



Hostel Life Challenges, Peer Support, and Academic Performance among University Students: A Correlational Study

Rabia Basharat¹, Muhammad Faisal Farid², Dr. Sabeen Qamar³

¹ M.Phil. Education Scholar, University of Education, Faisalabad Campus.

Email: chaudharyrabiag@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor of Education, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore.

Email: dr.faisal.farid@ue.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor of Education, Virtual University of Pakistan.

Email: sabeen.qamar@vu.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: August 28, 2026 Revised: September 09, 2026 Accepted: September 25, 2026 Available Online: October 05, 2026 Keywords: hostel life challenges, peer support, academic performance, university students, Pakistan Corresponding author: Rabia Basharat Email: chaudharyrabiag@gmail.com	This study examined the relationships among hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance of university students residing in hostels. A quantitative, correlational, and comparative design was used. Data were collected from 300 students (150 male, 150 female) living in public and private hostels in Faisalabad using a self-developed, expert-validated questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = .850 - .891$). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and independent-samples t-tests were used to analyze the data. Hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance were strongly and positively intercorrelated ($r = .833$ to $.921$, $p < .001$). Together, hostel life challenges and peer support accounted for 87.3% of the variance in academic performance scores, $R^2 = .873$, $F(2, 297) = 1021.04$, $p < .001$, with hostel life challenges the stronger predictor ($\beta = .681$) and peer support a smaller but significant predictor ($\beta = .288$). No significant differences were found in hostel life challenges between public and private hostels, or between male and female students in hostel life challenges, peer support, or academic performance (all $p > .05$; $d \leq .12$). The very high correlations, the unexpected positive association between challenges and performance, and the weak, non-significant relationship between the performance scale and self-reported CGPA suggest that common method variance may have inflated the associations, so the findings are provisional. Because the design is cross-sectional and single-source, no causal inference is possible. Universities are encouraged to address food, sleep, and noise concerns in hostels and to develop structured peer-support programs.

Introduction

In some contexts, the word “hostel” refers only to short-term accommodation for travelers. In developing countries such as Pakistan, however, a hostel is a residence where students of a school, college, or university live under the supervision of hostel administrators and staff, housing hundreds of students from diverse cultural, social, geographical, and economic backgrounds.

A hostel is not merely accommodation but also a social and learning environment in which students interact with peers and staff outside the classroom. Hostel residence can promote independence and responsibility, but it also brings psychological, financial, and nutritional challenges for students who study away from home (Medani et al., 2024). Recent studies from Pakistan and elsewhere indicate that the hostel or dormitory environment is related to students' academic performance (Bibi et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2025).

Hostels bring together students from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, who must negotiate shared space and routines. Peer support is an important resource in this setting. A hostel community of peers facing similar circumstances can be a

valuable source of emotional, informational, and practical support (Wilks, 2008). This is consistent with the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which postulates that social support not only exerts a direct effect on wellbeing but also buffers individuals from the negative effects of stressful events by providing coping resources when they are required. Peer networks may therefore mitigate the adverse impact of hostel-related stressors and contribute to a more learning-friendly environment. For instance, Dennis et al. (2005) found that peer support was related to college adjustment among first-generation ethnic minority students, and a recent systematic review has examined peer support interventions for student mental health and wellbeing in higher education (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024).

Students may face substantial academic, social, and environmental pressures while living in hostels. Noise, lack of privacy, interpersonal conflict, homesickness, and financial stress can combine to produce a non-conducive learning environment. Homesickness can make the transition to university difficult and, in some cases, contribute to withdrawal from study (Thurber & Walton, 2012), while poor sleep and stress are closely interlinked among undergraduates and carry negative consequences for academic performance and mental health (Gardani et al., 2022). These pressures may therefore plausibly lower academic achievement.

This study was conducted in this context, exploring hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance among university students together rather than in isolation. Understanding how these factors interact may yield a more comprehensive picture of what shapes student achievement in a residential academic context. The findings are intended to contribute to the academic discourse on student progress and to give academic leaders and policymakers in higher education research-informed evidence for making hostels more supportive environments in which students can learn and build resilience.

