



## **The Effect of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) on Poor Study Habits among Secondary School Students in Calabar Municipality**

**Blessing Agbo Ntamu and Nonso Bisong**

Department of Educational Foundations

University of Calabar

Calabar-Nigeria

[drntamuba@gmail.com](mailto:drntamuba@gmail.com)

08060905557

[nonnyb3000@yahoo.com](mailto:nonnyb3000@yahoo.com)

08188677544

### **Abstract**

The rate of failure of secondary school students in public examinations such as West African Examination Council (WAEC) and Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations and the seemingly increasing rate of examination malpractice in schools, have been a growing cause for concern among stakeholders in the educational system in Nigeria. Research has identified Poor study habits as one of the key factors responsible for this high rate of failure and widespread examination malpractice among students. REBT is a cognitive behavior therapy that deals with modifying maladjusted behavior that has to do with a faulty belief system. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of REBT on poor study habit of senior secondary School students in Calabar municipality. The research design employed in this study was the Pretest Posttest Control Group Experimental design. One hypothesis was formulated for this study and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Three research questions were asked to guide this study. 80 senior secondary school students were purposively sampled for this study. Data was collected using the Students Study Habits Questionnaire (SSHQ) and Oral interview of participants. Data generated from the study was analyzed using the Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA) statistical procedure. Results revealed a positive impact of REBT on poor study habits. Recommendations were made based on the findings for this study.

### **Introduction**

Performance of Secondary school students in both internal and external examination has not been impressive in the past decades. There has also been a widespread occurrence of examination malpractice amongst

secondary school students. Efforts to identify the cause of this high failure rates in internal and external examinations and to identify the causes of this widespread examination malpractice culture among secondary school students, points to poor study habits of learners. This study seeks to address the issue of poor study habits by application of Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy in changing students' poor study habits.

Nigerian government and other stakeholders have made several efforts at curbing the problem of examination malpractice; examples include the Federal Court Decree 21 (that is 21 year jail penalty for culprits) in the miscellaneous offences decree of 1987, which was later revised under decree Number 33 of 1999 to 3 to 4 years jail term with or without a fine of 50,000 to 100,000 Naira. Efforts by examination bodies such as WAEC have included public enlightenment campaigns, punitive actions on culprits, creation of a department to handle cases of examination malpractice amongst others, (Fagbemi cited in Olatoye, 2004). Research efforts on the subject have also been numerous but centered on identifying causes and possible solutions and not experimenting with the proffered solutions. Consequently the rate of examination malpractice has continued to increase with time (Abdullahi, 2009). The researcher is of the position that it is high time stakeholders experimented with some of the proffered solution to poor academic achievement and examination malpractice. The solution picked in this study is changing the wrong values associated with poor study habits, changing the poor study habits and inculcating good study habits.

Extensive efforts have also been made to improve performance of students in examinations. In Cross River State for instance, the government imposed a compulsory Prep period after school for a period of about 4 years or more to enable students study after school and to improve performance. This compulsory prep period was reversed because it yielded no results. Since some students have been studying but are yet unable to pass exams. There is a great possibility that there is a problem with their study habits. Some students however do not value hard work and do not know the value of studying. Hence they seek out alternative means of passing examinations. These methods have also been largely unsuccessful.

Examination malpractice behaviours and poor study habits have been learned from the environment. It is, therefore, the belief of the researcher that these learned behaviours can be unlearned by the application of Psychotherapy. When students learn how to read and understand they will be able to pass examinations without malpractice, hence, both the problem of poor academic achievement and that of examination malpractice will be

dealt with. Dale (2008) asserts that the values which adolescents affirm in the cause of their development are fundamental to their eventual academic adjustment. Tackling the problem at the secondary school level will ensure that students can progress productively with their academic career. It is against this backdrop that the researchers employ REBT in order to first of all change wrong values of the students such as lack of value for hard work and faulty beliefs associated with examination malpractice and poor study habits and also teach the students the SQ3R study method.

