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(IJEPC)**[www.ijepec.com](http://www.ijepec.com)**EXPLORING THE WELL-BEING OF SPECIAL NEEDS  
CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA: A STUDY AT SEKOLAH  
KEBANGSAAN PENDIDIKAN KHAS KUANTAN**

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**Abstract:**

This study investigates the well-being of Malaysian Muslim children with special needs, focusing on various aspects such as social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. The research was conducted at Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kuantan in Indera Mahkota 2, involving 24 students with Developmental Disabilities (DD) and Learning Disabilities (LD), aged 8-12, and 20 teachers. The children's well-being was assessed through self-report surveys and teacher evaluations, complemented by direct observations. Methodologically, the study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches, using self-report questionnaires and informal interviews. The sample size comprised 41 teachers and 107 students, with a subset of 30 participants for detailed study. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent sample t-tests were employed to analyse the data. The results showed no significant differences in well-being between LD and DD children. However, disparities were observed in self and teacher ratings, particularly in

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social and physical well-being, with children rating themselves lower. Emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being showed alignment between children's and teachers' perceptions. The study highlights the unique challenges faced by special needs children, including social integration difficulties, emotional stress, and the need for tailored educational strategies. Despite its insights, the study faced limitations, including a small sample size and focus on specific disability categories, which may limit generalizability. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples and alternative data collection methods. In conclusion, the study underscores the need for comprehensive support for special needs children in Malaysia, encompassing various dimensions of well-being. It calls for the involvement of families, educators, and the broader community in ensuring the holistic development and integration of these children into society..

#### Keywords:

Learning Disorder, Developmental Disorder, Well-Being, Special Needs

## Introduction

In accordance with Malaysian law, children with disabilities, commonly referred to as "anak kurang upaya" (OKU) or "anak istimewa" in a Malaysian context, pertain to individuals under the age of 18 facing long-term physical, mental, intellectual, and sensory impairments that may hinder their full participation in society due to various barriers (Siti Nor Ismalina et al., 2016). The National Child Policy emphasizes every child's right to live with care, love, health services, and social support, extending these rights to children with special needs, who also have the entitlement to protection from neglect, abuse, violence, and exploitation, along with habitation, rehabilitation, and integration into family and society. Compared to typically developing children, those with special needs often require more assistance and attention. Identifying a child with special needs can be challenging without close interaction. Special needs encompass not only genetic conditions like Down Syndrome or autism but also include children with hearing problems and those facing challenges in learning, often termed as "slow learners." These children necessitate additional care due to their unique cognitive needs. Children with impairments often experience social and emotional well-being challenges, manifesting in fewer friendships, increased likelihood of harassment, bullying, and limited participation in extracurricular activities. This also contributes to heightened parenting stress for mothers dealing with children facing emotional issues or engaging in violent behaviour (Vaughan et al., 2013). Given the social stigma attached to being "special," the well-being of these children is paramount. Well-being, in this context, is categorized into five main types: social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Each aspect holds significance, especially for children requiring special care.

Intellectual well-being involves engaging in cognitively stimulating activities to enhance knowledge, extending beyond formal education (Daily Mom, 2020). For children with developmental/intellectual disabilities, this aspect of well-being is particularly important, as it plays a significant role in their overall growth and development. Access to educational resources, tailored teaching methods, and opportunities for cognitive enrichment are essential to promote intellectual well-being in these children.

Social well-being concerns the challenges individuals face while embedded in social structures and communities (Keyes, 2014). Children with special needs often encounter difficulties in

social interactions due to their disabilities. It is crucial to address these challenges by providing them with social support, fostering inclusive environments, and promoting understanding and acceptance among their peers. Social integration and a sense of belonging are vital components of social well-being for these children.

Disabilities may impact emotional development, with children and youth with disabilities more likely to experience poorer social and emotional well-being than their peers without disabilities (Montie, 2019). Emotional well-being includes managing and expressing emotions effectively. Special needs children may face heightened emotional challenges due to the stressors associated with their disabilities. Therefore, it is imperative to provide them with appropriate emotional support, counselling services, and strategies for coping with emotional difficulties. Physical well-being, as emphasized by Millere and Senkane (2014), is fundamental for quality of life in children with disabilities, encompassing housing suitability, environmental adaptability, mobility, and healthcare accessibility. Access to appropriate healthcare services, assistive devices, and a supportive physical environment are essential for promoting physical well-being in special needs children. Physical well-being also includes ensuring their safety and comfort in daily activities.

