Australian housing market: a descriptive study on key issues around housing affordability relevance to international university students in Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract. Accommodation plays a crucial role in the attainment of quality education. International students are not eligible for housing benefits in most developed countries, including Australia. This, coupled with most Australian universities’ non-residential student accommodation policy, increases the housing affordability implications to international students. This study looks at the housing affordability experience of international students studying at three major public universities in Melbourne, including the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, and Monash University, to examine issues surrounding housing affordability relevance to international university students and their future prospects. This descriptive cross-sectional study employed a semi-structured survey questionnaire consisting of close and open-ended questions to collect data. The data was gathered from 100 international students. The responses to open-ended questions were quantified using content analysis and data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The study found the majority of international students experience housing affordability issues in Melbourne. To cope with high accommodation costs, the international students share rooms with other students at the expense of diminished privacy and accommodation congestion. Also, the evidence suggests financial stress and having to live in substandard accommodation has a detrimental effect on international students’ personal development. The data gathered from open-ended questions further observed that most of the student’s expectations of living in individual rentals changed after arriving in Australia to shared-room accommodation due to lower housing affordability. Most international university students feel insecure about their outlook in Australia due to lower housing affordability, and accommodation costs will be a top consideration in their future decisions involving settlement in foreign countries.

Keywords: Accommodation affordability; future prospect; housing affordability; international university students; Melbourne Australia

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1 Introduction

Housing is a basic need, regarded as a fundamental human right of the people in a society. Affordable housing accessibility provides independence, privacy, and security (Colebatch, 2015). Typically, housing is made more affordable in developed countries to several groups of people with housing benefits, including subsidised housing. However, the situation is not the same for all the groups. International students are temporary residents who are not usually eligible for housing benefits in most developed countries, including Australia. There is risk that traditional housing for locals may fail to meet the needs of international students. In Australia, where most universities operate a non-residential policy for student accommodation combined with the harsh housing market poses housing affordability challenges to international students. While Australian educational institutions have successfully recruited international students, equal attention should be given to ensure their well-being. Students chose to study in foreign countries to get a quality education also a pleasant international experience (Skinkle & Embleton, 2014). Considering the number of expectations international students have, it is crucial to be aware of their housing experience and its influence on their well-being in foreign countries.

In Australia, the education sector experienced massive growth in recent years with a sharp rise in international students, benefiting host universities, and society in general. According to the Reserve Bank of Australia (2019), there are over 700,000 international students in Australia, representing 30 per cent of total university students in Australia. In 2019 alone, international students contributed AUD 19.70 billion to the Australian economy (Economist, 2019). The education sector is the highest service-based export, contributing to the Australian economy (Reserve Bank of Australia, 2019). In Australia, the international student sector is a lucrative and complex one due to the challenges associated with ensuring the welfare of international students. Australian educational institutions have been successfully enrolling international students; however, to a lesser extent, attention is given to the well-being of international students outside the universities. To ensure the sustainability of the education sector, international students must have a positive international experience (Australian Education International, 2010). According to Barker and Hawkins (2006), while international students assume the benefit of studying abroad, they also face a range of difficulties, including the challenge of accessing affordable accommodation.

The increased demand and population lead to lower housing affordability in Australia, especially in major cities (Berry & Dalton, 2014). There are periods of anxiety in Australian society following the rise in rental and mortgage expenditure (Hulse, Burke, Ralston, & Stone, 2012). The Economist (2016) survey revealed that the most significant proportion of household expenditure is spent on housing in Australia. In most cases, leaseholders and tenants have more than fifty per cent of their income spent on housing. At the same time, a substantial share of the rental market in Australia consists of international university students (Economist, 2016). Major cities in Australia have minimal dedicated student accommodation on campus or within commercial Purpose-Built Students Accommodation (PBSA) (Dockery & Milsom, 2016). Therefore, most international university students are constrained to rely on private rentals for accommodation in major cities. According to Obeng-Odoom (2012), a study at the University of Sydney found that almost all their international students were reliant on private rentals for accommodations. Hence, international students face the task of sourcing their accommodation which is challenging for students on limited budgets from low-income countries, as for many years, Australia has been ranked as the most expensive country for affordable accommodation (HSBC, 2013). Therefore, student accommodation is cause for concern, and it could influence the position of Australia as a global education provider, as claimed by Eslake (2016). Given the above situation, an international student
may be disproportionately affected by housing needs; however, research on the issues surrounding housing affordability and housing needs for international students is limited.