Poor study habit refers to the unwillingness of students to study or the employment of study habits that impair understanding and retention and leads to poor academic achievement. When students do not know the right way to study and end up failing in spite of their efforts they end up engaging in examination malpractice out of frustration. Poor study habits include, lying in bed while reading, listening to loud music while reading, reading without taking notes or answering questions in order to ensure that what has been read has been committed to memory, reading only teachers notes, not reading until it is time for examinations, cramming and memorizing notes instead of reading with understanding, reading under poor lighting and poor ventilation conditions, adopting a wrong posture while reading, etc. It also refers to not reading sufficiently due to the belief that reading is hard work; and it is not necessary to read to pass as there are other means of passing. REBT encourages skill acquisition as a part of therapy; SQ3R study method by Robinson in 1946 will be taught to students in order to change their poor study habits.

Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy was propounded by Albert Ellis. It is a technique that attempts to change individual's behaviours by confronting their irrational beliefs, values and attitudes which they have imbibed from the processes of socialization and persuading them to adopt a rational thought process (Hansen, Stevic and Warner, 1977). One of the assumptions of the therapy is that our attitudes, our beliefs; the way we think about events and the meanings we give to them directly affect how we feel and behave, Michler (2004).

Ross (2006, para. 1) gives the following introduction to REBT;

We want to be well informed and educated; we want a good job with good pay; and we want to enjoy our leisure time. Of course life doesn't always allow us to have what we want; our goal of being

happy is often thwarted by the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". When our goals are blocked, we can respond in ways that are healthy and helpful, or we can react in ways that are unhealthy and unhelpful..... Our reaction to having our goals blocked (or even the possibility of having them blocked) is determined by our beliefs.

If our beliefs are rational our actions and reactions will be rational. If students believe that the road to success in examinations is studying hard, and they know how to study, their academic achievement will be enhanced and they will be no need for examination malpractice. Irrational beliefs such as it is impossible to pass exams only by reading hard, it is impossible to learn and understand large volumes of note, it is catastrophic to expect a student to learn and reproduce by heart theories and formulas, studying hard does not lead to academic success, the believe that studying hard is hard work, lack of dignity for hard work and the belief that they are other means of passing examinations, need to be tackled, hence the need for REBT.

REBT is a therapy of choice because it deals with changing the causes of maladjusted behaviours and not just the behaviours. This theory is suitable for addressing poor study habits because poor study habits are linked to irrational beliefs students imbibe through the processes of socialization, (Gbenda, 2008). If the students can be made to change their irrational beliefs they could abandon the behaviour of examination malpractice in favour of attending classes, carrying out assignments and homework, studying hard in order to excel in their academics, etc. Research has shown that REBT is effective in changing poor study habits of learners in certain geographical areas by changing wrong values and irrational beliefs.

Greenfield (2011) carried out a study to determine the effect of REBT on initiating and maintaining regular exercise among college age men, he reported that REBT helped the men modify their beliefs about exercise and by so doing improved their motivation to routinely engage in exercise. This study demonstrated that when an individual's belief about a thing is changed his behaviour concerning the thing is also changed.

Kumar (2009) carried out a research to determine the Impact of Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy on children with conduct disorder. The sample for the study included 200 students (100 boys and 100 girls) was purposefully drawn from 1142 students in colleges in Mysore. The intervention was given

to the experimental group for seven weeks, one session per week. Data was collected after the intervention and the posttest and analyzed using the GLM repeated measures ANOVA. Results showed that REBT had a significant effect on reducing the symptoms of conduct disorder.

A study was carried out by Flak (1998) to determine The Efficacy of Group Counselling Interventions Employing Short term Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy in Altering Beliefs, Values, Attitudes and Behaviours of at Risk Adolescents. The design for this study was a pretest-posttest control group experimental design. The sample included 48 adolescents of age 14 – 18 years. The students were randomly assigned to 3 groups according to gender. Instruments for data collection included the Idea inventory and the school social behaviour rating scales. Observation was a major method of data collection. The procedure for data analysis was a factorial ANOVA. The results showed that group counselling using REBT was effective in altering wrong beliefs, wrong values, attitudes and behaviour.

Adeoye (2009) stated that REBT and Reality Therapy were effective in reducing academic stress, improving study habits and producing better academic performance of sandwich undergraduate students in Oro Campus University of Ado – Ekiti.

