

Living far away from home: The shared stories of the student boarders from a developing country

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Abstract: Living far away from home can be a unique and transformative experience, but at the same time, it can be a difficult one. This paper depicts the cases and shared stories of four purposively selected student boarders at a state university in Negros. It adopted a narrative inquiry approach and utilized open-ended and discovery-oriented questions for data collection. The rigor of the findings was addressed using member checking, coding, recoding strategies, thick description, data saturation, and data checking. The data explication process applied the six-phase analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke. The themes that emerged from the study formed the elements of a story – Leaving Home for Dreams, The Perks of Living Far Away from Home, A House is Not a Home, and Hanging On. The student boarders left their low-income families in remote towns and cities to pursue their dreams. Living away from home is a big step for students—it's a chance to grow, learn independence, and build lifelong friendships. It also imparts important lessons on sharing and collaboration. On the other side of it, living in a boarding school or dorm isn't always smooth sailing. There's not much privacy, and students often don't have a choice in where or how they live. Living with others isn't always easy—differences can lead to conflicts, and cramped rooms or old facilities only make things harder. Still, many students push through, staying focused on their goals and hoping for better days ahead. Maybe it's time for colleges and local officials to take action and make student housing more comfortable.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, Shared stories, State university, Student boarders.

1. Introduction

College years spent living in a boarding home can be a special and rewarding experience. At foremost, it gives a student a better sense of freedom than living with a parent or other family member [1]. Boarding students can have more control over their daily routines, such as meal times, study schedules, and personal responsibilities. Abagon [2] cites that living in a boarding house can also be a wonderful chance to connect with people from other backgrounds and create friendships that last a lifetime. Living close to others enhances social contact and fosters a sense of community Abagon [2].

While living away from home gives students easy access to a chance to try new things, it is also considered a risky venture. Convenience, safety, comfort, sanitation, amenities, and facilities can be some of the confronting issues in living in a boarding house [3]. The study by Navarez [4] noted disappointing results from surveys on student housing amenities and lodging in one renowned university in the Philippines. It found that the students' living conditions do not satisfy the current needs and demands of the residents in terms of a learner-centered and quality-driven student-living facility [4]. Also, the student boarders' privacy concerns are unsatisfactorily unresolved since rooms are crowded, and there is not much space for movement.

The situation above is analogous to the boarding homes that provide temporary housing for students attending a state college in Northern Negros. Students clearly could only afford inexpensive

student facilities and accommodation without being picky with location, buildings, sanitization, security, and safety. Although it may not be immediately obvious, the housing facility and accommodation have the potential to negatively impact students' abilities and well-being. Price, et al. [5] linked good facilities to student interpersonal development [5]. There is also an accepted notion that students residing in respectable accommodations within or near their university are more likely to achieve academic success [6].

This study was grounded on the previous study, "Housing Facility and Accommodation (SHFA) of College Students: Inputs for Policy Development," by Malaga [7]. He found that proximity, location, and rental amount are the primary considerations students consider when choosing their boarding houses. The students' living conditions did not meet the highest status of compliance with the desired SHFA in terms of location, facilities, treatment of boarders, sanitation and cleanliness, and safety and security. Student-boarders had easy access to nearby facilities and services, but their living conditions were a different story. Many stayed in poorly maintained housing with little oversight, leaving them exposed to unsafe and uncomfortable environments. With no real efforts to improve their situation, their well-being often seemed overlooked. Instead of thriving in a supportive student community, they were left to navigate these challenges alone, making the experience far from ideal.

The numerical results from the previous study might not capture the full picture of student boarders' experiences. This paper aimed to explore the deeper factors behind those trends. Through interviews and observations, the researcher gathered insights that add depth and context, revealing the complexities of their daily lives.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study examined the experiences of student boarders at a state university in Negros who moved away from home to attend university study. Specifically, the paper aimed to address three key issues related to student boarders' experiences. First, it examined what students go through while living away from home to study at a state university. Second, it explored the ways they cope with the challenges and limitations of boarding house life. Lastly, it analyzed how their living conditions affect their independence, social interactions, and academic progress.

2. Literature Review

Living away from home fosters independence, but it also brings significant challenges, particularly in mental health and academic performance, both of which are greatly influenced by the quality of student housing. University students who live far from home, especially those who board, have special problems and educational possibilities. Research indicates that students who board endure unique emotional and intellectual challenges. A study in the Philippines found that poor living conditions and social isolation often worsen mental health issues among university students in Manila [8]. Similarly, research on social work students in Bicol highlights their difficulties in juggling home and school responsibilities. These challenges were made even harder by limited resources and unstable internet access, especially during the pandemic [9].

