

Well-Being of UiTM Shah Alam Students Living in Off-Campus Environment

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ABSTRACT

Current trends of housing development and rapid enrolment change are impacting students' daily life such as their housing comfort, convenience and safety. This research is undertaken to study the challenges faced by the students' well-being with regards to off-campus living environment. This study requires a key informant interview survey with samples taken from active and prominent off-campus students and also the officers from the Division of Students Affairs, Universiti Teknologi MARA. Findings will show challenges faced by the off-campus students and also the importance placed by the Students Affairs Division in ensuring that the comfort, convenience and safety of the students.

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed tremendous changes in the higher education scenario in Malaysia (see Table 1). One of the changes observed is the acceleration towards mass education (Mohamed Khaled, 2010a). This demands the increase in learning spaces, residential facilities, recreational and other supporting facilities. Higher education has grown rapidly in the world that encourages governments to strengthen institutions of higher education to face the challenges that higher education can be competitive through the development of a rapid development of higher education institutions (Mohamed Khaled, 2010b). With the rapid development of the higher education sector, universities need to be equipped with favourable student housing in enhancing the students well-being. However, the emphasis had been on providing student housing for living on-campus while living off-campus had been neglected.

This scenario is similar in the Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam campus. As a main campus that received an increasing of students' enrolment each year, this causes constraints on the student residential facilities. Many students in UiTM Shah Alam have to rent off-campus residential facilities on their own. In ensuring the welfare and safety of the off-campus students, the college management has established a Non-Resident Management Unit (UPNR) to manage all the living environment matters connected with them. Living environment experienced by off-campus students in UiTM Shah Alam is currently facing huge challenges. Current trends of housing development and rapid enrolment change are impacting students' daily life such as their housing comfort, convenience and safety. Numerous scholarly studies have highlighted student housing as an essential component of the facilities in assisting students to expand their intellectual capabilities and help to achieve the broader objectives such as social structure and responsible citizenship.

The challenges of living in housing and commercial buildings with problems related to noise, smell and safety are worrying. The problems would disturb and distract the students' learning experiences. The concern for university students living outside the campus is warranted. This paper will discuss the experiences on challenges faced by off-campus students living in the off-campus environment towards their well-being.

Table 1. Enrolment of students by Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia, 2002-2010

Types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI)	Year								
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Public HEI	281,839	294,359	293,978	307,121	331,025	382,997	419,334	437,420	462,780
Private HEI	294,600	314,344	322,891	258,825	323,707	365,800	399,852	484,377	541,629
TARC*	31,850	29,537	26,098	24,846	26,150	25,753	26,235	25,179	23,774
Polytechnics	52,898	53,492	64,382	73,834	82,045	84,250	85,280	86,471	87,751
Community College	3,207	6,424	8,945	9,873	11,273	14,438	17,082	17,729	18,200
Total	664,402	698,156	716,294	674,499	774,280	873,238	947,783	1,050,706	1,134,134

Note: Tunku Abdul Rahman College(TARC) has their own distinguish type of Higher Education Institution category.

(Source: Statistics of Higher Education of Malaysia, 2011)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Well-being is a vague concept of numerous human proportions (Diener, Napa Scollon, & Lucas, 2009). It can be implicit as a condition of health, happiness and prosperity. In a broad view, well-being is considered as living in a good life which individual satisfaction. On the other hand, well-being can be defined as an expression of life satisfaction, as an approach to influence the quality of people and its society.

The Malaysian government has realized the importance of well-being by establishing the strategic thrust that is building an environment that enhances Quality of Life (Economic Planning Unit, 2011). Indeed, strong and sustainable economic growth is unsatisfactory if the quality of life for all levels of society does not improve in tandem (Mohd. Najib, 2010). Furthermore, the Ministry Of Higher Education also has promised to provide a high quality and affordable standard of living in order to attract foreign student to study in Malaysia (Department of Higher Education, 2010). According to the aforementioned, these show that the government has embarked and move forward to improving the well-being of students living environment. There is considerable evidence to show that 'living environment' matters when it comes to well-being concerns. Two of the most common ways to measure well-being are through objective measures:

such as income; number of household; or educational attainment, and the use of subjective measures. Subjective measures of well-being reveal what people say about their lives. It is based on individuals' perception on whether they feel happy, satisfied, pleased and rewarded in their daily lives. It is not only about positive emotions, supported by Diener and Suh (1997), subjective wellbeing include negative emotions namely anger, guilt, fear, depression and sadness. The use of subjective indicators can give an overall picture of how students experience living in the off-campus environment. This in turn, can inform decisions about service delivery and priorities should be provided to increase off-campus students' well-being.

