

## Character Design For Educational Board Game “Kreasi Bento Bersama Teman Sehat” To Prevent Picky Eater Behavior In Preschool Children

**Putri Anindita Anwar<sup>1</sup>, Restu Ismoyo Aji<sup>2</sup>, Aditya Rahman Yani<sup>3</sup>**  
putrianinditata01@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, restu.ismoyo.dkv@upnjatim.ac.id<sup>2</sup>,  
aditya.dkv@upnjatim.ac.id<sup>3</sup>

Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Architecture and Design  
Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jawa Timur

### ABSTRACT

Preschool children often display picky eating behavior due to their growth stage and independence in choosing food, which can lead to unbalanced nutrition. This research focuses on developing character designs for an educational board game that introduces various nutritious foods in an engaging way. Using a qualitative method, primary data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), interviews, and observation, while secondary data came from literature studies. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify behavioral and visual patterns suitable for early childhood audiences. The analysis produced the concept “Active and Independent Behavior” as the foundation for character design. The resulting visual outcomes include five characters: four main figures called Teman Sehat and one antagonist, Monster Manis si Tetangga Menyebalkan. Each character was designed in an anthropomorphic style using simple shapes and bright colors to emphasize friendliness and emotional connection. The findings are expected to inform future design practices for educational media that promote healthy eating habits through visual storytelling and interactive play.

Keywords: character design, anthropomorphic, nutritious food, preschool, storytelling

### INTRODUCTION

Preschoolers are children aged three to five years old who are undergoing growth and development are active consumers. During this phase, children often experience eating difficulties because they can choose only the foods they like, also known as picky eaters (Saidah & Dewi, 2020). According to Arisandi, picky eating

behavior is a condition of being selective about the types of food and children tend to prefer foods that are sweet and savory (Putri et al., 2024). This is also proven by the results of a questionnaire distributed by the author, in which 71% of 93 mothers with preschool children (3-5 years old) stated that their children prefer foods and drinks with artificial sweeteners, such as candy, chocolate, snacks, and others rather than healthy foods such as vegetables. According to the results of an interview conducted by the author with general nutritionist Darul Asmawan, A.Md.Gz, foods with artificial sweeteners can cause tooth decay if dental hygiene is not maintained, but more importantly, they can reduce appetite for main meals because the lingering taste makes other foods unpleasant to eat. If picky eating behavior is not addressed appropriately, even though a child who only consumes one type of nutrient is still considered healthy, the child does not get nutrients from other foods because no single food can cover all nutrients, even if the calories are sufficient. Therefore, introducing a variety of foods to children is very important to meet their nutritional needs.

However, parents must first get their children interested in learning about different foods using the right media so that picky eating behavior does not become a long-term problem. To ensure that this introduction supports their development, board games can be used as they are not only entertaining for children but also serve as an educational media (Gunawan, 2021). Educational board games can engage almost all the senses and three learning styles, namely visual, practical, and auditory, which, according to the National Training Laboratories, can have a significant impact on memory, especially from practical activities, which can have an impact of up to 75% (Wirawan, 2023:10-11).

Board games are played using a game board and several components such as dice or spinners, pawns, cards, and others that are used according to the rules of the game. Board games, which come in several types have several benefits, including:

- 1) Reducing children's screen time so they do not become dependent on gadgets;
- 2) Improving relationships with parents through playing board games together (quality time);
- 3) Learning emotional management;
- 4) Improving children's focus;
- 5) Serving as an engaging learning tool for children (Mahyuddin, 2023: 89-99).

In addition, board games intended for education certainly contain classifications of knowledge taught or can be referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy, which is divided into three domains, namely cognitive (intellectual), affective (emotional), and psychomotor (motor skills). Each of these domains plays a role in the educational delivery of board games, namely: 1) cognitive focuses more on children's intellectual domain such as knowledge, understanding, and thinking skills that can hone children's memory, such as repeating what they have been taught; 2) Affective focuses on feelings and emotions such as children's interests which can help in the acceptance process, so they are willing to pay attention to an activity such as focusing on the game; 3) Psychomotor focuses on skills that use the senses as a guide in a movement, such as moving board game components according to the rules of the game (Wirawan, 2023: 107-111).

