

# New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Volume 6, Issue 4 (2019) 017-027

[www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selected Paper of 8th Cyprus International Conference on Educational Research (CYICER-2019) 13-15 June 2019, Cyprus Science University, North Cyprus

## Off-campus informal learning spaces selection: A Bangkok private university case study

**Sonthya Vanichvatana\***, MSME School of Management and Economics, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand

### Suggested Citation:

Vanichvatana, S. (2019). Off-campus informal learning spaces selection: A Bangkok private university case study. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 6(4), pp 017–027. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof.Dr. Huseyin Uzunboylu, Near East University, Turkey.  
©2019 United World Center of Research Innovation and Publication. All rights reserved.

---

### Abstract

Informal learning spaces (ILS) include both inside and outside library spaces and university's borderline. A university has its duty to provide classrooms and other supporting spaces for formal and informal learning. Nevertheless, the arrangement of such spaces might not logically and functionally match learning preferences and behaviours of students, who are prime users. The deficiency of on-campus ILS might drive students to use off-campus ILS. The understanding of why students select off-campus ILS can reflect any absence and inadequacy of on-campus ILS. The objective was to study where and why undergraduate students of business school select off-campus ILS. This research used students of a Bangkok private university as a case study. The research method was through quantitative analysis and descriptive data analysis, using questionnaire surveys conducted during March 2018. Students with any levels of grade point averages and undergraduate levels had similar preferences for using and not using off-campus ILS.

**Keywords:** Informal learning, learning spaces, ILS, HEI, off-campus, Bangkok.

---

\* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Sonthya Vanichvatana**, MSME School of Management and Economics, Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand. *E-mail address:* [sonthya@gmail.com](mailto:sonthya@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Learning spaces do not just limit within university campus territory. While universities provide formal learning spaces for scheduled teaching-and-learning (Middleton, 2018), many students use off-campus facilities to study and/or to do other related learning activities. Informal learning spaces (ILS) include both inside and outside of both library spaces and university's borderline. Universities have their duties to provide both formal learning spaces, such as regular classrooms, and ILS, such as the library and other common areas, for students and staff. The arrangement of such spaces should logically and functionally match study activities and viewpoints of students, who are the prime users. However, such arrangement is not easily done by all higher education institutions (HEI) because of unclear understandings, limited budgets or even neglected of the issues. Any deficiency of on-campus ILS arrangement might drive students to use off-campus ILS for informal learning.

It is interesting to find out where and why students use off-campus ILS rather than on-campus ILS. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether students with different academic attributes, such as grade point average (GPA) and undergraduate levels, have any similarity or differences in choosing off-campus ILS or not. The findings from this research can both reflect any drawback of on-campus facilities that cannot accommodate the study activities of students and pinpoint any improvement of on-campus facilities to support informal learning.

The objective of this research was to find out about students' selection for *off-campus ILS* for learning activities. The aims of this study were: (a) to understand where students study off-campus and (b) to explore the reasons and perceptions why students select or do not select off-campus ILS. This research took undergraduate students studying the business school of a Bangkok private university (BPU) in Thailand as a case study. The scope covered any off-campus ILS, but only physical/tangible learning spaces—excluding virtual/web-based ILS.

## 2. Literature review

Past research in ILS in HEI is largely focused on inside university territory, such as libraries and canteens, but scarcely focused on outside university territory. The following sections reviewed related past research, focused only on off-campus ILS, in two aspects: (a) Spaces for Informal Learning and (b) Environment and Facilities Required.

### 2.1. Spaces for informal learning

The non-formal learning space is defined as the spectrum of spaces beyond the formal learning spaces to support non-scheduled learning. Such spaces include those offered by supporting services, information commons and learning hubs and connecting spaces for breakout learning activities, independent study, working alongside, group study, networking and socialising (Dugdale, 2009).

Spaces for informal learning can be in various forms, virtual and physical. *Virtual spaces*, or so mentioned as digital (Middleton, 2018), are online communication platforms, which have been contributed and changed the internal nature of education (Kio & Negreiros 2013; Park, 2011). Various forms of web tools/technologies allow opportunities for learners to extend-then-combine their formal learning into more informal places (Hall, 2009). Vanichvatana has recently found that students applied virtual spaces to extend the functions of Home/Dorm for group/team activities (Vanichvatana, 2018a).

