



QUALITY OF PRIVATE ACCOMMODATION FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract:

Does quality of accommodation matter for academic excellence among undergraduate students in a public university? Does the emerging alternative accommodation provided by private investors maintain quality standards favorable for high academic performance? These questions formed the core of this study which was based on Education Production Function model. Adopting a descriptive survey design, the study targeted 30,339 students living in the private hostels around Kenyatta University. Questionnaires were administered to a total of 395 undergraduate students sampled using stratified and random sampling techniques, and one director of student affairs purposively selected. In addition, 10 Private Accommodation Providers (PAPs) as well as the director of accommodation services, having been purposively selected, were interviewed. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis revealed that 58.3% of hostels had poor quality sanitary facilities and 65.4% of hostels did not have internet connectivity. Further, a statistically significant positive correlation ($p=.008$) exists between adequacy of the room and academic performance of students. The study recommends that the University engages more private developers in a public private partnership in the development of more hostels, direct more resources through social responsibility towards improving the infrastructure in areas with high student population and offer PAPs training on ideal student accommodation.

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1. Introduction

Accommodation is an educational input whose quality matters for academic performance among university students. Nevertheless, the effect of private student accommodation on the academic performance of undergraduate students is of great concern. This study shed light on the quality of accommodation facilities in private hostels around public universities in Kenya and the plight of the undergraduate students who have to rent them. The study assessed the effect of accommodation on students' educational output. The findings inform policy makers on strategies that can be put in place to improve the status quo. There has been a lot of concern about private accommodation for undergraduate students (Gisesa, 2012). However, very little research has been done on the living conditions of university students staying in private accommodation facilities. This paper attempts to guide university management on how to enhance quality of students' academic life, inform policy-makers on the status of private accommodation facilities, and sensitize private accommodation providers on students' requirements in relation to accommodation and alert students on the importance of seeking appropriate accommodation.

Against this background the purpose of this study was to establish the status of private accommodation facilities with the aim of recommending intervention measures that would improve these facilities. Therefore, the research objective guiding this study is to establish the effect of private student accommodation on the students' academic life.

2. Literature review

2.1 An overview of Private Hostel Accommodation

Housing is both a basic human need and a fundamental human right. The universal declaration of human rights of 1948 recognizes the right to adequate housing as an important component to the right to adequate standard of living (Olima & Onyango, unpublished). Private accommodation refers to the location in which university students reside while learning at the university. These residential places are outside the university and are owned by private entrepreneurs. The study may also refer to the private accommodation facilities as private hostels. These are establishments that do not belong to the university that provide food and lodging for a group of university students.

In the United Kingdom, a student living in the private residential halls views it as part of their overall student experience (University of Westminster, 2012). University of Westminster recognizes its partnership with private sector accommodation as a vital one. Therefore, the University insists that the landlords take the welfare of the students seriously. Some of the facilities available in the University's halls of residence include, campus restaurant, coin-operated laundry, CCTV, large television/common room, car park and shared kitchens (University of Westminster, 2012). Whereas the study above

shows what students in the United Kingdom valued in relation to accommodation facilities, this study sought to investigate the adequacy of the private hostels for KU undergraduate students in terms of what these hostels offer and the facilities that students looked for in their choice of hostels.

Sirgy, Grzeskowiak and Rahtz (2005) study on the quality of college life of students in three universities in the USA found that quality of college life may be influenced by satisfaction with college facilities. Of importance to the students is the quality of housing, maintenance, security, location and dorm activities. Most residential halls are much closer to campus than private housing such as apartment buildings. This convenience is a major factor in the choice of where to live since living physically closer to classrooms is often preferred, particularly for first-year students who may not be permitted to park vehicles on campus. Universities may, therefore, provide priority to first-year students when allocating this accommodation. Halls located away from University facilities sometimes have extra amenities such as a recreation room. As with campus located residential halls, these off-campus halls commonly also have Internet facilities, either through a network connection in each student room, a central computer cluster room, or Wi-Fi. They may also contain basic kitchen facilities for student use outside catering hours. Most halls contain a laundry room. The above study indicates that hostel facilities in the USA and UK seem to be of high standards and so this study explored how the situation is in the private accommodation facilities for the KU undergraduate students.

The phenomena of commercial off-campus students housing across Nigeria public University has been stimulated by student explosion and prevailing lull in on-campus student housing development. Although in respect to federal institutions there is an open awareness of the federal withdrawal of its financial support to hostel services, University of Nigeria realizes that any institution that does not care about where students live may produce students of questionable character. Kenyan public universities de-linking accommodation services with academic programmes led to the phenomena of commercial off-campus students housing like in Nigeria. This study looked at how the delinking of accommodation services affected the undergraduate students living in the private accommodation facilities.

