# Who uses home as informal learning spaces: A Bangkok private university case study

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## Abstract

Home is one type of off-campus informal learning spaces (ILS). It is important to understand the behaviours of students that use home as ILS. Such information will enlighten universities to provide/improve proper on-campus ILS and/or other academic supports. This research used a quantitative approach through online questionnaire survey during February 2019. The study took business students at a Bangkok private university as a case study. The descriptive analysis was done according to students' grade point average (GPA) and undergraduate levels. The results revealed how and why students, especially those with different levels of GPA, chose to study at home. This study also suggests how higher education institutions (HEI) can support ILS to students who *do not* study at home. Students with different GPA levels should be supported from HEI differently.

Keywords: HEI, home, grade point averages, learning spaces, Bangkok.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rational

Home or residence is not only one of the basic needs essential for human life. In education, home is one important type of study spaces. Informal learning spaces (ILS) consist of both on-campus and off-campus. Higher education institutions (HEI) have their obligations to provide property ILS which consist of spaces outside scheduled lecture classrooms. However, not all HEI can accommodate proper on-campus ILS which are suitable to students' preferences and schedule. This is because each student chooses learning spaces to fit each own characteristics and preferences (Sfard, 1998) besides the interaction of space and the availability of learning modes (Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor & Trevitt, 2000; Lippman, 2010). In addition, students can choose to use off-campus ILS to support their studies. One important type of such off-campus ILS is *home/residence*. However, from many past research results, there were many undergraduate students who chose to study off-campus elsewhere rather than home. It is interesting to find out the behaviours of undergraduate students who use the home as ILS, in terms of types of learning activities at home, the periods to study at home during a semester, and the reasons why students study or do not study at home. The following parts discuss the backgrounds of this study: (1) informal learning spaces for HEI and (2) using the home as ILS.

### 1.1.1. Informal learning spaces for HEI

There are many types of ILS, both on-campus and off-campus, including: (a) University Libraries, (b) Coworking Spaces and Café, (c) Home and (d) Others. First, there have been many past research exploring the moving functions of University Libraries towards social dimensions of learning (Kumar & Bhatt, 2015; Sullivan, 2010; Walton & Matthews 2013). Rather than the traditional mode as a place to preserve and distribute the physical forms of resources, libraries have become places to support group works and socialisation (Larsen, 2010). Wide rages of learning activities that can be taken places in a university library include review during exams, complete assignments and course work, meet with colleagues and friends and conduct dissertation (Cunningham & Walton, 2015). Secondly, *Coworking Space and Café* are social learning spaces which allow students for active learning and social interaction (Kumar & Bhatt, 2015). 'Coworking Space', an increasing popular ILS, is a shared workspace where different groups of freelancers, remote workers and other independent professionals work together (Butler, 2008; Spreitzer, Bacevice & Garrett, 2015). Vanichvatana (2018b) found that the majority of coworking spaces' users were students, while the rest were those who worked in various occupations (advertisement, designer, information technology, marketing and salesperson). Unlike in a typical office environment, those coworking are usually not employed by the same organisation (Foertsch, 2013). The top frequencies usages of coworking spaces were for group discussions and term/team projects (Vanichvatana, 2018b). *Café (including catering outlet)*, especially off-campus ones, is a type of ILS (Hunter & Cox 2014; Waxman 2006). This type of spaces allows learners to study with or without requirements to purchase food. Some of these catering outlets provide access to a small number of PCs and can be sued as a learning space without any requirement to purchase food. Besides off-campus café, there is an on-campus café at La Trobe University where under-unitized spaces were converted to become ILS with café-style ambiance for a group and private studies (Riddle & Souter 2012). Besides social learning spaces, Home is one classic off-campus ILS.

### 1.2. Using home as ILS

Home is one type of off-campus ILS. It has been typically used for many types of learning activities by many students, including those at HEI. Home/Dorm is a highly preferred type of ILS, especially when students work alone on their learning activities (Vanichvatana, 2018a). In contrast, some past research stated that learners found it was difficult to study at home (Harrop & Turpin, 2013). Among many types of learning activities, the home has been mentioned by some research that it was not regularly chosen as a place suitable for teamwork activities (Harrop & Turpin, 2013). Vanichvatana

(2018a) identified that studying at home/dorm was more feasible with the support of virtual/digital spaces. Home/dorm possesses several drawbacks to use as off-campus ILS. Students normally feel distraction to work on learning activities at home because of a comfortable atmosphere.