It has been demonstrated that coping strategies, including faith and social support, can lessen some of these difficulties. A study on working students in Luzon found that those with strong social support networks, whether from family or dormmates, experienced better psychological well-being [10]. Additionally, Filipino students often cope with difficult situations by embracing cultural values like *pagdamay* (sharing burdens), which helps them stay resilient amid personal and academic stress [11].

The quality of boarding house living conditions has a major impact on students' academic performance, social interactions, and independence, both in the Philippines and beyond. Studies show that inadequate living environments contribute to increased stress and lower academic success, emphasizing the importance of providing students with safe and supportive housing [12].

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The researcher adopted a narrative study. The merged methodological framework contributed to a better understanding of the subjects as narrators connecting to their realities and professional identities.

3.2. Conversation Partners

The information that addressed the fundamental purpose of the study was sourced from four student boarders who satisfied the following predetermined inclusion criteria: (a) served as respondents of the previous study, Housing Facility and Accommodation (SHFA) of College Students: Inputs for Policy Development by Malaga [7]; (b) with a boarding house situated within 200 meter-proximity of the study locale; (c) had been staying in a boarding house for at least two years; (d) referred by the gatekeeper; and (d) freely and voluntarily showed willingness to share their experiences during the pre-interview [7].

3.3. Gatekeepers

College teachers and counselors, who had direct interactions with student boarders and connections with boarding house staff and supervisors, played a key role in identifying participants and facilitating access to them for the study.

3.4. Instrument

The researcher collected data through open-ended, discovery-oriented interview questions to gain deeper insight into the participants' stories and experiences. The goal was to explore student boarders' thoughts, emotions, and perspectives in greater detail.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

The researchers observed the following steps in the conduct of interviews:

3.5.1. Stepping Into the Field

The researcher personally visited the area to meet with the participants, introduce himself, and explain the purpose of the interview. He provided an overview of the discussion topics and the type of information being sought. Participants were informed of their rights and the potential benefits of their involvement. Before proceeding, the researcher ensured their voluntary participation by having them sign an informed consent form.

3.5.2. Conducting the Interview

The researcher asked for personal information from the participants regarding their lives and experiences as student boarders. Follow-up questions were asked based on their responses to gain deeper insights into their perspectives.

3.5.3. Deep talks

The researcher engaged in in-depth conversations with the participants, allowing them to share their true stories. They described their personal experiences, which were further understood through observations. Probing questions were used to gather more detailed and meaningful insights from their narratives.

3.5.4. Checking the Missed Parts

The researcher sought to uncover hidden realities by identifying any missing or unclear information before concluding the interview. Participants were asked for their contact details to allow for follow-up verification. If necessary, additional interviews were conducted to ensure a more complete understanding of their experiences.

3.5.5. Consulting the Participants

The interview transcripts were presented to the participants to confirm the accuracy of how their responses were recorded and decoded.

3.5.6. Storing the Data

The collected data were organized by date and stored in an electronic file. Before the data analysis process, the information was categorized and classified accordingly.

3.6. Rigors of Findings

The researcher employed member checking to confirm and clarify the responses of the participants, coding and recoding strategies to improve the narrations, provided a rich account or thick description of the data collected from the respondents, ensured data saturation, and performed data checking and re-checking throughout data collection and analysis.

3.7. Data Explication

The researcher applied Braun and Clarke's six-step framework for thematic analysis, which involved (a) familiarizing with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) identifying themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) compiling the final report.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Before the interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose and their rights, including their freedom to withdraw at any time. Their voluntary participation was ensured through signed consent forms. During the interviews, the researcher prioritized their well-being, respected their privacy, and took steps to prevent any potential harm. Afterward, all physical notes were securely stored, and digital files were password-protected. To protect confidentiality, only aggregated findings were shared.

4. Results

This section presents the narratives drawn from the shared experiences of the conversation partners. Five major themes and subthemes that emerged from the collected data are encapsulated into four elements that comprise the story plot – (a) Leaving Home for Dream; (b) The Perks of Living Far Away from Home; (c) A House is not a Home; and (d) Hanging on. The data were organized in a logical sequence to create a clear story arc that effectively highlights the shared experiences of student boarders living far from home.

4.1. Leaving Home for Dreams

Leaving home and stepping out of their comfort zones play a key role in the personal growth of student boarders. Moving to a new place exposes them to different perspectives, cultures, and experiences, broadening their outlook and opening up new opportunities. In pursuit of education, student boarders left their homes, believing that doing so would offer them a better environment for both career advancement and personal development.

