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## Cultivating Interpersonal Excellence in Teacher Trainees via Rational Emotive Strategies

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### Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of the Rational Emotive Education (REE) model in enhancing interpersonal skills among teacher trainees. Interpersonal skills, critical for fostering inclusive and productive learning environments, are often underdeveloped in traditional teacher training programs. The study utilized a quasi-experimental design with pretest-posttest non-equivalent groups. Fifty teacher trainees in the experimental group underwent an REE-based intervention, while a control group of equal size received no additional training. The intervention, structured in three phases over 18 sessions, emphasized cognitive, emotive, and behavioral strategies to improve communication, empathy, and emotional regulation. Results revealed a significant improvement in the experimental group's interpersonal skills, with posttest scores outperforming the control group. ANCOVA analysis confirmed the intervention's efficacy ( $F = 155, p < 0.001$ ), with pretest differences controlled. These findings underscore the potential of REE as a structured, evidence-based approach to interpersonal skill development, offering valuable implications for teacher education programs.

**Key Words:** Rational Emotive Education, Interpersonal Skills

### Introduction

In an era of rapid societal and educational transformation, the importance of interpersonal skills in teacher training cannot be overstated. These skills, which encompass effective communication, empathy, teamwork, conflict resolution, and cultural sensitivity, are crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive educational environment. Teachers are not just facilitators of knowledge but also role models and builders of strong relationships within the classroom and school community. For teacher trainees, cultivating interpersonal skills during their formative years of training lays the foundation for their future success in managing diverse classrooms and fostering productive learning environments.

Despite the recognized importance of interpersonal skills, their systematic development in teacher training programs remains limited. Many trainees enter the profession with insufficient preparation to handle interpersonal challenges effectively, leading to stress, misunderstandings, and less-than-optimal classroom dynamics. Addressing this gap necessitates a structured and evidence-based approach to skill enhancement.

Rational Emotive Education (REE), an educational adaptation of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), offers a promising pathway to improve interpersonal skills. Grounded in the principles of rational thinking and emotional regulation, REE focuses on helping individuals identify and challenge irrational beliefs, thereby fostering constructive behaviors and relationships. This study explores the potential of Rational Emotive Strategies in cultivating interpersonal excellence among teacher trainees, emphasizing the transformative impact of rational thinking on social interactions and classroom success.

### Review of Related Literature

#### Interpersonal Skills: A Cornerstone of Teacher Training

Interpersonal skills are vital for building strong professional and personal relationships. Defined broadly as the ability to communicate effectively, empathize, and collaborate with others, these skills are indispensable in educational contexts. According to Klein, De Rouin, and Salas (2006), interpersonal skills can be categorized into communication skills (e.g., active listening, assertive communication, and nonverbal communication) and relationship-building skills (e.g., trust, conflict resolution, and cooperation).

Studies underline the significant influence of interpersonal skills on academic and socio-emotional outcomes. For instance, Gresham et al. (2006) emphasized the role of social skills in promoting positive peer interactions and classroom adjustment, while Murray-Harvey & Slee (2007) highlighted their contribution to the well-being of both students and teachers. Moreover, Lane et al. (2003) found that students with strong interpersonal skills exhibited better academic performance and reduced behavioral issues, emphasizing the broader implications of these skills in educational settings.

Despite their importance, there is a paucity of structured interventions to develop interpersonal skills within teacher training programs. Most existing efforts focus on general social skills training, with limited emphasis on the specific needs of teacher trainees, leaving a critical gap that this study aims to address.

#### Rational Emotive Education: Theoretical Foundations and Applications

Rational Emotive Education (REE) is an educational adaptation of REBT, developed by Albert Ellis. It is based on the principle that individuals' emotional and behavioral responses are influenced not by external events but by their beliefs about

these events. By identifying and challenging irrational beliefs, individuals can develop healthier emotional responses and constructive behaviors (Ellis, 1962).

The application of REE in educational settings has shown promising results. Popa & Bochiş (2012) demonstrated the effectiveness of REE in improving peer relationships among children, while Mahfar et al. (2014) highlighted its role in reducing irrational beliefs and stress among school students. Nucci (2002) explored its application among teacher trainees, finding improvements in both personal and professional development. These studies underline the potential of REE to enhance social-emotional competencies, making it a valuable tool for interpersonal skill development.

