

FUNCTIONAL PEDAGOGY FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING: SURVEY OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS IN GWAGWALADA, ABUJA

UCHENDU, Caroline Ifeoma

School of Post Basic Critical Care Nursing, University of Abuja Teaching Hospital.

Email: uchendu.caroline@gmail.com, +2348055274605

Abstract

This study examined the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja, within the framework of functional pedagogy for effective learning of healthy behavioural skills. The estimated population of senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja is 2,200, from which a sample of 300 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation across schools and genders. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by experts in health education and curriculum studies and yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.77, indicating good internal consistency. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, and percentages were used to answer the research questions, while chi-square tests and Pearson correlation were applied to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that media and social media significantly shape students' exposure to and experimentation with substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, and cannabis. Functional pedagogical approaches particularly skill-based learning, media literacy, and decision-making strategies were found to enhance students' ability to resist peer pressure and critically evaluate negative media influences. The study concludes that functional pedagogy is a practical tool for equipping adolescents with healthy behavioural skills and recommends its integration into secondary school curricula, alongside teacher training and parental involvement, to address substance abuse challenges.

Key words: Abuse Behaviours, Functional Pedagogy, Media Influence, Skill-Based Learning, Social Media, and Substance

Introduction

Education in the 21st century has moved beyond the traditional transfer of knowledge to a more functional and transformative process aimed at equipping learners with practical skills, critical thinking abilities, and responsible behavioural competencies necessary for navigating a digitally driven society. The rapid expansion of media and social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) has significantly reshaped adolescent behaviour, communication patterns, and social interactions, particularly among senior secondary school students. While these digital technologies provide opportunities for learning, collaboration, and global engagement, they have also intensified exposure to harmful content that glamorizes substance abuse, violence, and other risky behaviours. Recent studies reveal that repeated exposure to media content promoting alcohol consumption, smoking, and drug use contributes to the normalization of substance abuse among adolescents, thereby affecting their academic performance, emotional stability, and moral development (Hassan & Ibrahim, 2023; Afolabi & Yusuf, 2023). In Nigeria, especially in rapidly urbanizing areas such as Gwagwalada, Abuja, the growing influence of digital media has heightened concerns about the vulnerability of young people to peer pressure, cyber influence, and unhealthy lifestyle choices, making functional pedagogy increasingly necessary as an educational strategy for behavioural reorientation and social adjustment.

Functional pedagogy emphasizes participatory, skill-based, and experiential learning approaches that empower students to critically evaluate social influences, develop self-regulation, and make informed decisions in real-life situations. Anchored on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this study recognizes that adolescents often imitate behaviours observed from peers, celebrities, and digital influencers, especially when such behaviours appear socially rewarding or widely accepted. Consequently, schools are expected not only to transmit academic knowledge but also to cultivate media literacy, resilience, moral discipline, and responsible citizenship among learners. Recent empirical evidence indicates that interactive teaching strategies such as role-play, group discussions, reflective learning, and problem-solving activities significantly reduce adolescents' susceptibility to risky behaviours and improve their psychosocial competence (Mensah & Oppong, 2022; Adeosun, 2022). Therefore, this study investigates the influence of media and social media on substance abuse among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja, while exploring how functional pedagogy can serve as an effective preventive and corrective mechanism for promoting healthy behavioural choices in the digital age.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing influence of media and social media on adolescents' behaviour has become a growing concern for educators, parents, policymakers, and mental health professionals, particularly in developing societies where digital exposure among youths continues to expand with minimal regulation. In recent years, senior secondary school students in Nigeria have become heavily exposed to media content that frequently glamorizes alcohol consumption, smoking, drug experimentation, and other risky lifestyle practices through