Kwesiga and Ahikire (2006) study on student access and equity in a reforming university, Makerere in the 1990s and beyond, noted that major reforms have taken place in Ugandan higher education leading to increased enrolment. However, the apparent gains have been off-set by lack of necessary investment in facilities with resulting problems of over-crowding and falling standards. At Makerere University, all the halls and hostels host a population of about 5000 resident undergraduates and 100 graduate students i.e. only 16% of students registered at the University (Makerere University, 2011). The rest of the students reside outside the campus either in private hostels or commute from homes. Private hostels provide their own security arrangements for the students they accommodate. The Uganda police force patrol also provides extra security both within and outside the campus (Makerere University, 2011). Access to University education in Kenya has also increased over fifty per cent of the undergraduate students

stay in private hostels. Kwesiga and Ahikire (2006) notes that the apparent gain in enrolment have led to falling academic standards due to lack of necessary investment in facilities. This prompted the researcher to investigate the status of the private hostels and how the gains made in increased enrolment have affected the students' academic life.

2.2 Effect of Private Accommodation on the Educational Output of University Students

Kenyatta University strives to provide quality education as indicated in its mission statement. This can only be achieved if her students have high quality education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all. As noted earlier, the number of public universities has increased, so as to improve access to higher education. This has resulted in a trade-off between improved access and compromised quality. Sifuna (2006) in a study on the Governance of public Universities observed that the decline in examination performance is partly attributed to the poor quality in educational experience brought about by the increased enrolments. He further points out that the high number of admissions has not been matched with the provision of teaching facilities and resources especially lecture halls and halls of residence. The effect of private accommodation facilities on the educational output of the students therefore, needed to be examined.

Mwinzi's (2002) study on the impact of cost sharing policy on the living conditions of students in Kenyan public universities, the case of Nairobi and Moi universities, looked at the phenomenon of university students involvement in income-generating activities (IGA) on campus as a response to cost sharing. The respondents pointed out that the engagement of students in trading activities in their hostels interrupted their attention on their studies and the required academic environment. The study found that these activities are not only time-consuming but some are rather immoral and anti-social like drug peddling and cohabiting. Some students were involved in cooking as an IGA and this posed danger to them due to electricity overload. This study sought to find out if there are any activities carried out in the private hostels and what effect they have on the students' academic output.

Mamman (2011) carried out a comparative study of the effect of on-campus and off-campus accommodation and other facilities on students' academic performance. The study identifies some advantages of on-campus accommodation. The findings revealed that a significant relationship exists between the type of accommodation and the students' academic performance. The diet, health, amount of sleep, comfortable shelter and sense of security a student has directly affects his ability to function at his full potential. Sicut and Panganiban (2009) appreciate that adequate housing in schools gives rise to comprehension and encourages positive learning outcomes. A clean and comfortable environment definitely gives an individual a lot of psychological satisfaction and hence there was need to study the status of the private hostels so as to find out how they affect the students' academic output.

Adequate hostel accommodation gives rise to improved productivity especially for students in tertiary institutions (Agboola, Olatulara & Alabi, 2001). Thus, for students

to concentrate on their studies, comfortable hostels are a necessity. This in turn eventually leads to the internal efficiency of an institution. According to Wesonga in Mwiria et al., (2007), a university's physical facilities ultimately affect the quality of an individual student's experience. Wesonga in Mwiria et al., (2007) further observes that most Daystar University students have to commute due to lack of adequate accommodation facilities and this limits the degree to which they can utilize the University facilities. Therefore, this study investigated how well KU undergraduate students living in the private hostels utilize the university facilities like the post-modern library which remains open until midnight.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method approach. A mixed methods approach is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Further, a convergent parallel mixed method research design as proposed by Creswell (2014) was used. This made it possible to describe the state of student accommodation outside university halls of residence (Wisker, 2001). This kind of design aims to find out more about a phenomenon without manipulation of variables and captures it with detailed information. The study was conducted in KU and focused on the private hostels. KU being a leading public university provided good representation of public university students experience in private hostels. The target population for this study was 30,332 undergraduate students at Kenyatta University who were accommodated in private hostels. The students were scattered in 10 private hostels within the estates neighbouring the university (KU data section, 2013). Using a formula developed by Israel (2009), out of the 30,332 students who resided in the private hostels, 395 of them were sampled as shown in Table 1.

Stratified random sampling was used. The 30,332 students were categorized by year of study into 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year and 4th year, and by gender. This ensured gender differentiation. Simple random sampling was used to select the students.

Purposive sampling was used to select ten hostel PAPs and KU director for accommodation services. Six PAPs were for the male hostels and four for the female hostels. According to Mugenda (2003), purposive sampling technique allows a researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to his or her study.

This study used three types of research instruments: questionnaires for students, interview schedules for PAPs and the Director of Accommodation services as well as an observation guide. The researcher used questionnaires to collect data from the students as they are appropriate in descriptive survey where the number of respondents is high (Orodho, 2005). On the other hand, interview schedules are considered appropriate when the sample is small since a researcher is able to get more information from respondents than when using a questionnaire (Keith & Bloomsquist, 1985).

