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Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Causes of Challenging Behaviour and the Choice of Management Strategies among Learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

Edward Khasakhala and Priscilla Galava
School of Education Mount Kenya University Kakamega Campus

Abstract
The ministry of Public Health and Sanitation in Kenya together with ministry of Education recognizes that mental well being is important in psychosocial well being and cognitive development of children. They point out that learners with emotional and behavioural problems may engage in truancy, delinquency, drug and substance abuse and other anti-social behaviour. If not addressed these problems may lead to poor academic performance, school dropout as well as criminal and antisocial behaviour. Teachers Perception of the causes of challenging behaviour may influence the way they respond to and manage challenging behaviour presented by learners with developmental disabilities. However, there is relatively dearth of research into this area. Little is known about how their perception of causes of challenging behaviour may influence the choice of management strategies. The purpose of the present study was to establish the relationship between teacher's perception of causes of challenging behaviour and the choice of management strategies. Descriptive survey and correlation research design were adopted for the present study since they have been established as the best research paradigm for investigating behaviour. The study involved 106 teachers teaching in public primary schools that had learners with ASDs. The study used checklists, questionnaires, interview schedules, observation checklists, and document analysis guide. Ethical approval was sought from Maseno University. The perception of causes of challenging behaviour was moderately correlated to the choice of management strategies such as sociological factors and social stories, ($r=0.521$, $p<0.01$) and sociological factors and TEACCH strategy ($r=0.435$, $p<0.01$). Efforts to be made by schools to address the teachers' perception of causes of challenging behaviour as it has an influence on their choice of management strategies.
Keywords: perception, causes of challenging behaviour, choice of management strategy

Introduction

The Relationship between teachers Perception of Causes of Challenging Behaviour and the Choice of Management Strategies is an area that seems not to have received attention of scholars to date. Instead, most studies have concentrated on perception of causes of challenging behaviour (Lambrechts et. al., 2008; Whitaker, 2009; Crossland, 2009). There are at least two reasons why most of these researchers have begun to focus on teachers' perception causes of challenging behaviour. First, there is implicit assumption that the ideas about the causes of challenging behaviour will influence their responses towards it (Crossland, 2009). Although there is no information currently on how and when teachers perception of challenging behaviour may be related to the choice of management strategies, it has been suggested that perception of the causes of challenging behaviour interact with a number of factors to determine the teachers behaviour on either to assist or not assist a learner presenting challenging behaviour (Lambrechts et. al., 2008; Whitaker, 2009). These factors include teachers' demographic information such as professional qualifications, working experience, their age and gender (Male, 2004). Weru (2005) study compared behavioural symptoms of ASDs among African American in the USA and Kenyan school aged children in Nairobi that showed that Kenyan schoolchildren presented more challenging behaviour than African American children. The study failed to address the relationship between perception of causes of challenging behaviour and the choice of management strategies. In Kenya, perception of causes of ASDs seems not in line with the western countries. A study carried out by Riccio (2011) that investigated perception of the causes of ASDs using informal interview found out that especially in rural areas of Kenya, ASDs was perceived to be caused by witchcraft and sorcery. The study found out that learners with ASDs are in most cases hidden rather than being exposed to educational and medical attention. The second reason for this interest in staff perception relates to the needs to evaluate teachers training on challenging behaviour and other support services that can be provided to them to enable them manage challenging behaviour effectively (Hastings, 2005). Some of the well-documented support services in the current literature in the field of intellectual disabilities are development of partnership between teachers and parents of learners with ASDs (Jones and Hall, 2005), clear organizational structures at workplace (Whitaker, 2009) and proper remuneration (Mansell, 1993). None of these studies has addressed the relationship between teachers' perception of the causes of challenging behaviour and the choice of management strategies. Teachers Perception of the causes of challenging behaviour may influence the way they respond to and manage challenging behaviour presented by learners with developmental disabilities. However, there is relatively dearth of research into this area. Little is

known about how their perception of causes of challenging behaviour may influence the choice of management strategies.

