



# Effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Techniques on Cognitive Dimensions of Religious Intolerance Among Adolescents in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study examined the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria. Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The population of this study was 1,514 SS1 students in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria and a sample of 20 adolescents were drawn as subjects of the study using purposive sampling. The researchers used an adapted version of the Religious Intolerance Questionnaire (RIQ) with a reliability index of 0.78 for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using paired samples t-test to test hypothesis 1 and independent samples t-test to analyze hypothesis 2. The findings revealed that rational emotive behaviour techniques were effective in treating cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance. The findings also revealed that there was no gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance. The study recommended among others that government and non-governmental organizations should train counsellors and psychologists in the effective utilization of rational emotive behaviour techniques in order to address cognitive distortions underlying religious intolerance.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Cognitive Dimensions; Rational Emotive Behaviour Techniques; Religious Intolerance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings have had the problem of living together peacefully since the inception of time. This is because the society contains diverse groups of individuals with different beliefs, values and lifestyles. One of the reasons for the lack of peaceful co-existence among the members of these groups have been attributed to the lack of understanding and respect of one another's beliefs and ways of life (Biam et al., 2022). This disregard for what people holds dear is manifested in the form of discrimination, prejudice and marginalization, and have hindered nation building and efforts of establishing peace; thereby leading to rifts between members of different groups and causing physical and psychological harm through conflict and violence (Hassan & Umar, 2014; Oyeleye & Fawziyah, 2022). Religious intolerance as defined by Nussbaum (2013) is the inability to acknowledge, accommodate or accept the right of others to live by another faith different from one's own. Ekwunife as cited in Raji et al. (2015) opines that religious intolerance is a blind and fixated mental and psychological negative attitude towards religious beliefs and practices that are contrary to one's cherished beliefs and practices. Such negative attitudes exhibit themselves in situations whereby leaders or groups in any society blindly refuse to understand and respect contrary

religious views and practices except the ones they consider to be true. This blind refusal is often associated with horrible acts such as segregation, discrimination etc. It is pertinent to note that previous researches have indicated that the presence of this form of intolerance can cause immeasurable ill to the society and individuals living in it (Dauda, 2020; Hogemann & Tavares, 2021).

The cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance involve the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs which adolescents hold about different religious groups. This dimension underscores the role of stereotypes and biased attitudes in shaping intergroup relations. Hidayat et al. (2020) asserts that the thoughts, perceptions and beliefs of individuals about other groups is formed through membership in social groups. The researchers conclude that it is not only the individual's mental state that is responsible for intolerance but socialization also contributes immeasurably. Adolescents' perceptions and attitudes about different ethnic and religious groups, influenced by socialization processes, contribute to the formulation of biased judgments and discriminatory behaviours. This could be attributed to the type of impression and teachings given to young people at homes, schools and places of worship.

Adolescence is a critical period in which individuals develop their identity, beliefs, and values. The process through which individuals develop such values are often influenced by societal factors, including religious beliefs of family members and peers. Ayoola (2013) asserts that most adolescents in Nigeria were brought up in the custom of viewing other cultures and religious beliefs as negative and erroneous. These individuals may harbour a strong belief and feeling that other people holding different beliefs should be punished because they perceive them as enemies of progress. Such a belief as this, is baseless and may not necessarily be the truth of what other ethnic groups' value and what other religious affiliations hold. They only appear in the imagination of the holders, or to put it better, as Ayoola assert, it may be a product of misinterpretation of the view, value and beliefs of others. Omotayo (2017) also supports this view by emphasizing that every religion has a method of turning impressionable children's minds into stone, impairing the ability to think critically and rationally. The implication of this is an impending danger to the society. The reason is because, children who are raised in an unhealthy environment, tend to view people outside their religious groups as alien and evil. Young people are the future leaders of the country and if they grow with such bitterness, anger, disregard and hatred of other people's diversities, the country is doomed. There is therefore, need to address these problems in order to create a society that teaches and preaches peace and love among the diverse groups living together. Religious tolerance could be the only way out of the dark times which the society

