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Students' Preference between Off-Campus Cafes vs Campus Space for Group Studies

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Abstract

This study investigates student preferences for off-campus cafes versus on-campus spaces as venues for group study, focusing on factors such as noise and distraction, social interaction, facilities, and overall productivity. Guided by a positivist philosophy and a deductive approach, the research adopts a descriptive and comparative design to analyze quantitative data from 141 college students collected through a structured self-administered questionnaire. Results indicate a general preference for off-campus cafes due to their comfortable atmosphere, robust digital facilities such as Wi-Fi and charging ports, and a social ambiance that fosters group interaction. However, cafes are also perceived as more distracting because of higher noise levels. In contrast, on-campus spaces are valued for access to academic resources, a motivating academic environment, and suitability for quiet, focused group work. Paired sample t-test results confirm significant differences in preferences between the two settings. The findings suggest that students choose study environments according to their specific needs seeking social engagement and comfort in cafes, and academic support and concentration on campus. The study recommends that educational

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institutions integrate both social and academic features in study space design to accommodate diverse learning styles and collaborative needs.

Keywords: Study Environment; Student Preferences; Cafes; Campus Study Spaces; Collaborative Learning

INTRODUCTION

Students' preferences for learning spaces often extend beyond traditional campus boundaries, with many opting for off-campus informal learning spaces due to factors such as flexibility (Vanichvatana, 2019). Wi-Fi-enabled coffee shops, for example, have become popular venues for students' daily activities, including academic pursuits. These off-campus locations often offer an ambiance that students find stimulating, with elements such as paint colors, carpeting, and lighting noted as important (Nuth Sloboda, 2023). In contrast, traditional college spaces, despite efforts to integrate technology and support collaborative learning, may sometimes lack the sensory stimulation or flexible arrangements preferred by students, particularly those accustomed to modern home remodeling trends and dynamic public spaces (Papaioannou et al., 2023). The presence of amenities such as catering areas or cafés within or near learning spaces is also an important consideration (Beckers et al., 2016).

Given the growing use of off-campus informal learning spaces and the continuous development of on-campus facilities, it becomes crucial to investigate student preferences specifically regarding group study activities. While prior research has explored general learning space preferences and the use of Wi-Fi coffee shops, a direct comparison between off-campus cafés and dedicated college spaces for group study remains underexplored (De La Cruz & Abillar, 2023). This study aims to bridge that gap by examining the factors influencing students' choices for collaborative learning environments, thereby offering insights that can inform the design of more effective and student-centered study spaces. The physical environment is regarded as highly relevant by students, who believe that the characteristics of learning spaces significantly contribute to their study outcomes (Beckers et al., 2016).

Objectives

- To assess the student's preference between off campus and college space for group studies.

- To examine different preference of students between off campus cafes Vs College space for group studies.

Literature Review

Oblinger and Lippincott (2006) explored how physical and virtual environments influence education in their work on learning spaces. Their study rethinks traditional classroom models by emphasizing human-centered designs that support diverse student needs. It highlights the integration of technology into students' lives and their preference for social and collaborative learning environments beyond formal classrooms. The authors conclude that effective learning spaces should be flexible, networked, and seamlessly integrate formal and informal activities, aligning with technological advancements and contemporary learning theories.

Beckers, van der Voordt, and Dewulf (2016) conducted a quantitative survey with 697 business management undergraduates at a Dutch University of Applied Sciences to examine learning space preferences. Findings indicated that while students recognize the importance of study environments for learning outcomes, their choices were less influenced by privacy, social interaction, comfort, or aesthetics.

Vanichvatana (2019) investigated business school students' preferences for off-campus informal learning spaces in Bangkok using a descriptive quantitative approach. Results showed flexible schedules, food availability, and social interaction as key factors, while cost, inconvenient location, and unsuitable environments discouraged use.

