally narrated audio stories enriched with targeted Arabic vocabulary, interactive comprehension tasks, and visual elements that create an immersive, engaging experience. Learners can access the content flexibly on mobile devices and computers, making it suitable for classrooms, self-paced study, or remote learning environments. QissahConnect goes beyond traditional language tools by fostering cultural appreciation, building empathy, and sustaining learner motivation.

User Journey Flow Diagram

Figure 1 : Audiobook Learning Cycle

Semai Folktales Learning Journey

Story Selection	Listen	Complete Tasks	Review Vocabulary	Progress Evaluation
Choose engaging audiobook	Immerse in Arabic narration	Interactive exercises reinforce understanding	Practice targeted words usage	Self-assessment and reflection

This diagram illustrates the five-step process learners follow when using QissahConnect to improve their Arabic language skills through digital storytelling:

- **Select Story**: This step allows learners to pick a story that interests them, fostering a sense of ownership and curiosity.
- **Listen to Audiobook**: Learners immerse themselves in the story by listening to professional narration in Arabic. This step strengthens listening comprehension and introduces authentic language in context.
- **Complete Tasks**: After listening, learners engage in interactive exercises designed to reinforce understanding. These tasks may include quizzes, matching activities, or comprehension questions related to the story.
- **Review Vocabulary**: Learners revisit and practice targeted vocabulary from the audiobook. This step helps reinforce the meaning and correct usage of new words, supporting long-term retention.

- **Reflection & Assessment**: Finally, learners evaluate their progress through self-assessment and reflection. They consider what they learned, identify areas for improvement, and set goals for future learning.

This cycle creates a continuous, engaging learning loop that blends listening, active practice, and self-reflection. It ensures that learners not only understand the story content but also retain vocabulary and develop greater cultural awareness (Cummins & Early, 2011) and confidence in using Arabic.

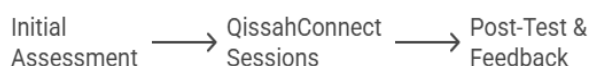**Learning Model Schematic**

Figure 2 : Qissah Connect Learning Model
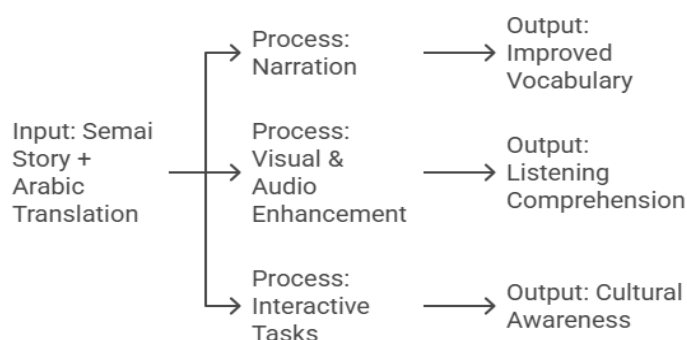
Intervention and Evaluation Flow Diagram

Figure 3 : Intervention and Evaluation Flow Findings and Commercialisation
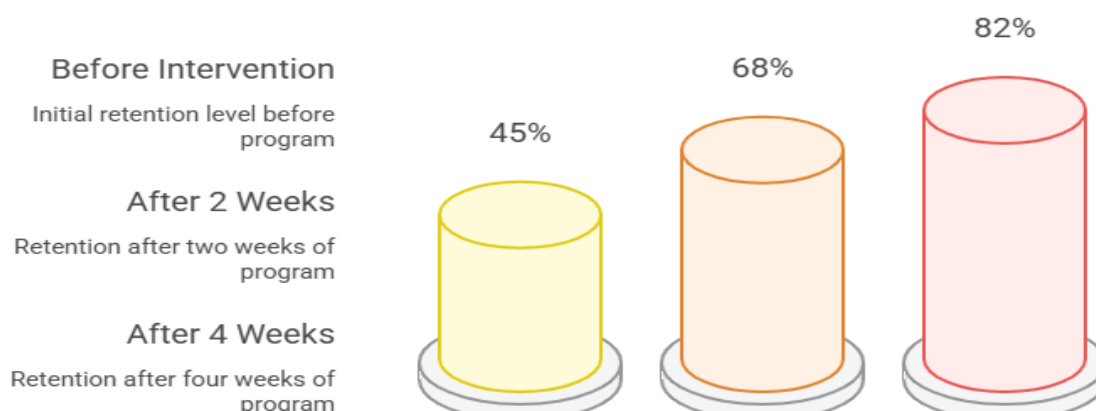

Research Question 1 - How does the use of QissahConnect influence vocabulary retention from pre-intervention to four weeks after implementation?