Home has been perceived as one often used as off-campus ILS. However, there are many past research explored how undergraduate students studying off-campus at many other types of ILS rather than home. It is interesting to understand how students use the home as ILS, in terms of students' behaviours, favourable factors and unfavourable ones. The understanding of these factors might reflect the drawback of on-campus ILS. These information can be able to enlighten universities to provide and improve their on-campus ILS to meet the needs of students.

The *objectives* of this research were to how students use one of their basic needs, *home/residence*, as a part of off-campus ILS. The aims of this study were to explore about: (a) types of learning activities that undergraduate students did at home, (b) the period to study at home during a semester and (c) the reasons why students studied at home, and why not. The analysis was based on students with different academic attributes, including grade point averages (GPA) and undergraduate levels. The ultimate expectation of this research was that the results could help HEI to support their students' learning at home. The *scope* of this study took undergraduate students, studying at the business school of a Bangkok private university in Thailand, as a case study.

## 2. Methodology

The research method was through quantitative analysis, using online questionnaire surveys. The data were analysed by using descriptive analysis. The surveys were conducted on students who studied at a business school of a Bangkok private university. This university is an international college where the majority of the students are Thai, around 85% of the population, and the rest were from more than 80 countries. The teaching and learning uses English as a medium of instruction. The total number of students who attended this business school was approximately 6,000 students. This university locates at the far eastern side of Bangkok. The surveys took place during February 2019.

### 2.1. Questionnaire

The questions and answer choices on the survey were from the background reviews. The main part of the questionnaire consists of four questions, as shown in the four parts of the 'Results' section. The questionnaires were developed by using an online survey application, namely, Google Form Application. The QR-code of this online survey was created and distributed to the four undergraduate levels: freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Four required business core courses were selected for the sampling surveys. Each of these four courses is a mandatory course for each undergraduate level.

### 2.2. Data

There were a total of 500 respondents from the online surveys. The data consist of 131 freshmen (26.2%), 160 sophomores (32%), 84 juniors (16.8%) and 125 seniors and over-seniors (25%), as shown in Figure 1. As in the aspects of GPA, these data consist of the following proportions: less than 2.00 (4.8%, 24), 2.00–2.50 (24%, 120), 2.51–3.00 (30%, 150), 3.01–3.50 (23.6%, 118) and more than 3.50 (17.6%, 88). Figure 2 shows these proportions. The outcomes from the descriptive analysis are presented in the 'Results' section.
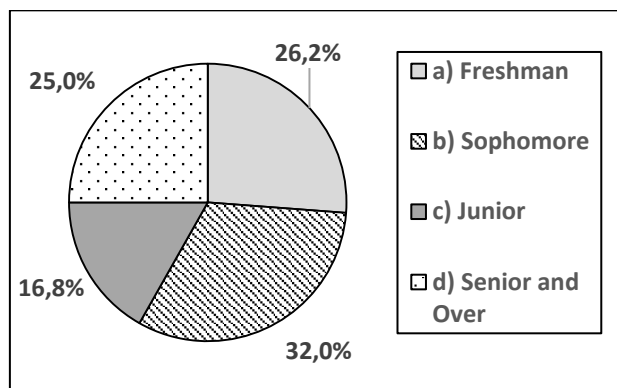
**Figure 1. The proportions of the respondents in the aspect of undergraduate levels**
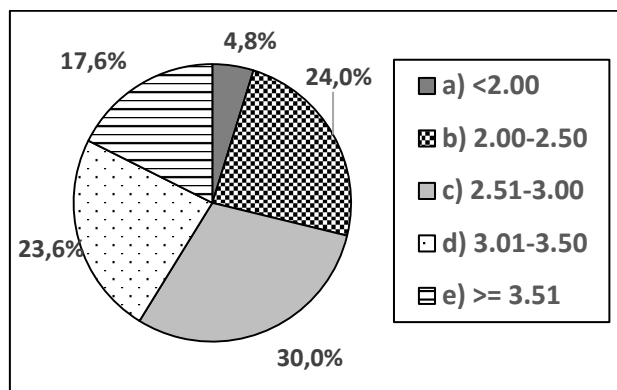