Review of Literature

Hostel Life Challenges Among University Students

Hostel life plays a critical role in the university life of students, who often come from distant places to pursue higher education. Adapting to life in a new residence, social network, institutional rules and regulations, and the sense of living alone may have adverse effects on students' wellbeing and studies, and consequently, the university experience as a whole. Students who do not live with their families often face numerous challenges associated with their accommodation, food, safety, privacy, financial status, technology, and roommates. In general, the quality of students' hostel life ultimately determines the nature of their residential experience and its impact on the studies. For example, Bibi et al. (2024) surveyed 300 hostel students in Haripur, Pakistan, and reported that hostel life was related to academic performance differently for intermediate and undergraduate students, with a mean difference also observed between male and female residents. Medani et al. (2024) found that students studying away from their hometown face psychological, financial, and nutritional challenges, with homesickness related to the type of housing and the distance from college. Studying Chinese university dormitories, Gao et al. (2025) examined dormitory hygiene, academic atmosphere, and interpersonal atmosphere in relation to academic performance, which shows that both the physical and the social features of the residence deserve attention.

Although negative influences of hostel life on students' academic performance have been highlighted, a hostel with a positive atmosphere could provide a learning environment for its residents. Moreover, interacting with high-performing students can enable hostel residents to develop effective learning approaches and receive supplementary academic support, among other benefits. In general, then, it is evident that the impact of hostel life on students' academic performance depends on the nature and the seriousness of the challenges faced by the residents. Addressing these issues through effective residential support services is a possible strategy for improving students' academic adjustment in hostels; therefore, universities that offer adequate hostel services and proper maintenance can enhance residents' academic performance. The impact of hostel life on students' academic performance is a critical issue in university education, necessitating further studies on the link between hostel life challenges and students' performance.

Peer Support and Academic Performance

Peer support has also been a subject of considerable interest as an influence on university students' academic adjustment and achievement. Among Pakistani university students, Hassan et al. (2023) found that perceived social support was directly and significantly related to both academic adjustment and academic success, with academic adjustment partially moderating these relationships; their findings put social and peer support as a resource to help students adjust to the demands of university life instead of just a source of emotional comfort. Similarly, in a study of Pakistani university students, Khan et al. (2023) reported a

positive association between the quality of peer relations and academic performance and a similarly positive association between peer pressure and performance; their findings suggest that peer-based social dynamics, even if they carry an element of pressure, can be positively associated with student achievement instead of uniformly undermining them. Evidence from other contexts is less consistent: Tinajero et al. (2020), following Spanish undergraduates over two years, found that satisfaction with social support predicted academic achievement whereas the perceived availability of support did not, and noted that research on social support and university grades has been inconsistent. Taken in conjunction with the hostel-specific literature discussed above, these studies suggest that peer relationships, whether experienced as support, pressure, or some combination of the two, are an important aspect of the social context within which hostel life challenges do, or do not, translate into academic outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985), which distinguishes between a direct (main) effect of social support on wellbeing and a buffering effect, whereby support weakens the impact of stressors on outcomes. In this study, hostel life challenges are treated as environmental, social, and emotional stressors, peer support as a coping resource, and academic performance as the outcome. The analysis examines the direct and joint associations of hostel life challenges and peer support with academic performance; a formal buffering (interaction) effect was not tested and is identified as a direction for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Students living in hostels face challenges alongside their academic work: psychological (e.g., homesickness), environmental (e.g., noise), social (e.g., adjustment), economic (e.g., expenses), and educational (e.g., distraction). While the effects of individual challenges have been documented, to the authors' knowledge the combined role of peer support and these challenges in relation to academic performance has received limited attention, and it remains unclear whether peer support is significantly associated with students' academic performance. Much previous research has also been confined to individual institutions or has examined single challenges rather than students' overall hostel experience. For example, a student with a large support network may cope better with homesickness than one without, yet excessive noise may still affect his or her performance despite that network. Comparisons between privately managed (independent) hostels and university-managed (public) hostels are also scarce, even though the two differ in facilities, management, and social climate, and therefore potentially in the challenges students face and the peer support they receive. Finally, higher education in Pakistan has changed over the past decade, with the rise of new universities, increased enrollment, greater participation of female students, and a growing number of independent hostels, so earlier findings may not reflect current conditions. A methodologically sound quantitative study can provide the comparable, systematic evidence that institutions need when making decisions about hostel provision.