Hsu, Chin, and Yau (2022) examined informal learning space usage among students from colleges with and without dedicated buildings through a mixed-method design involving interviews and surveys. Results revealed libraries as the most utilized spaces, with convenience and college location influencing choices.

Zainuddin and Shujahat (2022) used a mixed-method approach to study student activities in Wi-Fi coffee shops in Aceh. Their findings showed male students visited more frequently, using the spaces primarily for gaming and socializing, with smartphones as the main device.

METHODS

The study adopts a positivist philosophy, focusing on observable and measurable student preferences through quantitative data. A deductive approach is employed, as the research tests existing theories about study space preferences among students. The research design follows a descriptive and comparative approach to describe and analyze student preferences for group study spaces. The population consists of college students who participate in group studies both on and off campus. A sample of 141 students was selected using convenience sampling, targeting individuals who were easily accessible and willing to participate. Data were collected from primary sources through a structured, self-administered questionnaire focusing on variables such as comfort, facilities, noise level, and productivity in each setting. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and frequency, along with inferential analysis through t-tests. Ethical practices, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Information

Gender					
	Frequency			Percent	
Male	41			29.1	
Female	100			70.9	
Total	141			100.0	
Semester					
	Frequency			Percent	
1.00	1			.7	
2.00	42			29.8	
3.00	1			.7	
4.00	89			63.1	
6.00	8			5.7	
Total	141			100.0	
Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	141	17.00	26.00	19.9929	1.56979

The study's respondents consisted entirely of bachelor-level students, with a total sample size of 141 participants. Among them, 29.1% were male and 70.9% were female, indicating a higher representation of female students in the sample. In terms of academic

progression, most students were enrolled in the 2nd semester (29.8%) and 4th semester (63.1%), while a small number were in the 1st, 3rd, and 6th semesters. The age of the participants ranged from 17 to 26 years, with an average age of approximately 20 years (mean = 19.99, SD = 1.57). This demographic profile provides a clear context of the study population, representing mainly young adult students at early to mid-stages of their undergraduate education.

Student's preference between off campus and college space for group studies

Table 2: Comfort and Ambiance

Statement	Location	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)
The environment feels relaxing.	Off-Campus Cafes (CA1O)	11 (7.8%)	33 (23.4%)	97 (68.8%)
	College Campus Cafes (CA1C)	79 (56.0%)	42 (29.8%)	20 (14.2%)
The space has a cozy and friendly vibe.	Off-Campus Cafes (CA2O)	27 (19.1%)	34 (24.1%)	80 (56.7%)
	College Spaces (CA2C)	67 (47.5%)	42 (29.8%)	32 (22.7%)
Furniture and setup are comfortable.	Off-Campus Cafes (CA3O)	24 (17.0%)	27 (19.1%)	90 (63.8%)
	College Spaces (CA3C)	75 (53.2%)	36 (25.5%)	30 (21.3%)
Lighting and decor improve my mood.	Off-Campus Cafes (CA4O)	11 (7.8%)	36 (25.5%)	94 (66.7%)
	College Spaces (CA4C)	82 (58.2%)	40 (28.4%)	19 (13.5%)
I enjoy spending long hours here.	Off-Campus Cafes (CA5O)	26 (18.4%)	37 (26.2%)	78 (55.3%)
	College Spaces (CA5C)	79 (56.0%)	41 (29.1%)	21 (14.9%)

The findings indicate a strong student preference for off-campus cafes over college spaces when it comes to comfort and ambiance for group studies. A majority of respondents (68.8%) agreed that the environment in off-campus cafes feels relaxing compared to only 14.2% for college spaces, where more than half (56.0%) disagreed. Similarly, 56.7% of students agreed that off-campus cafes provide a cozy and friendly vibe, while less than a quarter (22.7%) felt the same about college spaces. Comfort in terms of furniture and setup also favored off-campus cafes, with 63.8% agreeing versus only 21.3% for college spaces. Lighting and decor were another key factor, as 66.7% agreed that off-campus cafés improved their mood compared to just 13.5% for college spaces. Lastly, students showed a greater

willingness to spend long hours in off-campus cafes (55.3%) compared to college spaces (14.9%). Overall, the results highlight that off-campus cafes are perceived as more relaxing, cozy, and comfortable, making them the preferred choice for group studies.

