

Relative Importance of Student Accommodation Quality in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study, which was part of a large study, empirically examines the importance students attach to different dimensions of Student Accommodation Quality (SAQ) delivered by Student Accommodation Providers (SAP) in two tertiary (higher education) institutions in Ghana. The study involved a cross-sectional survey that used a structured questionnaire administered to 700 tertiary students in residential and non-residential accommodation. The survey yielded a usable 66.6% response rate for analysis. The findings indicate that utility facility quality is the most important SAQ dimension to the students, followed by the overall impression of hostel, security, physical environment, toilet, distance to lecture, bedroom, bath room, accommodation fee, among others. Moreover, it was found that kitchen facility, access to transport and entertainment facility are less important SAQ items while the least important is garage facility. Few differences were found in the priority for SAQ items between COLTEK and K-Poly respondents and between residential and non-residential respondents. Implications for theory and recommendations to management of the two higher education institutions and SAP have been discussed. The study contributes to the body of knowledge in student affairs and managing student accommodation quality in higher education.

Keywords: Accommodation quality, Ghana, hostel developers, higher education, student accommodation

INTRODUCTION

In the face of growing enrolment of students in tertiary education globally (Sharma, 2012), student accommodation has become one of the teething problems faced by higher institutions in developing country context (Centre for Global Education, 2002). In many countries, especially in developing countries, the governments have been the main provider of student accommodation for public higher institutions. As a result of limited government resources, government in developing countries are unable to adequately meet the accommodation demand for all public higher institutions. Over past two decades, governments in many developing countries have involved private hostel providers to participate in building hostels and halls of residence for students in order to meet the demand for more accommodation infrastructure (Centre for Global Education, 2002). This has attracted many private individuals into investment in student hostel accommodation.

In Ghana with an estimated 9.7% enrolment rate in Ghanaian tertiary education (Ghana Education Performance Report, 2010), the government has been encouraging the concept of private participation in socio-economic development in many areas of the

economy of Ghana including provision of student accommodation infrastructure (Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda, 2010). Many tertiary institutions have policy guidelines regarding the sharing and using of student accommodation facility. Every student is affiliated to at least one hall of residence but not all students are accommodated at halls of residence on campus due to limited intake at the halls. As a result tertiary institutions in Ghana have policies that invite private individuals to provide hostel accommodation to students. Even in this, prospective hostel accommodation providers must comply with the rules and regulation regarding the kind of accommodation facility quality they ought to provide to the student tenants.

The proliferation of many Student Accommodation Providers (SAP) in Ghana has caused gradually increasing competition in the student accommodation industry. As a result, SAP are increasingly concerned about the needs and requirement of students who serve as their customers. Many private hostel developers are taking customer-driven initiatives that are intended to understand, attract, retain and build intimate long term relationship with profitable customers (Grönroos, 1984; Kotler and Keller, 2006). Thus, SAP are making attempts to deliver superior value to customer as a

means of achieving positive financial outcomes as opined by the popular Service-Profit Chain (Heskett *et al.*, 1994, 1997; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). It has longed being recognised that in a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for customers, delivering quality service is seen as a key differentiator and has increasingly become a key element of business strategy (Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Kotler and Keller, 2006).

The phenomenon of Student Accommodation Quality (SAQ) has begun generating research interest among researchers and practitioners. Based on the service quality literature, SAQ is defined as the extent to which accommodation service meets customers' needs or expectations (Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996). SAQ is the key to competitive advantage based on which SAPin hospitality industry use to gain more customers and market share (Voss, 2003; Voss *et al.*, 2004).

The priority customers attach to different dimensions of SAQ is of paramount importance for organisation seeking to attract more students to their hostels and even generating good word-of-mouth communication in customers for customer retention and long-term relationship with its student customers. Total and continuous quality improvement nevertheless needs to be focused on customers' own perceptions and preferences as to which aspects of service quality they deem important. The task of business organisations is, therefore, to be able to explore and get into the minds of their customers regarding the priority customers place on different dimensions of service quality delivered by the organisation (Grönroos, 1990; Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Kauppinen-Räisänen *et al.*, 2007).