REBT employs a wide range of techniques in its attempt to change irrational beliefs, (Froggart, 2005; Hansen et al. 1977). The techniques include cognitive counseling, skills training, homework, role playing procedures and operant conditioning procedures. It is preferred for dealing with irrational beliefs that underlie poor study habits because it is applicable to a group, it is eclectic in techniques use, it is time limited (does not require a lot of time) and it will provide opportunity for training the subjects on appropriate and effective study method as a means of changing students' poor study habits. Michler (2004) stated that in applying REBT, if the client is lacking any skills that could be instrumental to the desired behavioural change, the therapist is allowed to teach that skill to the client. It is based on this premise that the SQ3R study skills will be taught in an attempt to change the poor study habits of students.

Ogbodo (2010) described SQ3R as a very effective study method that can boost students' comprehension and reduce the frustration that emanates from poor study habits. Some authors refer to SQ3R as one of the best study habits for academic excellence (Ogbegbire, 2015; Ogbodo, 2010). There have been several studies that have shown the effectiveness of SQ3R in changing

poor study habits. Yahaya (2004) studied the effectiveness of SQ3R and group therapy in changing poor study habits of students. He discovered that SQ3R was effective both in individual and group counselling in changing poor study habits.

Omoegun in Gbenda (2008) applied REBT and Robinson's SQ3R in changing attitude towards examination malpractice on a sample of 300 senior secondary school students (150 males and 150 females) randomly selected from the total population of all senior secondary school students in Lagos Mainland Local Education District, through changing their irrational beliefs and value system. The experimental group was treated for four weeks after which both experimental and control groups were post tested using the Scale of Attitude Towards Cheating Questionnaire; data collected was analyzed using Student's *t* – test statistical procedure, results showed that REBT and SQ3R study method were effective in changing the attitude of the students towards examination malpractice by changing their poor study habits, helping them to study better and rely on their ability to excel

Mabekoje (2011) carried out a study to test the effects of SQ3R and 3-S-3-R study strategies on Senior Secondary Student's academic achievement in reading comprehension (3-S-3-R being Solomon Unoh's Survey- Read, Speed-read, Study-Read, Recall or Record, review and Reflect study method). SS1 students from six secondary schools in six Local Government Areas in Ogun State were randomly selected. The study was carried out using the Pretest Posttest Control group Quasi Experimental design. Hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance revealed that subjects that participated in the SQ3R study strategy performed better than the subjects in the other groups.

Passaglia (2003) investigated the effects of the SQ3R study method on reading comprehension in a high school chemistry class. Students in the experimental group were introduced to the SQ3R study strategy and asked to use the strategy while reading selected pages from their chemistry text books. Results of this study showed that reading comprehension of the two experimental groups improved through the use of the SQ3R reading strategy. Results also revealed that students who entered the study with previous SQ3R exposure showed significant improvement in their reading posttest scores and in their attitude towards reading versus student's without any previous SQ3R exposure.

Also, Omoegun (2000) carried out a study to find out the effects of Remedial Guidance (using the SQ3R model) on the academic achievement of Lagos

State Adolescents in English Comprehension. 200 adolescent students were randomly selected from a total of 552 SS1 students. Treatment was administered to the participants twice a week for four weeks, after which a posttest was administered and data analyzed using T-test statistics. The results of the study revealed that the remedial guidance intervention using SQ3R model was effective and thus promotes adolescents academic achievement in English comprehension.

In order to show the impact of SQ3R implementation as demonstrated by note packet completion on student's comprehension and retention, Carlstron (2011,p 1) carried out a study using 324 students completing Introductory Psychology class at Midwestern Public liberal Arts University across 9 separate sessions over a period of three and a half years, "results from the study indicated that when students use SQ3R strategies, they retain more information, as demonstrated by higher achievement on course exams" .

From the foregoing, applying SQ3R within the REBT therapeutic mold may be effective in increasing academic performance of secondary school students in Calabar Municipal Area. It might also increase self-reliance and hard work and might positively impact students' attitude towards examination malpractice. Due to the popularity of SQ3R in the world of education and research evidence supporting its effectiveness in the achievement of educational goals, it is believed that SQ3R will significantly change poor study habits of students in Calabar Municipality as well.

