



# An Analysis of Must-be Attributes of Off-campus Student Housing Facilities and their Influence on Effective Learning: The Case of One University in South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

The high rate of university enrolment in South Africa has placed an immense burden on universities to provide accommodation services, with the institutions categorised as historically disadvantaged being the most severely affected. This phenomenon has led to the emergence and development of private off-campus student housing facilities as an alternative. To ensure that the student housing provided falls within the acceptable standards for effective learning and safety of the students, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has formulated a housing policy to inform developers of such housing standards. This study investigated whether the living conditions in student housing facilities (SHFs) comply with this Policy and how such conditions affect students' academic performance, especially at historically disadvantaged higher education institutions (HEIs). A quantitative approach was used, using a closed-ended questionnaire to obtain data from respondents. The findings of this study revealed that the neighbourhood of off-campus housing facilities needed to be more satisfactory. However, the respondents found the social and physical dimensions of the houses and rooms somewhat acceptable, and they regarded the management of the facilities as commendable. The study concludes that the university should continue to work deliberately with developers so that they adhere strictly to the implementation of the student housing facilities policy to ensure effective learning and student safety. The study adds to existing research on student housing and its impact on effective learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

After the first report of the Coronavirus in Wuhan, China, in December 2019,<sup>1</sup> the world had no immediate way to prevent or stop the deadly novel COVID-19 pandemic despite its advanced

<sup>1</sup> Steve Brammer and Timothy Clark, "COVID-19 and Management Education: Reflections on Challenges, Opportunities, and Potential Futures," *British Journal of Management* 31, no. 3 (July 9, 2020): 453–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12425>.

technologies.<sup>2</sup> The report on Coronavirus prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it a pandemic in 2020.<sup>3</sup> Following this pronouncement, the globe witnessed unprecedented disruptions in literally all aspects of life, including educational institutions.<sup>4</sup> Staying at home was mandated to preserve social distance.<sup>5</sup> The working synergy between universities and commercial developers enhances and complements their capacity to fulfil their three missions: teaching and learning, research, and community participation.<sup>6</sup> Staff and students must have access to a suitable learning environment to fulfil these responsibilities efficiently. Considering this, this article examines the essential characteristics of off-campus student living facilities concerning effective learning. This study focuses on one South African university. The global student housing sector has undergone an unparalleled shift.<sup>7</sup> Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and individuals have concentrated on the issue of providing appropriate housing for inhabitants worldwide.<sup>8</sup> Despite being a fundamental human need and right, adequate housing has been rugged to provide for people.<sup>9</sup> Okolie states that public HEIs were under financial strain over a decade ago, hindering their capacity to develop, improve, and maintain SHFs to suit students' residential demands.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the disparity between demand and supply for on-campus SHFs, private off-campus SHFs have acquired remarkable dominance.

Private off-campus student housing facilities (SHFs) provide alternative accommodation for students who cannot secure on-campus housing. These facilities, ranging from dorms and apartments to flats and studios, aim to provide a conducive learning environment and acceptable living standards. However, the surge in student enrolment has overwhelmed higher education institutions, forcing many students to the private rental market. This high demand has made student housing profitable for developers. Despite this, off-campus SHF owners often need to pay more attention to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) standards for student housing. Existing research on student housing needs to examine better how well off-campus SHFs comply with the DHET's Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the alignment of living conditions in SHFs with the DHET policy and assessing the impact on students' academic performance, particularly at historically disadvantaged institutions.

In South Africa's context, the DHET's Policy similarly defines "on-campus accommodation" and "off-campus privately-owned housing". Both categories include housing units ranging from large dorms to multi-bedroom houses accommodating only students or individual rooms rented from homeowners. The second category can also involve housing facilities indirectly rented by universities through leasing agents. Despite high demand, adequate resident satisfaction is often overlooked when developing off-

<sup>2</sup> Bekithemba Dube and Nathan Moyo, "COVID-19 Pandemic and The Precarity of Life: Rethinking a Pedagogy of Compassion so That The People of This Earth May Live," *Journal of Education, Teaching and Learning* 6, no. 2 (2021): 146–53.

<sup>3</sup> Catrin Sohrabi et al., "PRISMA 2020 Statement: What's New and the Importance of Reporting Guidelines," *International Journal of Surgery* (Elsevier, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Sheryl Zimmerman et al., "The Need to Include Assisted Living in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* 21, no. 5 (2020): 572–75; Abass Anifowoshe et al., "Histological Changes, Micronuclei Induction and Nuclear Abnormalities in the Peripheral Erythrocytes of *Clarias Gariepinus* (Burchell 1822) Exposed to Water Sample from Apodu Reservoir," *Journal of Life and Bio Sciences Research* 1, no. 01 (April 20, 2020): 01–07, <https://doi.org/10.38094/jlbrs113>; Hadrian Geri Djajadikerta et al., "Australian, Malaysian and Indonesian Accounting Academics' Teaching Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Australasian Business, Accounting & Finance Journal* 15, no. 2 (2021): 103–13, <https://doi.org/10.14453/aabfj.v15i2.7>; Per Engzell, Arun Frey, and Mark D Verhagen, "Learning Loss Due to School Closures during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 17 (2021): e2022376118.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas A Adu, Antoinette Flynn, and Colette Grey, "Executive Compensation and Sustainable Business Practices: The Moderating Role of Sustainability-based Compensation," *Business Strategy and the Environment* 31, no. 3 (2022): 698–736; Louise Bedrossian, "Understand and Address Complexities of Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria in Students with ADHD," *Disability Compliance for Higher Education* 26, no. 10 (2021): 4; Kaitano Dube, Godwell Nhamo, and David Chikodzi, "Flooding Trends and Their Impacts on Coastal Communities of Western Cape Province, South Africa," *GeoJournal* 87, no. S4 (October 25, 2022): 453–68, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-021-10460-z>; Vishal Dineshkumar Soni, "Global Impact of E-Learning during COVID 19," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3630073>.

<sup>6</sup> Nelishia Pillay, "A Survey of School Timetabling Research," *Annals of Operations Research* 218, no. 1 (July 15, 2014): 261–93, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10479-013-1321-8>.

<sup>7</sup> Ojo Cyprain Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria" (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria."

<sup>9</sup> M. G. Sexwale, *Speech on the Establishment of the Chair for Education in Human Settlement* (Port Elizabeth: Department of Human Settlement, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> A. M. Okolie, *Contemporary Readings on Nigeria's External Relations: Issues, Perspectives and Challenges* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

campus SHFs.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this can hinder effective learning and negatively impact student academic progress.<sup>12</sup> This study, therefore, examines how selected key features of off-campus SHFs meet the Policy's requirements for fostering conducive learning environments. The guiding question driving this research is: "To what extent do off-campus student housing facilities (SHFs) meet the requirements for student housing as outlined in the Policy on the Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities?"

