

Perception of Students Housing Complex in Malaysian Public University. Case Study: University of Malaya

Lim, Frederick.K.W¹, Asrul Aminuddin^{2*}

^{1,2}*Department of Architecture, Faculty of Built Environment, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 50603, Malaysia*

limfrederick6@gmail.com, *asrilmahjuddin@um.edu.my

Student housing, colloquially known as residential college is one of the most fundamental components of any tertiary academical institution, accommodating both undergraduates and postgraduates aside from carving memories and sense of nostalgia. The importance of student housing becomes apparent as it houses students who form the social backbone of the campus. University of Malaya is selected as the case study of this research because it has not been covered by any past researchers. Most of its student housing complexes were built in much earlier days for a different generation of varsity students as it is the oldest public university in Malaysia. It is therefore crucial to evaluate the perception of millennial students currently dwelling in these relatively old student housing complexes where their daily lifestyles and needs have modernly transformed. Students living in all twelve on-campus residential colleges of University of Malaya were selected as the sampling for this survey research. The final outcome of this research illustrates that students collectively have a feeling of moderate satisfaction towards their student housing. The only attributes that they are dissatisfied with is the sports and recreational facilities and the walkability as well as connectivity to the public transportation hub.

Keywords: student housing, perception, level of satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of Student Housing

Student housing is the backbone of the campus where students encounter a sense of belonging to their respective larger institutions by embracing the feeling of homeliness within their corresponding on-campus units of dwelling (Cleave, 1996). Public universities often collate a wide-ranging amount of courses disseminated within quite a number of faculties, with each faculty being an academic complex of its own, leading to public universities occupying a much larger vicinity as compared to that of private universities. This in turn relates back to the fact that student housing is more fundamental and crucial in public universities for the purpose of providing convenience and sense of place to their large number of students (Curley, 2003). Nevertheless, student housing is a primary component of every tertiary institutions regardless of nomenclature as described by Melnikas. Melnikas (1998: p.326) noted that "A house is a concrete and relatively limited and close physical, biological and social space where individuals and groups can live their biosocial life taking on certain production, services, housekeeping and other biosocial activities".

In most cases, either due to ignorance or disregarding, a campus overall master plan has been given so much of thought and extravagance that the basic fundamentals of hostel liveability gets overlooked. This is a known phenomenon where architects, planners and consultants in the alike industry are obsessed with creating an awe-inspiring mammoth-like impersonation of the whole institution while forgetting that student housing is actually the heart, if not the soul of the campus (Howley et al., 2009). The quality of a campus is supposedly not measured from its wide range of modern facilities, interconnecting transportation network, lush greeneries and respectable academicians but should also be gauged by the liveability of its student housing. Additionally, Klis and Karsten (2008) emphasized that home is indeed the pedestal of all human needs, being the foundation that promotes the routine of our daily lives. The architectural design of student housing in the context of Malaysian universities as a whole, is very much essential not only in providing utmost expediency to the students, but also in ensuring only the best in their psychological and physical

development during their tenure ship in the respective institutions (Elias et al., 2010).

This research emanates from the perception of millennial students of University of Malaya residing in the on-campus student housing, as suggested by the research topic itself. Although the corresponding organization of every Malaysian Universities have performed what needs to be done when it comes to the provision of student housing, there seems to still be a missing gap that often leads to the issue of cost versus quality of living for the students (Najib et al., 2011). According to a study conducted by Khozaei et al. (2012), provision of a flourishing student housing is not solely dependent on the quantity of buildings or hostels constructed but the basic ideology on how the built facilities and services are able to fulfil the practical needs of their students while being non-compromising on their daily conveniences.

Stereotypically, public universities need to adhere to governmental policies which leads to the restriction of the maximum hostel rental rates that can be charged to students. Private universities on the other hand, are not regulated by such instances and are always in the argument of over-providing and over-charging students leasing their hostels. Due to the disparity in fee structure and established policies, the public universities cannot follow the footsteps of private universities when it comes to allocation of student housing. This is a common restraint for student housing in public universities within our developing world where having the hostels fitted with state of the art amenities is deemed to be exorbitantly uneconomical and will incur definite high allowances from the government (Khozaei et al., 2010).

