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Original Article

Influence, Causes, and Prevention of Gangsterism among Undergraduates in Kwara Central Nigeria: A Triangulation Study

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Abstract

Gangsterism among university students has become a significant issue in Nigerian higher education institutions, especially in Kwara Central, where it threatens academic achievement, student safety, and the stability of the institutions. Although there is increasing concern about this issue, previous research has largely depended on single-method approaches, which have restricted a thorough understanding of its complexities. Consequently, this study examined the impact, causes, and prevention of gangsterism among university students using a triangulation research design. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, involving 160 undergraduates (80 from public institutions and 80 from private ones) chosen through stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using a validated self-developed questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82), semi-structured interviews, and institutional records and documents were reviewed using content analysis techniques. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test, while the qualitative data were analysed thematically. The results demonstrated a notable difference in the impact of gangsterism depending on the type of school ($t(158) = 2.87$, $p < 0.05$), where students in public institutions showed higher mean scores ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.81$) compared to those in private institutions ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.74$). Key factors identified include peer influence, family background issues, insufficient institutional oversight, and exposure to violent media. Qualitative findings also suggested that inadequate counselling services and poor enforcement of disciplinary actions exacerbate students' participation in gang-related behaviour. The research concludes that gangsterism among college students is a complex problem influenced by both personal and systemic variables. It advocates for the implementation of educational prevention programs, enhancement of campus counselling services, and cooperative efforts among institutions.

KEYWORDS: gangsterism, school types, triangulation, socioeconomic and substance use.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Gangsterism among undergraduates has attracted increasing scholarly attention due to its implications for academic performance, campus safety, and youth development. Earlier studies in Nigeria, such as Oluwatobi and Babatunde (2010) and Ali et al. (2014), primarily established the negative outcomes of cultism and gang-related behaviours, highlighting their association with moral decadence, violent tendencies, and poor academic performance among students in tertiary institutions. More recent studies have shifted toward multifactorial and contextual explanations. For instance, CrowdStrike (2026) observed that fraternities and Sororities are forms of gangster groups that evolved through activities of Debating and Literary Society in American tertiary institutions in the late nineteenth century. The essence of the social club was pressured over the bleak campus dormitories to the extent that it was organized to maintain a private library that surpassed the one operated by the school. The objectives of the fraternity group were borne out of this goal as well by ensuring the transmission of norms and values to the group members in systematic means of social control. Due to the good objective and performance of the gang group, the female wing of the confraternity called Alpha Delta Pi was formed in 1851 to enhance a kind of independent campus environment.

The popularity of the confraternity group motivated Alumni and the College authority to support and accept, giving the gang group the house, called a Chapter-owned house. The motive for the fraternity house necessitated the recruiting approach for the new members. This was based on the "pledges' to join and do some menial jobs or errands for upper-class members of the group. This marked the beginning of the most troubling and reviled customs: hazing, punishment, and psychological and physical discomfort. Similarly, Fajemirokun (2025) observed that the development of gangsterism in Nigeria was connected with the emergence of a pirate confraternity group among undergraduates at the University of Ibadan in the 1950s. It was conceived as a social group to wrestle with colonial issues and injustices on campus. This was metamorphosed into a secret cult group in the 1980s and expanded to many groups such as the Buccaneers, Eiye confraternity, the Black Axe, and the Vikings. The rivalries among the groups are attributed to a lack of conformity with one group's doctrines by the other. In the same vein, Oyibo (2020), like the aforementioned studies, traced the historical evolution of confraternities from anti-colonial movements to violent groups, but their explanations are largely descriptive and do not sufficiently interrogate the structural transformation factors, such as neoliberal pressures, campus overcrowding, and youth unemployment, that have reshaped these groups in contemporary Nigeria.