Many previous studies seem to agree that, generally, customers may differ in their priority of quality dimensions in different service contexts and service types (Kotler and Keller, 2006). Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) found that Reliability was the most important dimension and while empathy was the least important across various service types. In Zeithaml *et al.* (1990), tangibles proves to be consistently unimportant. In the work of Chowdhary and Prakash (2007), empathy and responsiveness were found to be more important for labour intensive industry while tangibles and reliability affected the assessment of quality dimensions in case of capital intensive services. Moreover, Nimako (2012) found that in the mobile telecom context, customers places more priority on Technical Quality, Reliability and Economy than other quality dimensions like tangible and Image. Chowdhary and Prakash (2007) found that, regarding prioritising dimensions of service quality in different service contexts, the authors noted that "...no simple generalization of relative importance of determinants of SQ is possible. Thus, it must be noted that importance

of determinants of quality for customers would vary across different service types." They however, found that some generalizations within the service types were possible for different services.

In the case of SAQ dimensions in Ghanaian higher institutions, as far as the researchers know, no empirical study has been conducted to explore student priority of SAQ dimensions in Ghanaian Higher Institutions (GHIs). There is dearth of empirical studies in the accommodation quality literature regarding in developing country context in general and in the higher education context in particular. There is, therefore, the need to empirically explore the importance that students attach to the different dimensions of SAQ in GHI in order to provide direction for policy makers and managerial strategy. In view of the above, the main question addressed by this study is: How can student priority for SAQ dimensions be described in GHI? The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the relative importance of different dimensions of SAQ from students' perspective in the context of GHI and how students' accommodation type could influence priority placed on SAQ dimensions. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- To identify and prioritise SAQ dimensions in GHI.
- To determine whether student priority for SAQ dimensions in GHI differs between residential and non-residential accommodation types.

The results of this study will offers educational management, construction management and student accommodation developers the value of identifying areas to concentrate in order to provide maximum value and SAQ to student customers whom they offer accommodation to this allows practitioners to effectively redirect their focus and re-allocate resources toward improving more important SAQ dimensions for effective student learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Student Accommodation Quality (SAQ): Service quality has been defined as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations (Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996). Based on this, SAQ is defined as the extent to which accommodation services meets students' needs and expectations. A review of the service quality literature reveals that a lot have been written in service quality in hotels and other service contexts, very little is known regarding SAQ and the dimensions of SAQ in higher education context.

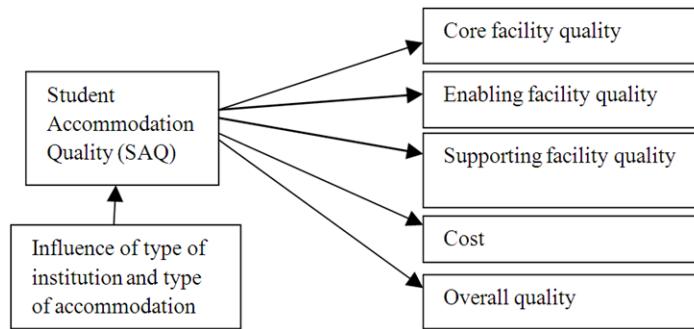


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework for the study

The dimensions of SAQ could be understood from classification and components of the service product identified in the marketing and service quality literature (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007). Normann (1991) and Grönroos (1990) have that it that the service product could be classified into core service products and supplementary service elements. According to Normann (1991), “the core service is the basic reason for a firm to be in the market. It represents the firm’s basic competency in creating value with and for the client. It represents a complex set of benefits which may be difficult to analyze because some are physical, some are psychological and others are emotional” (pp: 46). Core service is that part of the entire service offering that is supposed to meet the most basic purpose for providing the service.

In the context of student hostel or hall of residence accommodation, the core service refers to the most basic reason for renting a student accommodation for a time period. Thus, the core service will include such things as bedroom, toilet and bath facilities since these appear to be so basic that a student seeking an accommodation facility to rent would have to consider them probably first.

