On-Campus Housing Facilities: The Perceptions of Ghanaian University Students

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Abstract
This paper explores the perceptions that Ghanaian university students have about their on-campus student housing facilities (SHFs) with the aim of providing empirical information that can help hostel managers to appropriately manage and mitigate the gaps in the provision of the services and spaces in SHFs. A phenomenological research strategy was adopted for this study. Data was qualitatively collected by means of focus group discussions. A total of ten focus group discussions were carried out in five universities in the southern part of Ghana. The data was thematically analysed. The study found that students had both positive (commendation) and negative (challenges) perceptions about the SHFs. On the one hand, students commended the stable supply of electricity, the proximity of the SHFs to the lecture theatres, the washrooms provided inside the bedrooms, the provision of mini mart and the religious nature of the SHFs. On the other hand, discontentment was expressed with: the infrequent water supply; the poor condition of bathrooms and toilet facilities; the lack of study areas as well as the inadequacy and unavailability of chairs and tables in the study areas; the slow response of maintenance departments; the poor standard of cleaning; the lack of adequate kitchens and the lack of stable internet connectivity. With this information, the hostel managers will be well positioned to appropriately manage the provision of the services and spaces in the SHFs to meet students’ needs and expectations. The study recommends that university estate and hostel managers take prompt steps to improve on the provision and management of the services and spaces that students are discontent with, particularly, those that have health implications as well as those that affect the well-being of the students.

Keywords: Ghanaian, on-campus, perceptions, students, student housing facility, university

INTRODUCTION
The quality of higher education depends largely on an institution’s teaching and learning environment. However, an institution’s teaching and learning environment is shaped by the interaction of the human factors, educators and the facilities (Zakaria and Wan Yusoff, 2011). Lateef, Khimidi and Idris (2010) clarified that a conducive and adequate environment that can stimulate and promote learning, teaching, innovation and research is partly dependent on the functionality and the quality standards of the university’s facilities. In fact, achieving a high quality education is doubtful in an unfavorable learning environment, such as poorly maintained facilities (Al-Enezi, 2002). Thus, physical facilities are a crucial determinant and contributor to quality education. The physical facilities required in a university are wide ranging; the range may include but not limited to: administrative buildings, offices, libraries, lecture theatres, laboratories, workshops, student and staff accommodation, canteens and sports fields (Gruber, Fuß, Voss and Gläser-Zikuda, 2010; and Olanrewaju, Khamidi and Arazí, 2010). It is evident that one of the facilities which plays a critical role towards the provision of a quality higher education is the student accommodation or student housing facilities (SHFs). Several studies on SHF exist (Amole, 2009; Olanrewaju et al., 2010; Najib, Yusof and Osman, 2011; Addai, 2013; Bondinuba, Nimako and Karley, 2013; Nimako and Bondinuba, 2013; Abubakar, Kasim and Mamman 2015; Bella-Omunagbe, 2015; and Najib, Yusof and Tabassi, 2015). The majority of the previous studies on SHFs focused on student satisfaction (e.g. Amole 2009; Najib, et al., 2011; and Bella-Omunagbe; 2015). Some of the research has also concentrated on the assessment of SHF quality (e.g. Bondinuba et al., 2013; Nimako and Bondinuba, 2013; and Abubakar et al., 2015). Other aspects such as behavioural intentions and personal attainments of students in SHFs (e.g. Najib et al., 2015) and problems faced by students in SHFs (e.g. Addai, 2013) have also been studied. However, the majority of the studies on SHFs are quantitative in nature and these studies did not directly seek for students perceptions, both positive and negative, about their SHFs. Due to the inadequacy/lack of information on students’ perceptions (positive and negative), the hostel managers are unable to appropriately prioritise and manage the provision of the services and spaces in
the SHFs to meet students’ needs and expectations. This paper adopts a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions, both positive and negative, that Ghanaian university students have about their on-campus SHFs with the aim of providing empirical information that can help hostel and/or estate managers to appropriately manage and mitigate the gaps in the provision of the services and spaces in SHFs.

Student Housing Facility
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs suggests that shelter (housing) is a physiological need required for human survival. It is therefore not erroneous to state that SHFs are fundamental student’s need. It is for this reason that serious effort is made both by government and university authorities, including encouraging the private sector, in the provision of student housing. Student housing is an accommodation specifically constructed to create an environment that supports the living and learning experience of students while pursuing their education (Fields, 2011). SHFs are either located on campus or off campus. Moreover, university SHFs may be owned and managed by the institution; by a private entity; or by a partnership arrangement. On-campus SHFs, which is the focus of this study, are those that are provided within the boundaries of the university.

