



Reframing Arabic Reading Instruction: The Role of Digital Comics in Fostering Deeper Textual Understanding

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

Background of study: Many learners still encounter challenges in reading Arabic texts, often caused by limited vocabulary, low engagement, and instructional strategies that fail to connect with students' context and interests.

Aims and scope of paper: This research seeks to examine how digital comics can function as an alternative learning medium to support the development of maharah qirā'ah by integrating visual narratives with textual elements.

Methods: Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study relies on literature-based data and content analysis of Arabic-themed digital comics. Sources include previous studies, theoretical frameworks, and instructional media evaluations.

Result: The findings suggest that digital comics contribute positively to student motivation and comprehension. The visual-verbal combination not only helps learners grasp meaning more effectively but also stimulates emotional and cognitive engagement. The comics' narrative structure also supports moral and cultural literacy in a familiar, student-centered format.

Conclusion: Integrating digital comics into Arabic reading lessons provides both pedagogical and affective benefits. Their alignment with multimedia learning theory highlights their potential to enhance not just understanding, but also the overall reading experience in a more dynamic and relevant way.

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INTRODUCTION

Mastering reading skills in Arabic, known as maharah qirā'ah, continues to present challenges for learners, especially in non-Arabic-speaking countries. Students frequently face difficulties due to limited vocabulary, low motivation, and exposure to texts that feel irrelevant to their daily lives. Traditional instruction often relies on mechanical drills and passive reading, which do not support meaningful engagement (Conrad et al., 2024; Khezrlou, 2023). These outdated approaches fail to foster contextual understanding, leaving students disconnected from the purpose of reading in Arabic. As a result, learners tend to memorize rather than internalize language structures. This leads to shallow comprehension and weak transfer of skills across different texts. The absence of engaging media contributes further to the gap between learner needs and the instructional materials provided (Baceviciute et al., 2021). To overcome this, educators must design more adaptive and responsive learning tools that resonate with student interests. Such efforts are crucial to restoring motivation and improving comprehension in Arabic reading classes.

Digital technology offers promising opportunities to reshape language instruction, especially for the visually-oriented digital generation. Students are already immersed in visual and multimedia content through social media and entertainment platforms. However, Arabic reading classrooms remain largely static, relying on long texts without sufficient visual support. This mismatch can

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hinder student motivation and comprehension (Keelor et al., 2023; Turčáni et al., 2024). Integrating visual media into instruction, when done with purpose, can bridge this disconnect. Among the most effective forms of visual storytelling is digital comics, which combine narrative, dialogue, and illustration (Rutta et al., 2021). Comics offer both enjoyment and educational value by presenting language in a contextualized and emotionally engaging manner. Their structure can help students better follow the storyline and understand grammar without conscious translation. In this way, comics fulfill both linguistic and motivational functions in the classroom.

Research in multimedia learning supports the integration of comics in language instruction. Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning explains that students absorb information more effectively when it is presented through both verbal and visual channels. This theory is particularly relevant for Arabic learners, who often struggle with grammar and word meaning when relying on text alone. Visual cues in comics can support meaning construction and improve recall (Golding & Verrier, 2021; Walsh et al., 2021). Students are able to infer vocabulary from context, rather than rote memorization. Additionally, comics often reflect natural language through dialogue and familiar scenes. This makes them useful for introducing real-life expressions and sentence structures in Arabic (Al, 2021; Mizan et al., 2023). When compared to traditional textbooks, comics offer more accessible and engaging input. As a result, comics align with both cognitive science and learner-centered pedagogy.

Despite these strengths, comics are still rarely used in Arabic reading classrooms. Many curricula focus on grammatical drills and reading comprehension tasks with little visual support. Even when visual media are introduced, they are often supplementary rather than central to instruction. One reason is the lack of Arabic digital comics that are both pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate (Al-Abdullatif, 2022). Most available resources are either entertainment-oriented or linguistically too advanced for learners. This limits teachers' ability to integrate comics into structured reading activities. Students thus miss the opportunity to engage with language through visual narratives. Bridging this gap requires the design of comics tailored for Arabic instruction and aligned with students' learning needs. Without such materials, innovations in Arabic literacy remain constrained.

