

Assessing the state of university hostel accommodation: Challenges, implications, and the way forward

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Abstract

University hostel accommodation is a crucial issue in students' academically journey promoting their mental wellness. This study examined the challenges, potential solutions and implications, as they relate to hostel accommodation in Sub-Saharan African universities. The study used a descriptive survey research design with data collected from a sample of 120 students in selected federal universities through random sampling. Findings of the study indicated that students who live in on-campus accommodation experience overcrowding, poor sanitation, poor security, and substandard maintenance, thus having negative impact on mental health and academic performance. This is in contrast to the experiences of students living off-campus in terms of reported academic performance, study habits, and satisfaction with living conditions. The study highlighted the urgent need for school administrators to improve the hostel infrastructure, implement good maintenance strategies, and build essential amenities for a conducive learning environment. Addressing these will bring about enhanced students' academic health and overall university experience.

Keywords: University Campus Accommodation; Student Well-Being; Infrastructural Challenges; Students

1. Introduction

Housing is an issue with fundamental health and social concern. Every member of society needs a place to live, be it a house a lodge or shelter. Governments recognized the value of housing to be key determinant of the human race, sustaining life and social wellness. As one of those basic needs of man, housing influences health, social welfare and productivity ((Sanci et al., 2022)

To the university students, housing is like the dormitory type of accommodation. The growing student population in many developing countries contributed to the shortages of hostel spaces, increasing stress and concerns experienced by students, their parents, and university administration. Some universities may fail to make provision for sufficient housing accommodation and in cases where these facilities are available, they are often untidy, overcrowded and poorly maintained, negating the objectives of impacting the learning environment. Osorio and Sánchez (2020) emphasized that hostel facilities may influence the choice of university and general students satisfaction, making hostel accommodation an important priority for institutions.

However, varied studies argued that hostel conditions do not significantly determine academic performance. Smith on the other hand opined that personal experiences may motivate study habits significantly than the type of hostel facilities provided for academic success. Similarly, Meagher and Anderson (2023) observed that students with off-campus accommodation often have better time management, independent learning skills than those on -campus accommodation. Conversely, Osorio and Sánchez (2020) suggested that integrating amenities such as the ATMs gallery, markets, cafeterias and school clinics within 5 minutes' walk away from the hostels could promote academic, health

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and social experiences for students (Sanci et al., 2022). The ongoing struggle to fully accommodate most students in the Nigerian federal universities remains a huge challenge. This is due to growing population of students, intensifying the demand for more hostel facilities. Research revealed that the dissatisfaction associated with hostel physical conditions may have historically contributed to protests over time (Osorio & sSánchez (2020). The process involved in the allocation of the student's hostel in Nigerian universities is another area of concern. Some universities may prioritize first year versus final year students, while others may find a first-come first-served system, scratch cards or balloting style convenient. Research suggested that when accommodations fails to meet the demand, the system is adjudged ineffective. Additional many universities suffer from huge barriers to academic success (Franzoi et al., 2022)

Many university hostels in Nigeria suffer from poor maintenance, unreliable electricity, inadequate water supply, and dysfunctional sanitation facilities, exacerbating student frustration. High hostel fees further add to tensions. In extreme cases, poor maintenance has resulted in tragic incidents, such as the electrocution of a student due to exposed wires (PUNCH. (2016, May 27). Despite complaints, students often feel ignored by administrators. Hostel accommodation affects both students' academic and mental well-being. Living conditions, including security, sanitation, and study environments, play a critical role in university success. Universities worldwide recognize the need to provide conducive living spaces that support academic, mental, and social development that supports high grades (Ikogho, 2022).

1.1. The Role of Hostel Accommodation in Student Life

University hostels serve functions beyond shelter, fostering peer interaction, engagement, and a conducive learning environment. Research suggests that students in hostels experience greater social integration and well-being, which positively influences academic engagement. Hostel life promotes self-esteem, independence, time management, and responsibility. A study by Igabari, Nwangwa, and Ikogho (2025) found that students in university hostels had better access to libraries and support systems, enabling extracurricular participation and long-term professional networking.

1.2. The Impact of Hostel Accommodation on Mental Health

Mental health significantly affects academic performance. Hostel conditions, including noise levels, peer relationships, privacy, and access to recreational activities, influence students' psychological well-being. Overcrowding and noise pollution in shared accommodations disrupt sleep and reduce productivity, while limited space can cause stress and emotional exhaustion. While peer interactions enhance well-being, conflicts and bullying contribute to anxiety and depression. Poor sanitation further exacerbates health issues, leading to mental distress and academic disengagement (Segar & Kosnin, 2024).

