
The Effect of Student Housing Conditions on Academic Performance: A Case Study of Mbarara

University of Science and Technology (MUST)

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of student housing conditions on academic performance at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). Using a cross-sectional research design with a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from 300 undergraduate students through questionnaires and key informant interviews. The study examined how various housing factors—including location, basic amenities, privacy, security, affordability, distance from campus, and noise levels—influenced students' academic outcomes. Analysis revealed significant differences in academic performance between on-campus and off-campus residents, with on-campus students demonstrating higher GPAs (3.85 vs. 3.47), more weekly study hours (24.32 vs. 19.96), and better class attendance (88.65% vs. 80.02%). Multiple regression analysis identified distance from campus, basic amenities, security, privacy, and noise levels as significant predictors of academic performance, collectively explaining 48.9% of the variance in students' GPA. Affordability, however, was not a significant predictor when controlling for other factors. The correlation analysis further demonstrated strong relationships between housing conditions and academic metrics, with distance from campus showing the strongest associations ($r=0.45$ to 0.51) with all performance indicators. The qualitative findings from key informant interviews corroborated the quantitative results, highlighting challenges such as unreliable utilities, security concerns, and excessive noise in off-campus residences as significant barriers to academic success. Students residing in substandard accommodations reported difficulties in maintaining consistent study routines, completing assignments on time, and attending early morning classes. The study also revealed that female students faced additional housing-related challenges, including security concerns that often limited their participation in evening study groups and late-night library sessions. The findings highlighted the multifaceted relationship between housing conditions and academic achievement, demonstrating that adequate accommodation is not merely a welfare issue but a critical factor in students' educational outcomes. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the non-academic determinants of student success in higher education, particularly in resource-constrained settings. The results underscore the need for expanded on-campus housing facilities, quality assurance mechanisms for off-campus accommodations, and transportation support systems. These recommendations aim to create more conducive living environments that foster academic success among MUST students and potentially improve overall institutional performance metrics including retention and graduation rates.

Key Words: Student Housing and Academic Performance

Background of the Study

Student housing plays a critical role in shaping university students' academic experiences and overall performance (Emmanuel et al., 2023). The availability, quality, and affordability of accommodation significantly influence students' concentration, study habits, and psychological well-being. In many universities,

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particularly in developing countries, students face challenges related to overcrowding, inadequate housing facilities, high rental costs, and poor living conditions, all of which may impact their academic success. Studies have shown that students living in well-maintained and conducive environments tend to perform better academically compared to those facing housing difficulties (Adoch et al., 2023). In Uganda, where higher education enrollment has been rising, student accommodation remains a pressing issue, particularly in institutions such as Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), where both on-campus and off-campus housing options have their unique challenges (Moses, 2023). This study examines how student housing conditions affect academic performance at MUST, shedding light on the extent to which housing quality influences students' ability to excel in their studies.

The study is grounded in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which suggests that basic needs, such as shelter and security, must be met before individuals can focus on higher-order needs like academic achievement (Ntirandekura & Mushamba, 2022). According to (Alex et al., 2023), a stable and comfortable living environment is essential for psychological well-being and cognitive functioning. Students who struggle with inadequate housing, lack of privacy, or excessive commuting stress may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies, thereby affecting their academic performance. Additionally, Tinto's Student Integration Theory emphasizes that academic and social integration are key factors in student success. Poor housing conditions may limit students' engagement with academic activities, reduce study time, and contribute to absenteeism, ultimately leading to lower performance and increased dropout rates (Sánchez-Hernando et al., 2022). These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding how housing conditions impact students' ability to achieve their academic goals.

In Uganda, student accommodation has become a growing concern due to the rapid expansion of university enrollment without a proportional increase in housing infrastructure. MUST, located in Mbarara City, is one of the leading universities in Uganda, attracting students from different regions of the country (Victoria et al., 2023). However, the availability of on-campus accommodation is limited, forcing a significant proportion of students to seek housing in private hostels or rental apartments. Many off-campus accommodations lack essential facilities such as stable electricity, internet access, water supply, and security, which can negatively affect students' academic engagement (Jackline, 2023). Moreover, the high cost of private housing puts financial strain on students and their families, potentially leading to stress and reduced focus on academics. While the university has made efforts to address accommodation issues, challenges such as overcrowding in hostels, long commuting distances, and unfavorable living conditions persist, making it imperative to assess how these factors influence academic performance (Wadood et al., 2018).

This study focuses on the relationship between student housing conditions and academic performance by analyzing key housing factors such as room space, availability of study areas, noise levels, security, utilities (electricity and water supply), and affordability (Christopher, Moses, Enosh Muhindo, et al., 2022). Academic performance will be assessed based on students' grades, concentration levels, study habits, and attendance rates. The study will also explore how differences in accommodation settings—on-campus hostels versus off-campus housing—affect students' ability to succeed academically (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, et al., 2022). By

identifying the major challenges students face in their living environments, this research aims to provide insights that can guide policy recommendations for improving student housing at MUST and other universities in Uganda.

