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Dance and Emulation: Exploring the Adoption of Role Models Among Nigerian Youths with David Jones's Anti-Drug Abuse Music Intervention

AUTHOR(S)

Ezekiel Onyebuchi Eze

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4955-3351

Eliza Govender

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0937-9438

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Abstract

The prevalence of drug abuse continues to be one of the foremost public health issues globally, with Nigerian youth among the hardest-hit victims of this social problem. An anti-drug-abuse entertainment education intervention using music as a medium can offer new hope for vulnerable Nigerian youths. However, understanding the portrayal of positive role models in music and their impact on youth behaviour is crucial for effective entertainment education. This article employs reflexive thematic analysis of data from a study involving Nigerian youths from seven universities to address the question, "To what extent have David Jones's music entertainment education characters influenced the adoption of role models among Nigerian youths exposed to the interventions?" Key findings reveal that Nigerian youths exposed to David Jones's music adopted role models from the music characters, encouraging the emulation of positive behaviours. Nevertheless, despite the educational value of the entertainment education messages, undesirable conduct among music characters can deter listeners. This study suggests that when designing entertainment education for youths, it is essential to consider music characters that exhibit positive drug-use behaviours. In conclusion, entertainment education on anti-drug abuse which targets youths should incorporate music as a medium in the Nigerian context.

Keywords

Adoption and behaviours, drug abuse, entertainment education, music, role models

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is confronted with enormous social problems. Among the foremost issues plaguing the nation is drug abuse, which is one of the prevalent social risk behaviours among its growing youthful population. It is regarded as a critical health issue in Nigeria, as it is on the verge of reaching alarming levels due to the nation's drug-use prevalence, which significantly exceeds the global average of 5.5% (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2024). Documentary evidence released by UNODC (2024) estimates that 14.4% of the nation's population are drug abusers. Recent empirical studies conducted across the nation's universities revealed a disturbing prevalence of drug abuse among youths in Nigerian universities. Studies have demonstrated that the drug-use prevalence rate among young students in higher institutions in Benin City was 46.6% (Adeyemo et al., 2016) compared to 69.2% among students in higher institutions in Abeokuta (Onofa et al., 2016). Another study indicated a 76.6% prevalence rate of drug abuse among young university students in Port Harcourt and a 57.1% prevalence among students of Rivers State University (Umukoro & Aina, 2020).

Numerous studies have documented the reasons for the high prevalence of drug abuse among Nigerian youth. A survey conducted among a sample of 1,200 undergraduate students at Osun State

University revealed that peer influence remains one of the major risk factors driving drug abuse (Yusuf, 2010). A survey aimed at assessing the critical factors responsible for drug abuse among undergraduate students at Delta State University found that peer influence, frustration, sex drive and curiosity were the main factors associated with drug abuse (Ojezele, 2019). A related study by Bolakale and Markus (2015), designed to assess the risk factors influencing drug abuse among undergraduates at Ahmadu Bello University, found that 52% of cannabis users at the university indicated that their desire to become bold was the motivating factor for drug use. An all-inclusive study was conducted in Kashire town to explore whether youths were aware of the dangers of substance abuse. The study's outcome found that the majority of youths in the locality were unaware of the harms associated with drug use and, as a result, engaged in drug abuse. The findings of a recent study, whose main objective was to ascertain the primary cause of drug abuse among undergraduates at the University of Ilorin, indicated that the desire to cope with academic challenges was a motivating factor.

These findings demonstrate that previous studies largely concentrated on drug-use risk factors such as family background, academic stress and peer pressure (Ojezele, 2019). Although understanding these risk factors is considered essential, they often overlook the growing influence of entertainment education (EE) popular music interventions, especially the imitation of EE music characters as positive role models. Recent trends suggest that music has a significant impact on the minds of Nigerian youths (Ayobolu et al., 2024), with many recognising musicians as potential idols. This shift warrants a focused examination of how the idolisation of music characters may lead to the imitation of these figures as role models, potentially resulting in the prevention of drug abuse.

In Nigeria, several communication approaches have been explored to reduce the impact of these risk factors and the increasing prevalence of drug abuse among youths. For example, the in-school awareness approach (Maduka, 2016), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's (NDLEA) drug reduction programme through the instrument of public relations (Ude-Akpeh, 2017) and the University–parents collaborative communication strategy (Olaore & Aham–Chiabotu, 2012) were all designed and implemented to address these risk factors and mitigate the severe consequences of drug abuse. Yet, these strategies have failed to yield the desired results because the interventions were not supported by robust communication methods and they lacked scientific rigour (Nnam et al., 2021) to warrant social and behavioural change.

These facts emphasise the need for a more scientific and education-focused approach to address the situation (Ajayi & Somefun, 2020; Olarewaju et al., 2022). The adoption of EE could serve as one of the options. Although Govender (2013) has recognised the growing application of EE in Africa, debate-oriented literature in EE has still dominated in the past five years. Scholarship on EE has been shaped by numerous interconnected debates pertaining to EE effectiveness, mechanisms, scope and methodological rigour. The core discussion interrogates the level and durability of EE's influence, as recent reviews and meta-analysis highlight modicum to modest effects on attitudes, knowledge and behavioural intentions, while also demonstrating meaningful heterogeneity across context and outcomes (Dore et al., 2025). Scholars have also questioned the issue of the theoretical basis of EE, debating whether foundational frameworks such as narrative persuasion models and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) could adequately account for contemporary, fragmented and digital media environments (Murphy et al., 2025). Another key tension is the debate over narrative versus non-narrative mechanisms, with meta-analytic work showing that narrative EE often indicates persuasive influence. Parallel comparisons between the two show that non-narrative contents produce mixed results, highlighting that the benefit of narrative may lie more in audience engagement than in persuasion in the real sense (Rahmani et al., 2025). On the issue of scope of change EE can realistically stimulate, it has been proven that EE interventions are effectual in facilitating targeted behavioural and changes in viewpoints, but EEs' impact on central principles and broader social norms may be limited (Evans et al., 2025; Tufte, 2004). Finally, methodological debates have increased, dwelling on study design, measurement of outcomes and the rationale for mixed-methods and longitudinal techniques to better understand the context-specific effects on long term impact (Dore et al., 2025; Yadima, 2025). The implications of these debates reflect that EE is a maturing field that is

undoubtedly reflexive about the limitations and promises of EE as a strategy in the health domain.