## LITERATURE REVIEW

SHFs are vital in supporting the educational experience of university students. Students' experiences are evidenced in various studies conducted on both on- and off-campus SHFs, which focus on demographic characteristics,<sup>13</sup> differences in living satisfaction aspects between on-campus and off-campus facilities,<sup>14</sup> the relationship between selected housing conditions and associated health problems,<sup>15</sup> and students' living conditions. Previous research has also focused on students' social activities, community facilities and services, neighbourhood and physical surroundings, cost of living, and students' preferences.<sup>16</sup>

To emphasise the vitality of SHFs, the September 2011 report on the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Provision of Student Housing at South African Universities established that "student accommodation in HEIs is broader than the mere provisioning of beds; it is about establishing living, learning and social communities. The Policy on the Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities was developed in response to the findings of the 2011 report on the regulation of the provision of on-campus and off-campus student housing at South African public universities.<sup>17</sup> The established norms and standards must be applied at all public universities and in university-accredited student housing. The Policy requires SHFs to meet the following requirements outlined below.

### *Design of Residences*

In summary, the Policy describes the physical designs, such as the size of the rooms in square metres (m<sup>2</sup>) and the number of students they should accommodate. It outlines the physical amenities that should be in place, such as the number of washbasins for the number of students (1 basin for every four students), shower cubicles (1 shower cubicle for every seven students), and lavatories (1 lavatory for every five

<sup>11</sup> Rod McCrea, Tung-Kai Shyy, and Robert J Stimson, "Satisfied Residents in Different Types of Local Areas: Measuring What's Most Important," *Social Indicators Research* 118 (2014): 87–101; Fionn Stevenson and Adrian Leaman, "Evaluating Housing Performance in Relation to Human Behaviour: New Challenges," *Building Research and Information* 38 (2010): 437.

<sup>12</sup> V. McGhie and M. Du Preez, "Accessing Post-School Studies: A Student's GPS to Successful Learning," *African Sun Media*, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> J. Thomsen, "Student Housing Student Homes? Aspects of Student Housing Satisfaction" (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Phil Hubbard, "Regulating the Social Impacts of Studentification: A Loughborough Case Study," *Environment and Planning A* 40, no. 2 (2008): 323–41; Muhammad Hilmy Muslim, Hafazah Abdul Karim, and Ishak Che Abdullah, "Satisfaction of Students' Living Environment between on-Campus and off-Campus Settings: A Conceptual Overview," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 68 (2012): 601–14.

<sup>15</sup> Erin Johnson, Eugene C Cole, and Ray Merrill, "Environmental Health Risks Associated with Off-Campus Student-Tenant Housing," *Journal of Environmental Health* 71, no. 6 (2009): 43–47.

<sup>16</sup> C C M Adriaanse, "Measuring Residential Satisfaction: A Residential Environmental Satisfaction Scale (RESS)," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 22, no. 3 (2007): 287–304; Ahmad Hariza Hashim, "Residential Satisfaction and Social Integration in Public Low Cost Housing in Malaysia," *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 11, no. 1 (2003): 1–10; Dolapo Amole, "Residential Satisfaction in Students' Housing," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2009): 76–85; Dasimah Bt Omar et al., "The Impacts of Off-Campus Students on Local Neighbourhood in Malaysia," *International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences* 5, no. 10 (2011): 1221–27; W.R. Frazier, "A Study of Themed Residential Learning Communities at a Midwest Four-Year University: North Dakota State University" (North Dakota State University, USA, 2009); D. C. Garrard, "The Relation between a Student's Choice of Living Arrangement and Student Effort, Achievement and College Satisfaction" (The University of Texas at Austin, USA, 2006); S. M. Helfrich, "Understanding the Relationship between Undergraduate Housing Environments and Academic Self-Concept" (The Pennsylvania State University, USA, 2011); Fatemeh Khozaei et al., "Sense of Attachment to Place and Fulfilled Preferences, the Mediating Role of Housing Satisfaction," *Property Management* 30, no. 3 (2012): 292–310; Mohammad Abdul Mohit, Mansor Ibrahim, and Yong Razidah Rashid, "Assessment of Residential Satisfaction in Newly Designed Public Low-Cost Housing in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia," *Habitat International* 34, no. 1 (2010): 18–27; G. J. Naylor, "Predictors of Student Persistence: Student Satisfaction and Aspects of the Residential Environment" (University of Virginia, USA., 2009); Sai Leung Ng, "Subjective Residential Environment and Its Implications for Quality of Life among University Students in Hong Kong," *Quality-of-Life Research in Chinese, Western and Global Contexts*, 2005, 467–89; Survey Unit, "Housing Preferences for Students at Nottingham University" (University of Nottingham, 2008); Thomsen, "Student Housing Student Homes? Aspects of Student Housing Satisfaction."; H D Türkoğlu, "Residents' Satisfaction of Housing Environments: The Case of Istanbul, Turkey," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 39, no. 1 (1997): 55–67.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *Policy on the Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities*, 2015.

students), among other things. The Policy highlights the minimum social spaces, including large joint/meeting rooms. Such communal spaces should have a combination of some or all the following: communal lounges, games rooms, gymnasias, television rooms, meeting/seminar rooms, dedicated group study spaces and computer centres, among others. In the case of self-catering residences, the following minimum standards for food preparation must be upheld in a separate kitchen(s): suitable food storage, preparation and kitchen space, a four-plate stove with an oven for every eight students, as well as cold storage, among other things.

The most cost-effective access to the Internet, as determined by the university, is required in all residences. It is recommended that all student rooms and communal places have access to the Internet for academic purposes.

### ***Furnishings and Fittings***

Furnishings and fittings should be maintained so that they are always in working condition and should be replaced as soon as possible by the relevant university, property owner, or agent when broken beyond repair. Appropriate, fair and adequate mechanisms for determining responsibility for damage to and breakage of property should be established by the relevant authority at universities or the landlords in the case of private residences.