4.1.1. The participants and Their Settings

Student boarders from remote areas in Negros Occidental face a complex mix of financial struggles, logistical challenges, and the drive to pursue education. Their experiences reflect resilience and adaptability as they navigate life away from home to achieve their academic goals. Living near the university becomes a practical choice, helping them cut transportation costs while ensuring easy access to essential services like markets, internet cafés, and pharmacies.

Pretzel, a fourth-year student from Conchita-Binabagan, shared the difficulties she faces while balancing her studies and her family's financial struggles: "I'm from Conchita-Binabagan. I'm in my

fourth year now and about to have my OJT next semester. My parents cannot afford to support me. "My brother is the only one in our family with a steady income, and I still have younger siblings. Living in a boarding house is tough, but I have to endure it. I want to graduate, hoping for a better future despite the hardships." Her story highlights the sacrifices students from financially struggling families make to pursue higher education.

Charisse, a third-year student from Minoyan, Murcia, shared how financial struggles influence her daily life and decisions: "I'm in my third year, from Minoyan, Murcia. My family is poor, and selling flowers is their only source of income." Her story reflects the difficult realities faced by students from low-income families as they strive to complete their education. I tried my luck here at the university because of free tuition. Even if the school is free, I still have to dip my resources into my daily expenses for food, photocopying of handouts, and school contributions. My boarding is just across the street, so I can save money for transportation. Charisse also shared, "I am near the cafeteria, internet café, and stores where I can buy the things I need for school." For her, living close to the university and essential facilities is vital in managing her limited resources efficiently.

Bon, a student from Cabatangan, Talisay, highlighted the convenience of boarding near the university to overcome transportation challenges: "I'm from Cabatangan, Talisay. Living in a boarding house near the university helps me save time and money on transportation, making it easier to focus on my studies." His experience reflects the practical benefits of staying closer to school, especially for students from distant areas. I opted to be a boarding student because transportation is difficult when I go home late at night. In the morning, I would also be late because I have to wait long for a tricycle. What is good about my boarding house? It is near the school, internet, market, and pharmacy." His experience illustrates how proximity to the school can alleviate logistical issues and improve academic focus.

Ike, from Isabela, spoke about the economic advantages of studying at a state university and the strategic importance of his boarding arrangement: "I'm from Isabela. I enrolled here because only a private school is near my residence. Here, it's free, and I just pay for a boarding house. I just need to budget to allocate my 600 allowances per week adequately—the wall of my boarding house is already the perimeter fence of the school. There is no problem even if I go home late at night because I just have to walk. Bon added, "The cafeteria and the market are also accessible. If we have an assignment, there is a Wi-Fi connection on our campus or in cafés."

His experience highlights the importance of convenience and accessibility in student life. Meanwhile, Ike's story reflects how affordable education and careful budgeting played a crucial role in his academic success.

The students' experiences show their resilience and ability to adapt. Their choice to live near the university highlights how important location is in managing financial and transportation challenges. By staying close to school, they can focus on their studies and work toward a better future.

4.1.2. Chasing After Dreams

Leaving home isn't easy, and not everyone is willing to step out of their comfort zone to chase their dreams. But these student boarders took that risk, believing their aspirations were within reach. For them, moving away was a necessary step toward making their dreams a reality. Despite the struggles and sacrifices, they pushed forward, knowing that every challenge was worth it. Their stories reflect their determination and the strong motivations behind their choices.

Pretzel, determined to lift her family out of poverty, views her education as a means to a better future: "The reason I am here is to finish my college education and become a professional someday. I'm taking up HM, and after graduation, I plan to work abroad and help my family. It's alright if I experience difficulty now. What is important is that I can earn money in the future and help my parents and younger siblings." Her words reflect a deep sense of purpose as she endures present struggles with the hope of future success.

Charisse understands the cycle of poverty and views education as her way out: "History repeats itself if I do not try. I came from a low-income family. I will end up poor." Her words reflect a strong determination to change her future and build a better life.

For Bon, leaving home is both a personal investment and a commitment to his family: "It's clear why I am here at the university—to build myself and my future. After finishing my studies and realizing my dream, I will go back and help my family in Cabatangan." His words reflect a deep sense of purpose, balancing self-growth with a strong desire to give back.

Ike's optimism and determination stand out as he shares his motivation: "Despite being poor, I also have a dream for myself and my family. My life will become better if I can finish my studies." His statement reflects his belief in education as a path to overcoming hardship.