Causes of Challenging Behaviours

Biological, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives have been advanced as the causes of challenging behaviours among learners with ASDs (Milne, 1993; Noor, et al., 2006). For example, proponents of biological concept often focus on the brain and genetic factors as the source of challenging behaviour (Edward et. al., 2007). This concept assume that behaviour disorders may result from physiological disease or dysfunction and assumes that physiological problems disrupts the functioning of the brain The causes of challenging behaviours are generally explained using bio-psychological model and remediation services for this group of people are usually done by psychiatrists, clinical psychologists or psychotherapists. The assessment of challenging behaviour often relies on observation and questioning (Alonso, Angermerer and Bernet, 2004). Various health professionals provide treatment with psychotherapy and psychiatry medication being the two major options (Alonso *et al.,* 2004). In recent years, social intervention, peer support and self-help are rapidly gaining attention as the methods of intervention of challenging behaviour (Wittchen and Jacobi, 2005; Akiskal and Benazzi, 2006). Stigma and discrimination are the two major sufferings that are commonly encountered by learners with ASDs who present challenging behaviour (Mandell, 2008). These negative consequences associated with challenging behaviour may make learners with ASDs develop emotional problems. The ministry of Public Health and Sanitation in Kenya together with ministry of Education (2009) recognizes that mental well being is important in psychosocial well being and cognitive development of children. They point out that learners with emotional and behavioural problems may engage in truancy, delinquency, drug and substance abuse and other anti-social behaviour. If not addressed these problems may lead to poor academic performance, school dropout as well as criminal and antisocial behaviour.

In management of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs, proponents of biological perspective follow the medical model of disability whereby drugs are used to manage challenging behaviour (Tsakanikos, Costello, Holt, Stummy and Bouras, 2007). Proponents of this model also strive to establish a link between ASDs and mental health problems. In comparison to both typically and atypically developing peers, researchers investigating the rates of comorbid psychopathology symptoms in learners with ASDs have not been widespread. A study carried out by Knost, Jonny and Matson (2014) in UK that involved 205 infants with and without ASDs between 17 and 37 months to determine comorbid psychopathology. Statistical analyses identified that comorbid psychopathology symptoms occur at significantly greater rates in infants and toddlers diagnosed with ASDs when compared to an atypically developing peer group. While Knost et al, (2014) was a comparison study that involved toddlers, the present study involved only learners with ASDs attending public primary schools in western Kenya

Proponents of biological perspective believe that the co-morbidity between ASDs and mental health affects many learners. For example, a previous study (Kielinen, Rantalla and Moilanen*.,* 2004) in Finland focusing on establishing the proportions of children with autistic disorders demonstrated that there were other mental health conditions in children and adolescents with a diagnosis of autism in a total population of 152,732 under the age of 16 years. This included 187 children with ASDs based on Diagnostic Statistical Manual -IV (DSM-IV, APA (1994) and 18% of the 187 children had mental health problems. This indicated that a significant number of children and adolescents with ASDs also had other mental health condition rates that are much higher than would be seen in a general population. As Kieline *et al.* (2004) cautions, their methods could have failed to detect all of the children and adolescents in the study area with ASDs. This study was however carried out in a non-school setting involving psychologists using multi element design whose findings were open to different interpretations. The present study was carried out in a school setting and it involved teachers who directly deal with learners.

Ecological model emphasizes the capacity for growth, freedom to choose one's own destiny and positive personal qualities as possible causes of psychological disorders leading to challenging behaviour (Melaned and Alizur 2001). It focuses on physical spatial and social environment and their influence on behaviour. Proponents ecological approach (Melaned and Alizur 2001; Akiskal and Benazzi, 2006; Harvey *et al*. 2009) advocate for structuring of physical environment as one way of managing challenging behaviour. A multiple case design carried in UK by Harvey *et al*. (2009) involving 12 learners with ASDs aged 8-14 years found out those teaching replacement skills with system change or consequence manipulation had the strongest influence on challenging behaviour. The present study set no age limit for the learners to participate and was a descriptive survey research whose findings can be generalized while Harvey et al. (2009) study was a case study.

Cognitive behavioural approach views challenging behaviour as an inability to fulfill ones' potential arising from the pressures of the society to conform to expectation and values. In this approach, a person who displays challenging behaviour is likely to have low self-concept, because he/she has experienced repeated criticism and negative circumstances. This approach mainly attributes psychological disorders to unconscious

conflicts, negative cognition, and low self-concept. On the other hand, socio-cultural approach places more emphasis on a larger social context in which a person lives (Sigafoos, 2000). It takes into account the individual's marriage, family, neighborhood, socio-economic status and ethnicity. (Ian, 2008)

