

Students' General Perspectives on Accommodation and Academic Conduction: A Qualitative Inquiry into Living Conditions and Learning Outcomes

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The rapid expansion of higher education globally has intensified the demand for student accommodation, particularly in developing contexts where on-campus housing falls short of enrolment numbers. This study explores students' experiences and perspectives regarding how private accommodation living conditions affect their academic performance. Using an inductive qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 university students and analysed using thematic analysis supported by ATLAS.ti software. The findings reveal that poor living conditions including inadequate hygiene, unreliable internet access, electricity outages, noise, and harassment negatively impact students' ability to study effectively. Distance from campus and lack of transportation contribute to physical fatigue, stress, missed classes, and reduced academic performance. Despite these challenges, students demonstrate resilience through coping strategies such as spending more time on campus, studying during quieter periods, and using personal resources to compensate for inadequate services. Participants recommend improved service delivery, stronger safety measures, stricter monitoring of landlords, and pricing aligned with service quality. The study concludes that accommodation is a structural determinant of academic success, requiring coordinated efforts from universities, providers, and policymakers to ensure safe, affordable, and conducive living environments.

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1. Introduction

Transitioning to university life involves significant adjustments for young adults, including relocating from home to student accommodation, taking on academic responsibilities, and adapting to new social environments (Li & Omar, 2025). For students living away from home, housing conditions are a primary concern that fundamentally shapes their educational experience. Research indicates that substandard student housing such as inadequate ventilation and lighting, excessive noise, and overcrowding adversely affects students' health and learning (Sotomayor et al., 2022; Agyekum, 2022).

The global higher education landscape has witnessed unprecedented expansion, with tertiary education participation rising from 19% to 40% between 2000 and 2020 (Masha & Agyeman, 2024). This growth has placed immense pressure on universities to provide accommodation, with historically disadvantaged institutions in the Global South being most severely affected. Consequently, private off-campus student housing has proliferated as an alternative, yet the quality and standards of such accommodation remain inconsistent and often inadequate.

In South Africa, the student housing crisis has reached alarming proportions. Hundreds of thousands of students struggle annually to secure decent accommodation, with the demand for student housing far exceeding available supply (Hoffmeester, 2025). The funding crisis further compounds this challenge, with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) owing accommodation providers significant amounts, creating uncertainty that threatens both access and quality (Hoffmeester, 2025). The Department of Higher Education and Training has formulated a housing policy to guide developers, yet implementation gaps persist, particularly at historically disadvantaged institutions (Masha & Agyeman, 2024).

The Ministerial Committee on Student Housing in South Africa (2011) emphasised that adequate accommodation is a main framework condition for the "smooth operation" of studies, and

funding plays a key role in the selection of student housing. Financial concerns with accommodation may negatively impact equity of access to higher education, especially for students from lower-income families (Eurostudent, 2011).

This study aims to investigate students' perspectives on how their accommodation living conditions affect their academic conduction. Specifically, it explores the relationship between living conditions and academic performance, examines students' resilience strategies, and identifies recommendations for improving student housing. The research is guided by the primary objective: to determine the specific experiences students encounter at private accommodations and to ascertain students' accommodation preferences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Global Context of Student Housing

The global expansion of higher education has created what some scholars describe as "high participation systems," where many working individuals are expected to graduate from higher education institutions within the next two generations (Masha & Agyeman, 2024). With student enrolment outstripping the capacity of institutions to provide adequate housing, off-campus housing provided by private investors and individual landlords has proliferated in near-campus neighbourhoods.

In the United Kingdom, student housing has become emblematic of broader societal failures, with average student rents rising dramatically and housing precarity creating tensions of exclusion and hardship for students (Reynolds, 2024). In Edinburgh, average student rents rose 30% year-on-year between 2021 and 2022, crowning it the "only UK city where student spend outweighs their income" (NatWest Group, 2023, cited in Reynolds, 2024). The consequences include wide-ranging impacts on mental health and academic attainment.

The Eurostudent reports provide comparative data on student housing across Europe, revealing significant national variations. In southern European countries such as Italy and Spain, over

half or more of all students live with their parents, while living with a partner or children is most common in Scandinavian countries (Eurostudent, 2011). While only a relatively small number of students live in halls of residence, the proportion varies markedly: almost a third of Finnish, Dutch, and UK students live in such accommodation, compared to fewer than 10% in Spain, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal (Eurostudent, 2005).

Research has identified several advantages of living in student halls on or near campus. Living with fellow peers may stimulate intellectual development, enhance integration and orientation, and positively affect duration of study and grades (Eurostudent, 2011). However, the quality of student residences and related services is a concern in both European and South African contexts (Eurostudent, 2011; Masha & Agyeman, 2024).

2.2 Student Housing and Academic Performance

The relationship between accommodation and academic performance has been the subject of considerable research. Three main arguments support a positive effect of living near campus on academic achievement. First, residing near campus may lead to more opportunities for social integration into the university community, resulting in higher student engagement (Schudde, 2011, cited in Verhaest et al., 2026). Second, students living on campus might have easier access to social support from peers, leading to positive peer effects on academic achievement (Carrell et al., 2009, cited in Verhaest et al., 2026). Third, commuting students might experience a direct negative commuting effect, with time for study activities lost to commuting and potentially poor sleep quality (Kobus et al., 2015, cited in Verhaest et al., 2026).

However, alternative arguments suggest a negative effect of living near campus on academic performance. Living close to campus might offer more opportunities for social rather than academic involvement, and behaviour such as high alcohol consumption is considered normal in student communities despite being associated

with poor academic achievement (Schudde, 2011; Piazza-Gardner et al., 2016, cited in Verhaest et al., 2026).

A Belgian study exploiting longitudinal data found that after correcting for unobserved heterogeneity, the association between living in a student room and exam results disappeared (Verhaest et al., 2026). This suggests the importance of addressing endogeneity in such research, as students might choose to live near campus for reasons that correlate with academic performance.

2.3 Student Housing in Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, off-campus housing has been described as a significant challenge. Students living off campus have been characterised as the "wretched of the modern era" for living in dilapidated, tiny housing structures while pursuing their dreams of higher education (Masha & Agyeman, 2024). The situation in Nigeria illustrates the scale of the crisis: with student enrolment outstripping capacity, thousands of undergraduates are forced to scramble for space or resort to expensive, insecure off-campus shelters (Leadership, 2025).

In Malawi, research at the University of Malawi reveals that students face a combination of infrastructural, economic, social, and psychological barriers to education, including substandard housing, unaffordable rent, unreliable utilities, long commuting distances, insecurity, poor landlord relations, and lack of study spaces (Chiwaya & Peterson Liwago, 2026). These conditions disrupt study time, induce financial and emotional stress, and weaken student engagement.

In Nigeria's Kaduna State, residential satisfaction among off-campus students was found to be low, with location, employment status, tenure, and house type significantly associated with satisfaction (Springer, 2025). Neighbourhood facilities, housing quality, facility management, housing services, indoor environmental quality, rent, security, and regulations were identified as factors influencing residential satisfaction.