The perseverance of these students in facing the struggles of boarding life and financial difficulties speaks to their resilience and hope. They see their sacrifices not as burdens but as necessary steps toward a future where their dreams of becoming professionals will create better lives for themselves and their families.

4.2. The Perks of Living Far Away from Home

Living far away from home had its range of perks and advantages. It allowed student boarders to live their lives as they pleased without the restrictions of family life. It promoted independence, allowing them to take more ownership of their lives. Additionally, they were exposed to several different cultures, ways of life, and thought processes. Such increased their tolerance for diversity and widened their horizons. It increased their skills to deal with problems, imparted positive values, and improved their capacity to adapt to different situations.

4.2.1. Developing a Sense of Independence

Living in a boarding house helps students become more independent. They learn to manage their finances, organize their schedules, and follow house rules, all of which contribute to their personal growth. Many students expressed how this experience has taught them to take control of their lives.

Pretzel shared, "You have a sense of independence. You are the one budgeting your allowance. You have freedom in your schedule—when to wake up, work, and sleep. At home, when your parents are around, it's like there are so many restrictions." Her words highlight how living away from home allows her to make her own choices and manage her time freely.

Charisse also described her sense of independence: "I'm independent. I determine my lifestyle. I am free to decide what to buy and cook. Everything—I'm the one making decisions and taking responsibility." For Charisse, living alone means learning to take care of herself, from planning meals to making everyday choices.

Similarly, Ike reflected on how boarding life has shaped his sense of responsibility: "I'm more independent. I am more responsible if I stay in the boarding house." His statement emphasizes how living on his own has pushed him to become more accountable for his actions.

These responses show that the boarding house experience plays a crucial role in helping students develop independence and personal accountability. Beyond just managing their finances and schedules, they are also learning essential life skills that prepare them for adulthood.

4.2.2. Social Interaction

Living in a boarding house also provides opportunities for social interaction. Students from different backgrounds come together, forming friendships and offering each other support. This sense of community helps ease feelings of loneliness and creates strong bonds that go beyond academics.

Pretzel highlighted the social benefits of boarding life: "You can gain more friends. You have different backgrounds. You can build friendships and support each other." Her words reflect the rich social experiences that come with sharing a living space with people from diverse walks of life.

Charisse also spoke about the friendships she has formed in her boarding house: “Sometimes, this is where you can find true friends. They are like your family. If you are sad, they will cheer you up.” For Charisse, these friendships provide not just companionship but also emotional support, making the experience more meaningful.

Bon, who describes himself as a shy person, shared how boarding life has helped him become more social: “I am a shy type. I learned to make friends in the boarding house. There are times we would dine together, work on our assignments, and also get together. We also support each other if there are problems that we need to solve.” His experience highlights how living in a shared space encourages students to engage with others and build lasting connections.

Ike added another perspective: “We have social activities where we get together in the boarding house during holidays and no classes. We would gather for food. We can interact with one another.” His experience shows how shared activities, such as group meals and celebrations, help foster a sense of belonging among boarders.

The students’ responses demonstrate how boarding life creates an environment where friendships and social support thrive. These connections are essential in helping them navigate the challenges of university life, providing both emotional and practical support. The bonds they form not only help them academically but also create a sense of home away from home.

4.2.3. *Imbibing the Values of Sharing*

In a boarding house, students share common spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms, and living areas. This setup teaches them valuable life skills like cooperation, negotiation, and mutual respect. Living in close quarters with others requires them to be mindful of shared responsibilities and to practice sensitivity toward their housemates.

Pretzel described how boarding life has taught her to be more considerate: “You develop your values. Because of the shared CR, kitchen, and living room, we are sensitive to others. If others are already sleeping, you have to tone down your voice when talking to others. I would make sure I don’t slam the door. I would negotiate to switch off the light if I’m going to bed.” Her experience highlights the importance of being thoughtful and respectful in a shared living space.

Charisse also shared how boarding house life has made her more responsible: “We have a common living room and two comfort rooms. The living room serves as our study area. Because we share spaces, we are considerate of others. I am responsible for collecting my litter and cleaning my messes. I consider other users.” Her words show how sharing spaces fosters accountability and consideration for others.

Ike reflected on how boarding life has helped him mature: “I grow more mature in terms of the ability to deal with others. I have to consider and be sensitive to my boardmates so our relationship is always smooth.” His experience highlights how living with others teaches patience and cooperation, which are essential for maintaining positive relationships.

