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The Relationship between Students' Residence Type and Academic Achievement

Sevinc Yerli Usul¹

Abstract

As in many other countries, university education in Turkey has a special effect on students' lives. While students generally live with their families for high school education, most of them alter their residence and also living conditions when they start university education. Research studies show that, there is a close relationship between housing conditions and university students' performance. (Arauja&Murray, 2010; Astin, 1973; Clarkson, 2006) Therefore, housing options may have different effects on students' academic achievement. The present study was an attempt to explore the extent of this relationship. In order to collect data, two different instruments were used. The first instrument was the adopted form of a survey developed by Helfrich in 2011. In addition to this, students' final exam results, which were accepted as the determiner of academic achievement, were also used as another source of data. The data were analyzed by using independent samples t-test, and the results revealed that there was not a significant difference between the groups in terms of achievement. That's to say, if the conditions of the residence were arranged well, it did not matter for the students whether it was a dormitory, a flat or any other kind of residence.

Keywords: Residence type, prep-students, academic achievement, staying at dormitory,

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Introduction

For university prep students, there seem to be many different sources for stress; leaving their hometown and family, trying to learn a new language, complying with the new academic environment, trying to manage the financial, and housing problems may be just a few. In addition to this, it is clear with the related literature that stress is one of the most dangerous variables that may affect learning negatively. (Dörnyei, 2007; Wilson, Damiani & Shelton in Aranson, 2002) Research indicates that students' well-being and achievement are closely related to their positive feelings about the living conditions. (Alkandari, 2007; Clarkson, 2006) Therefore, the first year of the university life seems to be important for a successful university education. In his "student involvement" theory, Astin (1999) states that during the first years of university education, students try to *involve* in their new environment, and any kind of negative or positive effects have something to say on their involvement process. In his own words, "the factors that contribute to the students' remaining at college suggest involvement, whereas those that contribute to the student's dropping out imply a lack of involvement." (Astin, 1999, p.523) As a result, it is suggested that any kind of stress and negative feelings which aggravate students' involvement should be removed from the university students' lives.

In parallel with the idea of stress-free atmosphere, another scholar Clarkson (2006) came up with the theory of "student development" depending upon the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. According to this theory, a safe and relaxing housing environment in which the students had the chance for sleeping well, eating properly and living healthily was essential for their general well-being. Similarly, Astin (1993) also asserted that residence was the most important positive factor which could affect students' involvement regardless of sex, age, or any other variables. Furthermore, by measuring the effects of three different housing alternatives; staying at home, at a residence hall or in a private room/apartment, he found out that the most effective reason for students' dissatisfaction and unwillingness to attend the courses was the farawayness of their residence. He also mentioned the benefits of living on-campus by stating that students living on campuses were more advantageous than the ones who had to commute every day, especially about "friendships, faculty-student relations, and social life". (Astin, 1999, p.525) In a similar vein, Upcraft et al. (2005) also mentioned the advantages of living on campus especially on students' "leadership skills, interpersonal abilities, job skills, and cultural awareness." (as cited in Synder et al., 2011, p. 107)

Accordingly, it may be inferred that a relaxing, motivating and facilitating residence might be the basic need which brings success. Therefore, it may be assumed that different residence facilities or types may have different effects on students' achievement. Though different studies have been conducted on the relationship between residence and achievement so far, there seems to be hardly any one specifically conducted on the effects of residence types regardless of the location. However, residence type by itself, may also be a big drawback for students' achievement and should be dealt with by care. For this reason, this study is an effort to figure out the extent of this relationship.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

University education is known to have a special effect on students' lives. In Turkey, when students start university, they have to make some changes in their life. Many of them have to move from the cities where they have lived with their families so far, which means a big change in their lives/living conditions. A great majority of them need to stay at dormitories due to economical or distance problems, though some others share a flat with their friends. Research indicates that, there is a close relationship between housing conditions and university students' performance. (Araujo & Murray, 2010; Astin, 1973; Clarkson, 2006) Therefore, housing options may have different effects on students' academic achievement. The present study is an attempt to explore the extent of this relationship.

1.2 Justification of the Problem

As the prep class is the first year of university life, it has been accepted to have an important role in university education. In addition to this, it has been known that there are many different sources of stress for prep students. Among the various problems, different residence types have also been thought to be a stress-provoking situation which may affect prep students' performance negatively.

Therefore, in this current study the achievement levels of prep students staying at different residence types were compared in order to have an idea about the effects of residence.

1.3 Significance of the Study

As academic achievement has always received a lot of attention, various research studies have been conducted to see the effects of different variables on it. However, it was not until Riker and DeCoster's (1971) pioneering study when the researchers started to be more interested in the relationship between residence and achievement. Following Riker and DeCoster's (1971) study, numerous different studies were conducted on the subject matter. The general findings of these studies, as mentioned in a more recent meta-analysis by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), were that student development and learning were related to their residence.

Despite the variedness of the studies conducted on the residence and achievement relationship, there has not been a specific study especially designed to see the effects of residence types regardless of their location. Therefore, in this study, the effects of residence types on students' academic achievement have the special interest, which makes this study different and significant.

1.4 Research Questions & Hypotheses

The present study tries to find out an answer for the following research question:

Research Question: Is there a relationship between university prep students' residence type and academic achievement?

Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between university students' residence type and academic achievement.

1.5 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The current study was conducted at the prep school of a state university in Turkey, so it was limited to university prep school elementary level students. Furthermore, the departments of the participants were limited to Computer Engineering, Business Management, Physics, Mathematics, Genetics, and Electronical Engineering.

