

Factors influencing student's accommodation selection

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Abstract:

Selecting accommodation for occupancy is challenging as various factors are considered by the occupier to achieve maximum satisfaction from the premises. The study's objective was to identify the factors considered by tertiary students when selecting their off-campus accommodation. A quantitative approach was adopted for the study, using closed and open-ended questionnaires to collect data from conveniently selected 98 off-campus tertiary students from the University of the Free State. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to calculate the frequencies and percentages for the data collected. Data were collected from only off-campus students at the University of the Free State; albeit, the findings may be applicable in other similar settings. The results indicate that the most significant factors influencing students' accommodation selection are the safety of the premises, the apartment's rental value, the inclusion of furniture in the rooms, facilities available at the apartment, proximity to lecture halls, and privacy. Other new and emerging factors identified are Wi-Fi availability, the inclusion of water and electricity in the rent, gender-based accommodation, rules and regulations given to students, freedom, and a big yard for the dogs. There is an urgent need for private developers to be aware of contemporary students' needs and incorporate them in developing students' accommodation for their businesses' sustenance. Again, in assessing and approving off-campus housing for student usage, the authorities should be guided by these factors in the approval processes to ensure occupants' satisfaction.

Keywords: Accommodation, factors, off-campus, selection, students

1 Introduction

Housing is, without any doubt, a basic need of humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines housing (accommodation) as a shelter used by humankind that consists of the neighbourhood, environment when looking at residential aspects, or the structure and the environment of the built structure. It also includes necessities in the form of facilities and services required for the physical health and the social wellbeing of the occupants (Bondinuba et al., 2013). In various developed and developing countries globally, student enrollment growth in higher education institutions (Universities) has surpassed universities' ability to provide adequate accommodation to students, which leads to accommodation becoming more expensive for students (Ackermann and Visser, 2016). Studentification can be explained as a series of social, environmental, economic, and physical practices whereby many students move into a particular area of the city or town where the desired universities are situated. This happens because the students want to be closer to the selected institution, student atmosphere, student resources, and activities without physically residing on the universities' grounds (Smith, 2007).

South Africa is a developing country with good quality infrastructure and significant socio-economic problems (Layne, 2020). However, student accommodation's financial aspect has

been of great concern for a majority of students worldwide. All the universities in South Africa heavily rely on private investors to provide student housing around the University's campus periphery to augment the accommodation shortfalls (Bondinuba et al., 2013). These accommodations situated outside the universities' perimeters are termed off-campus student accommodation, mainly privately owned; therefore, rates cannot be regulated by either the government or university management to ensure uniformity (Bondinuba et al., 2013). Since the rental amount regulation and the standard of the private developer's infrastructure are not under the government and university authorities' arm pit, there should be a basis for a student to select among these off-campus housing. According to Ackermann and Visser (2016), variables such as accommodation quality, satisfaction, location, type of structure, availability, etc., may motivate occupant's choice of accommodation. A study by Lockyer (2002) identified factors such as hotel cleanliness, bathroom and shower quality, room maintenance, the comfort of mattress and pillow as the primary determinant of choosing a hotel by business guests. On the other hand, Tsang and Qu (2000) also focused on service quality in hotels in China by concentrating on tourists who use the hotel. More recently, Simpeh and Shakantu (2020) studied how on-campus prioritize the service available in their houses.

It is thus evident that many studies have focused on the factors considered in selecting accommodation among occupants and guests for hotel facilities and the prioritization of facilities available. This study concentrates on students at tertiary institutions and investigates the main determinants for choosing off-campus accommodation as they pay a substantial amount for the residences. The research focuses on students at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The study's outcome may also alert private developers on accommodation attributes considered significant by student occupants to guide future development.

2 Literature review

2.1 The concept of housing

The field of studying housing is a multi-faceted field with varied regions of interest. By looking at housing in a multi-faceted aspect, it is one of the crucial basic needs of a given individual and/or family in any society (Ghani and Suleiman, 2016). Houses are frequently built at a low density and cannot establish the required limits to support a city's functions effectively. Settlements are inappropriately located when accessing socio-economic facilities (Massyn et al., 2015). Due to the low efficient demand for housing at market-related costs by the low-class income to middle-class income households, the final costs of the houses being developed are mostly less than the costs and the profits needed to develop the housing (Massyn et al., 2015). Due to this, less housing is developed in the inner parts of cities in South Africa. Any idea directed towards increasing residential developments within the inner cities must consider the factors that drive the costs of the developments (Massyn et al., 2015).

