

Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in Improving Retirees' Attitude towards Political Participation

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Abstract: This study investigated the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in improving retirees' attitude towards political participation. Twenty four retirees (mean age = 55.50 years) within Ilorin, Nigeria participated in the study. They were randomly assigned to one treatment and one control groups. A validated instrument termed "Retirees' Attitude towards Political Participation Questionnaire") was administered to the two groups before and after the experimental programme. ANCOVA was employed for the analysis of data. Results showed that the treatment package (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) was effective in improving retirees' attitude towards political participation, their religious affiliations notwithstanding. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the counselling curriculum in Nigeria be expanded to accommodate this new problem area and that retirees should always seek counseling.

Keywords: Retirees, attitude, political participation, rational emotive behaviour therapy.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, like every other developing country, is striving towards nation building. Nation building is a multifaceted process of building the socio-political and economic preconditions that would be instrumental to the continued sustenance, development and growth of the society (Bozimo, 2000; Idowu, 2005). For a meaningful nation-building to thrive, mobilization, coordination and harnessing of all resources (including the retirees) are a prerequisite. This call for the need to counsel the retirees to participate in politics so as to contribute their quota in national development for no nation can aspire to achieve its full potentials unless all of its people, retirees inclusive, are full participants in the scheme of things.

Retirement has been described as a stage of life that is experienced by employees, whether in public or private organisations. Retirement entails leaving one's regular routine or habitual career, position, business or active life (Amadi, 1991). Retirement in Nigeria has a two-fold problem: negative perception which has made retirement planning and adjustment difficult for retirees and the social stigma attached to it. Retirement poses a threat to many people who may not know what to do with their lives after retiring from active service (Adewuyi, 2006). Most often than not retirees see themselves as worthless and rejected by the society. Most of them have negative self concept about their ability to contribute more to national development. Helping retirees restructure their cognition/change their mindsets so as to take active part in politics becomes necessary now more than ever before, as Nigeria marches

forward into stable democracy in the bid for political emancipation.

The dynamic interaction between attitude and behaviour has received a lot of attention in social psychological literature. Attitude is defined as a mental disposition, as it indicates opinion or allegiance. Durosaro (2004) defines attitude as the predisposition to respond cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally to a particular issue in a particular way. Attitudes are learned dispositions and they can be unlearned through rational thinking.

Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) now known as Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is based on the assumption that human beings are born with a potential for both rational and straight thinking. According to Ellis (1979), people have pre-dispositions for self-actualisation, happiness, communion with others, growth and self-actualisation. On the other hand, individuals also have exceptionally potent propensities to be self-destructive, to be superstitious, to be dogmatic, to avoid thinking things through, to shirk responsibilities and to avoid actualizing potentials for growth.

Reports in the professional literature (Meritt, 1974; Ellis, 1982; Baker & Thomas, 1983; Ellis, 1986; 1993) have emphasized the efficacy of REBT as a behaviour change approach. REBT is an insight behavioural procedure that emphasis recognizing and changing negative thoughts and maladaptive beliefs. REBT is based on the assumption that cognitions are the major determinants of how we feel and act (Ellis, 1986). As you think, so shall you act! This is the basic assumption (Esere & Idowu, 2000). Assumptions retirees make about their capabilities and worthiness exert considerable influence on their attitude towards political participation. Rigidly held assumptions restrict the flow of information, thereby reinforcing counter-productive behavioural patterns.

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REBT is highly didactic. Its strategies/skills include unconditional acceptance; disputing of irrational beliefs, humour, exhortation, positive self talk; and cognitive homework. These and other behaviour change techniques were employed in the treatment package of the present study which sought to find out whether?

- there is any significant difference in the attitude towards political participation of retirees exposed to treatment and those in the control group.
- there is any significant difference in the attitude towards political participation of older and younger retirees exposed to treatment.

METHOD

This is an experimental research, which involves the manipulation of treatment variable(s), followed by observing the effects of this manipulation on one or more dependent variables. For the purpose of this study, the experimental variables comprised the pre-test scores representing measures of retirees’ attitude towards political participation before the treatment package was administered. The post-test scores comprised measures of retirees’ attitude towards political participation after the treatment package had been administered.

Research Design

This study adopted a two (2) by three (3) factorial design as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the 2x3 factorial design adopted for this study. The first component comprised the two levels of experimental groups consisting of one treatment group (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) and a control group. The other component consists of participants from different religious affiliations.