This study addresses these gaps through contextually grounded quantitative research on the relationship between hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance among university students in Faisalabad, Pakistan, including a comparison between students living in private and public university hostels.

Research Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify hostel life challenges faced by university students.
2. To determine the level of academic performance of university students.
3. To determine the level of peer support among university students.
4. To examine differences in hostel life challenges faced by students living in public and private hostels.
5. To examine gender-wise differences in hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance at the university level.
6. To examine the relationship between hostel life challenges and peer support at the university level.
7. To examine the relationship between hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance at the university level, individually and jointly.

Research Questions of the Study

The research questions of the study were:

1. What are the challenges faced by students living in hostels at the university level?
2. What is the level of academic performance of university students?
3. What is the level of peer support among university students?
4. Is there a significant difference in hostel life challenges between students living in public and private hostels at the university level?
5. Is there a significant difference in hostel life challenges between male and female students?
6. Is there a significant difference in peer support between male and female students?
7. Is there a significant difference in academic performance between male and female students?
8. Is there a relationship between hostel life challenges and peer support at the university level?
9. Is there a relationship between hostel life challenges and academic performance, and between peer support and academic performance, at the university level?
10. Do hostel life challenges and peer support jointly predict academic performance?

Research Methodology

Nature of the Study

This study is quantitative in nature: numerical data were collected to examine the relationships among hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance. A correlational design was used to determine the relationships among these variables; a comparative element (independent-samples t-tests) was used to test group differences, and the study is also descriptive in that it characterizes the current state of hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance at the university level. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques in SPSS.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of university students living in public (university-managed) and private (independent) hostels within Faisalabad. Participants were selected through purposive sampling with a gender quota, yielding a sample of 300 students: 150 male and 150 female, of whom 146 lived in public hostels and 154 in private hostels. The sample was drawn from three main public sector universities and surrounding private hostels, and ranged in age from 20 to 26 years. As a non-probability technique, this approach means the sample cannot be considered representative of the broader population of hostel residents in Pakistan, and any generalization beyond the sampled population should be made cautiously (see Limitations).

Instrument of the Study

The research instrument was a self-developed questionnaire comprising three subscales, assessing hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance, respectively, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts to establish content validity. In addition to the Likert-based Academic Performance Scale, students separately reported their approximate current CGPA using a three-band, single-item background question (2.5–3.00, 3.1–3.5, or 3.6–4.0). This CGPA band is a self-reported demographic indicator and is analytically distinct from the multi-item Academic Performance Scale: it is reported descriptively in Table 3 and used as an independent check on the Academic Performance Scale in the Supplementary Analysis, but it is not used in the main inferential tests (Tables 6–11), which rely on the validated, multi-item scale scores. Content validity was established through review by three experts in education having PhD degree, and the instrument was pilot tested on 90 students.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument was established through expert review by specialists in education, who assessed the clarity and relevance of the items. The researcher developed three subscales, the Hostel Life Challenges Scale (HLCS), the Peer Support Scale (PSS), and the Academic Performance Scale (APS), whose internal-consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients, computed on a pilot sample, and are shown in Table 1; all three subscales exceeded the conventional .70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for the Hostel Life Challenges Scale (HLCS), Peer Support Scale (PSS), and Academic Performance Scale (APS)

Scale	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Hostel Life Challenges Scale (HLCS)	20	.891
Peer Support Scale (PSS)	15	.854
Academic Performance Scale (APS)	15	.850

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected face-to-face from university students residing in public and private hostels in Faisalabad during fall semester. The aim of the research was explained to the participants, and participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from respondents with assures that their response will be used for only this study. The sample included male and female students from different disciplines and semesters. Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 23). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize the variables, and each scale score was computed as the mean of its items. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationships among the three continuous scale scores, and multiple linear regression was used to examine the joint prediction of academic performance by hostel life challenges and peer support. Group differences were examined with independent-samples t-tests, with Cohen's d reported as the effect size and Welch's correction applied where Levene's test indicated unequal variances. Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the scales. Assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals were examined.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by students living in hostels at the university level?