### **Interplay Between Rational Emotive Strategies and Interpersonal Skills**

Integrating Rational Emotive Strategies into interpersonal skill training provides a holistic approach to addressing cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. By fostering rational thinking, teacher trainees can better manage their emotions, communicate effectively, and build positive relationships. For instance, the ABC framework of REBT—which focuses on identifying Activating events (A), irrational Beliefs (B), and emotional Consequences (C)—(Ellis, 1962) offers a practical tool for trainees to understand and regulate their emotional and interpersonal responses.

Existing research supports the synergy between REE and interpersonal skills development. Sharp & McCallum (2005) found that REE-based interventions reduced aggressive behaviors and improved social interactions among middle school students, while Wilde (1999) highlighted its effectiveness in managing extreme emotions that disrupt thinking processes. These findings underscore the relevance of REE in fostering interpersonal excellence in teacher trainees.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

Teacher trainees in India face unique challenges in managing diverse classrooms and fostering inclusive learning environments. While the curriculum emphasizes subject expertise and pedagogical skills, it often overlooks the critical role of interpersonal skills. This oversight leads to significant gaps in their preparedness to handle the relational aspects of teaching, such as building trust, resolving conflicts, and collaborating with students and colleagues.

At the same time, the growing diversity and complexity of classrooms demand higher levels of emotional intelligence and interpersonal competence from teachers. Without these skills, trainees are more likely to encounter difficulties in classroom management, student engagement, and professional collaboration.

Rational Emotive Education offers a structured approach to address these challenges. By integrating REE principles into teacher training programs, this study aims to:

- 1. Enhance interpersonal skills:** Equip teacher trainees with tools for effective communication, conflict resolution, and empathy.
- 2. Promote emotional resilience:** Foster rational thinking and emotional regulation to help trainees manage stress and challenges.
- 3. Improve classroom dynamics:** Empower future teachers to create supportive, inclusive, and collaborative learning environments.
- 4. Contribute to curriculum innovation:** Provide a framework for integrating interpersonal skill development into teacher training programs.

The significance of this study extends beyond individual teacher trainees to the broader educational ecosystem. By cultivating interpersonal excellence, the study seeks to improve teacher-student relationships, foster a positive school climate, and enhance overall educational outcomes. The findings are expected to inform policy and practice, offering actionable insights for teacher education institutions and policymakers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Rational Emotive Education Model in enhancing the Interpersonal Skills of teacher trainees.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the differences in pre-test and post-test scores of Interpersonal Skills between the control group and the experimental group.
2. To assess the validity of the performance difference in Interpersonal Skills between the experimental group and the control group.

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the mean pre-test and post-test scores of Interpersonal Skills between the control group and the experimental group.

### **Method**

#### **Techniques**

A quasi-experimental research design was utilized, specifically a pretest-posttest non-equivalent group design, to compare the effects of the intervention between groups that were not randomly assigned. This design was selected to reflect practical educational settings, where randomization is often unfeasible, and to ensure the intervention's applicability and relevance within existing teacher training structures. The study involved two intact groups: an experimental group that received the REEM-based intervention and a control group that engaged in regular classroom activities without additional treatment.

Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was applied to control for pre-existing differences, thereby enhancing the validity of the results.

### Variables of the Study

#### *Independent Variable*

The training given using Rational Emotive Education Model is the independent variable.

#### *Dependent Variables*

In this study the dependent variable was Interpersonal Skills of prospective teachers.

### Population

The study focused on teacher trainees from various regions of Kerala State. The sample included individuals who had completed their undergraduate education at different universities across Kerala. Participants for the experimental and control groups were selected from two teacher training colleges within the state.

### Samples

The two teacher training colleges serving as the experimental and control groups were selected through convenient sampling. The experimental group was S.N.M. Training College, Moothakunnam, where the investigator is employed, while the control group was H.D.P.Y. College of Education, Mattupuram, North Paravur, the nearest accessible institution to the investigator. This approach facilitated ease of access and ensured feasibility in identifying appropriate participants for the study.