Studies by Ojogwu and Alutu (2009) generalize that university students, particularly freshmen often favour or are encouraged to stay at on-campus hostels due to convenience as opposed to off-campus accommodations. In the United States, it is testified by Foubert et al. (1998) that senior students of University of Pittsburgh were compelled to relocate and dwell in the off-campus student housing because on-campus houses were made available only for freshmen. For most cases, while the on-campus hostels could be having better sense of security and safety as a result of stringent supervision by the hostel wardens, the attribute of comfort seemed

to be disregarded in the worst case scenarios. A majority of students in the United Kingdom had relocated to off-campus student housing due to the attractiveness to accomplish new housing needs and lifestyles as compared to dwelling in a traditional on-campus shared style of student living (Foubert et al., 1998).

There is a need to establish the ideal conditions that could be a design platform to guide the future nomenclature and typology of student housing in our Public Universities. Fulfilment of legislative regulations is one thing, while actually meeting and satisfying students' needs is quite another. There needs to be an establishment of a conducive middle-ground typology for student housing that advocates contemporary living qualities complemented by modern facilities and services in achieving scholastic-related goals covering various spectrums of hard and soft skills (Hassanain, 2008). With the above consideration, this research aims to obtain the perception of millennial students currently dwelling in the on-campus student housing of University of Malaya. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives are formulated:

1. To investigate the satisfaction of University of Malaya's students on the existing nomenclature and typology of on-campus student housing.
2. To investigate UM students' preference on student housing layout and room occupancy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Characterization of Student Housing

It is a dwelling typology that accommodates large numbers of people, first segregated by blocks in accordance to gender, then further broken down into unit rooms. The rooms are furnished by the hostel management body and student housing as a whole, is rented by the bed (Moore, 2000). According to study conducted by Amole (2009), student housing can be equated to an apartment that advocates both habitation and education. Depending on the designed scheme, its corridor could be single or double loaded and the bathrooms are either embedded into each twin sharing room or placed externally in several numbers as a shared facility. Student housing was hypothesized as a momentary residence that accommodates either undergraduates or postgraduates who are living away from their parental house while pursuing their studies.

Student housing is also interpreted as a university-owned lodging which fees and rules are set and standardized by the hostel management body in order to provide students with the experience to live in an on-campus setting, for the purpose of convenience and in worst case, as an option when there is nowhere else for them to reside. Student housing is often addressed by Westerners as “halls of residence” but it is colloquially termed as hostel in the Malaysian context. There are several other terminologies related to student housing such as student dormitory, campus housing, catered halls, university housing, campus dormitories, student accommodation units, campus apartments or college housing, all exuding similar roles as a supervised living-learning hub, incorporated with inexpensive chargeable rooms as well as shared amenities and facilities built on campus ground and owned by the university, where the students reside throughout their tenure ship in respective tertiary academical institutions (Amole, 2009).

2.2. Domestic Attributes of Student Housing

According to a study conducted by Adriaanse (2007), from the perspective of psychological milieu, the notion of a home is accentuated via physical structure which provides its occupants sense of territorial belonging and identity. It is the setting where one experiences social contact and social context. Additionally, some past researches from Sixsmith (1986) asserted that a home is not just 2 dimensional within a single location but could be multi settings, comparable to that of a dual or commuter residence. This is indeed relatable to a student where he or she has a parental house in respective hometown but requires a temporary second home for convenience that is located closely to the academic faculty and is where he or she will be provisionally dwelling during his or her scholastic programme. The tangible attribute of the societal-corporeal atmosphere is epitomized through a house while the social bit is exemplified via community and its engagement. A house is deemed as dwelling units comprising of bedrooms, kitchen facilities, floor area, public services and most importantly, neighbourhood. The furnishing and living quality as well as amenities provided for student housing should be of certain benchmark to provide the sense of home-living to students during their scholastic period. In fact, the provision of excellent student housing will not only provide well-being to its

dwellers but also accentuate students' achievement in both curricular and extra-curricular attributes, leading to augmentation of the campus accomplishment as a whole (Beitenhaus, 2009). Rinn (2004) also interpreted home as the imperceptible and intangible attribute of a dwelling where responsibilities are executed, recollections as well as meanings of life are crafted. Home is the permutation between house representing the physical unit and household representing the social unit, both collectively leading to the establishment of a socio-spatial system. It is the central place where solitude and liberation of an individual is permitted, offering well-being, sovereignty and a domestic gathering spot. These attributes of place making and sense of belonging of a home explains the residential academic communities adapted to student housing. This in turn allows students from varying academic backgrounds to foster good social communication with each other while also having the alternative to relish personal privacy.