Lastly, spiritual well-being is the search for life's meaning, purpose, and realization of a power greater than oneself (Alcan et al., 2021). Spirituality can be a source of strength and resilience for children with special needs and their families. Promoting spiritual well-being involves creating an environment that respects and accommodates diverse spiritual beliefs and practices, allowing these children to explore their own spirituality in a supportive manner.

The overarching goal of this study is to initiate an exploration into the well-being of children with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Objectives include observing how children with mental and physical incapacities express emotions, behave in social settings, and whether they require more attention than their typical peers. This paper specifically investigates the well-being of special needs children at Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kuantan in Indera Mahkota 2. It is anticipated that these children will exhibit distinct behavioural and emotional patterns compared to their typically developing counterparts.

Malaysia has made significant strides in recognising and addressing the well-being of special needs children. The government has established laws and policies aimed at protecting their rights and ensuring their access to education, healthcare, and social services. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 and the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities are key legislative measures that highlight the commitment of the Malaysian government to promote the well-being of individuals with disabilities, including children (United Nations, 2019).

In Malaysia, special education schools like Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kuantan play a crucial role in providing tailored educational programs and support services to children with various disabilities. These schools aim to enhance the intellectual, social, and emotional well-being of their students by offering specialized curricula and therapies (Mohamed et al., 2018).

Special needs children often encounter unique behavioural and emotional challenges due to their disabilities. Research by Vaughan et al. (2013) indicates that these children are more susceptible to experiencing social isolation, loneliness, and emotional distress. Factors such as

communication difficulties, limited mobility, and sensory sensitivities can contribute to their social and emotional struggles. This underscores the importance of addressing the emotional well-being of special needs children through counselling and social support programs.

In the context of Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh muamalat* deals with matters of social and financial transactions, ethics, and interpersonal relations. It is relevant to our study as it provides a framework for understanding the ethical dimensions of how society interacts with and supports special needs children. *Fiqh muamalat* emphasizes fairness, justice, and compassion in all interactions, which are principles that can be applied to the care and support of special needs children.

By examining the ethical and *fiqh* aspects of caring for special needs children in Kuantan, we can explore how Islamic values and principles can be integrated into educational and social programs to enhance their overall well-being. This study seeks to identify ways in which *fiqh muamalat* can be leveraged to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for special needs children, aligning with the broader ethical principles of Islamic ethics.

Several empirical studies have investigated the well-being of special needs children in various contexts. These studies have examined different aspects of well-being, including academic achievement, social inclusion, and emotional health. One such study conducted by Siti Nor Ismalina et al. (2016) in Malaysia explored the experiences of children with Down Syndrome and their families. The study highlighted the importance of early intervention, family support, and inclusive education in promoting the well-being of these children. Additionally, research by Montie (2019) focused on the emotional well-being of special needs children in the United States. The study found that social and emotional support from parents, teachers, and peers significantly influenced the emotional well-being of these children. These findings underscore the global relevance of addressing emotional well-being in special needs children and the importance of a supportive social environment.

The goal of this study is thus to initiate an exploration into the well-being of children with developmental/intellectual disabilities. Objectives include observing how children with mental and physical incapacities express emotions, behave in social settings, and whether they require more attention than their typical peers. This study specifically investigates the well-being of special needs children at Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kuantan in Indera Mahkota 2. It is anticipated that these children will exhibit distinct behavioural and emotional patterns compared to their typically developing counterparts.

## Methods

This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative research designs to comprehensively explore the well-being of special needs children in Kuantan. Self-report questionnaires are utilized as a primary tool for data collection.

## Study Design

To facilitate this investigation, an informal interview format was developed, featuring a set of carefully curated questions to extract relevant data from the participants. In addition to verbal inquiries, engaging activities such as colouring competitions were organized to capture the interest of the special needs children. The observation of students' well-being extended beyond questionnaire responses to include physical assessments conducted throughout the session.

### ***Sample Size and Subject Recruitment***

The study was conducted at Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Kuantan, involving 41 teachers and 107 students. Thirty participants, encompassing both teachers and students from the school, were recruited for the study. The children, aged 6 to 12, predominantly identified as Malay and practiced Islam. Special needs children were categorized based on their disabilities, including those with hearing problems, learning problems, and a combination of both.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

A Likert scale was employed to assess social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being based on the collected data. A set of 10 questions was administered to the students, while teachers received a questionnaire comprising 5 questions. The teachers played a crucial role in facilitating communication with Developmental Disability (DD) students.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

IBM SPSS ver 26 was utilized for all statistical analyses. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to discern differences between Learning Disability (LD) and Developmental Disability (DD) children across social, intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional dimensions. Additionally, an independent sample t-test was employed to compare ratings between children and teachers in terms of social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being. These analyses aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the well-being disparities within the studied population.