### ***Health and Safety***

All providers of student housing services must comply with the legislative requirements (national, regional and municipal) constantly regulating health and safety. Safety requirements pertinent to the provision of student housing are fire safety, fire prevention and detection mechanisms and procedures, electricity and gas installations, security staff as well as hygiene inspections of all food preparation facilities to mention but a few.<sup>18</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted to answer questions regarding how off-campus SHFs meet the requirements set out in the student housing policy, with the expected outcome of conducive learning environments. Questionnaires were used to achieve this objective of the study. A positivist paradigm was used as a foundation to guide the study. Accordingly, this set the tone for the epistemological, ontological, metatheoretical, methodological, rhetorical and axiological position of positivism in understanding the issues relating to student accommodation.

The data collection process was cross-sectional in design owing to its advantages. In terms of ethical considerations, the researchers secured informed consent from the respondents by requesting them to sign an informed consent form. They were told that they had the right to terminate their participation in the study at any time without penalty. They were further assured confidentiality. This measure ensured anonymity, which refers to the researcher keeping the participants' identities secret.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

This section focuses on the presentation of findings. Descriptive statistics are used to summarise the cases and indicate the percentages of variables used to measure the level of student satisfaction with off-campus housing facilities. First, the demographic data about the respondents are presented, followed by the key variables, and then a detailed interpretation.

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<sup>18</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *Policy on the Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities*.

### Demographic information of respondents

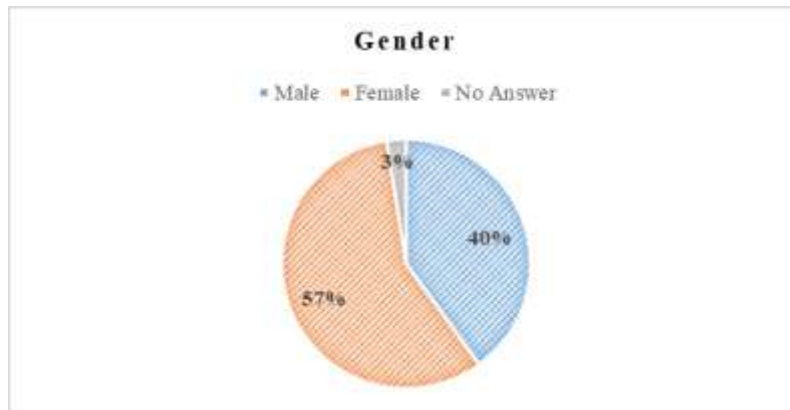


Figure 1: Gender of the respondents

Figure 1 indicates that 57% of the respondents were female, and 40% were male. These statistics imply that the number of female students is growing and surpasses that of males at HEIs. The increase in the number of female students in institutions of higher learning may be associated with concerted efforts by the government and NGOs regarding women empowerment programmes and funding opportunities. This finding brings some sense of hope for women's emancipation in many spheres of South African society.

### Level of study of respondents

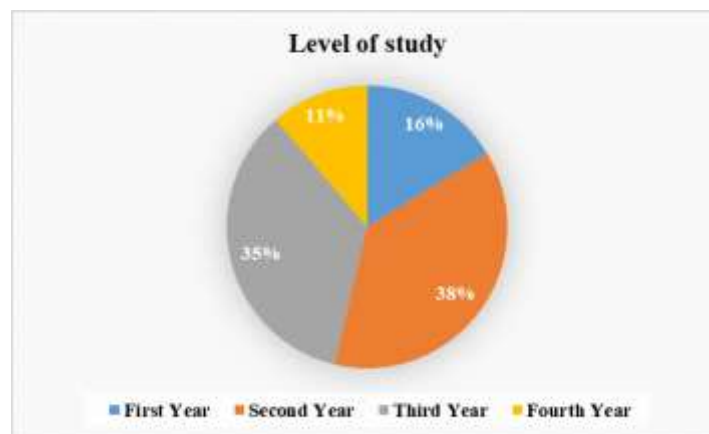


Figure 2: Respondents' level of study

According to the data presented in Figure 2 above, second-year students comprised 38% of the total, followed by third-year students, who comprised 35%. First-year students constituted 16%. Based on the researchers' experiential knowledge, second and third-year students form the majority of occupants of off-campus residences, perhaps because they want to compare life off campus to life on campus experienced in their first year. This phenomenon could also be attributed to the need for freedom and privacy as students advance in their studies. Basically, in many HEIs, first-year students are considered naïve and vulnerable. Hence, they are usually prioritised when allocating on-campus accommodation and are thus likely to be found on campus. However, some explore alternative accommodation services off campus after familiarising themselves with university life and its environs. This behaviour could then explain the findings presented in Figure 2.

Previous research shows that non-residential (off-campus) first-year students are deemed 'at-risk students' who are likelier to drop out than those who live on campus.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, developers of off-

<sup>19</sup> Zilungile Sosibo and Misiwe Katiya, "Closing the Loop between Access and Success: Early Identification of at-Risk Students and Monitoring as Key Strategies Used by a South African University," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 8, no. 2 (2015): 271–79.

campus SHFs have to work hand in hand with university management to ensure that SHFs meet the requirements to make learning effective and enhance retention.

**Distribution of Residence**

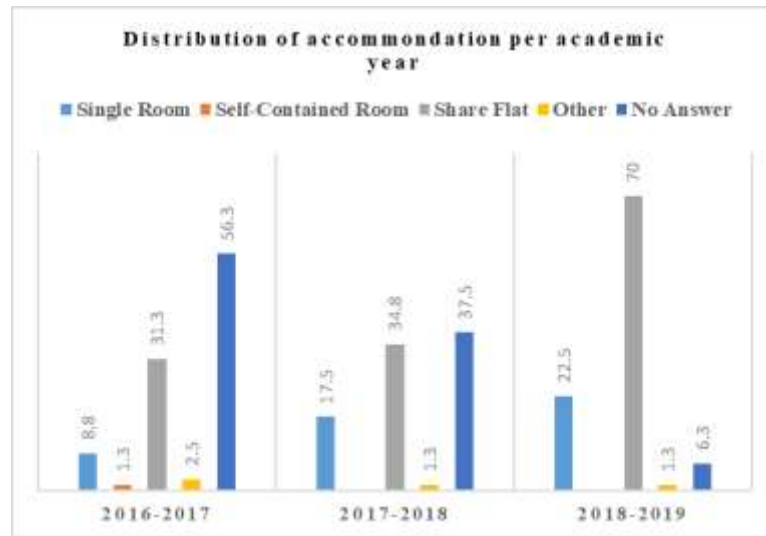


Figure 3: Residence Distribution per academic year

Figure 3 shows that shared flats were the most common or preferred accommodation arrangements across the academic years. The data shows a clear upward trend in the use of shared flats by students, with 31.3% in 2016-2017, 34.8% in 2017-2018, and 70% in 2018-2019. Shared flats imply inadequate housing in HEIs or the students' financial inability to afford single or self-contained rooms. The entrance of unfunded students into universities, especially traditionally disadvantaged students, could arguably explain the rise in shared flats in off-campus housing facilities.

