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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 who 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 an online questionnaire survey during February 2019. This study used business students at a Bangkok private university as a case study. The descriptive analysis was done according to students' cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and undergraduate levels. The results revealed how and why students, especially those with different levels of CGPA, chose to study at home. This study also suggests how higher education institution (HEI) can support ILS to students who *do not* study at home. Students with different CGPA levels should be supported by HEI differently.

Keywords: Cumulative grade point average, higher education institution, home, informal learning spaces, learning spaces.

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1. Introduction

Home or residence is not only one of the basic needs essential for human life but also one important type of study spaces for education. 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 suitable for students' preferences and schedules. 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 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) ILS for HEI and (2) using home as ILS.

ILS for HEI: There are many types of ILS, both on-campus and off-campus, including (a) university libraries, (b) coworking spaces and cafe, (c) home and (d) others. Firstly, 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 place 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 cafe* 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, whereas 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). *Cafe (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 cafe, there is an on-campus cafe at La Trobe University where under-unitised spaces were converted to become ILS with cafe-style ambiance for a group and private studies (Riddle & Souter, 2012). Besides social learning spaces, home is one classic off-campus ILS.

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, 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 a 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 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 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 cumulative grade point averages (CGPA) 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 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. Teaching and learning use 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 were taken place during February 2019.**

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 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.

Data: There was a total of 500 respondents from the online surveys. The data consist of 131 freshman (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 CGPA, 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.

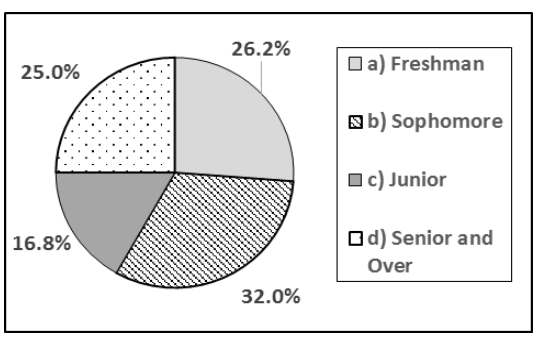

Figure 1. The proportions of the respondents in the aspect of undergraduate levels

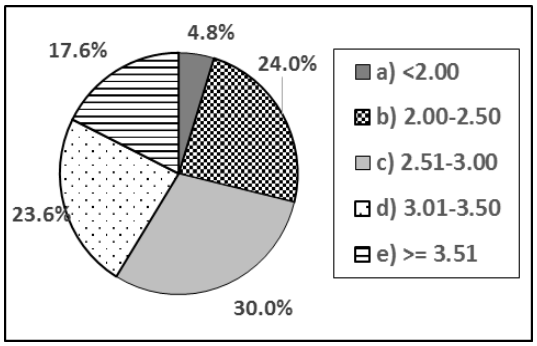

Figure 2. The proportions of the respondents in the aspect of GDP

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 analysed through descriptive analysis based on two types of students' attributes: CGPA and undergraduate levels. CGPA 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 response 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 analysed based on CGPA and undergraduate levels. Figure 3 shows the analysis based on CGPA. It can be seen that the lines – representing the three learning activities of 'Assignment', 'Exam/Quiz' and 'Term Project' – are fluctuating ups and downs among the five levels of CGPA. The line of 'Individual project' increases from 21% to 66% in CGPA of <2.00 to >3.50, respectively.

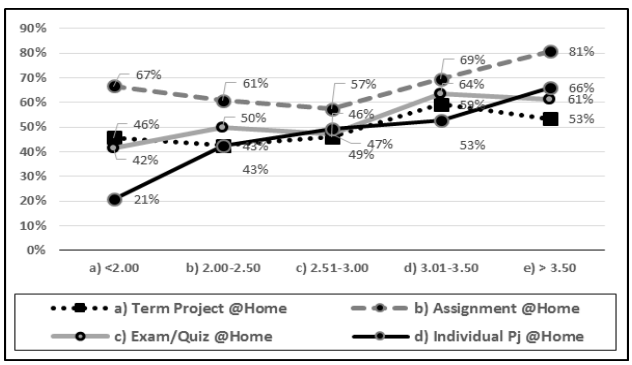

Figure 3. Types of learning activities performed at home based on CGPA

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.