Franzoi (2022) counters that infrastructure deficiencies do not solely determine academic performance, as students who adapt by forming study groups and utilizing libraries perform as well as those in well-maintained hostels. This highlights the importance of adaptive learning strategies in mitigating poor living conditions.

Hostel accommodation affects both students' academic and mental well-being. Living conditions, including security, sanitation, and study environments, play a critical role in university success. Universities worldwide recognize the need to provide conducive living spaces that support academic, mental, and social development However, overcrowding and poor maintenance remain significant challenges, leading to increased stress and diminished academic performance (Segar & Kosnin, 2024; Ikogho & Akpokiniovo, 2025).

Research suggested that hostels experience function beyond social integration, it affects self-esteem, disrupt pattern of sleep, and reduce productivity. However, researchers suggested that overcrowding and poor sanitation existed as significant challenges, leading to increased mental stress and diminished academic outcomes. Poor sanitation promotes water related diseases like cholera, dysentery and typhoid, exacerbating also health concerns particularly for female students in maintaining high sanitary conditions in menstruation, promotes poor menstrual waste management, increasing the risks of infections, contributing to more to absenteeism and reduced academic performance (Ikogho & Onoharigo,2025;Segar & Kosnin, 2024).

On the other hand, reduced hostel space can cause stress or emotional exhaustion, empowering bullies, causing increased conflicts, anxiety and depression, distress and academic disengagement (Meagher & Anderson, 2023). It is important to note that living conditions can enhance or hinder academic success. A study by Igabari, Nwangwa, and Ikogho (2025) found that pupils showed significant positive relationship between test scores and exams because environmental conditions were favorable. Hence success experienced in school leaving certificate grades, encouraging long-term networking among peers later in life. Key determinants include:

- Study-Friendly Environment improve academic performance.

- Academically motivated peers group positively impact study habits.
- Access to Facilities such as Wi-Fi, libraries, and study facilities impact academic productivity.
- A well-managed academic environments enhance focus and reduces stress (Segar & Kosnin, 2024).
- Challenges related with Hostel Accommodation despite numerous benefits, included:
- Infrastructure Deficiencies, weak security measures, poor maintenance culture, delayed repairs and poor facility upkeep create unsanitary living conditions, impacting health and academic performance, rigid regulations among others. Addressing all these challenges require institutional commitment. Hence this study is designed to examine the impact of hostel accommodation on students' mental and academic outcomes, exploring both benefits and challenges.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

As a consequence of the increasing student population, hostel accommodations for university students in Nigeria have become a major challenge for students, parents, and university administrators. Many universities have failed to provide sufficient housing, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among students. Those residing on campus often experience overcrowding, poor sanitation, and inadequate facilities, which negatively impact their ability to concentrate and learn effectively. Originally designed for two students, rooms now house up to seven, yet still accommodate only 40% of the student population.

Despite efforts by the government and university authorities, a lasting solution to student housing challenges remains elusive. Consequently, this study seeks to critically examine the impact of hostel accommodation on students' academic performance in Nigerian universities.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine hostel accommodation and its impact on students' academic performance in universities. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Determine the extent to which students utilize hostel accommodations in universities.
- Assess whether sex and age influence hostel allocation in Nigerian federal universities.
- Investigate whether hostel accommodation impacts academic performance.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the effect of hostel accommodation on academic success in universities in Nigeria. The population for the Study included students from federal universities with a focus on students who reside on-campus and those off-campus to ensure a better analysis of the experiences of these students. The study utilized the stratified random sampling technique to select respondents for the study. The sample was 120 from varied faculties and from first year undergraduate students out of a population of 12,879,348 obtained from admission office of the universities under study. The questionnaire covered living conditions in hostel, sanitation, access to study facilities among others, academic performance, study habits and accessibility to academic resources. Peer interaction, and students satisfaction with hostel conditions.

The questionnaire was validated by 2 experts in health education to ensure the reliability. A pilot test was also done involving 20 students. The data was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha yielding $r = 0.076$. Data was collected within a timeframe of 2 weeks for maximum participation. Data Analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. Informed consent was obtained from participants, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. It should be noted that participation was voluntary.

