

## ABSTRACT

Teachers working with learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) often feel ill prepared to manage challenging behaviours presented by them. Quite often, when they are faced with cases of challenging behaviour, they use coping strategies that have led to delinquency and other anti-social behaviours resulting into school dropout among these learners. Education Assessment records in Busia, Kakamega, Vihiga, Bungoma, Nandi, Kisumu and Siaya counties in Western Kenya indicate that between the years 2007 and 2012, 683 learners with ASDs had been assessed and placed in public schools out of which 202 had dropped out of school. Closer analysis of the records revealed that out of 283 learners assessed in Vihiga, Kakamega and Busia counties during this period, 135 had dropped out of school. These three counties accounted for 67 % of learners who had dropped out of school in the seven counties. Reason for this dropout has not been established although a number of studies seem to point at poor challenging behaviour management strategies. The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the influence of teachers' perception of challenging behaviour on the choice of management strategies. Objectives of this study were to; analyze types of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs in Western Kenya, assess strategies used in the management of challenging behaviours, determine the influence of teachers' cognitive perception of challenging behaviour on the choice of management strategies, establish the relationship between teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviours and the choice of management strategies, establish the Relationship between teachers Perception of Causes of Challenging Behaviour and the Choice of Management Strategies. A conceptual framework was used to show the interaction of dependent and independent variables. Descriptive survey research and correlation designs were adopted for this study. Target population of the study was 106 teachers. A saturated sampling technique was used. The sample size for the pilot study was 20 teachers drawn from 2 special schools and 2 special units. The reliability coefficient was set at 0.70 and above at an alpha level of 0.05. Test-retest of three instruments namely, challenging behaviour checklist, challenging behaviour perception questionnaire and teachers' attitude questionnaire in the pilot study yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89, 0.75 and 0.78 respectively. Experts from the department of Special Needs verified face and content validity of the research instruments. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation checklist, observation schedules, interview schedules and document analysis guide. Correlation coefficient analysis, inferential statistics and regressions were used to analyze quantitative data. Qualitative data from observation and interview schedules were collected, organized and categorized into themes, which were reported. Findings of the study indicate that all the 59 behaviours sampled occurred among learners with ASDs in Western Kenya albeit at different frequencies and magnitudes. Strategies used in management of challenging behaviours included intensive interaction, behavioural therapies and augmentative communication. Intensive interaction was the strategy that was being used by teachers and the one that they had found effective 83 (78.3%). Cognitive perception of challenging behaviour influenced the choice of management strategies, teachers who perceived challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs as a time line episodic chose least restrictive challenging behaviour management strategies such as behavior therapy model ( $r = .421$   $p \leq .05$ ) while those who perceived it as time line chronic chose more restrictive strategies such as mental health consultation ( $r = 0.294$   $p \leq .05$ ). There was a moderate relationship between positive attitudes and the choice of least restrictive management strategies such as intensive interaction ( $r = 0.438$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and negative attitudes with more restrictive strategies such as experimental functional analysis, ( $r = 0.283$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). The perception of causes of challenging behaviour was moderately correlated to the choice of management strategies such as sociological factors and social stories, ( $r = 0.521$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and sociological factors and The Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Handicapped Children strategy ( $r = 0.435$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Efforts to be made by schools to address the teachers' perception and attitudes towards challenging behaviour as they have an influence on their choice of management strategies.