Students who struggle with traditional text often show greater enthusiasm when presented with visual storytelling. Comics, by nature, simplify complex grammatical constructions through illustration and dialogue (Cop & Large, 2023; Gahman, 2021). A simple comic about daily life, for example, can illustrate verb conjugation and sentence flow in a way that is easy to grasp. When language is paired with relatable visuals, students are more likely to stay focused and retain the information. This reduces the intimidation and anxiety commonly associated with reading Arabic. Furthermore, comics provide emotional connection to characters and stories, which supports long-term engagement. They shift the perception of reading from a chore to a meaningful experience (Rapaport et al., 2024; Webber et al., 2024). These psychological and affective benefits are critical for sustained learning. Comics, therefore, serve not only linguistic but also motivational functions in Arabic education.

Digital comics also offer significant practical benefits. They are accessible via smartphones and laptops, making them suitable for both classroom and at-home learning. This flexibility supports blended and distance learning models that are increasingly common. Teachers can select or create comics based on themes, grammar points, or vocabulary targets (Rizcallah & Parlak, 2025). Moreover, comics can be adapted to different learning levels, allowing for differentiation within the same class. Interactive features such as clickable translations or embedded audio further support comprehension. Students can engage with texts at their own pace, revisit difficult sections, or explore culturally embedded meanings. Compared to printed texts, digital comics are more dynamic and

customizable. These features make them ideal for modern language instruction (Kumar & Dhar, 2024; Tekin & İlhan, 2025).

Beyond practical use, comics serve as a powerful medium for cultural and moral instruction. Arabic texts often aim to convey ethical messages alongside linguistic content. Comics can depict themes such as honesty, cooperation, and kindness through familiar and relatable characters. This allows students to engage with values in a narrative context, which enhances both understanding and emotional resonance (Reyes & Villanueva, 2024; Rühlemann, 2022). Furthermore, comics can showcase cultural elements, clothing, settings, rituals, that deepen learners' appreciation of Arabic life. This cultural immersion is difficult to achieve through text alone. Comics also foster empathy, as students follow character journeys and conflicts (Chandra & Jin, 2023; Cook & Chisholm, 2025). Language learning becomes a medium for understanding perspectives, not just structures. Such integration of content and context is essential in 21st-century language education.

Given the cognitive, affective, and cultural advantages discussed, digital comics hold strong potential in the teaching of *maharah qirā'ah*. They promote comprehension by combining visual and textual information in a learner-friendly format (Kang & Chen, 2025a). By reducing cognitive overload and enhancing engagement, they address common challenges in Arabic reading instruction. Their adaptability also makes them suitable across different learning contexts and student backgrounds. Additionally, comics can function as both instructional content and assessment tools through tasks like retelling or interpretation (Kang & Chen, 2025b). When aligned with multimedia theory and Arabic language pedagogy, comics represent a strategic innovation. However, successful integration requires teacher training and the development of quality materials. With thoughtful implementation, comics can bridge the gap between traditional instruction and modern learner needs. In doing so, they may also rekindle students' interest in reading Arabic meaningfully.

The integration of multimedia principles into language education has been widely explored through various research. Twabu (2025) emphasized how AI insights can complement multimedia learning frameworks to reduce cognitive overload. Similarly, Ozcelik (2025) demonstrated that multimedia content engages different areas of the brain, improving reading comprehension. Studies Lee & Shin (2025) and Aghasafari et al. (2025) highlighted the effectiveness of visual learning tools in enhancing both motivation and cognitive clarity, particularly among diverse learners. In Arabic instruction, where traditional methods often fall short, the use of narrative visuals can be transformative. Weinberg et al. (2025) found that interactivity combined with cognitive disequilibrium helped students stay engaged with complex learning material. From an instructional design perspective, Mohammad Basir et al. (2025) utilized the ADDIE framework to show how structured multimedia modules improve learner outcomes. On the cultural and emotional side, Lavoye & Kumar (2025) showed that immersive visuals foster meaningful learner connection, something Arabic comics can support. Taleby Ahvanooy et al. (2025) emphasized that trust and relatability are key in designing effective digital materials, especially in environments where motivation is low. Meanwhile, Wyssenbach et al. (2025) demonstrated that visual segmentation, like comic panels, can aid in information retention. Supporting this, Juřík et al. (2025) revealed that learners focus better when content flows in structured visual sequences. Altogether, these studies provide a strong foundation for using digital comics in Arabic reading instruction, both to enhance comprehension and to build a more engaging and student-centered learning environment.