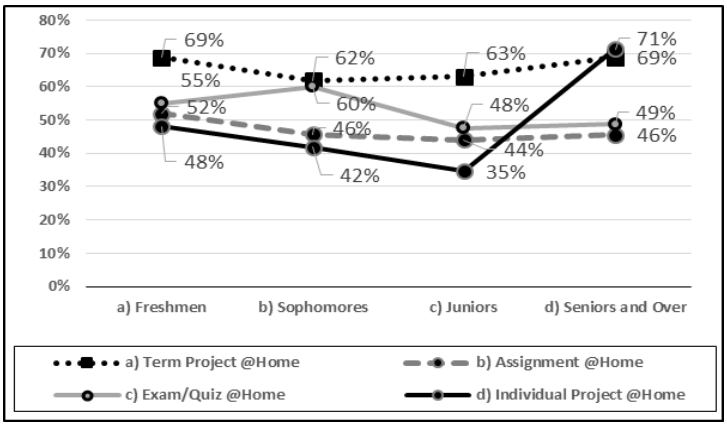

Figure 4. Types of learning activities performed at home based on undergraduate levels

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 response 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 shows that the two top lines of 'before/during midterm/final' and 'before quiz' are gradually upward – from the lowest CGPA range (of below 2.00) to the highest CGPA (of more than 3.50). For example, for 'before/during midterm/final' line, the percentage of students with CGPA lower than 2.00 equals 67%, whereas the percentage of those with CGPA higher than 3.50 equals 78%. For 'before quiz' line, the percentage of students with CGPA lower than 2.00 equals 54%, whereas the percentage of those with CGPA higher than 3.50 equals 72%.

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

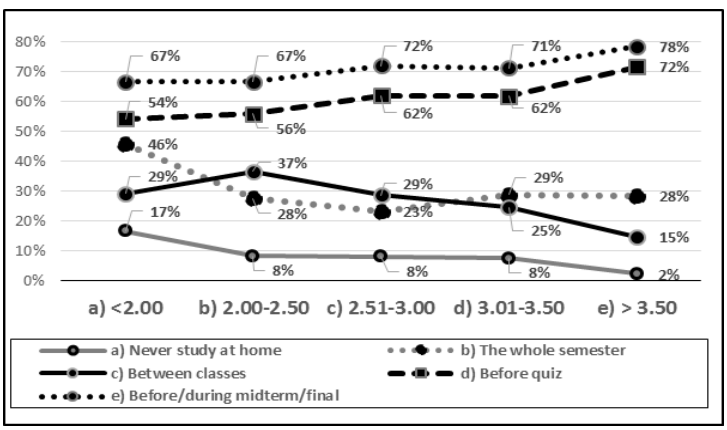

Figure 5. Period of a semester studying at home based on CGPA

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.

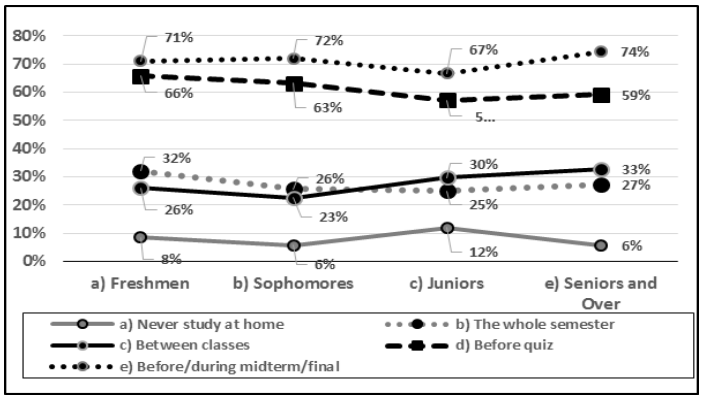

Figure 6. Period of a semester studying at home based on the undergraduate level

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)–(e)) were then analysed based on CGPA (in five levels of CGPA) and on undergraduate levels (in four levels). The analysis results based on CGPA 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 common upward trend, when examining only the portion of the four lines between the CGPA of '2.50–3.00' point and '>3.50' point, as shown inside the square-doted rounded-rectangle of Figure 7. These four lines represent 'a) productive', 'b) no need to travel', 'c) quiet' and 'e) can study anytime'.