In both empirical rigour and conceptual scope, EE scholarship has advanced significantly in recent times. Available evidence from recent meta-analysis demonstrates that EE interventions yield statistically significant effects on knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviours, most especially in health communication domains, with self-efficacy and narrative engagement evolving as robust outcomes (Dore et al., 2025). In the same manner, the understanding of EE's persuasive mechanisms has been refined by theoretical development through models such as the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model and the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model, which highlight emotional involvement, character identification and narrative transportation as the main mediators of influence (Dore et al., 2025; Moyer -Guse, 2008). In low- and middle-income countries, applications of EE go beyond health to address issues relating to community development, social equity and gender norms, reflecting a more comprehensive change agenda (Evans et al., 2023). Moreover, the EE field has gone beyond traditional broadcast formats, by integrating social media, digital and transmedia storytelling strategies that harness cross-platform engagement and audience participation (Giovagnoli, 2011). These emerging developments signal EE's maturation as a digitally adaptive communication approach, and one that is an evidence-based and a theory-driven phenomenon.

In spite of these developments, limited research is available on how Nigerian music genres can be tailored as effective interventions for drug-abuse messaging among Nigerian youth. Music intervention has not received much attention within the Nigerian context. The only evidence-based research suggesting the use of music as an EE strategy in Nigeria dates back to studies by Brown and Singhal (1993) and Kincaid et al. (1992), which involved the 1989 Johns Hopkins University Population Communication Services (JHUPCS)-commissioned music videos, "Choices" and "Wait for Me". Most of the data on EE programmes, as found in the literature, relate to family planning issues rather than drug abuse and focus solely on the adult population. David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention (2017–2022) is part of EE's anti-drug abuse health initiative. This popular music intervention conveys prosocial messages through the integration of negative, positive and transitional music characters, aiming to promote positive drug-use behaviours among Nigerian youths exposed to it. Drawing on SCT, EE posits that people learn not only through direct experience but also through observing modelled behaviours and their consequences within mediated narratives (Bandura, 1986).

This study explicitly argues that repeated exposure to positive EE music characters strongly promotes the emulation of positive role models, leading to meaningful changes in attitudes and behaviours that traditional interventions often fail to produce. Understanding how role models among the music characters are adopted by Nigerian youths can help gain insights on positive drug-use behaviours and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EE interventions have developed as a communication strategy for social and behavioural change (Frank & Falzone, 2021; Ryerson & Teffera, 2021). They serve as advocates, agenda setters and social mobilisers, influencing policy and public initiatives in a socially desirable direction (Atkin & Arkin, 1990). Moreover, they are regarded as the greatest communication revolution of our era (McKee, 2000). They have consistently been part of strategies to distribute information and persuade individuals to change their behaviour (Chirinos-Espin, 2021). This indicates that, when implemented systematically, EE can effectively promote long-term changes in social norms (Ryerson & Teffera, 2021). It offers a platform for discussing various issues, beliefs and practices, thereby enhancing the flow of transformative information (Donohue et al., 1975).

EE interventions have been used for decades to influence health behaviours. EE employs "drama, storytelling and other communication formats that engage emotions to inform audiences and change attitudes, behaviours and social norms" (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2008). EE is relevant to health initiatives because it has motivated individuals to make choices that support healthier lifestyles. For example, EE interventions for safe sex (Collins et al., 2003), cancer screening (Love & Tanjasiri, 2012) and organ donation (Morgan et al., 2009) have demonstrated the effectiveness of EE.

Other health-related EE efforts, such as encouraging bed net use and COVID-19 vaccination, have helped individuals adopt these practices (Appiah et al., 2021; Panter-Brick et al., 2006). The common view is that EE remains a strong way to influence attitudes and health behaviours (Slater & Rouner, 2006). However, EE approaches often face certain limitations. Some deeply rooted cultural beliefs may block acceptance of new behaviours promoted through EE (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2016). Moreover, EE rarely changes core values or broad worldviews and, in addition, its effects are often not substantial (Sabido, 2021).

EE has previously used mass media such as radio and television to reach a broader audience and has recently employed popular music because young people are a valuable target for intervention goals (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2008). Music, as a form of EE media, could be an important educational tool to address drug abuse in Nigeria. Popular music, defined as "music made in a commercial setting for entertainment and enjoyment" (Stone, 2017:9), remains one of the most preferred media formats among health advocates. Research has shown that most music interventions focus on increasing awareness of harmful behaviours (Donovan, 1995). For example, music interventions have helped promote preventive behaviours, such as reducing the spread of Ebola by encouraging hand washing (Kuriansky, 2016), ensuring the proper use of bed nets to combat malaria (Panter-Brick et al., 2006) and advocating social distancing to prevent COVID-19 (Thampi et al., 2020). Hip-hop music interventions have been used as an EE media format to raise awareness about socially risky behaviours, such as limiting physical contact during Ebola burials (Stone, 2017) and maintaining social distance during the COVID-19 outbreak (Deng et al., 2020). Music has also served as an EE tool to demonstrate that HIV can be transmitted through unprotected sexual relationships (Turner-Musa, 2008). Recently, music interventions have been used to communicate that COVID-19 is an airborne-transmitted disease (Thompson et al., 2021). Furthermore, music has been employed to encourage COVID-19 vaccination uptake (Appiah et al., 2021) and to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS risk factors (Turner-Musa, 2008).

While these studies have examined the effectiveness of music as an EE media format in health-related research by providing various successful interventions, these efforts have mainly focused on health solutions rather than exploring the potential influence of music characters on role model adoption. For instance, research by Rachmawati (2010) highlighted the role of music in character development but paid limited attention to how positive role models can influence youths' adoption of music characters as role models. This gap highlights the need to investigate the role of EE music characters in shaping youths' behaviours, particularly in contexts where anti-drug-abuse EE music interventions have yielded limited long-term results.