Board games are also easy to apply with various educational themes because their design can be easily varied, making them an effective educational medium (Widyasari et al., 2021). To support the initial purpose of creating a board game as an educational medium for introducing a variety of nutritious foods to preschoolers (3-5 years old), the board game can be made with a bento creation theme.

Bento is a meal arranged attractively in a lunch box. In Indonesia, bento is often made with various character-shaped creations. Presenting food in cute and attractive shapes can encourage children to eat, thereby reducing the potential of picky eating behavior (Hidayati, 2011). Making bento also has benefits for children, namely the development of an attitude of appreciation for the food made by their mothers (Rachmawati et al., 2020). In order to attract more interest and increase preschoolers' understanding of nutritious food, education in board games is also created based on storytelling.

According to the National Storytelling Network, storytelling is an interactive art through the depiction of parts or visuals of a story with words and movements to build the imagination of the listener (Salsabila and Maureen, 2022). Storytelling presented in games encourages children to use their imagination to describe stories

through storytellers, thereby developing children's creative processes and stimulating intellectual aspects as well as sensitivity, refinement of behavior, emotions, art, fantasy, and imagination, which utilize both the left and right sides of the brain. The benefits of storytelling in games are similar to those of board games, particularly in terms of children's self-development, namely in terms of children's knowledge (cognitive), feelings (affective), appreciation (conative), and social skills (Wardiah, 2017).

The addition of visuals in the form of characters also facilitates the delivery of information to support the learning process (Hidayah, 2023). Therefore, this design focuses on creating character designs that can support the storytelling process in educational board games. The character designs must consider several aspects such as drawing style, character body proportions, and colors that match the concept (Ruswandi & Purwaningsih, 2021). Character design, which is a key element in conveying a story in visual form, requires an analysis of character design principles in order to create designs that are appropriate for the narrative built for preschoolers. According to Lin Yu and Tsao, this analysis includes character background (character inspiration from the real world), head-body ratio (determining character height), silhouette (facilitating character recognition), and body parts (character body details) (Azhari and Afif, 2025). Through the creation of good character design, it is also possible to convey the meaning and implied context that board game players want to understand without many words. This also applies to the anthropomorphic character design that will be used in this design (Kalila et al., 2024).

According to Delgado-Ballester and Palazón, anthropomorphic words are a combination of human characteristics and emotions with things that do not resemble humans, such as animals, plants, objects, and others (Resmika and Souwandi, 2021). Furthermore, according to Urquiza-Haas and Kotrschal, anthropomorphic characters are further divided into two types: interpretive and imaginative. However, this design only uses imaginative characters, which are fictional characters depicted as humans with personalities, emotions, and interests (Endarini, 2025).

Anthropomorphic character depictions can also be an attraction in themselves because, according to Cahyadi, they can facilitate the delivery of moral messages that children can understand, are easily recognizable and clarify the story, engage emotions, make the story more interesting, entertaining, and educational (Endarini, 2025). With the emotional involvement mentioned above, anthropomorphic characters show that there is a connection with human psychology that can influence how children interact with and absorb stories. This connection is built not only because of the principles of visual psychology that are applied, but also because of the deep depiction of personality that enriches the characters and creates a strong emotional bond with the story (Cahyadi, 2023). This is not just theory. Based on the results of the author's Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with kindergarten students from classes A and B, they also generally prefer cartoon characters with an anthropomorphic style. Therefore, through the design of these anthropomorphic characters, it is hoped that they can support the storyline in the educational board game created by Bento, thereby enhancing preschoolers' understanding of nutritious food.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method used in the character design for the Bento Creation board game is qualitative. Qualitative research is a method that focuses on in-depth data collection (Sugiyono, 2013: 9-15). Data collection techniques involve the collection of primary and secondary data. Primary data is data collected directly in the field through interviews with informants as research samples. The data obtained can be in the form of text, images, sound, or a combination of the three (Sarwono, 2006: 209-210). In this design, primary data was obtained through focus group discussions (FGD), interviews, and observations.

