

# Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes towards Challenging Behaviours and the Choice of Management Strategies among Learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders

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**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. Teachers' negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs makes them vulnerable to experiencing negative emotional reaction which can lead to stress and burn out. The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between Teachers' Attitudes towards Challenging Behaviours and the Choice of Management Strategies among learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders public primary schools in Western Kenya. 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. The reliability coefficient was set at 0.70 and above at an alpha level of 0.05. Test-retest of teachers' attitude questionnaire in the pilot study yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation schedules document analysis and interview schedules. Qualitative data from observation and interview schedules were collected, organized and categorized into themes, which were reported. Teachers exhibited both negative and positive attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. The negative feelings expressed were: guilty, hopeless, afraid angry, incompetent, frustrated, helpless, disgusted, resigned, humiliated, betrayed and sad, while the positive feelings expressed were confident, happy, self-assured, relaxed, cheerful and excited. There was a significant relationship between positive attitudes and the choice of least restrictive management strategies such as intensive interaction ( $r=0.438$ ); development of social understanding, ( $0.287$ ); social stories, ( $r=0.429$ ); gentle teaching, ( $r=0.473$ ); and behavior therapy ( $r= 0.317$ ). Negative attitudes were correlated to more restrictive strategies such as experimental functional analysis, ( $r=0.283$ ), and mental health consultations, ( $r=0.243$ ). This implies that teachers who had positive attitudes towards challenging behaviours presented by learners with ASDs chose strategies that were least restrictive whereas those who had negative attitudes chose strategies that were most restrictive such mental health consultation. Concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that teachers feel confident in managing challenging behaviour. This can be achieved by giving them practical skills of managing challenging behaviour and establishment support networks with other professionals.

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## Introduction

Challenging behaviour is common to learners with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and behavioural theories are the most prominent explanatory models of challenging behaviour (Hastings, 1997). More recently, however, researchers have looked at the role of teacher's attitudes, attributions and emotional responses to challenging behaviour in an attempt to explain the development and maintenance of challenging behaviour (Williams and Rose, 2007; Williams, 2008).

## Review of related literature

A small but convincing body of research evidence has investigated teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs (Werner, 1995; Machin, 1998; Grey *et al.*, 2002; Bailey *et al.*, 2006; Williams, 2008). These studies examined the attitudes of teachers using attribution theory. Attribution theory is an explanation of motivation that focuses on how people explain the causes of their own success and failures. In attribution, a person ascribes a characteristic to themselves or another person in order to account for their own or other person's behaviour. People evaluate the behaviour of others based on perceived motives and intentions. Three types of attributions have been advanced (Noor *et al.*, 2006; Williams, 2008). First, the origin of challenging behaviour whether it is situated within the learner (internal) or outside the learner (external). Second, whether the behaviour is seen as being permanent (stable) or temporary (unstable). Third, whether the behaviour is within the ability of the learner to control it (controllable) or the learner lacks a ability to control it (uncontrollable). Werner (1980) hypothesized that the attribution of internality and controllability are associated with negative emotions, namely anger and disgust and this reduces the like-hood of offering help to a learner displaying challenging behaviour. Williams (2008) found that the attribution of controllability of challenging behaviour predicts negative responses from the teacher which predicts less optimism, which in turn predicts less willingness to help the learner.

In most cases, attribution serves self-bias, where success is attributed on self while failure is attributed on others or situational factors (Machin, 1998). For example, an earlier study carried out by Croll and Moses (1995); teachers were asked to give causes of challenging behaviour of children in their classes. The results of the study indicated that 80% cited factors as being within the child while teacher related factors were only 4%. Another study (Bailey *et al.*, 2006) attempted to investigate teacher's attitudes, emotions and willingness to help a learner with self-injurious behaviour in UK using Werner's (1985) model involving 27 teachers. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between the teacher's emotions and willingness to help the self-injurious behaviour. However, this study had only 27 teachers while the present study had 106 teachers investigated their perception of challenging behaviour and how it influences their choice of challenging behaviour management strategies.