**Physical dimensions of off-campus housing facilities**

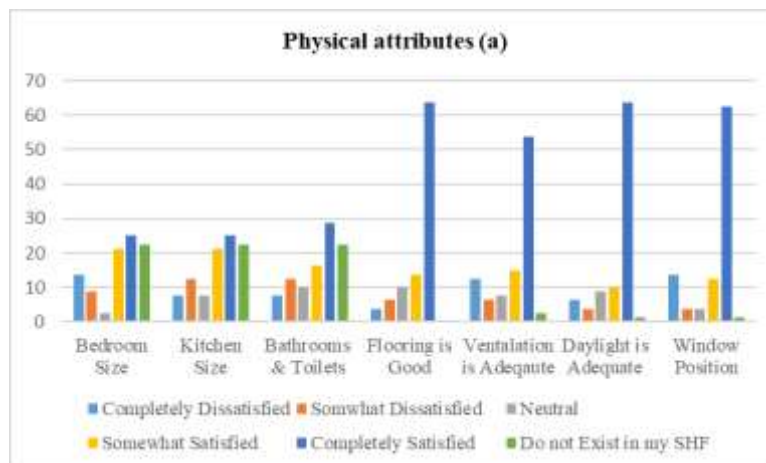


Figure 4: Respondents' satisfaction with the physical attributes of off-campus housing facilities

Figure 4 presents the different satisfaction levels with the physical attributes of housing facilities. On the one hand, the findings indicate that flooring (63.8%), daylight (63.8%), window position (62.5%) and ventilation (53.8%) were the most satisfactory attributes. On the other hand, bedroom size (21.3%), kitchen area (21.3%) and bathrooms and toilets (16.3%) were attributes with which respondents were somewhat dissatisfied. Comparatively, all the variables measured under physical attributes were scored positively (satisfied) rather than negatively (unhappy).

Based on these findings, one could argue that, to a greater extent, the attributes aligned with the standards and norms of housing at public universities. Favourable living conditions provide a safe and

comfortable environment for enhancing students' academic and social lives.<sup>20</sup> In line with instructions from the DHET, the university management should constantly ensure the quality of SHFs. Ensuring the quality of SHFs is crucial because it can affect students' academic performance and overall well-being.<sup>21</sup> According to Wallace, a relationship exists between students' residence and academic performance.<sup>22</sup> The appropriateness of the living and learning environment measures the suitability of SHFs.<sup>23</sup> The housing policy in public universities should be the developers' essential reference to ensure that housing is congruent with students' needs.

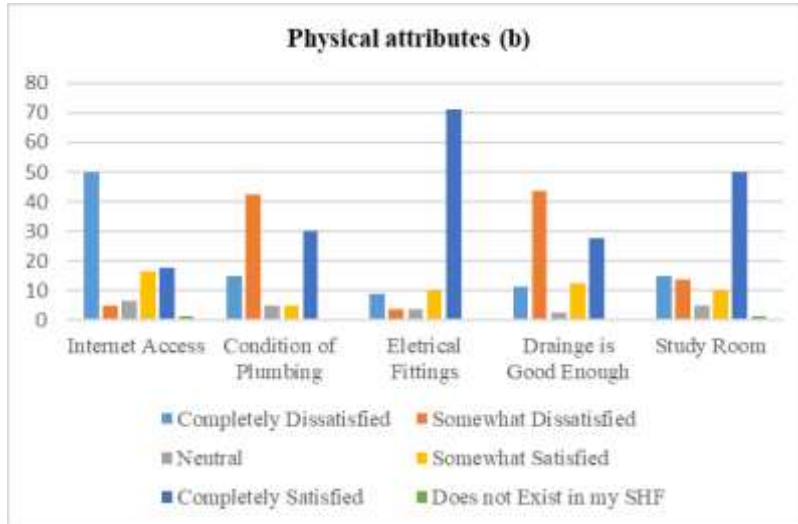


Figure 5: Physical attributes of off-campus SHFs (services)

Figure 5 indicates that 50% of the respondents were utterly dissatisfied with the internet access, while 42.5% and 43.8% were somehow dissatisfied with the plumbing and drainage, respectively. However, 71.3% and 50% were delighted with the electrical fittings and study rooms. These findings indicate mixed reactions on the part of the respondents. While they were delighted with some aspects of the facilities, they also reported complete dissatisfaction with others. These findings indicate possible gaps in standardising the SHFs, especially concerning internet accessibility and effectiveness.

**Social dimensions of off-campus housing facilities**

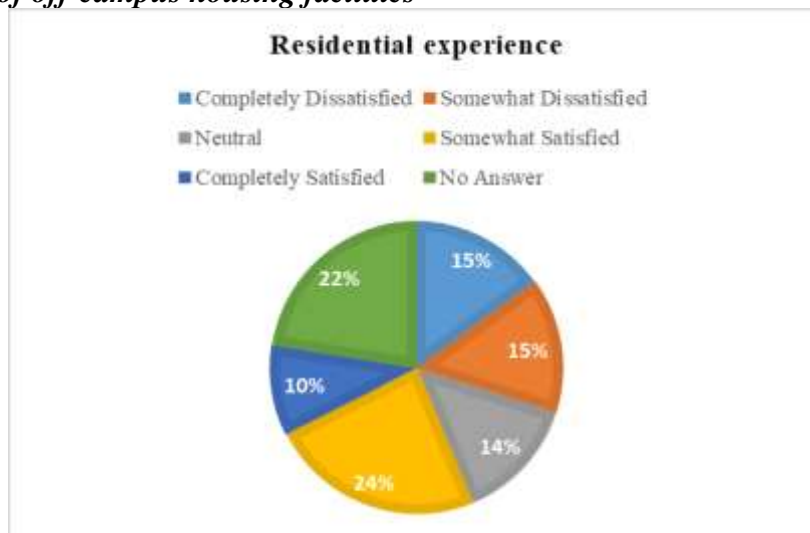


Figure 6: General residential experience

<sup>20</sup> James Penven, Robert Stephens, and Caleb Keith, "The Past, Present, and Future of Residential Colleges: Looking Back at S. Stewart Gordon's" Living and Learning in College", *Journal of College & University Student Housing*, 2013.  
<sup>21</sup> Beth Hurst, Randall R Wallace, and Sarah B Nixon, "The Impact of Social Interaction on Student Learning," *Reading Horizons*, 2013.  
<sup>22</sup> Hurst, Wallace, and Nixon, "The Impact of Social Interaction on Student Learning."  
<sup>23</sup> ACUHO-I, "Information Resources," Association of College and University Housing Officers-International, 2014, www.acuho-i.org.

