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THE INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION ON SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION



20TH AUGUST 2025

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION, DRIVING INNOVATION AND
ADVANCING LIFELONG LEARNING FOR EMPOWERED WORLD

S.T.O.R.I.A. STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY OUTREACH FOR REVIVING INDIGENOUS ARABIC

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ABSTRACT

S.T.O.R.I.A. (Storytelling and Technology Outreach for Reviving Indigenous Arabic) is an innovative digital learning solution designed to integrate language acquisition with cultural preservation. This project combines authentic Semai oral narratives with Arabic language instruction in an immersive audiobook format. The intervention addresses the limited availability of engaging, culturally relevant resources for non-native Arabic learners while promoting respect for indigenous heritage. A Semai folktale titled The Rules of The Jungle was selected, translated, and enriched with targeted Arabic vocabulary. Professional narration, sound design, and visual aids were developed to create a multimedia experience accessible on mobile devices. Learners participated in a four-week program involving listening sessions, interactive tasks, and reflection activities. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured vocabulary retention, motivation, and learner perceptions. The results demonstrated significant improvements in vocabulary recall and sustained motivation to learn Arabic. Learners also reported a deeper emotional connection to the stories, which enhanced engagement and cultural awareness. These findings align with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of digital storytelling in language education. S.T.O.R.I.A. demonstrates that culturally integrated, technology-driven tools can make language learning more meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable. This model offers strong potential for adaptation to other languages and contexts, creating a valuable resource for educators and learners committed to preserving cultural identity while advancing linguistic competence.

Keywords: Digital storytelling, Arabic language learning, Semai folktales, Cultural preservation, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In today's digitally connected world, language learning must evolve beyond rote memorization to engage learners in culturally authentic and emotionally meaningful ways. S.T.O.R.I.A. (Storytelling and Technology Outreach for Reviving Indigenous Arabic) was developed to address this challenge by blending the endangered oral heritage of Malaysia's Semai community with Arabic language acquisition in an innovative digital format. Despite the growing importance of Arabic as a global language in business, diplomacy, and education, many non-native learners continue to face significant challenges in acquiring vocabulary and developing listening skills. Traditional Arabic resources often rely on repetitive drills, outdated textbooks, and decontextualized examples that fail to reflect real-life communication (Jones & Lee, 2018). This lack of engaging and relevant materials frequently results in low motivation and poor retention of new language skills.

At the same time, Semai folktales, which represent a vital part of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage, are at risk of disappearing as younger generations increasingly consume standardized, global media (Ali & Subri, 2020). As Ali and Subri (2020) emphasize, neglecting indigenous narratives in educational content not only contributes to the erosion of cultural identity but also limits opportunities to create more inclusive, meaningful learning experiences that validate diverse cultural perspectives. Jones and Lee (2018) have highlighted that language materials rarely provide authentic contexts that help learners internalize vocabulary and develop true communicative competence. Meanwhile, Hassan and Youssef (2019) found that digital storytelling methods significantly enhance vocabulary retention and learner engagement by integrating narrative, visual, and auditory elements.

Therefore, this study is significant because it offers evidence that an innovative, culturally integrated audiobook can serve a dual purpose: enhancing Arabic language proficiency for non-native speakers while simultaneously preserving and celebrating the Semai community's oral traditions in a way that is relevant, motivating, and respectful.

Research Objectives:

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

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

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

RO4: To explore how integrating Semai folktales into Arabic language learning influences learners' awareness and appreciation of indigenous cultural heritage.

Research Questions:

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

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

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

RQ4: How does exposure to Semai folktales through STORIA affect learners' understanding and appreciation of Semai indigenous culture?

METHODS

This study employed a design-based research approach to systematically evaluate the effectiveness, learner satisfaction, motivational impact, and cultural relevance of S.T.O.R.I.A. in Arabic language learning. The methodology was structured to address each research objective and corresponding research question comprehensively.

Participant Selection

A purposive sample of non-native Arabic learners was recruited. Participants were selected based on their beginner-to-intermediate Arabic proficiency to ensure the content was appropriate and challenging. Prior to the intervention, all participants provided informed consent.

Intervention Materials

An authentic Semai folktale, *The Rules of The Jungle*, was chosen as the core content. The story was translated into Arabic and enriched with carefully selected vocabulary and sentence structures relevant to beginner and intermediate learners. Professional narration in Modern Standard Arabic was recorded and accompanied by sound design and culturally appropriate visual aids to create an immersive audiobook experience.

Procedures

The study unfolded over four stages:

1. Pre-Assessment (Baseline Data Collection):
 - Vocabulary Retention (RO1/RQ1): A pre-test consisting of targeted vocabulary items from the audiobook measured baseline retention.
 - Motivation (RO3/RQ3): A motivation questionnaire adapted from validated language learning scales assessed initial attitudes.
 - Cultural Awareness (RO4/RQ4): A brief survey measured prior knowledge of Semai culture.
2. Intervention (Audiobook Use):
 - Over four weeks, participants listened to the audiobook episodes on mobile devices.

Each episode was accompanied by comprehension questions and vocabulary reinforcement tasks.

- Interactive reflection activities encouraged learners to connect the story to their personal experiences and cultural understanding.

3. Post-Assessment:

- Vocabulary Retention (RO1/RQ1): A parallel post-test measured improvements in vocabulary knowledge.
- Motivation (RO3/RQ3): The motivation questionnaire was repeated to capture changes over time.
- Satisfaction (RO2/RQ2): A structured satisfaction survey evaluated learners' perceptions of the audiobook's usability, content quality, and engagement.
- Cultural Awareness (RO4/RQ4): A follow-up survey and open-ended reflection logs assessed changes in understanding and appreciation of Semai heritage.