*Physical ILS*—for on-campus ones, include numerous types of spaces, such as university libraries, students' union, discussion rooms and formal teaching environments—when they are not used for classes. Physical ILS—for off-campus ones, include (a) Home/Dorm, (b) Café and Catering Outlet and (c) Co-working Spaces. The followings explain these three types of off-campus ILS:

*Home/Dorm* is one of the highly preferred ILS, mostly when students work alone (Vanichvatana, 2018a). Nevertheless, inherent distraction, which lies within a comfortable atmosphere at

home/dorm, makes some learners find it difficult to study there (Harrop & Turpin, 2013). In addition, Harrop and Turpin (2013) stated that home was not frequently selected as a place suitable for group work. In contrast, Vanichvatana (2018a) identified that studying for group work at home/dorm was more feasible with the support of virtual/digital spaces.

*Café (including catering outlet)*, especially off-campus ones, is a type of ILS (Humter & Cox, 2014; Waxman, 2006). This type of spaces allows learners to study with or without requirements to purchase food. There were several previous studies that converted unused or low traffic areas into sharing ILS. La Trobe University converted under-utilised spaces to become ILS with café-style ambiance for a group and private studies (Riddle & Souter 2012).

*Coworking space* is defined as a shared workspace where diverse groups of freelancers, remote workers and other independent professionals work together (Butler, 2008; Spreitzer, Bacevice & Garrett, 2015). This type of social learning spaces has been increasingly recognised as one of the most social learning spaces which are a shared working environment. Vanichvatana has conducted a research survey of 300 users of coworking spaces located along Bangkok Mass Transit Sky-train stations (Vanichvatana, 2018b). One interesting result showed that 67% of the respondents were students, while the rest were users who worked in various occupations (advertisement, designer, information technology, marketing and salesperson). Vanichvatana (2018b) also found that coworking spaces have been used as off-campus ILS for several learning activities. The top frequencies usages of coworking spaces were for group discussions and term/team projects.

## **2.2. Learning facilities and learning environments required**

### **2.2.1. Learning facilities**

Students normally demand furniture and technology to support their learning. The main reasons that make students use ILS rather than libraries are furniture that are convenience, comfort, allowed spreading out of personal possessions and the availability of resources (Harrop & Turpin, 2013; Vondracek, 2007). Students preferred flexible furniture that can be adjusted to suit their needs to fixed furniture, such as lecture theatres that tend to make them feel restricted to spread out their belongings (Bennett, 2006; Bodnar, 2009). Technology refers mainly to the availability of Internet access. Availability of free Wi-Fi can enhance popularity for common space usage (Lippincott, 2010). The strength of the Internet signal is also important.

### **2.2.2. Learning environments**

Each student has different preferences for learning environments which consist of several factors of environment characteristics of spaces, such as background atmosphere. The preferred atmosphere can range from two extreme aspects, from enhancing privacy to the extreme contrast in socialised networking. Background atmosphere greatly influences students' choice of study location. Students adapted their study habits to fit the learning spaces that they liked (Humter & Cox, 2014). Vanichvatana (2018a) showed that the top three preferred environment of ILS were: 'Place that can share idea', 'Place that allow eat/drink' and 'Quiet place'. In addition, the top preferred equipment/facilities was 'Have high-speed Wi-Fi'.

## **3. Methodology**

The research method was through quantitative analysis, using questionnaire surveys. The surveys were conducted and used a case study of a BPU's business school students, in March 2018. This university is located at the far eastern side of Bangkok Metropolitan, Thailand. BPU is situated about 49 km from Bangkok CBD, which takes around 1 hour and 15-minute drive. The total number of students at BPU was about 6,000 students attended this business school during the survey period.

The questions and multiple choices were created based on past research in several aspects discussed in the previous sections. The questionnaire was distributed to students by lecturers in four

selected required business core courses, for each undergraduate level: freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. A total of 408 questionnaire respondents were collected. The data were analysed by the descriptive analysis.