Problem Statement

Student housing conditions play a crucial role in shaping academic performance, yet many university students in Uganda face significant challenges related to accommodation. At Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), limited on-campus housing forces a majority of students to seek alternative accommodation in private hostels or rental apartments, which often lack essential amenities such as reliable electricity, water supply, internet access, and a conducive study environment (Gracious, 2024). Many students struggle with overcrowding, high rental costs, insecurity, and long commuting distances, all of which can negatively impact their ability to concentrate on studies, complete assignments on time, and actively participate in academic activities (Mehra et al., 2014). Additionally, noisy environments and the absence of designated study areas in off-campus housing further hinder students' academic engagement, leading to lower academic performance. Despite the crucial role of housing in student success, there is limited research on how specific housing conditions affect academic performance at MUST, making it difficult to formulate targeted interventions to address these challenges (Hadijah & Ali, 2024).

While various stakeholders, including university administrations and the government, have acknowledged the importance of student housing, there is still an evident gap in policy implementation and infrastructural investment to support a growing student population (Abío et al., 2019). Many universities in Uganda, including MUST, continue to face difficulties in providing affordable and quality student accommodation, leaving students to rely on private hostels that may not meet academic-supportive standards. Consequently, students who live in poor housing conditions often experience stress, reduced motivation, and lower academic achievement (Nurudeen et al., 2024). This study seeks to examine the extent to which student housing conditions affect academic performance at MUST, identifying key housing-related factors that influence students' learning experiences. The findings from this research will provide valuable insights into the need for improved housing policies, better university accommodation facilities, and strategies to enhance students' academic success through improved living conditions.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the impact of student housing conditions on academic performance at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST).
2. To examine the key housing-related challenges faced by students at MUST and their effects on learning experiences.
3. To propose recommendations for improving student housing conditions to enhance academic performance at MUST.

Research Questions

1. How do student housing conditions affect academic performance at MUST?

2. What are the major accommodation challenges faced by students at MUST, and how do they influence their learning experiences?
3. What strategies can be implemented to improve student housing conditions for better academic outcomes at MUST?

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design to assess the effect of student housing conditions on academic performance at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). The design was appropriate as it allowed for the collection of data at a single point in time, providing insights into the prevailing housing conditions and their influence on students' academic outcomes. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The target population comprised undergraduate students at MUST, both those residing in on-campus hostels and those in off-campus accommodation. A stratified random sampling strategy was used to ensure representation from different accommodation categories. Students were first grouped based on their type of residence (on-campus or off-campus), and then a random selection was made from each stratum. A sample size of 300 students was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, ensuring statistical adequacy for generalization of findings.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire for quantitative data and key informant interviews for qualitative insights. The questionnaire captured key variables such as housing conditions (availability of basic amenities, privacy, security, affordability, and noise levels) and academic performance indicators (self-reported GPA, study time, and class attendance). The collected data was cleaned, coded, and stored securely to ensure confidentiality and prevent data loss. The data analysis plan involved three levels of statistical examination. At the univariate level, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize the characteristics of the respondents. At the bivariate level, Chi-square tests (for categorical variables) and independent t-tests (for continuous variables) were conducted to assess the relationships between housing conditions and academic performance. At the multivariate level, multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which different housing factors predict academic performance while controlling for potential confounders (Nelson et al., 2022). The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) due to its efficiency in handling large datasets and performing advanced statistical computations (Nelson et al., 2023).

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the MUST Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, and their informed consent was sought before they participated. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique identification codes instead of using respondents' personal details. Additionally, participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. However, the study had several limitations. First, the use of self-reported academic performance may have introduced recall bias or inaccuracies. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited the ability to establish causality between housing conditions and academic

performance. Lastly, due to financial and time constraints, the study was conducted within MUST, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other universities in Uganda. Despite these limitations, the study provided critical insights that could inform policy interventions aimed at improving student accommodation and academic outcomes.

Research Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Participants and Housing Conditions

Variable	Frequency/Mean	Percentage/SD
Gender		
Male	165	55.0%
Female	135	45.0%
Year of Study		
First Year	92	30.7%
Second Year	86	28.7%
Third Year	74	24.7%
Fourth Year	48	16.0%
Housing Type		
On-campus	117	39.0%
Off-campus	183	61.0%
Housing Conditions (scale 1-5)		
Basic Amenities	3.43	0.96
Privacy	3.32	0.97
Security	3.37	1.10
Affordability	3.05	1.13
Distance from Campus	3.28	1.29
Noise Levels	2.60	1.07
Academic Performance		
GPA (0-5.0 scale)	3.62	0.72
Weekly Study Hours	21.68	6.93
Class Attendance (%)	83.41	12.18

Interpretation: The descriptive statistics revealed that the study sample comprised 55% male and 45% female students, with a relatively balanced distribution across years of study. The majority of students (61%) resided in off-campus accommodation. In terms of housing conditions, basic amenities and security were rated above average (mean scores of 3.43 and 3.37 out of 5, respectively), while affordability received the lowest rating (mean of 3.05). The average self-reported GPA was 3.62, with students reporting an average of 21.68 weekly study hours and 83.41% class attendance.