Participants and Setting

The target population for this study consists of retirees in Ilorin Metropolis within the age of 45-60 years. On the whole, a total of 24 retirees participated in the study. The participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to gather a cross-sectional sample across educational level, age and religious affiliations. The participants were drawn from places of worship and within the community. This was done through advertisement, distribution of hand-bills and personal contacts. A number of criteria were satisfied by the participants before they were deemed qualified for selection into the experimental programme. These include:

- 1) Attainment of a minimum educational background of First School Leaving Certificate. The experimen-

tal programme was carried out in the English language and as such the researchers selected fairly literate retirees for easy comprehension of the programme;

- 2) Willingness to take part in the experimental programme by voluntarily signing a consent form;
- 3) Participants’ age must not exceed 60 years;

On the recruitment day the participants who met the requirements for selection were randomly assigned to the two experimental groups. The mean age of the participants was 55.50 years while the age range was between 45 and 60 years.

Instrument

The participants completed the Retirees’ Attitude towards Political Participant Questionnaire (RAPQ) before and after the experimental programme. The instrument was formatted on a 4-point Likert type scale, consisting of two sections. Section A deals with personal characteristics of the participants such as religious affiliations and age while section B has 30 items comprising statements on attitudes towards political participation. The content measures the extent to which retirees agree with attitudinal statements for political participation. For the purpose of this study, the higher the total score, the higher a retirees’ agreement and good disposition towards political participation and vice versa. Requesting experts in the related field of study to vet the instrument established its content validity. The reliability of the instrument was determined, through Cronbach alpha reliability technique with a coefficient value of 0.76. This lends credence to the suitability of the instrument for the study.

Procedure for Treatment

The procedure for collecting data was divided and was carried out in three stages as follows:

- Pre-treatment phase;
- Treatment phase; and
- Post-treatment phase

Pre-Treatment Phase

As part of the preparation for this study the authors collected letters of introduction from their Heads of Department which enabled them meet with various personnel and organisations such as:

- Religious organisations – churches and mosques;
- Igbo community leader;
- Hausa community leader;

Table 1. A 2x3 Factorial Design

Experimental Levels	Christianity Islam	Religious Affiliation	Others
REBT Group (A)	4	6	2
CONTROL Group (B)	4	7	1
Total	8	13	3
Grand Total	24 (Participants)		

- Yoruba community leader;
- The President, Women in Neighbourhood (for the use of their seminar hall).
- The Commissioner for Women Affairs (for the use of Kwara State Multipurpose and Youth Development centre).

In all these places the authors further explained their mission and sought their cooperation and assistance by way of making available to the authors the list of retirees around them or by recommending the programme to their organisations and community members. Posters were designed and several copies were pasted at strategic places within Ilorin Metropolis. Copies were also made available to churches; mosques and community leaders for interested members. Prior to the commencement of the experimental treatment, research assistants were employed to assist. The authors trained the two assistants on how to meet the purpose of each topic under discussion. They were taught how to personally pin the name tags on the participants, welcome the participants with warm handshake, handle the registration and distribution of files and other materials, display posters and counselling write-ups. Two days before the date of recruitment, the authors and the two research assistants went round to remind all the people that had earlier on been contacted and intimated about the programme.

On the recruitment day, the respondents who met the requirements for selection (see the section on participants and setting) were randomly assigned to the following groups:

- Monday (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy Group A)
- Thursday (Control Group B)

After the introductory talk, those who would not find the programme convenient were asked to leave. The authors retained the control group and “tied” them down somehow. The reason being that if the control group was not met once in a while, they might have been discouraged from coming back after six weeks. A different venue (Kwara State Multipurpose and Youth Development Centre) was used for the casual meetings with the control group so as to avoid “contamination” with the treatment group. No specific training skill was given to the group, but the group was involved in a general discussion on topics relating to family living, which had nothing to do with the treatment package.

The Treatment Phase

The participants that received the treatment were those in the experimental group A. The experiment was carried out over a period of six weeks with the first week used for the screening and final selection of participants. The experimental treatment (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) package was executed through series of instructions, coaching, discussions, take-home assignments and behaviour rehearsals. The lectures were arranged in such a way that one lecture built on the next. The opening remark oriented the participants to the entire programme. This facilitated participants’ appraisal of their current status as retirees, vis-à-vis the new knowledge they were receiving. For the treatment(REBT) group, participants were trained on such topics as (a) purpose of Rational Emotive Behaviour

Therapy; (b) underlying basic assumptions of rational emotive behaviour therapies; (c) components of rational emotive behaviour therapies; (d) principles underlying rational emotive behaviours/cognitive restructuring and (e) understanding the role of positive self evaluation using REBT principles.. Participants in the control group were involved in the pre-treatment meetings, assignment into groups and response to the pre-test and post-test questionnaire forms but there was no treatment for them.