### **3.1. Data**

Two aspects of students' attributes were concentrated and analysed here: (i) undergraduate levels and (ii) GPA. The whole 408 respondents consist of 110 freshmen (27.0%), 57 sophomores (14.0%), 66 juniors (16.2%), 143 seniors (35.1%) and 31 over-seniors (7.6%). When analysed in the aspect of GPA, the data consist of students: 15 with GPA < 2.00 (3.7%), 112 with 2.01–2.50 (27.8%), 104 with 2.51–3.00 (25.8%), 90 with 3.01–3.50 (22.3%) and 82 with GPA >3.50 (20.3%). Although the percentages of the respondents—in all levels of the ungraduated year of study—were not equal, the percentages of the respondents—in the five levels of GPA—turned out to be in similar percentages, except for those with GPA <2.00.

## **4. Findings**

The survey results were in three aspects: (1) Spaces and Places for Off-Campus ILS, (2) Reasons Why Off-Campus ILS are Used and (3) Reasons Why Off-Campus ILS are Not Used. The data on 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used' and 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used' were further analysed according to the two types of students' attributes: (a) GPA and (b) undergraduate levels (in freshmen, sophomores, juniors and senior years).

### **4.1. Spaces and places for off-campus ILS**

There were six spaces and places where students used as learning spaces outside the university campus. The top preference was 'Home/Dorm,' with 50.93%, as shown in Figure 1. The second preference was 'Cafés around the Main Campus,' which are located within 5 km around the university campus, with 20.14%. The third preference was 'Café and Coworking Spaces at Mega Bangna,' with 16.44%. Mega Bangna is located 27 km away from the campus. Mega Bangna is a super-regional mall with the total gross leasable areas (GLA) of 191,216 sq.m. (Siam Future Development Plc., 2017). The fourth preference was 'Café and Coworking Spaces at Siam Square,' with 7.18%. Siam Square is located 49 km away from the campus. It is a shopping and entertainment area, locating in the central business district of Bangkok. Siam Square area consists of many shopping arcades such as Siam Paragon (GLA = 300,000 sq.m.) (Gilani, 2017), Siam Discovery, Siam Center, MBK-Siam (GLA = 84,000 sq.m.) (Hotel.com, n.d.; MBK, 2017). The fifth group was those who had never studied outside the campus, with 3.24%. The last group was the other choices from the respondents who studied some places else, including friends' dorm and café/coworking spaces located in other areas of Bangkok, with 2.55%.