Apart from the core service, the service product also consists of other supplementary services. Supplementary Services have been variously described as auxiliary services by Grönroos (1990), peripheral by Normann (1991) and supplementary services by Lovelock and Wirtz (2007). Supplementary or customer services may include logistics services, advice, installation and upgrades. Additionally, Grönroos (1990) subdivides supplementary or peripheral services into enabling (facilitating) and enhancing (supporting) services. Facilitating services (and goods) are those which are necessary for the core service to take place. Supporting services (and goods) do not facilitate the delivery of the core service but create added value for the client.

In the context of student hostel or hall of residence accommodation, facilitating or enabling services

dimension of supplementary services are those necessary and facilitate to make for sound accommodation. Facilitating services include utility facilities (e.g., water, electricity, etc.), security, rules and regulations, among others. Supporting services, on the other hand, may include such value added services desirable at student hostel or hall accommodation like Junior Common Room, entertainment hall/facility, reading room, library, ease of transportation to lectures, garage, among other things. Supporting services are only desirable if they are available but may not be the most important in renting or student accommodation.

Aside the core and supplementary aspects of student accommodation quality, the cost of the accommodation and the perceived overall quality of it could be important factors for evaluation of SAQ. In many service provision context, the price or cost paid by customers or users in acquiring a service in general and the accommodation service in particular has long being found to be an important quality factor in product/service evaluation (Cronin *et al.*, 2000; Gera, 2011; Nimako, 2012). The monetary and searching costs, among other costs, may affect students’ choice and evaluation of the quality of the accommodation. Where students pay more, they are more likely to expect better accommodation service quality provision than those who pay less. Therefore, the conceptual framework for understanding SAQ in this study included core and supplementary services, cost and overall quality of student hostel or hall accommodation.

Conceptual framework for the study: The conceptual framework for this study is depicted in Fig. 1. It indicates the areas or dimensions of student accommodation quality for which student priority was measured. Thus, students would evaluate the importance they attach to the identified five SAQ dimensions which are core facility, enabling facility, supporting facility, cost and overall quality. The study also examined the influence of the type of institution and the type of student accommodation on the priority of students for the various SAQ dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

Population and research context: The population consisted of students of two public higher institutions in Ghana, being College of Technology Education, Kumasi Campus of the University of Education, Winneba (COLTEK) and Kumasi Polytechnic. The population consisted of students of two public higher institutions in Ghana, being College of Technology Education, Kumasi Campus of the University of Education, Winneba (COLTEK) and Kumasi Polytechnic (K-Poly). The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) is a Ghanaian public university established in 1992 and mandated to train professional teachers for all levels of education in the country. Currently, it has four main campuses located at Winneba, Kumasi, Asante-Mampong and Ajumako respectively. The mission of the University is to train competent professional teachers for all levels of education as well as conduct research, disseminate knowledge and contribute to educational policy and development. The vision of the University is to be an internationally reputable institution for teacher education and research.

Kumasi Polytechnic is one of the famous Polytechnics in Ghana. It is located at the Garden city of West Africa, the capital city of the Ashanti Region of Ghana (Kumasi). The Polytechnic, known earlier as Kumasi Technical Institute, was established in 1954, but started actual teaching and learning in 1955, dealing mainly with craft courses. It became a Polytechnic on 30th October, 1963 and from then on concentrated on Technician and a few Diploma Programmes. Additionally, a few professional courses were offered. Following the enactment of the Polytechnic Law 1992,

PNDC Law 321, Kumasi Polytechnic ceased to exist in its previous form and became a tertiary institution. The Kumasi polytechnic has since 1993 has expanded from three Faculties and one Centre in 2009/2010 to six Faculties, one school and two Institutes in the 2010/2011 academic year.

Sampling: A convenient sample size of 700 respondents was chosen for the study, being 350 students for each of the two institutions. In order to collect data of high quality that reflect customers' opinion, a survey was conducted from the two institutions. To improve representativeness, data were collected from students who were using residential and non-residential student accommodation types. Out of the 700 questionnaire administered, a usable 466 were obtained representing 66.57% response rate for analysis.