Interviews were conducted using unstructured interviews with informants to explore in depth information on specific issues (Sugiyono, 2013: 140-141). In this study, interviews were conducted with a general nutritionist at the Buduran Community Health Center named Darul Asmawan, A.Md.Gz to find out how to

prevent and overcome picky eating behavior in preschool children and their parents (mothers) and children (aged 3 years) who are quite picky eaters to find out the habits of picky eaters and as 3-year-old children. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a data collection method conducted by asking questions or discussing with several people, from which conclusions will be drawn (Sarwono, 2006: 226). In this study, FGD was conducted with 7 students who were a combination of kindergarten students from classes A and B, aged 4-5 years, to find out the drawing styles preferred by preschoolers as a reference for designing characters that are easily recognizable and can strengthen storytelling in board games. Meanwhile, observation is the activity of observing events, behaviors, or objects that are the target of research (Sarwono, 2006: 224). In this study, observations were conducted at several children's board game stores in marketplaces that sell games with similar educational themes to be used as references or comparisons in the creation of board games in terms of character design, color, layout, typography, components, and how to play.

Secondary data is data obtained by reading books or journals, listening to or watching videos from previously collected data (primary data) (Sarwono, 2006: 209-210). The secondary data collected contains various information about preschool picky eaters and educational board games, including character design, benefits, components, and how to play, obtained through literature studies such as books, journals, and news articles to determine the storytelling narrative theme and understand the basic principles of creating educational board games to support character design. After collecting the data, it was analyzed using qualitative descriptive data analysis techniques. Qualitative descriptive analysis is analyzing and summarizing the results of data collection on the issues being studied (Wirartha, 2006). The purpose of qualitative descriptive analysis is to develop creative concepts for storytelling-based bento board games.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Interview Results**

The results of the interview with Darul Asmawan, A.Md.Gz, a general nutritionist at the Buduran Community Health Center, concluded that children who are picky eaters can be helped by setting a strict meal schedule because they do not yet understand hunger and fullness. Parents should also not introduce foods with artificial sweeteners, such as candy, but rather introduce children to a variety of nutritious foods and accompany this with the establishment of eating rules modeled by the parents' eating habits. In addition, responsive feeding should be implemented by not giving children gadgets or walking around while feeding them so that they can focus on tasting their food and knowing when it is time to eat. To communicate about nutritious food, it can be done through media accompanied by real actions, such as inviting children to measure their height and explaining the reasons for their height increase with an interesting tone of voice. Communicating about nutritious food through real actions and providing an understanding of the cause and effect of these actions through an interesting tone of voice can be used as a reference in storytelling in games.

The results of interviews with parents (mothers) and their children (aged 3 years) show that children who are picky eaters prefer foods with artificial sweeteners that contain high levels of sugar, such as candy, chocolate, and jelly, rather than healthy foods such as vegetables because of the texture, taste, and aftertaste of sweet foods. Children easily get bored with eating, so their mothers have to motivate them by giving them gadgets while feeding them. Even though they get bored easily, children are still willing to eat protein and fresh fruit (juicy). As 3-year-olds, they still like to move around actively and play, especially role-playing games such as cooking, selling, and playing with dolls. Children can also be introduced to healthy foods directly through their meals and can be taught to eat on their own, even though they still make a mess while eating. His habit as a picky eater who prefers foods with artificial sweeteners rather than healthy foods will be used as the basis for building storytelling, and his love of role-playing will also be used as inspiration in determining character roles to support the game's story.