Figure 4 : Vocabulary Retention over time

The chart illustrates the progression of learners' vocabulary retention throughout their participation in the QissahConnect program.

Before Intervention:

Learners started with an initial vocabulary retention level of 45%, indicating that less than half of the target words were recalled accurately before using the program.

After 2 Weeks: Following two weeks of engaging with QissahConnect's digital storytelling and interactive activities, vocabulary retention improved (Burston, 2015; Lee, 2019) significantly to 68%. This increase shows early positive effects of the program on learners' memory and understanding of new words.

After 4 Weeks: By the end of four weeks, retention rose further to 82%. This result demonstrates that continued exposure and repeated practice through the platform led to sustained vocabulary acquisition over time.

Overall, the findings clearly indicate that QissahConnect effectively enhances vocabulary retention. The consistent improvement—rising from 45% to 82%—suggests that integrating culturally relevant storytelling and multimedia learning can substantially strengthen language outcomes. These results support the value of using innovative, culturally rooted educational technology to boost learner engagement and achievement.

Research Question 2 - What are learners' satisfaction levels with QissahConnect, and which aspects of the program contribute most to their satisfaction?

Figure 5: Learner Satisfaction Ratings
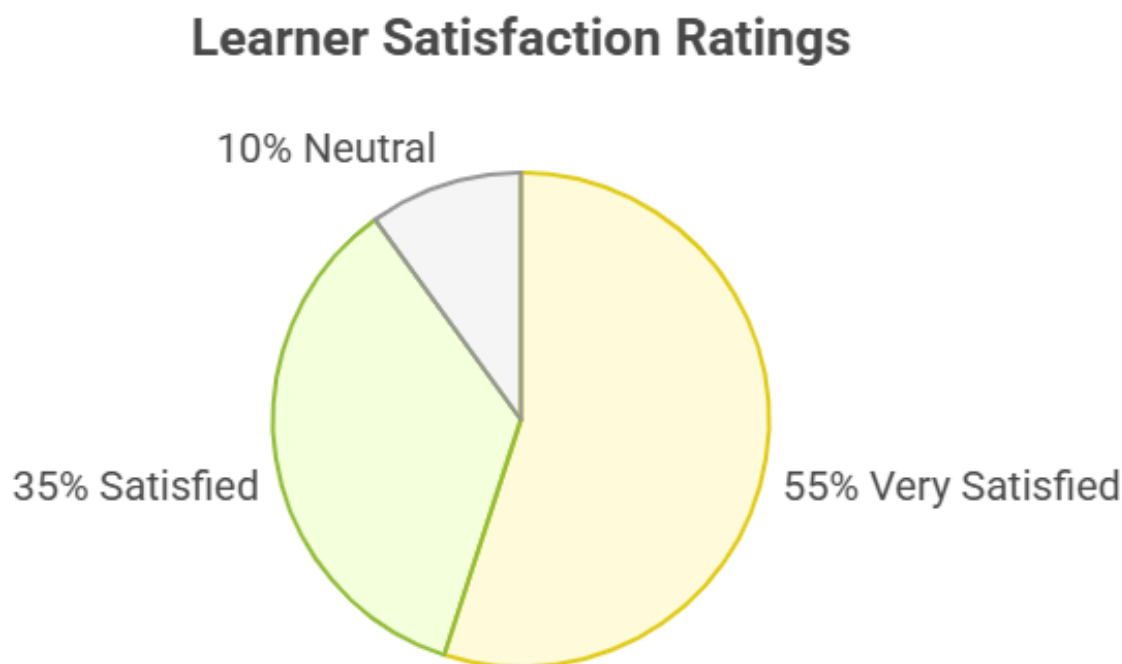
The chart displays learners' satisfaction levels after using the QissahConnect program:

The overall results demonstrate a strong positive reception of QissahConnect. With 90% of learners expressing satisfaction or high satisfaction, the data suggests the platform successfully engaged participants, supported their learning, and met its educational objectives. These findings validate the program's effectiveness in delivering culturally relevant, motivating Arabic language instruction.

