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Challenges faced by university hostel managers in the Greater Accra region of Ghana

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Abstract

Most universities provide hostels to promote the living and learning experience as well as the wellbeing of students. However, the managers of the hostels are generally faced with several challenges that hinder their effectiveness. This paper explores the challenges of university hostel managers in the Greater Accra region of Ghana, with the aim of providing empirical information that will help to develop a better understanding of hostel managers' challenges. Data was qualitatively collected by means of interviews; a total of 5 interviews were carried out in five universities. The data was thematically analysed. It became evident that university hostel managers in Ghana face both management and student related challenges. The general management related challenges were; insufficient funds and budget reduction, slow response to maintenance requests, and centralised management approach. The dominant student related challenges were students disregard for hostel rules and regulations such as students changing the paints of rooms as well as fixing carpets with glues, vandalism and misuse of facilities. Other student related challenges highlighted were; petty quarrelling, students' inability to pay hostel fees timeously and students disposing off facilities. The study provides invaluable information that contribute to filling the knowledge gap in the area of hostel managers' challenges. This study provides empirical evidence that can help university management to better understand and mitigate hostel managers' challenges. It is recommended that university management give priority to the hostels and reconsider the budget allocated for managing the hostels.

Keywords: Challenges, Ghana, Greater Accra, hostel, university.

Introduction

Facilities are an integral part and a contributor of the teaching and learning environment of universities. In fact, facilities should be perceived as a factor of production (Alexander, 2003; Olanrewaju, Khamidi and Arazi 2011). As a factor of production and an integral part of the teaching and learning environment of universities, facilities contribute to the quality of higher education. To buttress the importance, Lateef, Khimidi and Idris (2010) indicated that a conducive and adequate environment that can stimulate and promote learning, teaching, innovation and research is partly dependent on the functionality and the quality standards of a university's facilities. In fact, achieving a high quality education is doubtful in an unfavorable learning environment, such as poorly maintained facilities (Al-Enezi, 2002). Thus, facilities

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partly influence the quality of education. It is for this reason that the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of Ghana conducts a visit to evaluate an institution's physical facilities before accreditation is granted (NAB, 2011).

The physical facilities required in a university are wide ranged; the range may include but not limited to; administrative buildings, offices, libraries, lecture theatres, laboratories, workshops, student and staff accommodation, canteens and sports fields (Gruber, Fuß, Voss and Gläser-Zikuda, 2010; Olanrewaju, Khamidi and Arazi, 2010). It is evident that one of the facilities which plays a critical role towards the provision of a quality higher education is the *student accommodation i.e. student hostels*. Studies on university facilities and maintenance management in the broader context exist (Buys and Nkado, 2006; Ogbeifun, 2011; Kamarazaly, Mbachu and Phipps, 2013; Simpeh, 2013; Eghan, 2014). However, few of the studies focused on the challenges of the facilities and maintenance managers. Moreover, as much as considerable research related to student accommodation or hostels has been conducted in many parts of the world, including Ghana (Amole, 2009; Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2010; Najib, Yusof and Osman, 2011a; Najib, Yusof and Osman, 2011b; Addai, 2013; Bondinuba *et al.*, 2013; Nimako and Bondinuba, 2013; Abubakar, Kasim and Mamman 2015; Bella-Omunagbe, 2015; Najib, Yusof and Tabassi, 2015), these studies did not specifically deal with the challenges of hostel managers. This brings to the fore the need for a study that focuses specifically on the challenges of hostel managers. Thus, this paper explores the challenges of university hostel managers in the Greater Accra region of Ghana with the aim of providing an empirical and extensive understanding of the challenges. With this understanding, university management together with the facilities and hostel managers will be able to take steps to mitigate such challenges.