### ***Results***

The study focused on Malaysian, Muslim special needs children and their teachers, encompassing a total of 24 participants. The children were classified into two categories: Developmental Disabilities (DD) and Learning Disabilities (LD), within the age range of 8-12 years. Notably, 54.17% of the participants belonged to the LD category, while the remaining 45.83% were categorized as DD. The teaching staff included 20 individuals, with a composition of 80% female and 20% male.

In the assessment of social well-being, the children achieved an overall score of 69.17%, while the teachers rated them at 87%. Moving to physical well-being, the children self-reported an overall score of 71.25%, whereas the teachers assessed them at 85%. Evaluating emotional well-being, the children attributed themselves a score of 90.83%, while the teachers scored them slightly lower at 92%. In the realm of intellectual well-being, the children self-evaluated at 61.67%, and the teachers rated them at 61%. Lastly, in the spiritual category, the children awarded themselves a score of 75%, while the teachers assessed them at 81%.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being between LD and DD children. The results indicated no significant differences between the two groups ( $p > .05$ ).

When comparing between the children's and teachers rating, independent samples t-tests were used to evaluate the differences in their ratings. In terms of social well-being, the children ( $M = 6.92$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) rated themselves lower than teachers ( $M = 8.70$ ,  $SD .979$ ),  $t(42) = -3.78$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . When comparing physical well-being, the children ( $M = 7.13$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) rated themselves lower than teachers ( $M = 8.50$ ,  $SD 1.93$ ),  $t(42) = -2.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . In terms of



emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being, there were no significant differences between the children's and teacher ratings  $p > .05$ .

## Discussion

Employing standardized well-being indicators, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using self-report surveys filled out by special needs children and their parents or carers. These surveys assessed various well-being factors, including emotional regulation, social interaction, physical health, and intellectual and spiritual well-being. Additionally, direct observations of the children's behaviour were conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of their well-being.

In analysing social well-being, it was observed that special needs children, irrespective of their category (LD or DD), did not exhibit significant differences. However, a notable distinction arose when comparing self-reported social well-being scores between students (6.9) and teachers (8.7). This discrepancy suggests that special needs students may face challenges in expressing their thoughts and emotions, impacting verbal and non-verbal interactions. Despite these challenges, observations indicated that the students demonstrated effective socialization, overcoming hurdles with the use of sign language. The difference in social well-being scores between students and teachers could be attributed to several factors. Students might have a lower perception of their social skills or might not fully recognize their social competencies. This finding aligns with research suggesting that individuals with special needs often face challenges in self-awareness and social interaction (Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001). The effective use of sign language highlights the importance of alternative communication methods in special education (Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002).

Exploring emotional well-being, both students and teachers attributed high scores (90.83% and 92%, respectively). This alignment signifies a shared perception of the students' emotional well-being. Notably, special needs children, when asked about their happiness and enjoyment of school, provided overwhelmingly positive responses. This positive outlook is indicative of a supportive school environment fostering inclusion and positive attitudes toward disability. The high and consistent scores in emotional well-being among both groups suggest a positive emotional environment in the school setting. This consistency may indicate effective emotional support systems in place, such as inclusive practices and a supportive school culture, which are known to enhance the well-being of special needs students (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

In terms of physical well-being, there was a slight discrepancy in scores, with students rating themselves at 71.25% and teachers at 85%. This difference may indicate a potential underestimation by students regarding their physical abilities. However, no significant variations were observed between LD and DD categories. Addressing specific questions about sickness frequency and sleep, students' responses indicated potential challenges in their physical well-being, possibly due to their unique needs. The discrepancy in physical well-being scores might reflect a difference in the perception of physical abilities between the children and their teachers. This could also point to the importance of self-efficacy in children's assessments of their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). The challenges in physical well-being, as indicated by issues related to sickness and sleep, might require additional medical and psychological attention.