Table 3: Accessibility & Convenience

Statement	Location	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)
It is close to where I stay.	Off-Campus Cafes (AC1O)	43 (30.5%)	34 (24.1%)	64 (45.4%)
	College Spaces (AC1C)	67 (47.5%)	38 (27.0%)	36 (25.5%)
Easy for group members to reach.	Off-Campus Cafes (AC2O)	41 (29.1%)	54 (38.3%)	46 (32.6%)
	College Spaces (AC2C)	44 (31.2%)	42 (29.8%)	55 (39.0%)
Saves travel time.	Off-Campus Cafes (AC3O)	30 (21.3%)	51 (36.2%)	60 (42.6%)
	College Spaces (AC3C)	63 (44.7%)	52 (36.9%)	26 (18.4%)
Open and available when needed.	Off-Campus Cafes (AC4O)	19 (13.5%)	45 (31.9%)	77 (54.6%)
	College Spaces (AC4C)	61 (43.3%)	52 (36.9%)	28 (19.9%)
Easy to find a place to sit.	Off-Campus Cafes (AC5O)	42 (29.8%)	34 (24.1%)	65 (46.1%)
	College Spaces (AC5C)	54 (38.3%)	41 (29.1%)	46 (32.6%)

The results on accessibility and convenience reveal mixed perceptions between off-campus cafes and college spaces. Nearly half of the respondents (45.4%) agreed that off-campus cafes are close to where they stay, while only 25.5% felt the same for college spaces, indicating better proximity of cafes for many students. However, when it came to ease of access for group members, opinions were more balanced, with 32.6% agreeing for off-campus cafes and a slightly higher 39.0% for college spaces, suggesting that campuses may offer a central meeting point. Regarding saving travel time, off-campus cafes were rated more positively (42.6% agreement) compared to just 18.4% for college spaces. Availability also favored cafes, as 54.6% agreed they are open and accessible when needed, whereas only 19.9% said the same for college spaces. Finally, 46.1% of students found it easy to secure seating in off-campus cafes, compared to 32.6% in college spaces. Overall, off-campus cafes were perceived as more convenient in terms of proximity, availability, and time-saving, though college spaces offered slightly better accessibility for group members.

Table 4: Noise & Distraction

Statement	Location	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)
I get distracted easily here.	Off-Campus Cafes (ND1O)	27 (19.1%)	46 (32.6%)	68 (48.2%)
	College Spaces (ND1C)	50 (35.5%)	56 (39.7%)	35 (24.8%)
Space is calm and peaceful.	Off-Campus Cafes (ND2O)	25 (17.7%)	45 (31.9%)	71 (50.4%)
	College Spaces (ND2C)	55 (39.0%)	56 (39.7%)	30 (21.3%)
Good for quiet group work.	Off-Campus Cafes (ND3O)	51 (36.2%)	44 (31.2%)	46 (32.6%)
	College Spaces (ND3C)	46 (32.6%)	43 (30.5%)	52 (36.9%)
Background sounds help me focus.	Off-Campus Cafes (ND4O)	60 (42.6%)	30 (21.3%)	51 (36.2%)
	College Spaces (ND4C)	51 (36.2%)	39 (27.7%)	51 (36.2%)