Challenges of Managing Facilities

Student hostel management is part of the broader scope of facilities management. Therefore, the challenges of the hostel managers would have a relation with the broader facilities management challenges. The challenges faced by FM departments are enormous; some of the general ones include, but not limited to; poor maintenance culture, operatives' lack of maintenance knowledge, no emphasis on training, lack of long term planning, indiscipline and ignorance on the part of facility users, absence of planned maintenance programmes and inadequate funds for maintenance (Adenuga, Olufowobi and Raheem, 2010). With specific reference to the FM departments of universities, Kamarazaly *et al.* (2013) revealed some of the critical challenges as; inadequate funding, re-active maintenance, statutory non-compliance, lack of sustainability, obsolescence and not meeting stakeholder needs and expectations. It should be noted that financial constraints is acknowledged as the most serious challenge faced by facilities/maintenance departments (Buys and Nkado, 2006; Lee and Scott, 2008; Olanrewaju, 2010; Kamarazaly *et al.*, 2013; Simpeh, 2013). Buys and Nkado (2006) and Simpeh (2013), further revealed that departments responsible for the management

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of university facilities are not only faced with low budgets but occasional budget reductions. Closely related to the challenge of insufficient budgets and occasional budget reductions is the improper administration of funds (Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2010).

These facility management challenges are common in Ghana too. For example, Eghan (2014) cited inadequate resource allocation as one of the main challenges of facilities/maintenance departments in Ghana. Inflation exacerbate the financial constraints faced by the managers of university facilities in Ghana. The Bank of Ghana (2014) revealed that inflation rose to 16.5 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2014, which was the highest rate since November 2009. The inflation rate as at September 2017 stood at 12.2 per cent (Bank of Ghana, 2017). The challenge of inflation makes it difficult for FM departments to utilise the already insufficient funds available for managing facilities. Other prevailing facility maintenance management related challenges in Ghana include; inadequate knowledge on the part of facility users, re-active approach to maintenance, low priority for maintenance and poor facility maintenance management culture (Adadevoh, 2013; Afrane, 2017; Buabeng, 2015; Eghan, 2014; Kportufe, 2015). For example, the former President, Jerry John Rawlins, lamented the poor condition of the 'State House' which according to him is a result of the poor Ghanaian facilities management culture (Buabeng, 2015). Similarly, in an address to facilities managers in a day's training workshop in Accra, 2013, the vice president of the Chartered Institute of Building-West Africa, Mr Dogbegah, highlighted the poor infrastructure management culture in Ghana which manifests itself through poor facility and building management (Adadevoh, 2013). Furthermore, the studies of Addai (2013:582), Bondinuba, Nimako and Karley (2013) and Nimako and Bondinuba (2013) reveal some aspects of hostel management challenges such as noise and environmental pollution, electricity supply problems, frequent water shortages and unsatisfactory provision of bathrooms, kitchens, toilets and reading rooms. All of these challenges invariably lead to a substantial decline in the condition of buildings (Buys and Nkado, 2006).

Research Methodology

A phenomenological research strategy was adopted for this study; this approach was selected because it allowed the hostel managers to elucidate their experiences. Data was qualitatively collected by means of a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured form of interview was used because, it allowed the interviewer to seek clarifications from participants where necessary and as a result promoted interaction; and secondly, it ensured some level of consistency resulting from administering a set of predetermined questions. The interview approach also helped to generate an extensive list of challenges. Currently, the website for the National Accreditation Board reveals that there are 212 accredited tertiary institutions in Ghana; out of these, there are 10 accredited public universities, 81 private tertiary institutions accredited and recognised to offer degree programmes and 6 technical universities. It can also be extrapolated from the website that there is only 1 technical university, 3 public

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universities, and 40 private tertiary institutions in Accra (NAB: 2018). Consequently, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select five universities from two lots: namely, two public and three private in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The purposive sampling helped to balance the selection of the universities. The oldest public and private universities as well as the newly converted polytechnic (technical university) and two other private (relatively new) private universities were selected in Accra. After which 5 interviews were conducted with the hostel managers of the 5 universities. After transcription of the interview, the transcribed data were sent to the interviewees for confirmation or modifications to eliminate any possible transcription error. The data was thematically analysed; different themes which emanated from the interviews were grouped and discussed separately.