Research instrument: Student priority for each SAQ dimension was measured using self-administered structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was originally developed for a larger study so it contained many sections relating to student accommodation. However, for the focus of this study, the variables for measuring student priority for each SAQ dimensions that were contained in one section of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. The dimensions of SAQ were derived from focus group interview and previous work (Kotler and Keller, 2006; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2007).

The respondents were asked to rate the importance of the SQ dimensions on a five-point Likert scale. The responses were: very important (5), important (4),

Table 1: Prioritised SAQ dimensions in the two public higher institutions

Item of SAQ	Full sample (Both sub-groups)			COLTEK (n = 231)		K-POLY (n = 325)		Between groups X ²	sub- ANOVA Sign.
	Rank	Mean	S.D.	Rank	Mean	Rank	mean		
Light/Electricity availability	1	4.57	0.83	1	4.65	1	4.49	8.775	0.003*
Water supply	2	4.54	0.86	2	4.63	2	4.45	7.867	0.005*
The overall impression	3	4.43	0.82	3	4.46	3	4.40	1.941	0.164
Security facility	4	4.43	0.95	4	4.48	4	4.39	3.642	0.056
physical environment	5	4.39	0.95	5	4.45	5	4.32	3.631	0.057
Toilet facility	6	4.36	0.93	6	4.43	7	4.29	3.275	0.070
distance to lecture	7	4.33	0.95	7	4.35	6	4.32	0.019	0.889
Bed room facility	8	4.29	0.92	10	4.34	8	4.23	1.993	0.158
Bath room facility	9	4.28	0.90	11	4.33	9	4.23	1.487	0.223
Accommodation fee	10	4.25	0.91	12	4.29	10	4.21	0.826	0.363
Reading room facility	11	4.25	1.07	9	4.34	11	4.17	0.418	0.518
Behaviour of landlord	12	4.18	1.06	8	4.35	12	4.01	18.26	0.000*
Peer relationship	13	4.10	0.97	13	4.28	15	3.92	14.98	0.000*
rules and regulations	14	4.03	0.95	14	4.11	14	3.95	1.101	0.294
Kitchen facility	15	3.88	1.05	15	3.95	16	3.81	2.794	0.095
Access to transport	16	3.88	1.19	16	3.80	13	3.96	2.591	0.107
JCR/Entertainment hall	17	3.34	1.24	17	3.48	18	3.21	4.603	0.032*
Garage facility	18	2.64	1.30	18	2.71	17	2.56	1.582	0.209

SD: Standard Deviation; *:Significant at 0.05; df: 1, Scale: 1-Very unimportant; 2-Unimportant; 3 -Neutral; 4-Important; 5-Very important

neither important nor unimportant (3), unimportant (2) and very unimportant (1). The purpose of this section of the questionnaire was to find out how important the various SAQ dimensions were to students in searching for the desired student accommodation facility. It had five items for respondents' bio data and eighteen items for Importance of SQ dimensions. The questionnaire was pre-tested using a sample of twenty students for refinement in order to identify any ambiguous items and get a more effective instrument. It was finally administered to the target population through personal contact by researchers for nearly two weeks in their halls and hostels. Moreover, the questionnaire items contained a section for demographic variables (gender, age, education, income, marital status, student accommodation type). For the validity and reliability of the instrument, the face and content validity were verified and established by two experts in research methodology. The Cronbach alpha reliability for all the 18 items were generated using SPSS 16.0; it produced a value of 0.92, which is above the recommended minimum of 0.7 (Straub *et al.*, 2004).

Data analysis:

Methods of data analysis: All responses from the structured questionnaire were analysed using SPSS 16.0. The main statistical methods included descriptive statistics, ranking of the dimensions according to their means to determine the relative importance of the SQ dimensions and a non-parametric measure, Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA, was used to determine whether significant differences exist in the importance of or priority for SAQ between the two institutions and between residential and non-residential respondents.

RESULTS

Respondents' characteristics: The characteristics of the respondents are presented below.