It has been suggested that EE impacts the audience through role models to deliver evidence, generate attitudes for change or intensify knowledge (Cardey et al., 2013; Singhal & Rogers, 2003). La Ferrara (2016) believes that the efficacy of entertainment and EE media programmes in attaining developmental goals resides in three crucial factors. First, the media must hold and profitably relay information so that users can update their existing knowledge and assumptions. Second, the media should influence the attractiveness of specific actions over others, thereby motivating users to choose those actions over others. This can be accomplished through effective modelling that reflects the narrative of a programme (Grandy et al., 2019). Third, to observe an influence, an individual may need to consume consistent media exposure for meaningful impact (Grandy et al., 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SCT (Social Cognitive Theory) developed by Albert Bandura in 1986 served as the theoretical lens that scaffolds this study. SCT is a model of triadic reciprocal causality that states that people operate as cognitive performers but are products of their environments (Luszczynska et al., 2012). SCT posits that "individual behaviour is part of an inseparable triadic structure in which behaviour, personal factors and environmental factors constantly influence each other, reciprocally determining each other" (Bandura, 1995: 189; see also Alshobrany, 2019; Nabavi, 2012; Shaffer, 2005).

The key constructs of social cognitive theory

Numerous significant underlying constructs of SCT are vital outside the knowledge of triadic reciprocal determinism (Wombacher, 2017). Constructs such as outcome expectations, self-efficacy and motivation are paramount. In Bandura's (1973) view, learning from one another are accounted for by three general principles. SCT proposes that people learn from each other over a life span (Nabavi, 2012) via modelling and observational learning, as formulated below.

Observational learning/Modelling

Observational learning means people learning by simply imitating observed behaviours. Bandura (1973) pinpointed three basic models of observational learning to include:

- A live model involving an actual person acting out behaviour;
- A verbal instrument model that requires explanations and descriptions of behaviour;
- A symbolic model that showcases the behaviours of real or imagined characters in films, online media, books and television programmes.

Imitation

SCT states that imitation entails committing behaviour that is modelled on and from observing the same behaviour in others (Akers, 2011). It is the process of replicating the peculiarity of other individuals with or without a justifiable intention (Nwachi, 2007). As Gross (2020:489) notes, imitation is "the reproduction of learning through observation".

Modelling

Modelling, the centre of SCT, entails how persons duplicate behaviours observed in another person or group. SCT states that modelling is indispensable in the early phases of adopting a behaviour, but less so in conserving or terminating behavioural patterns once they have been acquired (Akers, 2011).

The principal basis of using Bandura's concepts to advance this study's conceptual framework stems from the view that SCT has been widely used in most communication studies (Lim et al., 2020) to promote the significance of communication in psychological research (Kutner, 1997) and to stimulate EE research (Grandy et al. (2019) and, therefore, the comprehension of harmful behaviours (Obirikorang et al., 2022). SCT formulated by Bandura explains how individuals learn behaviours by observing others and through reinforcement (Bandura, 1986). Since this study examines whether Nigerian youths adopt positive drug-use behaviours from EE music characters, the theory's concepts of observational learning and modelling are highly relevant.

SCT is acknowledged as an observational learning approach that integrates elements from both cognitive and behaviourist orientations (Merriam et al., 2007). It provides an intersection between behaviourist and cognitive theories involving attention, memory and motivation (Muro & Jeffery, 2008). For this reason, SCT is perceived as an essential part of advancing the necessary behaviour change (Muro & Jeffery, 2008). Bandura's SCT provides invaluable groundwork for comprehending how individuals learn through observation and modelling of behaviours (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). SCT provides an essential theoretical account for explaining how people gain and sustain specific behavioural patterns, not excluding addictive behaviour (Eslami et al., 2017). It is regarded as a pivotal element to be incorporated into the design and implementation of EE music anti-drug-abuse intervention. Therefore, it is significant to explore David Jones's anti-drug-abuse music interventions based on the SCT conceptual framework, appreciating that SCT in health communication research has proven to be one of most widely used and insightful theories (Eslami et al., 2017).

Individuals acquire behaviour by witnessing others, which is much easier than learning from their behaviours (Bandura, 1986). SCT explicates modelling as displaying behaviour that has been demonstrated and perceiving the same behaviour in others (Akers, 2011). It is a replication of the mannerisms of others or the reproduction of learning through observation with or without a defensible motive (Gross, 2020:489; Nwachi, 2007).

There is increasing evidence of a link between positive role models and positive outcomes among youth. Hurd et al. (2010) believe that youth with role models may be more likely to imitate the actions of these recognised figures than their peers in the immediate environment. Werner (1995) highlights that positive role models act as protective influences that foster adaptability in high-risk youth. This perspective is understandable since the primary purpose of a role model is to exemplify the attitudes, values and behaviours that youth may adopt. The scholars' views support Pleiss and Feldhusen's (1995) assertion that a role model is an individual deemed worthy of imitation. Conversely, role models can sometimes present negative examples, suggesting they may display characteristics seen by individuals as standards for how not to behave in specific situations. Gibson (2004) posits that individuals encounter role models whom they regard as similar in certain respects, aiming to learn how to avoid particular traits and behaviours. In addition, other studies document the practical negative consequences of role modelling on behaviour (Anderson, 1990; Ibarra, 1999; Liff & Ward, 2001). Anderson (1990) suggests that non-parental adults can negatively influence youth by modelling destructive and antisocial behaviours.