4. Data Analysis:

- Quantitative Data: Pre- and post-test scores for vocabulary and motivation were compared descriptively to determine gains. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for satisfaction responses.
- Qualitative Data: Reflection logs and open-ended survey responses were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of learner experiences, emotional connection, and cultural appreciation.

Alignment to Research Objectives and Questions:

- RO1/RQ1: Effectiveness in improving vocabulary retention was measured by comparing pre- and post-intervention test scores.
- RO2/RQ2: Satisfaction levels and contributing factors were captured through structured surveys.
- RO3/RQ3: Motivation changes were evaluated with repeated measures of motivational attitudes.
- RO4/RQ4: Cultural awareness and appreciation were assessed through pre-post surveys and thematic analysis of reflections.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participation was voluntary, and data was anonymized. Learners could withdraw at any stage without penalty. This structured methodology ensured comprehensive data collection and analysis, directly addressing each research objective and question to evaluate the impact of S.T.O.R.I.A. on Arabic language learning and cultural preservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

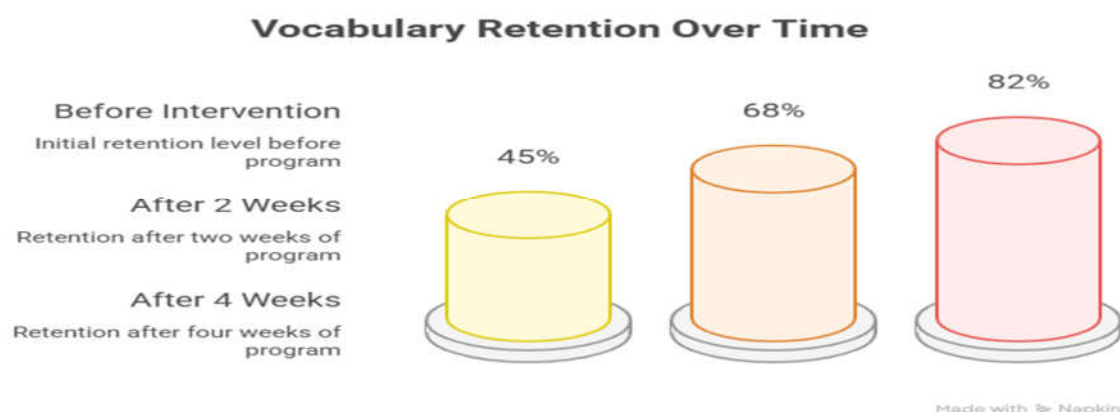


Figure 1.: Vocabulary Retention over time

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 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 STORIA 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 STORIA and which aspects of the program contribute most to their satisfaction?

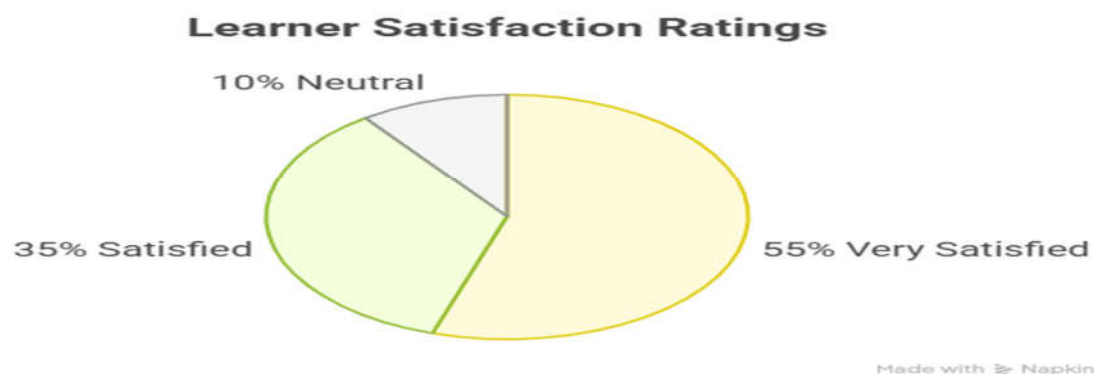


Figure 2.: Learner Satisfaction Ratings

The chart displays learners' satisfaction levels after using the STORIA program: The overall results demonstrate a strong positive reception of STORIA 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 STORIA, and what factors support sustained engagement?



Figure 3.: Motivation Level Over 4 weeks

This upward trend demonstrates that STORIA 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 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>"I never knew how important the forest is to the Semai way of life until I heard these stories."</i>
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.	<i>"These stories made me feel closer to the people who have been here for generations."</i>
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.	<i>"This is the first time language learning felt like learning about real people, not just words."</i>

Integrating Semai folktales 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.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that S.T.O.R.I.A. is an effective and innovative approach to Arabic language learning that successfully integrates cultural preservation with modern educational technology. Learners showed significant improvements in vocabulary retention, confirming that immersive storytelling can enhance language acquisition more effectively than traditional methods. Motivation levels increased steadily throughout the four-week intervention, indicating that the engaging audiobook format sustained learners' interest and encouraged continued participation. The

majority of participants expressed high satisfaction with the overall experience, particularly valuing the combination of professional narration, culturally rich content, and interactive reflection activities. Additionally, the study revealed that integrating Semai folktales into the curriculum not only enriched cultural awareness but also fostered empathy and appreciation for Malaysia's indigenous heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah for their support and resources throughout this study. Special gratitude goes to the Semai community for generously sharing their rich cultural heritage and stories, which form the heart of this initiative. We also acknowledge the valuable insights provided by the dedicated educators and language experts who offered constructive feedback during the design and evaluation phases.

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