For the characteristics of the respondents, in terms of gender, 61.2% of the respondents were males and 38.8% were females. 2.1% were below 20 years, 92.7% of the respondents were within the ages of 20-35 years, 4.3% were between 36 and 45 years and 0.9% were 45 years and above. This implies that majority of them were in the economically active population. All respondents were educated with about 39.9% of them pursuing Diploma programmes, 57.7% of them pursuing bachelor's degree and 2.3% pursuing master's degree programmes. In terms of marital status, 89.7% of them were singles, who were not married while 10.3% of them were married. Generally, this depicts that most of them respondents were young bachelors and spinsters who are preparing for responsible family life. In terms of accommodation type, 66.5% were using non-

residential student accommodation facility, notably private hostels, while 33.5% were using residential student accommodation, notably halls of residence on campus. Out of the 466 respondents, 231 were obtained from COLTEK, while 235 were obtained from K-POLY constituting 49.57 and 50.43%, respectively.

Relative importance of SAQ dimensions: A summary of relative importance of customer priority of SAQ dimensions is presented in Table 1 with respect to and irrespective of respondent institution. The table shows at a glance that 16 out of the 18 dimensions had means that exceed the theoretical mean of 3.5 (assuming normal distribution of responses).

Table 1 indicates that, generally without regard to respondent institution, utility facility quality was the most important SAQ items to the respondents, first, electricity availability and second, constant water supply. This is followed by the overall impression and security facility being 3rd and 4th ranked items respectively. From the fifth to the ninth ranked items, being cleanliness of the physical environment, toilet, distance to lecture and bedroom facility, it could be deduced that this group is dominated by core facility items. These are followed by accommodation fee, reading room facility, behaviour of hostel owner, peers and rules and regulation governing the hostel accommodation rented by the respondents. Kitchen facility comes fifteenth, followed by access to transport, entertainment facility and the least important SAQ item is garage facility, which falls within the support facility quality dimension.

With respect to the two institution, the ranking appear to be very similar from the fifth to the tenth ranking of items and from the fourteenth to the eighteenth item. There were a few significant differences between priority for SAQ items between respondent from the two institutions ($p < 0.05$), specifically water supply and electricity, respectively ($p = 0.005$; $p = 0.003$), behaviour of hostel owners ($p = 0.000$), interpersonal relationship ($p = 0.000$) and entertainment facility ($p = 0.032$).

Differences in priority of SAQ between residential and non-residential : Results from the Kruskal-Wallis tests (Table 2) show thatten out of eighteen dimensions of SAQ were similarly prioritised by residential and non-residential respondents from the two higher education institutions ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$). These SAQ items are distance from the hall/hostel to lecture/classes, toilet facility, overall impression of the quality of the accommodation to me, the physical environment, bed room facility, bath room facility, reading room facility, affordability of accommodation fee, rules and

Table 2: Differences in priority for SAQ between residential and non-residential respondents

Item of SAQ	Residential (n = 156)		Non-residential (n = 310)		Differences between sub-groups	
	Rank	Mean	Rank	mean	X ²	Sign.
Water supply	1	4.5833	2	4.5129	8.775	0.003*
Light/Electricity availability	2	4.5256	1	4.5903	7.867	0.005*
Security facility	3	4.4936	5	4.4	1.941	0.164
The distance from the hall/hostel to lecture/classes.	4	4.391	7	4.3065	3.642	0.056
Toilet facility	5	4.391	6	4.3452	3.631	0.057
The overall impression of the quality of the accommodation to me	6	4.391	3	4.4516	3.275	0.07
How the physical environment is helpful for my study/learn	7	4.3526	4	4.4065	0.019	0.889
Bed room facility	10	4.3077	8	4.2742	1.993	0.158
Bath room facility	11	4.2949	9	4.271	1.487	0.223
Reading room facility	12	4.2692	11	4.2452	0.826	0.363
How affordable accommodation fee is	9	4.2115	10	4.271	0.418	0.518
The behaviour of the landlord/lady	8	4.0833	12	4.229	18.26	0.000*
The cordial interpersonal relationship among tenants/students.	13	4.0128	13	4.1419	14.98	0.000*
Rules and regulations for residence	14	3.9808	14	4.0581	1.101	0.294
Kitchen facility	15	3.9231	16	3.8581	2.794	0.095
Access to transport	16	3.8077	15	3.9161	2.591	0.107
Junior common room/Entertainment hall	17	3.4551	17	3.2871	4.603	0.032*
Garage facility	18	2.6282	18	2.6387	1.582	0.209

SD: Standard Deviation; *Significant at 0.05; df : 1; Scale: 1:Very unimportant; 2-Unimportant; 3-Neutral; 4- Important; 5-Very important

regulations governing the accommodation, kitchen facility, access to transport and Garage facility.