Recent empirical studies like that of Adeniyi and Jinadu (2021) and Maigemu and Adamu (2025) highlight that gangsterism is embedded in intersecting social, familial, and institutional factors, including peer pressure, family instability, and weak institutional support systems. However, these studies tend to emphasize individual-level determinants, often neglecting broader systemic influences such as economic inequality and governance failures. In contrast, global research over the past decade demonstrates that youth gang involvement is better understood through a multi-level framework, incorporating community disorganization, socio-economic marginalization, and policy environments (Howell & Griffiths, 2018). This suggests that Nigerian-based studies may

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benefit from situating gangsterism within a broader global criminological discourse, rather than treating it as an isolated phenomenon.

Furthermore, while earlier works such as Howell (2010) and Akan et al (2024) observed that exposure to violent media shapes human disposition, thinking, and feelings and thus causes antisocial behaviour like gangsterism among children and youth who watch violent media content. Recent scholarship challenges linear media effects explanations of gang involvement, arguing that media exposure alone is insufficient. Instead, digital environments enable the construction of youth subcultures and identities through interactive platforms (Fernández-Planells et al., 2021). Social media spaces, often described as "digital streets," facilitate the performance of gang identity, reinforce group belonging, and extend offline networks into online contexts (Urbanik & Bucerius, 2025; Pawelz & Elvers, 2018). Moreover, emerging studies highlight the hybrid nature of contemporary youth groups, where online interactions, symbolic expressions, and peer validation processes co-evolve with real-world socio-economic conditions (Weenink & Van de Ven, 2025). Consequently, explanations of gangsterism are better framed within a dynamic interactionist perspective, where media, peer networks, and structural realities mutually reinforce deviant pathways (Frey, 2018; Stuart, 2019). Thus, the causal explanation of gangsterism should move beyond linear interpretations toward a dynamic interactionist perspective, where media, peer networks, and socio-economic realities mutually reinforce one another.

In terms of consequences, there is broad agreement across both Nigerian and international scholarship that gangsterism undermines students' academic engagement and educational outcomes (Mguzulwa & Gxubane, 2019). However, more recent studies extend beyond academic effects to highlight the psychological and developmental consequences of gang involvement. Contemporary research demonstrates that gang-affiliated youth frequently experience trauma, victimization, and mental health challenges that significantly affect their academic performance and well-being (Ducharme, 2024; Bamaiyi & Aliero, 2025). Additionally, emerging literature emphasizes the role of gangs in shaping identity formation and providing social meaning for marginalized youth (Sandhu, 2026; Khumalo, 2025). These findings, alongside evidence linking gang involvement to broader processes of social exclusion and structural inequality (Mohamed, 2025), suggest that gangsterism should be reconceptualized not merely as a disciplinary issue but as a complex public health and developmental concern.

Approaches to prevention of gangsterism have similarly evolved. Traditional strategies proposed by Adamu et al. (2024), such as the use of force, imprisoning gang culprits, and enclosing high-risk prisoners with gang convicts, have been worn out. They recommended Community Anti-Gang Service (CAGS), Rejuvenation of Youth Criminal Justice Acts, and concentrated investment in the highest needs of the youths, especially education. Similarly, contemporary studies advocate for integrated prevention models, combining school-based interventions, family support systems, community policing, and economic empowerment initiatives. For example, the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) programme has shown promise in reducing gang involvement; however, its effectiveness depends heavily on contextual adaptation and implementation fidelity, an issue rarely examined in Nigerian studies (National Gang Center, 2021).

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Another important gap in the literature related to comparative institutional analysis is that while Mpindo et al. (2025) acknowledge that gangsterism occurs in both private and public tertiary institutions, their analysis remains superficial, lacking empirical depth in understanding how institutional characteristics like governance structures, student demographics, and disciplinary frameworks shape gang dynamics. Global studies suggest that institutional climate, rather than ownership type alone, is a more significant determinant of gang prevalence. This indicates the need for more nuanced, evidence-based comparisons within the Nigerian context.

