

EXPLORING IMPACT OF OFF-CAMPUS COHABITATION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG STUDENTS OF SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING WITHIN BAUCHI METROPOLIS, BAUCHI STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of off-campus cohabitation on academic performance among tertiary institution students within Bauchi Metropolis, Nigeria. The research aimed to explore the causes, effects, and nexus of student off-campus cohabitation with student academic performance. Norm Activation Model and Subcultural Theory were employed as theoretical frameworks for the study, using a descriptive survey design. 400 students from the four selected institutions were drawn using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A structured and validated questionnaire was used for quantitative data collection. 8 key Informants were purposively selected for In-depth Interview (IDI). Quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS descriptive tool and presented in tables of frequency counts and percentages. Qualitative data was coded, recorded, analyzed, and presented verbatim. The study revealed that insufficient on-campus housing and financial constraints were the main motivators for off-campus cohabitation. Lifestyle choice also played a considerable role in student off-campus cohabitation. Off-campus cohabitation retards academic performance among students. Off-campus cohabitation renders students vulnerable to crime victimization, illicit marriages, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, and other social vices associated with off-campus cohabitation. The study recommends improving on-campus habitation among students, establishing financial support programs, and implementing safe habitation awareness initiatives on safe legitimate, and responsible cohabitation among students. Consistent counseling and support services are also suggested to help students appreciate and cope with the physical, emotional, and psychological pitfalls connected to off-campus cohabitation.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Bauchi Metropolis; Off-campus Cohabitation; Tertiary Institutions; Students

Introduction

Cohabitation connotes a social attainment, a status or process. It is perceived as an optional form of residential arrangement that is common among students of tertiary institutions. At the moment, public views of cohabitation, especially in Nigeria have shifted from gazing it as moral aberration to tolerating it as a form of circumstantial experience for the concerned co-habitants. Cohabitation is driven by changing lifestyles, societal values, and norms. The practice has attracted recognition both in developed and developing climes around the globe. According to Kasim & Falola (2019) and Pollard & Harris (2019), colonialism and urbanization in Africa have considerably disrupted communal living and imported foreign cultural norms, contributing to rampant cohabitation. The scholars reiterated that rapid urbanization and housing issues in African cities have made cohabitation a common solution to accommodation challenges. Omoniyi *et al.*, (2020), posited that in Nigeria, cohabitation among youths has been linked to the influence of foreign ideas and the sexual revolution in Europe and America, as noted by Omonijo *et al.* (2020). The increasing rates of cohabitation have coincided with rising ages of marriage, as more couples live together without the formal commitment of marriage, according to Ravinder (2021). This practice is characterized by sharing the social and legal rights typically reserved for married couples, as described by Ofoegbu (2022).

Periscoping the realm of Nigerian higher education specifically, cohabitation has attracted interest in the academic and policy discourse due to socio-economic challenges, ranging from rising tuition fees, accommodation shortages,

and fear of insecurity. With the unprecedented rising tide in student intake, on-campus housing has also become increasingly scarce, compelling an enormous number of students to seek affordable alternatives by hiring off-campus residential quarters. Off-campus cohabitation has become a cost-effective strategy for students facing high rents and competition for accommodation, particularly in public tertiary institutions, as described by Pat-Mbano (2018) and Svodziwa & Kurete (2019).

Statement of the Problem

The issue of student cohabitation as obtained in other climes has garnered significant attention in policy and academic discussions. In particular, tertiary institution students in Bauchi Metropolis have been facing plethora of socio-economic challenges, which are related to high tuition fees and inadequate on-campus accommodation. Many students are compelled to seek off-campus housing in neighboring areas such as Yuli, Tirwun, Wuntin dada, Gwallameji, Tsohon company, Birshin Fulani, Sabon Kaura, Bayara, Tsakani, Birshi Gandu, Kajitu etcetera, due to inadequate student hostel facilities on campuses. Other factors influencing off-campus cohabitation are poor parental upbringing, broken homes, poverty, privacy needs, sexual gratification, and criminalities among students in public tertiary institutions. This phenomenon exposes students to various risks, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), teenage pregnancies, and psychological issues related to love and relationships. According to Mashau (2021), the rise in cohabitation among youths also increases the prevalence of suicide, rape, and HIV/AIDS.

