

### PUPPETRY AND PEACEBUILDING: INDONESIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN VERSIONS OF SESAME STREET TV SHOW

#### Mufti Rasyid<sup>1\*</sup> and Shovi Maryam<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Arabic Language and Literatures Department, UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung <sup>2</sup>Arabic Language Education Department, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang

\*mufti.rasyid@uinsatu.ac.id

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#### Introduction

The Israel-Palestine conflict, which has been going on for almost a century, has always been a sensitive issue in the world. The history of this conflict could be traced to the rise of major nationalist movements among Jews and Arabs in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which sought to achieve Middle Eastern sovereignty (Gelvin, 2005). In 1917, during World War I, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, which expressed its support for the establishment of a "home for the Jewish people" in Palestinian land. This support sparked massive migration of Jews from all over the world to Palestine (Neal, 1995). As a result, resistances form Palestinians and Arab world were escalating. To provide solution, UN offered the Resolution 181, a partition plan to divide the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and



Jewish states. However, in 1948, Israel unilaterally proclaimed its independence, causing angers among Palestinians and the Arab world. A major war erupted between Israel and Arab countries that resulted in Israel's victory. This event is infamously known as *An-Nakba* (great disaster). Palestinians were scattered across the world and the eternal conflict began (Rasyid, 2022).

The number of people killed in the Israel-Palestine conflict remains the highest in modern history. Only in two years (2003-2005), more than 50,000 people have died in Gaza than in any previous 40 years (Aljazeera, 2025). In any conflicts in the world, children are the ones who suffer the most. Children living in war-affected countries live in constant fear, experiencing grave violations of their rights, with serious impacts on their mental health. Chronic exposure to war violence has damaging effects throughout childhood. Some youths exposed to war violence are more likely to act aggressively afterwards, and some are more likely to experience post-traumatic stress symptoms (Huesmann et al., 2023). Many experts believe that education could be one of the best solutions.

Education has a central role in helping people to experience more peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive societies, and providing people with the understanding, skills, and values they need to cooperate with others (Samura, 2013). In the context of wars and conflicts, the concept of "peace education" emerges. UNICEF defines peace education as "the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, national or international level." (Saifuddin & Chotib, 2022).

Puppetry is one kind of platforms used by many educators to promote peace. In puppet shows, the storytellers utilize drawings, dramatic voices, puppets, toys, dolls, stuffed animals, gestures, and theatrical effects to convey their messages. Many research show that young students are captivated and interested by puppetry. By using puppetry, the teachers share images with their students that reflect moral issues. These images promote discussion, and allow students to re-examine their own thoughts and ideas and to clarify their values, given most of the stories in puppetry deal with moral choices or incidents (Clendinning, 2019).

Unfortunately, in fact, puppetry is rare to utilize in formal schools because of technical difficulties, lack of resources and limited time. Many still considers them as merely



entertainment, ignoring the educational purpose. Therefore, the use of puppetry for education shifted to audio-visual media like television and YouTube. One thing to note is that education is not only conducted in classrooms because the term of "education" itself refers to process of developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values leading to behavior change, whether in formal (in schools) or non-formal (out of school) (Aslamiah et al., 2021)

One of the most popular puppetry shows broadcasted on air is Sesame Street. Created 40 years ago in the United States and now in 120 different countries, this program has tackled literacy and numeracy, race relations, environmental concerns, and health and hygiene. Sesame Street was created as an educational supplement to the frequently uneven educational opportunities in schools. This show was endorsed by an NGO called Children's Television Workshop (CTW; now Sesame Workshop) in 1967, and the show began production in 1968. The program was based on curricular models developed and continuously updated by childhood education specialists that addressed basic academic skills and social competencies (Clendinning, 2019). Sesame Street has been aired in more than 100 countries in the world, some of them are dubbed in the local languages (with original versions) and 35 of them are co-produced by local TV companies incorporating local values, one of them is in Israel/Palestine. In Israel, the show is titled Rechov Sumsum (נחום מום חום in Palestine it is titled Shara'a Simsim (شارع سمسم). Created in the late 1990s, Rechov Sumum/Shara'a Simsim attempted to build friendship between and Palestinian children.