In an era where digital media dominates how learners consume content, classroom practices, especially in Arabic reading instruction, have not kept pace. Students often encounter texts that feel abstract, outdated, or disconnected from their everyday lives, which contributes to low motivation and shallow comprehension. While the field of educational technology has advanced significantly, innovations like digital comics are still rarely used in teaching *maharah qirā'ah*. Comics, by combining visuals and words, offer more than entertainment; they provide a structured, contextual, and

emotionally engaging environment for language learning. Cognitive theories such as Mayer's multimedia learning framework validate this approach by emphasizing how learning improves when information is processed through both imagery and text. When narratives in Arabic comics are designed with cultural and linguistic relevance, they have the potential to foster deeper connections and lasting understanding. Therefore, using digital comics in this context is not merely a novelty—it reflects a pedagogical response to evolving student needs and learning preferences.

Although multimedia tools have been widely studied in general education, their role in Arabic reading instruction remains underrepresented. Prior research tends to focus on vocabulary acquisition, gamification, or digital storytelling in early literacy, leaving a notable absence in studies that examine how comics support structured reading in Arabic. Moreover, most available Arabic comics are created for entertainment, lacking alignment with educational goals or curriculum design. Studies that do explore comics often ignore the specific linguistic features of Arabic—such as morphology, syntax, or rhetorical patterns—which are essential to *maharah qirā'ah*. Few researchers have looked into how digital comics can reflect Islamic values, Arab social contexts, or classical-modern language variations. As a result, there is insufficient evidence on how comics can be adapted to meet the needs of Arabic learners, especially at the secondary or higher education levels. This gap opens space for studies that not only validate the use of comics pedagogically, but also localize them meaningfully for Arabic literacy contexts.

This study is intended to explore how digital comics may serve as an effective tool to improve students' skills in Arabic reading comprehension. More specifically, it aims to investigate whether visual narratives can enhance understanding of vocabulary, sentence structure, and textual meaning within culturally relevant stories. The study will also examine how digital comics correspond with principles of multimedia learning and whether they can bridge the gap between learner interest and curriculum objectives. Drawing on existing literature and theory, the research will present a descriptive and analytical perspective on how Arabic digital comics can be both designed and used in educational settings. Ultimately, the study seeks to offer insights for Arabic language instructors seeking to modernize their reading pedagogy without abandoning cultural and linguistic authenticity.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, aimed at examining how digital comics can function as an alternative instructional medium in Arabic reading classes. Instead of conducting field experiments, the research relies on reviewing and interpreting literature, digital comic content, and relevant theoretical frameworks. This design allows for a flexible exploration of the educational dimensions of digital comics—particularly their alignment with multimedia learning theory and Arabic literacy principles. The qualitative lens also makes it possible to explore subtle pedagogical elements that may not emerge through quantitative methods.

Participants

As the study is based on document analysis and media review, no direct human participants were involved in the data collection process. However, the study is contextually oriented toward learners of Arabic at the secondary and early tertiary education levels, particularly those in Islamic educational settings such as madrasah or university-level Arabic programs. The choice of comic samples and literature sources was guided by the linguistic challenges commonly faced by students in these environments, especially in understanding Arabic text structures and vocabulary in context.