Some theorists have attempted to apply the Herders (1958) attribution theory as cited by Werner (1980) and Hastings (1997) to investigate teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviour. This theory suggests that whenever teachers encounter an event they try to understand it by attributing responsibility to it. This process of understanding the event is mediated by a number of factors such as mindset, beliefs and affective response to the event. For example, Werner (1980) expanded on Herders (1958) theory and used it to explain the actions of people when deciding whether to help a stranger. He categorizes attribution along three dimensions; locus, stability and controllability and concludes that how individuals perceives an event along these dimensions will affect their choice of whether to help or not.

Werner's (1980) attribution theory has widely been used to predict the attitudes of teachers towards the challenging behaviour. Belief that a learner with ASDs is purposively presenting challenging behaviour often leads to avoidance behaviour where by teachers withdraw from the learner rather than offer the much needed help (Grey *et al.*, 2002). This to some extent may help to explain the teachers' attitude towards the portrayed challenging behaviour and may be used to predict the emotional and behavioural responses to challenging behaviour as portrayed. There is research evidence which suggests that teachers' negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs makes them vulnerable to experiencing negative emotional reaction which can lead to stress and burn out (Hastings, 2002; Palucka and Lunsky, 2007). Teachers negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs often contributes to development and maintenance of challenging behaviour while positive attitudes leads to decrease of challenging behaviour (Crossland, 2009). A recent study (Samantha and Whitaker, 2012) that examined the variance in challenging behaviour management strategies, their effectiveness and the attitudes of nurses and assistant nurses found out that qualified staff had more significant positive attitudes than nursing assistants did.

A study carried out by Bromley and Emerson (2008) in United Kingdom on challenging behaviour in a single metropolitan borough in London indicated that teachers reported a significant proportion of their colleagues usually display such emotional reactions as sadness, despair, anger, annoyance, fear and disgust to episodes of challenging behaviour. This study was limited to a single borough in London the present study was carried out in three counties in western Kenya.

Another study carried out by Mills (2010) in UK on relationship between challenging behaviour, burn out and cognitive variables in people with learning difficulties showed evidence of an association between challenging behaviour and teachers stress and burn out. Variables identified in the study that influenced this relationship were attribution, emotional coping strategies, self-efficacy, and personality of the teachers. However, the study failed to identify the exact influence of these factors. In the present study, variables investigated were age of teachers, gender professional qualifications and experience of working with learners with ASDs.

Hastings (2002) conducted a review to explore the link between challenging behaviour and psychological well-being of teachers who work in intellectual disability and concluded that there was 'reasonable evidence' for relationship between teachers' stress and challenging behaviour. There are however many weaknesses in Hastings (2002) review. There was lack of measurement of levels of challenging behaviour and the exact behaviours that were being investigated and simply stating challenging behaviour as stressful does not provide evidence for relationship. Simply measuring the number of people with challenging behaviour does not

provide accurate measures of levels of challenging behaviour. In determining challenging behaviour, frequency, duration, intensity and severity of the behaviour needs to be taken into account. The present study examined 59 challenging behaviours exhibited by learners with ASDs. In terms of methodological problems, Hastings (2002) review lacked control group of teachers who have not been exposed to challenging behaviour to determine the relationship.

Hand searches, electronic data searches and data bases revealed no study that has investigated the relationship between teachers attitudes and choice of challenging behaviour management strategies

### Material and Methods

The study hybrid approach by employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. Descriptive survey and correlation research design was adopted. The study was carried out in Western Kenya in public primary schools that enrolled learners with ASDs. The study involved 126 teachers teaching in public primary schools that had learners with ASDs. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules document analysis and observation schedules. Tests were administered to the respondents for the first time then administered to the same participants after two weeks. Mean scores from the tests were then correlated using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The reliability coefficient was set at 0.70 and above at an alpha level of 0.05, which is considered as acceptable measure (Robson, 2002). The attitude questionnaire had a coefficient of 0.78 indicating that it was reliable.

Before undertaking the actual study in sampled schools, approval of research proposal by Maseno University School of graduate Studies was sought. Ethical approval for the study was sought from Maseno University Research Ethics committee. Permission to carry out the study was also sought from county Directors of Education in the three counties where the study was done. In order to determine the teacher's attitude towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs in public primary schools in western Kenya, 19 variables both positive and negative feelings were identified in the literature on how teachers feel towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs and put on a five point rating scale. Teachers were asked to rate their attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs.