The analysis of noise and distraction factors highlights contrasting student preferences between off-campus cafes and college spaces for group studies. Nearly half of the respondents (48.2%) agreed that they get distracted easily in off-campus cafes (ND1O), compared to only 24.8% in college spaces (ND1C), indicating that cafes tend to have more elements that divert attention. However, when it comes to creating a calm and peaceful environment, 50.4% of students agreed that off-campus cafes (ND2O) provide such a setting, while only 21.3% felt the same about college spaces (ND2C), suggesting that cafes are perceived as more relaxed environments overall. For quiet group work, preferences were divided, with 36.9% agreeing that college spaces (ND3C) are suitable, slightly higher than the 32.6% who preferred off-campus cafes (ND3O). Interestingly, when asked if background sounds help them focus, students were almost evenly split, with 36.2% agreeing in both settings (ND4O and ND4C). This suggests that while cafes are often seen as calm and conducive to a relaxed atmosphere, they also present a higher level of distractions compared to college spaces, which may be perceived as more structured for focused group work.

Table 5: Social Interaction & Vibe

Statement	Location	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)
I feel more connected with my group.	Off-Campus Cafes (SV1O)	38 (27.0%)	27 (19.1%)	76 (53.9%)
	College Spaces (SV1C)	56 (39.7%)	38 (27.0%)	47 (33.3%)
Encourages discussion and talk.	Off-Campus Cafes (SV2O)	50 (35.5%)	38 (27.0%)	53 (37.6%)
	College Spaces (SV2C)	42 (29.8%)	37 (26.2%)	62 (44.0%)
The vibe is enjoyable and social.	Off-Campus Cafes (SV3O)	33 (23.4%)	35 (24.8%)	73 (51.8%)
	College Spaces (SV3C)	65 (46.1%)	37 (26.2%)	39 (27.7%)
I feel motivated here.	Off-Campus Cafes (SV4O)	56 (39.7%)	43 (30.5%)	42 (29.8%)
	College Spaces (SV4C)	29 (20.6%)	42 (29.8%)	70 (49.6%)
Group work feels fun and engaging.	Off-Campus Cafes (SV5O)	48 (34.0%)	40 (28.4%)	53 (37.6%)
	College Spaces (SV5C)	41 (29.1%)	37 (26.2%)	63 (44.7%)

The findings on social interaction and vibe show clear differences in how students perceive off-campus cafes versus college spaces for group studies. More than half of the respondents (53.9%) agreed that they feel more connected with their group in off-campus cafes (SV1O), compared to only 33.3% in college spaces (SV1C), suggesting cafes foster stronger group bonding. However, when it comes to encouraging discussion, 44.0% favored college spaces (SV2C) over 37.6% for cafés (SV2O), indicating that the structured setting of college spaces may better support academic conversations. In terms of ambiance, 51.8% agreed that the vibe in off-campus cafes (SV3O) is enjoyable and social, while only 27.7% felt the same about college spaces (SV3C), highlighting cafes as more relaxed and socially appealing environments. Interestingly, motivation levels show an opposite trend: nearly half of the students (49.6%) felt motivated in college spaces (SV4C), compared to just 29.8% in off-campus cafes (SV4O). Similarly, group work was perceived as more fun and engaging in college spaces (44.7%) than in cafés (37.6%). These findings suggest that while cafes create a socially enjoyable atmosphere and promote group bonding, college spaces are viewed as more motivating and better at fostering productive group discussions.

Table 6: Facilities & Resources

Statement	Location	Disagree (n/%)	Neutral (n/%)	Agree (n/%)
Good Wi-Fi and charging ports.	Off-Campus Cafes (FR1O)	17 (12.1%)	33 (23.4%)	91 (64.5%)
	College Spaces (FR1C)	76 (53.9%)	42 (29.8%)	23 (16.3%)
Access to books, tools, or whiteboards.	Off-Campus Cafes (FR2O)	72 (51.1%)	46 (32.6%)	23 (16.3%)
	College Spaces (FR2C)	20 (14.2%)	55 (39.0%)	66 (46.8%)
I use this space for its facilities.	Off-Campus Cafes (FR3O)	36 (25.5%)	33 (23.4%)	72 (51.1%)
	College Spaces (FR3C)	54 (38.3%)	39 (27.7%)	48 (34.0%)
Space is clean and well-kept.	Off-Campus Cafes (FR4O)	27 (19.1%)	38 (27.0%)	76 (53.9%)
	College Spaces (FR4C)	63 (44.7%)	46 (32.6%)	32 (22.7%)
I do serious academic work here.	Off-Campus Cafes (FR5O)	72 (51.1%)	39 (27.7%)	30 (21.3%)
	College Spaces (FR5C)	27 (19.1%)	39 (27.7%)	75 (53.2%)