Instrument

The primary tool for data collection was document analysis, which included journal articles, instructional design frameworks, and samples of Arabic-language digital comics. The selection

process focused on materials that specifically discussed multimedia learning, reading comprehension, and Arabic language pedagogy. A thematic coding system was used to identify key elements such as visual-text coherence, narrative structure, integration of moral and cultural content, and the use of language forms suitable for learners. This allowed the study to compare multiple sources meaningfully and consistently.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through a content analysis process. Each selected source was examined for recurring ideas, instructional relevance, and conceptual fit with the research focus. The analysis was carried out systematically by categorizing findings into themes such as student engagement, contextual language use, and multimodal learning advantages. Special attention was given to how visual narratives help reinforce vocabulary and sentence-level understanding in Arabic reading. The results were synthesized into a conceptual framework that illustrates the potential role of digital comics in enriching maharah qirā'ah instruction in a way that is both pedagogically sound and contextually grounded.



Figure 1. Flowchart of the Research Procedure: Integrating Digital Comics into Arabic Reading Instruction (Maharah Qirā'ah)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study identified several key aspects of how digital comics contribute to Arabic reading instruction (maharah qirā'ah). One of the most consistent findings is that combining visuals with text helps learners understand vocabulary and sentence patterns more easily. Rather than decoding meaning from words alone, students benefit from contextual illustrations that guide their comprehension. This visual support appears particularly helpful for beginners who often struggle with abstract grammar or unfamiliar vocabulary. Another pattern observed is the sequential nature of comics, which breaks down information into manageable parts. Each panel presents a small chunk of language, allowing students to follow the story at their own pace. This structure aligns with multimedia learning principles that emphasize cognitive efficiency when information is presented gradually. Students are less likely to feel overwhelmed and more likely to engage with the material meaningfully. Digital comics also promote stronger emotional and motivational responses compared

to traditional Arabic reading texts. Stories that include characters, conflicts, and relatable experiences help learners connect with the material. The visual storytelling format not only enhances memory but also increases willingness to read. Many of the comics analyzed contain themes such as honesty, respect, and family life—values that resonate with students and reinforce cultural understanding. While the overall findings are positive, the study also reveals gaps in available Arabic digital comics tailored for education. Most existing comics are designed for entertainment and lack linguistic adaptation for classroom use. This limits their effectiveness unless educators selectively adapt the content or develop materials in collaboration with designers. It also underscores the need for comics that reflect curriculum goals and local language contexts more directly.

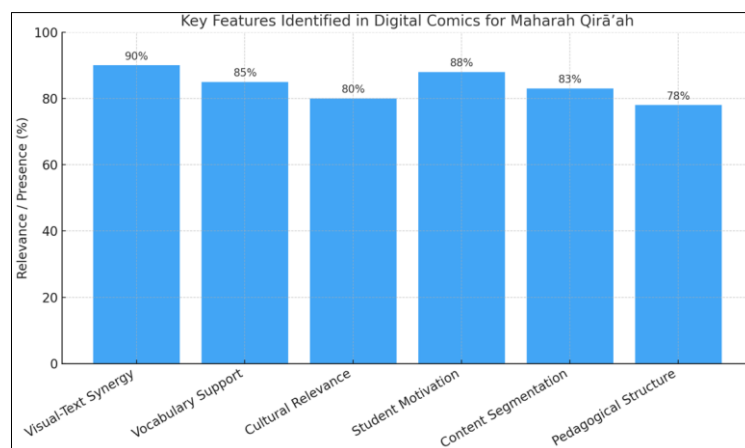


Figure 2. Key Features Identified in Digital Comics for Maharah Qirā'ah

The chart above highlights six major strengths found in the digital comics reviewed. Visual-text synergy and vocabulary support were especially prominent, helping learners connect images to meaning. Cultural relevance and motivation were also strong, showing that learners are more engaged when stories reflect familiar values. The structured layout and instructional design within comics further support step-by-step comprehension in Arabic reading.

Discussion

The use of digital comics in Arabic reading instruction has introduced new possibilities for how learners interact with text. Unlike conventional materials that rely on dense language, comics segment information into manageable visual panels. Each panel delivers meaning through both dialogue and imagery, making comprehension more intuitive. This aligns with Mayer's theory of multimedia learning, which suggests that learners benefit from visual-verbal integration. Similar conclusions were drawn by Twabu (2025) and Ozcelik (2025), who showed that combining modes of input reduces cognitive overload. In Arabic classrooms, this dual-channel input is especially helpful for decoding complex grammar and sentence structures. Comics guide learners through stories using visuals as anchors, lowering the mental effort required to understand formal Arabic. These insights support the idea that comics are more than supplementary—they are instructional tools.