Table 2: Hostel Life Challenges Among University Students (Top 10 Items by Mean, N = 300)

Rank	Hostel Challenge	N	Mean	SD
1	Food Quality	300	4.01	1.15
2	Emotional Comfort	300	3.74	1.29
3	Sleep Quality	300	3.66	1.30
4	Rule Clarity	300	3.59	1.12
5	Adjustment Ease	300	3.59	1.21
6	Class Attendance Impact	300	3.57	1.15
7	Study Noise	300	3.52	1.33
8	Security	300	3.52	1.33
9	Management Responsiveness	300	3.52	1.19
10	Internet Access	300	3.49	1.13

As seen in Table 2, hostel problems were ordered according to their mean scores. The highest-ranked item was food quality ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.15$), followed by emotional comfort ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.29$) and sleep quality ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.30$). Other highly ranked items were rule clarity ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.12$), adjustment ease ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.21$), and class attendance impact ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.15$), suggesting that conditions at the hostel can disrupt students' academic schedules. Study noise ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.33$), security ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.33$), and management responsiveness ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.19$) were concerns associated with the hostel's environment and administration. Internet access ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.13$) was a relatively minor but still noticeable concern. In general, challenges associated with basic living conditions (food, emotional comfort, and sleep) were more prominent than administrative and infrastructural concerns.

Research Question 2: What is the level of academic performance of university students?

Academic performance was assessed in two ways: a continuous, multi-item Academic Performance Scale (APS) used in all inferential analyses below, and a single-item, self-reported CGPA band used only as a descriptive background variable and as an independent validity check (see Supplementary Analysis). Table 3 reports the self-reported CGPA band distribution, and Table 4 reports levels on the APS.

Table 3: Self-Reported CGPA Band (Background Variable, N = 300)

CGPA Band	Frequency	Percentage
2.5–3.00	106	35.3%
3.1–3.5	122	40.7%
3.6–4.0	72	24.0%

As shown in Table 3, the largest group of students (40.7%) self-reported a CGPA in the 3.1–3.5 band, followed by 35.3% in the 2.5–3.00 band and 24.0% in the 3.6–4.0 band.

Table 4: Levels of Academic Performance on the Academic Performance Scale (N = 300)

Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1.00–2.33	30	10.0%
Moderate	2.34–3.66	154	51.3%
High	3.67–5.00	116	38.7%

Level boundaries in Table 4 (and Table 5, below) were computed by dividing the full five-point response range into three equal bands (1.00–2.33, 2.34–3.66, 3.67–5.00), a standard tripartite method for categorizing Likert-based composite scores. As shown in Table 4, most students (51.3%) scored in the moderate range on the Academic Performance Scale, 38.7% scored high, and 10.0% scored low.

Research Question 3: What is the level of peer support among university students?**Table 5: Levels of Peer Support (N = 300)**

Level	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	1.00–2.33	14	4.7%
Moderate	2.34–3.66	172	57.3%
High	3.67–5.00	114	38.0%

As shown in Table 5, most students (57.3%) reported moderate peer support, 38.0% reported high peer support, and a small minority (4.7%) reported low peer support.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in hostel life challenges between students living in public and private hostels at the university level?**Table 6: Difference in Hostel Life Challenges Between Students Living in Public and Private Hostels**

Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Public	146	3.54	.833	0.62	298	.538	0.07
Private	154	3.49	.586				

As shown in Table 6, students in public hostels ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .833$) and private hostels ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .586$) did not differ significantly in reported hostel life challenges, $t(298) = 0.62$, $p = .538$, $d = 0.07$ (negligible effect). Hostel type was not meaningfully associated with students' reported hostel life challenges in this sample.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant difference in hostel life challenges between male and female students?

Table 7: Gender-Wise Difference in Hostel Life Challenges

Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Male	150	3.54	.828	0.75	298	.457	0.09
Female	150	3.48	.584				

As shown in Table 7, male students ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .828$) and female students ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .584$) did not differ significantly in reported hostel life challenges, $t(298) = 0.75$, $p = .457$, $d = 0.09$ (negligible effect).