When adults display unlawful and harmful actions, there is a tendency for teenagers to be adversely impacted by these perceived models. As Shoemaker (1996) observed, young individuals living in neighbourhoods that are characterised by high levels of illegal activity tend to have numerous examples of criminal behaviour around them. For example, a study using interviews to assess the adoption of role models among imprisoned adolescents found that their willingness to engage in criminal activities was significantly influenced by figures in their violent environments (Heide, 1997). Another study by Hurd et al. (2010:324), involving "331 African American seventh and eighth graders living in low-income settlements in an urban Midwestern city, utilised a model developed and tested to assess the relationships between role model prosocial behaviour, role model antisocial behaviour, adolescents' attitudes toward violence, and adolescents' violent behaviour", found that role model prosocial behaviour is indirectly associated with reduced aggressive behaviour. In contrast, role model antisocial behaviour is directly linked to higher rates of violent conduct among participants. It is understandable that EE, as a strategy to showcase a role model, can produce both positive and negative outcomes.

However, these findings primarily concern real-life, crime-related role model behaviours and do not consider the imitation of characters influenced by music. The mechanisms through which music shapes individual behaviours appear to be complex. For example, Rachmawati (2010) argues that for music to have a positive impact on an individual, the person must genuinely enjoy good music; disregarding it diminishes the anticipated positive effect. Moreover, Mahmud (2003) explains that negative behaviours can quickly arise from exposure to music. His statement suggests that the adverse impact of music on behaviour is often more readily acknowledged than its positive effects (Rachmawati, 2010). These insights indicate that considerable effort is required to engage audiences musically and stimulate role model adoption. This presents a research gap that the current study sought to address by exploring whether positive or negative anti-drug-abuse EE music interventions over an extended campaign period (2017–2022) facilitated role model adoption. SCT is considered a critical area of study in entertainment studies (Madison & Porter, 2015). As a result, it is a viable theoretical framework to motivate and elucidate anti-drug-abuse popular music interventions. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how well-tailored and long-term anti-drug-abuse EE music interventions affect the actual adoption of music characters as role models among Nigerian youths.

If role models are described as individuals whose styles, characteristics and behaviours are to be emulated by others (Shapiro et al., 1978), to what extent have David Jones's EE music characters influenced the adoption of role models among Nigerian youths exposed to the music intervention? The section below outlines the research design and the methodology mobilised in the study to address this question.

RESEARCH DESIGN/METHODOLOGY

The case study design informed the research design of this study. Case study according to Creswell (2013: 97) "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system

(i.e. a setting, a context)". Case study is "an intensive longitudinal study of a phenomenon at one or more research sites to derive detailed, contextualised inferences and understand the dynamic process underlying a phenomenon of interest" (Pilz, 2023:76). Thus, it requires the study of a case in a real-life context (Yin, 2009). Case study is closely associated with a qualitative approach and, as a result, is viewed as a form of qualitative research that serves both as the focus of investigation and the outcome of the research process (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). When an infrequent or exclusive case is being studied or in a situation where a study is set to thoroughly understand a specific topic or condition, an intrinsic case study becomes ideal (Coombs, 2022). Because David EE music intervention is both unique and uncommon, this study adopts an intrinsic case study design. The central focus of the inquiry is the phenomenon represented by David Jones's anti-drug-abuse EE music intervention.

David Jones and the EE characters in his music constitute the focus of this study because the intervention was designed to encourage awareness, enhance knowledge, foster positive attitudes and eventually motivate youths to adopt responsible drug-use behaviours in their own lives. David Jones is an award-winning actor, music producer and drug activist who harnesses the power of music to promote positive behavioural change. He is a well-known figure among Nigerian populace, particularly youths and students, largely due to David Jones's extensive campus tours sponsored by the MTN Anti-Substance Abuse Programme (ASAP) Foundation, which aims to educate students on the dangers of substance abuse. David Jones's widespread appeal is further accentuated by his strong presence on social media, where he commands followings of 592,000 on Facebook, 386,000 on Instagram and 4,268 on Twitter. David Jones's EE anti-drug-abuse music intervention content includes *Onye Ara, Hello Doctor, Amen, Gbana Na Bastard, Even Though, Sim Mba,* and *Higher*. Others are *Stay Alive, We Can Stop It, Loud It,* and *Drug Users No Be Criminals.* These music albums were all produced between April 2017 and December 2022. David Jones's musical characters are rooted in EE framework. His music characters are quite unique because they try to promote positive behaviour against drug abuse by mimicking prosocial and pseudo-drug addicts as music characters to communicate messages.

The sites selected in this study were the Rivers State University (RSU), Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Kingsley Ozomba Mbadiwe University (KOMU), Chukwuemaka Odumegwu Ojiukwu University (COOU), Godfery Okoye University (GOU), Coal City University (CCU) and Veritas University (VU). The first four sites are state government-owned universities, while the last three are private universities. All seven universities are located in urban areas and are spread across five states within Nigeria's South-eastern, South-south and Middle Belt geopolitical zones. RSU is located at the heart of Rivers State capital, Port Harcourt, in the South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. ESUT, GOU and CCU are all located in Enugu, the capital of Enugu State in the South-eastern geopolitical zone. KOMU is located in Ideato in Imo State, in the same South-eastern geopolitical zone. COOU is in Igbariam in Anambra State in the South-eastern geopolitical zone. VU is located in Bwari, in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, in the Middle Belt geopolitical zone.

At the time of data collection, Nigeria had a total number of 282 universities, of which 69 were owned and founded by the Nigerian government, 66 universities were owned and managed by various state governments, and 148 universities were privately owned at 4 September 2024 (Sasu, 2024). The inclusion of all Nigerian-based universities as the study sites was impossible due to the fact that qualitative research requires a limited population (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

During the period of data collection, all 69 federal government-owned universities were on strike for eight months, thereby rendering the inclusion of the universities in the study practically impossible. Security challenges rendered universities located in the North-western geopolitical zone, North-eastern and South-western geopolitical zone inaccessible to the researchers at the time of data collection. Incidences of banditry, kidnapping and other criminal activities were rampant at the time in these locations. Consequently, the universities sampled for this study were included based on accessibility and feasibility, given the universities were reachable within the study's time frame and reachable logistically, as well as within budgeted resources. Attempts to accessing the universities domiciled in the Northern geopolitical zones posed security risks that could undermine the success of the research.