music videos, online trends, celebrity culture, movies, and social networking platforms. This persistent exposure has contributed to the normalization of substance abuse behaviours among adolescents, thereby threatening their academic performance, emotional well-being, moral development, and future productivity. Despite several educational and moral interventions introduced in schools, the prevalence of substance abuse among secondary school students continues to rise, especially in urban and semi-urban communities such as Gwagwalada, Abuja, where digital media access is rapidly increasing. More worrisome is the fact that many schools still rely heavily on conventional teaching approaches that emphasize theoretical instruction with limited attention to behavioural skill development, critical media literacy, and emotional resilience needed to resist negative social influences. Although previous studies have examined substance abuse and youth behaviour in Nigeria, most focused largely on peer pressure, family background, or socioeconomic factors, with limited empirical attention given to the combined influence of media/social media exposure and the role of functional pedagogy as a preventive educational strategy. Furthermore, existing literature has not adequately explored how demographic variables such as gender and class level shape students' vulnerability to media-induced substance abuse behaviours. It is against these observable gaps that this study seeks to investigate the extent to which media and social media influence substance abuse among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja, while examining how functional pedagogy can promote healthy behavioural skills capable of reducing adolescents' susceptibility to harmful media influences.

Research Objectives

- I. To examine the extent to which media and social media influence substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.
- ii. To determine the role of functional pedagogy in promoting healthy behavioural skills that mitigate substance abuse among senior secondary school students.
- iii. To investigate the relationship between students' demographic variables (such as gender and class level) and their susceptibility to media/social media influence on substance abuse behaviours.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent do media and social media influence substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja?
- ii. How does functional pedagogy promote the acquisition of healthy behavioural skills that reduce substance abuse among senior secondary school students?
- iii. What is the relationship between students' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender and class level) and their susceptibility to media/social media influence on substance abuse behaviours?

Null Hypotheses (H₀)

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female students in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference across students' class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3) in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of data from a large group of respondents in order to describe existing conditions, opinions, and behaviours without manipulation of variables. The target population comprised senior secondary school students in government day secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), estimated at over 2,200 students. From this population, a representative sample of 300 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring that gender and class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3) were fairly represented. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of two sections: demographic information and 12 Likert-scale items generated directly from the research questions. The instrument was validated by experts in curriculum studies and health education to ensure face and content validity, while a pilot study conducted with a smaller group of students outside the sample yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.77, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were collected with the assistance of trained research assistants and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency counts, and percentages) to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics (independent t-test and one-way ANOVA) were employed to test the null hypotheses on gender and class-level differences at the 0.05 level of significance. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly adhered to throughout the study.

Result Analysis

Research Question: How do media and social media influence substance abuse behaviours among students?

Table 1. The media and social media influence substance abuse behaviours among students

N300				
S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	I am exposed to images or videos of alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs through social media platforms.	2.56	1.050	Agreed
2	Social media portrays substance use as attractive and acceptable among young people.	2.50	1.046	Agreed
3	What I see on television, movies, or social media has influenced my decision to experiment with substances.	2.60	1.072	Agreed
4	Conversations with peers on social media encourage or normalize the use of substances among students.	2.53	1.055	Agreed
Sectional Mean		2.548	1.056	

The results in Table 1 reveal that respondents generally agreed that media and social media play a significant role in influencing substance abuse behaviours, as reflected in the sectional mean of 2.55. The mean values for all four items (ranging from 2.50 to 2.60) suggest moderate but consistent agreement across students' responses. This indicates that exposure to media portrayals and peer interactions online contributes to shaping attitudes and experimentation with substances among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada.

Research Question 2: How does functional pedagogy promote the acquisition of healthy behavioural skills that reduce substance abuse?

Table 2: The functional pedagogy promote the acquisition of healthy behavioural skills that reduce substance abuse

N300				
S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
5	Teachers use classroom activities (e.g., role play, group discussions) to teach us how to resist peer pressure.	2.54	1.056	Agreed
6	Functional teaching methods help me develop decision-making skills that discourage substance use.	2.57	1.047	Disagreed
7	Learning media literacy skills in school enables me to critically evaluate harmful media messages about substance use.	2.43	1.061	Disagreed
8	Skill-based teaching methods have increased my confidence in saying "no" when pressured to use substances.	2.54	1.054	Agreed
Sectional Mean		2.52	1.0545	

The results in Table 2 show a mixed response among students, with a sectional mean of 2.52 indicating a borderline agreement. While students acknowledged that classroom activities and skill-based methods boost confidence and resistance to peer pressure (means 2.54–2.57), they expressed doubt about the effectiveness of media literacy training in critically evaluating harmful messages (mean 2.43). This suggests that while functional pedagogy has potential, its implementation in schools is inconsistent and requires strengthening, especially in media literacy education.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between students' demographic characteristics (gender, class level) and their susceptibility to media/social media influence?