Emotional engagement was another strong outcome supported by this study. Learners often find Arabic reading difficult, especially when content is abstract or detached from real-life experiences. Comics, however, introduce characters and contexts students can relate to, which fosters emotional connection. According to Weinberg et al. (2025) and Lavoye & Kumar (2025), emotional relevance in educational media increases student attention and memory retention. In the context of maharah qirā'ah, this helps students internalize vocabulary and ideas without the pressure of formal text. Stories about school life, family dynamics, or moral dilemmas make reading feel purposeful. These affective benefits not only make reading more enjoyable but also more effective.

As students become emotionally involved in what they read, they are more likely to continue exploring language independently.

This study also highlights how comics contribute to cultural and moral learning. Arabic comics often embed Islamic values or ethical situations within their narratives, allowing learners to absorb language and social norms simultaneously. This dual function strengthens both linguistic comprehension and cultural competence. Aghasafari et al. (2025) and Mohammad Basir et al. (2025) note that instructional materials which reflect students' moral frameworks enhance learning outcomes and classroom harmony. Instead of explicitly teaching values, comics allow students to observe and interpret them through character choices. This method is not only effective but also respectful of learners' cultural identities. When language learning is embedded in context, students retain more meaning and develop empathy. This reinforces the broader educational role of *maharah qirā'ah* beyond grammar and vocabulary alone.

Instructionally, comics serve as highly adaptable tools. Teachers can use them to introduce grammar points, facilitate vocabulary acquisition, or guide reading comprehension activities. As observed by Wyssenbach et al. (2025) and Juřík et al. (2025), segmented and visually guided input helps learners stay focused and reduces the load on working memory. In Arabic classrooms, this approach can be especially helpful for introducing challenging structures like nominal sentences or derived forms. Furthermore, comics support differentiation—students at various proficiency levels can engage with the same material through layered understanding. Teachers can tailor tasks according to learner ability, whether it involves interpreting dialogue or analyzing moral themes. This makes comics a flexible medium that supports inclusive education. Their structure mirrors the principles of scaffolding in modern pedagogy.

Yet, despite their promise, Arabic educational comics remain underdeveloped. Most available comics are created for entertainment and are not aligned with language curriculum or learner needs. Taleby Ahvanooy et al. (2025) argue that digital content must be trustworthy and well-targeted to be effective, especially in educational contexts. The lack of alignment requires teachers to curate and sometimes revise content, which can be time-consuming. A collaborative effort between educators, designers, and linguists is necessary to produce comics that are pedagogically sound and culturally accurate. Language level, storyline design, and moral representation must all be tailored intentionally. Furthermore, unequal access to digital devices and infrastructure continues to be a barrier. Without institutional support, the reach of digital comics will remain limited.

From a technological standpoint, digital comics offer several clear advantages. They are accessible across devices, allowing for flexible learning both in and outside of school settings. Learners can navigate the content independently, revisit material at their own pace, and zoom in on sections that require closer attention. This kind of interaction promotes autonomy and encourages self-directed reading. Found that digital resources enhance learner agency and engagement, especially when designed for interaction. Teachers can also take advantage of digital platforms to assign, track, and modify reading tasks based on student performance. Comics may even be embedded with voice narration or simple quizzes to enhance comprehension. These features position digital comics as dynamic, learner-centered tools that go beyond static reading materials.

On the psychological level, comics offer students a sense of control and security in the learning process. Traditional Arabic texts can be intimidating, especially for beginners or students lacking strong foundational skills. Comics, with their informal tone and visual guidance, reduce the pressure to perform. showed that student engagement increases when instructional media lower affective barriers. Learners are more likely to take risks, ask questions, and engage in interpretation when the content feels accessible. As they build confidence, their language competence also improves. This sense of achievement fosters long-term interest in Arabic reading. By creating a low-stress learning

environment, comics encourage students to persist through challenges and develop resilience as language users.