Therefore, the concept of value versus cost is fundamental when planning a development, whether it be for low-, middle- or high-class income housing. The connection between value and cost is significant to determine and understand the type of development that will be taking place, when it will happen and what form the development will take. Therefore, a feasibility study must be conducted to evaluate the interaction between the value and cost (value vs. cost) of a development (Massyn et al., 2015). A house is of utmost importance to humans, leading to feeling secure and safe against external physical elements. It aids in leading a productive, happy, and fulfilling life to reach high living standards and modern times. Housing should not merely be a structure designed for shelter and protection but should include all the social

services and values that make the neighbourhood and/or community a habitable environment (Ghani and Suleiman, 2016). By furthering this perspective on modern time housing, Ghani and Suleiman (2016) opined that in the contemporary time, housing is supposed to include some basic infrastructure facilities, including the provision of clean water, sanitary facilities, and fittings, electricity, a kitchen, basic services, sewerage and drainage, and road access to be considered a house.

Housing has a substantial impact on humans in both positive and negative ways. Accessing healthy housing is crucial for living healthy and vital to social conduct, equity, efficiency, and the community's general welfare. Housing has a heavy influence on the community and the poor's general welfare, health, and social conduct; improper housing can lead to stress, health problems, and depression within a community and/or individual (Ghani and Suleiman, 2016). With the increasing wealth and high life expectations in developed and developing countries, the focus has been on raising housing quality and standards. This influence has led to the changing housing definition over time from only a shelter to a more thorough and clear description; a structure offers a combination of infrastructure facilities and services (Ghani and Suleiman, 2016). In a study done by Elsinga and Hoekstra (2005) concerning housing satisfaction among European communities, it was revealed that except Austria, tenants are discontent compared to homeowners since freedom and finances are derived from homeownership. Housing provision in South Africa has focused on providing ownership housing at the cost of other forms of occupancy and housing types. It assumes that people stay close to the area in which they work (Poulsen, 2010).

2.2 Housing satisfaction and selection factors

Satisfaction measures the difference between consumers' actual and anticipated needs (Kobue et al., 2017). According to Amole (2009), satisfaction is highly instrumental in housing evaluation as it indicates success level, determines user's happiness and identifies an exasperating aspect of living environment and user's future environmental responses. Again, it also assists in identifying factors contributing to satisfaction, differences among identified factors, and the relationships between various residential environments. Besides, satisfaction plays an essential part in determining a person's life quality, happiness, and wellbeing (Hammad et al., 2013; Muslim et al., 2012). Previous studies have proposed various models to measure living satisfaction; one such model is the neighbourhood and dwelling context (Azadeh et al., 2016). Adedeji (2011) suggests that a persons' satisfaction and loyalty levels are highly related because satisfied customers are loyal compared to dissatisfied customers. According to Kobue et al. (2017), students always look for accommodation that meets their needs and expectations, including the residence location. Students prefer to stay in residence near the school, where public transport is easily accessible and the neighbourhood suitable for effective learning (Kobue et al., 2017). Residence satisfaction is a necessity for only the occupants (students) but their visitors and all those accessing the building for business purposes (Mohit et al., 2010). Thus, appropriate conditions in student's residences are key indicative factors for personal wellbeing and performance. This is because building functions is vital for owners and occupants as it may measure their satisfaction. Therefore, it can be deduced that influencing factors for occupancy choice will subsequently determine the level of satisfaction. Kobue et al. (2017) opine that there should be unrestricted room for creativity and innovation in developing student accommodation to cater to their needs sufficiently.