Regarding international students housing affordability, a city particularly interesting is the city of Melbourne. By far, in comparison to other Australian cities, Melbourne is the biggest student city in Australia. More than 91,000 students reside in Melbourne, with eight full-fledged universities (Dockery & Milsom, 2016). The city of Melbourne is given a perfect score for education by the Economist intelligence unit’s Global Liveability Survey 2018 (The Economist, 2018). At the same time, apart from Sydney, Melbourne has the highest rental and property price in Australia (Dockery & Milsom, 2016). Hence, international students’ housing affordability issues in securing accommodation and its consequences are of significant research interest. Therefore, this study describes housing affordability issues relevance to international university students, including housing stability, adequacy, affordability, stress, stability, and accessibility in Melbourne, Australia, and their future prospects in a descriptive research design.

2 Literature review

International students are of tremendous economic importance to Australia and other nations, focusing on expanding international education. Such nations need to focus not only on recruiting international students but also on ensuring students well-being. Among several challenges and difficulties international students face in adjusting to a new environment, finding suitable and affordable accommodation is one of the primary challenges (Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, & Ling, 2004; Niven, 1987). Michel, Romain and Ragot (2014) study highlighted fees and housing costs as critical factors that affect international students’ mobility to foreign countries. Also, Scheyven, Wild and Overton (2003) claimed access to satisfactory accommodation is crucial for international students’ academic performance and well-being. However, the neoliberalism ideology in which Australian institutions manage their relationship with international students, compared to welfarism has minimal thoughtfulness to address the struggles of students finding satisfactory accommodation (Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010). The neoliberalism ideology assumes students as capable agents and is self-responsible in finding accommodation (Marginson et al., 2010). As increasing international students is a primary focus of the Australian government, more emphasis should be given to ensuring satisfactory and affordable living arrangements.

Housing affordability is a multidimensional concept. This study focuses on rental affordability, which is most relevant to international students. Berry and Dalton (2014) assert that price speculation by investors and landlords fueled growing property prices in Australia. Additionally, rising demand and increase in housing finance availability contribute to high property prices and rental costs in Australia (Eslake, 2016). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) report, the proportion of households renting has increased from 22 per cent (1.5 million households) in 2006 to 26 per cent (2.1 million households) in 2016, and international students and migrants are the main occupants of rental properties. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) report also indicates that most rental tenants find their accommodation insecure, poor quality, and unaffordable. Despite being one of the key occupants of rental properties, international students are generally not eligible for housing benefits and subsidised accommodation (Yates, 2007).

In Australia, several housing issues have relevance to international students. The shortage of student housing and the spike in rentals have caused significant hardships for international students to find affordable accommodation (Smith & Pang, 2007). The inability to find affordable housing is more severe in larger Australian cities, including Melbourne and Sydney, where international students cannot find satisfactory accommodation, which is
limited by affordability and accessibility (Smith and Pang, 2009). For instance, the City of Melbourne international student survey indicates that, although students are satisfied with the studying experience, the cost of accommodation and accessibility is a growing concern (City of Melbourne, 2019). In addition to that, before arriving in Australia, the international students are not fully informed about the student accommodation shortage, high rental cost, and limited university support in obtaining accommodation (National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia, 2008). Such experience can alter international students' study journey after arriving in Australia. Hence, challenges are present in managing accommodation for international students in Australia.

The lower housing affordability and poor decision-making skills result in students living in sub-standard accommodation in Australia (Harman, 2004). According to Bondi and Christie (2000), while satisfactory accommodation helps students encounter the stress of life and the insecurity of living abroad, unsatisfactory accommodation can add more stress and insecurity. Also, lower housing affordability is a factor that adversely influences the students’ mental health, well-being of students and academic performance (Evans, Chan, Wells, & Saltzman, 2000; Montgomer, 2017). Additionally, housing expectation and housing reality are other aspects of housing that is relevant to international students. Smith and Pang (2007) reported that international students have certain accommodation expectations in planning overseas education. For some students, the preference and hopes match the reality; on the other hand, for many students, the expectations meet with fear, uncertainty, and eventual departure to the home country. According to Smith and Pang (2007), international students often misjudge the actual accommodation situation due to limited information and contacts in the host country. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how their preferences change from the planning stage to the actual arrival in the host country for education.