2.3. Framework of Student Housing

Generally, the conception of student housing is inspired by the nomenclature of a regular family housing. Nevertheless, Amole (2009a) perceive it as a unique dwelling typology with it being a university owned facility that promotes momentary accommodation to students during their education phase. The overall student housing complex is less reserved than a regular family housing due to students only having personal space in their respective bedroom units while other complementary facilities are pretty much shared among the students community, besides being regulated by certain rules and procedures incorporated by the hostel management body. Student housing is unique because the backdrop is assimilated towards campus ground instead of conventional family housing that is adapted to its neighbouring developments either in urban or sub-urban context (Thomsen, 2007).

2.4. Components of Student Housing

The general components of student housing encompasses several essential features and support services. Components could vary greatly in amount, criterion and design between a public and private University with budgetary expenditure being the principal governing factor. It begins primarily with study bedroom which is the more personal setting where the student studies, lives and sleep. Each bedroom can either

be of single, double, triple sharing or quadruple of nomenclature, and the occupants of every room share access to common facilities. Students are accommodated in this study bedroom for academic, psychological, social and economic reasons. Additionally, the bedrooms can be designed to either come with or without private bathrooms. Certain student housing typologies incorporates both private bathrooms within the study bedroom and shared bathrooms that is accessible by all students living on the same floor (Hassanain, 2008).

A glimpse towards shared facilities sees the incorporation of laundry room, provided within the student housing complex for clothes washing functions. For the purpose of having a home-like cooking and dining room atmosphere, there is also provision of a pantry. Moving on, there is study room provided for the purpose of learning and reading. The study room allows students to either study unaccompanied or to have an interactive group revision. The computer room is fitted with ample amenities, allowing students to browse the web and conduct E-learning. Television room is allocated as a venue where students meet their social and recreational needs. Additionally, students can have discussions at the meeting room (Wiens, 2010).

Meanwhile, the lobby or common lounge which is complemented by sofa sets and reading materials such as magazines and newspapers advocates an intimate and leisure atmosphere through its informal ambience. For religious purposes, there needs to be a Surau facing the direction of Qibla for Muslims to conduct their prayers and this space shall be kept clean at all times. Lastly are the support facilities that are furnished as complementary facilities to increase the liveability of the student housing. These encompass convenience stores, mini stationery shops, cafeteria, parking lots, public phones and ATM Machines.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Quantitative method in the form of non-experimental survey research was adopted for this research. This research is therefore designed to be non-experimental with the sampling of heterogeneous respondents. Non-experimental survey research was chosen as it can be used widely among the designated respondents while also being easy to be conducted. Data can be can

be collected rapidly in a relatively short amount of time, not forgetting that it is very suitable to cater for large samples, in this case 6952 students who are dwelling in the on-campus student housing of University of Malaya. Survey research allows for the acquisition of direct information from the respondents with the results being able to be generalised. This method of research aims to elaborate as well as to predict on the outcome of data collected.

3.2. Research Instrument

Questionnaire is the instrument used for this survey research. The questionnaire serves to gauge opinions and standpoints of only the undergraduate and postgraduate students residing in the on-campus student housing of University of Malaya. The questionnaire was formulated with quick and direct answers to gauge the thoughts and views of the relatively large number of students living on-campus. Prior to having the respondents answering the questions set, they were briefly informed of the purpose of this survey so that they would be furnished with a clearer understanding of how and why the data was being collected. The same set of questionnaires were distributed to all students living in their respective on campus student housing, also known as residential colleges within the vicinity of University of Malaya. It contains a total number of 16 very straight forward questions suited to the level of readiness of respondents with the questions being systematically arranged and structured. Different types of variables are embedded within these array of questions asked. A variable can be defined as the property of a proposal that we deliberately would like to learn more about. Since these variables are catering for a quantitative research, they are assigned with certain numerals and values allowing them to be analysed later on via mathematical based methods. The earlier mentioned 16 questions within the survey questionnaire are categorized into several types, namely multiple choice, checkboxes, Likert-type scale and open ended. The mean response of each attribute asked in the Likert-type scale questions is tabulated as follows;

- A mean response lying between the values of 1.00 to 1.49 implies that students are “Extremely Satisfied”
- A mean response lying between the values of 1.50 to 2.49 implies that students are “Very Satisfied”

- A mean response lying between the values of 2.50 to 3.49 implies that students are “Moderately Satisfied”
- A mean response lying between the values of 3.50 to 4.49 implies that students are “Dissatisfied”
- A mean response lying above the value of 4.50 implies that students are “Strongly Dissatisfied”