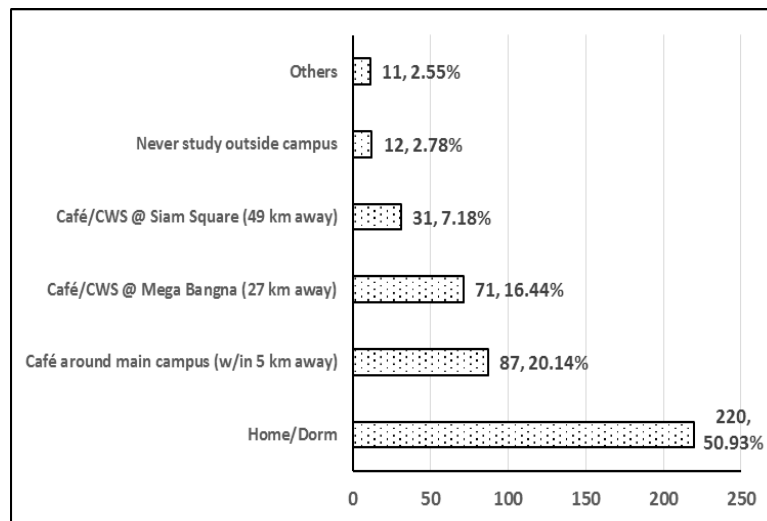


Figure 1. Spaces and places for off-campus ILS

#### 4.2. Reasons why off-campus ILS are used

There were several reasons why students study outside the university campus. The top three reasons were ‘Can Eat/Drink’ (19.10%), ‘Feel Relax/Refresh’ (15.32%) and ‘Can Talk/Discuss’ (12.79%), as seen in Figure 2. The other three reasons, with lower chosen percentages, were grouped as *Opening Time of ILS*, including ‘Open 24/7’, ‘Open Late Hours’ and ‘Open Sat/Sun,’ with 10.27%, 9.01% and 6.76%, respectively. The total percentages of these three reasons relating to *Opening Time* was 26.04%. The two reasons, ‘Can Talk/Discuss’ and ‘Social Interaction,’ were grouped and named as reasons relating to *Social Activities*, with the total of 18.29%. The rest of the reasons were about (a) *Distances from the Campus* (‘Close to Home/Dorm’ and ‘Close to Main Campus’), with the total percentages of 8.83%; (b) *Atmospheres of Learning Spaces* (‘Quiet’ and ‘Productive’), with the total of 8.65% and (c) *Supporting Facility* (‘Enough Plug Socket’), with 3.24%.

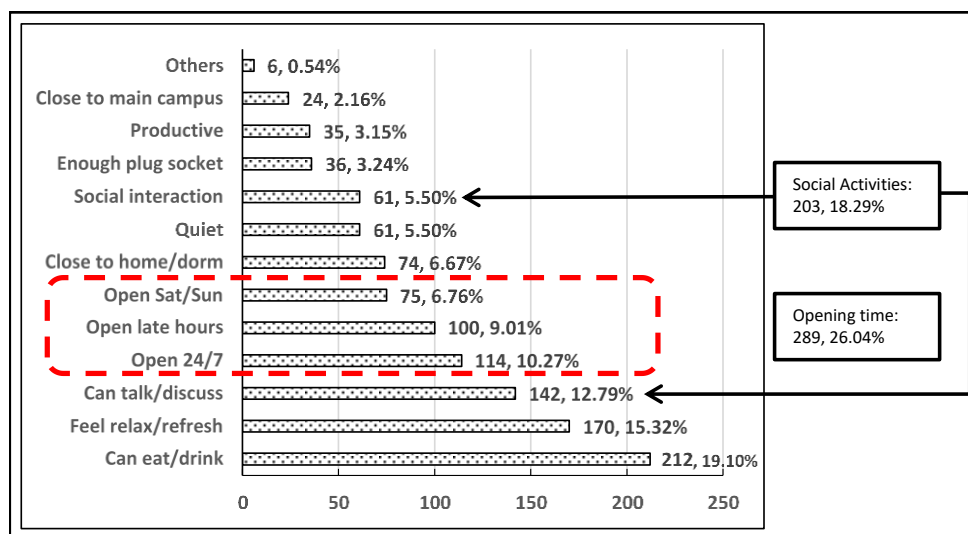


Figure 2. Reasons why off-campus ILS are used

The next step was to find whether students with different attributes have similar or different reasons ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used’. The data were further analysed according to two types of

students' attributes: (a) GPA, and (b) Undergraduate levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior and over senior years.)

**4.2.1. Analysis between why off-campus ILS are used and GPA**

The data from the answer 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used' were grouped according to GPA in five levels: students with GPA below 2.00 (<2.00), GPA between 2.00 and 2.50, GPA between 2.51 and 3.00, GPA between 3.01 and 3.50 and GPA more than 3.50. Then the data in each group were analysed by the descriptive analysis. The results of the analysis were plotted in five line graphs, as shown in Figure 3. The rankings of the reasons 'Why Off-Campus Are Used' were still similar to those in Figure 2. Line graphs in Figure 3 show that students with any levels of GPA had similar proportion of reasons 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used.'