### Materials and Tools Used in the Study

For the purpose of the present study, the investigator prepared the following materials and tools.

1. Rational Emotive Education Model (Musthafa & Bisini, 2013)
2. Interpersonal Skills Scale (Musthafa & Bisini, 2012)

#### *Rational Emotive Education Model*

The **Rational Emotive Education Model (REEM)** is a preventive counseling approach developed using the ADDIE instructional design model to enhance interpersonal skills, increase tolerance for ambiguity, and reduce irrational beliefs among students. The model integrates principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) of Albert Ellis into a structured educational framework, making it practical for classroom application. The model was validated through comprehensive theoretical and practical preparation, including intensive training in REBT techniques and studying its core principles.

**Design:** The model was structured into **three phases** spanning **eighteen sessions**:

- Phase I: Theoretical orientation (7 sessions)
- Phase II: Teacher intervention (6 sessions)
- Phase III: Group intervention (5 sessions)

The Rational Emotive Education Model (REEM) incorporates a range of **cognitive, emotive, and behavioral techniques** to enhance interpersonal skills, increase tolerance for ambiguity, and decrease irrational beliefs among students. These techniques are designed to be practical, classroom-friendly, and aligned with the principles of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). Below is a detailed overview of the techniques employed in the model, with an emphasis on their purpose and applications.

Cognitive, emotive, and behavioral methods are strategies designed to foster rational thinking, emotional regulation, and constructive behaviors. Cognitive techniques aim to modify thought patterns, including active disputing of irrational beliefs, creating rational coping self-statements, and using cost-benefit analyses to evaluate the impact of irrational thoughts. Modeling, cognitive homework, psycho-educational tools like the ABC model, proselytizing REBT principles, recording irrational thoughts, and reframing negative events are also used to develop rationality. Emotive methods focus on healthier emotional responses through techniques such as forceful self-statements, rational emotive imagery, role-play, and humor to reduce the intensity of irrational beliefs. Relationship methods like metaphors, stories, and encouragement provide relatable and supportive tools for emotional growth. Behavioral approaches emphasize actionable strategies, such as in vivo desensitization to manage anxiety, avoiding avoidance behaviors, using reinforcement or penalties to shape behaviors, and skill training for interpersonal effectiveness. Relapse prevention ensures sustained rational thinking and resilience against reverting to irrational patterns.

The REEM's comprehensive use of cognitive, emotive, and behavioral techniques ensures a holistic approach to developing students' mental health and interpersonal skills. By combining theoretical education, practical exercises, and interactive methods, the model empowers students to develop interpersonal skills, internalize rational beliefs, regulate their emotions effectively, and build constructive behaviors that contribute to lifelong well-being.

#### *Interpersonal Skills Scale (Musthafa & Bisini, 2012)*

The Interpersonal Skill Scale was developed and standardized to assess interpersonal skills among students, focusing on two key dimensions: **Communication Skills** (active listening, oral, written, assertive, and nonverbal communication) and **Relationship-Building Skills** (cooperation, trust, intercultural sensitivity, service orientation, self-presentation, social influence, and conflict resolution). The scale was created through a systematic process involving literature reviews, expert input, pilot testing, and item analysis resulting in a final scale of 50 items. Responses are scored using a five-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 50 to 250, where higher scores indicate stronger interpersonal skills. The tool was validated

through construct and face validity, while its reliability was confirmed using the test-retest method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.81. The scale offers a reliable and effective measure for evaluating and enhancing students' communication and relationship-building skills.

### Analysis and Interpretation

- Comparison of Pretest and Posttest scores of control group and experimental group.