Student housing and family housing have different characteristics. Student housing encompasses basic bedroom units with other shared facilities such as bathrooms, toilets, laundry, kitchens, common lounges and cafeterias located either per floor level, per block or for the whole student housing accommodation (Amole, 2009). On the other hand, the basic unit for family housing is a house which includes bedrooms, bathrooms, toilets and a living area all as part of the unit with other housing facilities such as playground, shops and school at the neighbourhood (Parkes, Kearns, & Atkinson, 2002). In addition, student housing offers limited security of ownership and freedom if compared to family housing. In this study, student housing consists of two types of accommodation namely, living off-campus housing and living on-campus residential colleges. The meaning of living off-campus is a student housing located or available outside the campus (Dictionary.com, 2011). By living off-campus, students are requiring to live in family housing like apartment, shophouses, terrace, semi-detached and detached house. In term of this research, off-campus students are UiTM students who live outside the campus (NR Management Unit, 2010).

The responsible unit managing off-campus student housing is known as the Non Resident Management Unit (UPNR). UPNR is a unit under Student Affairs Division (HEP). This unit normally will help off-campus students searching for houses around Shah Alam area. It is also helping off-campus students' welfare. Services provided by UPNR are:

1. Provision of housing database for off-campus students;

2. Preparing a rental and safety guideline;
3. Assisting off-campus students to perform their programme, activities and community services;
4. Giving an approval on car sticker application;
5. Guide a meeting with Community Committee Members, Mosque committee and local authorities;
6. Carry out a visit to off-campus students rental housing;
7. Advisory for off-campus students who need help;
8. Becoming a middle person between student family, landlord as well as the university.

There are some facilities offered to the off-campus students. The first facility is the Prima Siswa Complex that located inside the campus. Prima Siswa Complex has a lounge that is a great place to hang out while on campus. It includes a large screen television, day lockers, information racks, bulletin board, pool table, foosball, indoor games, prayer room and student activity room (Fig.1). The second facility is the UiTM Student Service Centre that located outside of the campus. This centre is located at Section 7 Commercial Centre. It includes free internet surfing (wired and Wi-Fi), self-service laundry and small lounge (Fig.2).



Fig. 1. (a) Prima Siswa Complex as a facilities centre for off-campus students in campus; (b) student lounge; (c) indoor game facilities: pool table and foosball



Fig. 2. (a) UiTM Student Service Centre at commercial centre outside the campus; (b) Free internet surfing; (c) Self-service laundry

METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks to determine the challenges of living environment for off-campus students' well-being in UiTM Shah Alam and to ascertain the causes of these challenges. It draws on the findings of a pilot study which involved interview methods with qualitative approach in data collection. The data collection method of the research is the key informant interview. The university students' affairs officer is thought to be the important key person who has the guidance and advisory roles for shaping the student's well-being. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a pilot survey that takes into account not just perceptions of the students, but also their university students' affairs officer. This method not only clarifies the same issues from two parties, but also shows the concern of the officer towards the well-being of the off-campus students'. The interviews are tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviewing language medium is Malay. The researcher analyse the six transcripts to determine the main themes whereby this technique was adapted from the Quality of Life Indicators Matrix (Hafazah, 2008) used to code the data. The rich data are coded by using NVivo, a Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) designed to aid the analyses of qualitative data.

The coding of the resident students' well-being living in an off-campus environment is based on conception of each theme. The themes are students' living condition; students' social activities; community facilities and services; and neighbourhood physical surroundings. The codings of the resident students' well-being living in an off-campus environment were categorized using a living environment factor namely comfort, convenience, and safety.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This pilot study involved equal numbers of respondent groups that consist of six respondents from off-campus students and student affairs' officers.

The huge concern being raised by the respondents is the community facilities and services domain (refer Table 2 and Table 3). Community facilities and services are an essential to make up the daily proportion of life for students. The community facilities and services like, public transportation, parking space, and sport complex for recreational activities are the most pressing problems faced by the off-campus students. Although Shah Alam city is equipped by a good public transportation services, it is still a problem during peak hours as students go to and come back from campus. The existing bus services provided by UiTM are not able to cater the needs of off-campus community living off-campus. On the other hand, overcrowding is one issue that has to be looked into the living environment of off-campus students. Students living in dense housing must have to be considerate especially when it comes to parking facilities. Most respondents highlighted that convenience is an important factor in the community facilities and services domain. The location and distances of these facilities are also important aspects to consider in order for it to be convenient for the off-campus students.

