



BentoFun Competition: A Community Service Innovation for Balanced Nutrition Education and Culinary Creativity in Youth

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 01/07/2026

Revised 14/07/2026

Accepted 17/07/2026

Keyword:

Creativity; cake decoration;
school students;
community service; Berau.

ABSTRACT

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Creativity was an important aspect that needed to be developed from school age to support innovative thinking and children's self-confidence. This community service activity aimed to provide a space for creative expression for elementary, junior high, and senior high school students through a competition called the BentoFun Competition with the theme "One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations." The activity was held on 12 July 2026, from 09.00 to 15.00 WITA, at Cafe Gavaria Durian III, Berau Regency. Participatory education and experiential learning methods were used, in which participants were directly involved in decorating and creating cakes according to their own imagination. Data were collected through observation of participant involvement, judges' assessment rubrics, and activity documentation, and were analyzed descriptively. The results showed high enthusiasm and participation among participants, with a variety of creative works reflecting different imaginative characteristics across age groups. The activity also had a positive impact, increasing participants' self-confidence, independence, and fine motor skills, with positive responses from parents and accompanying teachers. In conclusion, the BentoFun Competition was effective as a medium for developing the creativity of school-age children and has the potential to be replicated sustainably in other regions.



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INTRODUCTION

The school-age period, covering elementary school (SD), junior high school (SMP), through senior high school (SMA), is a crucial period in children's growth and development. During this age range, children undergo rapid physical, cognitive, and psychosocial maturation that requires adequate nutritional support (RS PKU Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2026). Balanced nutrition plays an important role not only in supporting physical growth, but also in maintaining immunity, optimizing cognitive function, and improving students' learning concentration at school (Lisa et al., 2024). Conversely, an imbalance in nutritional intake—whether in the form of deficiency or excess—can trigger various health problems that affect the quality of children's growth and development (Jusriani & Zulfirawati, 2024).

In reality, nutrition problems among school-age children in Indonesia remain a challenge that has not been fully resolved. Low knowledge of healthy eating patterns, high consumption of unhealthy snacks in the school environment, and minimal involvement of various parties in educating children are among the factors that worsen this condition (Asathin et al., 2026). In fact, good nutritional knowledge has been shown to be one of the determining factors of a person's attitudes and behavior in choosing food according to their body's needs. Nutrition education for school-age children therefore needs to be delivered continuously and through engaging media so that information can be well received and internalized.

One approach considered effective in bridging nutrition education with children's interests is activities that combine elements of play, art, and creativity. Various studies show that creative activities play a major role in developing children's potential, both in terms of motor skills, cognition, and problem-solving ability (Putro, 2016). Through enjoyable activities, children can learn to recognize themselves and their environment while sharpening their imagination and natural curiosity (Putro, 2016). This creativity-based approach is in line with the principle that learning is more meaningful when delivered through direct experience that involves physical activity and children's self-expression (Harahap, 2022).

Starting from these two needs—balanced nutrition education and the development of children's creativity—the concept of bento was considered an appropriate medium to implement in a community service activity. Bento, known as a Japanese-style lunch box with neat, colorful, and proportional food arrangement, allows children to learn about balanced nutritional composition (carbohydrates, protein, vegetables, and fruit) while training fine motor skills and aesthetic sensitivity in arranging food. Through this concept, nutrition education is no longer delivered one-way and didactically, but is packaged in the form of an interactive, enjoyable competition that encourages students' creative spirit.

Based on this background, the implementation team organized a community service activity titled BentoFun Competition, a competition to arrange creative and nutritious bento meals involving students from elementary, junior high, and senior high school. This activity was designed as a preventive and educational effort to increase students' knowledge of balanced nutrition principles, while also serving as a space to develop participants' creativity, independence, and self-confidence. By involving students across educational levels, this activity is also expected to reach a wider age group so that the impact of nutrition education can be felt sustainably, by students, teachers, and parents who assist in preparing meals at home.

Through the implementation of the BentoFun Competition, the service team hopes to contribute to growing collective awareness of the importance of healthy eating patterns from an early age, forming independent habits of consuming nutritious food, and encouraging the growth of a young generation that is not only physically healthy but also creative and innovative in addressing everyday needs.

RESEARCH METHODS

This community service activity was carried out in the form of a competition titled BentoFun Competition with the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations,” held on Sunday, 12 July 2026, from 09.00 to 15.00 WITA, at Cafe Gavaria Durian III, Berau Regency. The location was chosen based on the comfort of the venue, accessibility for participants from various schools in Berau Regency, and the availability of facilities adequate to support practice-based activities. The targets of this activity were students at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels, who were divided into competition categories according to educational level so that the assessment process was more proportional and appropriate to each age group's stage of creative development.