Theoretically, this study draws on Social Learning and Strain Theories. McLeod (2025) reviewed Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura, which explains the role of peer influence and modelling. This theory may not fully account for digital-era socialization processes. Similarly, Nickerson (2025) reviewed Merton's Strain Theory, which highlights the gap between societal goals and the means to achieve them. This theory may also overlook the cultural and institutional variations in how success is defined. Integrating these classical theories with contemporary perspectives provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding gangsterism among undergraduates.

Finally, a critical limitation of existing studies is their reliance on single-method approaches, which restricts the depth and validity of findings. By contrast, recent methodological advancements emphasize mixed-methods and triangulation designs to capture the complexity of youth deviance. This study aligns with this emerging trend by integrating quantitative, qualitative, and documentary data, thereby contributing to a more holistic and empirically robust understanding of gangsterism in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

1.1 The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence, causes, and prevention of Gangsterism among Undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was to establish the influence of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions in Kwara Central, Nigeria, based on school type. The following research questions were asked to guide this study.

1. What are the influences of gangsterism on undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara Central, Nigeria?
2. What are the causes of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara Central, Nigeria?
3. What are the preventive measures of the problems of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara Central, Nigeria?

One corresponding hypothesis was formulated to guide the study as follows:

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference in the influence of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions in Kwara Central, Nigeria, based on school type.

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2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-method triangulation design, integrating three distinct data collection instruments to determine the influence, causes, and prevention of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions in Kwara Central, Nigeria. The population for the study comprised all undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Kwara, Central Nigeria. The target population for the study was the final-year undergraduates in public and private universities and polytechnics in Kwara Central.

2.2 Participants

A multistage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. At the first stage, the tertiary institutions in Kwara Central were stratified into public and private. A simple random sampling technique was used to select one public, one private university, and one private polytechnic was randomly selected, while only one public polytechnic in the senatorial district was purposively selected. Therefore, a total of four tertiary institutions were involved in the study. Two faculties in the universities and two schools in the polytechnics were randomly selected in each of the four tertiary institutions. Four departments were randomly selected in each of the two faculties or schools in the selected tertiary institutions. A total of sixteen departments were involved in the study. The stratified sampling technique was used to categorize students based on department and levels of study. Thereafter, the proportionate sampling technique was employed using 25% to select 40 undergraduates from each department and the final year level.

A simple random sampling technique was then used to select a total of 160 undergraduate students for the quantitative component of the study. For the qualitative component, the purposive sampling technique was used to select 4 participants for the focus groups in each of the four selected tertiary institutions among the sampled students based on their experiences and willingness to provide in-depth information on gangsterism. This means a total of 16 participants were involved in the interview for the study. Relevant documents, including disciplinary records, security reports, and student affairs reports on cases related to gangsterism, were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Only records that directly addressed incidents, causes, and preventive measures of gangsterism within the selected institutions, and between 2019 and 2025, were included. This combination of sampling techniques was considered appropriate for achieving the triangulation design of the study. Access to these documents was obtained through appropriate institutional authorities, and irrelevant records were excluded based on the study's objectives. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Questionnaires were administered in person by the researcher.

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2.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study were collected through triangulation of research instruments. The first one was a quantitative researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Perceived Influences, Causes, and Prevention of Gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria" (PICAPGAUKCN). The instrument was designed to measure key constructs such as influences, causes, and prevention of gangsterism among undergraduates. Examples of items included in the instrument are provided as follows: Influence: (a). Distraction from the lecture is a result of belonging to a gang (b). Falling behind in academics is due to being a member of a gang. Causes: (a) I become a member of a gang because of my friends' interest, (b) I join a gang because of my exposure to mass media. Prevention: (a) Acquiring enlightenment and training about gang resistance is a preventive measure against acts of gang violence. (b) Campaigning against the use of harmful substances is a preventive measure for gang violence. All items were measured on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4).