Research Question 6: Is there a significant difference in peer support between male and female students?

Table 8: Gender-Wise Difference in Peer Support

Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Male	150	3.55	.791	1.02	298	.311	0.12
Female	150	3.46	.588				

As shown in Table 8, male students ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .791$) and female students ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .588$) did not differ significantly in reported peer support, $t(298) = 1.02$, $p = .311$, $d = 0.12$ (negligible effect).

Research Question 7: Is there a significant difference in academic performance between male and female students?

Table 9: Gender-Wise Difference in Academic Performance (APS)

Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Male	150	3.43	.826	-0.50	261.12	.616	-0.06
Female	150	3.47	.557				

Note. Degrees of freedom adjusted using Welch's t-test because Levene's test indicated unequal variances between groups for this comparison.

As shown in Table 9, male students ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .826$) and female students ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .557$) did not differ significantly in academic performance, $t(261.12) = -0.50$, $p = .616$, $d = -0.06$ (negligible effect).

Research Question 8: Is there a relationship between hostel life challenges and peer support at the university level?

Research Question 9: Is there a relationship between hostel life challenges and academic performance, and between peer support and academic performance, at the university level?

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Hostel Life Challenges, Peer Support, and Academic Performance (N = 300)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Hostel Life Challenges	3.51	.716	—		
2. Peer Support	3.50	.697	.833**	—	
3. Academic Performance (APS)	3.45	.704	.921**	.855**	—

** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

As shown in Table 10, Pearson correlation analyses revealed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships among all three variables: hostel life challenges and peer support, $r = .833$, $p < .001$ (Research Question 8); hostel life challenges and academic performance, $r = .921$, $p < .001$; and peer support and academic performance, $r = .855$, $p < .001$ (Research Question 9). Because higher scores on the Hostel Life Challenges Scale indicate more frequent or intense challenges, the positive correlation with academic performance is counterintuitive at face value and is addressed in the Discussion. The very high magnitude of these correlations, particularly $r = .921$, is also consistent with shared method variance, since all three scores came from the same self-report instrument administered at a single sitting (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012).

Research Question 10: Do hostel life challenges and peer support jointly predict academic performance?

Table 11: Multiple Regression Predicting Academic Performance from Hostel Life Challenges and Peer Support (N = 300)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	0.080	.077	—	1.04	.300
Hostel Life Challenges	0.669	.037	.681	18.21	< .001
Peer Support	0.290	.038	.288	7.69	< .001

Note. $R^2 = .873$, Adjusted $R^2 = .872$, $F(2, 297) = 1021.04$, $p < .001$. Variance inflation factor (VIF) = 3.27 for both predictors, indicating that multicollinearity, while present given the strong correlation between the two predictors ($r = .833$), is within an acceptable range ($VIF < 5$).

As shown in Table 11, a multiple linear regression was conducted with hostel life challenges and peer support entered simultaneously as predictors of academic performance. The overall model was statistically significant and accounted for a very large share of variance in academic performance scores, $R^2 = .873$, $F(2, 297) = 1021.04$, $p < .001$. Both predictors made statistically significant unique contributions: hostel life challenges was the stronger predictor ($\beta = .681$, $p < .001$) and peer support a smaller but still significant predictor ($\beta = .288$, $p < .001$). Given the magnitude of R^2 and the shared-method concern raised above, this result is best interpreted as evidence of a strong association among the three self-report measures rather than as strong causal, or even fully independent, evidence that hostel life challenges and peer support drive academic performance; this caveat is discussed further below and in the Limitations.

Supplementary Analysis: Convergent Check Against Self-Reported CGPA

Because the very high intercorrelations in Table 10 raise the possibility of shared method variance, a supplementary check was conducted using the independently collected, single-item, self-reported CGPA band (Table 3) as an approximate external criterion. If the Academic Performance Scale were capturing genuine variation in academic standing beyond a general self-report response tendency, it would be expected to show a moderate positive correlation with CGPA band.