Findings and discussion

This section discusses the challenges of the hostel managers. It was found that some of the challenges are management related whilst others are student related. Thus, the challenges are classified as management and student related.

Management related challenges

The number one and biggest challenge identified was funds inadequacy. For example, one of the interviewees said: *“Obviously funds is a problem”*. Actually, 4 out of the 5 interviewees admitted that funds provided were generally not adequate for the management of the hostel. Although, 1 of the interviewees was of the opinion that enough funds was provided for managing the hostel; she, however, stated that the lift in the hostel was occasionally switched off because of high electricity bills. The fact that the lift was switched off because of electricity bills is a clear indication of funds inadequacy. In fact, literature confirms that the biggest challenges of maintenance managers or departments is funds inadequacy (Buys and Nkado, 2006; Lee and Scott, 2008; Olanrewaju, 2010; Kamarazaly *et al.*, 2013; Simpeh, 2013). Funds inadequacy appears to be the biggest challenge in this study too.

In addition to funds inadequacy, the challenge of budget reduction was highlighted by one of the interviewees. The challenge is revealed in this statement:

- *“And when you do your budget to undertake maintenance for the following year the question that is normally asked is how much do you bring in; because your expenditure out-ways your income...you are compiled to cut down on the budget for the maintenance work”*.

Buys and Nkado (2006) and Simpeh (2013), actually revealed that departments responsible for the management of university facilities are not only faced with low budgets but occasional budget reductions. Thus, budget reduction is indeed a management related challenge which requires attention.

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Another dominant challenge acknowledged by all interviewees was the delay in solving or fixing required maintenance work. This challenge was linked to funds inadequacy and the urgency with which the maintenance personnel or department respond to calls. According to some interviewees, lack of urgency resulted in more deferred maintenance which accelerated the level of deterioration in the hostel. The inefficiency of the maintenance workers was also noted by one interviewee as a cause of delay. The following comments clarifies this challenge:

- “...you are not able to access funds when you need them so major maintenance work that are to be done within specific year is rescheduled to another year.”
- “The only thing is our efficiency at work ... for instance my head of maintenance ... if you need him at a point to do something immediately he may not be available.”

The vice president of the Chartered Institute of Building-West Africa, Mr Dogbegah, highlighted the poor infrastructure management culture in Ghana which according to him manifests itself through poor facilities and buildings management (Adadevoh, 2013). The poor Ghanaian maintenance culture has also been cited by many Ghanaians (Afrane, 2017; Buabeng, 2015; Eghan, 2014; Kportufe, 2015). The lack of urgency and deferment of maintenance work highlighted by the interviewees to some extent elucidate the poor maintenance culture in the country.

Two interviewees revealed that the centralised approach to managing the hostel was problematic; they indicated that this approach hinder prompt decision making and response to maintenance and service needs of students. Besides, the centralised approach to hostel management affects the credibility of the hostel managers as well as the respect they deserve. These are revealed in these comments:

- “...sometimes it is very embarrassing when a student informs you that the light system is not functioning and you as a head can't provide a bulb to help the student.”
- “I think the head-on we have now is with how the hostel is run, because I am the hostel manager alright but I cannot take major decisions in terms of its running.”

Interviewees also indicated that the condition of the hostels had deteriorated because of the challenges they are confronted with. This statement from one of the interviewee's clarifies this point: “the level of deterioration has gone so high.” Indeed poor maintenance practices such as lack of long term planning and absence of planned maintenance programmes can increase the deterioration rate of a building.

Students related challenges

All interviewees indicated that the biggest students' related challenge was students disregard for hostel rules and regulations. According to the interviewees, students generally kick against or refuse to adhere to the rules and regulation of the hostel. Additionally, some also

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do as they wish e.g. changing the paint/colour of the rooms and fixing carpets with glues. Few comments are provided in connection to this point:

- *“historical lack of adherence to rule and regulations”*
- *“Student always kick against enforcement of laws.”*
- *“...when they come in they paint their rooms with different colours.*
- *“Some lay carpets with glue which requires thinners to remove ...”*

The disobedience of rules and regulation is a common problem associated with students. This has a relation to indiscipline which was identified as one of the general facility management challenges in Ghana.