Post-treatment Phase

After the completion of the programme, there were unscheduled follow-up visits with some of the participants to ascertain the effectiveness of the training programme on their attitude towards political participation.

Control of Extraneous Variables

The authors took certain steps to prevent or at least minimize the incursion of extraneous variables into the experimental programme. Some of those steps include:

- *Non-Differential Selection of Subjects:* In experimental designs in which a control group is used, the effect of the treatment can sometimes be confounded because of differential selection of subjects for the treatment and control groups. To avoid this type of confounding effect, the authors selected treatment and control groups participants that did not differ except for exposure to the experimental treatment.
- *Participants were screened,* randomly selected and assigned to the treatment and control groups.
- *In order to prevent contamination,* a different venue was used for the casual meetings with the control group.
- *To avoid any form of interaction,* the authors ensured that each experimental group attended the training programme on separate days.
- *Instrument:* A learning gain may be observed from pre-test to post-test because the nature of the instrument used has changed. To guard against this, the same instrument was used for both the pre-test and the post-test measurements.
- *To ensure seriousness,* full participation and to avoid experimental mortality (a situation where participants quit in mid-experiment), participants were highly motivated and only retirees who signed the consent form to show their willingness to take part in the programme were used.

Data Analysis

The data obtained for this study were analysed to determine the effects of the independent variable (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) on the dependent variable (improved attitude towards political participation). The Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), using the pre-treatment test scores as covariates was employed for the data analysis. According to Hassan (1995), ANCOVA is a form of analysis of variance that tests the significance of the difference between the dependent variable and one or more covariates by adjusting initial mean difference in the experimental

Table 2. Means (X and Y) of Retirees’ Attitude Towards Political Participation Scores Based on Experimental Levels (Rows) and Religious Affiliations (Columns)

Experimental Levels	Christianity			Religious Affiliation Islam			Others		
	N	x-x	y-x	N	x-x	y-x	N	x-x	y-x
REBT Group (A)	4	73.30	110.30	6	72.400	109.60	2	76.30	108.76
CONTROL	3	76.20	66.40	4	70.26	70.08	5	72.60	72.70

groups. ANCOVA was therefore preferred to any other statistics because it increases precision in an experimental study and also removes the effects of any environmental source of variation that would otherwise inflate the experimental error.

RESULTS

In this section, the results of the data analysis for this study were presented. The results were presented according to hypotheses that guided the study.

Hypothesis 1

It states that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards political participation of retirees exposed to treatment and those in the control group.

In testing this hypothesis, two statistical analyses were carried out. The results are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 showed the unadjusted and adjusted means of the two experimental groups. Significant differences can be observed between the x-means and the y-means of the treatment group while no such differences were recorded for the control group. From this observation of pre-test and post-test means, it can be deduced that the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy package had a substantial impact in improving the retirees’ attitude towards political participation. The Analysis of Covariance that followed threw more light on the level of significant difference between the experimental groups (See Table 3).

The result in Table 3 showed that a significant difference exists between the scores of retirees who were exposed to the treatment package and those in the control group (F=142.03, df 1/20, p<.05). Thus the treatment (rows) was found to be significant while no interaction effect was observed between row (treatment) and columns (religious affiliations). That is Christians, Muslims and retirees from other religious group benefited from the training programme. Based on (Tables 2 and 3), the null hypothesis which stated that there is no

significant difference in the attitude towards political participant of retirees exposed to treatment and those in the control was rejected.

Hypothesis 2

It states that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards political participation of older and younger retirees exposed to REBT and those in the control group..

In testing this hypothesis, two statistical analyses were carried out. The results of these analyses are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

From (Table 4), the unadjusted and adjusted means of the experimental groups are presented. Significant differences can be observed between the x-means and the y-means of the treatment group while no such differences were recorded for the control group. From this observation of pre-test and post-test means, it can be deduced that the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy package had a substantial impact in improving the retirees’ attitude towards political participation. The Analysis of Covariance that followed succinctly highlighted the level of significant difference between the experimental groups (See Table 5).