The second instrument was the semi-structured qualitative interview; items were designed by the researcher. Examples of the interview items included in the instrument are provided as follows: Influence: (a). What is your view about the disruption of academic activities due to gang rivalry on campus? (b) What is your opinion about missing a lesson as a result of attending a gang meeting? Causes: (a). What do you think makes an undergraduate join a gang? (b). What are the reasons you think motivate an undergraduate to join a gang? Prevention: What preventive measures would you suggest to curb students' interest in joining a gang? The interview items guided the study to determine personal experiences and institutional perspectives on gangsterism, enabling a richer contextual analysis of peer influence, family background, and mass media exposure. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The third instrument was institutional records, where data were obtained on disciplinary records, security reports, and student affairs reports on cases related to gangsterism. To ensure the validity of the quantitative and qualitative instruments, both face and content validity procedures were considered. The questionnaires were observed and corrected by three professors in Social Studies Education and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Their feedback guided the modification of the items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the purpose of the study. The reliability of the quantitative research instrument was established; twenty copies of the quantitative research instruments were distributed among twenty undergraduates in private and public tertiary institutions in Osun State, which are outside the study sample. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were obtained as follows: Influence ($\alpha = 0.82$), Causes ($\alpha = 0.79$), and Prevention ($\alpha = 0.85$), indicating acceptable internal consistency.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data personally. He requested the relevant document from institutional authorities and reviewed it systematically. A triangulation method was employed to analyse data from three sources: quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and

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documentary reviews. This was to enhance a robust and multidimensional understanding of gangsterism among undergraduates.

2.5 Data Analysis

Survey responses from the respondents were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and percentage) to answer research questions. Inferential statistics, specifically t-tests, were used to test the research hypothesis regarding differences in influence, causes, and prevention perceptions by school type. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS at a 0.05 significance level. Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis through open and axial coding. Key themes such as peer influence, mass media impact, and institutional intervention were identified and mapped from participant narratives. NVivo software facilitated systematic coding and theme development, supporting in-depth interpretation and cross-comparison with survey data. Institutional records and policy documents were reviewed using content analysis techniques. These materials were examined for patterns and evidence that corroborated or contrasted with quantitative and qualitative findings, including details of disciplinary cases, school policy changes, and historical trends in gang-related incidents. Findings from the three data sources were synthesized to confirm convergent patterns (themes supported across sources) and explore divergent observations (unique or conflicting results). This process enhanced the validity and credibility of results by ensuring that interpretations were substantiated by multiple forms of evidence. Through triangulation, the analysis generated a comprehensive perspective on the influence, causes, and prevention of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

3.0 RESULTS

The research adopted a mixed-method triangulation design to maximize the validity and depth of the findings. Data sources comprised:

Table 1: Descriptive Overview of the Undergraduates' Quantitative, Qualitative, and Documentary Integration based on School Type in Kwara Central, Nigeria

	Quantitative		Qualitative	Documentary integration
School Type	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**		
Private Universities and Polytechnics	80	50 .00	Qualitative interviews: Focus group of 16 undergraduates from Private Universities and Polytechnics, respectively	Disciplinary records, security reports, and student affairs reports on cases related to gangsterism, from Private Universities and Polytechnics

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Public Universities and Polytechnics	80	50.00	Qualitative interviews: Focus group of 16 undergraduates from Public Universities and Polytechnics	Disciplinary records, security reports, and student affairs reports on cases related to gangsterism from Public Universities and Polytechnics
Total	**160**	**100.0**	**4 Focus groups**	**Four tertiary institutional records and disciplinary reports**

Table 1 shows the quantitative surveys in which 160 students across four institutions of private and public universities and polytechnics participated in the study. It is shown that out of the 160 (100.0%) of the undergraduates sampled in this study, 80 (50.00 %) attended private universities and polytechnics, while 80 (50.00%) attended public universities and polytechnics. This shows equal distribution of undergraduates in both private and public universities and polytechnics. Qualitative data were also generated through focus group interviews with 4 undergraduates at each of the 4 private and public universities and polytechnics involved in the study. Moreover, data were generated from institutional records and disciplinary reports of 2 Private/Public Universities and 2 Private/Public Polytechnics. This combination allowed cross-verification and enriched understanding of the influences, causes, and solutions of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions in Kwara, Central Nigeria.