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Students Category

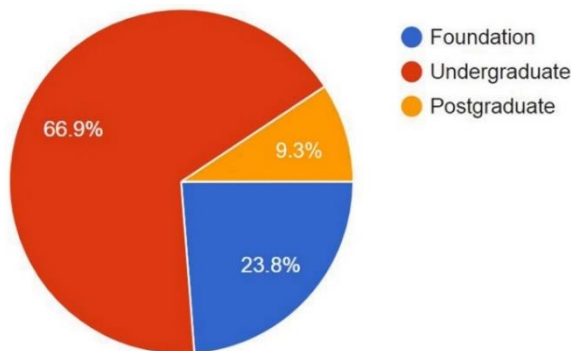


Figure 1: Pie chart illustrating category of students living in the on-campus residential colleges of University of Malaya

From figure 1, it is found that majority of the students who resides in the on-campus student housing of University of Malaya are undergraduate students who constitutes to 66.9% of the sampling. These group of students are those who are currently pursuing their Bachelor's degree. Foundation students or freshmen are the second largest cohort at 23.8%. Postgraduate students, comprising of those who are pursuing either their Master's degree or Doctorates form just 9.3% of the population sampling.

4.2. Students Gender Demography

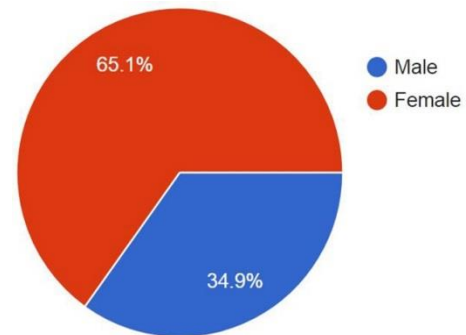


Figure 2: Pie chart illustrating gender of students living in the on-campus residential colleges of University of Malaya

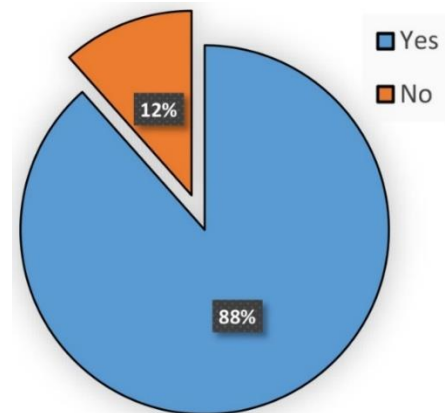


Figure 3: Pie chart illustrating percentage of students in support for a new student housing complex

In terms of gender demography, it is actually not surprising to see that there are more female samples than male samples as the number of female students in University of Malaya is indeed greater than their male counterparts as illustrated in figure 2. Therefore, it is understandable when there are more female students residing in the on-campus student housing.

4.3. Likert Type Scale Questions

Table 1: Data Analysis for Likert type scale Questions

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Response value
Satisfaction on study bedroom in terms of space quality & ambiance	3.34	1.04	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on furniture layout in study bedroom	3.38	1.04	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on amount of privacy in study bedroom	3.06	1.14	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on bathroom facilities	3.12	1.19	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on laundry facilities	3.11	1.13	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on clothes drying yard	2.99	1.18	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on nearby shops provided (grocery, cafe, photocopy & printing stationery, launderette, etc)	3.48	1.12	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on sports & recreational facilities	3.61	0.98	Dissatisfied
Satisfaction on safety & security provided at residential college	3.37	1.09	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction on the walkability of residential college as well as its connectivity to public transportation hub	3.68	1.04	Dissatisfied

4.4. Need for New Student Housing Complex in University of Malaya

A polling done to gauge students' opinions on University of Malaya having the need for a new on-campus student housing complex implies that a huge percentage of the sampling totally support the idea, citing that the existing residential colleges do not fully satisfy their living aspirations as millennials. The other 12% however, were not totally against the idea but had doubts on the idea of a new student housing complex being built within the vicinity of University of Malaya, quoting that the campus masterplan is already congested and may not have sufficient room for such development to take place.