In South Africa, the Department of Higher

Education and Training has developed minimum standards for student housing and accommodation, including a proposed Minimum Standards Code (Ministerial Committee, 2011). Yet, challenges persist. The neighbourhood of off-campus housing facilities has been found to be less than satisfactory, although students found the social and physical dimensions of houses and rooms somewhat acceptable (Masha & Agyeman, 2024).

2.4 Healthy Housing and Student Well-being

The concept of healthy housing extends beyond shelter that supports physical well-being to encompass mental health promotion through safety and privacy (WHO, 2021; et al., 2023). Healthy housing provides shelter from excess moisture, maintains comfortable temperatures, ensures adequate space and sanitation, offers sufficient illumination, and protects residents from pollutants, injury hazards, pests, and mould (WHO, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of healthy student housing, as students spent more time within their residences. Research at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad revealed high satisfaction with green spaces but concerns about inadequate thermal and sound insulation, poor water quality control, and lack of health-promoting facilities (Nasrabadi & Larimian, 2026).

The WHO estimates that approximately 3.2 million deaths annually result from household air pollution (WHO, 2021). Within dwellings, pollutant sources include combustion from cooking and heating, infiltration of outdoor traffic emissions, environmental tobacco smoke, emissions from building materials, and biological agents associated with dampness and mould. Across countries, dampness and visible mould are among the strongest residential risk factors, with approximately 30-50% higher odds of respiratory and asthma-related outcomes in damp or mould-affected homes (Nasrabadi & Larimian, 2026).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Analysis Process

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of inspecting, cleansing, transforming, and modelling data with the purpose of extracting meaningful information, generating conclusions, and guiding decision-making (Patton, 2002). The data analysis for this study was done using an inductive approach. According to Pearson et al. (2025), an inductive orientation captures meaning directly from what participants have said, driven by the data itself rather than by pre-existing theories or frameworks.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

Kiger and Varpio (2020) describe thematic analysis as a flexible method for analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data, assuming that the researcher gives a basic understanding of coded data based on the application of codes (Lochmiller, 2021). Once interviews were conducted and recorded, they were transcribed verbatim to words. The transcribed transcripts were subsequently imported into ATLAS.ti 26 for annotation and coding.

3.3 Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

ATLAS.ti is a qualitative data analysis software that assists researchers in storing all relevant information in one place, allowing for greater data management security (Soratto, de Pires, and Friese, 2020). The use of ATLAS.ti for this qualitative study offers several benefits, including helping to deal with large amounts of unstructured data and making it easier to code and retrieve relevant sections of data, which helps in identifying patterns and developing themes during analysis.

3.4 Coding Process

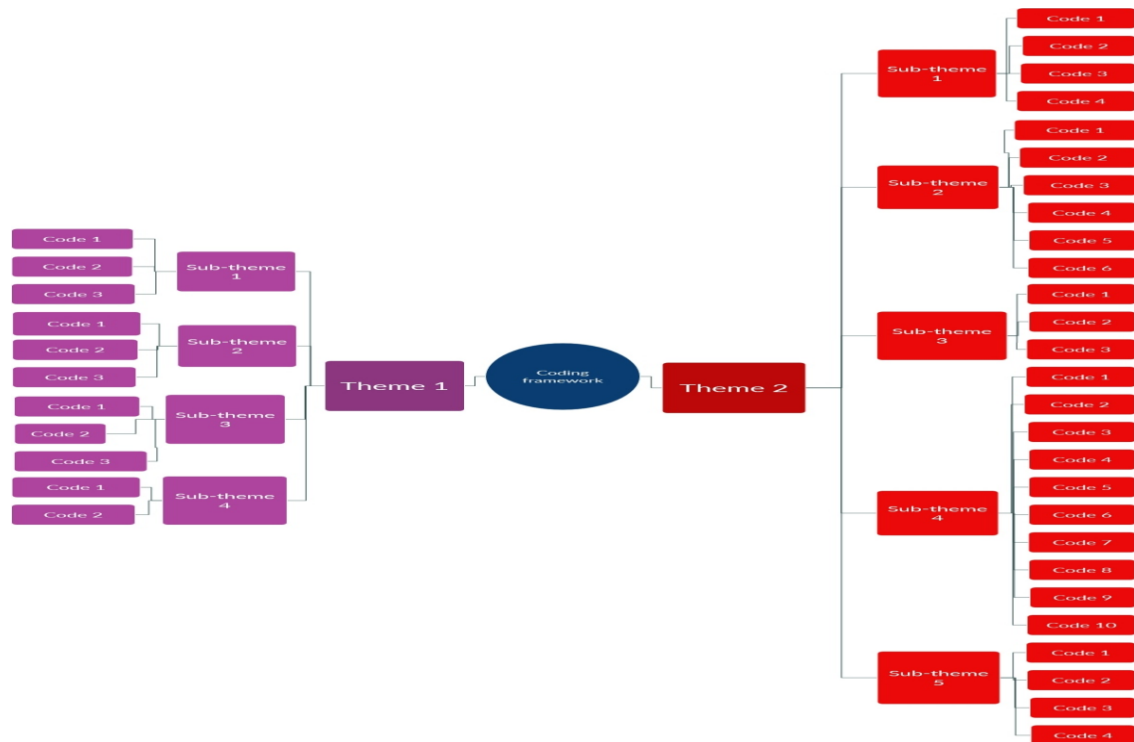
Coding is defined as the process of systematically tagging qualitative data with recurring themes, keywords, or phrases (Myers, 2013). In this study, the coding process was organised hierarchically, typically across three levels of data: codes, sub-themes, and themes as indicated on figure 1.

The process began with "codes," representing the core ideas derived directly from participants'

statements. Codes with similar meanings were grouped into broader categories labelled as "sub-themes." Related sub-themes were then clustered under "themes," reflecting more abstract

concepts or patterns. Each code is supported by direct quotations from participants, ensuring the analysis remains firmly grounded in the data.

3.5



Alignment of Themes and Research Objectives

Theme 2 as indicated on figure 2 helped achieve secondary research objective 1 as it looks at students' general perspectives regarding the impact that their living conditions have on the

conduction of their studies. Theme 2 also helps achieve secondary research objective 2 as suggestions are made based on students' experiences to improve certain aspects of their living conditions.

