

DESIGNING AN ILLUSTRATED CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK ABOUT AUTISM FOR RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATING THE CHILDREN

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Abstract: Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by impairments in behavior and social interaction. Typical characteristics of autism in children include communication difficulties, challenges in making eye contact, and hypersensitivity to specific sensory signals. In Indonesia, awareness and education about children with autism are still lacking. This could end up in social issues, including negative stigma or stereotypes within society in general, and also bullying of children with autism. This research and design project aimed to create an illustrated children's picture book about autism. Using an interesting visual style and adopting a comprehensible storyline language seeks to educate children about the common characteristics of autism and increase children's awareness. It is expected that it could prevent and even decrease cases of bullying among children with autism. In this research and design project, a qualitative method is utilized to collect data, which includes literature studies, interviews, and observations. The outcomes of this design are illustrated children's picture books that serve as educational media and enhance children's awareness and understanding of the basic characteristics of autism.

Keywords: *Autism, Illustration, Children's picture book, Visual Communication Design.*

Abstrak: Autisme, juga dikenal sebagai Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), adalah kelainan perkembangan saraf yang menyebabkan gangguan perilaku dan interaksi sosial. Ciri-ciri umum karakteristik autisme pada anak, yaitu mengalami kesulitan dalam berkomunikasi, kesulitan dalam melakukan kontak mata dengan lawan bicara, dan memiliki hipersensitivitas pada bagian sensori tertentu. Di Indonesia, kesadaran dan edukasi mengenai anak dengan penyandang autisme masih terbilang rendah. Hal ini dapat menimbulkan permasalahan sosial seperti stigma negatif atau stereotip di kalangan masyarakat, dan terjadinya perundungan terhadap anak dengan penyandang autisme. Maka dari itu, penelitian dan perancangan ini dilakukan bertujuan untuk merancang buku cerita anak bergambar tentang autisme. Dengan menggunakan gaya visual yang menarik serta pemilihan bahasa cerita yang mudah dipahami, diharapkan agar dapat mengedukasi mengenai karakteristik umum autisme yang sering ditemukan dan meningkatkan kesadaran anak-anak. Sehingga diharapkan dapat mencegah bahkan mengurangi kasus perundungan pada anak dengan penyandang autisme. Pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian dan perancangan ini yaitu metode kualitatif, dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui kegiatan wawancara, observasi, dan studi pustaka. Hasil dari perancangan ini berupa buku cerita anak bergambar sebagai media edukasi dan meningkatkan kesadaran anak-anak mengenai pemahaman ciri-ciri umum karakteristik autisme.

Kata kunci: Autisme, Ilustrasi, Buku cerita anak bergambar, Desain Komunikasi Visual.

INTRODUCTION

The Siloam Hospitals website (2025) states that autism within the autistic spectrum is a condition characterized by a complex neurological nature that influences behavior and cognitive functions. It encompasses every

aspect of social, linguistic, and both verbal and non-verbal communication. The condition can be identified in childhood and persists throughout life. Autism is not an illness; it is a condition characterized by atypical brain function compared to others. Autism represents one of the various forms of disabilities that exist in Indonesia. According to a statement from dr. Dante, reported by Stefanni on detikhealth (2024), it is observed that the incidence of autism is projected to rise consistently over the years. Current estimates indicate that approximately 2.4 million children in Indonesia are affected by autism spectrum disorders. According to pediatrician dr. Bernie Endyarni Medise, SpA(K), MPH, the estimated annual birth rate of children in Indonesia is approximately 4.5 million. Based on this statistic, 1 in 100 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Differences in the amount of data on people with disabilities, particularly people with autism, might influence how effective government programs are, as these policies are developed based on diverse data sources. Inaccurate and incomplete data about the situation of people with disabilities, especially people with autism, affects both the government and the society in addressing existing issues.

The Indonesian government offers support and regulations for people with autism under Law No. 8/2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities. This legislation served as the foundation for the founding of several institutions and therapeutic facilities dedicated to children with autism. Data indicates that certain children with autism can communicate and achieve in various fields. In the context of school, autistic children possess equal opportunity to access education as the other children. Therefore, inclusive schools have been established. Inclusive schools are general education institutions that support students with special needs, including people on the autistic spectrum. In

inclusive schools, autistic children engage with other students while they may get special attention from teachers (Anas, 2020).