The students’ experiences reveal that boarding house life is not just about having a place to stay—it is also about learning essential life values. Sharing spaces teaches them responsibility, respect, and adaptability, all of which are valuable lessons that extend beyond their university years.

4.3. *A House is not a Home*

A boarding house may provide basic shelter for student boarders, but it differs significantly from the comfort of home. Many students see their living situation as far from a typical home due to issues such as a lack of privacy, limited control over their environment, conflicts with housemates, insufficient amenities, and uncomfortable conditions.

4.3.1. *Lack of Privacy*

While living in a boarding house offers benefits such as proximity to school and a sense of community, it also presents challenges, especially when it comes to privacy. Sharing a living space with

others often means that personal boundaries are not always respected, leading to discomfort for students who value their privacy. The following responses highlight the struggles student boarders face in maintaining personal space and boundaries.

Pretzel expressed frustration with the lack of privacy in shared spaces: “We shared a toilet, kitchen, and living room. At worst, even your personal things, like shampoo, comb, and cologne, are also shared. Your roommate would use your personal things without seeking permission.” Her experience reflects a common issue in boarding houses, where personal belongings are sometimes used without consent, leading to feelings of intrusion.

She further added, “Your boardmates would even meddle with your personal issues.” This suggests that beyond physical space and belongings, emotional boundaries are also often crossed, making it difficult to maintain personal privacy.

Charisse shared a similar concern, stating, “Sometimes, your boardmates would use your things without seeking permission.” Her experience highlights a recurring challenge in communal living, where the lack of respect for personal belongings can create tension and discomfort.

Bon described the difficulty of finding solitude in a boarding house: “What I don’t like is if you want to be quiet and think. That is impossible in a boarding house. Your fellow occupants can see you even if you stay quiet. They would ask, ‘What happened to you?’” His response emphasizes how close living quarters make it hard for students to enjoy personal time without interruptions.

Ike echoed the same struggles: “If you want privacy and a quiet environment, that is not possible in a boarding house.” He added, “Your boardmates thought they had the right to utilize your personal items because they shared them with you.” His words reflect how personal boundaries in a shared space are often unclear, making it challenging for students to maintain both physical and personal privacy.

4.3.2. Limited Control Over Living Conditions

Living in a boarding house often means dealing with conditions that do not always meet personal standards of cleanliness, quietness, or upkeep. The maintenance of shared spaces such as bathrooms, kitchens, and common areas largely depends on the habits of fellow tenants and the oversight provided by the boarding house administration. Many student boarders expressed frustration over these challenges, reflecting their lack of control over their living environment.

Pretzel shared her concerns about the cleanliness of the boarding house, particularly in communal areas: “It can’t be avoided that sometimes the boarding house is too dirty. The caretaker cannot maintain the cleanliness of the rooms, especially the shared areas. The owner seems not to mind it as long as he can get the rentals every month.” Her statement suggests that despite paying rent, tenants often deal with poorly maintained spaces, as cleanliness is not a priority for the owners or caretakers.

Aside from cleanliness, noise was another common issue among boarders. Pretzel added, “The noise cannot be controlled.” Her words highlight the unpredictability of noise levels in a shared living space, making it difficult to find peace and quiet.

Charisse explained how she copes with the disorder: “I just go with the flow. I can’t do anything about it. I just ignore the messiness and the disorder. Others, sometimes, do not have consideration. When they converse with each other, their voices are excessively loud.” Her response reflects the feeling of helplessness in dealing with inconsiderate housemates who contribute to the mess and noise.

Bon also pointed out the lack of organization and excessive noise: “The chaos and the loudness are beyond your control. The boarding house is far too disorganized!” His statement emphasizes how the lack of order and discipline in shared living spaces can add stress to students' daily lives.

Ike expressed a sense of powerlessness over the situation: “You don’t have any control over your boardmates and their ways. What can I do? The administrator doesn’t even seem to notice it.” His words highlight the frustration of living in an environment where the administration does little to address ongoing issues, leaving students to manage these challenges on their own.

4.3.3. *Potential for Conflicts*

Living in shared spaces often leads to unavoidable conflicts due to differences in lifestyle, habits, and personalities. The close living arrangements and diverse backgrounds of boarders increase the chances of tensions, disagreements, and misunderstandings. Resolving these conflicts can be challenging, especially when individuals have different values or when some act inconsiderately. Student boarders shared their experiences with these issues and the difficulties they face in managing them.