Table 12: Correlations Between Self-Reported CGPA Band and the Study Scales (N = 300)

Scale	r with CGPA Band	p
Hostel Life Challenges	-.150	.009
Peer Support	-.171	.003
Academic Performance Scale	-.102	.077

As shown in Table 12, CGPA band was only weakly associated with all three scales. The relationship with the Academic Performance Scale was negative and not statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ ($r = -.102$, $p = .077$), the opposite direction to the moderate positive correlation expected if the scale captured actual academic standing. Counter to prediction, the weak associations that did reach significance were also negative: students in higher self-reported CGPA bands reported slightly lower hostel life challenges ($r = -.150$, $p = .009$) and slightly lower peer support ($r = -.171$, $p = .003$). These associations are modest and should be read carefully, but together with the very high APS-HLCS and APS-PSS correlations in Table 10, they give additional reason to treat the strength of the primary correlational and regression results with caution. They also reinforce the suggestion, made in the Limitations, that future work should pair this instrument with official academic records.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationships among hostel life challenges, peer support and academic performance of university students staying in public and private hostels by testing the relationships of hostel life challenges and peer support with academic performance individually (Table 10) and jointly (Table 11).

Descriptively, the highest-ranked hostel concerns were food quality, emotional comfort, sleep quality, and adjustment (Table 2), indicating that basic living conditions were more prominent than administrative or infrastructural issues. This echoes earlier reports of psychological, financial, and nutritional challenges among students living away from home (Medani et al., 2024), and of the close links between sleep, stress, and academic performance in undergraduates (Gardani et al., 2022). Peer support was moderate to high for most students (Table 5), consistent with the view that peers sharing a residential setting can be a source of belonging and practical support (Dennis et al., 2005; Wilks, 2008). The present design examined direct and joint associations only; it did not test whether peer support moderates the effect of hostel challenges on academic performance.

The correlational and regression results (Tables 10 and 11) showed that hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance were all strongly and positively intercorrelated, and that hostel life challenges and peer support together accounted for a very large proportion of the variance in academic performance scores. Two readings of this pattern are worth distinguishing. Substantively, the positive association between peer support and academic performance is consistent with the stress-buffering hypothesis's view of social support as a beneficial coping resource (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and with Pakistani evidence linking peer relationships to academic adjustment and performance (Hassan et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023). The positive association between hostel life challenges and academic performance, however, runs against expectation, since higher challenge scores would ordinarily be expected to accompany lower performance. One possible, but untested, explanation is that students who are more engaged in hostel life are also more aware of, and more willing to report, its difficulties, and that this general engagement is reflected in how they rate their own academic performance.

Methodologically, the magnitude of these correlations, particularly the $r = .921$ association between hostel life challenges and academic performance, is unusually high for two conceptually distinct constructs and is also consistent with common method variance: all three measures were self-reported, on the same instrument, at the same sitting (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012). The supplementary check against self-reported CGPA band (Table 12) supports treating the methodological explanation seriously, since CGPA band correlated only weakly, and in the case of the Academic Performance Scale non-significantly, with the study's scale scores. Readers should therefore treat the regression result in Table 11 as evidence of a strong association among these self-report measures, not as definitive proof that hostel life challenges and peer support drive academic performance independent of shared reporting tendencies.

No statistically significant differences were found in hostel life challenges by hostel type (Table 6), or in hostel life challenges, peer support, or academic performance by gender (Tables 7–9); all effect sizes were negligible ($|d| \leq .12$). This suggests that, in this sample, the challenges and support students report are relatively similar regardless of hostel type or gender. The standard deviations, however, differ noticeably across groups (about .79–.83 for public-hostel and male students versus .56–.59 for private-hostel and female students), suggesting that some subgroups include a wider range of experience than others. Because the pattern is almost identical for hostel type and gender, the two groupings may overlap in this sample; this should be examined in future work with larger or stratified samples. Bibi et al. (2024) reported a mean difference in academic performance between male and female hostel residents, whereas none emerged here; differences in sample, level of study, and instrument may explain the discrepancy.

Set against this, the peer-support literature reviewed above (Hassan et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023) suggests that peer relationships operate as a genuine coping and adjustment resource for Pakistani university students more broadly, which lends some external support to the substantive, stress-buffering reading of the present findings even as the shared-method concern counsels caution about their exact magnitude.