The second highest off-campus living environment domain mentioned by the respondent is students' living conditions. Comfort is an important factor in the students' living condition domain (refer Table 2 and Table 3). It shows that off-campus students' living condition were merely satisfactory. Satisfactory means that the spaces were not comfortable enough for studying, for interaction amongst housemates and were only suitable for them to sleep. Besides that, the privacy for students was often disrupted and that it is also inconvenient to invite friends over. The student's mentality is that they do not mind the inconvenience as long as they have a shelter. In terms of safety factors, students' living condition remains insecure.

Students' social activities domain is the third highest frequently mentioned by respondents. Even though the frequency are slightly different between the two parties regarding the student's social activities

and neighbourhood physical surroundings domain, the officers tend to highlight the student's social activities domain as important for off-campus students' well-being rather than neighbourhood physical surrounding. The two parties frequently mentioned convenience as a main factor for the student's social activities (refer Table 2 and Table 3).

The least frequent mentioned by respondents is neighbourhood physical surroundings domain. Respondent seems not to discuss about this domain with assuming the physical surrounding of the neighbourhood is good in terms of urban design and spatial distribution. They may not be concerned with the physical surrounding with the assumption that students live in the neighbourhood temporarily until they finish their studies. It shows that the neighbourhood physical surrounding is separated from the off-campus students' daily life.

Table 4 shows the summary of findings gathered from the coding process. It indicates the perception of satisfaction as a basis to indicate challenges faced by off-campus students living in the off-campus environment.

Table 2. Coding frequency of living experiences NR students'

Off-campus living environment domain	Students' Living Condition			Students' Social Activities			Community Facilities & Services			Neighbourhood Physical Surroundings			
	FACTOR	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety
		Respondent 1	2	2	-	-	-	-	1	6	1	-	-
Respondent 2	3	1	2	3	1	1	-	2	2	5	-	-	
Respondent 3	2	-	-	-	1	-	4	4	-	-	-	-	
Total	7	3	2	3	2	1	5	10	3	5	-	-	
	12			6			18			5			

Note: The figures are based on coding frequency analysed by Nvivo. It shows the frequency of respondents expressing their perceptions on off-campus living environment domain.

Table 3. Coding frequency of experiences of the NR management officer

Off-campus living environment domain	Students' Living Condition			Students' Social Activities			Community Facilities and Services			Neighbourhood Physical Surroundings			
	FACTOR	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety	Comfort	Convenience	Safety
Respondent 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	1	-	-	-
Respondent 5	2	-	-	2	1	-	5	2	-	-	-	-	-
Respondent 6	2	1	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4	1	-	2	2	-	7	8	-	1	-	-	-
	5			4			15			1			

Note: The figure is based on coding frequency mentioned by officers analysed by Nvivo. The number shows how often respondent express their perceptions on the off-campus living environment domain.

Table 4. Summary of qualitative analysis findings

Off-Campus Living Environment for Off-campus Students' Well-Being	Students' Living Condition	Students' Social Activities	Community Facilities and Services	Neighbourhood Physical Surroundings
Perceptions on satisfaction	Campus nearby	Collaboration between residents Many friends to hang out with	Active associations Near to many facilities Strategic location of accommodation	Favourable urban design and spatial distribution
Perception on dissatisfaction	Limited space for study Overcrowded rooms House too small to invite friends for group discussions Expensive rental rate Limited financial support Lack of home furniture Threat of burglary and theft	Immoral behaviour Noisy and loud neighbours Theft of motorcycles Unfriendly neighbours Lack of sense of belonging No interaction with neighbours	Limited recreational facilities Lack of parking space Need to pay for use of facility Lack of free internet access for student Lack of public transport	Noise from commercial activities e.g. workshop Unpleasant odour from restaurant, workshop Bad visual image of flat caused by hanging clothes from windows Bad smell from rubbish bins

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings have revealed interesting views from off-campus students and the management officers of the university student's affairs division. These views are very informative for all university stakeholders because these findings will trigger debates and discussions on the challenges that affect the well-being of students' living in an off-campus environment. From the findings, it can be summarized that there are many challenges faced by the off-campus students that affect their well-being as a university student. These challenges will distract the concentration and focus of the

off-campus students in some ways that will give a negative effect on their studies. It is recommended that this study be extended at a wider scale and also conducting similar studies to other universities.

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