Regardless of ownership, configuration or location, SHFs ought to serve dual purposes, i.e. learning and living. Therefore, a SHF should be well resourced with spaces, facility services and other amenities that can support and promote both the learning requirement and the living experience of students. Generally, the provision of an accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive SHF has a bearing on the quality of the higher education system of a country (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). Student housings also contribute critically to the attainment of the overall objectives of higher education institutions (Thomsen, 2007). Moreover, SHFs have the ability to influence the performance of resident students (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). Addai (2013) stated that on-campus SHF promotes unity and coherence among students and also helps to develop and maintain a vibrant student culture on campus.

Some of the importance of on-campus SHFs have also been highlighted by (Banning and Kuk, 2011; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011; and Orr, Gwosc, and Netz, 2011). Below is a summary of the importance highlighted:

- SHFs could enhance the integration of students, who might otherwise find it difficult to integrate in big cities or big institutions or in academia in general;
- Through integration, on-campus SHFs promote diversity and foster unity;
- The extra-curricular activities provided in on-campus SHFs also contributes to students’ development;
- The setting of on-campus SHFs make students see studying as their main occupation thus putting their energies on their academic endeavors;
- The atmosphere of on-campus SHFs may have a positive effect on students learning experience, thereby improving the chances of success;
- On-campus SHFs contribute to the overall culture of the institution;
- On-campus SHFs provide a community setting for the students.

Students’, however, have diverse perceptions about the quality of their SHFs.

Student Housing Facilities: Perceptions of Students
Studies on SHF that highlight students’ perceptions have provided varying views. For example, the study by Najib et al. (2011) which was carried out in Malaysia revealed that students were satisfied with their SHFs. However, there were some services and spaces which students were dissatisfied with. Dissatisfaction was expressed with parking lot, security (CCTV and guards), and the pantry room; whilst satisfaction was expressed with the bedroom, washroom, leisure room, cafeteria and minimart. Similarly, the result of another study conducted in Malaysia revealed that students were fairly satisfied with the availability, quality and comfort levels of the residential accommodation. All the following received fair rating: study bedroom design, toilet/bathroom location, cleanliness of toilet/bathroom, study area accessibility, internet connectivity, furniture in the study area, security of parking facilities, directional signage and cleaning services (Abubakar et al., 2015). Amole (2009) examined residential satisfaction in students’ housing in Nigeria. The study revealed that the performance of the attributes measured were below average; which implies that students were generally not satisfied with the residences. Spaces/services which were not performing well included: the availability and quality of the kitchenette; adequacy of storage; the furnishing in the bedroom and the quality of the bathrooms.

Amole (2009) clarified that these were very basic and essential facilities for living as such they predicted satisfaction. Another example from Sub-Saharan Africa is the research of Bella-Omunagbe (2015). The findings revealed that the parameters that needed to improve were; the availability of water supply, the condition of electrical fittings, size of windows, the level of privacy in the residence, and the quality of electricity service. Conversely, parameters such as security, noise levels, ability to sleep without disturbances and good access road were perceived to be performing well.
In the Ghanaian context, very few studies have been conducted. Addai (2013) indicated that there is a lack of empirical research on SHFs in Ghana. The few studies that have been published reveal some varying levels of students’ dissatisfaction and some form of commendations. The study of Bondinubu et al. (2013) revealed that; bathrooms, access to transport, toilets, kitchens, entertainment area, reading rooms, security, accommodation fees and searching cost received unfavourable rating from students. Whereas parameters such as provision of lighting, distance to lectures, overall quality of the accommodation, water supply, bed room facilities, rules and regulations, how student tenants enjoyed their accommodation, and physical environment of accommodation received a comparatively better rating.

The study of Addai, (2013) was on the problems faced by students. The study revealed that some of the main problems faced by off-campus residential students included; neighbourhood disputes, severed landlords’/landladies’ relationships, noise and environmental pollution, frequent water shortages, lack of resting places, frequent disputes over payment of monthly electricity bills and poor value for money.

METHODOLOGY
The overarching research strategy used is phenomenology. This is because the paper concentrates on the experiences of students. Data was qualitatively collected by means of a focus group discussion (FGD). Babbie (2005) suggests that in a FGD, 12 to 15 people are brought together to engage in a guided discussion of a topic. For Krueger (2002), participants of 5 to 10 should be acceptable for a FGD. Hence, 5 to 15 participants should be okay for a FGD. For this study, a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 11 participants was allowed. To allow for generalisation, 10 groups were used. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) clarified that studying multiple perspectives of a phenomenon can help to generalise the findings of a phenomenological studies. The FGD was selected to promote interaction among participants and by so doing gain a wide-ranging view of students.