Research Question 3 - How does learner motivation change over the four-week use of QissahConnect, and what factors support sustained engagement?

Figure 6 : Motivation Level Over 4 weeks
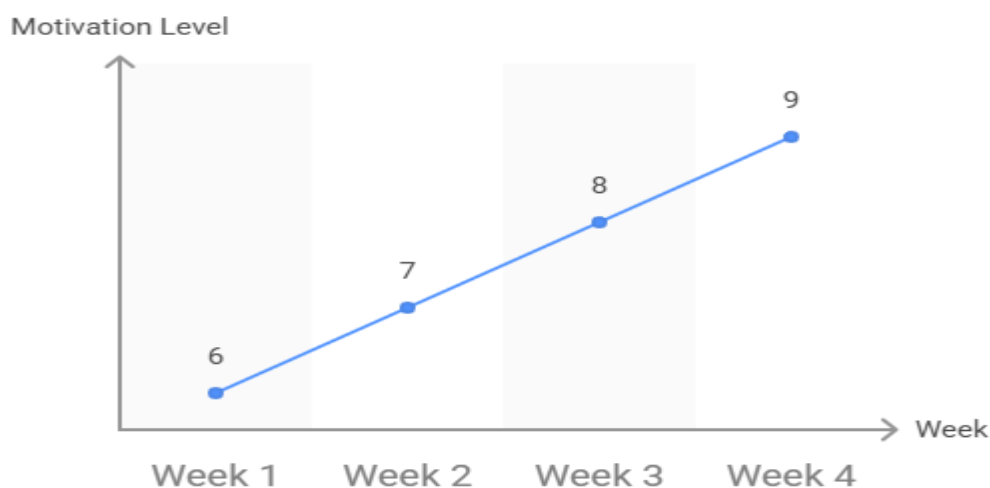
Motivation Level Over Four Weeks

This upward trend demonstrates that QissahConnect effectively maintained and boosted learners' motivation over time. The steady increase from a moderate level (6) to a very high level (9) suggests that combining cultural storytelling with interactive digital learning helped keep learners interested, invested, and eager to continue studying Arabic.

Research Question 4 - How does exposure to Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) influence learners' understanding and appreciation of indigenous culture?

Table 1: Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description	Sample Learner Quote
Theme 1: Increased Cultural Awareness	Learners reported that the stories introduced them to Semai customs and beliefs previously unknown to them, highlighting respect for nature and community values.	"I never knew how important the forest is to the Semai way of life until I heard these stories."
Theme 2: Personal Connection and Empathy	Participants felt a personal connection to the characters and situations, reflecting on their own cultural identity and building empathy towards Semai ancestors.	"These stories made me feel closer to the people who have been here for generations."
Theme 3: Motivation to Learn More	Exposure to authentic narratives sparked curiosity and motivated learners to explore indigenous heritage further, making Arabic learning feel more meaningful.	"This is the first time language learning felt like learning about real people, not just words."

Integrating Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) into Arabic language learning enriched learners' cultural understanding, built empathy, and increased motivation. Thematic analysis showed that authentic storytelling broadened knowledge of Semai traditions, encouraged reflection on identity, and made learning more meaningful and engaging. These outcomes align closely with previous research by Hassan and Youssef (2019) and Ali and Subri (2020), which demonstrated that culturally integrated, multimedia storytelling strengthens language skills, promotes intercultural respect, and fosters positive attitudes toward learning. The findings confirm that

combining heritage content with modern technology is an effective strategy to create inclusive, impactful educational experiences.

Commercialisation Potential

Beyond its pedagogical value, QissahConnect demonstrates potential for scalable adoption. Preliminary discussions with educators indicated willingness to integrate the platform if costs remain comparable to existing e-learning subscriptions. A feasible model could include:

- Institutional licences (RM3–5 per learner per month),
- Mobile app subscription plans (freemium model with RM10 monthly premium features), and
- Partnerships with NGOs and cultural organisations for subsidised access in rural areas.