Table 2: Comparison of Academic Performance by Housing Type

Variable	On-campus (n=117)	Off-campus (n=183)	t-value	p-value
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GPA	3.85 (0.65)	3.47 (0.72)	4.63	<0.001*
Weekly Study Hours	24.32 (6.24)	19.96 (6.87)	5.72	<0.001*
Class Attendance (%)	88.65 (9.78)	80.02 (12.57)	6.41	<0.001*

*Values in parentheses represent standard deviations; *significant at $p < 0.05$

Independent t-tests showed significant differences in academic performance indicators between students living on-campus versus off-campus. On-campus residents demonstrated significantly higher GPA (3.85 vs. 3.47, $p < 0.001$), more weekly study hours (24.32 vs. 19.96, $p < 0.001$), and better class attendance (88.65% vs. 80.02%, $p < 0.001$) compared to their off-campus counterparts. These findings indicated that housing location had a substantial association with various measures of academic performance.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Housing Conditions and Academic Performance

Variable	GPA	Study Hours	Attendance
Basic Amenities	0.42*	0.39*	0.35*
Privacy	0.31*	0.40*	0.22*
Security	0.38*	0.32*	0.36*
Affordability	0.15*	0.13*	0.11
Distance from Campus	0.45*	0.47*	0.51*
Noise Levels	-0.36*	-0.41*	-0.33*

*significant at $p < 0.05$

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships between housing conditions and academic performance metrics. Distance from campus showed the strongest positive correlations with all academic indicators ($r = 0.45$ to 0.51 , $p < 0.05$), suggesting that proximity to campus was a critical factor in student success. Basic amenities and security also exhibited moderate positive correlations with academic measures. Noise levels demonstrated moderate negative correlations with all performance indicators ($r = -0.33$ to -0.41 , $p < 0.05$), indicating that noisy environments adversely affected academic outcomes. Affordability showed the weakest correlations, although still statistically significant with GPA and study hours.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting GPA from Housing Conditions

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
(Constant)	1.743	0.194	8.98	<0.001
Housing Type (On-campus)	0.176	0.083	2.12	0.035*
Basic Amenities	0.154	0.042	3.67	<0.001*
Privacy	0.087	0.039	2.23	0.026*
Security	0.102	0.037	2.76	0.006*
Affordability	0.038	0.031	1.23	0.221
Distance from Campus	0.132	0.033	4.00	<0.001*
Noise Levels	-0.108	0.036	-3.00	0.003*

$R^2 = 0.489$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.477$, $F(7,292) = 39.86$, $p < 0.001$ *significant at $p < 0.05$

The multiple regression model explained approximately 48.9% of the variance in students' GPA ($R^2=0.489$). After controlling for other factors, on-campus housing was significantly associated with higher GPA ($\beta=0.176$, $p=0.035$). Among housing conditions, basic amenities ($\beta=0.154$, $p<0.001$), distance from campus ($\beta=0.132$, $p<0.001$), and security ($\beta=0.102$, $p=0.006$) emerged as the strongest predictors of academic performance. Noise levels showed a significant negative association with GPA ($\beta=-0.108$, $p=0.003$), confirming that quieter environments were conducive to better academic outcomes. Affordability was not a significant predictor of GPA when other housing factors were controlled for ($p=0.221$).

Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted the significant influence of student housing conditions on academic performance at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The results demonstrated that housing arrangements, both in terms of location and quality, played a crucial role in shaping students' academic outcomes as measured by GPA, study hours, and class attendance. On-campus residents consistently outperformed their off-campus counterparts across all academic indicators. This finding aligned with previous research by (Al-Khani et al., 2019), who found that students living in university residences generally achieved better academic results due to better access to university facilities and reduced commuting time. The proximity to academic resources, including libraries and study spaces, likely facilitated more effective learning environments for on-campus residents. As noted by (Peter et al., 2023), the convenience of on-campus accommodation eliminated transportation challenges and allowed students to allocate more time to academic pursuits rather than commuting.