Pretzel described how disagreements often arise from personal preferences: “Sometimes, there are disagreements. One has a preference, and the other one also has another preference. Of course, we are new acquaintances and have diverse ways. Sometimes, conflict is not resolved; we just keep it to ourselves. The conflict is merely contained within.” Her response highlights how boarders, unfamiliar with one another, may struggle to openly address conflicts, leading to unspoken tensions that remain unresolved.

Charisse shared a more concerning issue, pointing out the presence of bullying: “There are also bullies. They would stand as a group and intimidate others. Sometimes, it’s just a matter of who is stronger.” Her statement reveals that beyond simple disagreements, power dynamics exist where some boarders use intimidation to dominate others, making shared living even more difficult.

Bon acknowledged that conflicts are common, whether between boarders themselves or between boarders and caretakers: “It cannot be avoided. There would be conflict between board mates or between the boarders and the caretakers. Sometimes, some rules are inappropriately imposed.” His response suggests that disputes may arise not only from personal differences but also from inconsistencies in how caretakers enforce rules.

Ike expressed frustration over how some conflicts are handled: “Because of differences, conflict cannot be avoided. Plus, instead of settling the dispute, your companion would worsen the conflict.” His words highlight how disagreements can escalate when individuals fail to communicate effectively or refuse to compromise, making resolution even more challenging.

4.3.4. *Limited Amenities and Facilities*

Student boarders noted that while their boarding houses provide basic necessities, they often lack comfort and convenience. Cramped living conditions, poorly maintained facilities, and limited access to essential amenities make daily life more challenging. The following experiences highlight the struggles students face due to inadequate boarding house facilities.

Pretzel described the overcrowding and lack of essential utilities: “We don’t have a connection. If we want to use the internet, we go to the internet café outside. There are four double-deck beds with eight occupants per room. We are too crowded in the room and don’t have a place to put our things. There is no place where we could hang and dry our wet clothes. A rice cooker is not allowed. Ironing clothes is prohibited. We can only charge our phones in the living room. Of the 40 occupants, only eight outlets are in the living room. We do not have an outlet in the bedroom. Only seven can sit comfortably in the living room to work on their assignments. I just go to the boarding house when I’m about to sleep. We’re like inmates in the boarding house.” Her experience highlights the lack of personal space, restrictions on basic appliances, and limited access to electricity, creating an environment that feels more like a restrictive space than a home.

Charisse also voiced frustration over the limited facilities: “Too limited if talking about facilities and amenities. Of the thirty-seven occupants in the boarding house, we only have one small kitchen, two comfort rooms, and no living room, and we hang our clothes on the veranda. We are not allowed to cook food and iron our clothes.” Her account emphasizes the overcrowding, the shortage of essential spaces like bathrooms and common areas, and the restrictions that make everyday tasks difficult.

Bon echoed these concerns, stressing the lack of space and the need to adapt: “Our boarding is only for us to rest. At the back of the boarding house, it is where we cook our food and stay because we have no space inside. Our area is too congested, but we have to bear with it. We use the internet at school because it is not available in our boarding house.” His experience reflects how students are forced to

adjust, using makeshift areas for cooking and relying on external facilities like the school for internet access.

Ike also pointed out the inadequate amenities, particularly the lack of storage and restrictions on basic household tasks: “If I were to describe it, our boarding house seriously lacks facilities. We don’t even have a space where we could put our things. We cannot cook food and iron our garments. I would bring my dirty laundry home every Saturday.” His response highlights the inconvenience of not having space for personal belongings and the added burden of having to bring home laundry every week due to restrictions on basic chores.

These accounts show that many student boarders endure difficult living conditions, making it harder to focus on their studies. Limited space, a lack of essential facilities, and restrictions on daily activities add to their challenges, highlighting the need for better boarding house management and improved living conditions.

4.3.5. Unpleasant living environment

Living in a boarding house comes with challenges, particularly concerning noise disturbances and safety concerns. Many student boarders shared their experiences of discomfort and risks associated with their surroundings. Noise from nearby establishments, security issues, and poor maintenance of the boarding house environment were common sources of stress, making their living conditions far from ideal.

Pretzel described the struggle with constant noise: “There are stores, pool halls, video houses, and booze joints in the surrounding areas. The noise can reach our place. I used to get occasional sleeplessness.” The presence of these establishments made it difficult for her to rest, as loud conversations and music disrupted the peace.

Charisse raised concerns about security, saying, “Besides the noise, we are not also safe from thieves and burglars. People would come in and out of the boarding house and cannot be monitored all the time.” Her statement highlights the lack of proper security measures, leaving boarders feeling vulnerable to intruders.

