

EDUCATING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: DO TEACHERS AND PARENTS SUBSCRIBE TO A COMMON PARADIGM?

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ABSTRACT

Educational Psychology has made strides in helping educators to understand the physical, cognitive and emotional development of children including children with disabilities¹. Although the education of mentally, emotionally and physically challenged students has taken centre stage, traditional beliefs have persisted in influencing the education of children with special needs. Thus this article dwells on the negative attitudes that parents have towards the education of their children with special needs, especially those with cerebral palsy. These negative attitudes have their origins in traditional African culture where the causes on many disabilities were not well understood; hence having a disabled family member was regarded as taboo. Empirical investigation has shown that negative traditional parental attitudes, perceptions and beliefs impact unfavourably in the education of children with disabilities. Interestingly parents have little faith in the work of educational psychologists, preferring to consult traditional healers. Would equipping traditional healers with psychological knowledge make the difference?

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Special Needs Education, Disabilities, Educational Psychology, Traditional beliefs

¹ The term children with disabilities refers to exceptional children who have physical, mental, behavioral or sensory characteristics that differ from the majority of children such that they require special education and related services to develop their full potential. According to Burden (2000) these are children with impairments e.g. visual, hearing, or physical which restrict them from full and equal participation in society.