Some studies in the United States concerning student accommodations have shown that students are becoming more particular regarding accommodation quality and convenience, including the accessibility of facilities such as laundry rooms, computer labs, and gymnasiums

within the premises (Najib et al., 2011). According to Kobue et al. (2017), there is enough evidence showing that staying in a professionally managed residence, harmless, and safe residences has social and academic advantages, especially for the new students with poor backgrounds. This is because they are susceptible at this stage due to their unfamiliarity with the new environment. Decent, affordable, and well-maintained student accommodation may be a conduit for students to concentrate on their academic works, thus improving their academic success probability (Kobue et al., 2017). Kenna (2011) states that environmental settings encourage expressive tertiary experience, and students' academic performance depends on their place of abode. The Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) students living experiences are different due to the variety of housing and environment options available (Kobue et al., 2017). Thus housing occupant's satisfaction level influences their accommodation selection. Various studies have come with different factors occupants consider in selecting accommodation. Khozaei et al. (2010), on the other hand, stated convenience in terms of walking distance to lecture halls and being able to return to the residence to bath in-between lectures. Other factors such as accommodation fee, proximity to lecture halls, availability of electricity and water, and calm and peaceful environment have been identified as the main determinants for student's accommodation selection (Atkinson, 1988; Mahama et al., 2016; Oyetunji and Abidoye, 2016; Zortovie, 2017; and Adama et al., 2018). Therefore, it is undeniable that what influences people to choose a dwelling place differs depending on the satisfaction expected and preferences.

3 Methodology

A quantitative research approach was used for this study. According to Goertzen (2017), the findings generated from quantitative research uncover trends and not the reason behind the trends. Using a quantitative approach provided an opportunity to narrow down and filter responses from many respondents regarding the factors they consider in selecting off-campus student accommodation. Convenient sampling was used for the study. Convenient sampling is a non-probability sampling in which respondents are selected from the target population readily available as sources for research data (Blumberg et al., 2008). Thus, any off-campus students staying in a rented hostel and readily available to answer the questionnaire were included in the study. A questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect quantitative data. The data from a quantitative survey is widely used to explain behaviours, opinions, and predictions (Naoum, 2007). The study used closed-ended and open-ended questions where the respondents had to tick the applicable answer and express their opinions. The closed-ended questions related to demographic features and other questions relating to their accommodation (see Tables 1 to 5). The open-ended question was about the factors respondents consider in selecting the accommodation (see Table 6). Open-ended questions were used for the main research objective to allow the respondents to decide on the appropriate answer without being forced to choose an answer (Creswell, 2014). Due to COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing rules, the questionnaires were distributed via the survey monkey platform. The link to the questionnaire was sent to the respondents through WhatsApp or email. The researcher gave the respondents a week to fill in the questionnaire.

The research ethics clearance was received from the University of the Free State ethics committee before data collection. The collected data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to translate and process the data into functional and individual explanatory parts to support the study's objectives. The data was firstly encoded, and errors and outliers were detected. Frequencies and percentages for the respondent's responses were generated. According to Blumberg et al. (2008), frequencies and percentages are basic statistics that are not difficult to interpret and can present qualitative and quantitative data. The data was then be presented using tables.

3.1 Respondent's demographic information:

From Table 1, the respondents' demographic features indicate that the majority (65%) of the students are female students. Also, most of the students (89%) are between 18 and 25 years, indicating that they are within the school-going age; most of them are the third (47%) and fourth (29%) years. Also, 96% of the students study on a full-time basis, whilst 73% of them are unemployed.

Table 1: Respondents demographic features

Nature of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage	Nature of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Current level of education		
Male	34	35%	First-year	9	9%
Female	64	65%	Second-year	8	8%
Total	98	100%	Third-year	46	47%
Age			Honours	29	30%
18 - 25	87	89%	Masters	0	0%
26 - 30	11	11%	PhD	0	0%
31 - 40	0	0%	Total		
40 and over	0	0%	Employment Status		
Total	98	100%	Unemployed	72	73%
Type of student			Working on a part-time basis	21	21%
Part-time Student	4	4%	Fully employed	5	5%
Full-time Student	94	96%	Total	98	100%
Total	98	100%			

4 Findings

4.1 Respondents accommodation selection procedures

The purpose of this question was to determine whether the respondents chose their accommodation or if the universities did the accommodation placements on behalf of the students, leading to the respondents having no choice in their accommodation selection. This will influence the students' satisfaction because they must be satisfied with what is provided and cannot search for better accommodation. The findings to question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents' accommodation placement

Who chose the respondent's student accommodation?	Frequency	Percentage
Respondent (I) chose	98	100%
The institution chose	0	0%
Total	98	100%

Table 2 reveals that 100% of the respondents chose their accommodation. This implied that most respondents (students) had to look at various factors and consider them in selecting the accommodation.