Proponents of the behavioural model view challenging behaviour as an example of operant behaviour where positive and negative reinforcement principles at work in its development and maintenance (Felce and Perry, 1996; Williamson, 2008 Matson and Lovullo, 2008; Brosnan and Healy, 2011). They view challenging behaviour as functional and an adaptive way of exercising control over the person's environment. These events, whether negative or positive such as personal interactions or escapes from unpleasant work would have an influence on the behaviour of an individual. In management of challenging behaviour, this model attempts to look at functional relationship, contextual control and dynamic systems of behaviour (Williamson, 2008). In functional relationship, the reinforcers are defined functionally by what their actual effect to behaviour. In contextual control attempt is made to establish the motivational base that underlies the behaviour. It may translate into personal, biological or environmental setting events (Hastings, 1996). While in dynamic system, behaviour is viewed as being under control of wide variety of reinforcers with which a person's behaviour will interact. It means that intervention can take a wide variety of forms.

Evidence from research support the view that some challenging behaviours are likely to be caused by reinforcers including attention from teachers (Crossland, 2009), access to materials and activities as well as escape from demands (Williamson, 2008). This research evidence gives teachers a significant role to play in the development of desired behaviours in learners with ASDs via their interactions with those that they work with. However, these studies did not address the teachers' perception of challenging behaviours and how this influences their choice of challenging behaviour management strategies.

In terms of explanation to the causes of challenging behaviour teachers in Porter and Lacey (2009) study ranked in order attention seeking, task avoidance, communication problems, stress, interference with routines and provocation as some of causes of challenging behaviour presented by learners with developmental disabilities. In a related study, teachers ranked the causes of challenging behaviour as attention seeking, demand avoidance, communication problems, stress, interference with routines and provocation. These two studies did not address specific categories of challenging behaviour such as ecological, behavioural, psychodynamic and psychological that was addressed in the present study.

Whitaker (2009) study indicated that experienced and less experienced nursing staff working with people with learning disabilities who presented challenging behaviour differed in their views on the probable causes of challenging behaviour with the experienced staff being more likely to interpret challenging behaviour as an expression of need than less experienced staff.

Very little is known about the relationship between teachers' perception of causes of challenging behaviour and its influence on the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies. However, teacher's perception of the causes of challenging behaviours is likely to influence the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey and correlation research design were adopted for the present study since they have been established as the best research paradigm for investigating behaviour (Woods, 1986; Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), descriptive survey and correlation research can provide information about the distribution of a wide range of people's characteristics and of relationship between such characteristics. The study was carried out in Western Kenya in public primary schools that enrolled learners with ASDs. The study involved 106 teachers teaching in public primary schools that had learners with ASDs. Twenty teachers from four special units were used for pilot study. This population was not part of the actual study. For the remaining population consisting of 106 teachers, saturated sampling technique was used to sample respondents in the public primary schools in the counties that had programmes for learners with ASDs. The study used checklists, questionnaires, interview schedules, observation checklists, and document analysis guide.

Findings

Teachers' Demographic Information and Perception of the Causes of Challenging Behaviour

Multivariate analysis of variance was performed to investigate, age, gender, professional qualification, length of service and experience differences in teachers' perception of the causes of challenging behaviour. Seven dependent variables were used to elicit teacher's perception of the causes of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. These were Biological, psychodynamic, ecological, behavioural, humanistic, sociological and psychological challenging behaviour perception. There was a moderate relationship between teachers' perception of challenging behaviour and sociological factors as illustrated in table 1

Table 1 Teachers' Perception of causes of Challenging Behaviour (Sociological Factors)

Age category	Means	Wilk's lambda	sig	Partial eta squared
16-20 years	16.00	0.083	0.016	0.463
21-25 years	20.07			

Bonferroni adjustment value=.007

The results from multivariate analysis of variance as summarized in Table 1 shows that there was no statistically significant difference among all the independent variables on the dependent variables except experience of working with learners with autism Wilks' Lambda= 0.083, $p< 0.05$; partial eta squared=.463, which was high. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately, there was no any difference to reach statistical significance, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.007. Upon examining post hoc comparison with least square difference (LSD), a statistically significance difference was found between 15-20 years, (M=16.0), and 21-25, (M=20.07) years at $p< 0.05$ on perception of challenging behaviour as caused by sociological factors. This implied that more experienced teachers perceived the challenging behaviour as caused by sociological factors. This finding is not consistent with Porter and Lacey (2009) study where teachers dominantly attributed challenging behaviour exhibited by learners with ASDs to behavioural factors.