**Figure 2. The proportions of the respondents in the aspect of GDP**

## 3. Results

The results from the online surveys consist of the four main questions as follows (1) What types of 'Learning Activity' do you normally study at home/dorm/apartment?, (2) Which 'Period' a semester do you normally study at home?, (3) What is the reason(s) student 'Choose' to study at home? and (4) What is the reason(s) student 'Do Not Choose' to study at home? The data were analyzed through descriptive analysis based on two types of students' attributes: grade point average (GPA) and undergraduate levels. GPA is divided into five segments: (a) below 2.00, (b) 2.01–2.50, (c) 2.51–3.00, (d) 3.01–3.50 and (e) above 3.50. Undergraduate levels consist of four levels: (a) freshmen, (b) sophomores, (c) juniors and (d) seniors and above.

Question #1: What type(s) of 'Learning Activity' do you normally study at home/dorm/apartment, choose all applied?

There were five choices of learning activities for this question. The numbers of responds and the percentages of each choice are listed from high to low as follows: Assignments (328, 65.6%), Exam/Quiz (269, 53.8%), Term Project, (248, 49.6%), Individual project (235, 47.0%) and others (1, 0.20%). About half of the respondents did 'term project' at home. The percentages of studying term project at home are according to the previous study (Vanichvatana, 2018a).

The data were then further analyzed based on GPA and undergraduate levels. Figure 3 shows the analysis based on GPA. It can be seen that the lines—representing the three learning activities of 'Assignment', 'Exam/Quiz' and 'Term Project'—fluctuate ups and downs among the five levels of GPA. The line of 'Individual project' increases from 21% to 66% in GPA of <2.00 to >3.50, respectively.
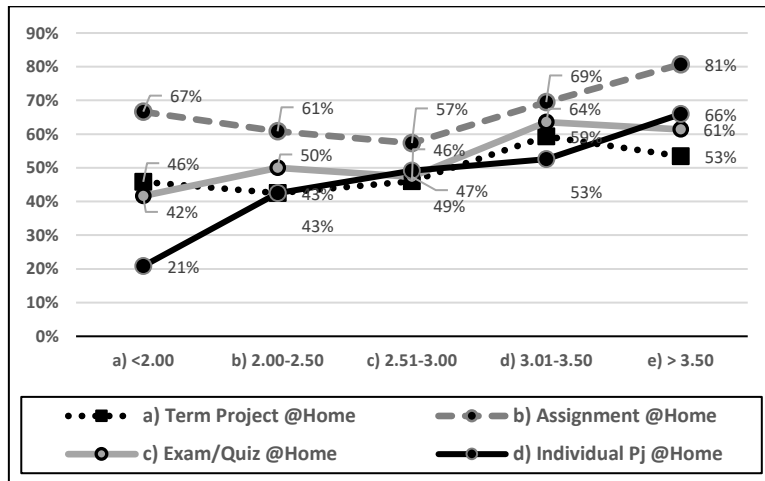
**Figure 3. Types of learning activities performed at home, based on GPA**

The data analysis based on four levels of undergraduate levels is shown in Figure 4. The four lines in the chart, representing four types of learning activities, are ups and downs among the four points of undergraduate levels.
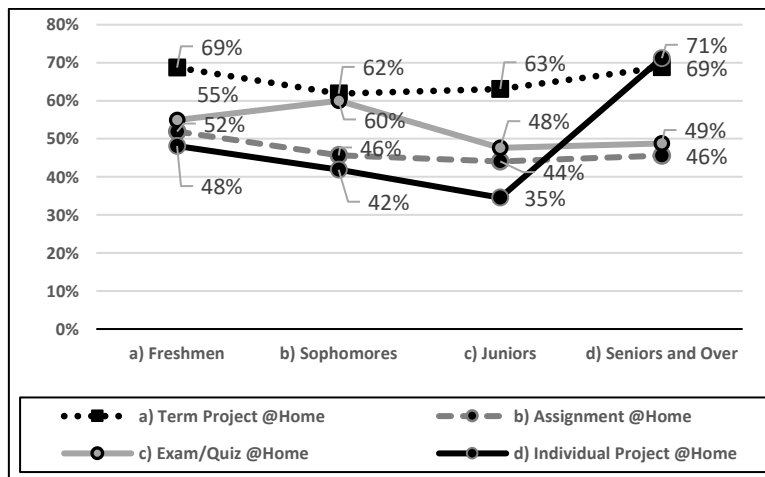


**Figure 4. Types of learning activities performed at home, based on undergraduate levels**

Question #2: Which 'Period(s)' during a semester do you normally study at home?