finds itself in. Muda (2017) asserts that religious tolerance is a serious issue that should not be taken lightly. The researcher believes that it is the foundation of the country's harmony, and that if it ceases to exist, there will be chaos and a series of conflicts as it will become one of the sources of societal conflict in a multi-religious society. Religious tolerance is the willingness to refrain from preventing individuals or groups of people from expressing their religious views, opinions, or choices. It is the willingness to allow one's religious beliefs, preferences, and practices to be criticized in order to advance knowledge and understanding. Religious tolerance is based on the premise that people have fundamental rights to choose which religion they want to follow, without fear, force, or coercion to influence such decisions (Chia, 2015).

When it comes to the issue of the cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance, certain factors such as prejudice or misinformation about different religions can also contribute to religious intolerance. Furthermore, cognitive biases, including confirmation bias and groupthink, can distort perceptions and reinforce negative attitudes towards religious diversity. This assertion is backed by Social Cognitive Theory which was propounded by Bandura (1986). The theory is a psychologist's point of view that emphasizes behaviour, environment, and cognition as important elements of development and behaviour acquisition. Social cognitive theorists believe that by observing the behaviour of others, people acquire a wide range of such behaviours, thoughts, and emotions. There is no disputation to the fact that adolescents with intolerant models will observe, learn and in turn exhibit the behaviours of their models. This theory serves as an explanation to how adolescents learn and maintain intolerant beliefs and attitudes, and how their thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by their social environment, including past experiences.

Several interventions have been implemented to reduce religious intolerance, including educational programs, interfaith dialogue, and psychotherapeutic approaches. However, these strategies have failed to yield any meaningful result as the members of the different religious groups still exhibit and experience intolerant acts. Previous studies conducted by researchers (Alamry, 2020; Almoteri, 2016; James & Omondi, 2021; Jibrin, 2017; Ofuebe et al., 2021; Okonkwo et al., 2023) have reported the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour therapy in reducing irrational beliefs, behavioural problems and a range of psychological disorders; however, its efficacy in addressing cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance remains under-explored. Addressing religious intolerance among adolescents is essential for fostering not only individual well-being but also social cohesion and harmony. It is with this in mind that the researcher is conducting this study in order to find out if Rational

Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) can be the most effective intervention to solve the problem of religious intolerance once and for all.

REBT is a cognitive-behavioural approach developed by Albert Ellis in the 1950s. The approach focuses on identifying and challenging irrational beliefs and thoughts that contribute to emotional and behavioural disturbances. By replacing irrational beliefs with rational ones, individuals can experience emotional well-being and develop healthier coping strategies. The utilization of REBT in the context of religious intolerance can provide adolescents with the necessary tools to challenge their irrational beliefs and cognitions regarding different religions. By challenging these irrational beliefs, adolescents may become more open-minded, tolerant, and empathetic towards individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study was to examine the effect of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the aim of the study was to determine the:

1. Effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.
2. The gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.
- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.

## **3. METHODS**

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design which utilized a pretest posttest design. The reason for selecting this type of design is that the results obtained from the administration

of the pre-test and post-test are analyzed and compared in order to measure the effectiveness or otherwise of the treatment. The study was conducted in Wukari Education Zone; a region in the Southern part of Taraba State located in Nigeria. Wukari Education Zone comprises of two Local Government Areas which are; Ibi and Wukari Local Government Areas. The population of the study comprised of 1,514 SS 1 students of public secondary schools in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. In order to select the sample for the study, the researchers used simple random sampling to select Wukari LGA out of the two LGAs. Thereafter, purposive sampling was used to select 20 students as subjects of the study. The instrument for data collection was an adapted version of the Religious Intolerance Questionnaire (RIQ) as designed by the researcher. The items of this instrument were adapted from Religious Tolerance Scale by Van der Walt (2014). The RIQ contains 21 items on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree which measure religious intolerance of individuals. However, the adapted version used for this study contains only 7 items that measure the cognitive aspect of religious intolerance. This was done to ascertain the level of cognitive intolerance of the subjects and to administer treatment where necessary.