**Table 1** *Outcome of Significance of Test Comparing Mean Pretest and Posttest Scores on Interpersonal Skills Between Control and Experimental Groups*

Group	No of Students	PreTest			Post Test		
		Means	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio	Means	Standard Deviation	Critical Ratio
Control Group	50	190	24.4	0.437(NS)	194	25.4	3.385**
Experimental Group	50	192	21.2		209	18.5	

\*\*Significant at .01 level

The results highlight the significant impact of the Rational Emotive Education (REE) model on improving interpersonal skills among B.Ed students. In the control group, the mean pretest score was 190 (SD = 24.4), which increased to 194 (SD = 25.4) in the posttest. Although the critical ratio (3.385) was significant at the 0.01 level, the improvement was modest. In contrast, the experimental group, which received the REE intervention, demonstrated a substantial improvement, with the mean pretest score of 192 (SD = 21.2) rising to 209 (SD = 18.5). This indicates a notable enhancement in interpersonal skills within the experimental group.

The ANCOVA analysis confirms the effectiveness of the REE model in enhancing interpersonal skills. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group, as indicated by a highly significant between-group F-value of 155 ( $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, the pretest scores (covariate) had a substantial influence on posttest results, with an F-value of 1642 ( $p < 0.001$ ), underscoring the importance of controlling for initial differences. The low residual variance (Mean Square = 27.8) suggests a well-fitting model. These findings validate the REE model's effectiveness, with the experimental group demonstrating significant and reliable improvement in interpersonal skills compared to the control group.

### Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the significant potential of the Rational Emotive Education (REE) model in developing interpersonal skills among teacher trainees. The experimental group, which underwent REE-based intervention, showed a substantial improvement in interpersonal skills compared to the control group, as evidenced by their higher posttest scores. This demonstrates the efficacy of the REE model in addressing the gaps in interpersonal skill development often observed in traditional teacher training programs. The REE approach's focus on fostering rational thinking, emotional regulation, and positive behavioral patterns helped participants in the experimental group to better manage interpersonal challenges, communicate effectively, and build stronger relationships. The ANCOVA analysis further validated the intervention's impact by controlling for initial differences in pretest scores, confirming that the observed improvements were not due to chance. These results highlight the importance of adopting structured, evidence-based frameworks like REE in teacher education to prepare trainees for the interpersonal demands of their profession.

### Educational Implications of the Study

The results have significant implications for teacher education and training programs. First, the integration of REE principles into teacher training curricula can help bridge the gap in interpersonal skill development, equipping future educators with the tools to handle relational challenges in classrooms. By focusing on rational thinking and emotional regulation, the REE model promotes a holistic approach to teacher development, benefiting both their personal well-being and professional competence. Teachers trained with these skills are more likely to create inclusive, supportive, and collaborative classroom environments, which in turn foster positive student-teacher relationships and improved educational outcomes. Furthermore, these findings provide actionable insights for educational policymakers, who should consider embedding interpersonal skill modules within teacher education frameworks. By doing so, institutions can address the rising need for emotional intelligence and interpersonal competence in today's increasingly diverse and complex classroom settings.

### Suggestions for Further Research

This study paves the way for future research to further explore the potential of the REE model. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to assess the long-term effectiveness of REE interventions on interpersonal skills and their sustained application in professional teaching contexts. Comparative studies with other psychological or pedagogical frameworks would provide deeper insights into the relative efficacy of REE, offering more informed choices for teacher training programs. Research involving a broader demographic across different cultural, educational, and geographical contexts would enhance the generalizability of these findings, helping educators understand how the REE model can be tailored to diverse populations. Additionally, focusing on specific interpersonal skills, such as conflict resolution, cross-cultural communication, or active listening, could provide more detailed insights into the areas where the REE model has the most pronounced impact. These efforts would help refine the application of REE and ensure its effectiveness in meeting varied training needs.

## Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates the transformative role of the Rational Emotive Education model in enhancing interpersonal skills among teacher trainees. By combining cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies, REE provides a comprehensive approach to developing the relational competencies critical for effective teaching. The significant improvements observed in the experimental group underscore the model's potential to address key gaps in traditional teacher training programs. Furthermore, the findings highlight the broader implications of incorporating structured, evidence-based interventions like REE into teacher education curricula. By equipping teacher trainees with strong interpersonal skills, educational institutions can better prepare them for the complexities of modern classrooms, fostering positive teacher-student relationships and improving overall educational outcomes. This study provides a foundation for further exploration and offers a promising pathway for enhancing teacher preparation and contributing to the advancement of the educational landscape.

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