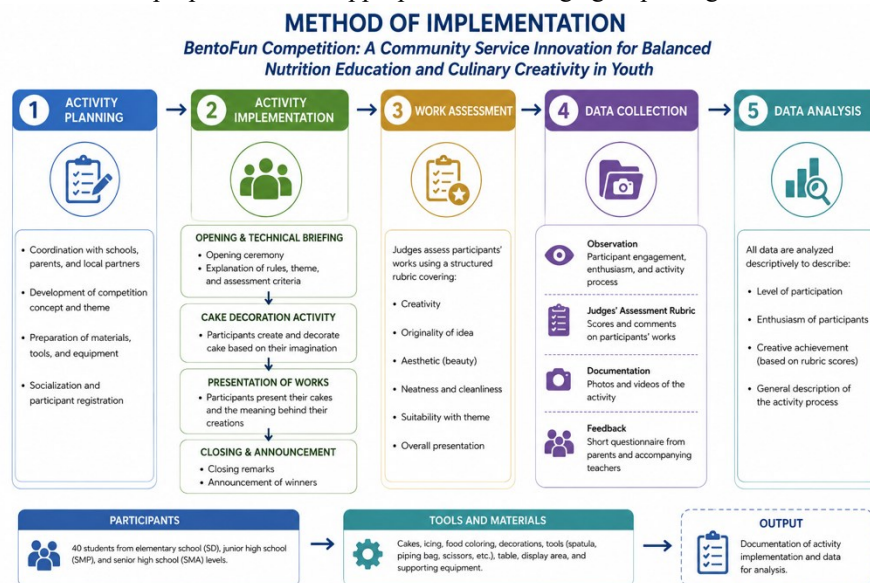


Figure 1. Method of implementation

The approach used in this activity was participatory education and experiential learning, in which participants were directly involved in the practice of decorating and creating cakes according to the predetermined theme. Through this approach, students were not only invited to create visually, but were also trained to pour their ideas and imagination into a real work independently and with confidence.

Implementation began with a preparation stage, which included coordination with Cafe Gavaria Durian III as the venue partner, preparation of the proposal and event schedule, determination of the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations,” preparation of competition assessment criteria, preparation of cake decoration materials and equipment, and publicity and registration of participants from the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels. On the day of implementation, the activity began at 09.00 WITA with participant re-registration, collection of participant numbers, and the official opening of the event by the committee/service team, accompanied by a brief explanation of the rules and the competition theme. The committee then provided a

technical explanation of the competition rules, time allocation, and assessment criteria, while also explaining the meaning of the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations” to stimulate participants' ideas and imagination before they began creating.

In the core stage, participants began decorating and creating cakes according to their own imagination using the materials and equipment provided. During this process, the service team and the panel of judges observed the work process, creativity of ideas, and participants' independence in completing their work. After the working time ended, the judges assessed the works based on several aspects: creativity and originality of ideas in line with the theme, beauty and harmony of the decoration, neatness and cleanliness of the finished work, and the overall suitability of the work with the theme. Assessment was carried out using a scoring rubric with a specific weight for each aspect to maintain the objectivity of the results.

The series of activities ended with an announcement and closing stage, which included the announcement of winners for each educational-level category, the presentation of appreciation to participants, a joint documentation session, and closing remarks from the service team on the importance of creativity and self-expression for students' growth and development. To measure the effectiveness of the activity, instruments used included an observation sheet on participant participation and creativity during the competition, the judges' assessment rubric, and photo and video documentation throughout the activity. The data obtained were then analyzed descriptively to examine the level of participation, enthusiasm, and creative achievement of participants in the BentoFun Competition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of Activity Implementation

The BentoFun Competition with the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations” was successfully carried out on Sunday, 12 July 2026, from 09.00 to 15.00 WITA, at Cafe Gavaria Durian III, Berau Regency. The activity was attended by 40 students consisting of elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels. Participant enthusiasm was evident from the registration session onward, with participants arriving on time and accompanied by their parents or supervising teachers. Overall, the event ran according to the prepared schedule, from the opening, technical briefing, the competition itself, judging, to the announcement of winners, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 2. The Service Team and Participants at the Opening of the BentoFun Competition

2. Participant Enthusiasm and Participation

During the competition, participants showed a high level of participation and engagement in exploring their creative ideas. The theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations” successfully drew a variety of creative interpretations from participants, ranging from cartoon characters and nature themes to abstract forms reflecting each child's imagination. This indicates that the experiential learning approach applied in this activity was effective in encouraging children to think freely, dare to try, and express their ideas through a concrete medium. In line with Putro (2016), activities that involve elements of play and hands-on creation can foster curiosity, imagination, and children's self-confidence in creating.



Figure 3. Participants Decorating Their Cakes During the Core Activity

Differences in creative characteristics were also apparent across participant age groups. Elementary school participants tended to produce works with bright colors and simple forms reflecting typical childlike imagination, while junior and senior high school participants showed more complex, detailed, and conceptually mature decoration skills. This finding reinforces the importance of grouping competition categories by educational level, as each age group has a different stage of creative development (Harahap, 2022).

3. Assessment Results and Participants' Works

Based on the judges' assessment of the aspects of creativity and originality of ideas, beauty and harmony of decoration, neatness and cleanliness of the finished work, and suitability with the theme, the works produced by participants generally showed good conformity with the activity theme, with a fairly wide variety of ideas despite the relatively uniform materials and tools used. This indicates that limited tools and materials did not hinder the emergence of creativity, but rather encouraged participants to think more innovatively in utilizing the available resources.