4.4 Facilities available at the respondents' accommodation

The purpose of this question was to determine the facilities available at the respondent's off-campus accommodation to decide which facilities are more and less freely available to students. The findings to question are indicated in Table 5. Table 5 reveals that 100% of respondents have water and electricity available, 98% have a bath or shower. This shows that all respondents have water and electricity freely available at their accommodation. Most

respondents (87%) have study desks in their rooms. Computer facilities are not freely available at all accommodations as only 24% have computer facilities available. The remaining 76%, therefore, must obtain their own computers or only work on campus. Most of the residences have kitchen appliances such as kitchen sink, stove/ hotplate, kitchen cupboards, microwave, washers, dryers, and kettle. Gym facilities are only available to 4% of the respondent, making it a very scarce facility within the student accommodation. Alarm systems are only available to 35% of the respondents. Shuttle services are also only available to 6% of the respondents, making them walk to class or use their transportation.

Table 5. Available facilities at respondents' accommodation

Available Facilities	No of respondents	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Water and Electricity	98	98	100%	1 st
Bath/ Shower	98	96	98%	1 st
Built-in cupboards	98	90	92%	2 nd
Study desk in the room	98	87	89%	3 rd
Kitchen sink	98	86	88%	4 th
Stove/ hotplate	98	84	86%	5 th
Wi-Fi (Wireless Internet)	98	84	86%	5 th
Kitchen cupboards	98	82	84%	6 th
Microwave	98	76	78%	7 th
Washers and dryers	98	72	73%	8 th
Kettle	98	69	70%	9 th
Furnished rooms	98	58	59%	10 th
Garage facility	98	45	46%	11 th
Communal Garden	98	43	44%	12 th
Dining hall/ room	98	41	42%	13 th
Alarm Systems	98	34	35%	14 th
Study Room	98	26	27%	15 th
Computer facilities	98	24	24%	16 th
Just a bed provided by the institute	98	21	21%	17 th
Air Conditioning	98	20	20%	18 th
Shuttle services	98	6	6%	19 th
Gym facilities	98	4	4%	20 th

4.5 Factors considered by the respondents when choosing an accommodation

This question aimed to determine the main factors the respondents considered to ensure their satisfaction when they choose the accommodation. The findings to question are indicated in Table 6. Table 6 reveals that 22.3% of the respondents considered safety when choosing student accommodation, 4.1% considered gender-based accommodation, and 10.6% took proximity to lecture halls into consideration. Fourteen percent (14%) considered the nature of the structure, 16.8% the rental value of the apartment, 11.4% facilities available at the apartment, 4.4% friends' companionship. Again, 14.5% considered the inclusion of furniture in the rooms, 10.1% considered privacy, 0.5% considered Wi-Fi availability, availability of water, electricity, and considered whether water and electricity are included in the rent, respectively. Also, 0.3% considered rules and regulations provided to students, how modern the place is, freedom, and a big yard for dogs into consideration, respectively.

Table 6. Main factors that are taken into consideration by respondents when choosing accommodation

Main factors considered in accommodation selection	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Safety	86	22.2%	1 st
The rental value of the apartment	65	16.8%	2 nd
The inclusion of furniture in the rooms (e.g., desk, bed, cupboard, etc.)	56	14.4%	3 rd
Facilities available at the apartment	44	11.3%	4 th
Proximity to lecture halls	41	10.6%	5 th
Privacy	39	10.1%	6 th
Friends companionship	17	4.4%	7 th
Gender-based accommodation	16	4.1%	8 th
The nature of the structure	14	3.6%	9 th
Availability of Wi-Fi	2	0.5%	10 th
Availability of electricity and water, and Wi-Fi	2	0.5%	10 th
Electricity and water included in the rent	2	0.5%	10 th
Rules and regulations given to students	1	0.3%	11 th
How modern the place is	1	0.3%	11 th
Freedom	1	0.3%	11 th
Big yard for the dogs	1	0.3%	11 th

