



Research Paper: Effect of Cognitive Restructuring in Reducing Cognitive Dimensions of Ethnic Intolerance among Adolescents in Taraba State, Nigeria



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Abstract

Objective: This study investigated the effect of cognitive restructuring in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State.

Methods: This study is quasi-experimental with one-group pretest-posttest design. The population of this study was 1,514 secondary school students of SS1 in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The researcher utilized purposive sampling technique in drawing a sample of 20 adolescents which were used as subjects of the study. The instrument used for data collection was the Ethnic Intolerance Questionnaire (EIQ). The data collected were analyzed using paired and independent samples t-test.

Results: The findings revealed that cognitive restructuring was effective in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance. However, the findings revealed that cognitive restructuring has no significant gender difference in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance.

Conclusion: The study concluded that cognitive restructuring is an effective intervention for reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents.

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1. Introduction

History has shown the existence of violence and conflict among individuals living in the various communities around the globe. The reason for this has mostly been attributed to intolerance. Intolerance according to [Si and Zhang \(2017\)](#) refers to the unwillingness to accept beliefs, opinions, and views that are not similar to the opinions and beliefs of one's self. It can also be seen as the refusal to view with respect contrary beliefs and other people's ways of life. [Shaista \(2011\)](#) maintains that this refusal is habitually ingrained in unawareness and fear: fear of unfamiliar, of other cultures, nations and religions. According to the [United Nations \(1992\)](#), ethnic intolerance refers to the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and groups that are based on the belief that some individuals or groups are inherently superior to others because of their ethnic or national origin. [Koshmanova and Holm \(2007\)](#) believe that ethnic intolerance is a major obstacle to the development of a democratic and inclusive society. Consequences such as social tension, conflict, and human rights violations are associated with ethnic intolerance. These consequences cause significant challenge in many societies and has implications for social cohesion and harmony.

Adolescents are at a stage of growth and development where they can be influenced by the beliefs and perceptions of the adults around them. It has been observed by the researcher that most adults rather than nurture, teach and preach peace to these young ones, end up polluting their minds

thereby leading to more and more unacceptable intolerant acts. The evolution of these intolerant acts seems to originate from the cognitive level. At this level, intolerance is manifested through rigidity, narrow and closed thoughts about other groups. Ethnic intolerance exhibited by adolescents is an attitudinal and psychological problem which needs to be addressed with appropriate counselling or psychological technique. [Lawan and Hassan \(2022\)](#) imply that the intolerant individual has a defect in their personality: a flaw, an inadequacy, a vice, an incapacity or a sickness. This personality defect could be referred to as cognitive distortion.

[Corey \(2009\)](#) assert that cognitive distortion is an error in the way of thinking that can interfere with a person's behaviour. Distortions related to ethnic intolerance are the negative cognitive dimensions which involves how the intolerant individual perceives, thinks, acts/behaves and what beliefs he/she has towards members of other ethnic groups. These perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and thoughts could reflect through forms of cognitive distortions such as polarized thinking (where an individual believes that all members of a certain ethnic group are inherently bad, without considering the diversity and complexity within that group), and overgeneralization (the intolerant person makes a complete judgment about an entire ethnic group based on limited experience). In the same vein, [Joe \(2011\)](#) points out another form of cognitive distortion to be mental filter: a situation where an individual is unable to think flexibly because their point of view is very limited and for that reason, they limit

themselves to only information that support their thoughts and beliefs. Joe believes that people who experience this mental filter will ignore thoughts and assumptions that are not in accordance with their beliefs. This also happens in cases of ethnic intolerance.

The presence of ethnic intolerance can cause immeasurable ill to the society and individuals living in it. Several incidents in recent history have shown clearly how lack of tolerance have made people to attack others and their communities because their beliefs do not align ([Biam et al., 2022](#)). Ethnic intolerance has become a thing of concern especially in Wukari Education Zone of Taraba State where it is one of the factors responsible for conflict which have displaced thousands and damaged the relationship among members of different ethnic and tribal communities. There is therefore need to seek for appropriate intervention which would help in reframing the mindset and attitude of adolescents. The reason for this is because, these young people are the future pillars of the country and if they should grow with hatred, disrespect and disregard for other people's diversities, conflict is bound to occur. One of the interventions that could help in that regard is cognitive restructuring.

Cognitive restructuring according to Ellis' statement, is the process of learning to refute cognitive distortion or fundamental faulty thinking with the goal of replacing one's irrational counter belief with more beneficial ones. [Beck \(2011\)](#) believes that cognitive restructuring involves the process of reframing negative and unrealistic thoughts to more realistic and positive thinking. Cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance

encompass all the faulty thinking and beliefs which adolescents harbour. The belief and thought that other people's beliefs, ideas and ways of living are of less significance is baseless, irrational, illogical and unacceptable. Individuals who harbour such a belief, are distorted cognitively. It is this form of faulty thinking that leads to the exhibition of unacceptable emotions and behaviours.