Bon also pointed out the combination of noise, poor sanitation, and safety issues: “The problems really are the noise, dirt, and unsafe environment. I am not really comfortable staying in a boarding house. It’s just that I don’t have any choice.” His response emphasizes how these factors make boarding life uncomfortable, yet students are forced to endure them due to a lack of alternatives.

Ike expressed how the environment affected his well-being: “I look forward to going home to Isabela every Friday or Saturday. Our community may seem backward, but it actually contrasts sharply with my boarding house situation. Here, there is no tranquility or comfort. The environment is filthy, congested, and noisy.” His words reflect the stark contrast between home and boarding life, where poor conditions make weekends away something to look forward to.

These accounts reveal how environmental factors, from excessive noise to security risks, significantly impact the student boarders' well-being. Instead of providing a comfortable space for studying and resting, many boarding houses create additional stress, making it difficult for students to focus on their academic and personal growth fully.

4.4. Hanging on

Despite the many challenges of living away from home in difficult conditions, the student boarders showed remarkable resilience and determination. Their shared goal of graduating kept them motivated, helping them endure the hardships of their living situations. While they acknowledged the struggles they faced, they remained hopeful, relying on perseverance, faith, and the belief that better days were ahead.

Pretzel expressed her determination and optimism: “In a few months, I will be graduating. After a few sacrifices, I will achieve my target. There’s no reason for me to surrender. Always pray. I hope that the concerned school and local authorities will be able to see the condition of the boarders, and they will

do something about it.” Her words reflect not only her personal commitment to overcoming challenges but also a call for attention to improve the living conditions of boarders.

Charisse shared a similar perspective: “The situation of the boarders might improve if the school will take a look at it. On my end, my student life will go on as long as I can endure the difficulty. Just seek refuge in God if life is difficult.” Her response highlights her ability to endure hardships while relying on faith for strength.

Bon also spoke about his determination to push through: “Just holding on to my dream of finishing my studies. There is God who will help me. But hoping that this problem will be resolved due to the appalling condition of the boarders. It’s like we don’t have protection.” While focused on his dream, he also pointed out the urgent need to address the poor living conditions and lack of security in boarding houses.

Ike echoed this perseverance: “I just keep going, although it’s difficult. I leave it to God. I pray always. I am hoping that our condition will be addressed before I graduate.” His words reflect a strong sense of faith and determination, along with the hope that improvements will be made for future boarders.

These testimonies show that, despite the hardships, student boarders remain steadfast in their pursuit of education. Their faith, resilience, and unwavering commitment to their dreams keep them moving forward, even in less-than-ideal living conditions.

5. Discussion

The challenges and aspirations of student boarders offer valuable insight into how education, living conditions, social interactions, and resilience shape their experiences. The students’ perseverance reflects the belief that education is a key to social mobility and personal advancement. Education provides underprivileged students with opportunities to break free from socioeconomic limitations [1, 10, 13]. This perspective is evident in the determination of Pretzel and Charisse, who remained committed to their studies despite numerous hardships. Their belief in the transformative power of education aligns with findings from the YouthLed survey, which revealed that many Filipino youth feel a strong responsibility to uplift their families financially [13]. For these student boarders, education was not just a personal pursuit but a pathway to improving their families’ lives.

Despite its difficulties, boarding life also fosters independence and personal growth. Living away from home allows students to focus on their academic goals without family [14]. The boarders in this study recognized the benefits of this arrangement, particularly in developing self-reliance and time management skills. Nair [1] further suggests that this independence builds students’ confidence, enabling them to express their thoughts more freely—something that was evident in the students’ unwavering focus on their educational goals [1].

Beyond academic benefits, the boarding house environment also encourages social interaction. Research by Abagon [2] and Saifi [15] highlights how boarding houses provide opportunities for students to form meaningful friendships and support systems. The boarders in this study echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the camaraderie and shared experiences that helped them cope with daily struggles [2, 15].

However, poor living conditions remain a significant concern. Velasquez-Garcia and Garcia [16] pointed out that student housing in the Philippines often fails to meet basic standards [16] a finding supported by Amante and Ortiz [17] who noted that many dormitories lack proper regulation and maintenance [17]. Similarly, Malaga [7] reported that student housing frequently lacks essential safety and sanitation measures [7]. The boarders in this study confirmed these issues, describing noise disturbances, security risks, and unsanitary environments. Financial constraints often forced them to endure these conditions, highlighting the urgent need for stricter regulations and better housing policies.