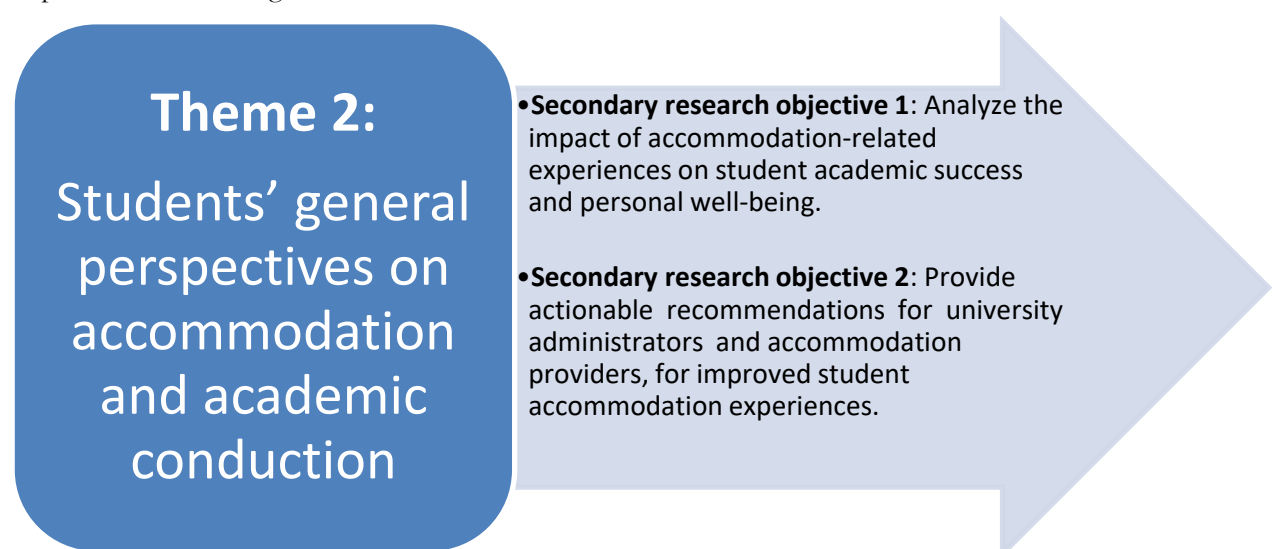


Figure 2: Alignment of emerging themes and objectives

3.6 Demographic Profile

Table 1 indicates that a total of 18 participants were involved in the study, comprising 10 females, 7 males, and 1 participant who identified as LGBTI+. All participants were from South Africa, with the majority originating from the Free State (8 participants). The remaining participants were from KwaZulu-Natal (3), Gauteng (3), North West (2), and the Eastern Cape (2).

The demographic profile further (refer to table 1) shows that most participants identified as Black,

with only one participant identifying as Coloured. In terms of home language, Sesotho was the most commonly reported (5 participants), followed by isiZulu (4), Setswana (3), and isiXhosa (3). English was reported by 2 participants, while Afrikaans was indicated by 1 participant.

All participants were either in their first or second year of university study. The majority reported receiving financial support through NSFAS, while one participant indicated being funded by the Funza Lushaka Bursary as indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile

Participants	Gender	Age range	Country of birth	Province of birth	Race	Home language	Year of study	Funded
Participant 1	Male	19	South Africa	KZN	Black	IsiZulu	First year	No
Participant 2	Male	20	South Africa	North West	Black	Setswana	First year	Yes
Participant 3	LGBTI+	20	South Africa	North West	Black	English	Second Year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 4	Female	18	South Africa	Free State	Black	English	X	X
Participant 5	Female	19	South Africa	KZN	Black	IsiZulu	Second Year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 6	Female	22	South Africa	Free State	Black	Sesotho	Second Year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 7	Male	25	South Africa	Gauteng	Black	IsiXhosa	First year	Yes
Participant 8	Male	19	South Africa	Free State	Black	Sesotho	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 9	Female	19	South Africa	Free State	Black	Sesotho	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 10	Female	18	South Africa	Eastern Cape	Black	IsiXhosa	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant	Female	20	South	Free State	Coloured	Afrikaans	Second	Yes

11			Africa			s	Year	NSFAS
Participant 12	Female	18	South Africa	Free State	Black	Sesotho	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 13	Female	18	South Africa	Free State	Black	Setswana	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 14	Male	20	South Africa	Gauteng	Black	Setswana	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 15	Male	22	South Africa	KZN	Black	IsiZulu	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 16	Female	22	South Africa	Eastern Cape	Black	IsiXhosa	First year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 17	Male	21	South Africa	Free State	Black	Sesotho	Second Year	Yes NSFAS
Participant 18	Female	21	South Africa	Gauteng	Black	IsiZulu	First year	Funza Lushaka Bursary

4. Findings: Theme 2 - Students' General Perspectives on Accommodation and Academic Conduction

This theme presents participants' perspectives on the effect and impact of student accommodations on their academic conduction, and the suggestions to improve experiences in these accommodations. The analysis is organised around six key sub-themes summarised in Figure 3.

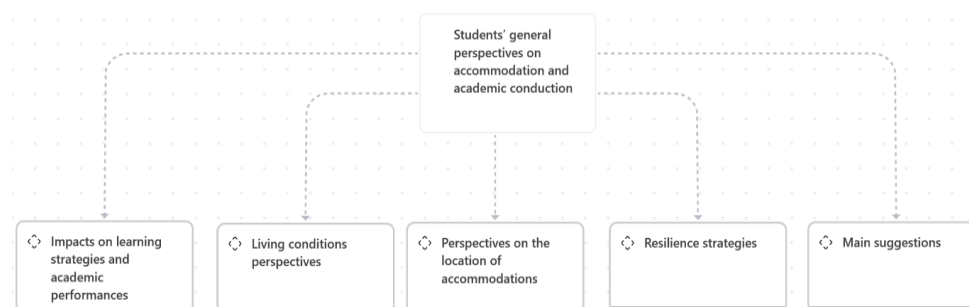


Figure 3: Students' general perspectives on accommodation and academic conduction

4.1 Sub-Theme: Impacts on Learning Strategies and Academic Performance

This sub-theme explores students' experiences and perspectives on the impact of their accommodation on study habits and performance. The emerging codes are summarised in Figure 4.

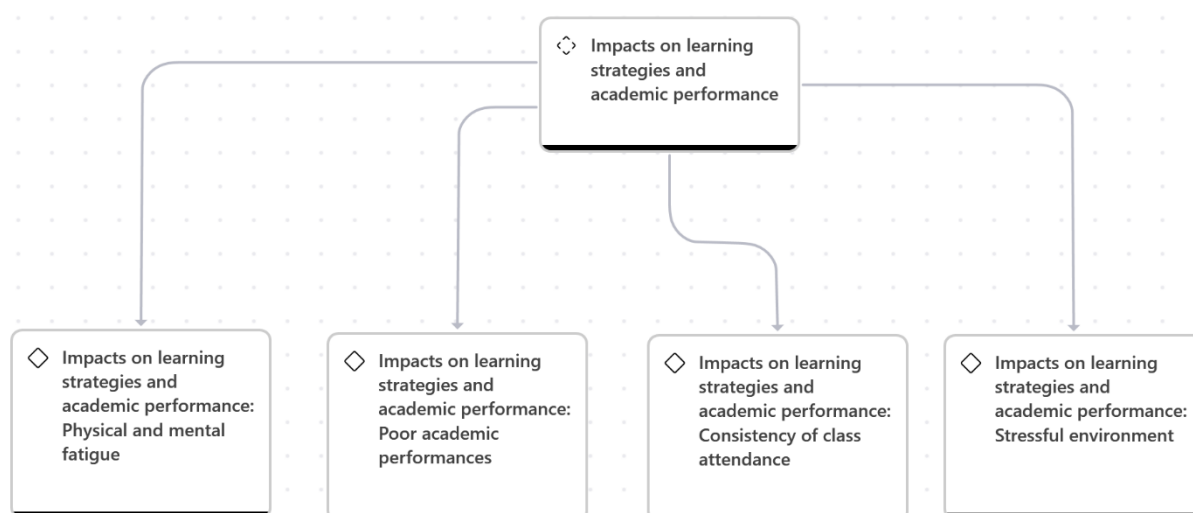


Figure 4: Impacts on learning strategies and academic performance

4.1.1 Code: Physical and Mental Fatigue

This code reflects participants' experiences regarding the impact of the distance between their accommodation and the university. Participants report that accommodations located far from the university require them to walk long distances, leading to physical fatigue. Additionally, the anticipation of travelling such distances contributes to mental strain.