On other hand, only five out of the eighteen SAQ items received significantly different rating between residential and non-residential respondents. These SAQ items are Junior Common Room/entertainment facility, behaviour of landlord/lady, cordial interpersonal relationship with co-tenants and the two utility quality items, water supply and constant availability of light/electricity.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Relative importance of SAQ dimensions: Among the SAQ dimensions to the respondents, availability of light/electricity and water, which are utility facility quality within the enabling facility quality dimension, is the highest rated SAQ dimension. These two SAQ items could be described as extremely important to the respondents when selecting student residential and non-residential accommodation in a university or polytechnic. The next group of SAQ items could be described as very important to the respondents, from the third to the ninth SAQ item. This group includes overall impression of hostel, security, physical environment, toilet, distance to lecture, bedroom and bath room. The group is followed by another group of SAQ items that could be described as important, which includes accommodation fee, reading room facility, behaviour of landlord/lady, interpersonal relationship with co-student tenants and rules and regulations. Thus, this group is dominated by facilitating qualityand cost dimensions. After this group comes the less important group of SAQ items which includes kitchen facility,

access to transport and JCR/entertainment facility. The least important or unimportant SAQ item is garage facility which falls in the category of support facility dimension.

Few differences were found in the priority for SAQ items between COLTEK and K-Poly respondents in areas such as waters supply and electricity, behaviour of hostel owners, interpersonal relationship and entertainment facility. In all these areas of SAQ, COLTEK respondents rated these item more important than their K-Poly counterparts.

The study finally found that only five out of the eighteen SAQ items received significantly different rating between residential and non-residential respondents. Out of these, residential students rated lighting/electricity, behaviour of landlord/owner, cordial relationship with co-student tenants and Junior Common Room/entertainment facility more important than residential students. It is only for water supply that residential students rated more importantly than non-residential students.

Theoretical implication: Theoretically, this study found that while cost (accommodation fee) and core facility quality (bathroom, bedroom and toilet) take very important priority in selecting student accommodation, they are not the most important. The results show that utility facility which are within the enabling facility quality dimension was the extremely important SAQ dimension that attracts and influences students in selecting student accommodation. This finding is also different from other studies that found that core facility quality which represents Technical Quality (Gi-Du and James, 2004; Grönroos, 1984) were

most important in a different industry contexts, which was the Iran Mobile Telecom Market (Satari, 2007) and Airline service (Bozorgi, 2007).

The findings of the present study lend support to the empirical assertion of Chowdhary and Prakash (2007) that "... no simple generalization of relative importance of determinants of service quality is possible ...that importance of determinants of quality for customers would vary across different service types." In some cases too, the situation pertaining in a particular cultural and economic context of a service type may also influence the relative importance of quality dimensions for customers. In Ghana the frequent electricity power failure and pipe water problems might have accounted for the topmost priority for utility facility demonstrated by the respondents in their rating of SAQ.

Policy implications: First, the policy implication of the findings is that the most important SAQ dimension that tertiary education management and student hostel accommodation developers in Ghana need to constantly improve upon is the availability of utility facilities, specifically water and electricity. This finding is particular relevant in the case of Ghana where water and electricity problem has recently been a major challenge affecting socio-economic activities in the country. This contradicts popular opinion in Ghana that holds that cost of accommodation remains the top most priority that is considered by most students in searching for student accommodation.