The exclusion of federal universities and universities in the crisis-prone regions at collection data phase does not in any way affect this study's credibility because music in Nigeria is not culture sensitive. In addition, Nigerian universities are culturally inclusive and uphold non-discriminatory practices. The selecting of universities located in urban areas over rural ones was informed by concerns associated with issues of the digital divide. According to Ogbo, Brown and Sicker (2017), the issue of Internet connection between rural and urban populations in Nigeria favours the urban areas when compared to the rural communities, who suffer from marginalisation. Infrastructural imbalance and scarcity between rural and urban areas (Okocha & Edafewotu, 2022) are well pronounced in Nigeria. The level of Internet penetration in Nigeria, which stood at 55.4% of the total population at the start of 2023 (NCC, 2023), indicates that the urban areas where the study sites were located have greater access to David Jones's EE music intervention content via streaming than youths of rural universities. It is noteworthy that deliberate efforts were made to ensure the sites of interest fit the nature of the research questions, while reducing extraneous variance or noise (Pilz, 2023) attributable to Nigerian youths' size and location effects. The foregoing reasons justified the researchers' decision to employ a purposive sampling approach in selecting the sites included in this research study.

This study involved volunteer participants aged 18 to 25 years, drawn from seven universities. The participants were enlisted through advertisements placed on departmental digital platforms and notice boards across the selected universities. Individuals who expressed willingness to participate in the study were asked to signal their interest by sending a text message to a dedicated mobile phone number, after which intending participants were contacted, invited to participate and provided with an information sheet detailing the study. The participation information sheet outlined the study's objectives, the risks and benefits, the nature of participants' involvement, their right to withdraw from the study at any time and measures to ensure participant confidentiality. Each focus group across institutions numbered between six and eight selected prospective participants. The criteria for inclusion were that a participant must be a Nigerian student; he or she must be aged 18 to 25 years and must be a registered student of one of the seven universities shortlisted. Finally, eligible participants were required to have listened to or viewed any of David Jones's drug-abuse-themed music tracks at least three times between April 2017 and December 2022.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted between 18 October 2023 and 4 November 2023 to explore the lived experiences of Nigerian youths exposed to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention. The short, defined period allowed the researchers to capture participants' knowledge of, contemporary attitudes towards and behaviour from David Jones's EE music intervention, reflecting a concurrent viewpoint rather than long-term or evolving opinions.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, was employed in this study as it is widely used in qualitative studies. This approach facilitates the selection of information-rich participants and helps save both time and money (Patton, 1990). Accordingly, only youths exposed to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music were recruited. Ethical approvals were granted by the research ethics committees of the seven universities: Rivers State University, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Godfrey Okoye University, Coal City University, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University and Veritas University. The ethical approvals were sought because drug-abuse studies often involve sensitive issues that could predispose study participants to harm, stigma, legal risks and emotional distress. Securing of ethical approvals ensures that measures are in place to protect participants' well-being, rights and confidentiality. The Nigerian youths who participated provided written informed consent. They were informed that they had the liberty to withdraw from the study at any moment they wished. All participants consented to the recording of the FGDs.

Seven FGDs were conducted to generate data. One of criteria for participants' eligibility was that they must be youths aged between 18 and 25 years. The justification for the age range was to reduce the power differential that may have arisen due to age gaps among participants. Only Nigerian citizens registered at the aforementioned universities as students were allowed to participate. The approach helped reduce the influence of foreign culture. The seven FGDs were conducted with Nigerian youths (n1=6, n2=7, n3=4,

n4=7, n5=5, n6=7, n7=5) and aimed at in-depth conversations, collecting various viewpoints from Nigerian youths to better understand their adoption of role models relevant to a prosocial drug-abuse message in popular music. The participants displayed maturity and responded respectfully to every discussion initiated by the researchers. The views of all the participants were used for the analysis, except for one participant who had vocal issues at the time of data collection and had to withdraw before the end of the FGD in CCU. Her contributions were not meaningful to the researchers and were not included as part of this study's analysis. Cumulatively, the entire FGDs lasted 8 hours 74 minutes, with varying duration across participating institutions (RSU =1:06, ESUT=0.55, CCU=1;16, COOU=1:16, GOU=1:00, KOMU=1:09, and VU=0.59). Each of these FGDs were held within the campus of the respective institutions mentioned under conductive research environments provided by the management of each of the institutions. The researchers' guarantee of confidentiality and their respect of the study participants might have influenced the participants' willingness to respond freely during the FGDs.

The common inclination to mimic popular music characters, along with the integration of values, attitudes and behaviours they represent, was categorised, and the repetition of similar viewpoints was identified as the core theme of discussion. Through a repeated process, the emergent themes were consistently fragmented into precise codes, which facilitated the identification of dominant themes. These processes are clearly explained below.

This study used Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). According to Braun and Clarke (2022), RTA, as a qualitative descriptive approach, is the method employed when there is a need to identify, analyse and communicate patterns recognised as themes within the dataset. RTA is "a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2023:1). This type of analysis investigates and identifies common patterns that are present throughout the entire FGD (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nota, 2019). RTA goes beyond merely locating patterns within the data because reflexive thematic analysis measures the connections between the recognised themes (Nota, 2019). It is ideal for understanding deep and complex cases such as the adoption of role models among young music audiences. The process involved transcribing focus group discussion recordings and subsequently undergoing the six stages of RTA. First, the authors engaged in reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify potential themes. This process led to the generation of initial codes and the further refinement of these codes. The research question, "To what extent have David Jones's EE music characters influenced the adoption of role models among Nigerian youths exposed to the interventions?", informed the analysis. Further examination conducted by the authors resulted in the identification of comments that were congruent with the overarching themes. Next, the authors reviewed the themes before refining, defining and naming them. Once consensus was reached regarding the final themes between the two authors, the report write-up commenced.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The analysis produced three themes.

Perception of the anti-drug-abuse popular music artist as a standard bearer worthy of mirroring

Most of the participants reported that their exposure to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention was useful and instigated role model inspiration. Some illustrative examples appear below.