Some research have been conducted to examine the relations between education, puppetry and peace building. The research conducted by Brown (2004) examines the influence of visual arts on building students' character (Brown, 2004). He concluded that puppetry as a form of visual art has a positive impact on the character development of students. However, this study only focus on puppetry in schools. Another study conducted by Kearney and Levine (2019) investigates the development of puppetry in wider platform like television. In this case, they chose Sesame Street as the best example. They concluded that the exposure to Sesame Street program improves early school children's performancemand encourages positive attitudes (Kearney & Levine, 2019). They suggests that television might be a good alternative for early childhood education. A research conducted by Borzekowski and Henry (2011) proves that the children in Indonesia with the greatest exposure to Jalan Sesama (Indonesian version of Sesame Street) has better score in social development and cultural awareness (Borzekowski



& Henry, 2011) However, all those research do not specifically talk about peace education.

Despite Sesame Street's generally positive reputation for fostering peace, it is unfortunate that there has been little to no research examining its impact in Indonesia. As the most populous Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia has consistently expressed strong support for Palestine, often positioning Israel as the opposing party (Rasyid, 2023). However, there is limited awareness that numerous initiatives exist internationally with the aim of promoting peace between both sides. Intellectuals, particularly academics and university students, bear a significant responsibility to advocate for peace and to encourage a more balanced understanding of the conflict. Accordingly, this article seeks to address this gap by (1) analyzing the peace education values embedded in the programs, and (2) exploring Indonesian students' perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict after engaging with these shows. The researcher firmly believes that this study will offer valuable contributions to the fields of humanities and social sciences, while foster peace between Israel and Palestine.

This study employed a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative content analysis with quantitative survey research. This approach was selected because it allows for a more comprehensive examination of the research problem by combining the in-depth, contextual understanding offered by qualitative data with the broader, generalizable insights derived from quantitative measures. The integration of both methods enables the strengths of one approach to offset the limitations of the other, thereby producing a richer and more robust interpretation of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

The qualitative phase focused on the analysis of three (3) YouTube videos of Rechov Sumsum (רחוב סומסום) and Shara'a Simsim (שוט שבשה) —that contained explicit and implicit peace education values. Data were collected through systematic observation and documentation. Particular attention was given to selected dialogues and visual elements, including settings, costumes, and other on-screen features that could be interpreted as promoting peace and intercultural understanding. The quantitative phase involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to thirty five (35) undergraduate students at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia. The questionnaire was designed to capture participants' perceptions of the Israeli—Palestinian conflict after engaging with the selected video content. This sequential combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection allowed for a nuanced analysis of both the media content and its reception among Indonesian



students.

#### Palestinian and Israeli Sesame Street as a Bridge to Promote Peace

Shara'a Simsim, a Palestinian version of Sesame Street was first premiered on April 1, 1998, as part of a groundbreaking Israeli-Palestinian co-production alongside the Israeli version Rechov Sumsum, aiming to foster coexistence by delivering bilingual content that steered clear of political or nationalistic imagery. The original collaboration ran until about 2002. From then until around 2011, the show evolved into a standalone Palestinian production featuring local characters (including the muppets Haneen and Kareem) with more local content. This show was partially funded by American government through USAID. Unfortunately now the show has stopped for being produced and aired since 2012. The researcher chose three (3) Youtube videos, consisting of two (2) Israeli version of Sesame Street: Rechov Sumsum (חוב סומסום) and one (1) Palestinian version of Sesame Street: Shara'a Simsim (شارع سمسم) which contains peace education value as follows:



Figure 1: Rechov Sumsum (רחוב סומסום) and *Shara'a Simsim* (شارع سمسم).