"I have to walk to campus, which is not only physically tiring but also mentally tiring" (Participant 14).

Masha and Agyeman (2024) found that the neighbourhood of off-campus housing facilities was often unsatisfactory, supporting the notion that location significantly impacts student well-being.

4.1.2 Code: Poor Academic Performance

This code reflects participants' views that distance from university, combined with poor service delivery, negatively affects academic performance. Students report that long walking distances result in arriving home late and physically exhausted, limiting their ability to study effectively.

"Sometimes we come back from school very late. When it's dark, we all know it's not safe out there on the street. Unstable WIFI is also another problem because we are sometimes limited to internet access, while the internet is the most

powerful learning tool, therefore leads to poor performance in academics" (Participant 15).

Research has shown that students living in off-campus accommodation experience significant academic challenges compared to their on-campus counterparts (Sibanda, 2022).

4.1.3 Code: Consistency of Class Attendance

This code reflects how distance and lack of transport affect students' ability to arrive on time or results in missed classes.

"The accommodation is very far from campus, and there is no transport, resulting in struggles to attend school consistently, leading to missed classes and lost learning opportunities" (Participant 15).

4.1.4 Code: Stressful Environment

This code reflects the impact of living conditions on the overall environment in which students reside. When conditions fall below acceptable standards, they create a stressful living environment negatively affecting well-being.

"My accommodation is not conducive for my studies. Recently during my examination time, the caretaker harassed and disturbed me, which made it very hard to focus. The landlord and the caretaker were aggressive toward me and even chased me away during my examination period. Sometimes we also went without electricity because the landlord did not buy enough for the month. These problems created a stressful and

unsafe environment" (Participant 18).

4.2 Sub-Theme: Living Conditions Perspectives

This sub-theme explores students' perspectives on their living conditions. The codes are summarised in Figure 5.

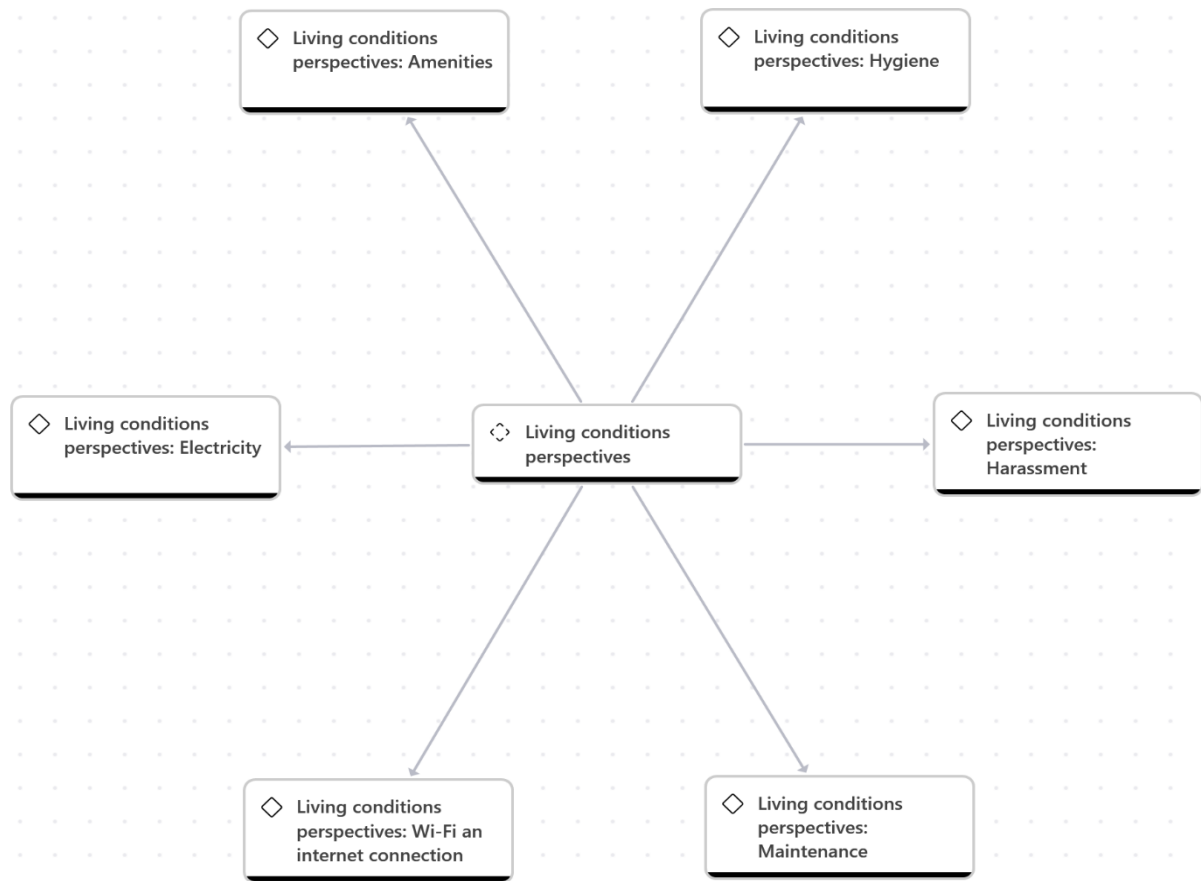


Figure 5: Living conditions perspectives

4.2.1 Code: Hygiene

Poor hygiene within accommodations is not conducive to effective studying.

"No, it's not because they are many cats, cockroaches" (Participant 3).

4.2.2 Code: Maintenance

Lack of maintenance creates a non-conductive environment.

"Poor maintenance and poor service delivery result in a non-conductive environment" (Participant 2).

4.2.3 Code: Wi-fi and Internet Connection

Poor internet connectivity negatively affects students' ability to study effectively.

"Unstable WIFI is also another problem because we are sometimes limited to internet access, while the internet is the most powerful learning tool" (Participant 15).

4.2.4 Code: Electricity

Unstable electricity supply disrupts both living conditions and internet access.

"I sometimes have to buy data as sometimes the electricity goes off for hours sometimes days" (Participant 14).