One participant remarked:

> David Jones is a role model to look up to, someone to try to be like, because his music impacts our lives. I try to get people to listen to him because, in the same way, he has helped me; he can help others fight their urge to drug addiction (P37, male, FGD#7 participant. VU, November 26, 2023).

The participants highlighted the distinctive nature of the anti-drug-abuse popular music artists and their strong motivation to emulate David Jones, who serves as both the musician and a music character in his anti-drug-abuse popular music albums. They explicitly connected this motivation to their perceived inherent benefits of popular music for individuals, as imitating him would significantly aid in moral contributions towards the reduction of drug abuse, as depicted in this participant's viewpoints:

> I feel proud to see a young person doing something like this, and it also motivates me to contribute in my small way. You know, I speak to people about all these issues and share my thoughts on the music because it helps (P11, female, FGD#2 participant, ESUT, October 22, 2023).

The suggestions made by the participant below indicate that David Jones can serve as a model only to those who are wise, but may amount to nothing to those who are morally bankrupt. The statement made by the participant below depicts such:

> The lifestyle right now is really alarming, and David Jones, right now, just as Chukwuma said, he's like the light in the darkness, which alone means that he has a lot on his plate, in the sense that he's very relevant, not to everybody, but for the people who are ready to learn good morals (P40, male, FGD#7 participant. VU, November 26, 2023).

Some participants became a bit carried away by his musical skills as they regarded David Jones as their role model due to his artistic prowess. This particular participant could not hide such feelings when she expressed the following:

> I have seen him through his videos, and I have seen what he looks like and how he acts sometimes; I even want to be like him. I will bring powder to keep on the table and keep my phone to act like him, as he usually acts when he is singing about drugs (P21, female, FGD#4 participant. COOU, October 26 2023).

The participant below shared a similar experience as portrayed in the following remark:

> He is a writer, a singer and also a creator, a content creator. It's not easy for someone to do these things by himself, that's what I desire for myself, that's why he is my role model and that is the connection between me and him. So he is like a mentor (P18, male, FGD#4 participant. COOU, October 26 2023).

The relationship between positive role models and behavioural outcomes among youths has attracted significant research attention. Exploring the adoption of role models among youths exposed to an anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention is necessary as it provides insights into strategies to address drug-abuse prevalence in Nigeria. However, studies on the adoption of role models among youths exposed to EE anti-drug-abuse popular music characters are rare. Hurd et al. (2010) highlight that youths with role models to emulate are more likely to adopt the actions of distinguished role models than those in their immediate surroundings. Similarly, Werner (1995) opines that positive role models serve as protective influences that can facilitate the adaptability of high-risk youth. It is therefore important to consider whether exposure to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention led to the adoption of role models among Nigerian youths from a qualitative perspective. The main goal of positive role models is the adoption of attitudes, values and behaviours that youths may integrate into their own (Hurd et al., 2010) regarding drug use.

Our findings indicate that among the Nigerian youthful participants, the impact of mimicking role models was overwhelmingly positive. The findings indicate that David Jones, the anti-drug-abuse music

artist is perceived by the Nigerian youths not strictly as a messenger, but as a culturally established moral exemplar. This status is founded in assessments of authenticity, uprightness and cultural relevance, though the form and extent of emulation differ across his youthful music fans and often tend to be symbolic rather than enacted in practice.

Specifically, the participants in our study reported that David Jones, as a music character in his anti-drug-abuse EE popular music intervention, inspired them to emulate him. This suggests that the participants viewed him as a "moral role model", "standard bearer" or "significant other" who exemplifies indispensable virtues and values (Vos, 2017). As Henderson (2022) rightly points out, an individual's activities are essential before they become emulative for those experiencing the behavioural activities. This perspective agrees that the behavioural suggestions espoused by the characters in David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention must be vital to motivate the participants to practise virtuous drug-use behaviour. Most of the participants were willing to put into practice the moral ideals represented in popular music. These experiences confirm previous studies that uncovered that the presence of role models protected against diverse health risk behaviour, including engagement in sexual acts, alcohol and drug abuse (Aspy et al., 2004; Oman et al., 2004).

A comparison across participants' institutional backgrounds revealed notable differences in how David Jones was perceived as an inspirational figure. Participants from VU and ESUT primarily emphasised David Jones's moral orientation, describing him as a role model whose anti-drug stance, discipline and socially responsible lifestyle inspired them to emulate similar values and behaviours. Conversely, participants from COOU were more likely to express admiration for David Jones's creative talent and performance abilities, indicating a desire to emulate David Jones's musical success, popularity and artistic excellence rather than his moral messaging that spur some participants into moral actions. This pattern suggests that institutional backgrounds may shape whether audiences prioritise moral exemplarity or artistic achievement when interpreting EE figures.

This theme appears to connect with the concept of role model adoption and the influence of observational learning. According to Bandura (1968), role modelling fosters the acquisition of knowledge primarily through informative functions, with observers obtaining a symbolic characterisation of modelled activities rather than explicit stimulus–response associations. From the perspective of SCT, addressing the prevalence of drug abuse involves rejecting antisocial behaviour and adopting prosocial characteristics, as drug abuse is a social issue that diffuses through peer pressure (Valente et al., 2025). David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention relates to the initiation and public exposure to popular music that conveys prosocial drug-use messages and features characters who embody these messages. Mimicking the symbolic models who exhibit prosocial behaviours by notional characters in an anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention aligns with the three basic models of observational learning of SCT (Bandura, 1973).

The theme reflects key constructs of SCT, particularly observational learning (modelling), identification and vicarious reinforcement. Nigerian youths' exposure to David Jones's EE anti-drug-abuse music intervention positioned the artist, David Jones, as an apparent and exemplary guiding figure, whose attitudes and behaviours were found worthy of emulation. The youths' portrayals of David Jones as a "standard bearer" indicate that repeated exposure to the artist's EE music intervention did not merely transmit anti-drug messages but also motivated youths to internalise David Jones's lifestyle and moral stance as coveted behavioural templates. This extends Albert Bandura's SCT proposition that people learn behaviours by noticing genuine models, especially when such symbolic figures are socially attractive or esteemed. The finding further illuminates how EE content can reinforce anti-drug advocacy by transforming media personalities into inspirational figures who shape youths' behavioural expectations and reinforce drug-resistant norms.