Figure 2: Screenshot of Video 1



#### Table 1: Selected Dialog of Video 1

Selected Dialog of Video 1				
VIDEO 1 - Title: Israel: Rechov Sumsum- Mahboub's Friend Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2oqfFSse0s				
Story: Mahbub is a bilingual boy. He can speak Arabic and Hebrew. Mahbub wants to introduce his friend Omar, a Palestinian boy to Abigail and Sivan, Israeli girls.				
Translation  Mahbub: Wait a minute, how will I introduce him to all? Omar only speaks Arabic!  Mahbub: Everyone will speak Hebrew and Omar wouldn't understand anything.  Sivan: Wait, if he doesn't speak Hebrew, you can be the translator. Translate into Hebrew what Omar says, and what we say in Hebrew, translate for him into	Original Script מחבוב: רגע אחד, איך אני אכיר לו את כולם? עומר מדבר רק ערבית! מחבוב: כולם ידברו עברית ועומר לא יבין שום דבר סיון: רגע, אם הוא לא מדבר עברית, אתה יכול להיות המתרגם. תתרגם למול עברית את מה שעומר אומר, ואת מה שאנחנו אומרים בעברית,			
Arabic.  Mahbub: They are my friends, Abigail & Sivan	תתרגם לו לערבית			
Omar: Hello I am Omar Mahbub: Omar said, <i>Shalom</i> I am Omar	محبوب :هؤلاء صديقاتي، أبيجيل وسيفان عمر: مرحبا أنا عمر מחבוב: עומר אומר שלום אני עומר			
Abigail: Mahbub, How to say Hello in Arabic? Sivan: Tell him Welcome to Rechov Sumsum Abigail: Mahbub do you know that "right" is both "yamin" in Hebrew and Arabic	אביגיל: מהבוב, איך אומרים שלום בערבית? סיון: תגיד לו ברוך הבא לרחוב סומסום אביגיל: מהבוב אתה יודע ש"נכון" זה "ימין" בעברית וגם בערבית			
Sivan: Isn't it wonderful to know that you can understand one another even when you don't speak the same language?	סיון: נכון שזה נהטר שאפשר להבין זה את זה גם אם לא מדברים אותה שפה?			
We'll raise our arms We'll raise our arms (Arabic) Now we'll clap our hands Now we'll clap our hands (Arabic) Let's forget everything meanwhile Dancing dancing Dancing dancing (Arabic) All the kids play together Suddenly we understand without talking at all, Because you don't need words to become friends	להזיז ידיים! יבקל ולגני ועכשיו נמחוא כפיים والآن نصفق בתפיים אל כתפיים לשכוח הכל בינתיים ריקודים ריקודים יرقص יرقص ויחד כל הילדים פתאום אנחנו מבינים בלי שנדבר כי אתה לא צריך מילים כדי להיות חבר			





Figure 3: Screenshot of Video 2

Table 2: Selected Dialog of Video 2

#### VIDEO 2- Title: Israel: Rechov Sumsum- Noah and Brosh Are No Longer Friends

Link: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmCV2gvg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmCV2gvg</a> s4

Story: Noah and Brosh are two friends who are currently fighting and don't talk to each other because of different preferences. They are suddenly amazed how Tzachi (an Israeli Jew) and Ibtisam (an Israeli citizen of Arab origin) are friends despite of their differences.

Translation	Original Script
Brosh: You (Ibtisam) and Tzachi	ברוש: אתה וצחי חברים?
are friends? But you are very different!	אתם גם שונים מאוד
	את אישה והוא גבר
You are a woman and he is a man.	לך שיער ארוך ולו קצר
your hair is long and his hair is short, you like coffee he likes	את אוהבת קפה וצחי אוהב שוקו
chocolate	את יודע ערבית ועברית. הוא יודע רק עברית
You speak Arabic and Hebrew.	,
He speaks only Hebrew	
Ibtisam: We are different in many	אבתיסאם: אנחנו שונים בהרבה
ways. I am Arab. He is Jew	אני ערביה. והא יהודי אני דובר ערבית וגם עברית.
	הוא מדבר רק עברית
Ibtisam and Tzachi: we are also	כי אנחנו גם דומים במובנים רבים. שנינו בני אדם,
similar in many ways. We are both	אנחנו חיים באותה עיר, אנחנו אוהבים שלום ואוהבים
human, we live in same city, we love	לעזור אחד לשני
peace and we love to help each other	





Figure 4: Screenshot of Video 3

Table 3: Selected Dialog of Video 3

#### VIDEO 3

Title: Magazine: K Is For Kaffiyeh

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jk7je-9qpP

Story: This video is actually a coverage of Sesame Street Israel-Palestine by New York Times.