The FGDs were tape recorded to allow for easy transcribing. Transcribing was done with a Microsoft 2010 word document. The study was limited to the Greater Accra and Volta Regions of Ghana. Five universities were purposely selected from two lots: namely, two public owned and three private. The purposive sampling was used to allow for the inclusion of the oldest public and private universities, one relatively new public university as well as two other (relatively new) private universities in the (Greater Accra and Volta Regions) southern part of Ghana. With respect to the FGD, purposive and snowball sampling techniques were combined to select the students. Only students who had stayed in the SHFs for at least one academic year were considered for the FGD. The snowball sampling technique was then used to complement the purposive sampling method. The data was thematically analysed; different themes which emanated from the interviews were grouped and discussed separately.

RESULTS
Table 1: interpretation table for challenges and commendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Commendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8 to 10</td>
<td>Very high occurring challenge</td>
<td>Very high occurring commendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6 to 7</td>
<td>High occurring challenge</td>
<td>High occurring commendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>Moderate occurring challenge</td>
<td>Moderate occurring commendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
<td>Low occurring challenge</td>
<td>Low occurring commendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Less than 2</td>
<td>Very low occurring challenge</td>
<td>Very low occurring commendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several comments were provided by participants from the different SHFs. The positive comments are presented as commendations whilst the negative ones are presented as challenges. Table 1 shows how the challenges and commendations can be interpreted in each category. Example, if 8 to 10 groups state the same challenge, then it could be interpreted as a very high occurring challenge across the SHFs in Southern Ghana, whilst less than 2 implies a very low occurring challenge. Figure 1 shows all the comments both positive and negative.

Students’ Commendations with the SHFs
The number one commendation was the stable supply of electricity in the SHFs. Six groups had positive comments implying a high commendation. An example of a statement that highlight the stable electricity supply is: “the good thing is that we have unlimited electricity and is good”. The second category of commendations were in relation to the spaciousness of the rooms and the fact that kitchens were provided in the SHFs. In total, 4 groups had positive comments which implies a moderate commendation. Comments such as these highlight the commendations related to the sleeping space (“what I like about my hostel is that my room is spacious”) and the kitchen (“I like the fact that we have a kitchen”).

The third category of commendations were in relation to; the washroom provided inside the bedroom; the

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proximity of the SHF to the lecture theatres; the provision of study room and WIFI and the religious nature of the SHF. These commendations were made by 3 groups implying a low commendation. The fourth set of commendations were in relation to; the food service (perceived to be nice); presence of security; continuous supply of water; the provision of mini mart, and the provision of a laundry space. Only 2 groups had positive comments on these issues, suggesting that these are also low commendation.

Commendations provided by only 1 group, i.e. a very low commendation, included: the saving advantage of being on-campus, freedom associated with staying on-campus, the advantage of socialisation, the provision of toiletries, and the availability of computer room and library.

**Students’ Challenges with the SHFs**

The first group of concerns were the infrequent flow/availability of water, slow response to maintenance and quality of maintenance in general, and the poor quality of cleaning. With respect to the water challenge, one participant stated: “sometimes the water doesn’t flow and it makes it difficult to bath.” Regarding the maintenance services, one participant said: “what I don’t like is the response time with the maintenance service.” This is what one group said about the cleaning service: “our cleaning system is very bad, especially the bathroom and toilet.” Seven groups had complaints about these issues; thus, these could be regarded as high occurring challenges. The second category of challenges were with the washrooms and study rooms. With respect to the washrooms; some groups were not happy with the level of maintenance, others had issues with the quality of cleaning and some felt the number of washrooms provided in the SHFs were not adequate. With regards to the study rooms, some groups were dissatisfied with the condition, inadequacy and unavailability of chairs and tables. In total, 6 groups had issues with their washrooms and study rooms. Thus, these two are also high occurring challenges. Comments such as these highlight the problems related to the washrooms and study rooms: “…the washroom smells all the time; no water to flush toilets.” “The reading room is not so conducive; there aren’t enough chairs and tables.”

Absence of the kitchen was the next challenge. The general dissatisfaction was the fact that no kitchen was provided. Five groups had comments, which implies a moderate occurring challenge. One of such comments is: “we don’t have kitchens so we can’t cook on our own”. The fourth challenge was with the internet provision; there were SHFs which either had no internet or very poor internet service. Four groups had comments in relation to the internet, which implies a moderate occurring challenge. One of such comment in relation to the internet is: “The internet service is very bad; we can’t research anything.”