The findings on residential experience indicate mixed reactions among the respondents. As shown in Figure 6 above, 24% of the respondents were somewhat satisfied, while 10% were delighted. However, 15% of the respondents were entirely and slightly dissatisfied with their residential experience. These results contradict the findings on the physical attributes of the facilities, which were significantly positive. These results could imply that while the physical characteristics are satisfactory, the social aspects are dissatisfactory. The housing developers must focus on balancing both aspects when providing housing services.

**Reasons for living off-campus**

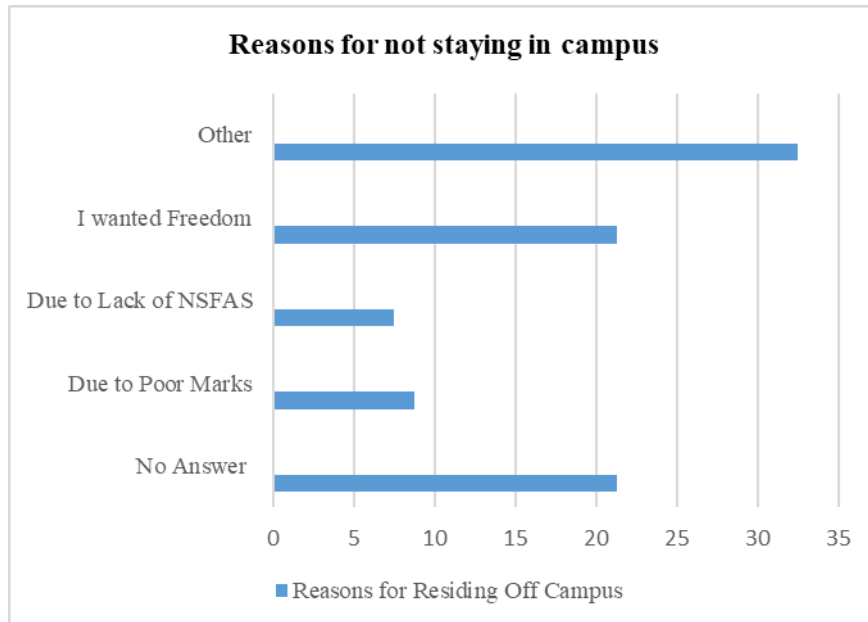


Figure 7: Reasons for living off-campus

The main reasons for the respondents seeking off-campus housing were the need for freedom (21.3%), poor performance (8.8%), and lack of funding (7.5). In addition, there were other reasons (32.5%) that the respondents did not specify. These findings reveal that some students need to be accommodated on campus because of their poor performance the previous year, while others need more funding to live on campus. Therefore, private housing facilities provide flexibility, allowing students to secure accommodation to continue their studies. Thus, off-campus housing facilities fill a significant housing gap in the higher education sector.

**Type of student housing facilities in the area of study**

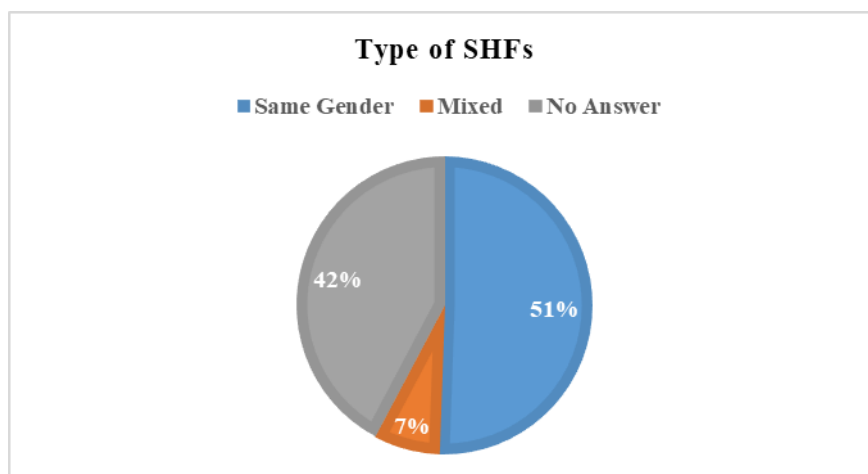


Figure 8: Type of student housing facility

University residences are either same-gender or mixed. As indicated in Figure 8 above, 51% of the respondents lived in same-gender facilities, while 7% lived in mixed ones. Traditionally, university residences have been organised to serve one gender, especially when it comes to first-year students. The allocation of residences in terms of gender could be for privacy and to protect female students from rogue male students. In addition, these results are similar to the cultural and societal dictates of the African housing setup. Students could have more freedom when living with their gender than a mix of genders. The type (same or mixed) of student housing facility will influence the student's choice, as some may prefer one over the other.

The current findings relate to a study by Greene and Ortuzar on social housing in Chile, which focused on understanding and identifying the attributes that drive residents' satisfaction. The study established that investors need to determine the combinations of attributes that are most appealing for individuals and the segment of existing and potential residents. Attribute for segmenting was paramount for the success of housing delivery and the prudent management of resources for optimal returns.<sup>24</sup> The social attributes of SHFs must be based on actual needs and priorities to enhance student well-being and academic success.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to note that the success of housing developments requires what Bella-Omunagbe refers to as an understanding of the types of attributes required and expected by residents and the quality level of these attributes.<sup>26</sup>

