

The Remarkable Impact of

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AHLAN SIMSIM



New Research Shows Substantial Impact on Children’s Learning from Groundbreaking Ahlan Simsim Initiative Combining Educational Media and Early Childhood Services

Conducted by NYU researchers, major studies show the efficacy of Sesame Workshop and International Rescue Committee’s initiative for children affected by conflict and crisis, through a local version of Sesame Street and a new approach to remote preschool

(New York, NY – May 16, 2023) – New research from [NYU Global TIES for Children](#) shows substantial impact on children’s language, numeracy, and social-emotional development from Ahlan Simsim programs. Ahlan Simsim (“Welcome Sesame” in Arabic), is an initiative created by Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to deliver early childhood development and learning to children affected by conflict and crisis in the Middle East. The findings demonstrate the power of integrating educational media with early childhood development services, with significant implications for delivering early learning in humanitarian and other contexts where traditional in-person schooling is not possible.

Launched with the support of the MacArthur Foundation’s [first-ever \\$100 million 100&Change award](#), and additional support from the LEGO Foundation, Ahlan Simsim is the [largest early childhood intervention in the history of humanitarian response](#), reaching more than 1 million children through direct early childhood services and playful learning in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and over 23 million children across the Middle East and North Africa through a locally produced Arabic language version of *Sesame Street*. [Key learnings from the new research](#) announced today include:

- **The potential of a groundbreaking new approach to media-integrated remote preschool programs: In Lebanon, Ahlan Simsim’s 11-week remote preschool program with educational media integrated into the curriculum produced statistically and developmentally significant impacts on children, particularly for literacy, numeracy, social-emotional, and motor skills, comparable to a year of in-person preschool programs.** The results of the program, which was implemented remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, show the tremendous potential of this approach to remote preschool with implications for contexts where in-person services aren’t possible, whether due to a pandemic, conflict, natural disaster, or in rural or low-resource settings.
- **Strong evidence of the power of educational mass media to improve foundational social emotional skills, which are critical for children’s long-term success:** Watching the *Ahlan Simsim* TV show significantly increased children’s ability to identify emotions and apply a simple regulation and coping strategy. These “emotional ABCs” form a crucial foundation for all young children, but especially those who have experienced adversity. The findings from a study conducted in Jordan underscore the ability of educational mass media to achieve key learning outcomes while reaching children at scale.
- **Ahlan Simsim’s unique combination of educational media and early childhood services is effective, laying the groundwork for others to adapt and scale similar programs:** The findings demonstrate that flexible, user-centered, evidence-based and culturally relevant early childhood services integrated with media content can support a wide range of child development outcomes, strengthen children’s learning at school and at home, and support lifelong positive outcomes.

“These studies, the result of years of collaboration show how quality early childhood programming can have impressive positive impacts on caregivers and young children in a region affected by displacement

and crisis,” said **Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Ph.D.**, NYU Steinhardt Professor and Co-Director, Global TIES for Children, New York University. “They provide new evidence that innovations in educational media and in leveraging caregivers’ support of learning can improve children’s holistic development. This research makes landmark contributions to the science base for early childhood development in the Middle East.”

A commitment to learning is at the core of Ahlan Simsim, with a robust research plan built into the initiative’s design and an intent to share learnings to inform and inspire early childhood development programs for children in crisis and conflict settings worldwide. NYU conducted three rigorous randomized controlled trials on Ahlan Simsim programming, the results of which can be found [here](#).

"Five years ago, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Sesame Workshop came together to give children affected by conflict and crisis in the Middle East the support they need to learn, grow and thrive. Ahlan Simsim is not just the single largest early childhood intervention in the history of humanitarian response: new research published today shows the impact of this groundbreaking initiative on children. Our aim was to set a new standard for early childhood learning: we believe this research shows that combining the IRC’s expertise in communities affected by crisis with the proven impact of Sesame’s educational media has exceptional impact. The task now is to spread the message and catalyze lasting change for all children affected by crisis around the world,” said **David Miliband**, President and CEO, International Rescue Committee.

“There is no time in a child’s life more important than their first five years, when their brain is rapidly developing and most sensitive to its environment. We know that repeated exposure to trauma can inhibit brain development with long-term repercussions, but we can mitigate these effects through quality early childhood development and nurturing care,” said **Sherrie Westin**, President, Sesame Workshop. “By combining the power of media with direct services and extensive collaboration with refugee and host communities, we hope that the success of Ahlan Simsim will become a model for reaching children affected by conflict and crisis, wherever they are.”

Conflict, violence, and other crises have left [a record 36.5 million children displaced from their homes](#) – the highest number recorded since World War II. Only 31% of these children [have access to pre-primary education](#), which means the majority will grow up without access to learning opportunities. Integrating educational media with direct support for families in crisis, [Ahlan Simsim](#) provides transformational early childhood development and playful learning that is now part of daily life for millions of children in the Middle East. Ahlan Simsim is laying the groundwork for other efforts to scale, adapt, and build on these models for other humanitarian contexts.

To learn more about Ahlan Simsim, visit [here](#). You can also watch episodes on *Ahlan Simsim*’s [YouTube channel](#) and explore the library of resources at [ahlansimsim.org](#).

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About NYU Global TIES for Children

NYU Global TIES for Children (NYU-TIES) is an international research center based at NYU Steinhardt. Since our launch in 2014, NYU-TIES has pursued the vision of a world in which all children have equitable access to quality resources and opportunities that enable them, their caregivers, and teachers to thrive.

namely, to contribute to a robust and culturally grounded science for program and policy action that promotes children’s holistic learning and development in low- and middle-income and crisis-affected contexts. Learn more at globaltiesforchildren.nyu.edu and follow NYU-TIES on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

About IRC

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives have been shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and rebuild. Founded in 1933, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas. Ingenuity, fortitude and optimism remain at the heart of who we are. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls. Learn more at www.rescue.org and follow the IRC on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [TikTok](#) and [Facebook](#).

About Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop is the nonprofit educational organization behind *Sesame Street*, the pioneering television show that has been reaching and teaching children since 1969. Today, Sesame Workshop is an innovative force for change, with a mission to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. We’re present in more than 150 countries, serving vulnerable children through a wide range of media, formal education, and philanthropically funded social impact programs, each grounded in rigorous research and tailored to the needs and cultures of the communities we serve. Learn more at www.sesameworkshop.org and follow Sesame Workshop on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [TikTok](#).

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