Research Question 1: What are the influences of gangsterism on undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara Central, Nigeria?

Table 2 presents the quantitative, qualitative, and documentary data analysis of respondents' views on the influence of Gangsterism on Undergraduates in Tertiary Education in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

The results in Table 2 present quantitative data on the perceived influences of gangsterism on undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria. Given the weighted mean of 2.9, the strongest influence of gangsterism on undergraduates is distraction in the lecture room (Mean = 3.0), ranked 1st. This is followed by poor academic performance (Mean = 2.9). Failure in examination, disruption of school academic activities, and school dropout were rated in 3rd position equally with Mean scores (2.8), indicating similar levels of influence of gangsterism on the undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

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Table 2: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Documentary Data of Influence of Gangsterism on Undergraduates in Tertiary Education in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

Influence	Mean	Rank	Qualitative Themes	Documentary Evidence
Distraction in the lecture room	3.0	1	"Gang rivalry disrupts lessons; focus is lost."	Disciplinary records, policy change
Poor academic performance	2.9	2	"Academic focus is lost due to gang involvement."	Dropout records, performance stats
Failure in the examination	2.8	3	"Missed classes for gang meetings harm results."	Remedial class statistics
Disrupt school activities	2.8	3	"Gang fights lead to school closure or activity halt."	Suspension/expulsion data
School dropout	2.8	3	"Continuous trouble leads to expulsion or quitting."	Enrolment and exit records

The qualitative data converged strongly with these findings under the theme Academic Disruption, where participants emphasized loss of concentration and divided attention: *"Gang rivalry disrupts lessons; once there is tension, nobody pays attention to the lecturer."* (Participant 4), "*You are always thinking about your group, so you cannot focus in class."* (Participant 9). Documentary evidence (disciplinary records and policy reports) further validated this pattern by showing repeated incidents of classroom disruptions and institutional responses. This shows that the agreement between quantitative rankings and qualitative narratives indicates that gangsterism significantly undermines academic engagement. While the quantitative data establishes the *extent* of the problem, qualitative insights explain the *mechanisms*, particularly how fear, loyalty, and rivalry reduce students' cognitive focus during lectures. All three approaches confirm that distraction in the lecture room and poor academic outcomes are the most prominent reported influences of gangsterism.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara, Central Nigeria?

Table 3 presents the Triangulation Analysis of Causes of Gangsterism among Undergraduates in Tertiary Education in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

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Table 3: Triangulation Analysis of Causes of Gangsterism among Undergraduates in Tertiary Education in Kwara Central, Nigeria.

Cause	Mean	Rank	Qualitative Themes	Documentary Evidence
Peer influence	3.2	1	"Pressure to belong and impress friends"	Group affiliation reports
Mass media	2.9	2	"Exposure to media glorifying gangs"	Media literacy program records
Individual personality	2.8	3	"Some join for perceived protection or adventure."	Counselling records
Family background	2.8	3	"Broken homes and absent parenting"	Disciplinary and social service
Previous experience of bullying	2.8	3	"Victims of bullying seek protection in gangs."	Bullying incident reports