The result in Table 3 showed that a significant difference exists between the scores of retirees who were exposed to the treatment package and those in the control group (F=142.03, df 1/20, p<.05). Thus the treatment (rows) was found to be significant while no interaction effect was observed between row (treatment) and columns (age). That is both younger and older retirees benefited from the training programme. Based on Tables 4 and 5, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the attitude towards political participation of older and younger retirees exposed to treatment and those in the control was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study is to investigate whether or not experimental manipulation would be effective in improving retirees’ attitude towards political participation.

Table 3. Summary Results of ANCOVA for Adjusted (Y-Means) on Retirees’ Attitude Towards Political Participation Based on Rows (Experimental Conditions) and Columns (Religious Affiliations)

Source	SS	Df	MS	F
Rows	1660.16	1	830.08	142.03*
Columns	4.22	1	4.22	.40
Interaction	6.40	1	6.20	.64
Within	16242.16	20	812.08	

* = Significant, p>0.05 level

Table 4. Means (X and Y) of Retirees' Attitude Towards Political Participation Scores Based on Treatment (Rows) and Age (Columns)

Experimental Levels	Age					
	Younger(45-50 years)			Older(51-60 years)		
	N	x-x	y-x	N	x-x	y-x
REBT	7	72.12	100.76	6	71.42	101.10
CONTROL	5	73.22	72.78	7	73.40	72.80

Table 5. Summary Results of ANCOVA for Adjusted (Y-Means) on Retirees' Attitude Towards Political Participation Based on Rows (Experimental Conditions) and Columns (Age)

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Rows	1060.12	1	530.08	102.01*
Columns	3.20	1	3.20	.30
Interaction	4.30	1	4.30	.44
Within	12282.14	20	614.10	

* = Significant, $p > 0.05$ level.

The adjusted y-mean scores of the participants in the treatment group are considerably higher than those of participants in the control group. This difference is attributable to the effect of the treatment to which the control group was not exposed. The study has, to this end, established the effectiveness of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in improving retirees' attitude towards political participation. The possible reasons for this are not far fetched. The effectiveness of the treatment package could be attributed to the opportunities provided the retirees in re-discovering themselves through positive self evaluation of their worth and untapped potentials. The present findings have corroborated such studies as (Ellis, 1982; Baker & Thomas, 1983; Esere & Idowu, 2000; Adewuyi, 2006), which found the efficacy of rational emotive behaviour therapy in enhancing behavioural/attitudinal change in the participants. Adewuyi (2006) reported experimental studies in which the main target was rational behaviour/attitudinal change towards retirement. Rational Emotive Behaviour and Reality Therapies training groups using behaviour rehearsals, modelling, group and trainer feedback, and homework assignments was compared to a control group. The REBT participants were found to be better in self-report and behaviour measures than those in the control group.

The findings of this study also lend credence to the research findings of Baker & Thomas (1983) who surveyed the efficacy of cognitive restructuring and structured group discussion as primary preventive strategies. They found out that adoption of effective cognitive restructuring strategies/skills like positive self-talk; unconditional acceptance; disputing of irrational beliefs; humour; exhortation and cognitive homework were effective in preventing participants' self destructive behaviours. These strategies were also incorporated in the treatment package of the present study.

The findings also show that the treatment was effective irrespective of religious affiliation and age. This may be attributed to the fact that the retirees in the treatment group were exposed to the same methodological step by step training on rational emotive behaviour therapy. The participants were given necessary ingredients for overcoming their problems thereby improving their attitude towards political participation.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study show that retirees who were exposed to treatment condition (Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy) reported improved attitudinal change towards political participation than their counterparts in the control group who received no skill training. The efficacy of the treatment condition is a promising development in the helping profession as it can further increase the chances of most retirees to participate and benefit from counselling therapy enabling them to imbibe the skills of Rational Emotive Behaviour for their optimal well-being. Toward this end, it is recommended that:

- Nigerian government should try to encourage the training of more counsellors in the nation's universities to effectively serve the community in areas other than the school setting.
- Retirees should seek counselling always to enable them face daunting challenges of retirement and to re-discover themselves for further use to the society.
- Counselling curriculum in Nigeria should be expanded to accommodate this new problem area.
- Non-governmental organizations focusing on retirees should involve counsellors as consultants.

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