The lower housing affordability implications are present at both macro-economic and micro-economic levels in society. According to Crane and Warnes (2000), at the macro-level lower housing affordability leads to social inequality, as most vulnerable groups contribute the highest proportion of their income towards housing expenditure. Igelesias (2012) supports this finding, which argues that affordable housing is a critical factor in human development, and lower housing affordability widens the inequality gap in society. Likewise, Dunn (2000) asserts that affordable housing plays a crucial role in social integration, overall health, and well-being of society. At the micro-level lower housing affordability creates more stress with resulting hardship to acquire other necessities such as food, clothing, and proper healthcare (Crane & Warnes, 2000). Jones and Texeira (2015) affirm that lower housing affordability has a more severe impact on less fortunate individuals. For example, single mothers coping with high rental expenditure involves sacrificing sleeping space and privacy. Despite the macro-level and micro-level implications of lower housing affordability presented by various researchers, Zhu and Haibin (2003) claimed that real estate is a significant capital expenditure in every economy, and the rise of property value will benefit the society in terms of employment and resulting multiplier effect in the economy.

The evidence suggests that housing affordability is a cause for concern with the observed detrimental effects on Australian society. At the same time, international students’ presence and contribution to the Australian rental market is immense. The literature also suggests possible more significant ramifications of lower housing affordability for students, especially when their expectations differ from accommodation reality in host countries. The rising accommodation cost is argued to increase financial and psychological strain on international students (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2007). Also, affordable housing is argued to play a critical role in students’ physical and emotional development, as it is a means of protecting individual rights, and privileges that affect safety, freedom, and privacy (Brown, Rob & Callum, 2011). In Australia, international students are turned away from the direct provision of accommodation by the universities as they are no longer willing to subsidise the on-campus
accommodations (Marginson et al., 2010). Hence, international students’ choice of accommodation may come at the expense of other preferences, including accommodation size, costs, and location. Despite the possible implications to students regarding lower housing affordability, limited empirical studies are conducted to study the consequences of lower housing affordability relevance to international university students in Australia. Additionally, most of the housing affordability research focuses on single mothers, home buyers, and existing homeowners. Also, contradicting housing issues were observed to different parties involved in the housing market following lower housing affordability. Hence, objective findings are required in understanding housing affordability relevance to various parties. Furthermore, despite the literature providing evidence that international students have accommodation expectations before arriving to host countries, it fails to explain what they are and how they change based on accommodation affordability. So, there is a need to describe the housing issues and implications when international students are faced with housing affordability challenges, the relevance of housing affordability to them, their housing choices, and their future prospects. Therefore, this study aims to describe issues around housing affordability and its relevance to international university students in Melbourne, Australia, and their future prospects using a descriptive research design.

3 The study

3.1 Design of the study and research method

This descriptive study aims to describe housing affordability issues relevant to international university students and their future prospects. It follows the pragmatic approach, using the method best suited to address the research problem rather than a philosophical view about the method (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). This approach grants the freedom to use any method(s), techniques, and procedures associated with quantitative and qualitative research. This study used a survey questionnaire and complementary descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques to answer the research problem. The ethics approval was granted by the Victoria University ethics board.

A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to respondents, consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions in a cross-sectional research design. The close-ended questions gathered information on socio-demographic characteristics, choice of accommodation, and factors that influence international students’ accommodation choices. The close-ended questions also gathered additional information on the various implications of lower housing affordability for international university students. The open-ended questions gathered explanations for international university students’ accommodation choices, their accommodation expectations before arriving in Australia, and how they changed after arriving in Australia. Open-ended questions are further meant to explain how housing affordability influences international students’ future prospects and how housing affordability can be improved for international students in Australia.

3.2 Data collection and analysis method

The target population of this study is international university students currently enrolled in various universities across Australia. The target population is the total collection of individuals to which the researchers aim to make some inferences (Bryman & Bell 2003). However, housing affordability is more visible in large and student-populated cities in Australia. Therefore, Melbourne is selected as the geographic scope of this study. It is
international university students’ enrolled in various universities across the city of Melbourne.