There were five choices of periods to study at home: (a) never study at home, (b) the whole semester, (c) between classes, (d) before quiz and (e) before/during midterm/final. The numbers of responds and the percentages of each choice are listed from high to low as follows: 'before/during midterm/final' (357, 71%), 'before quiz' (309, 62%), 'the whole semester' (138, 28%), 'between classes' (137, 27%) and 'never study at home' (37, 7%).

The line chart in Figure 5, the two top lines of 'before/during midterm/final' and 'before quiz' are gradually upward—from the lowest GPA range (of below 2.00) to the highest GPA (of more than 3.50). For example, for 'before/during midterm/final' line, the percentage of students with GPA lower than 2.00 equals to 67%, while the percentage of those with GPA higher than 3.50 equals to 78%. For 'before quiz' line, the percentage of students with GPA lower than 2.00 equals to 54%, while the percentage of those with GPA higher than 3.50 equals to 72%.

The bottom line in Figure 5 represents 'Never study at home' choice. It shows that students with the higher GPA, the lower percentages they responded on this choice. That is, the percentage of students with GPA lower than 2.00 equals to 17%, while the percentage of students with GPA higher than 3.50 equals to 2%.
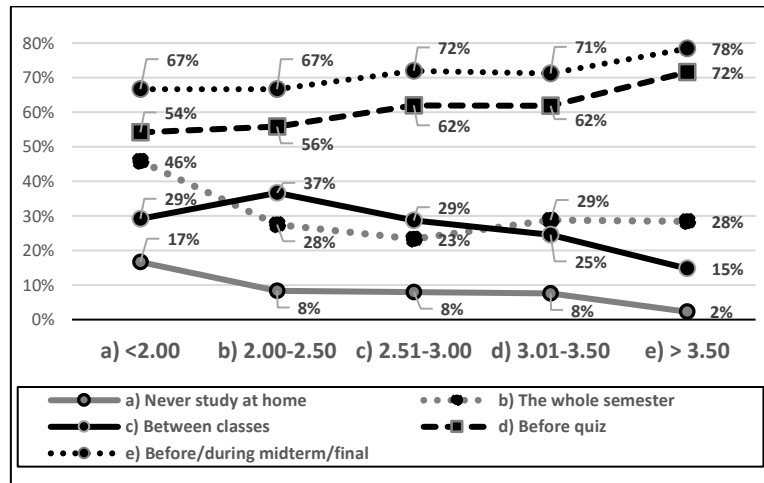


**Figure 5. Period of a semester studying at home, based on GPA**

The data analysis based on four levels of undergraduate levels is shown in Figure 6. The five lines, representing the five choices of periods during a semester, are ups and downs among the four points of undergraduate levels.
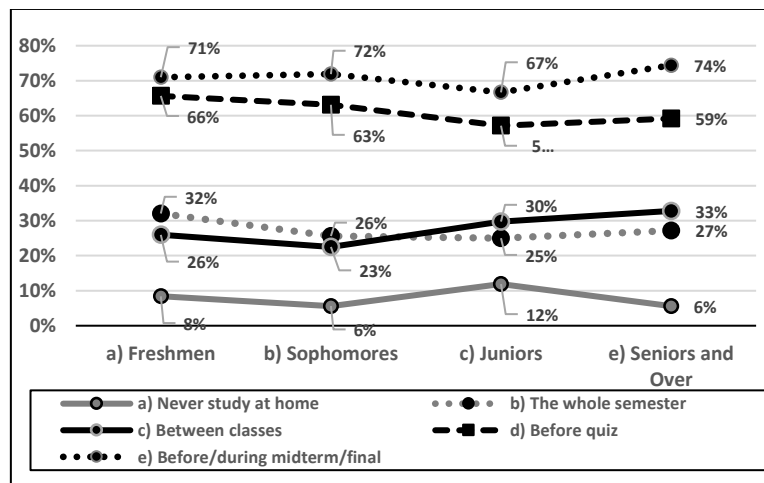


**Figure 6. Period of a semester studying at home, based on undergraduate levels**

Question #3: What Is the Reason(s) Students Choose to Study at Home?