Mentorship offers

In the participants' accounts, most highlighted how their exposure to the anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention provided them with an opportunity for mentorship. Their perspectives were broadened

following the guidance presented in the anti-drug-abuse EE music intervention. One participant who felt mentored on how to relate to drug addicts stated:

> He was trying to convey that we, as a society, who do not use drugs, should assist those struggling with addiction. For instance, if you know someone who is using drugs, you ought to help them. It is important not to alienate them; even if you are aware of a rehab centre or any place that could assist them, show them that they are not failures and that they can still change (P21, female, FGD#4 participant, COOU, October 26 2023).

The majority of the participants had cultivated a kind of parasocial relationship with David Jones such that they were looking at him as someone they could turn to in moments of difficulty. The views of this participant captures it all, when she declared:

> My relationship, personally, is a mentor–mentee relationship. Because of his words, the lyrics he sings, he actually gets to me and discourages me more every day from trying drugs. The music is more like a guide and a reminder every day to stay away from drugs (P28, female, FGD#5 participant. GOU, Octomber 27, 2023).

The participant below emphasised the insights gained from his exposure to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse EE music intervention when he stated:

> I have learnt how not to discriminate against those who are doing drugs. That they can actually be helped and rehabilitated. I have also learnt the consequences of using drugs myself (P15, Male, FGD#4 participant. CCU, Octomber 25, 2023).

Another male participant shared similar views when he remarked: "But him, he is trying to bring us to a knowledge where we will be able to know the hazards, the precaution to taking hard drugs" (P15, Male, FGD#7 participant. CCU, November 4, 2023).

The emergence of mentorship offers an outstanding finding among the participants, and it reflects the planned projection of the music character David Jones as a guide who extends moral, social and emotional direction through lyrical narratives. Rather than presenting mentorship as a fixed or uniform stance, the character's guidance unfolds in layered ways, at times explicit through advisory language and cautionary themes, and at other times implicit, embedded in storytelling, metaphor and lived experience. The depth of this mentorship varied across contexts, responding to issues such as youth vulnerability, identity negotiation, peer influence, structural inequality and gender. In certain instances, the mentorship offer was perceived as empowering and relatable, grounded in authenticity and shared struggle; in others, it appeared conditional, shaped by genre conventions and audience expectations. These variations reveal mentorship not as a singular message but as a dynamic, context-sensitive offer, one that invites youths to engage, interpret and internalise guidance at their own pace. Such complexity enhances the quality of the music character, positioning mentorship as an open, negotiated relationship rather than a directive authority.

A comparative review of participants' responses indicates a notable gendered pattern in perceptions of mentorship linked to exposure to David Jones anti-drug-abuse EE music intervention. Specifically, only female participants described experiences that reflected direct or perceived mentorship from David Jones. These participants frequently framed David Jones as a source of personal guidance, emotional encouragement and behavioural direction, often describing David Jones's music as offering advice on resisting drug use and navigating peer pressure. In contrast, male participants acknowledged the educational and preventive value of the music but did not explicitly interpret David Jones as a mentorship figure. This pattern may suggest that female participants were more inclined to form parasocial mentoring connections with David Jones's messages, although this interpretation should be viewed cautiously given

the limited sample size. Overall, the finding highlights how audience gender may shape the ways EE messages are interpreted and internalised.

To the female participants, David Jones is perhaps best conceived as a "resourceful" and "perfect mentor", distinguished by his knowledge of and experience in drug-abuse-related issues. A perfect mentor is an individual whom others wish to emulate, admire and aspire to become; someone who is talented, possesses technical know-how and is amicable in social settings (Mara & Morar, 2024). Mentors are measured by the level of guidance they offer to those they mentor, fostering growth through advice and support. The female participants in this study spoke of David Jones as a trusted advisor with whom they interacted through his EE music intervention, as he provided them with guidance on drug-abuse-related issues.

When mentors impart unique knowledge and awareness, it enables the mentee's accomplishment. This aligns well with Mara and Morar (2024), who argue that when a mentor acts as a source of knowledge, it indicates that the individual serves as a wellspring of insight and skill, enhancing the participant's understanding and skill set through their experience and insights. Evidence supports this from the participants of this study. For instance, one participant expressed an understanding of how to show compassion to victims of drug abuse and the necessity of providing them with guidance to find themselves again. Participants also described how the benefits of David Jones's mentorship had spilt over into their private lives. Notably, individuals exposed to David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention emphasise the relevance of the knowledge provided in avoiding discrimination against drug users. The participants' attitudes and understanding towards drug abusers shifted.

From an SCT perspective, the appearance of mentorship offers a theme following youths' exposure to David Jones anti-drug-abuse EE music intervention. This can be interpreted as demonstrating how mediated inspirational figures stimulate behavioural and relational outcomes beyond mere attitudinal shifts. Through repeated exposure to David Jones's prosocial messaging, the female participants may have developed strong identification with David Jones as a genuine inspirational figure, which amplified observational learning and bolstered positive outcome expectations associated with aligning with anti-drug values. This reverence could evolve into a craving for closer interaction, leading some female participants to offer mentorship support, seek counsel or establish themselves within David Jones's advocacy network. Such outcomes extend SCT by demonstrating that media personalities not only shape imitation of behaviours, but also motivate audiences to trigger supportive social relationships that strengthen sustained behavioural commitment and collective anti-drug engagement.