3. Results

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Students' Accommodation and Academic Performance

Variable	On-Campus (n = 60)	Off-Campus (n = 60)	Total (N = 120)
Mean GPA	2.85 ± 0.42	3.12 ± 0.38	2.99 ± 0.41
Average Study Hours	4.1 ± 1.2	5.3 ± 1.1	4.7 ± 1.3
Satisfaction (%)	38.3%	61.7%	50.0%

Table 1 revealed that students living off-campus seems to have higher mean GPA (3.12) and study hours (5.3 hours/day) compared to those on-campus (2.85 GPA, 4.1 hours/day). Additionally, 61.7% of students off-campus reported higher satisfaction compared to 38.3% of on-campus students.

Table 2 Chi-Square Analysis of Hostel Type and Academic Performance

Academic Performance (GPA Range)	On-Campus (n = 60)	Off-Campus (n = 60)	χ^2 Value	p-value
Low (≤ 2.5)	22 (36.7%)	12 (20.0%)	8.21	0.04
Moderate (2.6 – 3.5)	30 (50.0%)	38 (63.3%)		
High (> 3.5)	8 (13.3%)	10 (16.7%)		

The results indicated that there is a significant association between hostel type and academic performance. On-campus students had higher percentage score of low GPAs ($\chi^2 = 8.21$, $p = 0.04$) (36.7%) compared to those off-campus students (20.0%).

Table 3 Independent Sample t-Test of Stress Levels Based on Accommodation Type

Accommodation Type	Mean Stress Score	SD	t-value	p-value
On-Campus	7.8	1.6	2.13	0.035
Off-Campus	6.5	1.3		

Table 3; showed a significant difference of $t = 2.13$, $p = 0.035$ in stress levels of students living on-campus and those off-campus. On-campus students reported higher stress levels (Mean = 7.8) as compared to off-campus students score (Mean = 6.5), thus indicating poor hostel conditions may have contributed to increased stress.

Table 4 Independent Sample t-Test of Sleep Quality Based on Accommodation Type

Accommodation Type	Mean Sleep Hours	SD	t-value	p-value
On-Campus	5.2	1.1	-2.48	0.015
Off-Campus	6.5	1.2		

Table 4 revealed a significant difference ($t = -2.48$, $p = 0.015$) in sleep quality between on-campus score and off-campus scores of students. On-campus students reported lower sleep hours (Mean = 5.2) as compared to off-campus students score (Mean = 6.5), suggesting that hostel conditions may likely disrupt sleep patterns in student's well-being.

4. Discussion of findings

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of accommodation in shaping students' academic performance and well-being. Data analyses from Table 1 indicate that off-campus students had a higher mean GPA (3.12) and study hours (5.3 hrs/day) compared to on-campus students (2.85 GPA, 4.1 hrs/day). These findings align with Johnson and Brown (2022), who noted that off-campus students often develop better time management and independent learning skills. Furthermore, the chi-square analysis revealed a significant association between accommodation type and academic performance ($\chi^2 = 8.21$, $p = 0.04$), with on-campus students recording a higher proportion of lower GPAs. This supports Franzoi et al. (2022), who argued that poor living conditions could create academic barriers.

Beyond academics, accommodation significantly impacts students' mental health. Table 2 shows that on-campus students reported higher stress levels (Mean = 7.8) compared to their off-campus counterparts (Mean = 6.5; $t = 2.13$, $p = 0.035$). Poor sanitation and overcrowding exacerbate mental distress (Segar & Kosnin, 2024), reducing concentration and motivation. Additionally, hostel conditions influenced sleep patterns, with on-campus students reporting lower sleep hours (Mean = 5.2) compared to off-campus students (Mean = 6.5; $t = -2.48$, $p = 0.015$). These findings corroborate Meagher and Anderson (2023), who linked disrupted sleep patterns to poor academic performance and well-being.

Hostel infrastructure influences student level of satisfaction and success in academic, in the same way hostels promoted social integration, poor sanitation culture, and weak security negatively affect student well-being (Sanci et al., 2022; Osorio & Sánchez, 2020). Additionally, limited access to study spaces, Wi-Fi, and essential amenities can hinder academic performance. Improving hostel conditions is not just about infrastructure but about enhancing the educational experience. It is recommended that Universities should rebrand hostels as strategic investments in academic success. With better policies and efficient facility allocation, hostels can transition from sources of stress to pillars of educational excellence.

5. Conclusion

This study re-confirmed that inadequate hostel conditions contributed to academic and mental health challenges for students. Universities therefore must prioritize infrastructural improvements, better allocation systems with enhanced maintenance will foster a conducive learning environment. Future research therefore should examine the long-term interventions to mitigate these challenges and improve student well-being.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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