### **Research Questions**

One research question was asked to guide the study:

1. What is the effect of REBT on poor study habits scores of students?

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

1. The underlisted Null Hypothesis will be tested at 0.05 level of significance. There is no significant difference between the experimental and the control group in the effect of REBT on scores of poor study habits.
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### **Theoretical Framework**

Two theories will be reviewed under this section of the study; they include Skinner's operant conditioning and Cognitive Restructuring (REBT). These theories are learning theories and follow the basic principle that every behaviour is learnt and hence can be unlearned by the application of psychological principles.

### **Operant Conditioning**

Operant Conditioning is a theory under the Behavioural approach that believes that human behaviour is learned. Thus, all behaviours can be unlearned and new behaviours learned in its place. Behaviourism is concerned primarily with observable and measurable aspects of human behaviour. It proposes that when an observed behaviour is unacceptable it can be unlearned.

Operant conditioning was propounded by B. F. Skinner in 1938. Skinner disagreed with the preposition that, in the absence of a stimulus the organism did not emit any response. This position was held by proponents of classical conditioning. He believed that man is not a passive member of the environment waiting for things to happen to respond, but man operates upon the environment through his own initiatives. The likelihood of the behaviour being repeated was dependent on the consequences of the behaviour.

If students are taught good study habits and as a consequence they begin to excel in their academics, automatically the students will continue using the SQ3R study method because of the positive consequence and their academic achievement will be enhanced.

### **Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT)**

Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT), originally called Rational Therapy and later Rational Emotive Therapy was developed by Albert Ellis. He observed that quicker success with Clients came from a change in their beliefs about themselves, their problems and the world at large and these led to the revolution in Psychology that became known as REBT; (Ellis cited in Ian 2007).

Rational thoughts and feelings leads to effective behaviour and a productive lifestyle, while irrational thoughts and beliefs lead to unhappiness and a non-productive lifestyle. Hence irrational thoughts and beliefs about the Society, the school system and oneself could lead to the ineffective and non-productive lifestyle of examination malpractice, instead of studying hard, hence, poor academic performance.

Ellis believes that the irrational pattern of thoughts, feelings and beliefs begin early in life and is reinforced by parents and the general culture. Going by this principle parents in our society reinforce poor study habits by not



pressurizing and encouraging their wards to study hard, yet, insisting on good grades by all means; by hook or by crook and by eliminating poor study habits such as laying on the bed to read, watching television or listening to music while reading. While teachers who demand for money or other favours from students in exchange for good grades, assist students during examinations for a price, they are teaching the learners that there is no need to study hard.

According to Ellis (n.d.) to describe a belief as self-defeating, or irrational, is to say that it distorts reality (it's a misinterpretation of what's happening); or it involves some illogical ways of evaluating oneself, others, and the world around one, such as awfulising, can't-stand-it-itis, demandingness, discomfort intolerance and people-rating. This blocks one from achieving one's goals and purposes. Some self-defeating beliefs of students indicate that it is impossible to pass examinations only by reading hard and that it is impossible and catastrophic to learn large volumes of notes. Reading hard is discomfoting and one cannot stand this (discomfort intolerance); int indicates that one can eat one's cake and have it at the same time. This means I can go to parties, go out on dates, remain on social media all day and still pass my exams. When all this beliefs are changed using REBT techniques such as disputing irrational beliefs and devil's advocate, and teaching proper study habit, the students' poor study habits, academic performance and examination malpractice behavior will be changed.

### **Methodology**

The research design employed in this study is the pretest/posttest control group experimental design. Two groups were used for this study, one experimental group and one control group. The experimental group was pretested, treated and then post tested. The control group was pretested, post tested and given a placebo treatment consisting of a summary of the treatment after the post test.

The population for this study includes 14,055 secondary school students in 24 public secondary schools in Calabar Municipal Area of Cross River State. This population statistics was obtained from Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS) Department of the Ministry of Education of Cross River State and it represents the Statistics as at the year ending 2012. Statistics for the year 2013 are not yet available.

The sample size for the study includes 80 Secondary school students chosen from 2 secondary schools in Calabar Municipal area through a purposive

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sampling technique. The students were sampled from senior secondary 1(SS1) classes. This was in order to ensure that if for any reason the subjects were needed, they would still be available in the school and would not have graduated.