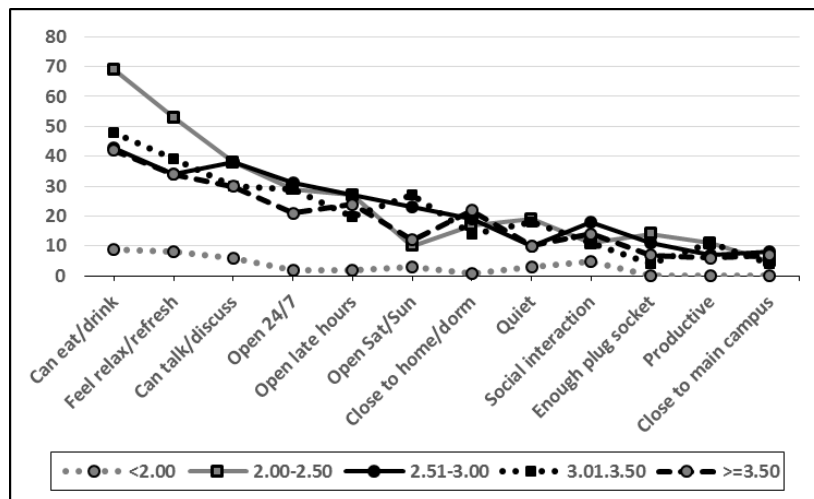


Figure 3. Why off-campus ILS are used, grouped by GPA

**4.2.2. Analysis between why off-campus ILS are used and undergraduate levels**

The data from the answer 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used' were grouped according to undergraduate levels in five groups: freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors and over-senior years. The next step, the data in each level were descriptively analysed. The analysis results were plotted in five line graphs, as shown in Figure 4. The rankings of the reasons 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used' in all five line graphs were still similar to those in Figures 2 and 3. In Figure 4, the results show that students with any undergraduate levels also had a similar proportion of reasons 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used.'

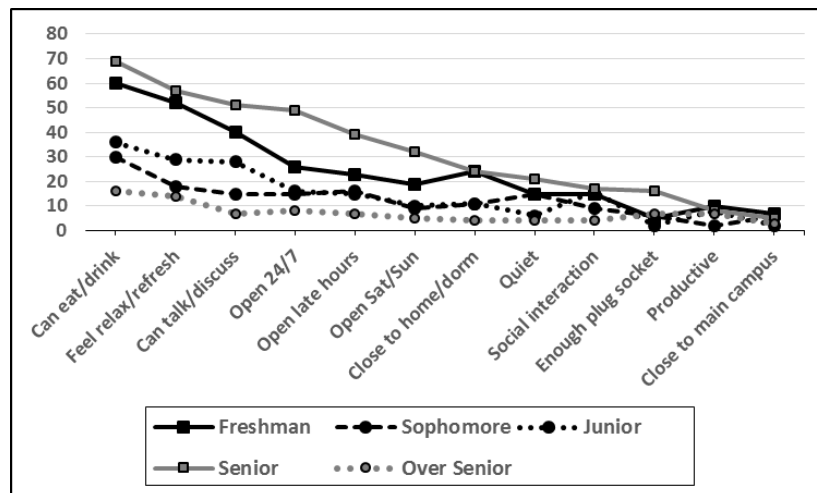


Figure 4. Why off-campus ILS are used, grouped by undergraduate levels

#### 4.3. Reasons why off-campus ILS are not used

There were several reasons why each of the respondents did not study outside of the university campus, as shown in Figure 5. The top most frequency reason was 'Cost Money' (23.79%). However, there were four factors relating to *Environment/Atmosphere* with the total of 40.47%, including 'Noisy/distraction' (20.09%), 'Impractical for studying' (8.15%), 'No Inspiration' (7.68%) and 'Uninspiring Design' (4.55%). The other reasons why students did NOT want to use off-campus ILS were about *location* and *study resources*: 'Inconvenient Location' (19.5%) and 'Study Resources not Available' (15.6%).