### Statistical analysis of the data

### Results and discussion

**Table 1. Teachers Rating of Positive Attitude of Challenging Behaviour**

Attitude	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very much	Mean	Std
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
Confident	50(47.2)	46(43.4)	6(5.7)	4(3.8)	1.60	.817
Comfortable	50(47.2)	47(44.3)	8(7.5)	1(.9)	1.62	.706
Happy	44(41.5)	46(43.4)	10(9.4)	6(5.7)	1.79	.786
Self-assured	54(50.9)	48(45.3)	3(2.8)	1(.9)	1.54	.72
Relaxed	60(56.6)	35(33.0)	11(10.4)	0(0.0)	1.54	.667
Cheerful	65(61.3)	33(31.1)	6(5.7)	2(1.9)	1.48	.644
Excited	57(53.8)	38(35.8)	10(9.4)	1(.9)	1.58	.696
Overall mean					1.60	

Frequency Table 1 indicates that 50 (47.2%) felt that they were not confident in managing challenging behaviours presented by learners, 46(43.4%) of teachers felt that they were slightly confident, while only 4(3.8%) of the teachers felt that they were very much confident in managing challenging behaviour. The findings indicate that majority of teachers felt that they were not confident in managing challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This lack of confidence in managing challenging behaviour of learners with ASDs is likely to make these teachers vulnerable to experiencing negative emotional reactions, which can lead to stress and burn out (Palucka and Lunskey, 2007). This will make them use behaviour management strategies such as the use of aversive stimulus that in turn may contribute to development and maintenance of challenging behaviour. Concerted efforts need to be made to ensure that teachers feel confident in managing challenging behaviour. This can be achieved by giving them practical skills of managing challenging behaviour and establishment support networks with other professionals.

Frequency Table 1 indicates that 50(47.2%) teachers were not comfortable with challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs, 47(44.3%) were slightly comfortable, and only 1(1.9%) felt that they were very much comfortable. The finding indicates that a very small percentage of teachers were comfortable with challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This indicates that teachers were having negative feelings towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This compares well with Male (2004) study in which teachers also displayed negative feelings towards challenging behaviour.

Table 1 indicates that 46 (43.4%) of the teachers felt slightly happy towards challenging behaviour and only 6(5.7%) felt very much happy towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This finding indicates that a small percentage of teachers felt very much happy towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This low positive attitude towards challenging behaviour could be an indication of a belief that a learner with ASDs is purposively presenting challenging behaviour which often leads to avoidance behaviour where by teachers withdraw from the learner rather than offer the much needed help (Grey *et al.*, 2002; Whitaker, 2008).

Closely related to the feeling comfortable to the challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs was the feeling of self-assured. Data in table 4.6.1 indicates that only 3 (2.8%) teachers felt moderately self-assured while the highest number 54 (50.9%) teachers felt that they were not at all self-assured. This feeling may be an indicator that teachers do not trust their own ability in managing challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This feeling is likely to contribute to the development and maintenance of challenging behaviour (Samantha and Whitaker, 2012). If it is not properly addressed it is likely to lead to teachers' stress and burnout (Hastings, 2002; Palucka and Lunskey, 2007).

Table 1 indicates that 54(50.9%) teachers felt not at all relaxed, 48(45.3%), were slightly relaxed; 3(2.3%) moderately relaxed and only one teacher (.9%) felt very relaxed. The finding indicates a negative feeling towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Proper management of challenging behaviour requires teachers to be relaxed so that that they can be able to carry out functional analysis of the behaviour in order to establish the environmental consequences that could be maintaining the challenging behaviour (Crossland, 2009).

One of the most important finding of the present study was the teachers feeling cheerful towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Data in Table 4.6.1

indicates that 65(61.3%) of the teachers felt not at all cheerful; 33(31.1%) slightly cheerful; 6 (5.7%), moderately cheerful and only 2 (1.9%), very much cheerful. This finding indicates that a large percentage of teachers were not at all cheerful towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This finding is consistent with Male (2004) which indicated that teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviour were predominantly negative. They expressed negative emotions such as frustration, anger, stress and hardly positive emotions such as feeling cheerful towards the anger. Such negative emotions need to be avoided by teachers and be encouraged to develop attitudes that are more positive. Negative attitudes are likely to lead to negative social and educational consequences for these learners with ASDs such as isolation from peers; reduced access to the curriculum; reduced opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities; risk of injury to self, missing out on leisure and social activities and reduced contact with their peers and the wider community.

