QFI and QCRI launch mobile app to increase knowledge of Arabic

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In an effort to make Arabic more accessible to those unfamiliar with the language, Qatar Foundation International (QFI) and Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) recently launched *Madar Al-Huruf*, a mobile application that introduces native English speakers to the Arabic alphabet.

The mobile application uses an interactive and innovatively-designed Arabic language wheel created by Moneera Al-Badi, a Qatari graphic designer and graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University – Qatar. Meaning "wheel of letters" in Arabic, *Madar Al-Huruf* is both a physical handheld and virtual wheel. It is user-friendly, designed to be rotatable on two sides and allows non-Arabic speakers to learn how to match English letters and sounds, such as their name, to their Arabic phonetic counterparts. With QFI support, Moneera worked closely with US-based teachers of Arabic in Washington, DC to finalise the wheel's design. Two Arabic teachers in Tucson, Arizona also assisted in developing the user guide and curriculum, making the wheel a truly global endeavour.

Originally launched in the U.S. as a physical device, the wheel is being brought to the digital world through the combined efforts of QCRI, QFI and the original designer, in an effort to extend its reach globally to individuals and communities unfamiliar with Arabic. With QCRI's expertise in technology around Arabic language research and development, and leveraging the technical advancements that have been made thus far, QFI is now launching the Mobile Application version of *Madar Al-Huruf*. Users can download the app from the iTunes store and onto their smart mobile device by visiting https://itunes.apple.com/mx/app/madar-al-huruf/id717596929?l=en&mt=8.

"Learning the basics of Arabic by writing your name, the name of your hometown or a friend's name demystifies the language and increases appreciation for the culture in the process. And that is the goal of *Madar al-Huruf*. At Qatar Foundation International, we work with talented individuals and partners to break down linguistic and cultural barriers by having those with no prior exposure to Arabic engaging with the alphabet in a fun, interactive and meaningful way," says Maggie Mitchell Salem, Executive Director at Qatar Foundation International.

QCRI's Arabic Language Technologies team has been working on a number of projects related to e-education, enabling people to access and learn in a language not native to their own. In bringing QFI's physical transliteration tool to the digital environment, Dr Stephan Vogel, Principal Scientist in the Arabic Language Technologies team at QCRI, said, "We are excited to work on the virtual version of *Madar Al-Huruf* with QFI and Moneera. We identified a gap in the online education domain for language learning and have been developing supportive technology for language learning including an assistive language learning tutor and an Arabic e-book reader. *Madar Al-Huruf* serves as a great first step into a whole host of inventive language learning tools that QCRI has developed for non-native speakers of Arabic."

Baljit Singh, a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, implemented the iPad and iPhone versions of *Madar Al-Huruf*. Singh was an intern with QCRI during the summer of 2012 and worked on *Arabia* – a computer assisted language learning application.

"I am pleased to see that the skills and techniques which Baljit Singh learned while working on *Arabia* were applicable to *Madar Al-Huruf*," said Dr Francicso Guzman, Scientist at QCRI and Singh's mentor. "*Madar Al-Huruf* employs a similar intelligent feedback mechanism and multimedia interaction, which benefits those in the process of learning a new language."

QCRI is one of three national research institutes established by Qatar Foundation, and is part of the Foundation's Research and Development enterprise. QFI is a not-for-profit organisation and member of Qatar Foundation, promoting education as a force to facilitate cross-cultural collaboration.

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About Qatar Computing Research Institute
Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI) was established in 2010 by Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar's transformation from a hydrocarbon-based economy to knowledge-based economy.

QCRI is a national research institute and member of Qatar Foundation Research and Development, supporting QF's mission to build Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by focusing on large-scale computing challenges that address national priorities for growth and development.

In doing this, QCRI conducts world-class multidisciplinary computing research that is relevant to the needs of Qatar, the wider Arab region, and the world. It performs cutting-edge research in such areas as Arabic language technologies, social computing, data analytics, distributed systems, cyber security and computer science and engineering.

The research conducted at QCRI is aligned with the Qatar National Research Strategy and supports the strategic priorities outlined in the Qatar National Vision 2030. For more information, please visit www.qcri.qa.

About QFI
Qatar Foundation International (QFI), LLC, is a U.S.-based member of Qatar Foundation (QF). Its mission is dedicated to connecting cultures and advancing global citizenship through education. QFI is a not-for-profit organization in Washington, D.C., focused on grant-giving and programmatic activities that promote education as a force that facilitates collaboration across geographical, social and cultural boundaries.

About the inventor
Moneera Hamad Al-Badi is a talented graphic designer from Qatar. She graduated Magna Cum Laude from Virginia Commonwealth University-Qatar. Moneera's vision is to combine art with education to make it easy, accessible and fun for students to learn and understand Arabic. She created and designed the innovative language wheel "Madar Al-Huruf" for native English speakers with no background in Arabic or exposure to

the Arabic alphabet. Her future plans are to continue creating more visual tools and software with different languages to help spread education globally in a creative and artistic way.