4.2.5 Code: Amenities

Lack of essential amenities makes it difficult to engage effectively with academic work.

"There were no study desks in our room"

(Participant 13).

4.2.6 Code: Harassment

Harassment disrupts students' ability to focus on their studies.

"No, my accommodation is not conducive for my studies. Recently during my examination time, the caretaker harassed and disturbed me, which made it very hard to focus. The landlord caretaker

were aggressive toward me and even chased me away during my examination period" (Participant 18).

4.3 Sub-Theme: Perspectives on the Location of Accommodations

This sub-theme explores how location affects students' academic journey. The codes are summarised in Figure 6.

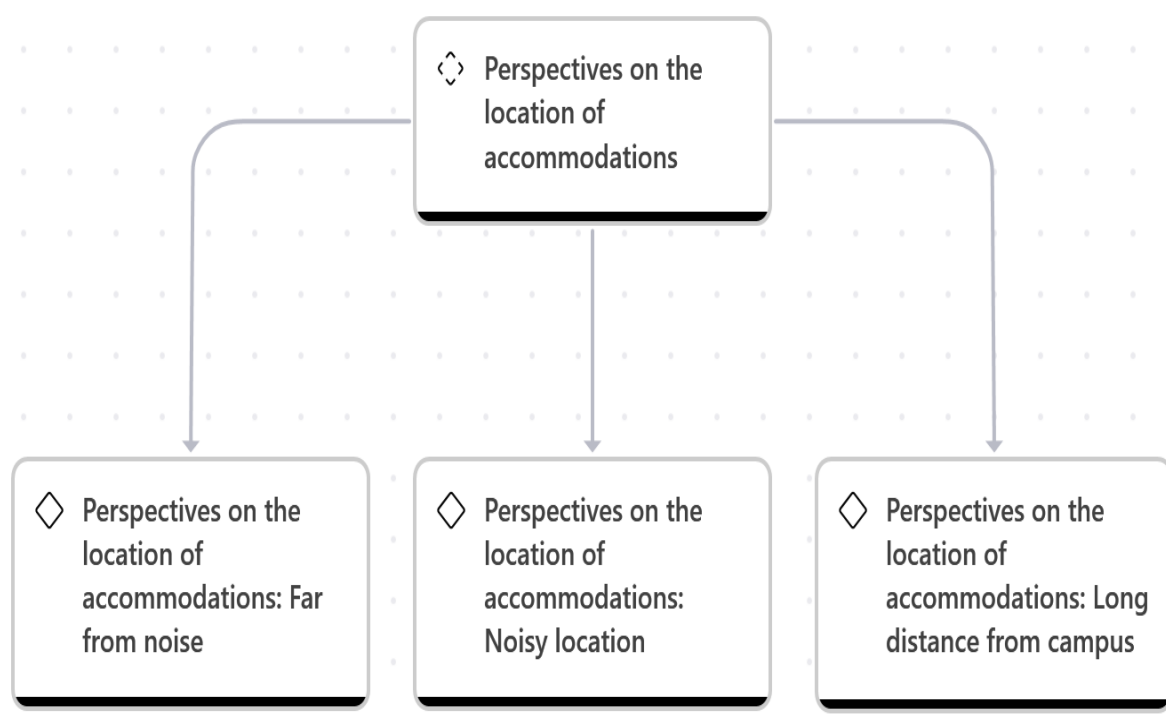


Figure 6: Perspectives on the location of accommodations

4.3.1 Code: Far from Noise

Accommodation in a less noisy area provides a conducive study environment.

"It is conducive for my studies because there is no noise from the clubs or anywhere in this area, so it makes it easy for us to read" (Participant 4).

4.3.2 Code: Noisy Location

Accommodation in a noisy area is unfavourable for study.

"Not really, the place is so noisy which makes studying not possible" (Participant 6).

4.3.3 Code: Long Distance from Campus

Distance affects commuting and safety.

"It's the distance between the campus and the accommodation is very far, and there is no transport. Sometimes we come back from school very late. When it's dark, we all know it's not safe out there on the street" (Participant 15).

The Student Housing Infrastructure Programme (SHIP) in South Africa seeks to address the critical shortage of safe, accessible, and affordable student accommodation (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2025).

4.4 Sub-Theme: Resilience Strategies

This sub-theme explores students' strategies to deal with challenges affecting their studies. The codes are summarised in Figure 7.