The current study selected three universities in Melbourne. The universities include (a) the University of Melbourne, (b) Victoria University, and (c) Monash University. All three universities are public institutions that have campuses in metropolitan areas. The questionnaire is administered using judgmental sampling on all three university campuses. Based on this technique, personal judgment is required when choosing the respondents (Saunders et al., 2012). The data is collected face-to-face from international students, considering the questionnaire involves some open-ended questions that may require assistance. The data collection was done in English. Students were told of the importance of the research and their contribution to addressing challenges associated with housing affordability to international students. A total usable sample size of 100 responses was collected for analysis with the use of judgmental sampling. According to Hair, Black Jr, Babin and Anderson (2014), a sample of 100 elements is appropriate for descriptive research characterised by a reasonably large population. The judgmental sampling technique facilitates selecting cases that answer the research questions and meet the study objectives (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

This study used quantitative data analysis technique for analysing both open-ended and close-ended questions using SPSS. The quantitative data gathered from the survey questionnaire were analysed using simple percentages and summary statistics. These are collectively known as descriptive statistics, which are used to acquire a feel for the data by measuring the central tendency and the dispersion (Sarantakos, 2005). The qualitative data gathered from open-ended questions were quantified categorically using qualitative content analysis. After that similar to close-ended questions, descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution and simple percentages are applied. It is a method of identifying, analysing, classifying, and reporting patterns of descriptive data (Patton, 2002). It minimises complexity and organises data in rich detail (Porcia & Cherie, 2016). It also improves the reporting and interpreting of various research aspects, which requires further explanations (Braun, 2006). In the current study, such explanation is required in terms of student’s accommodation choices, future prospects, and solutions.

4 Results and discussions

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that 55 per cent of respondents were female, while male respondents represented 45 per cent of the sampled population. Among the respondents, those in the age group 18-25 years constituted 62 per cent, age group 26-25 years constituted 33 per cent, age group 26-40 years constituted 5 per cent. This shows that majority of the international university students were in the younger age group 18-25 years. The implication based on this finding is that, as most international students in Australia were young, they may not have the experience and skills to sourcing accommodation by themselves; therefore, assistance may be required from their host institutions. The distribution of respondents by education level showed that 45 per cent of respondents were from bachelor level programs, while another 45 per cent were from postgraduate programs. The remaining 10 per cent of respondents were from diploma level programs. This implies an equal number of respondents from bachelor and postgraduate level programs and relatively a smaller number of students from diploma level programs.
4.2 Choice of accommodation and factors influencing international students’ choice of accommodation

In terms of international university student’s accommodation choices, the majority of the international university students (74 per cent) currently live in shared-room rentals, and 26 per cent of students live in individual-room rentals. It is to be noted that none of the respondents currently live in self-owned accommodations or apartments. This finding implies that the majority of the international students resort to sharing rental accommodations with other students to solve their accommodation needs in Melbourne. Also, only a lower percentage of students have the means or chose to live in individual rental accommodations.

On a 5-point Likert scale, the international student reported a higher level of importance of rental cost and income in making their choice of accommodation (Mean = 4.4, Mode = 5). Students also reported a high level of importance of access to transport in making their choice of accommodation (Mean = 4.2, Mode = 5). Students reported moderate importance of nearness to university (Mean = 3.64, Mode = 4) and nearness to shops (Mean = 3.2, Mode = 3) in making their choice of accommodation. This finding implies that rental cost is one of the most important factors determining international university students’ choice of accommodation. As such, it can be implied that the majority of students live in shared-room rentals to cope with the higher rental cost or lower accommodation affordability.

4.3 Relevance of housing affordability issues to international university students

Of the total 100 respondents, 98 per cent of international university students reported housing affordability hardship. This finding implies that housing affordability is a cause for concern in Australia, especially for international students. In assessing ways in which housing affordability relevant to international university students, on a 5-point Likert-Scale, students reported higher level of agreement housing affordability is related to; students’ ability to choose accommodation from a convenient location (Mean = 4.07, Mode = 4), financial stress among students’ (Mean = 3.98, Mode = 4), students’ privacy (Mean = 3.93, Mode = 4), students’ miscellaneous spending capacity (Mean = 3.88, Mode = 4), housing congestion among students’ (Mean = 3.83, Mode = 4), and students’ personal development (Mean = 3.62, Mode = 4). Also, students moderately agreed that housing affordability is related to; inequality among students’ (Mean = 3.43, Mode = 3), students’ work hours (Mean = 3.55, Mode = 3) students’ educational performance (Mean = 3.26, Mode = 3), and students’ health (Mean = 3.26, Mode = 3). These findings imply that though most of the observed housing affordability issues have moderate to high relevance to international students, it has the highest relevance to international students’ ability to choose an idle location, financial stress among students’, privacy issues, students’ miscellaneous spending capacity, and housing congestion.