The adapted version of the RIQ was validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo. Thereafter, the instrument was pilot tested on 15 adolescents randomly drawn from 2 public secondary schools in Takum Education Zone which is not part of the study area but share similar characteristics in terms of religious intolerance and religious conflicts. In order to measure the reliability of the instrument, the researchers used a test-retest method which involved administering the instrument two times in an interval of two weeks. The scores obtained from the first and second administration were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) and a reliability index of 0.78 was obtained. Reliability co-efficient of 0.78 indicates that the instrument is statistically reliable and considered suitable for the study.

The data administration for this study was carried out in three phases as follows: pre-treatment phase which involved administering the RIQ to determine the baseline for subject selection. At the treatment phase, treatment was conducted in form of sessions which involved the utilization of rational emotive behaviour techniques such as disputation and cognitive restructuring in treating cognitive aspects of religious intolerance among the subjects selected for the study. At the post-treatment phase, a post-test was carried out by re-administering the RIQ to the subjects in order to compare the effectiveness of the treatment. A brief summary of the treatment intervention is outlined below

**Treatment:**

Weeks	Themes	Activities
1	Pretest	Adapted version of RIQ was administered to collect pre-test scores.
2	Developing rapport	The counsellors and the clients made introductions and established rapport.
3	Psychoeducation	The counsellors outlined and explained the meaning, causes, signs and consequences of ethnic and religious intolerance to the clients.
4	Identifying irrational beliefs	The counsellors helped the clients to identify the irrational beliefs and thoughts of ethnic and religious intolerance
5	Disputing irrational beliefs	The counsellors utilized the different disputation techniques to help participants challenge the irrational beliefs and thoughts of religious intolerance.
6	Replacing irrational beliefs	Clients were guided through series of cognitive restructuring techniques i.e. generating rational alternatives, thought stopping and positive affirmations to replace their irrational beliefs and distorted thought patterns.
7	Revision and posttest	Recap of the sessions and re-administration of the RIQ.
8	Follow up	The counsellors conducted a follow up through a group reunion. Clients were asked to monitor their progress and seek further assistance if they have any need for that.

The data collected using the research instrument were analyzed in accordance to the hypotheses stated. Paired samples t-test was used to test hypothesis 1, while independent samples t-test was used to test hypothesis 2. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The choice of the paired samples t-test and independent samples t-test for analysis is because the paired samples t-test is a comparative hypothesis test that aims to determine whether there is a difference in the mean of related samples (Samuels & Gilchrist, 2015), while independent samples t-test is used to compare the mean of two groups of participants and to know whether there is a difference between the population (Banda, 2018).

## 4. RESULTS

### Hypothesis 1

There is no significant effect of rational emotive behaviour therapy on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Paired Samples t-test on Cognitive Dimensions of Religious Intolerance.

Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Religious Intolerance scores	Pretest	20	18.10	2.73	19	8.340	.000
	Posttest	20	10.90	3.04			

*P < 0.05, t computed > 1.96 at df 19*

Results of the Paired sample t-test statistics in table 1 showed that rational emotive behaviour techniques have significant effect on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance ( $t = 8.340$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The mean score of the participants' cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance before exposure to the treatment was 18.100 and it was reduced to 10.900 after exposure to treatment, implying a mean reduction difference of 7.200 in favour of the post test scores. This shows that rational emotive behaviour therapy has positive effect on the cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents is rejected.