Although the policy of people with disabilities is protected by the law, the policy has not been effectively implemented. One of the main factors is the stigma and stereotypes associated with autism in society. A lack of understanding and prevalent misconceptions regarding autism may end up in the bullying and discrimination of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with the continuing of stereotypes and stigmatizing beliefs (Handayani, M. M., & Paramita, P. P., 2018). In Indonesia, traditional beliefs suggest that issues during pregnancy and infancy, disrespect for pregnancy taboos, karma, supernatural intervention, God's plan or fate, and family size may contribute to the causes of autism (Riany, Y.E., et al., 2016; Handayani, M. M., & Paramita, P. P., 2018). According to Riany, Y.E., et al. (2016), Indonesian culture emphasizes that children are a source of social pride, expected to bring joy and prosperity. Although more research is required, she suggested that stigma and misconceptions regarding autism may cause Indonesian parents to ignore their autistic children (Handayani, M. M., & Paramita, P. P., 2018). The lack of information and education about autism, along with societal stigma and stereotypes, causes many parents to feel ashamed of their child's condition. As a result, some people attempt to hide their children from others and make it difficult for them to access a proper quality of life (Education, health, economy, etc). This is also one of the causes of the difference in data from the government.

Societal stigma and stereotypes may directly impact people with autism. As explained in the previous paragraph, a lack of understanding and prevalent misconceptions regarding autism may end up in bullying and discrimination of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), especially at school. According to Mulia, A. L., et al (2022), schools that offer inclusive

education enable students with special needs and their fellow students who are typically normal to learn collaboratively in the same environment, following the idea of adaptive learning. The diversity of characteristics, including physical problems and students' capabilities, can benefit or adversely impact the school within an inclusive educational environment. The advantageous impact is that the presence of students with special needs educates the other students to embrace and respect each individual's uniqueness. The considerable diversity among students may also lead to conflict (Salend in Mulia, A. L., et al., 2022). According to Penda Annie and Chrisness Chimuka (2024). The study identified the factors contributing to the bullying of students with autism. These factors included their challenges in communication with other students, difficulties in self-expression, and a tendency to become frustrated when pressured to speak by non-autistic students. Additionally, their quiet behavior was perceived as irritating by other students, which contributed to the bullying behavior. Students with autism often showed their true selves while frequently staying in isolation, which created challenges for socializing with their classmates. Their antisocial behavior resulted in a lack of consideration for others' feelings during play, leading to a disconnect with their peers. Negative conflict occurs when an individual uses acts of violence to harm another person verbally, physically, or mentally. This behavior is classified as bullying if it continues over a long time and is repeated. Victims of bullying may experience fear, anxiety at school, and low self-esteem, which affects learning activities and impacts both academic and non-academic achievements (Mulia, A. L., et al., 2022).

Considering the issues of problems, stigma, and stereotypes, along with the impact of the cases outlined previously, it can be concluded that there is a need to increase awareness and education about autism. Raising awareness and education about autism should begin at an early age,

especially for elementary school children, since they represent the beginnings of inclusive educational environments. A concept will be developed to create media aimed at raising awareness and education regarding autism. Picture books are an effective medium to increase knowledge and literacy in children. Illustrations in children's Picture books are designed to have appealing visuals and appropriate color and font selections that attract attention. The basic introduction about autism is expected to be understandable for children.

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research is a methodology that explores complex phenomena and meanings attributed to them. It is commonly used in social sciences, psychology, anthropology, and other fields where subjective experiences and interpretations are of interest. A qualitative research design typically relies on the collection of data through a variety of methods, including interviews, observations, focus groups, and the analysis of documents or artefacts. These methods allow researchers to collect comprehensive, descriptive data regarding participants' perspectives, experiences, and contextual factors (Ideascale, 2023).

Observation

Sekolah Luar Biasa Autisma Yayasan Pengembangan Potensi Anak Bukittinggi (SLB Autisma YPPA Bukittinggi) is an educational institution that supports children with special needs, particularly children with autism. Observations conducted on April 11, 2025, indicate that the school offers two different types of classes: individual classes and classical classes. Individual classes, which are made up of one teacher and one student, serve as the beginning step for children with autism, particularly children with serious

obstacles, to begin their education. It also serves as a treatment for children with moderate to mild autism, offering more individualized and in-depth attention. On the other hand, the classical class, which includes more students, provides general learning in a more structured approach, while contact between students is still limited owing to the solitary character of children with autism. Observations indicated that the teacher's role is crucial in building a supportive learning environment, assisting students in emotional regulation, and facilitating effective two-way communication. During break time and meals, the teachers attempt to stimulate social interaction among students. However, some students still prefer to spend their time in loneliness. Overall, SLB Autisma YPPA Bukittinggi doesn't just focus on academics. It also helps children with autism improve their potential, skills, social skills, and cognitive abilities. With this comprehensive approach, the school aims to establish an atmosphere that encourages children's growth, enabling them to engage with their surroundings outside of school and resolve challenges in the future.