Calabar Municipality has 16 Secondary Schools while Calabar South has 8 Secondary Schools (Information obtained from the PRS department of the Ministry of Education Calabar). 2 Secondary school poles apart from each other which were purposively selected from Calabar Municipality, area selected in order to ensure that the students from the experimental and control groups, do not interact. 100 participants were randomly selected from the two schools selected for the study, giving a total of 200 students. The pretest was then administered to the 200 students selected

After the pretest was scored, a purposive sampling of 80 students with the highest pretest scores was done, 40 students were selected from each school. Higher pretest score is an indication of a poorer study habit.

The treatment sessions for the experimental group held at Government Secondary School, Akim Qua Town, while the control group received a placebo treatment at Government Secondary School State Housing Estate Calabar. The experimental group received a post test at the end of the treatment which lasted for 6 weeks. While the control group received treatment after writing the posttest.

The Students Study Habit Questionnaire (SSHQ) was administered as a pretest and a posttest. The treatment applied on the research subjects was designed by the researcher based on REBT. It consists of 12 sessions. Each session lasted for one (1) hour. The entire treatment lasted for a period of 6 weeks, one session per day. Poor Study Habit treatment spanned through 4 sessions in order to ensure mastery of the study Habit skills. The control group had three encounters with the researcher after the pretest for both groups had been completed. They were given summarized lessons on the consequences of examination malpractice to the students, the school, the educational system and the society as a whole.

Experts in Educational Psychology and Measurement and evaluation valued the logical validity index of the instrument at 73.6%. Reliability, using the Cronbach alpha test reliability coefficient was 0.77. A pretest was administered to 200 students selected from 2 secondary schools purposefully selected for the study. Two research assistants were recruited among the

teachers in the schools concerned. Two venues were selected for the pretest. After which the pretest was graded and 80 students selected for the study. The experimental group was treated to 6 weeks of a treatment package designed in line with REBT principles by the researcher. The control group received a placebo treatment after the post test.

At the end of the treatment there were 25 participants in the control group and 23 in the experimental group. These participants were post-tested to determine the effect of the treatment. The researcher decided to use data from 20 participants in the experimental group and twenty participants in the control group for analysis in order to ensure uniformity of the two groups. These 40 participants were randomly selected. Data generated from the study was analyzed using the Analysis of Covariance Statistics (ANCOVA).

### **Presentation of Results**

Results are presented according to research questions and hypothesis tested.

#### **Research Question 1**

What is the effect of REBT on poor study habits scores of students?

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of poor study habit scores*

Group	Pretest			Posttest		
	Total scores	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total Scores	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	368	18.4	2.73	292	14.6	2.28
Control	456	22.8	3.36	418	20.9	3.97

REBT has a positive effect on participants' poor study habits. Pretest scores of 368 for the experimental group, is higher than the posttest score of 292. Therefore, the participants' poor study habits have been unlearned. Looking at the pre and post-test scores for both experimental and control group, there is greater difference in the mean scores of the experimental group, 3.8 than the difference in the mean scores of the control group of 1.9. This difference in the mean scores of the experimental group as compared to the control group could be attributed to treatment with REBT. Hence REBT has a positive effect on poor study habits.

#### **Null Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference between the experimental and the control group on the effect of REBT on scores of poor study habits.

Table 14 represents the descriptive statistics for the effect of REBT on poor study habits. The table shows that the experimental group has a mean of 14.600 and a standard deviation of 2.348 and the control group has a mean

of 20.9 and a standard deviation of 2.149. Hence there is a mean difference of 6.3 between the experimental and the control group.

**Table 2**

*ANCOVA Result for the effect of REBT on poor study habits*

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	399.503	2	199.751	38.900	.000	.678
Intercept	326.842	1	326.842	63.679	.000	.632
Pretest	2.603	1	2.603	.507	.481	.014
Group	292.885	1	292.885	57.036	.000	.007
Error	189.997	37	5.135			
Total	13192.000	40				
Corrected Total	589.500	39				

a. R Squared = .678 ( Adjusted R Squared = .660) Sig.=, .05; df=2,38 P=.000

A one-way ANCOVA was carried out to test the significance in the mean difference between the experimental and the control group on the effect of REBT on poor study habits. Holm's sequential Bonferroni procedure was used to control for type 1 error across the pairwise comparisons. The ANCOVA was highly significant at  $F(2, 38) = 57.036$ ,  $P = .000$ ,  $P < .05$ . Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control on scores of poor study habits at posttest. The experimental group who had been treated with REBT had lower poor study habits scores at the posttest than the control group. Hence there is a significant effect of REBT on poor study habits of students.