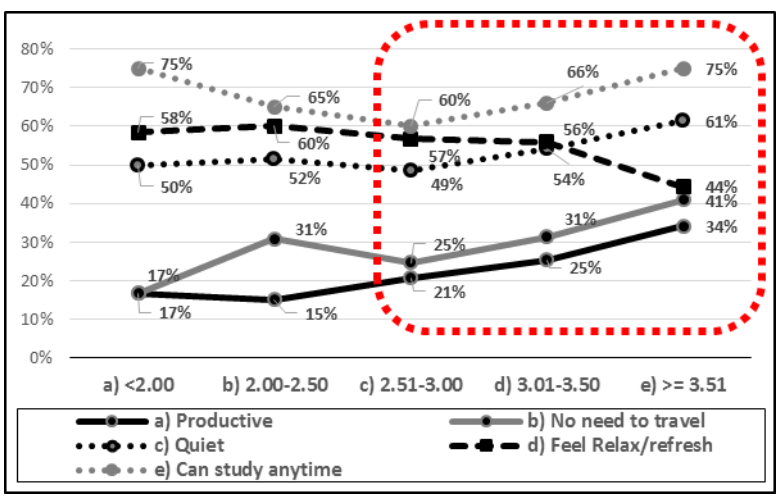

Figure 7. Reasons why students 'choose' to study at home based on CGPA

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.

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

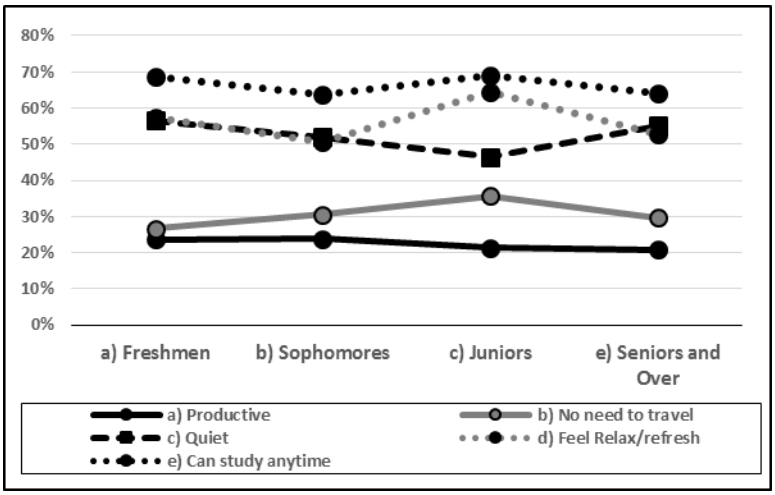

Figure 8. Reasons why students 'choose' to study at home based on undergraduate levels

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)–(d) were then analysed based on CGPA (in five levels of CGPA) and on undergraduate levels (in four levels). The analysis results based on CGPA 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'.