The music character's appearance looks irresponsible and deters listeners/viewers

The third theme was how David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music character was sometimes perceived as irresponsible, and how such an appearance alienated listeners and viewers of the anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention. The views of the female participant below confirmed such assumption when she stated:

> If you want to be a leader or a mentor, you should lead by example. Because most of us come from Christian homes, you cannot expect me to play your music with tinted hair and probably a new set of earrings, and you are not well dressed. Yes, you are conveying a good message, but your physical appearance is not giving off the right vibe (P16, female, FGD#43 participant. CCU, October 25 2023).

Participants noted that an individual's appearance, to some extent, is sufficiently communicative and reflects their behaviour. One male participant reported that:

> I concur with Ken on this point because in Nigeria, you dress the way you are addressed; that is the culture and the norm. Therefore, before approaching someone, you should first observe the individual and their attire before considering their behaviour (P17, male,

FGD#3 participant. CCU, October 25 2023).

The finding that David Jones's appearance looks irresponsible and deters some participants reveals a complex tension between perceived mentorship credibility and visual self-presentation. David Jones's aesthetic, identified by his unconventional fashion choices, exaggerated gestures or symbols associated with rebellion, forced participants from CCU to more frequently describe him as "irresponsible", "undisciplined", "wayward" and "unworthy of admiration". They emphasised David Jones's moral bankruptcy and personal lifestyle as reasons for their non-identification.

In contrast, the male participants from VU were more likely to focus on the David Jones's social influence, popularity and perceived courage in addressing drug abuse publicly. They attributed the despising views held by a few participants and some members of society about David Jones to his resolve to fight drug use, which is a sensitive issue in most cultures. The views expressed by this participant clearly highlight this when he said:

> Most people don't like the fact that David Jones is trying to pass a message to stop what they are doing, but to think of it, actually, he's having a lot of hate. Most people really don't like the music because he is singing about drug abuse (P38, male, FGD#7 participant. VU, November 26, 2023).

For most CCU participants, David Jones's appearance undermines the seriousness of the guidance offered, creating dissonance between the moral messages conveyed in the music and the visual cues presented in performances and media appearances. Conversely, participants from ESUT perceived the same appearance as relatable and expressive, interpreting it as a strategic rejection of rigid norms rather than outright irresponsibility. These divergent readings were shaped by factors such as exposure to alternative youth identities, moral expectations and cultural background. This variation climaxes how appearance aids as a communicative layer that can either strengthen or weaken the mentorship intent, ultimately influencing whether the music character is dismissed as a contradictory role model or perceived as a credible guide. This is portrayed by this female ESUT participant when she pointed out the following:

> I understand that dread may not generally be an issue, but due to the societal implications attached to it, when one experiences dread, whether as a man or a woman, it may come across as irresponsible. Nevertheless, what David Jones presents aligns with his music; he is attempting to convey that he is trying to prevent drug abuse. Consequently, his casual appearance, cleanliness, and pleasing sound may encourage people to sing along or listen to his songs. That is my perspective (P11, female, FGD#2 participant. ESUT, October 22, 2023).

The finding aligns with Gibson (2004) who offers a new focus on the concept of role models, which posits that individuals encounter role model figures whom they perceive as similar in certain aspects, aiming to learn how to eschew specific attitudes and behaviours. This suggests that some of David Jones's appearances are strategically crafted to educate audiences on how to behave and how not to behave, depending on the role he chooses to portray, a hero or a villain, in any of his anti-drug-abuse EE music interventions.

The findings of this study support Ojebode and Adegbola's (2016) view that deeply rooted cultural beliefs may hinder the acceptance of behaviours promoted through EE. This suggests that good work done by an individual could easily be undermined by one unfavourable behaviour that conflicts with broad worldviews or core cultural values. Galvano (2019:8) rightly points out that "integrating physical appearance into behaviour analysis involves a deeper understanding of cultural influences on perception, fostering a more equitable assessment of behaviour". Galvano's statement implies that an individual may be misjudged if rational analysis is not mobilised during the evaluation of appearance.

From Albert Bandura's SCT perspective, some participants' interpretation that David Jones's appearance looked "irresponsible" and as a result deterred them from identifying with or emulating him underscores the significance of symbolic modelling, identification and vicarious evaluation. SCT contends that audiences are more inclined to embrace behaviours from role models they view as genuine, exemplary or socially attractive. In this case, exposure to David Jones's EE music intervention instigated a reverse modelling process: rather than fostering emulation among CCU participants, David Jones's being linked to irresponsible appearance functioned as a negative symbolic cue that diminished CCU participants' eagerness to associate with the portrayed behavioural patterns. The participants cognitively evaluated the visual representation, associated negative meaning to it and used that judgement to distance themselves from the behaviour being depicted. This extends SCT by showing that observational learning is influenced not only by behavioural outcomes but also by how audiences interpret the physical presentation and social image of media persona.

CONCLUSION

David Jones's anti-drug-abuse popular music intervention inspired Nigerian youths to adopt role models. The ultimate goal of the EE intervention is to replicate attitudes, values and behaviours modelled, integrating them into their personal lives to counter antisocial habits. Evidence suggests that Nigerian youths' exposure to the EE popular music intervention fostered the emulation of prosocial characters in Bandura's sense of observational learning. These youths perceived themselves as having benefited from the EE intervention, believing these gains would guide their attitudes, values and behaviours regarding drug use. The perceived benefits underscore the importance of employing popular music as a medium for EE interventions that are aimed at tackling issues related to the prevalence of drug abuse. Specifically, this illustrates the positive impact of EE popular music intervention on Nigerian youths and its broader prospects. In summary, the themes developed in this study reveal changes in the attitudes, values and behaviours of youths exposed to anti-drug-abuse EE popular music, highlighting the need for further research on the incorporation of EE as an educational programme to address drug abuse prevalence in Nigeria. Research studies conducted in Nigeria (Brown & Singhal, 1993; Kincaid et al., 1992) indicate that music, as a medium for EE interventions, can meet multiple needs. These studies advocate the expansion of EE in various formats to tackle educational challenges related to drug-abuse prevalence among the large Nigerian youth population. These considerations are crucial, as EE music interventions addressing drug abuse remain in their infancy and promise to demonstrate evidence of efficacy in the future.

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