The challenge of vandalism and misuse of facilities and waste of utilities were also highlighted by interviewees. Closely related to the ‘challenge of vandalism and misuse of facilities’ is the challenge of students not taking responsibility to report defects and also the challenge of students disposing refuse anyhow and anywhere. Some statements in support are:

- *“The other issue has also been students not understanding the use of specific facilities in the hostel. You will see students banging doors and forcing open doors here and there, breaking W/C, cistern handles...I mean causing harm to specific sanitary appliances within the washrooms.”*
- *“...you go to a room and then light, fan is on, and the students are not around. You go to places and students are just wasting water here and there.”*
- *“Once they are in the room as soon as the problem come up they should be able to tell you for you to correct it but they let it stay there and then it get out of hand.....so they are not pre-emptive with regards to defect in the room.”*
- *“... Students are expected to gather their refuse in a trash bag come down and dispose it but what they do is that they put it in the trash bag and leave it in the corridor.*

Eghan (2014) identified ignorance on the part of facility users as one of the general facility management challenges in Ghana. It can be inferred that the aforementioned challenges are very much related to ignorance and indiscipline.

Another major student’s related challenge was pilfering, this was mentioned by two interviewees. One interviewee clarified that some students steal in order to sustain a particular lifestyle they have adopted in the hostel. Below is a statement to confirm:

- *“The other issue has to do with theft... some live a lifestyle beyond their means and when they run out of cash they steal their friends’ laptops.”*

Other challenges highlighted were; students’ inability to pay hostel fees timeously, petty quarrelling and students disposing off facilities. Few of such statements are:

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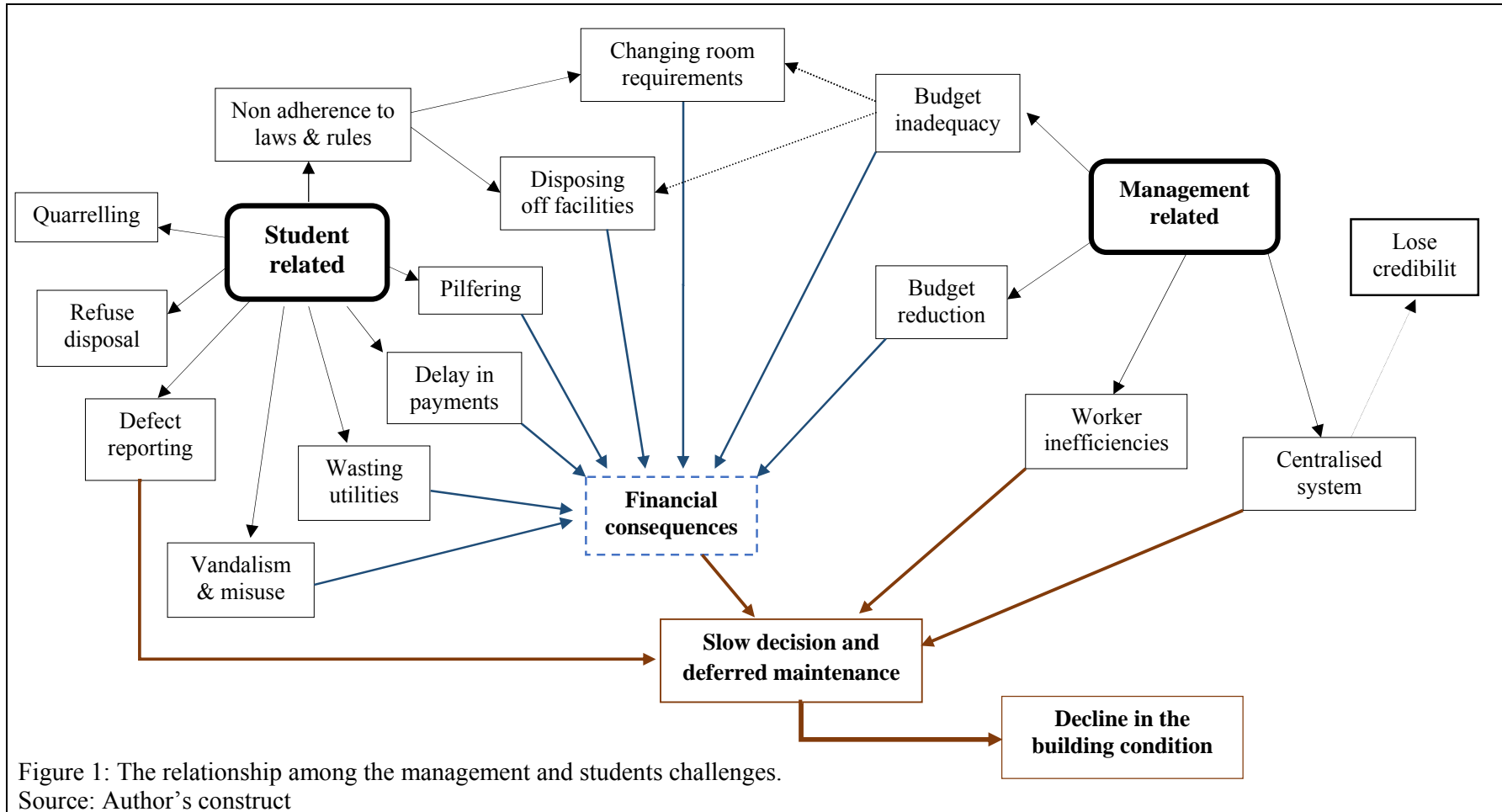
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- *“...some of them too ... the desk that we have provided they remove them and put them somewhere and some dispose them and put in their own.”*
- *“Recently we have a challenge with the payment of the fees.”*