Several researchers ([Aliero et al., 2023](#); [Ahmad et al., 2020](#); [Astuti et al., 2020](#); [Alnaimat, 2022](#); [Egbunike & Nwankwo, 2021](#); [Eseadi et al., 2020](#); [Motevalli et al., 2020](#); [Oparaduru, 2017](#)) have utilized cognitive restructuring in order to handle irrational beliefs and thoughts that lead to bullying, stress, anxiety, proneness to maladaptive behaviour, procrastination, and motivation. These previous studies have added to the body of literatures in confirming the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in treating various forms of disorders, psychological and behavioural problems. However, none of these studies were conducted to address negative cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance. Even if such a study may have been investigated elsewhere which is yet to be captured in literature, it is not in Nigeria and certainly has not been conducted in Taraba State or Wukari Education Zone. Thus, the concern of this study was on utilizing cognitive restructuring in a group counselling session in order to address the cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The hypotheses of the research were:

1. Cognitive restructuring has no significant

effect in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State.

2. Cognitive restructuring has no significant gender difference in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study is quasi-experimental with one-group pretest-posttest design. The rationale behind the selecting of this type of design is because the results obtained from the administration of the pre-test and post-test are analyzed and compared in order to determine if the intervention was effective or not.

2.2 Area of the Study

The area of the study was Wukari Education Zone which is located in the Southern part of Taraba State, Nigeria. The zone comprises of two Local Government Areas i.e., Ibi and Wukari LGAs. The main reason why this area was selected for this study is because, there has been a lot of conflicts and violence between members of different ethnic groups due to the intolerance and lack of respect for one another's beliefs and ways of living.

2.3 Population, Sampling and Sampling Method

The population of the study was 1,514 SS 1 students in the public secondary schools

located in Wukari Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. In order to select the sample for the study, the researchers administered a pretest which served as a baseline for the selection of the subjects. A total of 20 students who fulfilled the requirements for selection as participants of this study were then drawn using purposive sampling technique.

2.4 Instrument

Ethnic Intolerance Questionnaire (EIQ):The items of this instrument were adapted from "Tolerance Index" by Soldatova and Shaigerova (2008). The items of the EIQ are scored on a 4-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The EIQ was validated by three experts in Counselling, Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Taraba State University, Jalingo. Thereafter, the instrument was trial tested on 30 adolescents who were 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 and a reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. This reliability co-efficient of 0.83 signifies that the instrument is statistically suitable for conducting the study.

2.5 Procedure

In order to conduct this study, the researchers adopted a three-phase method of data collected. The first phase was the pre-treatment phase and it involved administration of the EIQ to students in order to serve as baseline for the selection of the participants to be involved in the study. The second phase was the treatment phase and it involved the utilization of the techniques of rational emotive behaviour therapy to serve as the intervention in reducing levels of cognitive distortions with regards to ethnic intolerance. The treatment phase took the form of sessions which lasted for a period of eight (8) weeks and involved the utilization of techniques such as cognitive restructuring, and challenging irrational beliefs and thoughts. The third stage was the post-treatment phase and it involved the re-administration of the EIQ to the subjects in order to compare the effectiveness of the treatment. It also involved a follow up which

was done in order to monitor the progress, help reinforce and maintain the change which the participants attained.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics of t-test to analyze the hypotheses. 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 t-test as the statistical tool for analysis is based on the assertion by [Bevans \(2023\)](#) that t-test is a statistical tool which is often used in hypothesis testing and to determine whether a process or treatment actually has an effect on the sample of the study, or whether two groups are different from one another.

3. Results

Table 1
Demographic Information of the Sample

1	School	N	Percentages
	School A	10	50.0
	School B	10	50.0
	Total	20	100
2	Gender		
	Male	10	50.0
	Female	10	50.0
	Total	20	100
3	Age Range		
	12-15	7	35.0
	16-19	13	65.0
	Total	20	100

The participants' demographic results revealed that 10 (50.0%) participants represented adolescent students from School A, another 10 (50.0%) were drawn from School B. The participants were selected equally based on gender signifying 10 males representing (50.0%) and 10 females representing (50.0%) respectively.

Table 2

Paired Samples t-test on the Effect of Cognitive Restructuring.

Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Ethnic Intolerance scores	Pretest	20	17.95	2.23	19	13.183	.000
	Posttest	20	10.45	1.90			

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

Results of the analysis in table 1 showed that cognitive restructuring has significant effect on cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance ($t = 13.183$, $p = 0.000$). The mean score of the participants' cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance before exposure to the treatment was 17.95 and it was reduced to 10.45 after exposure to treatment, implying a mean reduction difference of 7.50 in favour of the post test scores. This shows that cognitive restructuring has positive effect on ethnic

Participants within the age brackets of 12 and 15 years of age were 7 (35.0%) while those between age 16 and 19 were 13 (65.0%).