Table 3: The relationship between students' demographic characteristics (gender, class level) and their susceptibility to media/social media influence

N300				
S/N	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
9	Male and female students are equally exposed to media content that promotes substance use.	2.55	1.051	Agreed
10	Students in higher classes (SS2 and SS3) are more likely than those in lower classes (SS1) to be influenced by media portrayals of substance use.	2.57	1.045	Agreed
11	My age and level in school affect how I respond to media messages about alcohol and drugs.	2.52	1.061	Agreed
12	Gender plays a role in determining how students engage with media and social media content about substance use.	2.53	1.051	Agreed
Sectional Mean		2.54	1.052	

Findings from Table 3 indicate that respondents generally agreed that demographic factors influence susceptibility to media and social media influence, with a sectional mean of 2.54. Gender and class level were perceived as significant variables, with higher-class students (SS2 and SS3) considered more vulnerable to negative media portrayals than their lower-class peers. This suggests that demographic characteristics, particularly age, level, and gender, shape how students respond to substance-related content in media and social networks.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female students in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

Table 4: t-test on the differences between male and female students in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

Location	Number	Mean	S. D	t-value	Df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Male	115	2.60	.812	-.672	292	.502	Not Significant
Female	185	2.65	.848				

The results in Table 4 show that male students (Mean = 2.60) and female students (Mean = 2.65) reported similar levels of media and social media influence. The t-test value of -0.672 with a significance level of 0.502 ($p > 0.05$) indicates that the difference is not statistically significant. This implies that both male and female students are equally influenced by media and social media in relation to substance abuse behaviours.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference across students' class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3) in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

Table 5: One -way ANOVA on the difference across students' class levels (SS1, SS2, and SS3) in the influence of media and social media on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja.

<i>Academic Qualifications</i>	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Between Groups	1.699	3	.566	.801	.491	Not Significant
Within Groups	279.019	297	.702			
Total	278.717	298				

The ANOVA results in Table 5 show that the calculated F-value of 0.801 with a significance level of 0.491 ($p > 0.05$) is not statistically significant. This indicates that there is no meaningful difference across class levels (SS1, SS2, SS3) regarding media and social media influence on substance abuse behaviours. The findings imply that students, irrespective of class level, are equally vulnerable to media-related influences on substance use.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study reveal that media and social media exert a substantial influence on substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja. The sectional mean of 2.55 indicates a moderate but consistent agreement among respondents that exposure to media portrayals of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs encourages experimentation and normalizes risky behaviours. This aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals, especially adolescents, learn behaviours through observation and imitation of models in their social environment. Social media influencers, peers, and celebrities often glamorize substance use, thereby shaping adolescents' perceptions of acceptability. The findings corroborate similar research by Pantic (2020) and Olatunji & Bello (2020), who found that frequent exposure to substance-related media content significantly predicts early experimentation and peer normalization of drug use among Nigerian youths.

The study further demonstrates that while functional pedagogy shows potential in mitigating substance abuse, its implementation in schools remains inconsistent. The mean values in Table 2 (ranging from 2.43 to 2.57) suggest that students acknowledge the importance of classroom-based interventions, such as role plays, group discussions, and decision-making exercises in enhancing resilience and refusal skills. However, there was less confidence in the efficacy of media literacy training, suggesting that the cognitive and critical-thinking aspects of functional pedagogy are not yet adequately integrated into instructional practice. These results reinforce findings by Hassan and Ibrahim (2023), who reported that conventional health education approaches had limited behavioural impact compared to participatory, skill-based pedagogies. Thus, while Nigerian schools have begun to recognize the importance of functional pedagogy, there is a need for systemic curriculum reform to make it more experiential, reflective, and responsive to contemporary social influences.