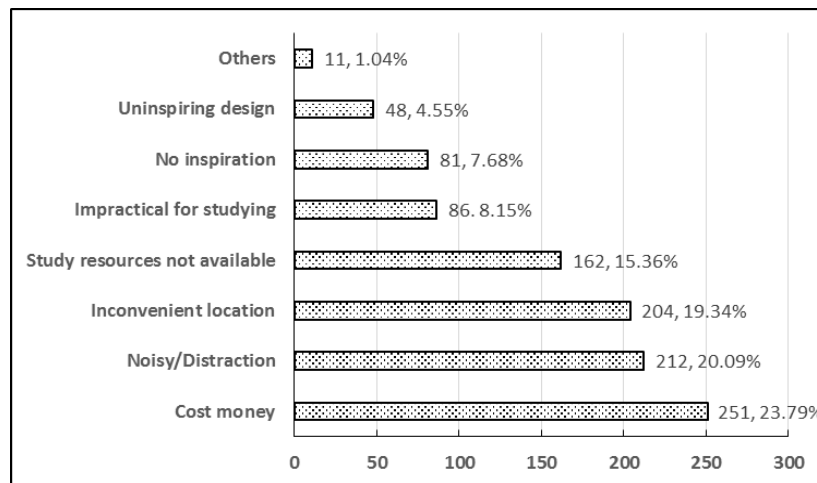


Figure 5. Why off-campus ILS are not used

The next step was to find whether students with different attributes have similar or different reasons 'Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used'. The data were further analysed according to the two types of students' attributes: (a) GPA and (b) undergraduate levels (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior and senior years).

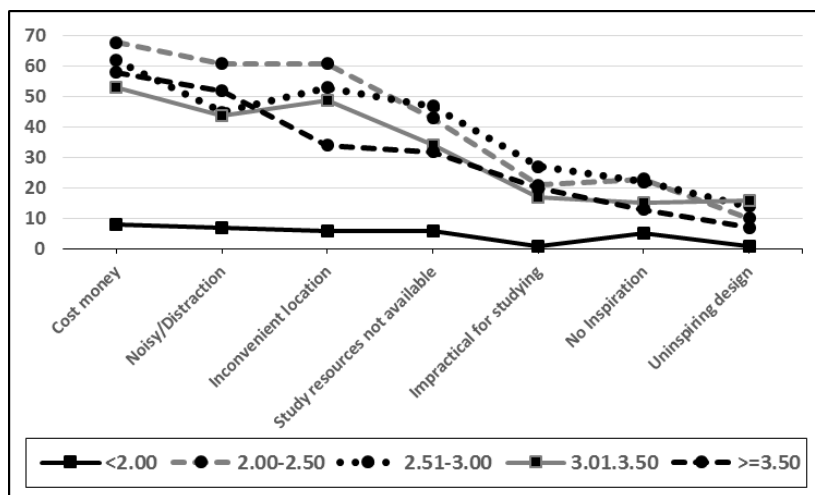


Figure 6. Why off-campus ILS are not used, grouped by GPA

#### 4.3.1. Analysis between why off-campus ILS are not used and GPA

The data from the answer ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used’ were grouped according to GPA in five levels, similar to those in Figure 3: students with GPA below 2.00 (<2.00), GPA between 2.00 and 2.50, GPA between 2.51 and 3.00, GPA between 3.01 and 3.50 and GPA more than 3.50. Then the data in each group were analysed by the descriptive analysis. The analysis results were plotted in five line graphs, as shown in Figure 6. The rankings of the reasons ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used’ were also still similar to those in Figure 5. Line graphs in Figure 6 show that students with any levels of GPA had similar proportions of reasons ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used.’

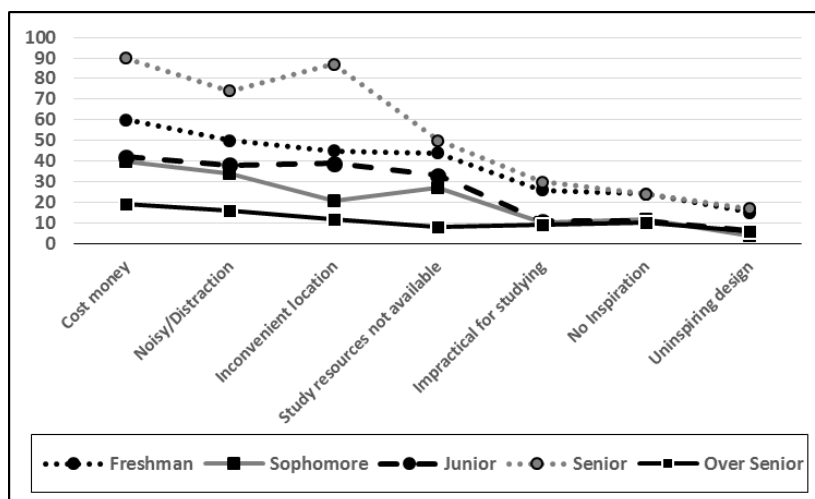


Figure 7. Why off-campus ILS are not used, grouped by undergraduate levels

#### 4.3.2. Analysis between why off-campus ILS are not used and undergraduate levels

The data from the answer ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used’ were then grouped according to undergraduate levels in five groups: freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors and over-seniors. Next, the data in each level were analysed by the descriptive analysis. The analysis results were plotted in five line graphs, as shown in Figure 7. The rankings of the reasons ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used’ in all five line graphs were also still similar to those in Figures 5 and 6. The results in Figure 7 shows that students with any undergraduate levels had similar proportions of reasons ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used.’