Image 1 The School's Logo, Individual Class, Meal Time of SLB Autisma YPPA Bukittinggi

Source: Nabyla, 2025

Interview Analysis

Based on interviews with the principal, psychologist, and illustrator, it can be concluded that a multi-perspective approach is needed to understand and support children with autism. SLB Autisma YPPA Bukittinggi prioritizes emotional connection, patience, and customized teaching methods to help students' social and emotional growth. The principal said that students with autism have different behavioral and sensory characteristics that require special attention and continuous support.

From a psychological perspective, children with autism have different needs and symptoms. The psychologist said that to help children adjust to real-world circumstances, early detection, inclusive education, and individualized therapy are essential. In addition, he emphasized the fact that the diagnosis of autism requires behavioral observations and clinical tools such as the DSM-5, not just appearance.

Meanwhile, the Illustrator shared her story of creating a book for children about disabilities. The Illustrator emphasized how visual storytelling can encourage young readers to be more tolerant and empathetic. Children's books can be a powerful tool for showcasing and supporting children through the careful choice of illustrations and storyboards.

Therefore, all three perspectives based on the educational field, psychology, and design confirm that empathy, inclusivity, and a structured approach are essential to help raise awareness and educate children about autism.



Image 2 Interview Session with SLB Autisma YPPA Bukittinggi Principal, Psychologist, and
Illustrator

Source: Nabyla, 2025

Matrix Comparison Analysis

Visual Object			
Title	Kado Alma untuk Dila	Noel! Noel! Leon! Leon!	A Friend for Henry
Author	dr. Nurul Luntungan and Bunga Khatulistiwa	Kristine Canon	Jenn Bailey
Illustrator	Alnurul Gheulia and Bella Ansori	Nina Martinez	Mika Song
Pages	26 pages	32 pages	36 pages

Category	Children's picture book	Children's picture book	Children's picture book
Publisher	Drisana Center	Adarna House	Chronicle Books LLC
Cover Type	Hard Cover	Soft Cover	Hard Cover
Size/Dimension	23 x 23cm	21 x 29 cm	26.1 x 21.2 cm
Language	Indonesian	Filipino (Original) English (Translated Version)	English
Book	The story relies on Dila, who is celebrating her birthday at home with all of her friends, and her sister Alma, a child diagnosed with autism. This book focuses on the understanding and support of children	The story outlines the characteristics of children with autism, illustrated through Noel's character, who is different from his friends, at first leading to Leon's discomfort with him.	The story focuses on the characteristics and emotions of children with autism, as conveyed through the experiences of the main character, Henry, who is in search of friendship.

	diagnosed with autism.		
Illustration	Using a cartoon illustration style that effectively conveys the emotions between characters through different expressions.	Using a simple cartoon illustration style to illustrate every key moment in the story. Furthermore, the emotions of each character are strongly presented to depict the transition from hatred to a good friend.	Using a simple cartoon illustration style while highlighting the expressions between characters. The illustrations in this book also reflect Henry's interactions with his classmates.
Color	Using a bright color palette.	Dominated by primary color, it creates vibrant and contrasting color.	Using a soft and bright color palette creates a warming vibe.
Typography	Using sans serif font.	Using sans serif font.	Using serif font.

Layout	Dominated by illustration and scene to scene.	Dominated by illustration. Some of the pages there are full illustrations without text.	Dominated by illustration, but always there is a space for the text, either on the right or on the left page.
Conclusion: - All three books are illustrated children's picture books that illustrate similar characteristics relating to children with autism. However, the three illustrated children's picture books illustrate variations in storytelling, storyline, and point of view. - Although all three books use a cartoon illustration style, each of them is distinctly characterized by a distinct style. - The expressions of each character in the three picture books are clearly illustrated, enabling readers to articulate the emotions of the characters effectively. However, variations exist among the books, attributable to the different characteristics of the illustrations. - The three books use different kinds of fonts and typographic characters. - The layouts of the three books dominate illustrations, yet they employ different ways of placement.			