### **Results of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)**

The results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving 7 students, consisting of a combination of kindergarten students from classes A and B, concluded that when the children were given 6 illustrations with various styles, 3 of the 7 students chose the same illustration with a colourful simple style.

### **Observation Results**

Observations of several children's board game stores in the marketplace show that board games specifically designed for preschoolers aged 3-5 years have educational aspects such as color matching and memory games, spinner and token picker components that can hone fine motor skills, easy game rules, and encourage social interaction and imagination in children. In terms of gameplay, most of these games use cooperative mechanisms that teach children to work together and incorporate storytelling concepts in completing missions, one example being the board game "Pete the Cat the Missing Cupcakes". The game has a story with anthropomorphic characters, namely a group of Pete the Cat's friends (Gus, Squirrel, Alligator, Turtle) who are trying to collect cupcakes that have been taken by their enemy (Grumpy Toad). The narrative dynamics and game characters, such as cooperation and conflict, as well as the anthropomorphic character design style, will be an inspiration in designing board game characters. Additionally, the game board layout featuring a square-shaped board with a token collection area in the center, will also serve as a reference for creating the board game.

### **Keywords and Creative Concepts**

Keywords formulated based on several aspects of picky eaters, the target audience of preschoolers, and board games as an educational medium, the keywords obtained as a reference in the design are "Active and Independent Behavior." The meaning of these keywords refers to the purpose of designing an educational storytelling-based board game that is played actively and trains children's independence. The creative concept can be formulated based on the keywords and data analysis results which include children's interest in role-playing, anthropomorphic character design, colourful simple drawing style. The focus will be on character design to support storytelling in board games, which includes

several things, namely: 1) Character design is divided into two types, a group of four main characters and one enemy character; 2) The main characters are created with each character representing a group of nutritious foods (staple foods, vegetables, fruits, side dishes) and the enemy characters representing foods with artificial sweeteners (candy); 3) Each character design is conceptualized to have various roles; 4) The characters are created in an anthropomorphic style.

### **Visual Concept**

In designing the characters, a visual style reference is needed as a guideline for drawing the characters. Based on FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, they prefer illustrations with a simple drawing style and Figure 1. Visual Style Reference from the Puffy Sticker 3D Playhouse Game colourful, so the drawing style reference for the visual concept is taken from the Puffy Sticker 3D Playhouse board game.



Figure 1. Visual Style Reference from the Puffy Sticker 3D Playhouse Game  
source: author's documentation

The Puffy Sticker 3D Playhouse game was also used as a color palette reference and will be dominated by yellow in this design, because the colors are in accordance with Angela Wright Morninglight's color theory, namely bright colors that appear soft, fresh, clear, and clean. These colors represent optimism, joy, and a youthful spirit (Rustan, 2019: 63), making them suitable for keywords that refer to active and independent individuals.

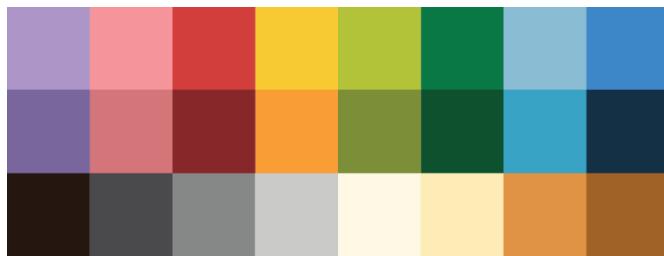


Figure 2. Color palette reference from the puffy sticker 3d playhouse game  
source: author's documentation