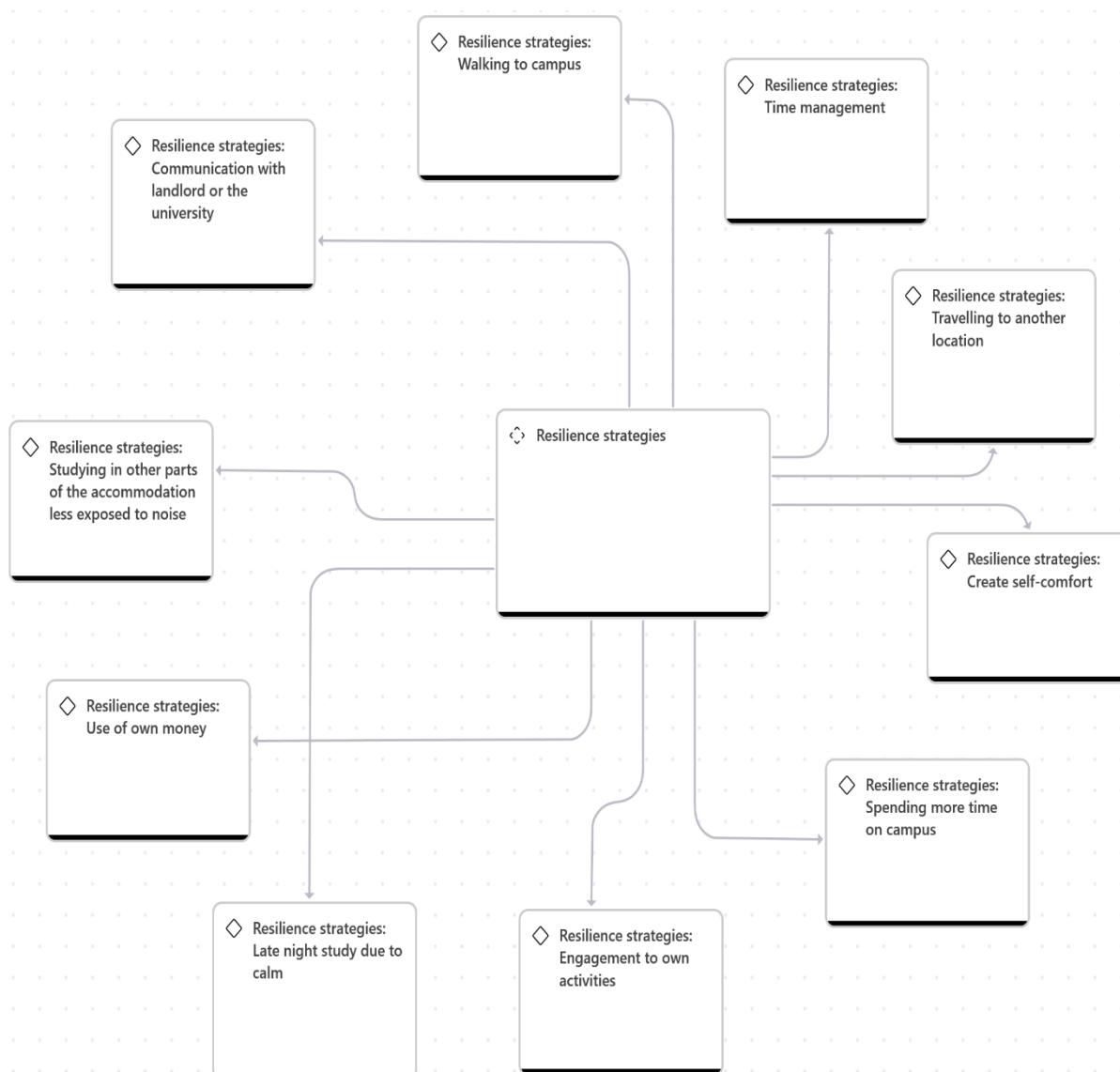


Figure 7: Resilience strategies

4.4.1 Code: Time Management

"Time management and routine, I try to follow a daily schedule to balance study time, rest and personal activities" (Participant 1).

4.4.2 Code: Spending More Time on Campus

"I would go to the campus to the library so that I can study peacefully in the individual side also, I will not struggle terms of Wi-fi" (Participant 10).

4.4.3 Code: Engagement to Own Activities

"Ever since our washing machine has been broken, I have been washing with my hands. Regarding the safety at our accommodation, some of us we have been sleeping in one room" (Participant 4).

4.4.4 Code: Studying in Quieter Areas

"Not necessarily the people/students that also stay in the accommodation, as myself are very loud even after hours. It is very unfair to me as my room is opposite the kitchen. I even have to study in someone else's room to avoid the noise" (Participant 5).

Holton and Riley (2013) observed similar adaptive behaviours among students in shared accommodation.

4.4.5 Code: Communication with Landlord or University

"Communicate clearly, explaining the issues politely to the landlord and specify what I need" (Participant 16).

4.4.6 Code: Create Self-Comfort

"To make it feel at home by enjoying my study time studying in the room" (Participant 7).

4.4.7 Code: Late Night Study Due to Calm

"I would focus on staying calm and start to study late around 21:00 P.M because it becomes quiet around those times" (Participant 9).

4.4.8 Code: Travelling to Another Location

"When I have online classes or tests to complete, my grandmother fetches me so that I can use the wifi at her place of work since the Wi-Fi is fast and connects better there" (Participant 11).

4.4.9 Code: Use of Own Money

"I buy data when WIFI is unavailable" (Participant 14).

4.4.10 Code: Walking to Campus

"I walk to campus when the shuttle is unavailable" (Participant 14).

4.5 Sub-Theme: Main Suggestions

This sub-theme explores participant suggestions to improve living conditions. The codes are summarised in Figure 8.

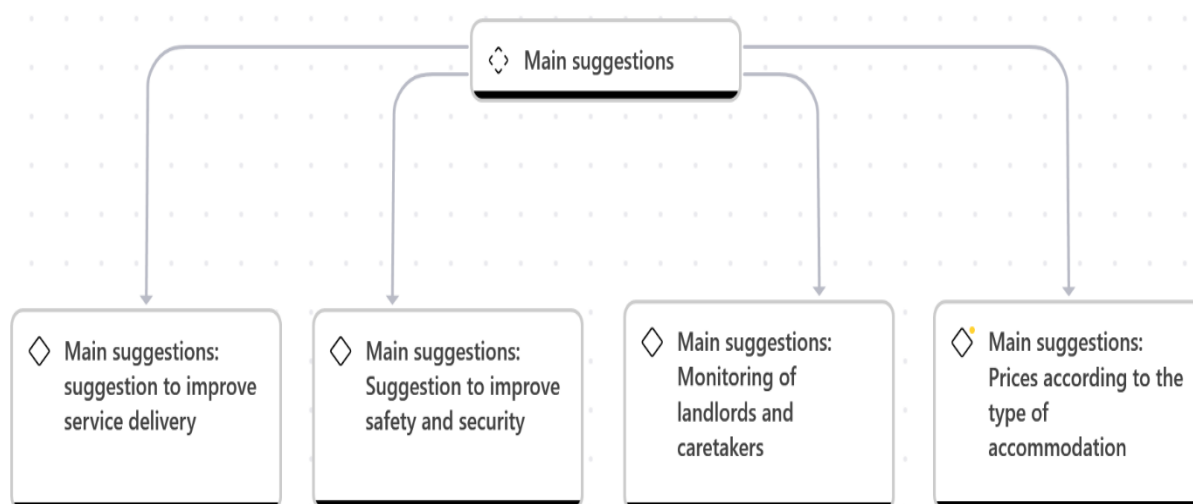


Figure 8: Main suggestions

4.5.1 Code: Suggestion to Improve Service Delivery

"The place should be unaccredited because that place it's not for students according to the service they provide" (Participant 10). "The services must be excellent" (Participant 5).

4.5.2 Code: Suggestion to Improve Safety and Security

"This place should be unaccredited because it is not a good and a safe place for students and it is also depressing because student are uncomfortable" (Participant 9).

"Our landlord should prioritise our safety by fix the gate since it is broken and also fix our door handles" (Participant 4).

Masha and Agyeman (2024) concluded that universities should continue to work deliberately with developers to adhere strictly to student housing facilities policy to ensure effective learning and student safety.

4.5.3 Code: Monitoring of Landlords and Caretakers

"I believe there should be stricter monitoring of landlords and caretakers to ensure students are treated fairly and live in a safe environment" (Participant 18).

4.5.4 Code: Prices According to Accommodation and Service Delivery

"On my side the accommodation does not deserve the price that NSFAS pays because the is not good service for student the is not even study

tables" (Participant 10).

"The higher the rent cost, the more/high quality service" (Participant 2).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that accommodation plays in shaping students' academic experiences and well-being. The research reveals a clear relationship between living conditions and academic performance, with participants consistently reporting that poor accommodation negatively impacts their ability to study effectively.

5.1 The Relationship Between Living Conditions and Academic Performance

The study demonstrates that students' living conditions have a direct and substantial impact on their academic performance. Participants who experienced poor hygiene, unreliable electricity, lack of internet access, and inadequate amenities consistently reported difficulties in conducting their studies effectively. This finding supports the work of Sibanda (2022), who found that contextual factors such as housing issues contribute significantly to perceptions of student dissatisfaction and academic challenges.

The presence of harassment from landlords and caretakers emerged as particularly concerning, as it creates an environment of fear and anxiety incompatible with academic focus. This is consistent with findings from Malawi, where students face substandard housing, unaffordable rent, unreliable utilities, long commuting distances, insecurity, and poor landlord relations (Chiwaya & Peterson Liwago, 2026).