5 Discussion of the Findings

5.1 Factors to consider in selecting student's accommodation

The factors considered by respondents in choosing their accommodation have been identified in table 6 and ranked in order of importance. Kobue et al. (2017) state that satisfaction factors have vast influences on student's occupancy choices as they seek accommodation that meets their needs and expectations. Security is ranked high as a factor considered when choosing accommodation. It is a requirement and priority to ensure student's safety when residing in student accommodation, especially privately-owned student accommodation. Mahama et al.'s (2016) study in Nigeria states that hostel security has become the most significant factor among students when choosing off-campus housing due to increased social vices among university students. Adama et al. (2018) also opined that occupants are concerned chiefly about their safety when renting or buying apartments. Accommodation safety and security have also been identified as a priority among occupants even in the hospitality industry (Weaver and Oh, 1993; Lockyer and Roberts, 2009). It has been argued by Kobue et al. (2017) that harmless and safe residence is academically and socially advantageous to especially newly admitted students as they are vulnerable at that stage; thus, they look for a secured environment in selecting where to stay.

The second student consideration factor in selecting accommodation is the rental value. This is not surprising as the students pay for the rent themselves. Even where the student has a bursary, the student looks for affordability to save some of the money for other necessary needs. In Adama et al. (2018), the result indicated that accommodation fee was the first consideration in selecting hostel apartments by the students. Again Oyetunji and Abidoye (2016) identified rental value as the second and third factor in choosing accommodation, respectively. The inclusion of furniture in the rooms (e.g., desk, bed, and cupboard) was considered a factor in selecting the apartment. This finding defies literature as various studies have not identified this as a factor considered by accommodation occupants. Although Lockyer and Roberts (2009)

mentioned kitchen facilities as the second factor considered by tenants in rented accommodation, they were no specifics regarding the desk and bed availability. Again, Zortovie (2017) and Adama et al. (2018) mentioned the availability of study areas as the fourth factor in selecting accommodation by students in their study; it might not have been related to room-specific but a general study area within the complex. Thus this finding may be a new trend in student accommodation selection criteria.

Factors such as facilities available at the apartment, proximity to lecture halls, privacy were also considered among the top six. Therefore, it is not surprising that most (77%) of the students stay in a single room (see table 4). This finding is also in line with Adama et al.'s (2018) findings, where the need for privacy was ranked the 3rd factor. Proximity to lecture halls has also been considered a topmost priority in selecting student's hostels. According to Kobue et al. (2017), students prefer staying near the school for learning convenience. A study by Oyetunji and Abidoye (2016) and Zortovie (2017) identified hostel proximity to campus as the first factor considered by the students in selecting accommodation. Khozaei et al. (2010) suggest that students prefer to shower in-between lectures; thus, they prefer to stay off-campus hostels where they could quickly go and shower and return for the following lecture. Again, Najib et al. (2011) suggest that students in the United States search for computer labs, laundry rooms, and gymnasiums within the apartments where they stay for convenience; these facilities influence where they choose to stay. It is therefore not surprising for the study's respondents to state this as the 4th factor. Again Lockyer and Roberts (2009) state that outdoor facilities (swimming pool, spa, gymnasiums) are highly sought after by occupants and consider them when selecting accommodation. According to Adama et al. (2018), the availability of other necessary facilities within the premises was considered an essential factor in choosing a student hostel.