Interview schedule data to triangulate the data gained from the questionnaire indicated that teachers had many attributions to the causes of challenging behaviour. They attributed it to organic, behavioural, psychodynamic, and ecological, For example, one teacher who attributed the cause of the challenging behaviour to psychodynamic said:

"They were abused when they were very young… its because of their childhood, they were abused and that causes them a lot of problems and when they become adults they will be very negative always fighting"

Another teacher who perceived the causes of challenging behaviour to be ecological attributed it to conflicts between the teachers and learners arising from the expectation and demands of the school and the individual learner's preference. She said during the interview:

"When you ask them to do something that they don't want to do they can become very violent… slam doors, stamp feet, always shouting and very bad language. They just go off the edge, just flip off and that becomes very challenging"

Relationship between Teachers' Perception of Causes of Challenging Behaviour and the Choice of Management Strategies

Pearson product moment correlation was carried out to determine the relationship between teacher's perception of the causes of challenging behaviour and choice of challenging behaviour management strategies. Based on research literature (Edward *et al*. 2007; Alonso et.al, 2004; Wittchen and Jocabi, 2005; Akiskal and Benazzi, 2006; Mandel, 2006; Tsakanikos *et al*, 2007; Crossland, 2009; Williamson, 2008; Porter and Lacey, 2009; Kiernan and Kiernan, 2006) causes of challenging bahaviours were categorized as sociological, psychodynamic, biological, ecological, behavioural and humanistic. Respondent's responses to the causes of challenging behaviour were correlated to the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies.

Table 2 Relationship between Teachers' Perceptions and Choice of Management Strategies

		intensive interaction	argumentative communication	development of social understanding	teach	gentle teaching	behavioral therapy model	social stories	mental health consultations	mindfulness training	structure teaching	pharmacological or medical
	Pearson Correlation	-.028	-.048	.521**	.435**	-.042	.031	.411**	.102	-.035	-.134	0.1
Sociological	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.433	0.14	0.00	0.00	0.723	0.7	0.00	0.08	0.78	0.17	0.3
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Psychological	Pearson Correlation	.057	.418**	.001	.144	.432**	-.101	.062	.137	.509**	-.530**	0.2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.352	0.006	0.334	0.2	0.008	0.2	0.7	0.23	0.48	0.004	0.1
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Psychodynamic	Pearson Correlation	.426**	.111	.071	.292**	**.425****	-.084	.026	.273**	.485**	.481**	0.3
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	0.54	0.395	0.003	0.001	0.2	0.7	0.004	0.005	0.003	0
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Humanistic	Pearson Correlation	.050	.064	.087	.113	.522**	-.141	.612**	.119	.474**	.534**	0.1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.13	0.15	0.113	0.3	0.00	0.1	0.00	0.44	0.004	0.00	0.6
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Ecological	Pearson Correlation	.042	.545**	.003	.204*	.433**	-.091	.040	.141	.607**	-.097	0.2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.791	0.005	0.775	0.02	0.001	0.2	0.4	0.09	0.00	0.47	0.1
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Biological	Pearson Correlation	.132	.517**	-.112	.105	.086	-.123	.132	.079	.088	.429**	0
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.159	0.00	0.328	0.4	0.48	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.79	0.005	0.7
	N	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Teachers' Sociological Perspective of Challenging Behaviour

The results in Table2 indicates that there is a moderate positive significant relationship between perception of sociological factors and development of social understanding, (r= 0.521, p< 0.01), sociological factors and TEACCH strategy (r= 0.435, p< 0.01) sociological factors and, social stories (r=.411, p< 0.01). This means that teachers who perceived causes of challenging behaviour as being rooted in sociological factors chose strategies that were more learners focused such as TEACCH and development of social understanding. This finding supports a study carried out in USA (Perry *et al.* 2008) that indicated that sociological approaches such as social stories when used to manage challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs are likely to lead to reduction of challenging behaviour by half standard deviation and improvement of social skills by one standard deviation. This fact was supported by observation data and document analysis as the following case observed in one school illustrates:

Peterson was admitted to the school after countless unsuccessful placements in other institutions. For just a few days after placement, Peterson displayed some extreme circles of challenging behaviour, which included aggression towards teachers, self-injury and serious destruction of property. The teachers developed and implemented an individualized Education Programme based on sociological approach of engaging Peterson in conversation and building of interpersonal skills of using polite language, gestures and facial expressions through the use of visual cues and how to seek help whenever he felt agitated. After several weeks Peterson behaviour improved significantly and there were marked reduction in his aggressive and self injurious behaviour

Teachers' Psychological Perspective of Challenging Behaviour

The results in Table 2 further indicate that there was a moderate significant positive relationship between perceptions of challenging behaviour being caused by psychological factors. The teachers who held this perception chose management strategies that are cognitive in nature. This is clearly illustrated by moderately significant positive relationship between Augmentative communication, (r= 0.418, p< 0.01) psychological factors and gentle teaching, (r= 0.432, p< 0.01), psychological factors and Mindfulness training, (r= 0.509, p<0 .01), psychological factors and structured teaching, (0.455, p< 0.01) psychological factors and Pharmacology/medical, (r= 0.455, p< 0.01). There is a close relationship between this finding and Literature searches and analyses that have demonstrated that interventions which are based on psychological principles derived from learning theory are currently the most effective intervention for reducing incidences of challenging behavior (British Psychological Association, 2004; Allen,2009). In particular, this finding supports Meta analyses by Allen *et al.* (2009) who cites a number of literatures that demonstrates reduction of challenging behaviour by systematically applied behaviour approaches.

For this strategy to succeed, teachers need to involve learners with ASDs in reflecting on their own behaviour, setting up individual targets for learners and monitoring them. They should strive to provide learners with strategies to self regulate their own behaviours like use of visual clues and verbalization. Teachers also need

to have a clear understanding on how learners attribute their challenging behaviour and the meaning that they give to the challenging behaviour that they present such as communicative aspect, sensory stimulation, task avoidance or skill deficit.

Teachers' Psychodynamic Perspective of Challenging Behaviour

Results in Table 2 indicates that teachers' perception of psychodynamic as causal factors of challenging behaviour among the learners with ASDs closely related with strategies such as augmentative communication, gentle teaching, Mindfulness training, structured teaching and Pharmacology/medical. The relationship was positive and moderately significant as shown in the results, ($r= 0.426$, $r= 0.425$, $r= 0.485$,$r= 0.481$, 0.437 $p< 0.01$,) respectively. This finding is not well supported by earlier findings for example the preferred method of dealing with challenging behaviour described by teachers in the Males (2004) study was behaviour modification. Other relatively 'popular' approaches included child-focused/individual approaches, Gentle Teaching and interactive approaches. In response to a particular pupil showing challenging behaviour, teachers in the Hastings (2008) study described ignoring/avoiding the problem, diverting/distracting the pupil and removing the pupil from the situation. In the Kiernan and Kiernan (2004) study, teachers described responses which included: the employment of physical resources (for example time-out) and the use of drugs to control behaviour that appeared to be ecologically based. In the study by Porter and Lacey (2009) more staffing, smaller classes and more space and equipment were mentioned by teachers as means of improving provision for pupils with challenging behaviour; training and increasing staff skills were also considered important when dealing with behaviour that is ecologically based.

For this method to work, teachers need to be aware that learners challenging behaviour may be as a result of unconscious conflict arising in early childhood. Learners who may not have received enough care may have attachment anxiety. Teachers need to consider what unconscious pattern of behaviour is being portrayed by challenging behaviour. These would help them in choosing intervention that may help the learners to process unresolved unconscious emotions in a safe way such as therapeutic story telling (Collins, 2008). Where it is possible, teachers can refer these learners to specially trained therapist such as psychotherapists and clinical psychologists.

Teachers' Biological Perspective of Challenging Behaviour

The results in Table 2 indicate that teachers' perception of challenging behaviour being caused by biological factors had a moderately significant positive relationship with management strategies such as use of pharmacology, structured teaching and augmentative communication. Biological perception and pharmacology, ($r= 0.557$, $r= 0.429$, $r= 0.517$; $p< 0.01$). This finding compares well with an earlier finding by Hastings (2008) which identified methods such as use of physical restraints, deployment of sufficient staff and medication as important management strategies of challenging behaviours that were biologically based. It also supports the findings of Allen *et al*. (2009) in UK that investigated use of reactive strategies in the management of challenging behaviour. It identified physical restraints, medication and seclusion as the preferred modes of management strategies. This finding supports Mandel (2008) who states that Challenging behaviour intervention based on either ecological or behavioural model may not be possible or effective in some individuals and recommends the use of medication in cases where functional analysis of behaviour fails to identify environmental contingencies sustaining challenging bahaviour among learners with ASDs. Teachers need to play their roles in relation to medication as advised by Humphrey, (2009) effectively. Firstly, they can provide detailed information that will help in the assessment that leads up to medication and secondly, they need to take an active role in monitoring the effect of medication observed in the classroom.