Despite its prevalence and scholarly significance, no empirical studies have focused on off-campus student cohabitation in the Bauchi Metropolis, leaving a significant research gap. The obvious failure and inability of tertiary institutions to provide sufficient on-campus accommodation has intensified the practice of cohabitation among students. This study therefore seeks to examine the motivators, implications, and panacea to the effects of off-campus cohabitation on the academic performance of students in selected tertiary institutions within the referent study area. A review of past literature has also presented a theoretical gap as non-highlighted and discusses, the significance of sub-cultural theory to cohabitation as an accepted way of living among students of tertiary institutions. No focus was accorded to the structural strains and consequences associated with the notorious trend.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research work is to explore the impact of off-campus cohabitation on academic performance of students in selected tertiary institutions in Bauchi Metropolis. Specifically the research aims to:

1. explore the causes of off-campus cohabitation among the students of the mentioned selected tertiary institutions of learning within Bauchi metropolis.
2. examine the correlation between off campus cohabitation and academic performance among the students of the selected tertiary institutions.
3. determine the implications of off campus cohabitation for academic performance among students of the selected tertiary institutions of learning.

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Concept of Cohabitation

Cohabitation, where two individuals live together in an intimate relationship without marriage, has grown in prevalence. Scholars like Bacharach *et al.*, (2020), and Bower & Christopherson (2017) define cohabitation as an intimate union of unmarried partners sharing a living space. The growing acceptance of cohabitation signals a weakening of traditional marriage norms, driven by changing societal attitudes, economic factors, and shifting gender roles. While cohabitation provides financial advantages and flexibility, research indicates that it may lead to

relationship instability, as cohabiting couples often experience higher rates of separation compared to married couples. The definition by Bacharach *et al.*, (2020)

Concept of Students

Students, as learners in educational institutions, increasingly engage in cohabitation, reflecting broader societal trends of delaying marriage. Many cohabit for emotional support, independence, and financial reasons (Stanley *et al.*, 2020). While cohabitation may provide companionship and financial benefits, it also introduces challenges such as balancing academics with relationship demands. Research shows that cohabitation can impact academic performance and personal development, often leading to stress, conflicts, and difficulties in managing autonomy (Manning & Cohen, 2015). These challenges can be especially pronounced as students navigate their identity and academic goals (Raley *et al.*, 2013).

Concept of Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to the level of success a student attains in educational tasks, which can be measured through tests, assessments, and self-evaluation (York *et al.*, 2015). It reflects a student's ability to achieve cognitive and subject-specific goals in school. High academic performance is essential for personal growth and future success, acting as a strong indicator of academic achievement and career prospects (Tremblay *et al.*, 2012). Several factors influence academic outcomes, including teaching quality, student background, and motivation (Hattie, 2009). Academic performance remains a key metric for educational success and future opportunities (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011).

Concept of Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions provide advanced education and training beyond secondary education, preparing students for specialized careers in various fields (Altbach *et al.*, 2009). These institutions also play a pivotal role in research, innovation, and intellectual development, contributing to societal progress (Teichler, 2004). In recent years, tertiary institutions have increasingly adopted technological advancements to enhance access and foster innovation in education (Bates, 2019). This evolution reflects the global shift toward a knowledge-based economy, where education must adapt to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world (Marginson, 2016).

Review of Previous Studies

Cohabitation among students in higher education is influenced by several factors. Pollard (2018) notes that high tuition fees and associated costs, including on-campus accommodation, compel students to seek alternative living arrangements. Aluko (2019) highlights that spiraling college costs often drive students to cohabit. Schoen (2019) adds that the physical environment can significantly shape student behavior, with financial pressures leading students to share living spaces. Olotuah (2020) emphasizes that inadequate housing can impact students' health and academic success, prompting some to opt for off-campus accommodation, which may be less affordable (Bello & Ogunsanwo, 2018). Elise (2016) and Goodwin *et al.*, (2020) suggest that high housing costs and tight budgets drive students to cohabit for financial reasons. Prager (2020) indicates that romantic motivations also play a role, with students cohabiting out of affection or to strengthen relationships (Arisukwu, 2018). Cohabitation is sometimes viewed as a stage in courtship or a prelude to marriage (Elise, 2018; Risan *et al.*, 2018). Svodziwa and Kurete (2017) explain that limited on-campus accommodation forces many students to live off-campus. Soboye (2018) and Aluko (2021) observe that growing student populations and inadequate housing contribute to increased cohabitation. Arisukwu (2018) notes that cohabitation can clash with societal norms, leading to hidden or unsupported arrangements by parents. Gault-Sherman and Draper (2016) find that religious attitudes may influence cohabitation, though some students may disregard these norms (Ogunbamila, 2018).