The fifth set of challenges were in relation to; the room sizes (perceived to be small), the level of security which was seen to be inefficient, high noise levels and the fact that no recreation space or facilities were provided. Three groups had comments on these issues, suggesting that these are low occurring challenges. The sixth set of challenges related to; small size of wardrobes, lack of alternative power supply, porters’ attitude, poor state/lack of playground, and rubbish collection delays. Only 2 groups had comments concerning these. This suggests that these are less occurring challenges in the SHFs.

Finally, challenges mentioned by only one group (i.e. very less occurring challenges) included; restricted use of the lift; lack of laundry service; absence of visitors lounge; poor ventilation; storage not accessible to all; and lack of fire extinguishers.

**DISCUSSION**

Stable supply of electricity received high commendation. Although 2 groups were concerned about the lack of alternative power supply, the majority of groups commended the supply of electricity. Bondinuba, et al. (2013) also identified lighting/electricity as one of the SHF parameters that students expressed satisfaction with. Generators were provided in the majority of the universities/SHF’s. The provision of generators in the universities guarantees a constant supply of electricity. This is because, electricity is a basic service and to ensure the continuous supply, a generator is required. The fact that stable supply of electricity is commended accentuates the importance of electricity in a SHF.

The proximity of the SHFs to the lecture theatres and the religious nature of the SHF were also commended. One of the main advantages of on-campus SHF is proximity to the lecture theatres/classroom coupled with the advantage of getting access to university facilities. The study of Bondinuba et al. (2013) also revealed that distance to the lecture theaters/classrooms was rated as a high indicator of a quality SHF.

The fact that washrooms were provided inside the bedrooms was commended. One student expressed the advantage of having the washrooms inside the bedroom with this comment: “what I like about this hostel is that it’s a kind of a master bedroom, with the bathhouse inside the room, you don’t need to go out to bath”. Indeed an en suite bedroom is generally convenient and can promote privacy and save time. The provision of a mini mart was also commended by 2 groups. The importance of the mini mart is revealed in this comment: “the mini mart in the hostel really
help us a lot, you know, sometimes you are thirsty and you want to drink water you don’t have to walk a long distance before you get water”. This shows that the provision of a mini mart could influence students’ wellbeing positively. This presumption is actually supported by the study of Najib et al. (2011b).

The other commendations were the food service (perceived to be nice) and the provision of a laundry space. The saving advantage of being on-campus, freedom associated with staying on-campus, the advantage of socialisation, the provision of toiletries, the availability of computer room and library were also commended by 1 group. These commendations were generally because these spaces and services were merely provided and not because of their unique provision and/or great performance. There were no counterstatements (or negative comments) to these commendations.

Issues such as spacious rooms and the provision of kitchens received moderate commendation (4 groups). However, 3 groups expressed dissatisfaction with the room sizes, implying that participants had mixed views about the spaciousness of the room. The mixed views with respect to kitchen is evident in most SHF studies. Whereas 4 groups commended the provision of kitchen, 5 groups were discontent that kitchens were not provided in the SHF. On the one hand, the fact that participant commended the mere provision emphasizes its importance. On the other hand, the fact that the mere provision of kitchen is commended reveals there might be a lack with respect to the provision of some critical facilities in the SHFs. The lack is evinced by the 5 groups who expressed discontentment. Kitchen was also highlighted as one of the spaces that received low satisfaction rating (Bondinuba et al., 2013). Studies conducted in Malaysia (Najib et al., 2011b) and Nigeria (Amole, 2009) highlight this challenge as well.

Kitchen is certainly a very important facility required in a SHF and as such one would expect a SHF to be provided with a kitchen. The perceptions about security was also mixed. Two groups commended the visibility of the security personnel whilst 3 groups were dissatisfied with the security systems. However, security is a very important service that requires high priority (Shen and Spedding, 1998). Therefore, any concerns about security needs attention. Frequency of water supply was commended by 2 groups, but, the majority of groups – 7 in total – were dissatisfied with the frequency of water supply. Frequent water shortages was identified as one of the main problems faced by students staying in SHFs (Addai, 2013). Similarly, Bella-Omunagbe, (2015) also identified water supply as a service that should be improved in the SHFs in south-south, Nigeria.