Student accommodation facilities need constant flow of water as it is essential in many aspects of living quality life in higher education institutions. In this regard, student accommodation providers should provide adequate water storage facilities to store water and ensure that there is constant flow of water for students use. In respect of electricity, student accommodation developers should provide electricity plants and generators that would supply light to student in the face of rampant electricity power failure in Ghana. The need for constant light for student accommodation cannot be overemphasised. Students need light to study at all times, electricity power for essential household activities that make living comfortable at student hostels and halls of residence.

Second, the study found that the next group of SAQ dimension described as very important include overall impression of hostel, security, physical environment, toilet, distance to lecture, bedroom and bath room. Students are particular about the security of their accommodation. Student accommodation developers and management should ensure:

- That there are effective security measures to provide a safe haven for student residence.
- That there is standard core facility in place in the areas of bedroom, bathroom and toilet for all student accommodation. These should be constantly monitored to ensure that their standards are maintained all the time.
- That effective and reliable transport system is put in place at vantage locations around students' residence such as taxi ranks or specially arranged college or commercial vehicles to convey students to and from lecture to their residence safely. This will help reduce lateness to lecture that result from waiting unduly for public transport to board by students to campuses for lecture.

The third group of SAQ items described as important includes accommodation fee, reading room facility, behaviour of landlord/lady, interpersonal relationship with co-student tenants and rules and regulations. Thus, this group includes facilitating quality and cost dimensions of SAQ framework. Among these factors, the most controllable factors by tertiary institution management and hostel developers are cost and rules and regulations. In this regard, it is recommended that hostel developers and school management should negotiate and agree on acceptable fees to pay, and general rules and regulations for student residents to abide by. Thus, school management should not leave the decisions about accommodation fees and rules and regulation for non-residential students to be decided entirely by private hostel developers. In Ghana, in many cases it is the private hostel operators who charge their own prices and set their own rules and regulations for student residents. Campus residential accommodation fees are, however, negotiated by management boards and committees appointed to fix student accommodation facility user fees.

The fourth group of SAQ items in terms of priority is described as less important SAQ items which includes kitchen facility, access to transport and JCR/entertainment facility. Kitchen facility and entertainment facilities are useful to students' domestic and social life (DuBrin, 2002) and a part of the supporting facility quality dimension. However, these SAQ items are rated less important by the respondents in the two institutions in selecting a hostel accommodation probably because most bachelors might prefer to eat from restaurants and from available local food venders that are around local communities in which student hostels are located or food vendors permitted to sell food to students at affordable prices.

The least important or unimportant SAQ item is garage facility which falls in the category of support facility dimension. One possible explanation is that, in the first place most the respondents in the two institutions might be bachelors who do not own their

private cars, therefore, availability of garage facility would not be important factor to consider. Aside this, it is well-known fact that in the cities where these two institutions are established it is difficult and very expensive to acquire land for student accommodation. Therefore, student accommodation developers do not usually make it a priority to provide garages for student car parking.

It recommended that the student hostel providers seek to invest more in utility facility quality. They should also endeavour to understand that students are customers whose voice and expectation of accommodation quality should be given top priority when building accommodation facilities for students in tertiary institution. It is also recommended that management in the two tertiary institutions would consider the top priority of SAQ items identified in this study and put in measures to ensure that such priorities are given due attention by private hostel developers who are affiliated to the tertiary institution in serving students.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study sought to assess and analyse the importance student customers place on different aspects of SAQ in two Ghanaian tertiary institutions. The study concludes that within the COLTEK and K-Poly, students priority for SAQ dimensions is similar in most respect and that the most important SAQ dimension to the tertiary students when considering accommodation is availability of utility facility specifically water and electricity, followed by overall impression of hostel, security, physical environment, toilet, distance to lecture, bedroom and bath room, accommodation fee, reading room facility, behaviour of landlord/lady, interpersonal relationship with co-student tenants and rules and regulations, kitchen facility, access to transport and JCR/entertainment facility. The least important or unimportant SAQ item is garage facility which falls in the category of support facility dimension. The study implies that student accommodation providers and management of the tertiary institutions are to focus more attention, strategy, resources and efforts on SAQ dimension that students give more priority to than others in order to ensure effective and efficient hostel accommodation services that promote students' learning in tertiary education in Ghana.

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