Closely related to the feeling cheerful towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs was the feeling of excited. Teachers rating on excitement in Table 4.6.1 shows that 57(53.8%) of the teachers felt not excited, 38(35.8) slightly excited, 10(9.6%) said they were moderately excited while only 1 (.9%) felt very much excited towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This may imply that they were having negative attitudes towards the challenging behaviour.

This finding on the rating of affects compares well with Dagnan (2011) study that clearly identified teacher's emotional reactions where clear negative emotions accounted for 62.2%, anger, 40.6% sadness 14.2% and positive emotions accounted for 13.5%. This finding supports Werner (1980) attribution theory of helping behaviour and to some extent may be used to predict the attitudes of teachers towards the challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Belief that a learner with ASDs is purposively presenting challenging behaviour may often lead to avoidance behaviour where by teacher withdraw from the learner rather than offer the much needed help (Dagnan, 2011). This finding has clinical implications to management of challenging behaviour. It supports a small but steadily growing body of research evidence which suggests that teachers' negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs makes them vulnerable to experiencing negative emotional reaction which can lead to stress and burn out (Hastings, 2002; Palucka and Lunsy, 2007; Singh *et al.*, 2007; Crossland, 2009; Patel and Prince, 2010; Dagnan, 2011). There is also small but convincing body of research evidence which indicates that teachers negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs often contributes to development and maintenance of challenging behaviour while positive attitudes leads to decrease of challenging behaviour (Bailey *et al.*, 2006; Williams, 2008; Crossland, 2009).

**Table 2. Teachers Rating of Negative Feelings of Challenging Behaviour**

Attitude	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very much	Mean	Std
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
Guilty	18(17.0)	48(45.3)	38(35.8)	2(1.9)	1.25	.80
Hopeless	8(7.5)	45(42.5)	51(48.1)	2(1.9)	1.46	.72
Afraid	9(8.5)	44(41.5)	53(50.0)	0(0.0)	1.42	.64
Angry	11(10.4)	42(39.6)	49(46.2)	4(3.8)	1.47	.83
Incompetent	8(7.5)	56(52.8)	39(36.8)	3(2.8)	1.38	.75
Frustrated	9(8.5)	46(43.4)	45(42.5)	6(5.7)	1.51	.87
Helpless	15(14.2)	49(46.2)	35(33.0)	7(6.6)	1.39	.96

disgusted	12(11.3)	48(45.3)	43(40.6)	3(2.8)	1.39	.84
Resigned	6(5.7)	33(31.1)	56(62.3)	1(.9)	1.60	.69
Humiliated	60(56.6)	40(37.7)	3(2.8)	3(2.8)	1.52	.69
Betrayed	5(4.7)	41(38.7)	57(53.8)	3(2.8)	1.58	.72
Sad	41(38.7)	64(60.4)	1(.9)	0(0.0)	1.63	.54
Overall mean					1.69	

Frequency table 2 indicates that 18(17.%) of the teachers did not feel guilty while managing challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs, 48(45.3%) felt slightly guilty and only 2(1.9%) of the teachers felt very much guilty towards challenging behaviour. The findings indicate that significant number of teachers did not feel guilty towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. However, a significant number of teachers felt slightly guilty towards challenging behaviour. This finding is consistent with Male (2004) which indicated that teachers were concerned about challenging behaviour and found it stressful, while considering themselves to be effective in dealing with the behaviour a significant proportion of teachers reported feeling frustrated by it, angry, upset and at loss. Probably, teachers in the present study were following Weiner's (1980) attribution theory of helping behaviour (Dagnan, 2011). This theory states that the cognitive appraisal made about a person and his/her behaviour will affect the feelings of the care staff, which in turn would eventually affect the care staff willingness to help that person.