Ojo (2019) and Miyakado & Timothy (2018) report that students may struggle with academics due to the distractions and emotional stress of cohabitation. Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong (2017) highlight that sexually active students face challenges that compromise their academic performance. Emotional turmoil from unstable relationships can lead to poor grades and academic setbacks (Ali, 2018; Tesfaye & Jibat, 2020). Bello and Ogunsanwo (2021) note that depression from broken relationships also impacts academic success. Abdullahi and Umar (2018) identify pre-marital sex as a significant distraction, compounded by financial and emotional issues (Aluko, 2019). Research by Fareo and Moses (2018) shows that financial constraints and lack of proper accommodation lead students to cohabit, resulting in health risks, academic failure, and increased dropout rates. Aluko (2019) and Fareo and Moses (2018) find that cohabitation often leads to negative outcomes such as unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and prolonged periods of study.

Isiugo-Abanihe and Oyediran (2019) find that early sexual activity among youths can lead to health issues and school dropouts. Augustine *et al.*, (2018) and Sabia & Rees (2019) suggest that sexual relationships can detract from academic focus. Cohabitation often leads to increased sexual activity, which may result in academic underachievement (Ogunbamila, 2018; Martin *et al.*, 2021). Arisukwu (2018) and Ajibefu (2015) observe that many cohabiting students face moral and academic challenges, with potential health risks and financial difficulties. Adeniyi (2019) highlights high rates of abortion among cohabiting students, which can lead to severe health and educational consequences. Overall, cohabitation among students tends to be associated with negative impacts on academic performance, including lower grades, extended study periods, and increased risk of health issues (Alo, 2018; Adeoye *et al.*, 2021).

Theoretical Orientations

The Norm Activation Model (NAM), developed by Schwartz in 1977, focuses on altruistic behavior and personal norms. Schwartz distinguished personal norms, which relate to an individual's self-concept, from social norms, emphasizing that personal norms are experienced as moral obligations rather than intentions. According to NAM, personal norms are shaped by two factors: awareness of the consequences of a behavior and a sense of responsibility for addressing those consequences. Conforming to these personal norms can lead to feelings of pride, while failure to meet them can result in guilt. Although Schwartz's initial research did not deeply explore emotions, NAM has been applied to explain behaviors like pro-environmental actions and can be used to understand cohabitation among students as a form of altruistic behavior. NAM posits that personal norms influence behavior through two mechanisms: awareness of consequences (AC) and ascription of responsibility (AR). Awareness of the impact of one's actions leads to a sense of responsibility to address those impacts, which in turn activates personal norms. Research has shown that awareness of consequences mediates the relationship between personal norms and behavior through ascribed responsibility.

Subcultural Theory

This theoretical model which was propounded by Albert Kircidel Cohen (1918-2014) posited that urban settings forced people to find ways of creating a sense of community irrespective of alienation or anonymity. In the context of this study, Urban subculture and dominant sociocultural practices informed students to develop a new and different sense of community. The theory further elucidates that inadequate or lack of in-house hostel arrangements in tertiary institutions of learning for students frustrate and pressure them to improvise off-campus cohabitation irrespective of the utilitarian value ascribed to such a decision. The key constructs of the theory help reaffirm the link between social strain among the students to cohabitation which ascribes them to a subgroup status different from the mainstream cultural practices. This situation often drives them to social deviance and criminality.