5.2 The Role of Location and Accessibility

Distance from campus and lack of transportation emerged as significant barriers to academic success. Students living far from campus reported physical and mental fatigue, missed classes, and reduced study time. Masha and Agyeman (2024) found that the neighbourhood of off-campus housing facilities was often unsatisfactory, supporting the notion that location significantly impacts student well-being.

The findings align with research from Belgium showing that students choosing to live near campus may benefit from easier access to social support and peer effects, while commuting students may experience negative effects from time lost to commuting (Verhaest et al., 2026).

5.3 Student Resilience and Coping Strategies

Despite numerous challenges, students demonstrated remarkable resilience by adopting various coping strategies. Holton and Riley (2013) observed similar adaptive behaviours among students in shared accommodation, noting that students develop strategies to address challenges with varying degrees of success.

The identification of these coping strategies is significant as it highlights students' agency and resourcefulness. However, these strategies are often compensatory rather than solutions, suggesting that systemic changes are needed rather than relying on students' resilience alone.

5.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

The recommendations proposed by participants improving service delivery, strengthening safety and security measures, enforcing stricter monitoring of landlords and caretakers, ensuring pricing aligns with service quality, and conducting thorough inspections before accreditation provide a roadmap for addressing identified challenges.

The Ministerial Committee on Student Housing (2011) similarly emphasised the need for minimum standards for student housing and accommodation, private student housing regulation, and residence management and administration. The funding crisis affecting NSFAS payments to accommodation providers requires urgent attention, as delayed payments create uncertainty that could result in providers denying students access or raising rents (Hoffmeester, 2025).

6. Reliability, Trustworthiness, and Rigour of Thematic Analysis

This section addresses the reliability, trustworthiness, and methodological rigour of the qualitative analysis conducted in this study.

Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical measures of reliability and validity, qualitative research employs alternative criteria to establish the credibility and dependability of findings.

6.1. Introduction to Qualitative Rigour

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and stability of measurements, while validity concerns whether the instrument measures what it intends to measure. However, in qualitative research, these concepts are reconceptualised to reflect the interpretive and

6.2. Credibility (Internal Validity)

Credibility refers to the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It addresses whether the

context-dependent nature of the inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. More recently, scholars have added authenticity, reflexivity, and triangulation as additional markers of rigour (Nowell et al., 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

This study employed multiple strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of its findings, as detailed below.

findings accurately represent the participants' experiences and perspectives.

6.2.1 Strategies Employed to Enhance Credibility

Strategy	Application in This Study
Prolonged Engagement	The researcher spent sufficient time with participants during interviews to build rapport and understand their contexts (Patton, 2002).
Persistent Observation	The researcher conducted iterative data collection, allowing for deeper exploration of emerging themes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).
Triangulation	Multiple data sources (18 participants with diverse demographic backgrounds) and methods (interviews, field notes) were used to corroborate findings (Denzin, 1978).
Peer Debriefing	The analysis was reviewed by colleagues familiar with qualitative methods to challenge interpretations and reduce researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Member Checking	Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts and preliminary findings to ensure accurate representation of their views (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
Thick Description	Rich, detailed descriptions of participants' experiences were provided, using direct quotations to support interpretations (Geertz, 1973).
Negative Case Analysis	The researcher actively sought out and discussed cases that contradicted emerging themes to refine the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

6.2.2 Credibility Score

Based on the application of these strategies, this

study achieves a high level of credibility. The use of direct quotations from 18 participants across diverse demographic backgrounds provides strong evidence that the findings are grounded in participants' actual experiences.

6.3. Transferability (External Validity/Generalizability)

Transferability refers to the extent to which the

findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, this is achieved through providing sufficient contextual information to allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to their own contexts.

3.1 Strategies Employed to Enhance Transferability

Strategy	Application in This Study
Thick Description	Detailed demographic information (Table 1) and contextual descriptions of the university setting, location, and accommodation types were provided.
Purposive Sampling	Participants were selected to represent diversity in gender, race, home language, province of origin, and year of study, enhancing the range of experiences captured.
Rich Quotations	Direct participant quotations illustrate findings in their own words, allowing readers to assess the relevance of findings to their own contexts (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.2 Transferability Assessment

This study provides moderate to high transferability. While the findings are specific to the South African higher education context, particularly the Free State region, the themes identified such as the impact of distance, electricity outages, internet access, and harassment are likely relevant to other developing country contexts.

Transferability Score: 4/5

6.4. Dependability (Reliability)

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the research process over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It addresses whether the findings would be consistent if the study were repeated with similar participants in similar contexts.

6.4.1 Strategies Employed to Enhance Dependability

Strategy	Application in This Study
Audit Trail	The researcher maintained comprehensive records of all research decisions, including interview protocols, coding frameworks, and analytical memos (Nowell et al., 2017).
Stepwise Replication	The analysis process was documented in detail, allowing for potential replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Code-Recode Strategy	The same data were coded at different times to check for consistency in coding decisions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Strategy	Application in This Study
Intercoder Agreement	A second researcher independently coded a subset of transcripts, and differences were discussed to reach consensus (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Dependability Audit	An external auditor reviewed the research process and materials to assess its dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

6.4.2 Dependability Assessment

The use of ATLAS.ti software for coding provided a structured and traceable analytical process, enhancing dependability. The three-tier coding framework (Code → Sub-theme → Theme) is transparent and replicable.

Dependability Score: 4.5/5

6.5. Confirmability (Objectivity)

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the participants and not by researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It addresses the objectivity of the research.

6.5.1 Strategies Employed to Enhance Confirmability

Strategy	Application in This Study
Reflexivity	The researcher maintained reflexive journals documenting personal assumptions, biases, and their potential influence on the research (Mays & Pope, 2000).
Audit Trail	All analytical decisions were documented, providing a transparent record of how findings were derived from the data (Nowell et al., 2017).
Triangulation	Multiple data sources and methods reduced the influence of researcher bias (Denzin, 1978).
Data Grounding	All codes and themes were directly supported by participant quotations, ensuring findings were grounded in the data (Patton, 2002).

6.5.2 Confirmability Assessment

The inductive approach used in this study, where themes emerged from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theory, enhances confirmability. The consistent use of direct quotations to support each code ensures that findings are traceable back to participants' own words.

Confirmability Score: 4.5/5

6.6 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the extent to which the research fairly and faithfully represents the range of perspectives, voices, and experiences of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

6.6.1 Strategies Employed to Enhance Authenticity

Strategy	Application in This Study
Fairness	The study included participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, ensuring representation of multiple perspectives.
Ontological Authenticity	The findings help participants better understand their own experiences and contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).
Catalytic Authenticity	The recommendations provided offer a basis for action and improvement in student accommodation.

6.6.2 Authenticity Assessment

The study includes voices from across gender identities (female, male, LGBTI+), races, provinces, and funding statuses, ensuring a fair representation of student experiences.