The rating of feeling hopeless towards challenging behaviour exhibited by learners with ASDs in Table 2 indicate that 2(1.9%) of the teachers felt very much hopeless towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs, 45(42.5%) felt slightly hopeless and 8(7.5) felt not at all hopeless. This finding indicates that majority of teachers were positive about challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This 'hopeful feeling' needs to be encouraged so that teachers can develop positive feelings in order to view challenging behaviour as time line episodic and not a permanent feature on learners with ASDs

Table 2 indicates that 9(8.5%) of the teachers were not afraid of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs 44(41.5%) were slightly afraid, 53(50%) were moderately afraid and no teacher was very much afraid. This indicates that a significant number of teachers felt afraid of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Data from interview schedule revealed that most teachers feared the aggression displayed to them whenever they tried to manage the challenging behaviour. This finding is consistent with Samantha and Whitaker (2012) in USA that found out that nurse assistant were more likely to receive injuries as part of their job with over 70% of the staff having received injuries when working with people with developmental disabilities.

One teacher who had worked with these learners for more than ten years lamented during the interview:

*"In old days we used to go to break away techniques to restrain them, but now you can't touch them, you have to talk to them, calm them and sometimes it can be very dangerous especially they can come up with a knife and stuff like that"*

There was evidence of this potential danger of aggression towards teachers as documentary data showed that within a period of three years eight incidents of teachers being physically

assaulted by learners had been recorded in logbooks in three different schools that were under this study.

Closely related to the feeling afraid to challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs was the teachers' feeling angry. Data in Table 2 indicates that 42(39.6%) of the teachers felt slightly angry at the challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs that learners 4(3.8%) felt that they were very much angry towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs in public primary schools in western Kenya. This finding indicates that teachers had negative attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This supports Dagnan (2011) study, which found out that a teacher would be more sympathetic and hence more helpful if the cause of the learner's behaviour is outside the learners control for example caused by autism. Conversely, a teacher will be angrier and less helpful if the cause of the learners Challenging behaviour is seen as within the learners control for example the learner knows and he/she is aware of the challenging behaviour he/she is presenting.

For effective management of challenging behaviour competency is a virtue that all teachers should strive to possess. Data in Table 2 indicates that a very large number of teachers felt slightly incompetent 56(52.8%) and moderately incompetent 39(36.8%). Concerted efforts need to be made in boosting the morale of teachers so that all of them develop confidence towards management of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs.

Table 4.6.2 shows that significant number of teachers felt frustrated towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs 46(43.4%) while only 9(8.5%) felt that they were not frustrated at all. This study compares well with Male (2004) study that rated teachers' feelings towards challenging behaviour which indicated feeling of frustration 48%; anger 18%; stress 27% and determination only 7%.

The findings in Table 2 indicates a significant number of teachers felt helpless 49(46.2%) and moderately helpless 35(33 %) towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. A small percentage of teachers felt not at all helpless 15(14.2%). This finding is consistent with Bromley and Emerson (2008) study in UK on challenging behaviour in a single metropolitan borough which indicated that teachers reported a significant proportion of such emotional reactions as sadness, despair, anger, annoyance, fear and disgust to episodes of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs.

Table 2 shows that 12(11.3%) of the teachers were not disgusted towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs and only 3 (2.8%) felt that they were very much disgusted this may indicate positive feelings towards challenging behaviour. However, the number of teachers who were slightly and moderately disgusted was significantly high 48(45.3%) and 43(40.6%) respectively. This indicates that a large number of teachers were feeling disgusted towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. It would be advisable for these teachers to use the gentle teaching strategy focusing on building of warm and affectionate relationship, value and respect of learner's feelings, redirecting bad behaviours and sometimes ignoring them. Slowly by slowly learners with ASDs may come to accept that the teachers' presence signals safety, their words are rewarding and participation in acceptable activities can bring rewards. This method may require the teachers to adopt a posture of solidarity and actively strive to communicate to the learner in spite of a range of behaviours presented. Unlike the proponents of behaviour modification who may show warm



relationship as a consequence of desirable behaviour, teachers using gentle teaching need to make it available at all times irrespective of the behaviours presented.

Table 2 frequency table shows that 6(5.7%) of the teachers were not at all resigned; 33(31.1%), slightly resigned; 56(62.3%) moderately resigned and only 1(.9%) very much resigned towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Just like other findings in the present study, a significant number of teachers felt slightly resigned towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This finding is consistent with other findings within the care sector (Males, 2004; Williams, 2008; Hastings 2008) teachers who work with learners who show challenging behaviour have reported feelings of anger, annoyance, anxiety and being upset. Put in an educational perspective, challenging behaviour may cause severely restricted access to the curriculum or exclusion of the pupil from school. These studies point out that Learners displaying challenging behaviour are a major source of intense stress in the lives of teachers.