Distance from campus emerged as one of the strongest predictors of academic performance, with a significant positive correlation with GPA, study hours, and class attendance. This finding was consistent with the work of (Carrión-Pantoja et al., 2022), who established that long commuting distances negatively impacted students' ability to attend early morning and evening classes, participate in group discussions, and utilize campus resources effectively. For MUST students residing off-campus, particularly those living far from the university, the time and energy expended on daily commutes likely detracted from time available for studying and academic engagement. Basic amenities, including adequate water supply, electricity, and internet connectivity, demonstrated a strong positive association with academic performance. This result supported the findings of (Hassan et al., 2020), who emphasized that the availability of essential facilities created conducive environments for studying and completing academic tasks. In the context of MUST, where power outages and water shortages were sometimes reported, students with reliable access to these amenities had a distinct advantage in maintaining consistent study routines.

The negative relationship between noise levels and academic performance highlighted the importance of quiet study environments. This finding corroborated the study by , who no(Wilbrod Aviu, 2024)ted that noise pollution in student residences adversely affected concentration and learning. For MUST students, particularly those living in densely populated off-campus areas or hostels without noise regulation policies, this factor represented a significant barrier to effective studying. Privacy and security also emerged as significant predictors of academic performance, supporting previous research by Nimako and Bondinuba (2013), who

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found that students' sense of safety and personal space influenced their psychological well-being and, consequently, their academic engagement. MUST students who reported feeling secure in their accommodations and having adequate privacy for studying demonstrated better academic outcomes, suggesting that these factors contributed to creating environments conducive to learning.

Interestingly, affordability showed the weakest correlation with academic performance and was not a significant predictor in the regression model when other factors were controlled for. This finding contrasted with some previous studies (Kukundakwe, 2024) that emphasized the impact of accommodation costs on students' financial stress and, consequently, their academic performance. This discrepancy might be attributed to the relatively homogeneous socioeconomic background of students at MUST or the possibility that those facing severe financial constraints had developed effective coping mechanisms to mitigate the impact on their studies. The overall findings highlighted the multifaceted relationship between housing conditions and academic performance, with the regression model explaining approximately 48.9% of the variance in students' GPA. This indicated that while housing played a significant role in academic outcomes, other factors not captured in this study, such as personal motivation, teaching quality, and prior academic preparation, also contributed substantially to student performance.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between student housing conditions and academic performance at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The findings revealed that housing arrangements significantly influenced students' academic outcomes, with on-campus residents demonstrating better performance than their off-campus counterparts. Key housing factors including proximity to campus, basic amenities, security, privacy, and noise levels emerged as significant predictors of academic success. The study concluded that inadequate housing conditions posed substantial challenges to students' learning experiences and academic achievements. The challenges were particularly pronounced for off-campus residents who faced issues such as long commuting distances, unreliable basic amenities, security concerns, and noisy environments. These conditions collectively impeded students' ability to effectively engage with their academic work, resulting in lower GPAs, fewer study hours, and reduced class attendance.

The findings underscored the need for targeted interventions to improve student accommodation at MUST, particularly focusing on increasing on-campus housing capacity and enhancing the quality of available accommodation options. By addressing these housing challenges, the university could create more conducive learning environments that support students' academic pursuits and contribute to better educational outcomes. While the study provided valuable insights into the housing-academic performance nexus at MUST, it recognized that student success is determined by multiple interacting factors beyond housing alone. Therefore, a holistic approach to improving student outcomes should consider housing as one critical component within a broader framework of academic support services and resources.

Recommendations

Expansion of On-Campus Housing Facilities: MUST should prioritize the development of additional on-campus housing facilities to accommodate a larger proportion of the student population. The university

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administration should consider public-private partnerships to finance new residential buildings equipped with modern amenities, study spaces, and internet connectivity. These facilities should be designed to promote both academic work and social interaction, incorporating features such as quiet study areas, group discussion rooms, and recreational spaces to enhance the overall living-learning experience.

Quality Assurance for Off-Campus Accommodations: The university should establish a robust off-campus housing accreditation system to ensure that privately-owned accommodations meet minimum standards of quality, safety, and affordability. This system should include regular inspections, feedback mechanisms for students, and partnerships with landlords to address identified issues promptly. Additionally, the university should develop a comprehensive database of accredited off-campus housing options, making it easily accessible to students to facilitate informed accommodation choices. This initiative would help improve the overall quality of off-campus housing while fostering accountability among property owners.

Implementation of Transportation and Infrastructure Support: For students residing off-campus, the university should implement reliable transportation services connecting major student residential areas to the campus. This could include dedicated shuttle services operating on schedules aligned with class timings, particularly for early morning and evening sessions. Furthermore, MUST should advocate for improved infrastructure in areas with high student populations, including better roads, street lighting, and internet connectivity. The university should also consider establishing satellite study centers in locations with high concentrations of off-campus students, providing access to essential academic resources closer to their residences. These measures would mitigate the challenges associated with distance and commuting, thereby enhancing students' ability to fully participate in academic activities.

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