### Neighbourhood dimensions of off-campus student housing facilities

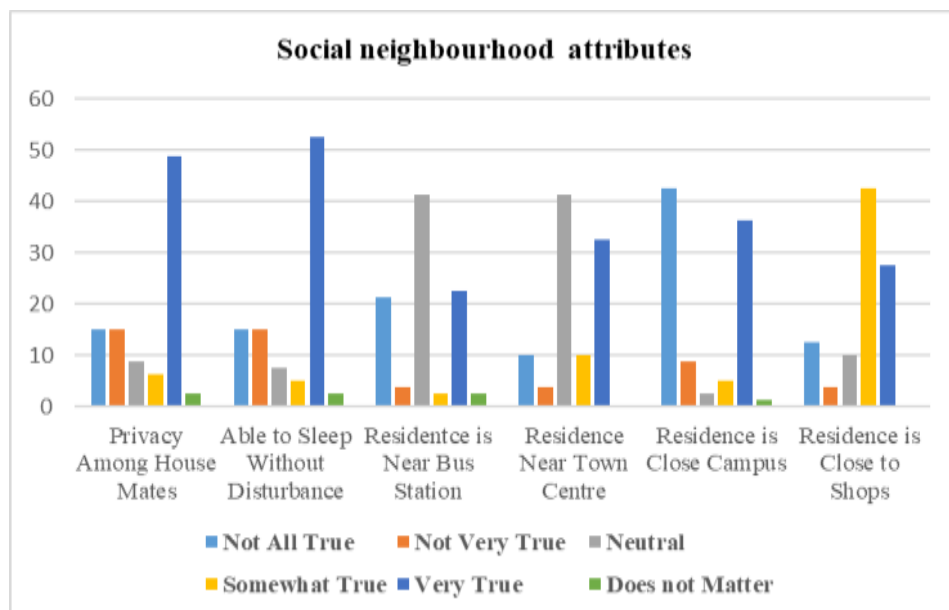


Figure 9: Social attributes of the neighbourhood of off-campus SHFs

The question in this section sought to assess the importance of various attributes. On the one hand, the findings indicate that privacy among housemates (48.8%), being able to sleep without disturbance (52.5%), and the residence being close to campus (36.3%) were the most critical attributes compared to the other attributes indicated in Figure 9 above. On the other hand, the respondents indicated that the SHFs being close to campus (42.5% somewhat authentic) could have been more critical. These findings do not support the notion that students desire on-campus or nearby housing. Other attributes, such as the residence being close to shops, near the town centre, and a bus station, are considered essential neighbourhood attributes.

<sup>24</sup> Margarita Greene and Juan de Dios Ortúzar, "Willingness to Pay for Social Housing Attributes: A Case Study from Chile," *International Planning Studies* 7, no. 1 (2002): 55–87.

<sup>25</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria."

<sup>26</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria."

According to Bella-Omunagbe, the residential environment includes all the attributes included in the dwelling units and the immediate environment of the residence.<sup>27</sup> The attributes of the SHF residential environment and how they drive residents' satisfaction have been documented by various authors,<sup>28</sup> The primary goal is to understand the level and types of attributes that make the residential environment suitable and satisfactory. These studies found that the residential environment's attributes impact users' perceptions of satisfaction differently.

### *Physical environment and safety of the neighbourhood*

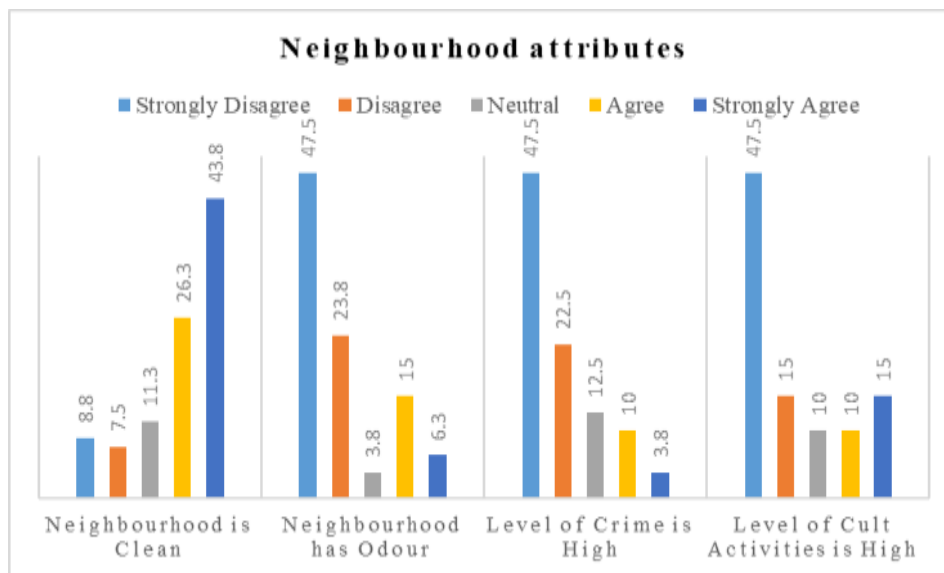


Figure 10: The physical and safety environment of SHFs

The question in this section focused on the cleanliness of the neighbourhood, noise levels, rubbish, security (crime level) and religious practices. Figure 10 shows that 43.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that the neighbourhood was clean, without odour (47.5%) and was secure (low crime rates: 47.5%). The respondents also strongly disagreed (47.5%) that there was a high incidence of cult activities. These findings imply that the neighbourhood was safe and conducive for student living.

A change in the residential environment characterises the student's transition from home to university. Most students who previously lived with their parents find themselves away from home for the first time and in a new environment. The new environment, namely SHFs, is not only a place where students live and eat but also a place where academic activities take place.<sup>29</sup> Previous studies indicate that on-campus residences increase the student's physical and emotional well-being and positively influence retention.<sup>30</sup> The increase in on-campus residence is vital because students can interact easily with peers and staff and have access to learning materials.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, positive on-campus and off-campus living experiences significantly affect students' social integration into the university and academic success. However, off-campus students will likely take advantage of such opportunities if the neighbourhood is safe and well-regulated.

<sup>27</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria."

<sup>28</sup> Thomsen, "Student Housing Student Homes? Aspects of Student Housing Satisfaction."

<sup>29</sup> Sosibo and Katiya, "Closing the Loop between Access and Success: Early Identification of at-Risk Students and Monitoring as Key Strategies Used by a South African University."

<sup>30</sup> Alexandros Chrysikos, Ejaz Ahmed, and Rupert Ward, "Analysis of Tinto's Student Integration Theory in First-Year Undergraduate Computing Students of a UK Higher Education Institution," *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* 19, no. 2/3 (2017): 97–121.

<sup>31</sup> C Nel, C Troskie-de Bruin, and E Bitzer, "Students' Transition from School to University: Possibilities for a Pre-University Intervention," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 23, no. 5 (2009): 974–91.