This video consists of two parts: a song promoting coexistence between Arabs and Jews in Israeli school and a footage of Shara'a Simsim episode about introducing holy landmarks of 3 religions in Jerusalem, such s Masjid Al Aqsa, Dome of the Rock, etc

אנחנו קוראים בשתי שפות שונות אבל דבר אחד ברור גם אם המילים שונות הסיפור עדיין אותו סיפור אנחנו שני חברים עם שתי שפות בוא נשחק יחדיו

. איך אתה יכול להיות חברים! שניכם כל כך שונים we read in two different languages
but one thing is clear
even if the words are different
the story is still the same
we are two friends
wit two languages
let's play together

Peace education encompasses a wide range of values, including nonviolence, gender equality, human rights, historical awareness, communication skills, and tolerance of diversity. Among these, the three videos above highlight coexistence as the most prominent value. Coexistence refers to the ability of different groups or individuals to live side by side and interact meaningfully without threatening



each other's existence, even when disagreements, historical animosity, or cultural differences exist (Gusic, 2022). In the context of peace education, the concept of cultural coexistence is particularly relevant and, according to (Loring, 2016), consists of three main elements.

First, adaptability refers to one's ability to respond to change, surprises, and challenges constructively. In Video 1, for instance, Abigail and Sivan, two Israeli girls, face communication difficulties when they meet Omar, a Palestinian boy, due to their different languages. However, they eventually overcome this barrier by using music and dance as universal tools for communication. This episode encourages children not to fear forming friendships regardless of differences in race, nationality, or language.

Second, pluralism emphasizes valuing cultural diversity and recognizing the fundamental rights of people from different backgrounds to share spaces and resources. In Video 2, Ibtisam, an Arab citizen of Israel, demonstrates this value by showing Bosh and Noah that differences in race, ethnicity, and religion do not prevent friendship but can instead enrich it. Similarly, in Video 3, the characters in Sesame Street demonstrate respect for all three major religions by referencing them while Kareem and Haneen admire the Jerusalem cityscape, symbolizing harmony and inclusivity.

Third, equity highlights the importance of protecting basic human rights and ensuring that no group is marginalized. In Video 1, Sivan uses a wheelchair, subtly underscoring the respect for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. In Video 3, the presence of both Arabic and Hebrew within the educational content signifies equal access to education for Arab minorities in Israel.

Across all three videos, the values of peace, tolerance, and pluralism are consistently reinforced, presenting powerful examples of how cultural coexistence can be nurtured through children's educational media.

#### Perception of Indonesian Students of the Role of Sesame Street in Peacebuilding

The researcher conducted a survey involving 35 respondents from UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, most of whom are students majoring in Arabic Language, Literature, and Education. Their responses provide valuable insights into the pedagogical and socio-political dimensions of the program. The survey consisted of ten Likert-scale items and open-ended questions as follows:



Table 4: Survey Questions

No.	Question	Type of Question	Scale / Response
1	The video conveys a message about living together peacefully.	Likert scale	1 → 5
2	The video teaches the importance of tolerance toward differences.	Likert scale	1 → 5
3	The video highlights the importance of equal rights for everyone.	Likert scale	1 → 5
4	The video teaches adaptability skills in diverse social situations.	Likert scale	1 → 5
5	The messages of peace are delivered in an easy-to-understand manner.	Likert scale	1 → 5
6	The characters in the program serve as role models for positive behavior.	Likert scale	1 → 5
7	The video helps me better understand the perspectives of both sides (Palestine and Israel).	Likert scale	1 → 5
8	The video helps me see that peace is achievable despite major differences.	Likert scale	1 → 5
9	I believe the video can foster values of tolerance among Palestinian and Israeli children who watch it.	Likert scale	1 → 5
10	The video motivates me to seek further information about the Israel–Palestine issue.	Likert scale	1 → 5
11	What message impressed you the most after watching the Israeli-Palestinian version of Sesame Street?	Open-ended	Text response
12	Do you have any suggestions or criticism for the Israeli- Palestinian version of Sesame Street?	Open-ended	Text response
13	In your opinion, can audiovisual media (such as TV and YouTube) help reduce real-world conflicts?	Multiple choice	Yes / No
14	What solutions would you propose to achieve peace between Israel and Palestine?	Open-ended (optional)	Text response

The result shows that the respondents expressed strong agreement that the video effectively promotes peaceful coexistence (94.2%), equality of rights (94.2%), and optimism that peace is attainable (94.2%). Furthermore, the video was considered effective in fostering tolerance (91.4%) and empathy, motivating viewers to seek more information regarding the Israel–Palestine conflict (85.8%). However, the area requiring the most improvement is the video's ability to enhance social adaptability, which obtained the lowest rating at 82.8%. The overall average score reached 89.8%, indicating a high level of effectiveness.

Open-ended responses reveal that respondents found messages of tolerance, empathy, and humanity the most memorable. Many participants emphasized that humanity should



transcend religious and national identities, showing a deep resonance with the video's core values. Nevertheless, respondents suggested several improvements, including enhancing creative storytelling, ensuring balanced representation between Palestinians and Israelis, and expanding broadcast accessibility—especially within Palestinian communities that may face viewing restrictions.

Regarding the role of audiovisual media, 57% of respondents believe platforms like TV and YouTube can help reduce real-world conflicts, while 43% expressed skepticism, citing concerns over bias and propaganda. Suggested solutions for achieving peace include promoting education-based awareness, involving neutral mediators, and encouraging positive narratives through digital media. Interestingly, only one respondent mentioned the Two-State Solution, showing that participants prioritize grassroots educational efforts over formal political resolutions.

Overall, the Sesame Street Israel–Palestine version is considered highly effective in conveying messages of peace, empathy, and coexistence. Respondents appreciate the program's ability to encourage critical thinking and emotional understanding while recognizing areas for improvement, such as representation balance and broader accessibility. To maximize its impact, the program should strengthen empathetic narratives, enhance creative engagement, and leverage digital platforms to reach wider audiences. This indicates that educational media can play a significant role in conflict transformation when implemented thoughtfully and inclusively.

#### **Conclusions**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Sesame Street Israel–Palestine versions, Rechov Sumsum and Shara'a Simsim, are highly effective in promoting values of peace education, such as coexistence, tolerance, equality, and empathy. The overall effectiveness score reached 89.8%, indicating a strong positive reception among Indonesian students. Respondents particularly appreciated the program's ability to deliver messages of peaceful coexistence (94.2%), equality (94.2%), and optimism about achieving peace (94.2%). Qualitative responses also highlighted that messages of humanity and mutual respect resonated deeply with viewers. However, the study identified several areas for improvement, including the need for greater creative engagement, balanced representation of both Palestinian and Israeli narratives, and wider accessibility of the program across affected regions.



While this study provides valuable insights into the role of educational media in peacebuilding, future research should broaden its scope by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across different educational and cultural contexts. Comparative studies involving audiences from various countries could reveal cross-cultural differences in perceptions of peace education. Moreover, future researchers could examine the long-term impact of exposure to such media on children's and young adults' attitudes toward conflict resolution. It is also recommended to investigate the integration of digital platforms and interactive media in promoting peace narratives, as well as the influence of political, religious, and cultural factors on audience reception. By exploring these dimensions, future studies can contribute to developing more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable models for peace education through audiovisual media.

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