### Visual Character Study

Based on the results of the creative concept, two types of characters were designed: main characters and enemy characters. The four main characters were designed based on the Ministry of Health's balanced nutrition campaign "Isi Piringku" which consists of: 1) Staple foods (sources of carbohydrates) that have become part of the culture of eating and local wisdom in Indonesia, such as rice, corn, cassava, and sweet potatoes; 2) Side dishes (sources of protein); 3) Fruits (sources of vitamins and minerals); 4) Vegetables (sources of vitamins and minerals) (Darmawanti, 2022). This main character group was then named "Teman Sehat" because it is a collection of nutritious food groups and also the result of observational data analysis that has a concept similar to the board game "Pete the Cat The Missing Cupcakes," which has a narrative dynamic and game characters that involve cooperation and conflict. Teman Sehat characters were selected based on interviews with parents about their children's favorite healthy foods, which consisted of potatoes (staple food), chicken (side dish), carrots (vegetables), and watermelon (fruit). Meanwhile, the enemy character was designed based on the author's questionnaire with parents about the foods with artificial sweeteners that children like the most, namely candy, because based on an interview with nutritionist Darul Asmawan, A.Md.Gz, eating too much candy will affect children's health and appetite, so the enemy character was named "Monster Manis Si Tetangga Menyebalkan".

Through the keyword "Active and Independent Behavior" and targeting preschoolers (3-5 years old) who on average enjoy role-playing games such as playing chef, shopkeeper, and others. The characters were created with various roles that are still related to the process of making bento and have cheerful expressions and active body poses in accordance with children's behavior. The roles and names of the characters include Kentang Si Juru Masak, Semangka Si Petani Buah, Wortel Si Petani Sayur, and Ayam Si Hobi Belanja whose goal in the story is to chase away Monster Manis Si Tetangga Menyebalkan who wants to sneak into the bento dishes and make them unhealthy. For reference in terms of shape and expression, the characters are based on their original forms or photos to make them easily identifiable.

### **1. Character of Kentang Si Juru Masak**

The character design of the staple food is represented by the staple food potato and has the role of a chef, so the character is named "Kentang Si Juru Masak". References to the shape of the potato as well as the chef's clothes used also vary.



Figure 3. Reference photo for kentang si juru masak  
source: Google 2024

Alternative 1 uses potatoes with an asymmetrical shape and a shirt typical of a restaurant chef who is cooking soup, alternative 2 uses potatoes with an oval shape and a typical apron of a housewife who is cooking eggs, and alternative 3 uses round potatoes and a typical apron of a restaurant chef who carries a food serving hood. Based on the results of the FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, alternative character 3 was chosen.



Figure 4. Selected alternative character of kentang si juru masak  
source: author's documentation 2024

## 2. Character of Semangka Si Petani Buah

The character design of the fruit is represented by a watermelon and has the role of a fruit farmer, so the character is named "Semangka Si Petani Buah". References to the shape of the watermelon and the farmer's hat used also vary.



Figure 5. Reference photo for semangka si petani buah  
source: Google 2024

Alternative 1 uses the shape of a watermelon that has been split in half, wears a bucket hat, and carries a fruit basket. Alternative 2 uses the shape of a watermelon that has been split into a quarter, wears a caping hat, and poses picking fruit with



Figure 6. Selected alternative character of semangka si petani buah  
source: author's documentation 2024

scissors. While alternative 3, uses the shape of a watermelon that has been cut into triangles, wears a caping hat with additional fabric to prevent heat, and while carrying a fruit basket. Based on the results of FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, alternative character 1 was chosen.

### **3. Character of Wortel Si Petani Sayur**

The character design of vegetables is represented by the vegetable carrot and has the role of a vegetable farmer, so the character is named "Wortel Si Petani Sayur". References to the shape of carrots, farmer's clothes and baskets used are also various.



Figure 7. Reference photo for wortel si petani sayur  
source: Google 2024

Alternative 1 uses carrots with uncut leaves, wears a hat and an unbuttoned shirt, and poses picking fruit using scissors. Alternative 2 uses a small carrot with a leaf shape that leaves only the stem, wears a caping and t-shirt while carrying a vegetable basket using a cloth. While alternative 3, uses carrots with a small number of leaves, wears a bucket hat with a rope, and a sleeveless shirt while carrying two baskets of vegetables. Based on the results of FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, alternative character 3 was chosen.