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Overall Assessment of the Adequacy of the Hostels for the Students

Adequacy of the hostels means that the hostels are good enough for students' use. The variables investigated included study tables and chairs, beds, bookshelves, sanitary facilities, water, ventilation and internet connections. In hostels where these variables were rated as very good quality were thus said to be adequate. Table 2 shows that more than half (57.4%) of the students reported that they did not have adequate study furniture. About half of the students did not have bookshelves. Only about a quarter (26.6%) were satisfied with the state of their sanitary facilities. More than half (58.3%) of the students indicated that the sanitary facilities were of poor quality. The study further established that a third (34%) of the students reported that water in their hostels was of poor quality while (9.6%) did not have water at all in their hostels. Nearly two-thirds (65.4%) of the students noted that the hostels they lived in did not have internet connections. Only a few (16.5%) students reported that they had good quality internet connectivity.

4.2 Effect of Private Student Accommodation on the Students' Academic Life

To establish the effect of Private Student Accommodation on the Students' Academic life Spearman correlation coefficient between security and performance, hostel status and performance, adequacy and performance, time and performance was evaluated. Table 3 shows the effect of student accommodation on their academic performance

Spearman rank correlation coefficient revealed that there was negative but insignificant relationship between security of the hostels and the students' performance since p is 0.225 (Table 3). This implied that the level of security did not affect the performance of the students.

5. Discussion

This finding disagreed with Mamman (2011) who identifies security as having a significant relationship with the students' academic ability. On the other hand, there was a significant relationship between the hostel status and students' academic performance as p was 0.008 which is less than 0.05. This is in agreement with Agboola et al., (2001) who reported that for students to concentrate on their studies, comfortable hostels are a necessity as this leads to internal efficiency of the institution. In addition, adequacy of the hostels had a significant relationship with performance at $p=0.05$. The findings are in agreement with Sicut and Pangaiban's (2009) study which reported that adequate student housing gives rise to comprehension and encourages positive learning outcome. Time wastage in terms of travelling had no significant relationship with performance as $p=0.448$. This implies the distance between the hostels and the university had no effect on education performance. However, it does not concur with Wesonga in Mwiria et al.,

(2007) who observed that students who commuted from long distances made less use of the university facilities hence low academic performance.

6. Conclusions of the study

The study concludes that most of the private accommodation facilities were not adequate for the undergraduate students. There is overcrowding while important items like furniture that are necessarily for studies are inadequate. The study further concludes that the status of private accommodation positively correlated with the educational performance of the students. This implies that the more adequate the accommodation facilities are, the higher the performance. Further the quality accommodation services for undergraduate students' increases performance.

7. Recommendations

The study recommends that universities should ensure that the status of private accommodation is adequate since the students stay there is part of their overall university experience. As part of a university's social responsibility, the university should aim at improving infrastructure at places where student population is high. Non-resident students should be guided by the rules and regulations governing student life on campus. Further, the study recommends that through Public Private Partnership, universities can engage private developers in developing student satellite villages where low- cost houses can be built and rented to students at very low rates. This can be done through the Build Operate and Transfer programme. Finally, the study recommends the establishment of an association for PAPs which can be used as a link between them and universities and the PAPs.

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Appendices

Table 1: Students sampled by gender and Year of Study

Year of study	Population		Sample	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1 st year	5,161	4,054	67	53
2 nd year	4,731	3,716	62	48
3 rd year	3,871	3,040	50	40
4 th year	3,225	2,534	42	33
Total	16,988	13,344	221	174

Source: Researcher (2013).

Table 2: Adequacy of hostel the room

Adequacy of the Room	NA f (%)	VPQ f (%)	PQ f (%)	GQ f (%)	VGQ f (%)	NR f (%)
Study Tables and Chairs	69(18.4)	43(11.4)	68(18.1)	120(31.9)	57(15.1)	19(5.1)
Bed	34(9.0)	46(12.2)	80(21.3)	133(35.4)	60(17.6)	17(4.5)
Book shelves	203(54)	33(8.8)	39(10.4)	49(13.0)	35(9.3)	17(4.5)
Sanitary facilities	129(34.3)	82(21.8)	97(25.8)	52(13.8)	0(0)	16(4.3)
Water	35(9.3)	52(13.8)	76(20.2)	130(34.6)	71(18.9)	12(3.2)
Ventilation	36(9.6)	56(14.9)	91(24.2)	113(30.0)	61(16.2)	19(5.1)
Internet Connections	246(65.4)	25(6.6)	30(8.0)	29(7.7)	33(8.8)	13(3.5)

Students' questionnaire N=376

Key: NA=Not available, VPQ=Very Poor Quality, PQ=Poor Quality, GQ=Good Quality, NR=No Response

Table 3: Effect of private student accommodation on their performance

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Performance
Performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.
	N	269
Security index	Correlation Coefficient	-.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.225
	N	269
Hostel status index	Correlation Coefficient	.161**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008
	N	268
Adequacy	Correlation Coefficient	.172**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
	N	264
Time wasted index	Correlation Coefficient	.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.448
	N	266

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Students questionnaire

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