## 5. Discussions

The findings from the survey of where and *why off-campus ILS are used and not used*, in the above sections, reveal four interesting aspects as follows: (a) Characteristics of Preferred ILS, (b) Strengths and Weaknesses of On-Campus ILS, (c) GPA and Undergraduate Levels and Reasons Why Off-Campus Are Used or Not-Used and (d) Long Commute for Preferred ILS.

### 5.1. Characteristics of preferred off-campus ILS

The reasons why students chose to use off-campus ILS identify the characteristics of the top preferred off-campus ILS. These top preferred off-campus ILS are as follows: (1) Places that students can eat/drink, (2) places with environment that help them feel relax/refresh, (3) places that allow social activities and (4) places that have flexible opening hours. This finding is in similar to the findings of Vanichvatana (2018a). The preferences/positive-impressions of ILS were based on the environment more than based on facilities/equipment.

On the other hand, the top reasons why students did not choose to use off-campus ILS were about (1) location of off-campus ILS and (2) the availability of facilities/equipment. The lower reasons were about environment, such as uninspiring design. These results are similar to previous research findings (Harrop & Turpin, 2013; Vanichvatana, 2018a). The negative impressions about off-campus ILS are based on location and facilities/equipment more than environment.

### 5.2. Strengths and weaknesses of on-campus ILS

The reasons why students did not use off-campus ILS *reflect* the strengths of on-campus ILS. On the other hand, the reasons why students used off-campus ILS *reflect* the weaknesses of on-campus ILS. The following sections reveal the details of the strengths and weaknesses of on-campus ILS:

*The strengths* of on-campus ILS—when comparing to off-campus ILS—include: (1) it is free of charge, (2) it has proper learning environments and atmosphere, (3) it is convenient in terms of location—it is right there on the campus and (4) it is usually equipped with free Wi-Fi/PC, and supporting furniture.

*The weaknesses* of on-campus ILS—when compared to off-campus ILS—include: (1) On-campus ILS—such as libraries and other common areas—its opening hours are limited, not open late, not 24/7, not open on weekend, (2) On-campus ILS does not allow social activities, including discussion spaces and social interactions, (3) On-campus ILS—such as libraries—should allow food and drink. However, there is a caution about the improper handle of food debris, and (4) On-campus ILS should provide enough comfortable furniture, such as comfortable chairs and flexible desk, and quality Wi-Fi and plug sockets.

### 5.3. GPA and undergraduate levels

Students with different attributes, in terms of GPA and undergraduate levels, have similar proportions of reasons in both analysis of ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Used’ and ‘Why Off-Campus ILS Are Not Used’.

### 5.4. Long commute for preferred ILS

The majority of the respondents chose to study off-campus at Home/Dorm and Café around the campus—with the total percentages of 71.07%. However, there were 23.62% of the respondents who chose to commute very far away—27 km (16.44%) to 49 km (7.18%)—from the campus to study off-campus at their preferred ILS. This finding is very amazing and very interesting to further research exploration.

## 6. Conclusions

This research studied where students used off-campus ILS and why they selected them or not. The study was through a case study of a BPU's business school students, through quantitative questionnaire surveys, with descriptive analysis. The results do reflect the strengths and weaknesses of on-campus ILS. The proportion of preferences for each off-campus ILS of students are in similar, no matter which levels of study performances (in term of GPA), and which year of study. The study points out that universities should increase and improve ILS to support students' informal learning base on their preferences, including more flexible opening hours and ILS that allow more social activities.