Finally, the findings align with broader pedagogical shifts toward student-centered learning. Rather than passively receiving information, students are invited to interact, analyze, and even co-construct meaning. Comics naturally support this goal by embedding language within social and moral contexts familiar to students. This not only supports linguistic development but also critical thinking and collaborative learning. Students may reflect on character decisions, predict story outcomes, or even write their own comic episodes. Such activities transform reading from a solitary task into a creative process. When implemented well, comics can become a vehicle for both academic growth and personal development.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that digital comics can serve as a valuable instructional option for Arabic reading classes. Their combination of visuals and narrative offers students an alternative way to engage with texts, especially those who find traditional materials difficult to follow. Teachers may find comics useful not only for introducing vocabulary and grammar, but also for encouraging reading habits through familiar and engaging formats. Because many Arabic comics also carry cultural and moral messages, they can be used to reinforce character education alongside language instruction. This dual function makes comics particularly relevant for use in faith-based or values-oriented educational settings. For curriculum designers, the results imply a need to consider multimodal materials as part of the literacy toolkit. Integrating comics could help create more inclusive and motivating environments for learners with varying backgrounds and proficiencies. More broadly, this approach aligns well with current movements toward student-centered and culturally responsive teaching.

Limitations

While this study provides useful insights, several limitations should be considered. First, the research relied solely on secondary sources and content analysis, without conducting fieldwork or classroom-based trials. This limits the ability to assess how digital comics perform in real learning environments. Second, the selection of materials was based on availability and relevance, which may not reflect the full range of Arabic digital comics being used or developed. Third, because the study focused primarily on theoretical and conceptual analysis, it did not measure direct impacts on student outcomes such as reading speed, vocabulary growth, or motivation levels. Differences among students in terms of digital access, learning preferences, or regional variations in Arabic were also not explored in detail. These limitations mean that while the study opens new perspectives, it does not offer definitive claims about effectiveness. More empirical data is needed to confirm the practical value of digital comics in classroom settings. Nevertheless, the results provide a foundation for deeper investigation into this evolving area of instruction.

Suggestions

Future studies should consider testing digital comics in real classroom contexts using practical research methods such as classroom experiments, lesson observations, or learner interviews. Gathering feedback from students and teachers can help determine how comics affect engagement, comprehension, and retention. It would also be useful to compare the outcomes of comic-based instruction with those of traditional reading materials. Another suggestion is to design Arabic comics specifically for instructional use, ensuring alignment with learning objectives, language level, and cultural themes. Collaboration between educators, comic creators, and educational designers would be essential for this process. Exploring how students respond to interactive elements—such as voice narration, clickable text, or built-in assessments—may further expand the educational benefits of digital comics. In addition, providing training for teachers on how to use comics effectively in lessons

could help maximize their impact. These directions will allow the potential of comics in Arabic literacy development to be better understood and more widely implemented.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how digital comics can serve as a meaningful alternative to traditional materials in teaching Arabic reading skills. By presenting language in a visual and story-based format, comics help students better grasp vocabulary, sentence forms, and overall context without feeling overwhelmed. The engaging nature of comics encourages learners to interact with Arabic texts more confidently and willingly. Moreover, many comics incorporate themes that reflect students' everyday experiences and values, making the learning process more personal and relevant. These features support not only language acquisition but also the development of cultural and moral understanding. Still, the lack of comics created specifically for classroom use and the need for greater access to digital resources remain challenges. Addressing these gaps will be essential for educators aiming to use comics as part of a modern, student-focused approach to Arabic instruction. Overall, the findings suggest that comics, when used thoughtfully, can enrich Arabic literacy in ways that are both pedagogically effective and culturally responsive.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ahmad Fauzi contributed to the conceptualization of the study, formulation of the research problem, and drafting of the theoretical framework. He also led the synthesis of literature related to maharah qirā'ah and digital learning media.

Nisa Ulfi Jannah was responsible for gathering and analyzing the reference materials, conducting the content analysis of digital comic design, and assisting in drafting the methodology and results sections.

Shofil Fikri contributed to the validation of data, refinement of the discussion section, and final editing of the manuscript to ensure academic coherence and linguistic accuracy. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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