4.4 Reasons for choosing shared rental and individual rental accommodation

The descriptive data suggest 70 respondents (94 per cent of students live in shared-room rentals), live in shared-room rental to afford rental costs by sharing with other students. The remaining small portion, 4 respondents (6 per cent of students live in shared-room rentals), live in shared-room rental to increase the chance of socialising and building networks in a foreign country. The 26 students who live in the individual-room rental are mostly with their partners and children. The common expression among the twenty-six (26) students who live in the individual-room rental is ‘The reason for the individual rental is that they are with the family and do not have a choice. This suggests that international students with family prefers
individual-room rental regardless of high rental expenditure, possibly to ensure the privacy and security of their families.

4.5 International student’s pre-arrival housing expectations and post-arrival housing reality

Regarding housing expectations or preferences, the information gathered from students, 76 of them (76 per cent of the respondents) expressed that they plan to rent self-contained rooms in pre-arrival. However, from the students who plan to rent self-contained rooms, most of them (68 students) choose shared-room accommodation with other students upon arriving in Melbourne. Therefore, what is certain is that majority of international students are not fully informed about the student accommodation situation in terms of cost and availability up until they arrive in Australia. So, the questions are, what is the reason(s) for the change of preferences from self-contained rooms to shared rooms. The reasons from 68 who planned to rent self-contained rooms and chose to live in shared-room rental after arriving in Melbourne, the 90 per cent of them indicated reason to change to shared-room accommodation is the high rental cost. The common statement among the (43 students) who indicated high rental cost as the reason for the change of accommodation preference after arriving in Melbourne is that rental is too expensive for them to have self-contained rooms.

On the other hand, there is a small portion of students, 15 of them (15 per cent of the respondents) expressed that in pre-arrival they plan to rent shared-room accommodation with other students. Remarkably, all students who plan to rent shared-room accommodation stick to their original preference of shared-room accommodation even after arriving in Australia. The common statement among (15 respondents) students who stick to their original plan of shared-room accommodation even after arriving in Australia is that ‘They are aware of high accommodation cost in Melbourne through their friends before arriving in Melbourne’.

4.6 Housing affordability relevance to the future prospect of international students

The next question is how relevant housing affordability is to the future prospect of international university students. The findings suggest that 72 per cent of respondents have insecurity over their future due to lower accommodation affordability in Australia. The common statement among 45 respondents who have insecurity about their future due to lower housing affordability is that ‘They work long hours to pay tuition fees and rental, they are not certain they can keep up with both for the duration of their studies’. On the contrary, the remaining 28 (72 per cent) students reported that they feel secure about their future regardless of the rising rental cost. The common statement among 20 respondents who are secure about the future irrespective of the housing affordability is that ‘They have family members who will support them in emergencies. Another common statement among 5 respondents who are secure about future irrespective of the housing affordability is that ‘They have well-paid part-time jobs which they can pay for accommodation and other expenses. In addition, 53 (53 per cent) of the students reported that housing affordability would influence their future choice of country for settlement, including work and studies. Also, 45 (45 per cent) students favoured giving housing benefits directly to university students to curb the student housing affordability issues.

5 Discussion
Housing research focused on international students has been limited, and this study addresses this gap by understanding the housing affordability experience of international students, housing affordability implications on international students and their future prospects. This study revealed that housing affordability regarding international university students is a cause for concern in Australia, particularly in Melbourne. The arrangement that international students are solely responsible for sourcing their accommodation in a private rental market has created a challenging and precarious situation. Rental cost is one of the critical factors that international students consider when choosing accommodation, and most of them reported having challenges affording accommodation expenditure. This finding is supported by a more extensive quantitative study of the City of Melbourne (2019), which asserts that accommodation affordability is a growing concern although students are satisfied with the studying experience. To cope with high rental costs, the majority of international university students chose to live in shared-room rental accommodation. This finding mirrors the finding of Dunn (2000) coping with higher rental costs involves sacrificing sleeping space and privacy. The exception is a few students with families and children who live in individual-room rental accommodation regardless of the higher rental cost to safeguard privacy. However, these students are expected to work longer hours, hence, have a much more significant influence on their education.

Financial stress, having to forgo convenient location, limiting other miscellaneous expenses, sharing sleeping space with other students at the expense of privacy, and resulting negative impact on their personal development are ways housing affordability most relevant to international university students in Melbourne, Australia. This finding echoes the findings of Khawaja & Dempsey (2007), high rental cost increases financial and psychological strain on university students. Also, it mirrors the finds of Brown et al. (2011), that affordable housing is a means of protecting privacy and freedom. In addition to that, these findings support Igelesias (2012) findings that housing affordability plays a crucial role in human development. However, only a moderate level of housing affordability is relevance to work hours, educational performance, and health reported by students. This could be due to restricted work hours for international students and international students adjusting to the lower housing affordability by sharing with more students, giving up privacy, and other leisure expenditures.