Water and electricity availability was not considered among the topmost consideration for accommodation selection in this study, contrary to the study of Mahama et al. (2016); Zortovie (2017), and Adama et al. (2018) in Nigeria, where students ranked this factor 2nd, 6th, and 7th respectively. This may be because students in South Africa consider water and electricity as basic services readily available in the cities, unlike Nigeria; thus, they value these services as not critical in selecting a place to stay. This is supported by the findings in Table 5, where all respondents confirmed the availability of water and electricity at their apartments. Friend's companionship was also stated as a significant factor in selecting accommodation. Students want to be closed to their friends; thus, they intend to look for apartments where their friends stay. This factor was also identified by Adama et al. (2018), where the desire to be closed to friends was stated as a determinant factor. With regards to the modernity of the place, a study by Oyetunji and Abidoye (2016) identified similar factor in their research, where students cited the type of dwelling as a factor they consider in selecting hostels, whilst Adama et al. (2018) identified aesthetics (beauty) of building as a factor considered in hostel selection. It has been argued that a decent and well-maintained student accommodation allows students to concentrate on their academic activities because it reduces a situation where they have to follow up on default issues and thus enhance their academic success (Kobue et al., 2017).

5.2 New trend of student's accommodation selection factors

It is interesting to know that there is an emerging trend in the factors considered by the student in deciding on off-campus accommodation. These emerging factors are Wi-Fi availability, the inclusion of water and electricity in the rent, gender-based housing, rules and regulations given to students, freedom, and a big yard for the dogs. The Wi-Fi facility's consideration is also a new emerging factor considered by the students before selecting off-campus accommodation.

Note that internet services are now becoming a tool for tertiary studies in the developing world; thus, students rely on it for many school-related activities. Since data is expensive for them, they will rather prefer to stay where internet services are freely available. According to Kenna (2011), there is a correlation between facilities available within students' hostels and students' academic performance; thus, where internet services are freely available, students will use them to enhance their learning strategies. As a result of increasing water and electricity, modern students will now prefer to rent accommodation that includes electricity and water in the rental value. This may prevent a situation whereby they have to think about the water and electricity bills they need to pay as they use these services daily. Gender-based as a factor for accommodation selection is rarely found in the literature. Students now consider whether the accommodation is earmarked for either males or females before deciding to rent. This may be due to the recent increase in gender-based violence; thus, staying where only, for example, females are allowed may reduce the probability of being attacked. The property owners' rules and regulations are also becoming a deciding factor in accommodation selection. Perhaps, students want freedom; thus, any rules in the tenancy agreement that restrict them from exercising their liberty may discourage them from renting that apartment. According to (Najib et al., 2011), students are now looking for accommodation convenience; thus, an unfriendly environment may discourage them from staying. Again, concerning a spacious yard to accommodate pets, it was surprising for a student to use this as a factor for accommodation selection. Usually, pets are not allowed in the apartment. Perhaps a student may decide to rent a whole house, thus making this a selection factor. In a study by Adama et al. (2018) and Lockyer and Roberts (2009), respondents mentioned spacious and well-ventilated rooms as a factor for accommodation selection; however, their finding is different from this study's findings as the current factor refers to the size of the entire compound but not just a room.

6 Conclusion and recommendation

As a result of an increased number of students yearning to study in tertiary institutions in South Africa, the government and the university authorities struggle to meet the students' on-campus accommodation requirements. Having realized the student accommodation shortages, private developers have taken advantage of developing residences around the universities' periphery. Students thus heavily rely on these off-campus accommodations to meet their needs. However, as private developers aimed at making a profit, students have to pay a hefty amount to secure a place within any of these residences. This study looked into what students consider before deciding on the accommodation to rent. The findings revealed the top six factors students consider in selecting any off-campus housing as safety, the rental value of the apartment, the inclusion of furniture in the rooms (e.g., Desk, bed, cupboard, etc.), facilities available at the apartment, proximity to lecture halls and privacy. Besides these factors, the study identified a new trend of accommodation selection factors hardly found in the related literature. These factors are Wi-Fi availability, water and electricity availability in the rent, gender-based accommodation, rules and regulations given to students, freedom, and a big yard for the dogs. These findings imply that, aside from traditional accommodation selection factors, modern students consider other factors that may challenge the private developers to meet these new factors in the future development to sustain their businesses. Based on the findings, it is recommended that off-campus accommodation developers should consider incorporating these new factors in future housing development to attract students into their apartments. Private developers may have to research students to ascertain their needs and requirements before any students' accommodation development and incorporate them in the developmental process for their businesses' sustenance. As more and more developers enter the property market, the competition increases; thus, developers who can meet the tenants' demand will suffice.

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