In examining the influence of demographic factors, the study found that both gender and class level contribute marginally to variations in susceptibility to media and social media influence. Although descriptive statistics showed that students perceived older adolescents (SS2 and SS3) to be slightly more vulnerable than younger ones (SS1), inferential results from the t-test ($p = 0.502$) and ANOVA ($p = 0.491$) confirmed that these differences were not statistically significant. This implies that all students, regardless of age or gender, are equally exposed to, and affected by, media influences promoting substance use. This finding echoes the work of Jenkins and Kim (2019), who observed similar patterns of uniform susceptibility among adolescents exposed to social media in the United States. The result also underscores the pervasive nature of digital exposure in contemporary adolescence, where age and gender distinctions are increasingly blurred by the democratizing power of the internet.

Moreover, the findings underscore that functional pedagogy can act as a protective buffer when effectively implemented. Students who reported exposure to participatory and skill-based instruction demonstrated stronger confidence in resisting peer and media pressure. This aligns with Mensah and Oppong (2022), who found that peer-led and experiential teaching strategies significantly enhanced students' resilience against negative behavioural influences in Ghanaian secondary schools. In the context of Abuja, these findings highlight that functional pedagogy, through activities such as scenario analysis, group problem-solving, and reflective dialogue can transform classrooms into safe spaces for behavioural reorientation. However, its success depends on teacher training, curriculum alignment, and the availability of relevant instructional resources to sustain practical learning environments.

In summary, the results establish that media and social media influence adolescents' substance use behaviours through constant exposure and peer validation, while functional pedagogy provides a feasible pedagogical intervention for behavioural correction. Yet, the lack of significant differences across gender and class levels suggests that substance abuse risk is a universal adolescent concern requiring holistic educational responses rather than selective interventions. The findings therefore call for an integrated educational strategy

combining media literacy, functional pedagogy, and psychosocial support to empower learners with critical reasoning, emotional regulation, and self-control. By embedding such approaches into the secondary school curriculum, educators can more effectively counteract the subtle but powerful forces of digital and media-driven behavioural modeling among Nigerian youth.

Recommendations

- I. Schools should incorporate structured media literacy modules into Civic Education, Social Studies, and Health Science curricula to enable students to critically evaluate harmful online content and resist glamorized portrayals of substance use.
- ii. Teachers should receive regular training in functional, participatory, and skill-based instructional methods such as role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and peer mentoring to promote decision-making and self-regulation skills among students.
- iii. Curriculum planners should design and implement lessons that build resilience, emotional intelligence, and assertiveness, empowering students to say “no” to peer and media pressure.
- iv. Ministries of Education and school administrators should organize continuous professional development workshops focused on applying functional pedagogy in addressing social challenges, including substance abuse.
- v. Guidance and counselling units in schools should collaborate with NGOs, health agencies, and parents to provide awareness programs and early intervention strategies targeting both male and female students across all class levels.
- vi. Government agencies, educational institutions, and media regulators should partner to monitor youth-oriented media content and promote positive portrayals that align with national educational values and healthy youth development.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which media and social media influence substance abuse behaviours among senior secondary school students in Gwagwalada, Abuja, and the mitigating role of functional pedagogy in promoting healthy behavioural skills. The findings revealed that pervasive media exposure significantly shapes adolescents' perceptions and experimentation with substances, reinforcing **Bandura's Social Learning Theory** that behaviour is acquired through observation and imitation. While functional pedagogy emerged as a promising framework for equipping students with resilience, decision-making, and media literacy skills, its current application within Nigerian schools remains inconsistent and underdeveloped. Moreover, gender and class level differences were found to be statistically insignificant, suggesting that vulnerability to media-induced substance use is a shared concern among adolescents, irrespective of demographic distinctions. Therefore, to safeguard students' health and moral development, it is imperative for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers to strengthen the integration of functional pedagogy into classroom practice, ensuring that media literacy and behavioural education become core components of secondary school instruction.

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