Overall, the findings indicate that it is important for universities to enhance hostel facilities and make them more conducive to students' welfare, while the specific magnitude of the relationships reported here should be treated cautiously given the single-source measurement design.

Enhancing the tranquility of the learning environment, hostel management, and healthy peer relationships could potentially promote wellbeing and academic engagement; counselling services and recreational activities could also help students cope with stress and adapt academically. The paper's findings may help teachers, parents, university administration, and policymakers address students' wellbeing and academic performance issues.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, and most importantly, all three variables were measured using a single self-report questionnaire administered at one time point, which raises the possibility of common method bias inflating the observed correlations and regression coefficients (Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012); the supplementary check against self-reported CGPA band (Table 12) is consistent with this concern, since it found only weak, and for the Academic Performance Scale non-significant, associations with an independently collected background variable. Future studies should pair self-report scales with official academic records (institutional GPA or transcript data) rather than relying solely on a parallel self-report item, and, where possible, should separate the measurement of predictor and outcome variables in time or format to reduce shared-method variance. Second, the cross-sectional design means that none of the associations reported here, including the regression in Table 11, can be interpreted as causal; longitudinal or experimental designs would be

needed to establish directionality. Third, the sample was drawn from hostels in a single city (Faisalabad) using a non-probability, purposive (quota) sampling technique, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Pakistan or to hostels selected through random sampling. Fourth, the instrument was self-developed and, beyond expert review and internal consistency, no evidence of construct validity (e.g., factor analysis) was reported, and academic performance was captured through self-perception and coarse self-reported CGPA bands rather than official records. Fifth, the study did not control for variables such as year of study, programme, family income, or distance from home, and hostel type and gender may overlap in the sample. Finally, the stress-buffering (moderation) hypothesis was not tested, so the study cannot show whether peer support reduces the effect of hostel challenges.

Conclusion

This study examined (a) the challenges university students face in hostel accommodation, (b) the level of peer support available to them, (c) the level of academic performance they report, and (d) how these three variables relate to one another individually and jointly. Hostel problems are not a minor annoyance for university students: factors such as food quality, emotional comfort, sleep, and adjustment were among the most commonly reported concerns. Peer support was moderate to high overall, although a minority of students (4.7%) reported low support, indicating that it is not equally available to every student.

Hostel life challenges, peer support, and academic performance were all strongly and positively intercorrelated, and hostel life challenges and peer support jointly accounted for a very large share of variance in academic performance scores. The positive association between peer support and academic performance is consistent with the stress-buffering hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and with peer relationships functioning as a coping resource. The positive association between hostel life challenges and academic performance, in contrast, is counterintuitive and, together with the very high correlations and the weak, non-significant relationship between the Academic Performance Scale and self-reported CGPA, suggests that shared method variance may have inflated the associations. The findings should therefore be treated as provisional pending replication with independent academic-performance data. Even so, they suggest that housing quality alone is unlikely to be sufficient for supporting student outcomes: the social side of hostel life also appears to matter.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, hostel administrators should prioritize the concerns students ranked highest, namely food quality, sleep conditions, study noise, and the responsiveness of hostel management, for example through regular student feedback, enforced quiet hours, and routine monitoring of meal quality. University administrations should also consider establishing trained peer-support systems at the hostel level to address common problems such as homesickness, loss of privacy, cultural adjustment, and academic stress, together with wellness programs focused on social integration, an area in which evidence on peer support interventions in higher education is growing (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024); such initiatives should be piloted and evaluated before being built into hostel standards. Researchers pursuing this line of work should prioritize designs that pair self-report measures with official academic records, employ mixed-methods, cross-institutional, or longitudinal designs, test whether peer support moderates the effect of hostel challenges, and examine potential negative peer processes (for example, social exclusion or reinforcement of risky behavior) as well as the differential effects of different types of peer support (emotional, instrumental, and informational). Treating peer support as an evidence-based component of residential life programming, rather than an informal add-on, is a reasonable first step for institutions seeking to support student wellbeing, retention, and academic achievement.

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