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data and research, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have issues communicating both verbally and nonverbally,

don't connect with others very much, repeat the same behaviors, and respond differently to various types of sensory input. An organized and personalized strategy within an empowering and encouraging educational environment is essential for addressing the needs of children with autism. To facilitate their adaptation, it is crucial to possess an understanding of communication and education. Families, educators, and classmates who engage actively in their lives significantly influence their social and emotional development. Children's picture books are an effective tool to educate non-autistic children about autism characteristics, as long as the illustrations are enjoyable, the stories are easy to understand, and the themes promote empathy and acceptance of diversity. The interviews highlighted the critical importance of collaboration among psychologists, teachers, and illustrators in creating a welcoming environment for the learning development of autistic children.

The three books all convey stories about common characteristics of children with autism, but they do so in different ways, such as through varying styles of illustrations and how they convey their messages, when comparing similar works using matrix comparison. The three books present the same story through varying perspectives. The three books employ cartoon-style illustrations; however, they exhibit different variations in design aspects, including typography selection, color palettes, and layout arrangements.

Message Concept

This illustrated children's picture book seeks to gently and pleasantly introduce the characteristics of autism to children. This picture book aims to foster empathy, acceptance, and understanding among friends on the autistic spectrum via engaging illustrations and an impactful story. Children will learn from a unique character that differences are not impeding friendships, play,

and growth together. This book serves as an effective educational medium, fostering early awareness of the importance of inclusion and the appreciation of variety in interactions with others. The objective is to eliminate and reduce negative stigmas and bullying towards children with autism by enhancing awareness and educating non-autism children.

Keywords: Empathy, education, awareness, autism, characteristics

Communication Concept

The story emphasizes inclusive and empathetic communication, illustrating the diverse interactions between people with special needs. The communication approach employed in this story is descriptive and is delivered straight from the main character's perspective ("me" or "I"). This concept facilitates the reader's emotional connection to the protagonist's inner experience, as well as their comprehension and empathy for the challenges the main character experiences in social communication and interaction.

The paragraphs of a story, which are often narrative and descriptive, aid in accurately describing the main character's experiences and feelings. The primary character's experience softly discloses the direction or moral message without evoking a patronizing impression. The transformation of the main character from a child who has a struggle to communicate to one who begins to engage, learns to connect, and gains acceptance from fellow students and teachers effectively conveys the message. Children's emotions need the potential for development via self-actualization, which includes enhanced awareness of love and being loved, comprehension of others and acceptance, self-assurance, recognition from friends, and the ability to grow and develop. Via thoughtful affirmations and empathetic persuasiveness, encourages

readers to embrace inclusivity and diversity, thus raising the story from just interesting to deeply emotional.

Media Concept

This design project will use an illustrated children's picture book as an educational medium to educate the children and raise awareness about autism, presented through stories that illustrate the general characteristics of children with autism. By emphasizing visual elements that can attract children's attention, this book is designed with more dominant illustrations. This is based on the findings of previous observations, interviews, and analyses. This illustrated children's picture book measures 23 x 23 cm. The cover material that will be employed is a hardcover with matte lamination.

In designing this illustrated children's picture book, there are also supporting media that can help promote the main media. Here are some items that will be used as supporting media, such as a bookmark, standee acrylic, tote bag, keychain, sticker set, promotion banner, puzzle, mug, poster, origami, pencil case, ruler, coloring book, box file, and paper doll.

Visual Concept

Moodboard

Moodboards are essential as a reference for designing illustrated children's picture books.



Image 3 Moodboard

Source: Nabyla, 2025

Illustration

Based on the theory discussed in the previous chapter and the target audience, the illustrations that will be employed in the design of this illustrated children's picture book will be in a cartoon style without outlines, utilizing digital media. The setting for this story's illustrations is a school environment. Furthermore, there exist other decorative visual elements.



Image 4 Cartoon Illustration Style

Source: Nabyla, 2025

Typography

- Decorative: Decorative fonts are employed for the book title and onomatopoeia (words that mimic sounds). The font utilized on the book cover title is "Dunkin Bold," which conveys a playful and cheerful atmosphere that is suitable for children. The font applied is "Joti One Regular," which produces a loud but not dreaded effect in terms of onomatopoeia.