The respondents reflected the frequencies and percentages of the *Reasons Students Choose to Study at Home* as: 'a) Productive' (113, 22%), 'b) No need to travel' (151, 29%), 'c) Quiet' (265, 53%), 'd) Feel relax/refresh' (276, 55%) and 'e) Can study anytime' (330, 68%). The data in each category ((a) to (e)) were then analysed based on GPA (in five levels of GPA) and on undergraduate levels (in four levels). The analysis results based on GPA are shown in the five lines in Figure 7. Each entire line goes ups and downs and all five lines have no common linearity direction.

However, there is a common upward trend when examining only the portion of the four lines between the GPA of '2.50–3.00' point and '>3.50' point, as shown inside the square-dotted rounded-

rectangle of Figure 7. These four lines represent 'a) productive', 'b) no need to travel', 'c) quiet', and 'e) can study anytime'.
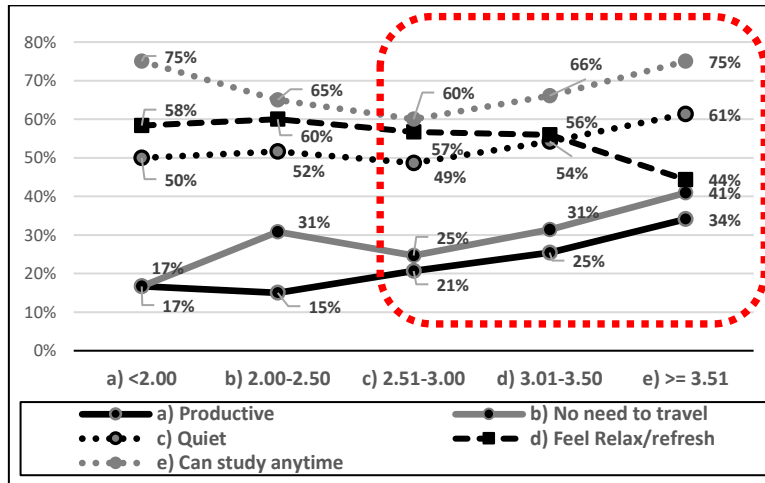


**Figure 7. Reasons why students 'choose' to study at home, based on GPA**

The data analysis based on four levels of undergraduate levels is shown in Figure 8. The five line charts, representing five types of reasons why students chose to study at home, are ups and downs among the four points of undergraduate levels.
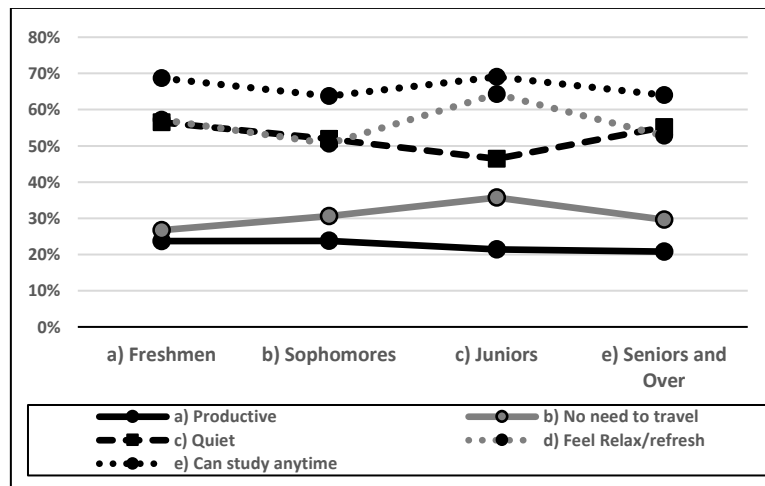


**Figure 8. Reasons why students 'choose' to study at home, based on undergraduate levels**

Question #4: What Is the Reason(s) Students 'Do Not' Choose to Study at Home/Dorm/Apartment?