4. Impact of the Activity on Participants

This activity had several positive impacts on participants, including increased self-confidence in creating, improved fine motor skills through the process of decorating cakes, and the growth of the ability to work independently in completing a piece of work within a set time limit. Observation during the activity showed that participants did not only focus on the competitive aspect, but also enjoyed the creative process itself, in line with the principle that creative activities should provide an enjoyable learning experience for children (Putro, 2016).

In addition to benefiting participants, this activity also received a positive response from the parents and accompanying teachers present. A number of parents expressed appreciation because the activity provided a space for children to develop talents and interests outside of formal academic activities, while also serving as an educational recreational outlet that is rarely found in the Berau Regency area.

5. Challenges and Solutions during Implementation

During implementation, this activity was not without technical challenges, such as limited working time for elementary-level participants, weather conditions, or limited seating. To address this, the service team made direct technical adjustments in the field, such as adding extra working time or rearranging participant table layouts], so that the activity could still run smoothly to completion.

6. General Reflection

RESULTS MATRIX					
BentoFun Competition: A Community Service Innovation for Balanced Nutrition Education and Culinary Creativity in Youth					
No.	Indicator	Description	Findings / Results	Evidence	Remarks
1.	 Participation Level	The level of participant involvement from the registration to the end of the activity.	40 students (SD, SMP, SMA) participated. 100% of registered participants attended the activity. - Participants were active and engaged throughout the activities.	- Attendance list - Observation sheet - Activity documentation (photos)	High participation indicates the relevance and appeal of the activity to the target group.
2.	 Enthusiasm of Participants	The level of enthusiasm and interest shown by participants during the events.	- Participants showed high enthusiasm during the cake decoration process. - Active questions and interactions during technical briefing and guidance. - Participants completed their works on time.	- Observation sheet - Photos - Field notes	Participants demonstrated great excitement and interest in creative activities.
3.	 Creative Achievement	The quality and diversity of participants' works in terms of creativity, imagination, and originality.	- Various creative ideas were produced with unique themes and designs. - Works reflected participants' imagination and personal characteristics. - Most works met or exceeded the assessment rubric criteria.	- Judges' assessment rubrics - Photos of participants' works - Score summary	The quality of works shows that the activity effectively draws out creativity at each age level.
4.	 Skill Development	Improvement of skills observed during the activity process.	- Participants demonstrated better fine motor skills while decorating cakes. - Participants were able to work independently within the given time. - Increased confidence in presenting their work.	- Observation sheet - Field notes - Photos	The activity contributed to the development of fine motor skills, independence, and self-confidence.
5.	 Response from Parents and Teachers	Perceptions and feedback from parents and accompanying teachers.	- Parents and teachers gave positive responses. - They viewed the activity as educational, creative, and beneficial. - The activity is considered suitable to be conducted regularly.	- Feedback questionnaire - Interviews / comments - Documentation	Positive responses indicate social acceptance and support for the continuity of the program.
OVERALL SUMMARY		The BentoFun Competition was successfully implemented with high participation, strong enthusiasm, and a wide variety of creative works. The activity had a positive impact on participants' skills and received supportive responses from parents and teachers.			

Figure 3. Results Matrix

Overall, the BentoFun Competition with the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations” can be said to have successfully achieved its stated objective, namely providing a space for creative expression for elementary, junior high, and senior high school students in Berau Regency. This activity demonstrates that a practice- and competition-based approach can be an effective medium for fostering creativity, self-confidence, and innovative thinking in school-age children, while also strengthening the involvement of parents and the community in supporting children's development outside the formal school environment.

CONCLUSION

The BentoFun Competition community service activity with the theme “One Cake, a Thousand Imaginations,” held on 12 July 2026 at Cafe Gavaria Durian III, Berau Regency, was successfully implemented and achieved its stated objectives. This activity proved to be an effective platform for elementary, junior high, and senior high school students to develop creativity, imagination, and self-confidence through hands-on practice in decorating and creating cakes according to the theme.

The participatory education and experiential learning approach applied in this activity was shown to encourage active participant involvement, foster independence in creating, and train fine motor skills and innovative thinking among school-age children. Differences in creative characteristics across age groups also confirm the importance of grouping competition categories by participants' developmental stage, so that the assessment process can be more proportional and fair.

In addition to providing direct benefits to participants, this activity also received a positive response from parents and accompanying teachers, who considered such activities important as a space for developing children's talents and interests outside formal academic activities, while strengthening family and community involvement in supporting children's growth and development. Thus, the BentoFun Competition can serve as a model for sustainable community service activities that can be replicated in other regions, to continue encouraging the growth of a young generation that is creative, confident, and able to express its imagination positively.

As a follow-up, it is recommended that similar activities be held regularly with varied themes, and involve more schools and communities in Berau Regency so that the educational impact and benefits of the activity can be felt by more students.

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