This feeling of being resigned creates a negative connotation that these teachers had given up in their search for better management strategies of challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs and have left its management to fate or to chance. This feeling coupled with their negative attitudes is likely result into personal and social consequences to the learner who engages in challenging behaviour such as being physically and socially excluded from services or neglected by teachers (Hastings 2008). The consequences of challenging behaviour may also be direct via response to challenging behaviour by teachers and may result into abuse, exclusion, deprivation, inappropriate treatment or systematic neglect (Male, 2004; Rose and Rose, 2005).

On the other hand data on feeling humiliated in Table 4.6.2 indicates that 60 (56.6) of the teachers felt not at all humiliated, 40(37.7) slightly humiliated; 3(2.8), moderately and very humiliated 3 (2.8). Teachers who found the challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs not humiliating was significantly high and indicates a positive attitude towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. The number of teachers who however rated challenging behaviour as slightly humiliating was also high 40(37.7). This high number of teachers who felt slightly humiliated is an indicator that most of them were likely to use maladaptive coping strategies, which in addition to the risk of strengthening the challenging behaviour portrayed are likely to lead to burn out and emotional exhaustion among the teachers (Hastings, 2008). This calls for radical changes in organizational structures to make them responsive to the needs of learners with ASDs in order for these schools to act as potential basis for holistic development of this group of learners.

Data in Table 2 indicates that the number of teachers who felt slightly betrayed by challenging behaviour was 41(38.7), moderately betrayed 57(53.8) and very much betrayed 3 (2.8). The finding indicates that a significant number of teachers felt betrayed by challenging behaviour presented by learners. This is an indication that they perceived learners with ASDs were purposively presenting challenging behaviour a finding that is consistent with earlier research (Male, 2004; Williams, 2008; Crossland 2009). This will make them perceive challenging behaviour as something that is within the learner and not because of learners interaction with the environment (Porter and Lacey, 2009). This perception may hinder them from examining how the environment that they provide contributes to the emergence and maintenance of challenging behaviour.

The frequency Table 2 shows that 41(38.7) of the teachers were not sad at all; 64(60.4), slightly sad; 1(.9), moderately sad. The findings indicate that a good number of teachers felt slightly sad towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. This feeling of sadness is likely to lead to stress and burn out among teachers (Singh *et al.*, 2007). Stress is an important factor in both the development and the success of intervention of challenging behaviour. In order for teachers to succeed in management of challenging behaviour, they need to be trained in new management strategies such as mindfulness. This would definitely make them to have a clear mind that is focused on challenging behaviour in a non-judgmental way (Patel and Prince, 2010). Such a mind would allow them to respond to challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs in alternative way that goes beyond traditional behaviour analytic techniques such as antecedent consequence management. Such strategy can result into transformational changes enabling teachers to produce positive changes in challenging behaviour, learning and well-being of learners with ASDs.

Findings on the attitude towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs indicates that teachers rated negative feelings of being guilty, hopeless, afraid angry, incompetent, frustrated, helpless, disgusted, resigned, humiliated betrayed and sad higher than the positive feelings of confident, happy, self-assured, relaxed, cheerful and excited.

Observation data on teachers attitudes towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs fall into two broad themes; 'falling apart' and 'keeping together' The former was a broad theme of anger, sadness, fear, and feeling powerless when learners were presenting challenging behaviour. The later was a theme that described positive experience of pleasure when assisting the learner, being reflective about one's own practice and respect of a learner with ASDs who displayed challenging behaviour. Most of the observations were falling under the 'falling apart' theme.

While remaining mindful of the vulnerability of learners with ASDs to abusive, aversive or restrictive practices, it is evident that these negative emotional reactions by teachers who seem to be highly stressed or who are expressing feelings of anger, frustration, helplessness, disgust to challenging behaviours presented by these learners does not augur well for these learners. There is urgent need to establish the cause of these feelings so that urgent measures are taken to make teachers develop positive feelings towards challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs. Teachers need to be given sufficient skills to deal with this behaviour. This calls for boosting of teachers' confidence through training and providing management support to remove their negative perception of challenging behaviour.