To have an opinion about students' achievement level, the results of the final exam which was prepared by the "testing office" were used, so the assumptions about students' achievement closely depended on the quality of this exam. Furthermore, participants of the current study were chosen among elementary classes rather than intermediate ones because the effects of the variables were thought to be more significant at this level.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Participants were thirty-four elementary level students attending the prep school of a state university in Turkey. As residence problems are thought to be more obvious at this level, the participants were chosen from the prep school on purpose. The ages of the participants, majority of whom were males, varied between 17 and 25.

2.2 Instrumentation

In this study, two different instruments were used for data collection. The first instrument was the adopted form of a survey developed by Helfrich in 2011. In addition to this, students' final exam results, which were accepted as the determiner of academic achievement, were also used as another source of data.

2.3 Procedures

The survey was given to the students before starting the daily session. Although there was not a time limitation, most of the students finished answering the survey within 10 minutes. The participants were asked to complete the survey with their names on it because knowing the participants' identity

was necessary to be able to answer the research question. As the participation was based on voluntariness, anyone who did not want to contribute had the chance not to respond to the survey questions.

2.4 Analysis

Having analyzed the survey results by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the researcher separated the participants into two groups according to their residence types. These groups were consisted of students who were staying at "dormitory" or "any other residence". In pursuit of survey analysis, students' final exam results were also uploaded to the SPSS. Finally, *independent samples t-test* was utilized to see whether or not there was a significant difference between two groups' academic achievement level.

3. Results

In this part of the study, the results are going to be presented. As it has been stated previously, this study aimed at answering the research question: "Is there a relationship between university prep students' residence type and academic achievement?" Therefore, some statistical analyses were made accordingly by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). At the outset of these analyses, the participants were separated into two groups according to their residence types. The results were as the following:

Table 1: Residence Types

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dormitory	15	44,1	44,1	44,1
Other places	19	55,9	55,9	100,0
Total	34	100,0	100,0	

As it can be seen in the **Table 1** above, there were 34 participants who completed the questionnaire and took part in this study. According to the results, there were 15 students staying at dormitories while the rest of them were staying at other places rather than the dormitories. In other words, majority of the participants, 55, 9 % of them, were not staying at dormitories.

After grouping the students according to their residence types, *the independent samples t-test* was run to see the difference between the groups in terms of their final exam performances. Since the students' final exam grades were used as the determiner of the success for this study, the results of the t-test would shed a light on the subject matter.

Table 2: Final Exam Grades

	Residence	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Finalgrade	Dormitory	15	61,5	13,37	3,45
	Other	19	58,5	10,40	2,38

As it was shown in **table 2** above, **the mean** of the final exam grades was 61, 5 for the first group, which represented the students staying at dormitories; on the other hand, it was 58, 5 for the second group of students who were known to be staying at other places rather than the dormitories.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Finalgrade	Equal variances assumed	,738	32	,466
	Equal variances not assumed	,716	25,967	,480

Sig.=0,05

The results of the independent samples t-test (**table 3**) revealed that there was not a significant difference ($p = 0,466 > p = 0,05$) between the groups in terms of their final exam performances. Therefore, it was not possible to reject the null hypothesis, and make a connection between students' residence types and their achievement.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

As it is clear with the related literature that stress is one of the most important factors debilitating students' performance in language classrooms. (Dörnyei, 2007; Wilson, Damiani & Shelton in Aranson, 2002) Therefore, any kind of stress should be removed from the language classes. Though many different sources for stress have been defined for prep students, the stress stemming from the residence type is thought to be more effective than the others on students' learning and achievement. However, the results of this study indicated that residence type doesn't have too much to say on prep students' achievement.

4.2 Interpretation of the Findings

According to the results, though there was a little difference between the final exam grades of the two groups, it was not found to be statistically significant as it was thought to be so at the outset of the study. The findings of the study also indicated that residence type might not be that important while talking about the students' academic achievement. However, these findings may be pleasing and leading in that, instead of dealing with residence types, which is not possible to change, it is better for the instructors to try to deal with and remove any other sources of stress from the prep classes. For this reason, these findings are thought to be important.

4.3 Implications

In Turkey, most students have to stay at dormitories when they start university. Though some schools provide their students with many different options to choose among, some other students attending to different schools may not have the same chance to choose their residence. Although it may be thought as a stress-provoking situation which may affect the students' performance negatively, the results of this study indicated that it is not the case. Although the findings are not in line with the results of the previous studies (Alkandari, 2007; Clarkson, 2006; Astin, 1999) they are still important to show that residence type may not be that affective on students' performance. That's to say, if the conditions of the residence are arranged well, it does not matter for the students whether it is a dormitory or a flat or any other kind of residence.

4.4 Applications

In university prep classes, as teachers spend too much time with their students, they may be well aware of their problems. Therefore, they should know possible sources of problems and solutions as well. Except for other problems, the instructors and the administrators should be aware of the importance of providing the students with comfortable and suitable places to accommodate during their university education. As the results of this study indicated that, regardless of its type, if students are happy with their residence, it will not make any effect on their performance.

4.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Since the number of participants is not very high, this study should be conducted again with a larger sample size. For the current study, the participants have been chosen among the elementary classes; however, a larger scale study in which participants from other levels are also included may reveal different results. Besides these, other variables regarding students' back ground features should be included into the study for future research. Effects of residence type on male or female students' performance or the relationship between residence type and any other variable may also be studied.

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