To investigate the first hypothesis of the research, a paired t-test was used, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

intolerance as it relates to cognitive dimensions. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that cognitive restructuring has no significant effect in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents is rejected.

In order to investigate the second hypothesis of the research, independent t-test was used, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 3

Independent samples t-test on Gender Difference.

Variable	Test	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Sig (p)
Ethnic Intolerance scores	Pretest	10	11.80	2.44	18	.814	.426
	Posttest	10	10.10	1.19			

$P > 0.05$, t computed > 1.96 at df 18

The result of the analysis in table 2 shows that cognitive restructuring has no gender difference in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State. The outcome of the t-test shows

that the p value of .426 is higher than the 0.05 alpha level of significance and the calculated t value of .814 is higher than the t critical value of 1.96 ($P > 0.05$; $t < 1.96$) at 18 df implying that cognitive restructuring has no

gender difference in the treatment of cognitive distortions related to ethnic intolerance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that cognitive restructuring has no significant gender difference in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State is accepted.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the effect of cognitive restructuring in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents in Taraba State. The results of the analysis showed that cognitive restructuring has significant effect in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents. The effectiveness of the technique could be because it is a technique under the cognitive behaviour and rational emotive behaviour therapies. This technique helped in the reduction of cognitive distortions and helping the clients to challenge their irrational and unrealistic beliefs of ethnic intolerance. The finding of the study aligns with [Motevalli et al. \(2020\)](#) who conducted a study to find out the effect of a new cognitive restructuring and critical thinking intervention on test anxiety. The researchers concluded that cognitive restructuring is an important intervention that helps young people to think rationally and logically. The finding also agrees with [Eseadi et al. \(2020\)](#) who conducted a study on the effect of rational emotive behaviour therapy on re-offending thoughts of prisoners at Nsukka Prisons, Enugu State, Nigeria. Their findings suggest that cognitive restructuring as REBT technique has a significant positive effect on the thoughts of participants. The

sessions helped the participants in acquiring rational and more acceptable beliefs about themselves and people around them. Similarly, the finding of this study corroborates with findings by [Ahmad et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Astuti and Wangid \(2020\)](#) who found positive effect of cognitive restructuring in reducing irrational thoughts and beliefs in relation to procrastination and motivation among participants of the study. The finding of the present study suggests that the intervention played a meaningful role in promoting positive changes in the participants' beliefs and thoughts towards different ethnic groups. Cognitive restructuring as a technique under the umbrella of REBT and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is an effective intervention that can be used in helping adolescents to decrease levels of irrational beliefs and thoughts as it relates to ethnic intolerance. This is evident in the fact that the participants displayed more tolerant attitudes as was observed in their post-test scores and during the follow-up period.

Another finding of this study indicates that cognitive restructuring has no significant gender difference in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents. The implication here is that the intervention positively reduced both male and female adolescents' cognitive levels of ethnic intolerance equally. The reason could be attributed to the neutral nature of the therapy's content and the possibility that the participants exhibited a similar level of openness to change. The finding of this study is in agreement with findings by previous researchers ([Aliero et al., 2023](#); [Egbunike & Nwankwo, 2021](#); [Oparaduru, 2017](#)) who

reported the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring on both male and female adolescents. However, the findings of this study disagree with previous findings as reported by [Alnaimat \(2022\)](#) which indicated that cognitive restructuring has significant positive effectiveness on participants of the study who were all female students. Cognitive restructuring can provide both male and female adolescents with opportunities to challenge and dispute the irrational thoughts and beliefs of ethnic intolerance and to acquire better and healthy ways of thinking.

The implication discovered due to the findings of this study is that helping adolescents to acquire more rational and logical beliefs, and thoughts of ethnic tolerance, enabled them in exhibiting respect towards members of other ethnic groups, thereby leading to peaceful co-existence in the society. Another implication is that counsellors in Wukari Education Zone can be able to utilize Cognitive restructuring as a technique of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and adopt or adapt the treatment package which the researcher designed in order to help address ethnic intolerance among adolescents and adults who exhibit it.

5. Conclusions

This study examined the effectiveness of rational emotive behaviour therapy in reducing cognitive dimensions of ethnic intolerance among adolescents. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that cognitive restructuring is effective in reducing cognitive issues

associated with ethnic intolerance. The study found out that the technique resulted in a significant decrease in the irrational beliefs and thoughts which the participants exhibited prior to the treatment. The findings therefore, suggest that cognitive restructuring as a technique of REBT could be a veritable tool that can be applied in decreasing ethnic intolerance and enhancing peaceful co-existence in the community.

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Conflict of interest

The researcher declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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