4.5. Preferable Monthly Rental Rate

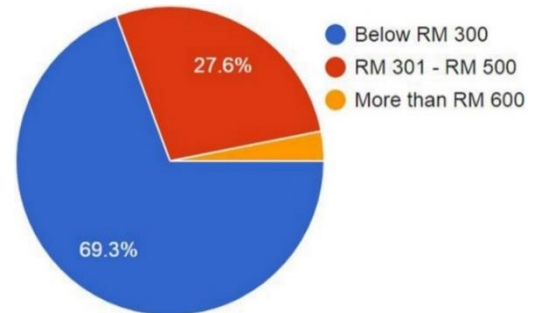


Figure 4: Pie chart illustrating students' preferable monthly rental rate for the new student housing complex

In terms of preferable monthly rental rate, a huge bulk of students opt to pay below RM 300 for their rental rate while another bunch are in approval to pay between RM 300 to RM 500 monthly. The remaining 3.1% of the sampling are students who are willing to pay more than RM 600 monthly. It is worthy to note that University of Malaya is currently implementing a system whereby postgraduate students are paying double the rate as compared to undergraduate students. While this system allows for better likelihoods for the undergrads to secure an on-campus student housing, it is actually unfair for the postgrads to pay double for the similar type of student housing facility.

4.6. Favoured Student Housing Layout

There are 4 student housing layouts that is preferred by the students, namely standard single, en-suite single, standard twin and en-suite twin. Generally, the students prefer twin sharing over single rooms. Students also favour en-suite housing units as compared to standard units. The difference between a standard and en-suite unit lies in the availability of an attached bathroom within the student housing unit, allowing for more convenience to its occupants. Students preference on the housing layout in a descending order is en-suite twin, followed by standard twin, en-suite single and and finally, standard single.

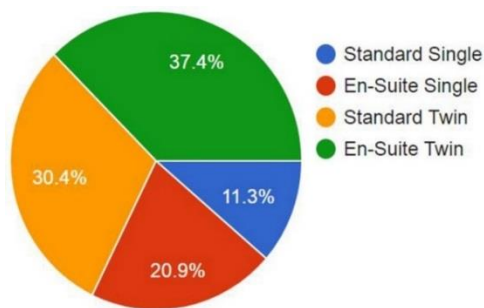


Figure 5: Pie chart illustrating students' favoured room layout for the new student housing complex

4.7. Preferred Room Occupancy

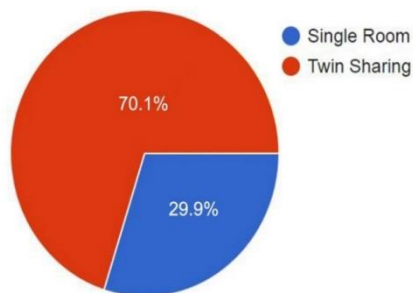


Figure 6: Pie chart illustrating students' preferred room occupancy for the new student housing complex

The preferred room occupancy obtained from this survey research is somewhat related to the preferable monthly rental rate analysed earlier at figure 4. The selection of twin sharing room occupancies forming 70.1% of the cluster is closely connected to the 69.3% of students who were willing to pay only up to RM 300 a month for their accommodation. Meanwhile, the

remaining bulk of 29.9% who opt for single room occupancy comprised of students who had no issues paying up to RM 500 and for some, the monthly rental rate of more than RM 600 is still very much within their budget.

5. CONCLUSION

Millennial generation of students currently dwelling in the on-campus student housing of University of Malaya are moderately satisfied. This is evident when we look at the data analysis tabulated in Table 1, where the obtained Y (mean) values are closer to the Likert scale numeric of 3, indicating moderate satisfaction. The acquired S (standard deviation) values are also uniform, ranging only between 0.98 to 1.19, which implies that students possess similarly concentrated opinions when asked to rate on their satisfaction level on the current provision of student housing by University of Malaya. Students were only dissatisfied on the sports and recreational facilities as well as the walkability and connectivity of their residential colleges to the public transportation hub. Although the students were moderately satisfied with the current residential colleges, they strongly agreed that there is need for a new on-campus student housing complex to impartially accommodate more students while meeting the modern living needs of millennial students. This need is justified in figure 3, with 88% of the sampling being supportive of the new student housing complex. The survey research also found that students' budgetary capacities for the monthly rental of the new student housing complex lies between below RM 300 to more than RM600, which makes the proposed student housing feasible based on the revenue that will be generated. From the survey research conducted on the preferred student housing layout and room occupancy, it is found that students favoured twin sharing more than single bedroom units and have higher preference for en-suite typology due to the provision of attached toilets within the units. Another important attribute to take note is that there were more female than male students within the sampling, suggesting that the new student housing complex should have more blocks catering to the female residents.

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