Despite these struggles, the students displayed remarkable resilience and hope. Hope is a powerful tool that helps individuals endure hardships, and for these students, hope and faith were sources of

strength [18]. Their reliance on prayer for guidance and protection aligns with Kor, et al. [19] findings on how spirituality helps individuals reframe challenges and find meaning in adversity. This sense of purpose kept them motivated to push forward [19].

Given these findings, educational institutions must recognize how living conditions impact students' academic performance and well-being [10]. Colleges should evaluate housing policies and implement stricter monitoring of boarding houses to ensure they meet basic safety and cleanliness standards. Local government collaboration with schools could also improve student housing regulations.

The experiences of these student boarders illustrate the complex relationship between education, living conditions, resilience, and hope. While they faced significant hardships, their determination to succeed and help their families remained strong. Their stories underscore the importance of addressing inadequate student housing to support both their academic success and overall well-being.

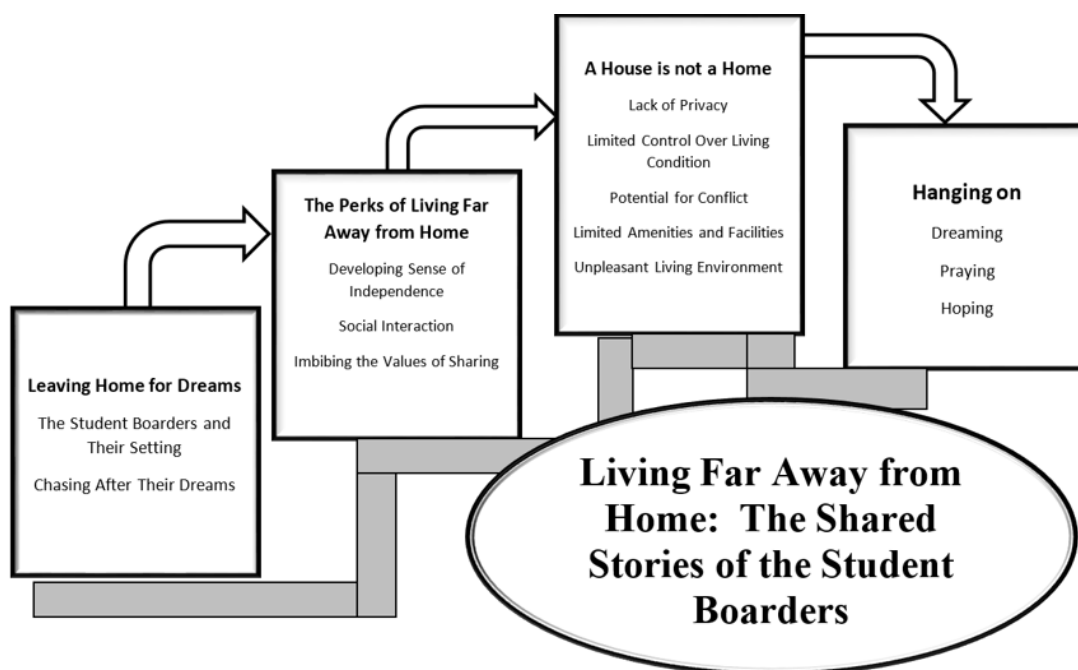


Figure 1.
Schematic illustration of the significant findings that emerged from the data.

6. Conclusion

Leaving home to pursue a dream requires student boarders to adapt to a new environment, adjust their habits, and cope with being away from their families. While boarding life offers benefits such as greater independence, social interaction, and the development of cooperation and sharing, it can also be emotionally challenging. For some students, this transition brings stress and discomfort as they navigate life in an unfamiliar setting without the immediate support of their loved ones.

Different social dynamics might emerge when students live together in a communal setting. Student boarders may experience difficulties making friends, resolving disputes, or fitting in with the boarding community. Peer pressure, social hierarchies, or cultural differences can also influence the complexity of social relationships. In addition, there are concerns about personal space, comfort, hygienic conditions, and general safety and security.

Surveys indicate that most boarding houses fail to meet students' needs and expectations. However, due to financial limitations and a lack of better housing options, students are left with no choice but to endure uncomfortable and often inadequate living conditions. With limited alternatives, they hold on to hope and prayer, wishing for improvements in their situation.

Many student boarders come from low-income families and see education as their way out of poverty. They believe that earning a degree will not only uplift their own lives but also create opportunities for their families and future generations. Unfortunately, in their pursuit of education, they find themselves forced to endure substandard living conditions, making sacrifices in the hope of securing a better future.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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