Teachers' Ecological Perspective of Challenging Behaviour

Pearson correlation coefficient in Table 4.7.3 revealed a slightly positive significant relationship between ecological perception causes of challenging behaviour and management strategies such as augmentative communication, gentle teaching, Mindfulness training and structured, teaching, ($r= 0.545$, $r= 0.433$, 0.607;$p< 0.01$). This study compares well with Male (2004) study that also highly ranked child focused individual approaches such as ignoring or avoiding the challenging behaviour, diverting or destructing the learner or removing the learner from environment that is likely to lead to challenging behaviour thus advocating for ecological approaches. This also supports Hastings (2008) study that showed that teachers were likely to use restraint for self-injurious behaviour, make environment safe for aggressive behaviour and distract the person for stereo type behaviour, which implies that they also favoured ecological approach.

Teachers who may find this method useful need to consider the implication of classroom layout and décor and consider factors such as how their classroom layout would affect the learner's behaviour. They also need to come up with clear routines and schedules to guide learners.

Teachers Humanistic perspective of challenging Behaviour

The finding in Table 2 also indicate that perception of challenging behaviour being rooted in humanistic factors correlated moderately significant with management strategies such as gentle teaching, (r= 0.522,p< 0.01), Mindfulness training, (r= 0.474, p< 0.01), structured teaching, (r=0.534, p<0.01), Pharmacology/medical,(r=0.711, p< 0.01) and Social stories,(r=0.612, p<0.01). Objectively, the finding supports Nour, (2012) study in Egypt that investigated the relationship between teachers self reported use of management strategies and disruptive behaviour. The study showed that most teachers preferred using positive management strategies and both positive and negative management strategies were perceived to be effective in handling disruptive behaviours. The findings also revealed that teachers reacted positively when their management strategies whether positive or negative succeeded in dealing with disruptive behaviour and no increase in disruptive behaviour was detected after using negative or positive management strategy. Probably that could be the reason why teachers in the present study were using both positive and negative challenging behaviour management strategies such as gentle teaching and pharmacology respectively.

Additional support for this finding in the present study might also be found in the results of the findings of Porter and Lacey (2009) study, which identified behaviour modification as the most preferred method with other relatively popular methods being gentle teaching and interactive approaches. For teachers who may prefer to use this strategy should aim at building quality relationship with learners. They need to apply techniques that demonstrate to the learners that they value them such as active listening. They should strive to build self-esteem in learners, blame the behaviour and not the child by accepting the child and not the challenging behaviour.

The findings of the study indicate that teachers' perception of the causes of challenging behaviour had great influence on their choice of challenging behaviour management strategies. Observation and interview schedule data also revealed a close relationship between the perceived causes of challenging behaviour and the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies. The major attributes of the causes of challenging behaviour were biological, psychodynamic ecological and behavioural and this attributes were related to ways in which teachers responded to challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs and methods of choice of preventing the behaviours from occurring. One teacher interviewed said

'*Some of it is mental, they have mental problems and they have nervures breakdown'*

The same teacher regarded the use of medication as the best management strategy to manage challenging behaviour as her statement indicates:

'*You have to give them medication to calm them down… and when they refuse the medication, hell breaks loose'*

Observation data revealed that teachers in most cases, selected strategies, which were concerned with diffusion rather than prevention of challenging behaviour thus, tending to deal with behaviour after it had occurred rather than preventing it from occurring in the first place. In some instances, anomalies were noted in terms of teachers 'matching' strategy selection to causal attribution: for example, whilst considering the cause of self-injury to be a biological cause, teachers in one school over depended on medication at the expense of examining the environment that they had set up for these learners. They tended to see the self-injurious behaviour as factors within the learner without considering how their own practice could be influencing the occurrence of the behaviour.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that the perception of the causes of challenging behaviour was a major variable that influenced the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies by teachers.

Recommendation

Teachers' perception of challenging behaviour need to be considered when designing behaviour management strategies among learners with ASDs.

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