Interviewees linked the majority of the students' related challenges and management challenges to the inadequacy of funds. Figure 1 provides both the management and students challenges. The relationship among the challenges are shown. It is evident that the majority of the students' challenges have financial consequences. According to one interviewee, if enough funds are provided, the hostel managers and maintenance personnel will be able to put rooms in decent condition before students come in. Thus, limiting the challenge of students disregarding rules and regulations of the hostel by making changes to the room and discarding facilities which they consider unsuitable or obsolete. These actions on the part of students certainly have financial consequences. Financial consequences coupled with inefficiency on the part of maintenance personnel, centralised approach of management plus lack of defect reporting leads to delay in resolving maintenance problems which ultimately accelerate the deterioration rate of the hostel. As a matter of fact, Buys and Nkado (2006) stated that low budgets and the reduction in maintenance budget invariably lead to a substantial decline in the condition of buildings.

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CONCLUSION

Most universities provide hostels to promote the living and learning experience as well as the wellbeing of students. To achieve this purpose, hostel managers are appointed to ensure that the hostels are well managed. However, several challenges limit the effectiveness of the hostel managers. Some of the challenges are management related whilst others are student related. The main management related challenges include; insufficient funds and budget reduction, slow response to maintenance requests, and centralised approach of management. The dominant student related challenge was students disregard for hostel rules and regulations. The majority of both the student challenges and the management challenges have financial consequences. Financial consequences coupled with worker inefficiencies and the centralised approach to hostel management results to a reactive approach to maintenance. The reactive approach adopted for maintenance does contribute to the deterioration rate of the hostels. The study has provided invaluable information that contributes to filling the knowledge gap in the area of hostel managers' challenges. It is anticipated that by understanding these challenges, university management together with maintenance and hostel managers will be able to take steps to mitigate such challenges and as a result reduce the deteriorating rate of the hostels.

Recommendation

- University management should reconsider the funding model and budget allocated for managing the university hostels.
- Campaigns should be organised to create awareness and educate facility users (students) on their responsibilities in ensuring effective maintenance.

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