The comparison of facilities and resources highlights distinct strengths between off-campus cafes and college spaces for group study. A majority of students (64.5%) agreed that off-campus cafes (FR1O) provide good Wi-Fi and charging ports, whereas only 16.3% felt the same about college spaces (FR1C), emphasizing cafés as better equipped for digital connectivity. In contrast, access to academic resources such as books, tools, or whiteboards was rated much higher in college spaces, with 46.8% agreeing (FR2C) compared to just 16.3% for cafés (FR2O). Over half of the respondents (51.1%) reported using off-campus cafes specifically for their facilities (FR3O), while only 34.0% said the same for college spaces (FR3C). Cleanliness and maintenance were also viewed more favorably in cafes, with 53.9% agreeing (FR4O) versus 22.7% for college spaces (FR4C). However, when it came to serious academic work, the trend reversed: 53.2% of students preferred college spaces (FR5C), while only 21.3% used off-campus cafes (FR5O) for intensive study. These results indicate that cafes excel in providing digital amenities and a clean, comfortable environment, while college spaces are valued for academic resources and fostering serious study sessions.

Table 7: Different preference of students between off campus cafes vs college space

Paired Samples Statistics							
Pair	Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
1	Offcampus	141	2.2009	0.29169	0.02457	2.1534	2.2512
1	Campus	141	1.9011	0.31825	0.02680	1.8489	1.9529
Paired Samples Correlation							
Pair	Variables		N	Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
1	Offcampus & Campus		141	-0.630	0.000	-0.754	-0.480
Paired Samples Test							
Pair	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	0.29979	0.55082	0.04639	0.20808	0.39150	6.463	140	0.000
Bootstrap for Paired Samples Test							
Pair	Mean Difference	Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	
1	0.29979	-0.00008	0.04704	0.000	0.21114	0.39411	

The paired samples analysis compares students' preferences for off-campus cafés and college spaces. The Paired Samples Statistics show that the mean score for off-campus cafés ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.29$) is higher than that of college spaces ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.32$), suggesting students generally favor off-campus cafés. The negative correlation between the two settings ($r = -0.630$, $p < 0.001$) indicates an inverse relationship, meaning that students who rate off-campus cafés higher tend to rate college spaces lower, and vice versa. The Paired Samples Test further supports this difference, with a mean difference of 0.30 ($t(140) = 6.463$, $p < 0.001$). The 95% confidence interval (0.21 to 0.39) excludes zero, confirming the difference is statistically significant. Bootstrap results reinforce this finding, showing consistent confidence intervals and negligible bias. Overall, the analysis reveals a significant preference for off-campus cafés over college spaces for group study activities.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals distinct student preferences between off-campus cafes and college spaces for group studies. Off-campus cafes are favored for their relaxed atmosphere, better Wi-Fi and charging facilities, and a social vibe that enhances group connection and interaction. However, they are also seen as more distracting, which may impact focused

academic work. In contrast, college spaces are preferred for access to academic resources like books and whiteboards, a motivating environment, and suitability for quiet, productive group study. While cafes offer a more enjoyable and social setting, college spaces better support serious academic tasks and effective discussions. The statistical analysis confirms a significant difference in preference, with students generally rating off-campus cafes higher but recognizing the academic benefits of college spaces. These findings suggest that students choose study locations based on their specific needs, balancing social engagement with academic focus. Educational institutions should consider these factors to improve study environments that accommodate diverse student preferences.

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