The respondents reflected the frequencies and percentages of the *Reasons Why Students Do Not Choose to Study at Home* as: 'a) Impractical to study at home' (92, 18%), 'b) Study resources not available' (132, 26%), 'c) Need to study with friends' (200, 40%) and 'd) No inspiration' (246, 49%). The data in each category ((a) to (d) were then analysed based on GPA (in five levels of GPA) and on undergraduate levels (in four levels). The analysis results based on GPA are shown in the four lines in Figure 9. Only two lines are in the same downward direction, 'b) Study resources not available' and 'c) Need to study with friends'.
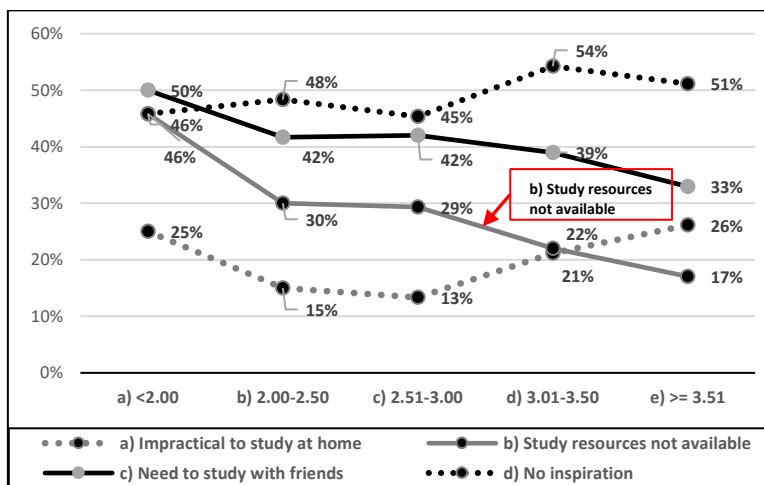
**Figure 9. Reasons why students 'do not choose' to study at home, based on GPA**

The analysis results based on undergraduate levels are shown in the four lines in Figure 10. The top line representing 'd) no inspiration' is in upward direction. The bottom line representing 'a) impractical to study at home' is in downward direction. The other two lines are ups and downs with no common direction.
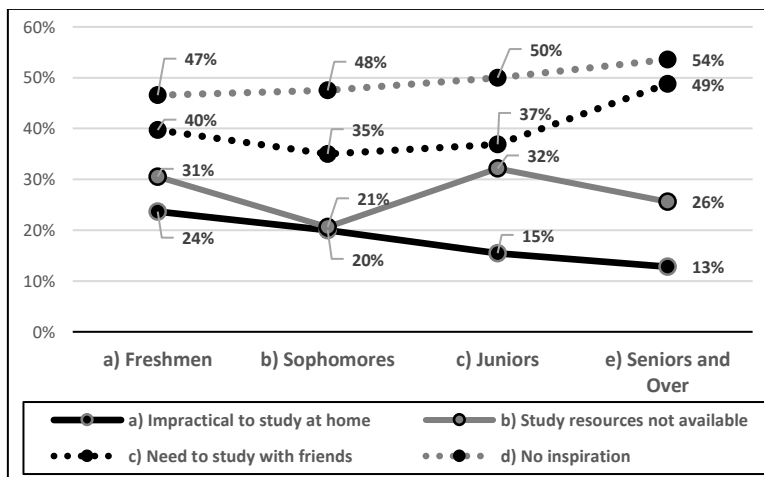


**Figure 10. Reasons why students 'do not choose' to study at home, based on undergraduate levels**

## 4. Discussions

The findings from the online in the above sections reveal four interesting aspects as follows: (a) the Characteristics of Student Who Study at Home, (b) the Reasons Why Students Study at Home or Not, (c) Students' Attributes: GPA versus Undergraduate Levels, (d) Who Uses Home as ILS? and (e) How Can HEI support Students from the Results?

### 4.1. The characteristics of students who study at home

### 4.1.1. The number of students studying at home

The results show that the majority of students studied at home. There were only 7% who responded that they 'never study at home', from Question 2. Also, the higher the GPA, the lesser percentages of students 'Never study at home', shows in Figure 5. Students with GPA '< 2.00' group have more percentages of never study at home more than the other GPA groups. From Question 1—

Figure 3, for all *four* types of learning activities, about half and more of students responded that they conducted each of these learning activities at home.