Compared to conventional Arabic learning apps, QissahConnect differentiates itself by embedding indigenous cultural heritage into language education, aligning with SDGs and CSR priorities. A pilot cost-benefit study is recommended to validate market readiness.

QissahConnect offers strong potential for commercialisation as an innovative, scalable educational product. Its digital format ensures cost-effectiveness, ease of distribution, and broad accessibility for diverse user groups. The platform can be developed and marketed through multiple channels:

- Mobile Learning Application:

QissahConnect can be offered as a subscription-based mobile app compatible with Android and iOS devices. This format allows learners to access audiobooks, interactive exercises, and reflection tools anytime and anywhere, supporting self-paced study and lifelong learning.

- E-Learning Package for Institutions:

The product can be licensed to schools, universities, and language centres as part of their Arabic curriculum. Educators can integrate QissahConnect into classroom activities, blended learning environments, and remote instruction to enrich traditional materials with culturally meaningful content.

- Audiobook Subscription Series:

QissahConnect can be distributed as a stand-alone audiobook series with accompanying workbooks and vocabulary guides. Institutions and individuals can purchase subscriptions to receive new folktale modules periodically.

- Corporate and NGO Partnerships:

Partnerships with educational NGOs, cultural organizations, and corporate sponsors can expand QissahConnect's reach to underserved communities, supporting corporate social responsibility initiatives focused on education and heritage preservation.

By leveraging these channels, QissahConnect is well-positioned to meet the growing demand for inclusive, engaging Arabic language learning resources. Its unique combination of cultural content and technology differentiates it in the market and creates opportunities for sustainable commercial success.

LIMITATIONS

This study is constrained by its short intervention period (four weeks), which limits conclusions about long-term vocabulary retention and sustained motivation. The sample size was also modest and drawn from a specific learner group, reducing generalisability. Additionally, the cultural specificity of Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) may limit direct transferability to other contexts. However, these limitations also highlight future research

opportunities, particularly for longitudinal studies, cross-institutional trials, and adaptations across different indigenous narratives.

Future Research

Future Research Directions

Building on the current findings, future studies should:

- Conduct Longitudinal Assessments to Measure Retention Over 6–12 Months.
- Expand Content Libraries to Include Folktales from Other Indigenous Malaysian Groups, Testing Adaptability and Inclusivity.
- Examine Cross-Cultural Applicability, Using Qissahconnect with Learners in Other Countries Studying Arabic.
- Evaluate Teacher Training Integration, Equipping Instructors with Resources to Scaffold Storytelling-Based Lessons.
- Perform Cost–Effectiveness Analyses to Assess Sustainable Scalability for Institutions.

NOVELTY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

QissahConnect is the first known digital platform to integrate authentic Semai folktales (Ali & Subri, 2020) with Arabic language learning through an immersive audiobook format. Unlike traditional materials, it combines professional narration, interactive comprehension tasks, and culturally rich storytelling to deliver a multi-sensory, learner-centered experience (Hassan & Youssef, 2019). Its unique contribution lies in its dual impact: improving language proficiency and motivation (Ali & Mohamed, 2021), while preserving Malaysia's intangible Semai heritage (Ali & Subri, 2020). This culturally responsive approach addresses a critical gap in Arabic education by offering authentic and empathetic learning experiences that foster intercultural understanding (Jones & Lee, 2018).

The recommendations for further enhancing QissahConnect focus on deepening its educational impact and broadening its reach. These include expanding the content libraries by incorporating additional Semai and other indigenous Malaysian folktales to enrich cultural exposure and learner engagement (Ali & Subri, 2020). It is also recommended to integrate teacher training resources to support educators in effectively embedding the platform within their language instruction, thereby maximizing learning outcomes (Brown & Smith, 2021). To sustain long-term motivation, enhancing interactivity through the inclusion of gamified features, quizzes, and discussion forums is advised (Hassan & Youssef, 2019). Lastly, conducting longitudinal studies is essential to evaluate the enduring effects of QissahConnect on vocabulary retention, cultural knowledge, and learners' attitudes toward intercultural understanding (Lee, 2019).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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