## 7. Limitations and further studies

The data for the research were from a case study of business school students at a BPU. The findings reveal students' preferences specifically to this case study. This research leads to future studies including: (a) what types of students' learning activities by using off-campus ILS, such as individual projects, assignments/homework, studying for quizzes/exams, term projects/team projects and group discussions and (b) the advantages of ILS in CBD over ILS around the campus.

## References

- Bodnar, J. (2009). Information and learning commons, faculty and student benefits. *New Library World*, 110(9/10), 403–409.
- Butler, K. (2008). *Works Well with Others*. Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/01/practical-values-works-well-others/>
- Bennett, S. (2006). First questions for designing higher education learning spaces. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(1), 14–26.
- Dugdale, S. (2009). *Space strategies for the new learning landscape*. Retrieved from [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/234747657\\_Space\\_Strategies\\_for\\_the\\_New\\_Learning\\_Landscape](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/234747657_Space_Strategies_for_the_New_Learning_Landscape)
- Gilani, S. (2017). *10 Largest malls in the world*. Retrieved from <http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/10-largest-malls-world-syed-gilani>
- Hall, R. (2009). Towards a fusion of formal and informal learning environments: the impact of the read/write web. *Electronic Journal of e-Journal*, 7(1), 29–40. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ867100.pdf>
- Harrop, D. & Turpin, B. (2013). A study exploring learners' informal learning space behaviors, attitudes, and preferences. *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, 19, 58–77.
- Hotel.com. (n.d.). *Siam square Bangkok*. Bangkok.com. Retrieved from <http://www.bangkok.com/siam-ratchadamri/siam-square-review.htm>
- Humter, J. & Cox, A. (2014). Learning over tea! Studying in informal learning spaces. *New Library World*, 115(1/2), 34–50.
- Kio, S. L. & Negreiros, J. (2013). *Facebook as an informal learning space channel: the Sao Jose, Macao case*. Proceedings of Learning and Teaching in Computing and Engineering (LaTiCE), on (pp. 70–76). IEEE.
- Lippincott, J. K. (2010). Linking the Information Commons to Learning. In D. J. Oblinger (Ed.), *Learning Spaces* (pp. 7.1–7.18). Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE.
- MBK. (2017). *Key Performance 12M/2017*. Retrieved from <http://setlive.thailivestream.com/data-file/events/pdf/270318155709-Oppday-MBK.pdf>
- Middleton, A. (2018). *Reimagining spaces for learning in higher education* (1st ed.). Macmillan International Higher Education. New York, NY: Red Globe Press.
- Park, Y. (2011). Blogging for informal learning: analyzing bloggers' perceptions using learning perspective. *Educational Technology & Society*, 14(2), 149–160. Retrieved from [http://www.ifets.infor/journals/14\\_2/13.pdf](http://www.ifets.infor/journals/14_2/13.pdf)

Vanichvatana, S. (2019). Off-campus informal learning spaces selection: A Bangkok private university case study. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 6(4), pp 017-027. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Riddle, M. & Souter, K. (2012). Designing informal learning spaces using student perspectives. *Journal of Learning Spaces*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/jls/article/view/282>

Siam Future Development Plc. (2017). *Details of operating projects*. Investor Relations. Retrieved from [http://investor.siamfuture.com/operating\\_projects.html](http://investor.siamfuture.com/operating_projects.html)

Spreitzer, G., Bacevice, P. & Garrett, L. (2015). *Why people thrive in coworking spaces*. Harvard Business Review Blog. Retrieved from <http://hbr.org/2015/05/why-people-thrive-in-coworking-spaces>

Vanichvatana, S. (2018a). Informal learning spaces for undergraduate business school: a Bangkok private universities case study. *Journal of Engineering Science and Technology*, Special Issue on i-CITE 2018, November (2018), 71–79.

Vanichvatana, S. (2018b). Investigating users' perspectives of coworking space: cases of Bangkok CBD. *Chinese Business Review*, 17(9), 465–478.

Vondracek, R. (2007). Comfort and convenience? Why students' choose alternatives to the library. *Libraries and the Academy*, 7(3) 277–293.

Waxman, L. (2006). The coffee shop: social and physical factors influencing place attachment. *Journal of Interior Design*, 31(3), 35–53.