Application of the Theories

In the context of the selected tertiary institutions, the Normative Active Model can be applied to understand how awareness of the consequences of cohabitation and the responsibility of the institution to provide adequate housing impact student behavior and academic performance. If students recognize that their cohabitation leads to negative outcomes, they may feel a sense of responsibility or frustration to or not to act in ways that conform with personal or sub-group norms. In this context, such dilemma could directly abnegate academic goal and output of the students. The theories are mutually reinforcing as both buttress the nexus between social conditions and personal standards, particularly when faced with limited choices.

Methodology

The study investigated the impact of off-campus cohabitation on academic performance among students at selected institutions in Bauchi Metropolis, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey research design. The research encompasses Sa'adu Zungur University, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, and Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic. The sample size of 400 students was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's scientific formula. The sample size was equally allocated (100 per institution) across the four institutions. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to ensure unbiased selection. Data collection involved both quantitative methods, using validated can questionnaires, and qualitative methods, through oral interviews. Data was analyzed using simple percentages, frequency distributions, and SPSS, with ethical considerations addressed through formal introduction letters for fieldwork access.

Table 1: Causes of Off-Campus Cohabitation

S/No	Item	SA (Freq./%)	A (Freq./%)	D (Freq./%)	SD (Freq./%)	Total (Freq./%)
1.	Shortage of campus accommodation leads to off-campus cohabitation	150 (37.5%)	180 (45%)	50 (12.5%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
2.	Financial difficulties prompt students to cohabit to save on rent and food	200 (50%)	150 (37.5%)	30 (7.5%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
3.	Students cohabit to avoid rules and regulations of on-campus hostels	180 (45%)	170 (42.5%)	30 (7.5%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
4.	Low religious inclination in students leads to more cohabitation	140 (35%)	150 (37.5%)	70 (17.5%)	40 (10%)	400 (100%)
5.	Students cohabit for sexual gratifications	160 (40%)	180 (45%)	40 (10%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 show that students primarily cohabit off-campus due to a shortage of campus accommodation and financial difficulties, with 82.5% and 87.5% respectively citing these reasons. Other significant factors include the desire to avoid strict hostel regulations and lower religious commitment, both of which also contribute to off-campus living.

Table 2: Correlation Between Off-Campus Cohabitation and Academic Performance

S/No	Item	SA (Freq./%)	A (Freq./%)	D (Freq./%)	SD (Freq./%)	Total (Freq./%)
1.	Cohabitation makes serious students perform below expectations	190 (47.5%)	150 (37.5%)	40 (10%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)

S/No	Item	SA (Freq./%)	A (Freq./%)	D (Freq./%)	SD (Freq./%)	Total (Freq./%)
2.	Cohabitation leads to poor academic results	200 (50%)	140 (35%)	30 (7.5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
3.	Involvement in sexual relationships causes emotional problems affecting academics	180 (45%)	160 (40%)	40 (10%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
4.	Students who cohabit find it difficult to graduate on time	210 (52.5%)	130 (32.5%)	40 (10%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
5.	Cohabitation increases the likelihood of students dropping out due to poor academic performance	200 (50%)	150 (37.5%)	30 (7.5%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 outlines that off-campus cohabitation is associated with negative academic outcomes. About 85% of respondents believe it leads to poorer academic performance, delays in graduation, and increased dropout rates. Emotional issues related to sexual relationships from cohabitation are also seen as detrimental to academic success.

Table 3: Implications of Off-Campus Cohabitation on Academic Performance

S/No	Item	SA (Freq./%)	A (Freq./%)	D (Freq./%)	SD (Freq./%)	Total (Freq./%)
1.	Cohabitation leads to unwanted pregnancies among students	180 (45%)	160 (40%)	40 (10%)	20 (5%)	400 (100%)
2.	Cohabitation results in students contracting sexually transmitted diseases	170 (42.5%)	150 (37.5%)	50 (12.5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
3.	Some cohabiters engage in stealing and cybercrimes for upkeep	160 (40%)	180 (45%)	30 (7.5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
4.	Cohabitation erodes the level of morality among students	190 (47.5%)	150 (37.5%)	30 (7.5%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)
5.	Students who cohabit are likely to join cultist groups	150 (37.5%)	180 (45%)	40 (10%)	30 (7.5%)	400 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 displays that off-campus cohabitation is linked to several adverse effects, including unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and potential involvement in criminal activities. Additionally, it is associated with a decline in morality and an increased likelihood of joining cultist groups, reflecting significant personal and social consequences.