### **Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Independent samples t-test on Gender Difference.

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Religious Intolerance scores	Male	10	11.10	2.84	18	.287	.864
	Female	10	10.70	3.36			

**$P > 0.05$ ,  $t_{computed} > 1.96$  at  $df\ 18$**

The result of the above independent samples t-test statistics in table 2 shows that there was no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State. The outcome of the t-test shows that the p value of .864 is higher than the 0.05 alpha level of significance and the calculated t value of .287 is higher than the t critical value of 1.96 ( $P > 0.05$ ;  $t < 1.96$ ) at 18 df implying that rational emotive behaviour techniques has no gender effectiveness in the treatment of cognitive issues related to religious intolerance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State is accepted and retained.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The findings shown on table 1 revealed that there was significant effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on cognitive dimensions of religious intolerance among adolescents. The reason for the effectiveness of REBT could be because of the utilization of cognitive restructuring techniques which has been proven to be effective in

reducing cognitive distortions, thereby, helping the participants to challenge their irrational beliefs. The finding is consistent with cognitive restructuring theory as postulated by Ellis and Beck which emphasizes the potential of REBT in fostering change in distorted thought and behaviour patterns of humans. The finding agrees with that of Ebrahim et al. (2020) who conducted a study on the effect of REBT on stress and irrational thoughts. They found out that it was significantly effective in mitigating stress and irrational thoughts. Similarly, the study carried out by Ogbuanya et al. (2018) found out that REBT exerted significant effect when applied in the treatment of negative thoughts among students. This finding also agrees with a study carried out by Onuigbo et al. (2018) who found out that there was a significant reduction in thoughts and stress levels of individuals who participated in a REBT intervention programme. In a study conducted by Eseadi et al. (2016), the researchers also found a similar outcome in that they conclude that REBT effectively reduced stress and irrational thoughts of participants during a 12-week session utilizing techniques of rational emotive behaviour therapy. The finding also aligns with that of Eseadi et al. (2020) who found out in a study using the techniques of rational emotive behaviour therapy to change negative thought patterns that the therapy had significant positive effect in reducing irrational thoughts of the individuals who participated in the treatment. REBT as a counselling and psychological intervention can help adolescents to change the illogical and irrational thoughts, beliefs and ideas and ideas related to religious diversity; thereby reducing their religious intolerance.

Another finding of this study as revealed on table 2 indicates that there was no significant gender difference in the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour techniques on religious intolerance among adolescents. The implication here is that the treatment reduces both male and female adolescents' levels of religious intolerance equally. The finding is in line with Amoke et al. (2021) and Yahaya (2021) who suggested that REBT is a powerful counselling tool that helps in dealing with behavioural problems among male and female adolescents without exerting any significant difference. However, the finding disagrees with the finding of Ayodele et al. (2022) who investigated the effect of enhanced thinking skills, rational emotive therapy and social skills training in improving adolescents' interpersonal relationship. They found out that female adolescents benefited more from the interventions than their male counterpart. The result of their finding may be due to the fact that three counselling interventions were used on the same adolescents who participated in the programme.

The implication of this is that the government, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders and stakeholders in the society can liaise with counsellors and psychologists



in organizing seminars and workshops through which professionals can utilize the techniques in helping adolescents to gain the understanding and respect of members of other religious faiths and their religion.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that rational emotive behaviour techniques are effective in reducing cognitive problems of religious intolerance among adolescents. The study found out rational emotive behaviour techniques such as cognitive restructuring is effective in reducing cognitive distortions that has to do with intolerance towards members of other religious groups. The findings therefore, suggest that rational emotive behaviour techniques are vital in enhancing and promoting religious tolerance among individuals. The implication here is that tolerance of religion can lead to peaceful coexistence in the community.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher based on the conclusions, recommend the following:

1. The government and non-governmental organizations should train counsellors and psychologists in the effective utilization of rational emotive behaviour techniques in order to address cognitive distortions underlying religious intolerance.
2. Techniques of rational emotive behaviour therapy should be effectively employed by counsellors and used in treating religious intolerance among both male and female adolescents.

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