Intellectual well-being showed no significant differences between students and teachers, with both groups scoring similarly. However, challenges emerged when assessing the perception of learning difficulty. Students, particularly in both LD and DD categories, expressed struggles with schoolwork, indicating delays in specific intellectual capacities required for academic progress. Notably, the need for assistance with homework highlighted the additional support these children require, both at school and home. The similarity in intellectual well-being scores suggests a shared understanding of the children's cognitive abilities. However, the expressed difficulties in schoolwork highlight the need for specialized educational approaches. This is in line with literature emphasizing the necessity of tailored educational strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of children with LD and DD (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Examining spiritual well-being, special needs children demonstrated a sound understanding of Islamic principles, with minimal differences between LD and DD categories. Parents' diverse approaches to religious education at home played a role in variations in scores. Additionally, the school's efforts in incorporating Islamic activities contributed positively to the students' spiritual well-being. Teachers, while slightly rating students higher, acknowledged their efforts in providing adequate exposure to religious practices. The study underscores the importance of religious education in the holistic development of special needs children. The minimal differences in spiritual well-being scores between LD and DD categories indicate a uniform approach in integrating religious principles. The role of family in religious education and the school's contribution to spiritual development reflect the significance of a collaborative approach in the spiritual nurturing of children with special needs (Hay & Nye, 2006).

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

During the course of this research project, several limitations were identified that warrant acknowledgment. Additionally, recommendations are proposed to enhance the validity and reliability of future studies in this area.

#### ***Limitations***

*Small Sample Size:* The primary limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size, involving only 24 students. The restricted sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings, rendering them potentially nonspecific or imprecise.

*Specific Disability Categories:* Another limitation arises from the study's focus on students with Developmental Disabilities (DD) and Learning Disabilities (LD). The results obtained may not be universally applicable to children with diverse disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder, health impairments, emotional disturbances, and others.

*Questionnaire Understanding:* Many students faced difficulty comprehending the questionnaire, potentially affecting the reliability of responses. The uncertainty surrounding whether students truly understood and responded honestly introduces an element of ambiguity into the results.

*Uniform Well-being Levels:* The study did not identify differences in well-being based on age, suggesting that participants across age groups may experience similar stress levels. This could potentially mask nuanced results and hinder a deeper understanding of age-related variations.

**Recommendations**

*Enlarge Sample Size:* Future studies should prioritize enlarging the sample size to obtain more robust and representative results. Inclusion of participants spanning various age groups and diverse disabilities would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of special needs children's well-being.

*Diversify Participants:* To enhance the applicability of findings, future research should encompass a broader range of disabilities. Including conditions beyond DD and LD would provide insights into the unique well-being challenges faced by children with diverse special needs.

*Alternative Data Collection Methods:* Employing alternative data collection methods, such as structured observation, can complement interview data. This would offer a more holistic view of participants' well-being, mitigating potential limitations associated with self-reporting.

*Teacher and Professional Involvement:* Increase the involvement of teachers or other professionals in the research process. These individuals can contribute to the development of strategies aimed at ensuring students feel more comfortable and confident during interviews, potentially improving the quality of responses.

*Enhanced Interview Protocols:* Develop more structured interview protocols or utilize visual aids to facilitate effective communication of thoughts and feelings by students. This could address comprehension challenges and yield more reliable data.

By addressing these limitations and implementing the suggested recommendations, future research endeavours can advance our understanding of the well-being of special needs children, contributing to more inclusive and nuanced support strategies.

**Conclusion**

It is evident that children with special needs require heightened care and support compared to their typical counterparts. Faced with challenges such as fewer friendships, increased likelihood of bullying, and limited participation in extracurricular activities, these children often experience lower levels of social and emotional well-being than their peers without disabilities. As a collective community, we bear the responsibility of safeguarding the rights and welfare of these special needs children. This responsibility extends beyond their immediate families and educators; broader societal involvement is crucial to ensure their overall well-being, encompassing aspects such as care, maintenance, social support, and health services. Achieving a balanced well-being is paramount for these children, encompassing social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. The concerted efforts of family members, educators, and society at large are essential to create an environment where their rights and needs are met, fostering a more meaningful and beautiful life for every individual. Regardless of abilities, every human being has the inherent right to a quality life, and it is incumbent upon us as a community to uphold and nurture these rights for all. This study also provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of well-being in Malaysian Muslim special needs children. It highlights the importance of considering various dimensions of well-being and the role of different stakeholders, including teachers, families, and the educational system, in supporting the holistic development of these children. The findings also suggest areas for further research and intervention, such as enhancing self-awareness in social skills,



supporting physical health needs, addressing academic challenges, and fostering spiritual development.

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