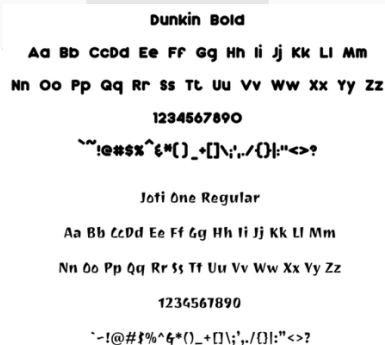
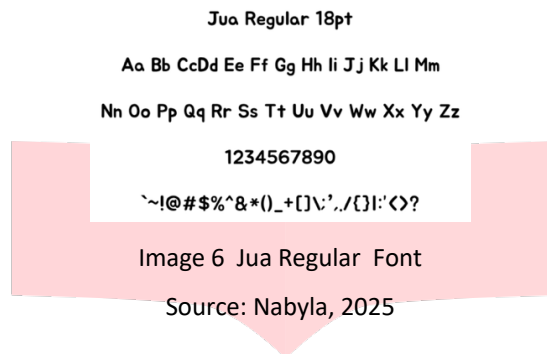


Image 5 Dunkin Bold and Joti One Font

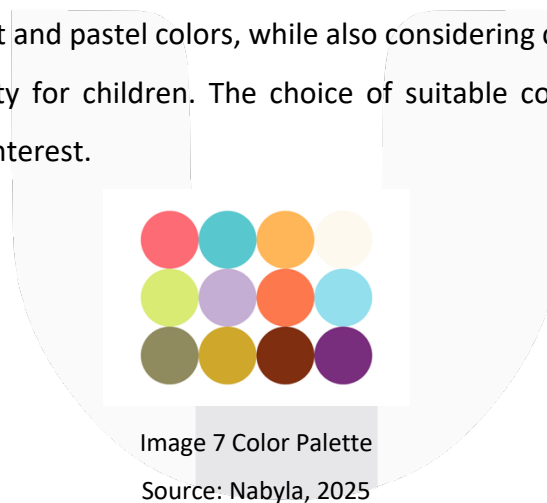
Sumber: Nabyla, 2025

- Sans-serif: As discussed in the previous chapter, the font that is optimally utilized in illustrated children's picture books is a sans serif typeface. Sans serif fonts with a simple shape and no hooks will be easier for children to read. The font utilized is "Jua Regular" with a size of 18 points.



Color

The color palette of this illustrated children's picture book primarily emphasizes vibrant and pastel colors, while also considering color contrast to facilitate readability for children. The choice of suitable colors is made to attract children's interest.



Layout

The layout setups in the design of this illustrated children's tale use a combination of single-page, spread-page, and spot layouts. Additionally, this children's picture book has a lot more illustrations than words.

FINAL DESIGN



Image 8 Final Design

Source: Nabyla, 2025

Mockup

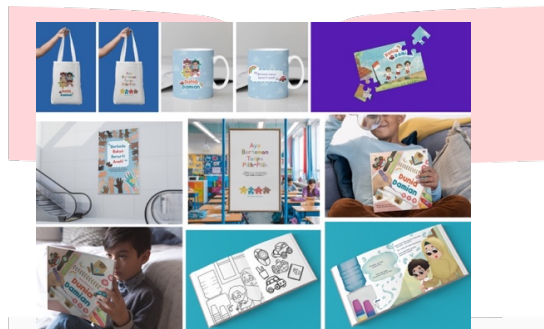


Image 9 Mockup

Source: Nabyla, 2025

FINAL PICTURE BOOK TESTING WITH THE CHILDREN

Due to privacy and safety, the children's faces and names have been hidden.

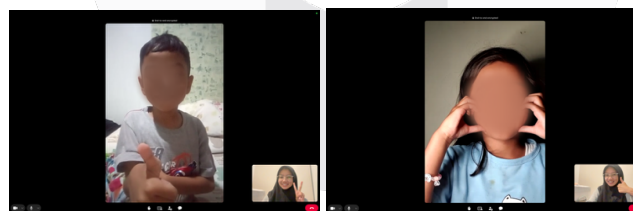


Image 10 Final Picture Book Testing with the Children

Source: Nabyla, 2025

The initial test of illustrated picture books about autism with two non-autistic children showed very favorable results for the visual, story, and educational aspects. Both responders liked the story and designs. The storyline was entertaining and easy to understand, and the visuals were

appealing. Most importantly, they understood the story's core lesson about accepting difference and including friends like Damian. They seemed to enjoy Damian and the other children, showing empathy and social acceptance. This book could educate children about autism through testing.

CONCLUSION

The illustrated picture book "Dunia Damian" raises autism awareness among non-autistic children aged 6-8. The method begins with a theoretical study and expert interviews to identify autism characteristics, create sympathetic characters, and create a child-friendly visual design. To foster empathy, the book describes an autistic child's school life. Supporting media were created utilizing design and communication strategies to complement the educational content alongside the main media.

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