Qualitative Analysis and Results of In-Depth Interviews (IDI)

The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews provided insights into the experiences of students cohabiting off-campus:

- **Factors Influencing Off-Campus Cohabitation:** Students cited lack of affordable on-campus housing, financial constraints, privacy, and the desire for a conducive study environment as major reasons for cohabiting.
- **Impact on Academic Performance:** While some students reported improved focus and privacy, others found that cohabitation caused several distractions that negatively influenced their academic performances.

- **Challenges in Balancing Cohabitation and Academics:** Many students struggled to balance household chores, relationship dynamics, and academic responsibilities, leading to conflicts and procrastination.
- **Effect on Study Habits:** The presence of a partner or roommate influenced students' concentration, with some benefiting from shared study habits and others struggling due to distractions.
- **Managing Conflicts and Distractions:** Students employed strategies such as setting ground rules and effective communication to minimize disruptions, but not all were successful and constructive.
- **Inadequacy of School Management Supports:** Respondents noted the absence of formal support from the university in managing cohabitation challenges, suggesting a need for resources like counseling.
- **Reflections on Cohabitation:** Students had mixed views on the overall impact, with some seeing emotional support as beneficial while others found the distractions outweighed the benefits.
- **Strategies for Maintaining Balance:** Successful cohabitators used structured routines, open communication, and study-focused environments to navigate and maintain an equilibrium between personal and manifest academic responsibilities.

In conclusion, while cohabitation provided emotional support for some, it also posed significant challenges in terms of academic focus, concentration, and performance. Students learned the importance of setting boundaries, managing time, and maintaining a balance between personal relationships and academic responsibilities.

Summary of the Findings

This study explored the causes, implications, and remedies to off-campus cohabitation on students' academic performance across four tertiary institutions in Bauchi Metropolis, Nigeria. A mixed-method approach was used, involving 400 students randomly selected from Bauchi State University Gadau, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi, Abubakar Tatari Ali Polytechnic, and the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi. The study focused on identifying the causes of off-campus cohabitation, examining its link to academic performance, and assessing its impact on students' academic outcomes. Key findings indicated that many students cohabit off-campus due to a shortage of on-campus accommodations, financial challenges, and a desire to avoid strict hostel regulations. The data revealed a clear relationship between off-campus cohabitation and poor academic performance, with students reporting distractions, emotional stress, and a higher likelihood of dropping out. The study also raised concerns about unwanted pregnancies, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, and involvement in illicit activities to cover living expenses, showing that cohabitation has a wide range of negative implications on students' academic performance and overall well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research concluded that off-campus cohabitation significantly influences students' academic performance, largely caused by financial limitations, the pursuit of independence, and the difficulty of balancing personal relationships with academic responsibilities. The study calls for educational institutions to recognize and address the socio-economic factors contributing to off-campus cohabitation, suggesting that better support and healthier living arrangements could improve students' academic outcomes.

1. Government and tertiary institutions should synergize to invest in expanding on-campus accommodation facilities to meet the growing demand among students. Such effort can assuage the hard socio-economic conditions forcing students to seek off-campus cohabitation.
2. Tertiary institutions should interface governments, relevant stake holders and philanthropist to establish financial support programs, including scholarships, grants, and affordable housing initiatives, to assist students facing economic challenges. This support can help reduce the financial burdens that drive students to cohabit off-campus.

3. Institutions should implement awareness and education programs focused on safe practices regarding cohabitation, sexual health, and emotional well-being. These initiatives can equip students with the knowledge and skills to navigate their living situations more effectively.
4. Institutions should enhance counseling and support services to assist students in managing the emotional and psychological challenges associated with cohabitation. Providing access to professional counseling can help students address relationship issues and maintain their academic focus.
5. Regular monitoring and evaluation of students' academic performance and well-being be made a policy in order to identify trends related to off-campus cohabitation. Such student data could inform institutional policies on spiralling difficulties associated with off campus cohabitation among tertiary institutions students towards supporting their academic goals.

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