**Means of transport to and from the university for off-campus students**

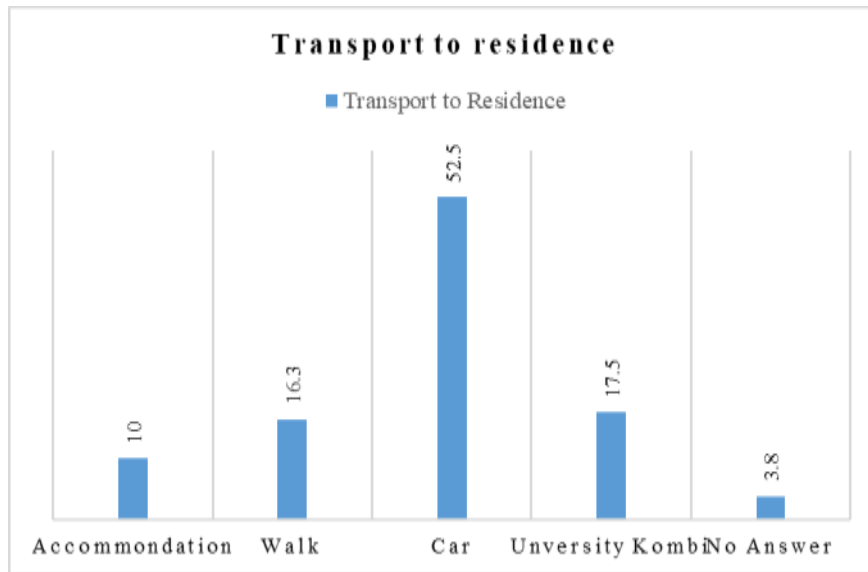


Figure 11: Mode of transport to and from SHFs

As indicated in Figure 11, most respondents (52.5%) used cars for transportation, 17.5% used university-related transport, and 16.3% walked. These findings indicate multiple means of transportation for the students from the campus to their SHFs. Since the highest percentage of cars were used, the distance between the SHFs and the campus was considerable. In addition, these findings imply costs in terms of fuel for students with their cars, as well as the time spent commuting. Therefore, the academic performance of students who cannot afford transport every day is likely to be affected by absenteeism.

**Management dimensions of off-campus student housing facilities**

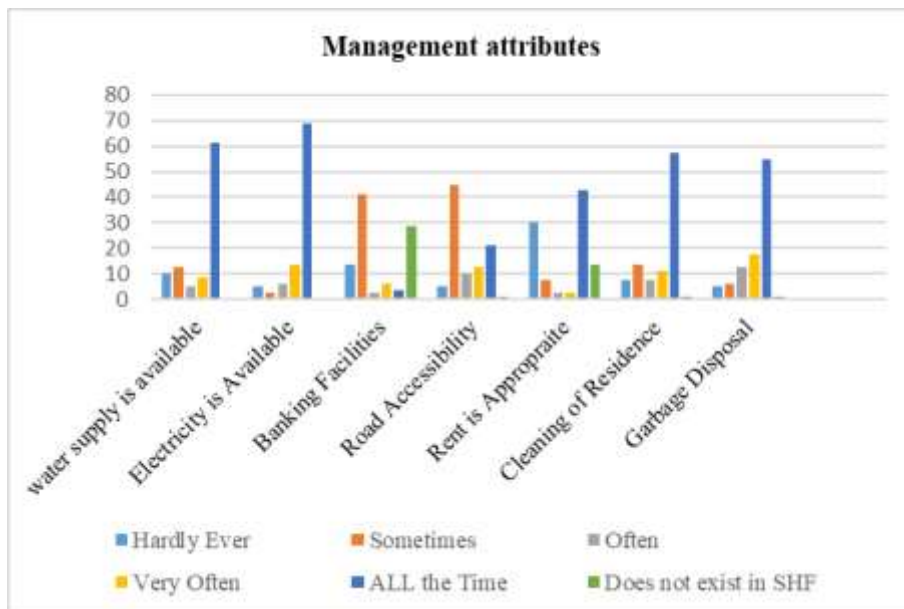


Figure 12: Management of off-campus SHF utilities and other services

The findings indicate that electricity (68.8%), water supply (61.3%), cleaning services (57.5%), garbage disposal (55%), and appropriate rental rates (42.5%) were available all the time. However, banking facilities (41.3% sometimes) and road access (45% sometimes) were only occasionally available. Generally, these findings indicate that SHFs were managed well since critical services such as water, electricity, garbage disposal, and cleaning attracted positive ratings from the respondents.

Literature indicates that students who occupy off-campus SHFs usually consider whether such facilities meet specific must-be attributes, described by Linares (2011, p. 234) as “attributes that are expected by residents and considered as entry-level requirements and dissatisfaction is caused if not fulfilled or delivered at a satisfactory level”. Therefore, students’ satisfaction with the products and services provided by businesses is essential for the survival of SHF businesses.<sup>32</sup> However, some developers are primarily concerned with the economic benefits of off-campus SHFs rather than satisfying the must-be attributes for an effective learning environment.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, developers and investors in off-campus SHFs often need to pay more attention to the critical and essential requirements outlined in the housing policy.

## DISCUSSION

Student enrollment trends have increased globally, and South African universities are no exception. The goal of increased university enrolment is to generate high-level human capital. To achieve this goal, several strategies and initiatives must be applied and implemented successfully,<sup>34</sup> one of them is to ensure that students have conducive learning and living environments. Owing to the limited accommodation facilities in public universities in South Africa, the demand for off-campus SHFs is increasing. Consequently, SHFs provide stable returns on investment globally, thus making the student housing sub-market an investment niche area.<sup>35</sup> In line with the findings of the current study, off-campus SHF development is dominated by informal investors, such as small business owners,<sup>36</sup> Most of whom live in the vicinity of the university. Owing to the limited capital of some of these investors, their ability to provide good-quality residences is often constrained. In addition, giving good-quality SHFs is further undermined by a lack of regulation, allowing developers to build without regard for users’ needs and expectations.<sup>37</sup> Lack of regulation could be the reason for the dissatisfaction reported in this study about the physical, social, neighbourhood, and management attributes of SHFs.

Transitioning from high school to the university environment is one of the biggest challenges first-year students face in tertiary institutions.<sup>38</sup> Studies conducted worldwide indicate that universities are aware of these challenges and attempt to assist and support new students in overcoming them.<sup>39</sup> The type of accommodation students select, whether on or off campus, plays a crucial role in their academic success and adjustment to university. In the context of this study, most students arriving at university come from rural areas. As such, students must adjust to the academic demands and an unfamiliar urban environment and lifestyle. Adjusting to their new environment may be simultaneously an exciting and overwhelming experience. Historically disadvantaged students may need more time to adapt to the new surroundings and feel comfortable and part of the university community. Such students, therefore, need to be accommodated in on-campus SHFs to enhance their integration. Accommodating such students in off-campus facilities would be overwhelming, considering the challenges of transportation, security, internet access, and the general neighbourhood.