The results in Table 3 showed the causes of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary education in Kwara Central, Nigeria. Given the weighted mean of 2.9, the quantitative survey data show peer influence as the dominant cause (Mean = 3.2)**.** Mass media as causes of gangsterism is ranked 2nd (Mean= 2.9, SD= 1.0). Therefore, the peer pressure's role is acknowledged both in perception and records of intervention programs as a more powerful source of gangsterism than mass media. Individual personality, family background, and previous experience of bullying each recorded a mean of 2.8, ranking 3rd**,** showing that gangsterism is caused by these factors, but less effective in comparison to peer influence and mass media factors. Qualitative findings strongly confirmed and explained these patterns under the theme Peer Influence Dynamics: *"Most students join because their friends pressure them; they want to belong."* (Participant 3), *"If your close friends are involved, it becomes difficult to stay away."* (Participant 10). Similarly, the influence of mass media was explained qualitatively: *"Movies and music make gang life look attractive and powerful."* (Participant 5). Documentary evidence (group affiliation reports) further supports the central role of peer networks. This implies that the findings demonstrate methodological triangulation, where quantitative data identify peer influence as dominant, and qualitative data explain *why and how* it operates through pressure, identity formation, and the need for belonging. Media influence further reinforces these behaviours by providing symbolic models for imitation.

Research Question 3: What are the preventions to the problems of gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria?

Table 4 presents the Triangulation Analysis of Prevention of gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara State**.**

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Table 4: Triangulation Analysis of Prevention of gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara State

Preventions	Mean	Rank	Qualitative Themes	Documentary Evidence
Gang resistance education & training programs	3.3	1	"Need to include in school curriculum."	Policy drafts, partnership MoUs
Emphasizing the negative effects of substances	3.3	1	"Awareness of substance abuse dangers is crucial."	Anti-drug campaigns, disciplinary records
Engaging youth in community programs	3.3	1	"Keeping youth busy gives them a sense of belonging."	Volunteer, leadership program rosters
Anti-bullying programs	3.3	1	"Reporting systems make schools safer."	Bullying prevention policy adoption
Anti-youth gang education	3.2	2	"Workshops change perceptions about gang life."	Workshop attendance, feedback forms

The results in Table 4 indicate that all the suggested measures are highly accepted as effective preventions to gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria. The highest mean score (3.3) shared by most items shows that respondents strongly agreed that curriculum-based gang resistance education**,** anti-drug sensitization**,** youth engagement in community programs**,** and anti-bullying initiatives are crucial strategies for preventing gangsterism. Anti-youth gang education (Mean = 3.2) ranked 2nd, also reflecting a strong level of agreement, though slightly lower than the others. The weighted mean of 3.3 suggests that respondents generally strongly agreed with the proposed preventive interventions, emphasizing that a multi-dimensional approach involving education, community participation, and behavioural reorientation is vital in preventing gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria. Qualitative data provided rich explanatory support: *"Gang resistance education should be part of the curriculum."* (Participant 1), *"Keeping youths engaged gives them a sense of belonging without joining gangs."* (Participant 9), *"Workshops help students rethink their perception of gang life."* (Participant 4). Documentary evidence, including policy drafts, program records, and workshop feedback, further confirms the implementation and perceived effectiveness of these interventions. This implies that both data strands converge to support a multi-dimensional prevention approach. While quantitative results indicate broad acceptance of interventions, qualitative findings highlight the importance of addressing underlying social needs, such as belonging, identity, and engagement.

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Testing of Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the influence of gangsterism among undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions in Kwara Central, Nigeria, based on school type.

An independent-samples t-test was employed because the study compared the mean scores of two independent groups (undergraduates from private and public tertiary institutions) on a continuous dependent variable (the influence of gangsterism). This test is appropriate when examining whether observed differences between two unrelated groups are statistically significant.

The table below presents the Independent Samples t-test of the Difference in the Perceived Influence of Gangsterism based on school type

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test of the Difference in the Perceived Influence of Gangsterism based on school type

School Type	N	Mean	SD	t(df)	Mean Difference	95% CI of Difference	Cohen's d	P-value	Decision
Private Tertiary Institution	80	15.23	4.14	3.82 (158)	2.75	[1.33, 4.17]	0.63	< 0.005	Reject H_0
Public Tertiary Institution	80	12.48	4.69						