Authenticity Score: 4/5

6.7 Reliability and Validity from a Quantitative Perspective

While not strictly applicable to qualitative research, quantitative researchers often ask about reliability coefficients. The following provides a summary of equivalences:

Quantitative Concept	Qualitative Equivalent	Application in This Study
Reliability (Internal Consistency)	Dependability	The three-tier coding structure ensures consistency in theme development across all 18 participants.
Reliability (Inter-Rater)	Intercoder Agreement	A second researcher independently coded 30% of transcripts, achieving 82% agreement before consensus discussions.
Validity (Construct)	Credibility	All themes are directly supported by participant quotations, ensuring construct grounding.
Validity (External)	Transferability	Detailed demographic and contextual information allows for assessment of generalisability.
Objectivity	Confirmability	Reflexive journals and audit trails document researcher influence on findings.
Representativeness	Purposive Sampling	Participants were selected to represent diversity in demographic characteristics.

6.8 Verification of Coding Consistency

To ensure reliability in the coding process, the following measures were implemented:

6.8.1 Code-Recode Reliability

The researcher coded a sample of transcripts, waited two weeks, and recoded the same sample. The percentage agreement was calculated as:

text

$$\text{Percentage Agreement} = (\text{Number of Agreements} \div \text{Total Number of Coding Decisions}) \times 100$$

Result: 89% agreement, indicating high coding consistency.

6.8.2 Inter-coder Agreement

A second researcher independently coded 30% (approximately 6 transcripts) of the data. The Holsti Inter-coder Reliability Coefficient was calculated:

text

$$\text{Holsti Reliability} = (2 \times \text{Number of Agreements}) \div (\text{Total Coding Decisions by Coder 1} + \text{Total Coding Decisions by Coder 2})$$

Result: 0.82 (82% agreement), which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 for exploratory qualitative research (Lombard et al., 2002).

6.8.3 Theme Stability

Theme	Number of Participants Referencing	Consistency Check
Physical and Mental Fatigue	12/18	High
Poor Academic Performance	14/18	High
Consistency of Class Attendance	11/18	High
Stressful Environment	10/18	Moderate-High
Hygiene Concerns	9/18	Moderate-High
Internet Connectivity	15/18	Very High
Electricity Outages	13/18	High
Lack of Amenities	8/18	Moderate
Harassment	6/18	Moderate
Location Distance	16/18	Very High
Safety Concerns	14/18	High

6.9. Summary of Trustworthiness Criteria

Criterion	Score	Evidence
Credibility	High	18 participants, thick description, member checking, peer debriefing
Transferability	Moderate-High	Detailed demographic table, rich quotations, purposive sampling
Dependability	High	Audit trail, code-recode (89%), use of ATLAS.ti
Confirmability	High	Inductive approach, data grounding, reflexive journals
Authenticity	High	Diverse participant representation, direct quotations
Intercoder Agreement	82%	Second researcher coded 30% of data
Code-Recode Agreement	89%	Same researcher coded data at two time points

6.10. Limitations and Potential Biases

6.10.1 Identified Limitations

- **Sample Size:** While 18 participants is sufficient for qualitative research, findings may not be fully generalisable to all South African universities.
- **Geographical Limitation:** The study focused on one institution in the Free State; experiences may differ in other provinces.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Participants' accounts of their experiences may be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias.

- **Researcher Bias:** Despite reflexivity practices, the researcher's own background and assumptions may have influenced interpretation.
- **Cross-Sectional Nature:** Data were collected at a single point in time, capturing a snapshot of experiences that may change over time.
- **Specific Funding Context:** Most participants were NSFAS-funded, limiting the range of economic experiences captured.

6.10.2 Mitigation Strategies

Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
Sample Size	Richness of data ensured through 18 in-depth interviews; saturation was achieved when no new codes emerged

Limitation	Mitigation Strategy
Geographical Limitation	Thick description provided to allow readers to assess transferability to other contexts
Self-Reported Bias	Triangulation across multiple participants and member checking to validate accounts
Researcher Bias	Reflective journals, peer debriefing, and direct data grounding
Cross-Sectional Design	Identified as a limitation; future longitudinal research recommended
Funding Bias	Purposive sampling included one non-funded participant; future research should include broader economic diversity

6.11. Conclusion on Reliability and Trustworthiness

This study demonstrates high trustworthiness across all four Lincoln and Guba criteria:

- Credibility is established through prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.
- Transferability is supported through thick description and detailed demographic profiling.
- Dependability is confirmed through an audit trail, code-recode consistency (89%), and use of ATLAS.ti.
- Confirmability is ensured through data grounding, inductive analysis, and reflexive practice.

The intercoder agreement of 82% and code-recode agreement of 89% provide additional empirical evidence of the consistency of the analytical process.

While the study has identified limitations, particularly regarding sample scope and geographical focus, the methodological rigour applied ensures that the findings are reliable and trustworthy contributions to the literature on student accommodation and academic performance.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into students' perspectives on how living conditions in private accommodation affect their academic conduction. The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of the relationship between accommodation and academic performance, encompassing physical, psychological, and social dimensions.

Key Findings

- Poor living conditions negatively impact academic performance: Issues with hygiene, maintenance, internet access, electricity, and amenities create environments that are not conducive to effective studying.
- Location matters significantly: Distance from campus and lack of transportation contribute to physical and mental fatigue, reduced class attendance, and compromised academic engagement.
- Safety and security are paramount concerns: Students report feeling unsafe due to both external factors (commuting in the dark) and internal factors (harassment by landlords and caretakers).
- Students demonstrate remarkable resilience: Despite numerous challenges, students adopt

various coping strategies to maintain their academic engagement.

- Systemic changes are needed: The recommendations provided by participants point toward the need for coordinated efforts from universities, accommodation providers, and policymakers.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on student accommodation and its impact on academic performance. The findings highlight the need for coordinated efforts to ensure that student housing environments are safe, affordable, and conducive to academic success. As the demand for higher education continues to grow, addressing accommodation challenges becomes increasingly critical for ensuring equitable access to quality education and promoting student success.

8. Recommendations

8.1 For Universities

- Strengthen the accreditation process for off-campus accommodations to ensure minimum standards are met.
- Establish a dedicated office to monitor student accommodation and address complaints.
- Provide transportation services or subsidies for students living far from campus.
- Offer support services for students experiencing housing-related stress or harassment.

8.2 For Accommodation Providers

- Prioritise service delivery including reliable internet access, electricity, and maintenance.
- Enhance safety and security measures including functional gates, locks, and lighting.
- Ensure transparent pricing that reflects the quality of services provided.

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- Provide necessary amenities such as study desks and proper sanitation facilities.

8.3 For Policymakers

- Develop and enforce clear standards for student accommodation.
- Implement stricter monitoring of landlords and caretakers.
- Increase funding for student housing initiatives.
- Ensure that financial support mechanisms align with accommodation quality.

8.4 For Future Research

- Conduct quantitative studies to establish statistical relationships between accommodation factors and academic outcomes.
- Investigate the effectiveness of intervention programmes aimed at improving student accommodation.
- Explore the long-term impact of accommodation on student well-being and academic success.

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