The provision of study room and WIFI were commended by 3 groups. Conversely, 7 groups highlighted the lack and poor condition of the study rooms (including inadequacy and unavailability of chairs and tables) as a problem whilst 4 groups were concerned about either the availability or connectivity of internet. One of the SHF parameters that was rated low by students according to Bondinuba et al. (2013) was the reading rooms i.e. study rooms. Internet is an important service that promote learning and research, as such, it is problematic if the internet/WIFI in the SHF is unstable or if internet/WIFI is not provided at all. Similarly, 3 groups highlighted the challenge of noise pollution. Noise pollution was identified as one of the main challenges faced by students staying in SHFs (Addai, 2013). In fact, Orr et al. (2011) clarified that the setting of on-campus SHFs should make students see studying as their main occupation. In other words, SHFs must be conducive for learning; therefore, services and spaces that influences students learning such as study room and internet as well as issues such as noise pollution needs critical attention.

The poor condition of bathrooms and toilet facilities; as well as slow response of maintenance departments to the maintenance requests of students, and poor cleaning were highlighted by 7 groups (i.e. high occurring problems). In fact, the few Ghanaian studies on SHFs reveal some of these challenges; for example, the study of Bondinuba et al. (2013) revealed that bathrooms and toilet facilities were rated low by students. Studies conducted outside Ghana such as (Amole, 2009) also reveals bathrooms and toilet facilities related challenges. The lack of recreation space or facilities was mentioned by 3 groups. Recreation facilities are important to student socialization and de-stressing as such could to some extent influence performance. This is justified in this comments from one of the participants: “There is no JCR so we are dull, no place for outdoor games”.

The remainder of problems were mentioned by fewer groups but not countered with commendations. They include; small size of wardrobes, porters’ attitude, poor management of rubbish collection, restricted use of lift, absence of place to receive visitors (visitors lounge), poor ventilation, storage space not accessible to all, and the lack of fire extinguishers. Although these challenges were mentioned by 1 or 2 groups, they are not to be ignored. In actual fact, some of these challenges are health, environment and safety related. Those related to health, environment and safety such as; poor management of rubbish collection, poor ventilation and the lack of fire extinguishers require serious attention. This is because, safety, health and environment issues are the most essential considerations when setting priorities for building facilities (Shen and Spedding, 1998).
In summary, it can be deduced from the discussion that: the infrequent water supply; poor condition of bathrooms and toilet facilities; as well as slow response of maintenance departments to the maintenance requests of students; and poor cleaning are high occurring facility related challenges. Besides, the availability and condition of study rooms, the lack and inadequacy of kitchens and the lack and instability of internet are also a serious concern. In fact, the few Ghanaian studies on SHFs reveal most of these challenges (Addai, 2013; and Bondinuba et al. 2013). Other problems such as; poor security, high noise levels, poor rubbish collection, poor ventilation, and the lack of fire extinguishers, although mentioned by fewer groups requires high priority. On the positive side, the stable supply of electricity received high commendation but not without concerns. The proximity of the SHFs to the lecture theatres, the washrooms provided inside the bedrooms, the provision of mini mart and the religious nature of the SHF were all commended by participants without reservations.

CONCLUSION

Most universities provide SHFs on the campuses so that students secure easy and affordable accommodation. The on-campus SHFs also offer the advantage of being in close proximity to academic facilities; thus, offering the students the opportunity to utilise university facilities. The main purpose of a SHF is to promote the living and learning experience as well as the wellbeing of students. Consequently, the provision of adequate and well managed spaces and services in SHFs are critical. It is evident that the negative perceptions overshadow the positive ones.

Some of the less dominant problems which requires serious and perhaps immediate attention include poor security systems, poor management of rubbish collection, poor ventilation, high noise levels, and lack of fire extinguishers. University management and SHF managers also need to pay critical attention to the challenges which dominated the list. The proximity of the SHFs to the lecture theatres, the washrooms provided inside the bedrooms, the provision of mini mart and the religious nature of the SHF were commended.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made for the universities:

- SHFs which do not have critical spaces such as kitchen and study room should be upgraded.
- SHFs with stable supply of electricity must maintain the supply whilst those without must ensure that the supply of electricity is uninterrupted.
- The management of all SHFs which have problems related to health, safety and security (such as security personnel visibility, rubbish collection, poor ventilation and lack of fire extinguishers) should take immediate actions to resolve them.

Recommendation for regulatory bodies and policy makers:

- Critical consideration should be paid to the quality and adequacy of spaces and services of SHFs before accreditation is granted.
- Condition assessment of university SHFs must be conducted regularly after accreditation is granted.

Figure 1: Perceptions of students
Source: Researcher’s construct
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