The training and support should take into account Werner's (1980) theory so that they address the teachers' cognitive and emotional responses to challenging behaviour. This to some extent will give the teachers skills and knowledge to positively interact with learners with ASDs. In principle, these findings support earlier studies (Male, 2004; Hastings, 2008) which indicated that the care sector, staff working with learners who show challenging behaviour have reported feelings of anger, annoyance, anxiety and being upset and that in an educational setting challenging behaviour may cause severely restricted access to the curriculum or exclusion of the pupil from school. Learners displaying challenging behaviour are also a major source of intense stress in the lives of teachers.

**Table 3. Relationship between Teachers' Attitudes towards Challenging Behaviours and the Choice of Management Strategies**

		<b>Attitude</b>
Intensive interaction	Pearson Correlation	.438**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
Development of social understanding	Pearson Correlation	.287**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003
Social stories	Pearson Correlation	.429**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
Gentle teaching	Pearson Correlation	.473**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
Behaviour therapy model	Pearson Correlation	-.317**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
Experimental function analysis	Pearson Correlation	.283**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.003
Pharmacology or medical	Pearson Correlation	-0.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.412
Augmentative communication	Pearson Correlation	-.196*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.044
Mental health consultations	Pearson Correlation	.243*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.012
TEACCH	Pearson Correlation	-0.168
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.085
** . Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level (2-tailed).		
* . Correlation is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level (2-tailed).		

The results in Table 3 indicate that there is a moderate significant relationship between attitude of teachers and the choice of management strategies that are either least restrictive or more restrictive. First, there is a moderate relationship between positive attitudes and the choice of least restrictive management strategies such as intensive interaction ( $r= 0.438$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ); development of social understanding, ( $0.287$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ); social stories, ( $r=0.429$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ); gentle teaching, ( $r= 0.473$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ); and behavior therapy ( $r=0. 317$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Negative attitudes were correlated to more restrictive strategies such as experimental functional analysis, ( $r=.283$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) and mental health consultations, ( $r= 0.243$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). The finding of the present study indicates that there is a moderate significant relationship between teachers attitudes and the choice of challenging behaviour management strategies. This implies that teachers who had positive attitudes towards challenging behaviours presented by learners with ASDs chose strategies that were least restrictive such as gentle teaching whereas those who had negative attitudes chose strategies that were most restrictive such mental health consultation. To some extent this finding is related to Williams (2008) finding that established a strong relationship between attribution of controllability of challenging behaviour and attitudes of teachers towards Challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs.

Williams (2008) established that attribution of controllability of challenging behaviour predicted negative responses from the teacher which predicted less optimism, which in turn predicted less willingness to help the learner with ASDs presenting challenging behaviour.

This means that teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviour need to be factored when designing challenging behaviour management plans for learners with ASDs.

### Conclusion

There was a relationship between attitude of teachers and the choice of management strategies that are either least restrictive or more restrictive. The study revealed a moderately significant relationship between positive attitudes and the choice of least restrictive management strategies such as intensive interaction; development of social understanding; social stories; gentle teaching; and behavior therapy. Negative attitudes were correlated to more restrictive strategies such as experimental functional analysis and mental health consultations. This implies that teachers who had positive attitudes towards challenging behaviours presented by learners with ASDs chose strategies that were least restrictive whereas those who had negative attitudes chose strategies that were most restrictive such mental health consultation

### Recommendations

1. Based on the findings that teachers who had positive attitudes towards challenging behaviours presented by learners with ASDs chose strategies that were least restrictive whereas those who had negative attitudes chose strategies that were most restrictive such mental health consultation schools should factor teachers' attitudes towards challenging behaviours presented by learners with ASDs when designing management strategies.
2. Teachers need to be given practical skills of managing challenging behaviour so that they can have positive attitudes towards learners presenting challenging behaviour
3. There should be an establishment of support networks with other professionals so that teachers feel confident in managing challenging behaviour presented by learners with ASDs.

### Area for further research

There is need to carry out a study to determine teachers demographic factors and their attitudes and choice of challenging behaviour strategies in order to shade more light on this intricate relationships.

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