The current study also revealed that most international students are not fully aware of the housing situation until they arrive in Australia. Therefore, most of the time, international students have unrealistic expectations regarding accommodation before arriving in Australia. Most students were forced to live in a shared room with other students to cope with the higher rental expenditure. A finding supported by Smith & Pang (2007) indicates that while some international students’ expectations match reality, most of them misjudge the actual accommodation situation. Also, the high rental cost makes students anxious and insecure about their future, creating doubts among international students in their ability to keep up with tuition fees and accommodation expenditure. Therefore, there is consensus among students that housing affordability will influence their future choices concerning a country for settlement or study. This finding is consistent with the finding of Michael and March (2014), who maintains that accommodation cost and tuition fees are among the most significant factors influencing international students’ mobility to foreign countries.

Based on the findings of this study, housing affordability is an existing problem, forcing students to live in shared-room accommodation. The government and institutions current stance is that affordable housing for international students is not an institutional responsibility (Marginson et al., 2010). However, this study implies that educational institutions and authorities need to put policies and facilities to help international students source satisfactory and affordable accommodation. Such policies and facilities can reduce anxiety, financial stress and ensure privacy for vulnerable international students. Also, some levels of
welfarism can be introduced instead of relying entirely on neoliberalism in managing the relationship with international university students. This will help identify and address international students’ challenges in adjusting to the new learning environment. Overall, educational institutions must ensure that international students are aware of housing reality in Australia before arriving in Australia. This includes institutions developing accurate and accessible information to prospective students concerning living costs and options in Australia. This is because, currently, accommodation expectations of most international students do not match housing reality in Australia, and being informed can help them plan well and avoid disappointments. In short, it is believed that the findings of this study will assist international students in planning their studies in major cities in Australia by accounting for accommodation reality and risks.

6 Limitations and future research recommendations

The primary limitation of this study lies in the sample of this study, which is restricted to international students in 3 public universities in Melbourne. Therefore, users of this study findings should be cautious in generalising the findings to other dissimilar contexts. However, there is a good mixture among the universities selected for this study regarding university size and location. Additionally, this descriptive research utilised a semi-structured questionnaire to overcome the limitation of fixed responses from a structured questionnaire. However, the level of effort respondents put in when answering open-ended questions was still limited.

Future research in this area is recommended to increase sampling scope by considering more private and public universities in Melbourne. This will improve the representativeness and accuracy of the research findings. Also, instead of having a semi-structured questionnaire, it is highly recommended to use in-depth interviews in future research to acquire rich qualitative results. Likewise, a more holistic approach can be adopted for future research in this area. As such, the focus can be expanded to get perspectives from educational institutions and government authorities.

7 Conclusion

In Australia, the international students’ contribution to the local economy is immense. The international student number is expected to increase in the coming years. To ensure the sustainable growth of international students, students need to have a positive overall living and education experience in host countries. This study assessed the housing experience of international university students in Melbourne, Australia, focusing on housing affordability by surveying three major public educational institutions, namely the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, and Monash University. This study has established the relevance of housing affordability issues to international university students and their prospects through an exploratory research design. Most of the observed housing affordability issues and their implications to other parties in literature is true and more demeaning for international students.

This study established that housing affordability is a serious issue among international university students in Melbourne. As such that rental cost is a crucial factor being considered choosing their accommodation. To cope with higher housing expenditure, sharing sleeping space with more than one student is common among international students in Melbourne. Also, housing affordability is relevant to financial stress among students, privacy issues, level
of control over choosing a convenient location, miscellaneous spending, and accommodation congestion. Housing affordability is also relevant to the future prospects of international university students. For all these reasons, housing affordability is an issue in which institutions must focus on sourcing international students, as finding suitable and affordable accommodation is an area where international students require assistance, especially in larger cities in Australia. Therefore, solving the housing affordability issue requires cooperation between authorities and institutions.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the students at the University of Melbourne, Victoria University, and Monash University who participated in this study for their time and effort contributed to this study. This paper constitutes part of the author’s master’s degree; the author would like to thank staff and students at Victoria University Melbourne, Australia.

Declarations

Funding. The authors received no financial support for this article’s research, authorship, or publication.

Conflict of interest statement. On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Availability of data and material. The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on request.

Author’s contributions. Study conception, design of the analysis, material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Shahid Hassan, Wai Chuen Poon, and Shahid Hassan wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and all authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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