### **Presentation of Result of Oral Interview**

A geography test was scheduled for the students after the treatment and the students were told to study for the test using the SQ3R study method. The result of the test revealed an overall improved performance. The students were interviewed after the test as follows:

**Table 3**

Results of Oral Interview of Participants in the Experimental Group

Questions	Answers
How was your experience reading with SQ3R	18 out of 20 students reported a pleasurable and productive experience in reading whilst implementing all the skills they had been taught. Responses like: "Even though I only read for a short time, I understood what I read" "I was able to ask myself questions and answer them" "I did not feel sleepy while reading"; were gotten. Two students however confided in the researcher on their inability to read. They were counseled on what to do to improve their reading skills.
What new behaviours have you acquired concerning reading?	All the students indicated that they now have study time tables and no longer waste time in deciding which subject to study. The following responses were also gotten: "I always have a jotter and a pen while reading" "I answer questions while reading" "I review my notes at the end of reading" etc.

**Discussion**

Research Question 1 and Hypothesis 1, revealed that REBT has a significant positive effect on poor study habits. Research Question four, hypothesis four revealed that REBT was effective in changing poor study habits of students. Through teaching the SQ3R study habit skills to students. This result is in line with the findings of Adeoye (2009), that REBT and Reality therapy were effective in reducing academic stress, improving study habits and producing better academic performance of sandwich undergraduate students in Oro – Campus, University of Ado Ekiti. The goal of applying REBT in this study was to change irrational beliefs and wrong values that underlie poor study habits and initiate proper study habits in students. The findings that REBT was effective in changing poor study habits support previous findings using REBT. Greenfield (2011) found REBT effective in initiating and maintaining desired behaviours, Kumar (2009) found REBT effective in changing conduct disorder and Flak (1998) found REBT effective in altering beliefs, values, attitudes and

behaviour. In The current study, REBT has been found to be effective in altering irrational beliefs and values and changing undesired behaviours (poor study habits) and initiating desired behaviours (proper study habits).

It was considered necessary to not only tackle irrational beliefs and wrong values that lead to poor study habits but to also teach the students proper study habits. In the treatment, SQ3R was taught to the subjects. The findings in this study confirms the finding by Yahaya (2004) that SQ3R was effective both in individual and group counselling, in changing poor study habits. This study also aligns positively with the findings by Omoegun in Gbenda (2008) that REBT and SQ3R were effective in changing the attitude of students towards examination malpractice by changing their poor study habits and teaching them to rely on their ability. The discovery that REBT and SQ3R is effective in changing poor study habits of students supports the discovery by Ogbodo (2010) that SQ3R is effective in reducing the frustration that emanates from poor study habits. It is also in line with the findings by Mabekoje (2011), Omoegun (2000) and Passaglia (2003) that SQ3R is effective in increasing student's achievement in reading comprehension. From the foregoing research evidence it is obvious that REBT and SQ3R is invaluable in changing poor study habits, improving academic performance and hence changing students' attitude towards examination malpractice.

#### **Conclusion**

Based on the research carried out and the analysis of the data generated from the research, the following conclusions were reached: there is a significant effect of REBT on Poor study habits.

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are being made based on the findings from this study:

1. REBT and SQ3R should be applied in in changing poor study habits of learners, increasing academic performance and changing students' attitude towards examination malpractice.
2. REBT should be applied in changing wrong values such as laziness, lack of integrity, external locus of control etc., responsible for poor study habits and maladjusted behaviours such as examination malpractice among students.
3. REBT should be applied in changing irrational beliefs and irrational thoughts that underlie problem behaviours among students.
4. Federal and state ministries of education should make available psychological treatments of this nature to secondary and university students at all levels to change the irrational believes of students that tend to support problem behaviours.

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