Literature indicates that student housing plays a vital role in the enrolment of students and their success, and the adequacy of facilities determines their desire to remain on campus.<sup>40</sup> Despite living in on-campus SHFs being convenient for many students, Bowman and Partin did not find statistically significant differences in student's grade point averages regardless of residence. However, Frazier claims that progress and retention were higher among students who lived on campus, regardless of race, gender,

<sup>32</sup> Mala Srivastava and Dimple Kaul, “Social Interaction, Convenience and Customer Satisfaction: The Mediating Effect of Customer Experience,” *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 21, no. 6 (2014): 1028–37.

<sup>33</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, “Drivers and Consequences of Residents’ Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria.”

<sup>34</sup> Christian Sommer, “Shortest-Path Queries in Static Networks,” *ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR)* 46, no. 4 (2014): 1–31.

<sup>35</sup> Property Wire, “Investment in Student Housing,” Property Wire, 2012, www.propertywire.com.

<sup>36</sup> Ramin Keivani and Edmundo Werna, “Modes of Housing Provision in Developing Countries,” *Progress in Planning* 55, no. 2 (2001): 65–118; Okechukwu Joseph Ndubueze, “Urban Housing Affordability and Housing Policy Dilemmas in Nigeria” (University of Birmingham, 2009); Olabisi S Yusuff, “Students Access to Housing: A Case of Lagos State University Students-Nigeria,” *Journal of Sustainable Development* 4, no. 2 (2011): 107.

<sup>37</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, “Drivers and Consequences of Residents’ Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria.”

<sup>38</sup> McGhie and Du Preez, “Accessing Post-School Studies: A Student’s GPS to Successful Learning.”

<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Beyer and Bernhard Sendhoff, “Robust Optimization—a Comprehensive Survey,” *Computer Methods in Applied Mechanics and Engineering* 196, no. 33–34 (2007): 3190–3218; Angela Bowles et al., “Staying the Distance: Students’ Perceptions of Enablers of Transition to Higher Education,” *Higher Education Research & Development* 33, no. 2 (2014): 212–25.

<sup>40</sup> Frazier, “A Study of Themed Residential Learning Communities at a Midwest Four-Year University: North Dakota State University.”

or condition of admittance.<sup>41</sup> The literature mentions that SHFs affect students' academic performance. For instance, SHFs with electricity and Internet and in quiet neighbourhoods favour students, supporting their studies and allowing them to perform better than those living in SHFs without such services or utilities.

According to Thomsen, the demographic characteristics that significantly predicted a higher possibility of living off campus included being male, ability or freedom to cook own meals, length of lease/contract, proximity to campus/town, ability to live with or near friends, and privacy.<sup>42</sup> Thomsen also found significant negative predictors for students' preference to live off-campus, such as the ability to be on a dining plan, leadership opportunities, academic support availability, and high-speed internet options.<sup>43</sup> Apart from the physical attributes of housing, students are concerned about social attributes when making a residential choice.<sup>44</sup> These refer to social networks established in both the shared areas of the building and the neighbourhood, that is, relationships with roommates and neighbours. These relationships foster conducive environments, a friendly community, and a sense of belonging.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the existence of places of socialisation, such as a TV room or lounges, promotes social interaction and relaxation,<sup>46</sup> Which in turn promotes students' well-being and ability to learn effectively. The current study's findings corroborate the literature because most of the social attributes of SHFs attracted a certain extent of satisfaction from the respondents. The findings suggest that most SHFs in the study area adhered to the standards and regulations outlined in the 2015 DHET housing policy.<sup>47</sup>

Management factors on off-campus SHFs refer to attributes such as rules and guidelines, maintenance, cleanliness, and security. These, among other things, are important determinants of satisfaction with SHFs.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of the cost of the rental units, students expect a minimum of reportable housing problems during their study or occupancy.<sup>49</sup> According to Hubbard, the must-be attributes of SHFs should be considered informative for all university stakeholders in providing a conducive living environment for students to increase their well-being.<sup>50</sup> Ensuring students have positive experiences in their SHFs is essential, as this can greatly influence their academic success and personal development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities can successfully maximise the opportunities presented by the developers of off-campus SHFs by adopting a housing policy that requires strict adherence to must-be attributes. The Policy or policies should be constantly updated by the Council on Higher Education and DHET guidelines on teaching learning and accommodation in HEIs.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined five must-be attributes of off-campus SHFs (physical dimensions, social dimensions, neighbourhood, public services, and management). The findings revealed mixed reactions from the respondents, with some aspects attracting positive ratings while others attracted negative ones. The dissatisfaction with off-campus SHFs, as identified in this study, provides both the university and facility developers with the opportunity to revisit development plans to prioritise professional design and user needs and to adhere to housing requirements in line with the 2015 DHET housing policy. The current prospects of off-campus SHFs largely depend on the residents' satisfaction level. The implication of this

<sup>41</sup> Frazier, "A Study of Themed Residential Learning Communities at a Midwest Four-Year University: North Dakota State University."

<sup>42</sup> Thomsen, "Student Housing Student Homes? Aspects of Student Housing Satisfaction."

<sup>43</sup> Thomsen, "Student Housing Student Homes? Aspects of Student Housing Satisfaction."

<sup>44</sup> Bella-Omunagbe, "Drivers and Consequences of Residents' Satisfaction with Off-Campus Student Housing in South-South, Nigeria."

<sup>45</sup> Pei Chao, "Exploring the Nature of the Relationships between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty: An Attribute-Level Analysis," *The Service Industries Journal* 28, no. 1 (2008): 95–116.

<sup>46</sup> Hazel Christie, Moira Munro, and Heidi Rettig, "Accommodating Students," *Journal of Youth Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 209–35.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *Policy on the Minimum Norms and Standards for Student Housing at Public Universities*.

<sup>48</sup> Eziyi Offia Ibem and Egidario B Aduwo, "Assessment of Residential Satisfaction in Public Housing in Ogun State, Nigeria," *Habitat International* 40 (2013): 163–75.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, Cole, and Merrill, "Environmental Health Risks Associated with Off-Campus Student-Tenant Housing."

<sup>50</sup> Hubbard, "Regulating the Social Impacts of Studentification: A Loughborough Case Study."

is that the experiences of residents (students) should be explored and monitored regularly and factored into housing development plans.

### Delimitations

This study focused on the must-be attributes of off-campus SHFs, which contribute to effective learning and the general well-being of students. Methodologically, the study used a single case study, which does not allow the generalisation of the findings to the entire population of off-campus SHFs in South Africa. Moreover, the sample was comprised mainly of respondents from low-income family backgrounds; therefore, choosing an off-campus facility could have been deliberate, owing to affordability. The views of SHF developers were not included in the study.

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