

RESEARCH REPORT :

Understanding Boarding Challenges Faced by Sri Lankan University Students

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1. Introduction

Finding safe, affordable, and reliable accommodation is a major challenge for university students in Sri Lanka. Many students relocate to urban areas for their studies and struggle with locating boardings that meet their needs. This research aims to understand the difficulties students face, the information they seek, and the features they expect from a digital platform designed to support boarding searches.

The findings from this study will guide the development of a student-focused boarding-finder platform that offers accurate information, trustworthy listings, and a convenient search experience.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Identify the primary challenges students face when searching for boardings.
2. Understand what factors students consider most important when choosing a boarding place.
3. Explore what features students expect in a digital platform that helps them find boardings.
4. Gather real feedback to guide product decisions for an effective solution.

3. Methodology

- Data was collected using a structured online survey.
- The survey included multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions.
- Students from a variety of universities and backgrounds participated.
- Quantitative responses were used to identify general trends, while open-ended answers provided deeper insights into personal experiences.

4. Key Findings: Difficulties When Searching for a Boarding Place

Across the responses, students highlighted several recurring problems. These represent the most significant obstacles in their boarding search journey.

4.1 Safety and Environment Issues

Safety was one of the biggest concerns:

- Students struggled to find boarding places located in secure areas.
- Many were unsure about the quality of the environment or the trustworthiness of the landlord.
- Lack of verified information created fear of ending up in unsafe or uncomfortable surroundings.

Insight: Students place strong importance on safety and expect clear verification and ratings.

4.2 Affordability and Value Concerns

Many students expressed difficulty with boarding costs:

- Boarding fees often did not match the facilities provided.
- Students encountered hidden charges after moving in.
- It was difficult to evaluate whether a place was worth the price before visiting.

Insight: Transparent pricing and facility details are essential for decision-making.

4.3 Poor Information Quality and Lack of Transparency

A major pain point was the inability to access trustworthy and updated information:

- Many websites and listings were outdated.
- Photos often did not match the actual condition of the boarding.
- Some owners claimed rooms were available when they were not.
- Students had no reliable way to verify reviews or safety claims.

Insight: Students require **accurate, verified, and regularly updated** information to avoid guesswork.

4.4 Location and Availability Difficulties

Finding a boarding place close to the university was a challenge:

- Good locations near universities were often fully occupied.
- Certain high-demand areas had extremely limited availability.
- Some students had to settle for places farther away, increasing travel time and costs.

Insight: A platform showing availability, distance, and travel convenience is highly needed.

4.5 Logistical and Daily Living Challenges

Students also struggled with:

- Finding accommodation that aligned with their preferences (e.g., single rooms, attached bathrooms).
- Managing food, groceries, and basic needs around their boarding area.
- Transportation difficulties and long commute times.
- Finding suitable roommates or others from the same university.

Insight: Students expect the platform to help with not only the boarding itself but also the surrounding lifestyle.

5. What Students Want in a Boarding-Finder Platform

Open-ended responses revealed strong expectations for a modern, reliable, and user-friendly platform.

5.1 Accurate and Detailed Listings

Students expect:

- Real, truthful photos
- Updated descriptions of all facilities
- Clear rental fees with no hidden charges
- Information about whether the room or bathroom is shared
- Number of students per room
- Safety features available
- Availability status (vacant or full)
- Distance to university and travel time

Insight: Low-quality information is a major frustration; accuracy is essential.

5.2 Powerful Filtering and Search

Students want to filter and search by:

- Price
- Location and area
- Distance or walking time to university
- Room type (single/shared)
- Facilities (kitchen, laundry, Wi-Fi)
- Safety level
- Real-time vacancies

Insight: Advanced filters help students quickly identify suitable options.

5.3 Safety and Verification

Students strongly recommended:

- Verified owner profiles
- Safety ratings
- Reviews from real students
- System checks to prevent misleading or “dodgy” places

Insight: Safety verification is a make-or-break factor for trust.

5.4 Communication & Booking Features

Students expect:

- A chat option to directly contact the owner
- Easy ways to handle payments or booking
- The ability to find roommates or group bookings within the platform

Insight: Students want a seamless and complete process from search → conversation → booking.

5.5 Information About Surroundings

Students also want details such as:

- Nearby grocery stores
- Restaurants and affordable food options
- Public transport availability
- Distance from the main road
- Estimated travel cost

Insight: Choosing a boarding place is not only about the room — it's about the entire environment.

6. Summary of User Insights

- Students face **significant safety, affordability, and transparency issues** when searching for boardings.
- Information available online is often outdated or unreliable.
- Good boardings near universities are difficult to find due to limited availability.
- Students want **detailed, verified listings with real photos, facility information, and clear costs.**
- Advanced filtering, safety verification, a review system, and map-based search are highly requested.
- Communication tools, roommate matching, and nearby services information would greatly improve the user experience.

7. Product Recommendations

Based on the findings, the platform should prioritize:

Must-Have Features

- Verified listings and owner profiles
- Real photos and complete facility details
- Real-time availability
- Price transparency
- Distance and travel-time calculation
- Map view with nearby services
- Student review and rating system
- Advanced filtering (price, distance, facilities, room type)

High-Priority Features

- Direct chat with the owner
- Online booking/payment options
- Roommate matching
- Safety score based on user reviews

Future Enhancements

- Integration with universities for trusted boarding recommendations
- Community features for students living nearby
- Automated suggestions based on user preferences

8. Limitations

- Responses are self-reported and may contain personal bias.
- Boarding conditions vary by region and season.
- Some individual comments may reflect unique cases rather than general trends.

9. Conclusion

The current boarding search process for Sri Lankan university students is inefficient, unreliable, and stressful due to safety concerns, lack of transparency, and poor access to information. Students clearly expressed the need for a reliable digital platform that provides verified listings, honest reviews, updated availability, and strong filtering tools.

The insights gathered in this research provide a strong foundation for developing a practical, user-friendly boarding-finder solution that truly addresses the challenges students face.