### 4.1.2. The time students studying at home
Students studied at home for major exams the most, followed by quizzes, as seen from Question 2. Students with higher GPA conducted many types of learning activities at home more than the lower GPA groups. There were more number of student with higher GPA who studied before the major and minor than those who had lower GPA, as seen in Figure 5. Students with higher GPA (2.51 and above) study 'Before/during midterm/final' and 'Before quiz' more than the others.

### 4.2. The reasons why students study at home or not

### 4.2.1. Reasons why students study at home
The reason of 'can study anytime' is the highest chosen to support why students study at home, followed by 'feel relax/refresh', 'quiet', 'no need to travel' and 'productive', respectively. Students with higher GPA than 2.50 seem to be more positive trend to study at home than the other side. The responds from the three groups of students with GPA above 2.50 (2.51–3.00, 3.01–3.50, >3.50), the higher the GPA, the higher percentages of they responded on the four reasons, except for 'feel relax/refresh'. These four reasons are 'can study anytime', 'quiet', 'no need to travel' and 'productive'. Such percentages are reasonable. Students with high GPA, who also use the home as an ILS besides a resting place, might feel studying home is less relax and refresh than other choices.

### 4.2.2. Reasons why students do not study at home
Among the four reasons why students do not study at home, there are two reasons that are explainable: 'need to study with friends' and 'study resources not available'. From Figure 9, students with higher GPA showed lower response on 'Study resources not available' and 'Need to study with friends'. That is, the higher the students possessed, the lower respondent percentages. Students with higher GPA seem to be more independent to study alone and less rely on study resources than the lower GPA groups. In other words, students with high academic performances tend to have less excuses why they do not study at home.

### 4.3. Students' attributes: GPA versus undergraduate levels

The analysis based on GPA shows meaningful results in every question, as seen in Figures 3, 5, 7 and 9. In contrast, the analysis based on undergraduate levels does not show any meaningful results in all questions, as seen in Figures 4, 6, 8 and 10.

### 4.4. Who uses home as ILS?

It is very interesting to find that the majority of the respondents used the home as ILS, however differently based on GPA. Students with higher GPA study at home on more types of learning activities, especially on the major and minor exams than those with the lower GPA. Students with higher GPA also showed higher positive percentages on many reasons to study at home and less dependence on studying with friends and studying resources. These findings reflect some aspects on how students who achieve high academic performances, like GPA, worked on their learning activities.

### 4.5. How can HEI support students from the results?

This research started with the ultimate aim how HEI can use the results to support their students' learning at home. The results, however, twist such aim into: '*how HEI can support their students who do not study at home*'. This is because students who showed that they normally studied at home were high GPA students who less depended on others and study resources. On the other hand, students

who normally did not study at home were students with low GPA who more depended on friends and study resources.

First, there are a number of students who do many types of learning activities elsewhere but not home. These activities include 'term project' and 'individual project'. These two types of learning activities required social spaces, where HEI should properly support to students. Secondly, there are many students who do not study the major and/or minor exams at home. HEI should provide study and review spaces during exam periods, for example, extending library opening hours to midnight or 24/7. Last, from the results of why students study at home, HEI should provide ILS that: separate ILS into 'quiet' zone and 'social discussions' zone, have flexible opening hours, allow food and refreshment, and should be equipped with proper study resources.

## 5. Conclusion

This research answered 'who used home as ILS'. It reached its objectives by providing the results that explained *how* and *why* students, especially those with different levels of GPA, chose to study at home. The results reflected the characteristics of students who used the home as ILS. Students with different GPA showed different ways and reasons to study at home. The results strengthened the study-characteristics of students who achieve high academic performances, like GPA. This study also suggests how HEI can support ILS to students who *do not* study at home. That is, students with different GPA groups should be supported differently.

## 6. Limitations and further study

The data for research were from a case study of business school students at a Bangkok private university. The findings reveal students' preferences specifically to this case study. This research leads to future studies including: there should be similar studies to by using students at public universities and students at other private universities—to reconfirm or contradict with these research results.

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