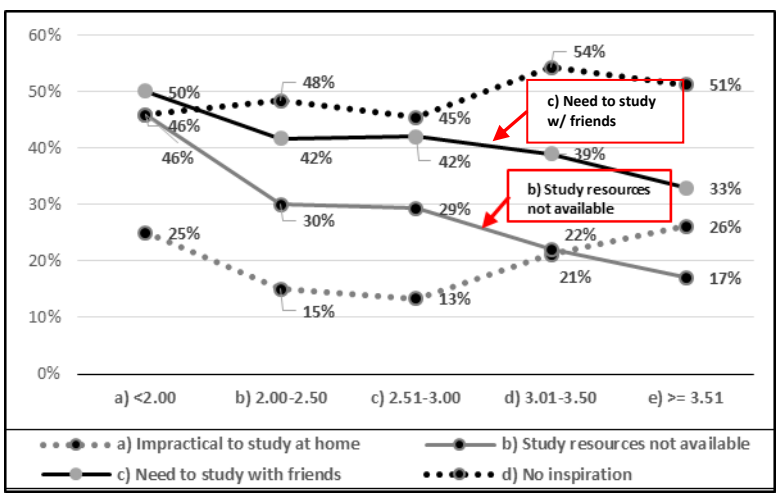

Figure 9. Reasons why students 'do not choose' to study at home based on CGPA

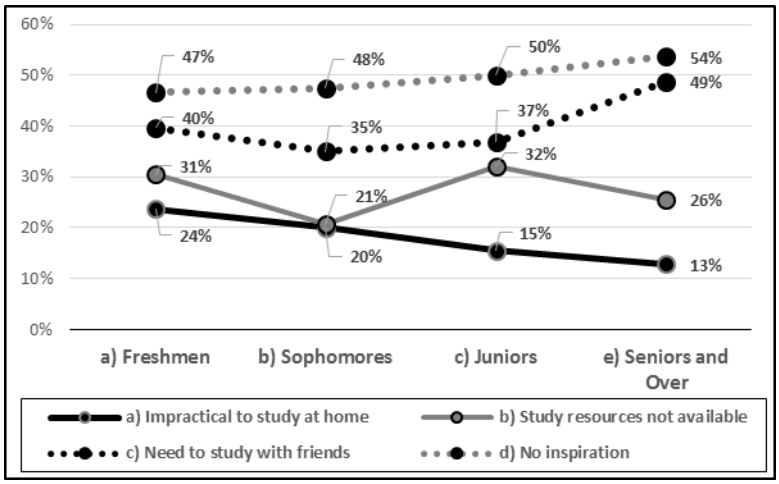

Figure 10. Reasons why students 'do not choose' to study at home based on undergraduate levels

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 the upward direction. The bottom line representing 'a) impractical to study at home' is in the downward direction. The other two lines are ups and downs with no common direction.

4. Discussions

The findings from the online in the above sections reveal five 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: CGPA 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 CGPA, the lesser percentages of students 'Never study at home' shows in Figure 5. Students with CGPA '< 2.00' group have more percentages of never study at home more than the other CGPA 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 are the most, followed by quizzes, as seen from Question 2. Students with higher CGPA conducted many types of learning activities at home more than the lower CGPA groups. There was more number of students with higher CGPA who studied before the major and minor than those who had lower CGPA, as seen in Figure 5. Students with higher CGPA (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'. Students with higher CGPA than 2.50 seem to be a more positive trend to study at home than the other side. The response

from the three groups of students with CGPA above 2.50 (2.51–3.00, 3.01–3.50, >3.50), the higher the CGPA, 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 CGPA, who also use 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 CGPA showed lower responses on 'Study resources not available' and 'Need to study with friends'. That is, the higher the students possessed, the lower the respondent percentages. Students with higher CGPA seem to be more independent to study alone and less rely on study resources than the lower CGPA 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: CGPA versus undergraduate levels

The analysis based on CGPA 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 home as ILS, however, differently based on CGPA. Students with higher CGPA study at home on more types of learning activities, especially on the major and minor exams than those with the lower CGPA. Students with higher CGPA 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 CGPA, worked on their learning activities.

4.5. How can HEI support students from the results?

This research started with the ultimate aim of 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 CGPA 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 CGPA who more depended on friends and study resources.

Firstly, 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. Lastly, 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 CGPA, chose to study at

home. The results reflected the characteristics of students who used home as ILS. Students with different CGPA showed different ways and reasons to study at home. The results strengthened the study-characteristics of students who achieve high academic performances, like CGPA. This study also suggests how HEI can support ILS to students who *do not* study at home. That is, students with different CGPA groups should be supported differently.

6. Limitations and further study

The data for this 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 using students at public universities and students at other private universities to reconfirm or contradict with these research results.

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