Figure 8. Selected alternative character of wortel si petani sayur  
source: author's documentation 2024

#### 4. Character of Ayam Si Hobi Belanja

The character design of the side dish is represented by a chicken side dish and has a role as a character who likes to shop for healthy groceries so that the character is named "Ayam Si Hobi Belanja". References to the type of chicken, clothes and shopping bags used are also diverse.



Figure 9. Reference photo for ayam si hobi belanja  
source: Google 2024

Alternative 1 uses a hen with a dominant white color and black stripes, wears a woven shopping bag and wears a sleeveless shirt. Alternative 2 uses a hen that is slightly fuller with a dominant brown color and has a slight pattern, carrying a shopping basket and wearing a negligee shirt. While alternative 3, uses a type of hen that has a puffy chest with a brown color and has a slight white pattern, carries a clear plastic grocery bag, and wears a shirt with sleeves. Based on the results of FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, alternative 1 was chosen.



Figure 10. Selected alternative character of ayam si hobi belanja  
source: author's documentation 2024

### **5. Character of Monster Manis Si Tetangga Menyebalkan**

The character design of the sweet (unhealthy) food presented through candy, has the role of an annoying neighbor character because it always wants to sneak into bento dishes so that the character is named "Monster Manis Si Tetangga Menyebalkan". Reference to the type of candy used, using a variety of candies that are most commonly found and familiar to children.



Figure 11. Reference photo for monster manis si tetangga menyebalkan  
source: Google 2024

Alternative 1 uses a type of lollipop candy with a colorful circle shape, the candy is depicted still wrapped in plastic and poses running with several other lollipops. Alternative 2 uses a type of candy wrapped in a twisted way and has a candy basket to carry other candies. While alternative 3, uses a type of lollipop candy with a round shape like a small ball and poses as if it is scaring. Based on the results of the FGD with kindergarten students from classes A and B, alternative character 1 was chosen.



Figure 12. Alternative selected characters of the monster manis si tetangga menyebalkan  
source: author's documentation 2024

## **Design Implementation**

The character designs have been created and one alternative for each character has been selected. The characters can be applied to several board game media to support the gameplay and storytelling in the board game. The characters can be applied as pawns, as images on the front and back covers of the packaging, and also on the character introduction board. The title of the storytelling-based bento creation board game designed is "Board Game Kreasi Bento Bersama Teman Sehat." The title was created based on the game's purpose to introduce nutritious food to children through bento creations, and the phrase "Bersama Teman Sehat" is taken from the name of the main character group in the story.

## **CONCLUSION**

To prevent picky eating behavior in preschool children (3-5 years old), which often occurs due to their developmental and growth phase where they can already choose their own food but tend to choose unhealthy foods, it is important to introduce a variety of nutritious foods with the support of interesting media. One of them is an educational board game with a bento creation theme and using anthropomorphic characters to strengthen the storytelling in the game. The storytelling features a group of Healthy Friends consisting of Kentang Si Juru Masak, Semangka Si Petani Buah, Wortel Si Petani Sayur, and Ayam Si Hobi Belanja who work together to chase away the Monster Manis Si Tetangga Menyebalkan who wants to sneak into their bento meals and make them unhealthy. In creating educational board games, anthropomorphic character designs are made with the aim of strengthening the emotional bond between players and the story so that the introduction and messages to be conveyed are easily understood by preschoolers. To suit the target audience, the visual design of the characters is based on key words and the results of interview data analysis, FGD, observation, and literature studies.

With the character design that has been created, it is hoped that children will find it easier to understand the concept of healthy food much better than eating foods with artificial sweeteners, recognize nutritious food groups, and even want to try a variety of healthy foods. This design has also updated information related to visual

character design that is specifically tailored to the target audience who tend to be picky eaters and keeps up with the latest developments. Therefore, it is hoped that in future research, this character design can be developed and applied to other educational media such as children's storybooks, animated videos, social campaigns about children's health, and so on.

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