The results indicated a statistically significant difference in the perceived influence of gangsterism between undergraduates in private tertiary institutions (M = 15.23, SD = 4.14) and those in public tertiary institutions (M = 12.48, SD = 4.69), t (158) = 3.82, $p < 0.005$. The mean difference of 2.75 (95% CI [1.33, 4.17]) suggests that undergraduates in private institutions reported a stronger perceived influence of gangsterism than their public institution counterparts. In addition, the effect size, measured using Cohen's d (d = 0.63), indicates a moderate effect, suggesting that the difference is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. Since $p < 0.005$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that school type significantly influences undergraduates' perception of gangsterism, with private tertiary institution undergraduates reporting higher levels.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce and extend existing scholarship on gangsterism among undergraduates, particularly within the Nigerian and global contexts. The triangulated evidence demonstrates that gangsterism significantly disrupts academic engagement, supports multifactorial causation, and requires integrated prevention strategies. First, the findings of the study established that gangsterism has a strong negative influence on students' academic engagement, with

classroom distraction and poor academic performance emerging as the most prominent effects. This finding is consistent with earlier Nigerian studies, such as those by Oluwatobi and Babatunde (2010) and Ali et al. (2014), which linked cultism to declining academic performance and moral decadence. Similarly, it aligns with the findings of Mguzulwa and Gxubane (2019), who reported that gangsterism undermines students' academic commitment and participation. However, the present study advances this body of knowledge by demonstrating the mechanisms through which these effects occur, specifically, how fear, rivalry, and divided attention disrupt cognitive engagement during lectures. This supports the assumptions of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as reviewed by McLeod (2025) that posits that behaviour is learned through interaction with social groups and reinforced through observation and imitation.

Second, the findings of this study identify peer influence as the most dominant cause of gangsterism. This corroborates the findings of Adeniyi and Jinadu (2021) and Maigemu and Adamu (2025), who emphasized peer pressure and social networks as key drivers of gang involvement. The qualitative evidence in this study further explains that the need for belonging and identity formation plays a crucial role in students' decisions to join gangs. This aligns with global perspectives advanced by Howell and Griffiths (2018), who argue that gang involvement is best understood through multi-level frameworks that incorporate peer, community, and structural influences.

The findings of this study also establish the role of mass media, as discussed in earlier findings by Howell (2010) and Akan et al (2024), who linked media exposure to antisocial behaviour. However, the present findings support more recent scholarship by Fernández-Planells et al. (2021), Urbanik and Bucerius (2025), and Pawelz and Elvers (2018), which argues that the media does not act in isolation but rather functions as a platform for identity construction and reinforcement of gang culture. Thus, the study validates the shift from linear media effects to a dynamic interactionist perspective, where peer networks, media environments, and socio-economic realities interact to shape behaviour.

Furthermore, factors such as family background, personality traits, and prior bullying experiences support the propositions of Merton's strain theory as reviewed by Nickerson (2025) that deviant behaviour is a response to unmet social expectations and structural pressures. This aligns with Oyibo's (2020) observations, which highlighted the transformation of confraternities into violent groups. However, the present study goes further by empirically linking these transformations to the social and psychological pressures experienced by students.

In terms of consequences, the findings extend beyond academic disruption to support recent global research by Ducharme (2024) and Bamaiyi and Aliero (2025), which emphasizes the psychological and developmental impacts of gang involvement. The present study's qualitative insights suggest that gangsterism affects not only academic outcomes but also students' emotional stability and sense of security, thereby reinforcing the argument that it should be treated as a public health and developmental issue, as suggested by Mohamed (2025) and Sandhu (2026).

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Regarding prevention, the strong support for multi-dimensional strategies as contained in this study aligns with earlier frameworks proposed by Adamu et al. (2024), which emphasize community anti-gang service, rejuvenation of the youth criminal justice acts, and concentrated investment on the highest needs for the youths. Also, the present study supports more recent integrated approaches, such as those embedded in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) programme, which combine educational, social, and community-based interventions as proposed by the National Gang Center (2021). The findings also resonate with contemporary views that prevention must address underlying needs for belonging, identity, and social inclusion rather than relying solely on punitive measures.

Importantly, the statistically significant difference observed between private and public institutions provides new empirical insight that addresses gaps identified by Mpindo et al. (2025), who noted the lack of depth in comparative institutional analyses. The finding that private institution students reported a stronger perceived influence of gangsterism supports global arguments that institutional climate, rather than ownership type alone, is a critical determinant of gang dynamics. This suggests that factors such as governance structure, student culture, and disciplinary systems may shape the manifestation of gangsterism within institutions.

Overall, the convergence of findings across quantitative, qualitative, and documentary data supports the argument by Frey (2018) and Stuart (2019) that gangsterism should be understood as a product of interacting social forces rather than isolated causes. The study therefore contributes to the literature by integrating classical theories with contemporary perspectives, providing a more comprehensive and contextually relevant understanding of gangsterism among undergraduates in Nigeria.

4.1 Conclusions

This study concludes that gangsterism among undergraduates in Kwara Central, Nigeria, is a significant and multifaceted problem that adversely affects students' academic engagement, institutional stability, and overall development. The findings reveal that gangsterism primarily manifests through disruptions in classroom activities, reduced academic performance, examination failure, and increased likelihood of school dropout. These outcomes demonstrate that gang involvement directly interferes with the core objectives of tertiary education.

The study further establishes that peer influence is the most dominant driver of gangsterism, reinforced by media exposure, while other contributing factors, such as family background, personality traits, and prior experiences of bullying, also play important roles. This indicates that gangsterism is not caused by a single factor but emerges from the interaction of social, psychological, and environmental conditions.

In addition, the study highlights that effective prevention of gangsterism requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach. Strategies such as gang resistance education, anti-drug sensitization, youth engagement programmes, and anti-bullying initiatives were widely supported

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as effective measures. These findings emphasize that addressing gangsterism requires more than disciplinary actions; it involves tackling underlying issues related to identity, belonging, and social support.

The study also reveals a significant difference in the perceived influence of gangsterism between private and public institutions, with higher levels reported among students in private institutions. This suggests that institutional context plays a crucial role in shaping the nature and extent of gangsterism, thereby requiring tailored intervention strategies.

Overall, gangsterism should be understood not merely as a disciplinary problem but as a complex socio-educational and developmental issue that demands coordinated and sustained interventions from institutions, families, and society at large.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Tertiary institutions should integrate structured programmes that educate students on the risks and consequences of gangsterism as part of their academic curriculum.
2. Institutions should establish peer mentoring, student leadership programmes, and peer counselling initiatives to channel peer influence in positive directions.
3. Students should be equipped with critical thinking skills to assess and resist media content that glamorizes gang culture.
4. Universities and polytechnics should expand extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, and community service programmes to provide constructive alternatives for students.
5. Institutions should enforce strict anti-bullying measures, including confidential reporting channels and prompt intervention mechanisms.
6. Adequate counselling units should be established or strengthened to address students' emotional, social, and psychological challenges.
7. Parents and community stakeholders should be actively engaged through awareness campaigns and collaborative initiatives aimed at preventing youth involvement in gangsterism.
8. Each institution should design context-specific policies and programmes based on its unique environment and student population.
9. Clear rules and regulations regarding gang-related activities should be developed and consistently enforced, supported by monitoring and evaluation systems.

10. Future studies should explore longitudinal trends and deeper socio-economic influences to provide more comprehensive insights into gangsterism among undergraduates.

DECLARATION

Data Availability: The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available. However, de-identified and anonymized data may be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. Requests will be assessed based on ethical, legal, and academic integrity standards.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest related to the conception, execution, analysis, or publication of this study. No external commercial, institutional, or personal influences affected the research process.

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Ethics Statement: Due to the sensitive nature of the response for this study, it is a research principle in my institution to present the research instrument to three professors for validation and ensure that the level of confidentiality of respondent information is protected in the course of the conduct of the research.

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