

Housing Challenges and Coping Approaches among International Students in Ratchathewi, Bangkok

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Abstract

This paper examines the experiences and strategies of international postgraduate students in off-campus housing in Ratchathewi District, Bangkok. Off-campus housing is limited and expensive, and many students live in private rental accommodation in areas adjoining the university. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with twelve international postgraduates and uses thematic analysis to explore housing difficulties, decision-making processes and everyday coping approaches. Results indicate that students face interlinked issues of rental affordability, language barriers, a lack of housing information, spatial trade-offs, and variable housing quality. In response, students draw on peer networks, shared accommodation, budget adjustment, informal translation support, collective cooking, minor room modification and acceptance of compromised living conditions. The paper argues that the response to these challenges is not a fixed strategy but a ` coping approach mediated by Bangkok's private rental market, students' financial resources, language ability, peer networks and limited institutional housing support. This study contributes to the literature on student housing and urban studies by illustrating how international students acquire situated housing knowledge as they navigate the off-campus rental markets in a Southeast Asian city. It also underscores the need for universities and housing providers to improve multilingual housing information, rental guidance, and accommodation support for international students.

Keywords: housing experiences, international students, coping approaches, off-campus housing, Bangkok

INTRODUCTION

International students are not only temporary learners but also urban residents who are shaping cities' social, economic, demographic, and cultural landscapes (Smith, 1979; Uribe-Toril et al., 2018). However, the housing literature has not adequately considered the varied experiences of international students, especially those reliant on off-campus accommodation and with few affordable options (Luthra & Platt, 2016; Sotomayor et al., 2022). They contend with housing markets, mobility, affordability, and the practicalities of establishing a temporary home in the city (Chanida Lumthaweepaisal, 2025; Collins, 2010).

The provision of international student housing is context-specific, nationally and institutionally. Accommodation can be provided by university-managed accommodation, e.g. in China, where living on-campus is required (Gu & Smith, 2020), but often depend on off-campus private housing, dependent on price, availability, location, and institutional support. Accommodation on campus is often seen as cheaper and better for academic success than off-campus, reducing travel time and providing access to study facilities (Attigbo et al., 2024; Basiri et al., 2026; He, 2014; Moore et al., 2019). However, when on-campus housing is scarce, expensive, or unavailable, international students are pushed into off-campus private dormitories in the city.

This issue is visible in Bangkok, notably among postgraduate international students at one prominent university, attracting many Asian students, partly through scholarships of THB16,000/month (Vinthai Pongsin et al., 2023). But monthly on-campus housing costs THB14,000 and accounts for roughly 90% of their scholarship. With only 846 rooms on campus, many students will need to look for off-campus accommodation, as the average admission number is almost 1,500 (Chua, 2026). Ratchathewi District, in downtown Bangkok, has long been known for its student dormitories and private rental accommodation. The university also recommends Ratchathewi as an area where students may seek off-campus housing, making it an important site for examining how international students experience and negotiate housing challenges in Bangkok's off-campus private housing context.

Previous studies on international student housing have been conducted primarily in the Americas (Pillai et al., 2024; Sood & Vicino, 2024; Sotomayor et al., 2022), Europe (Aksay Aksezer et al., 2023; Holton, 2016), Australia (Hastings et al., 2023), Africa (Gbadegesin et al., 2021), and some East Asian (Gu & Smith, 2020; Tong & Kim, 2026). These studies have explored issues such as affordability, housing insecurity, overcrowding, dependence on private rentals, academic stress and institutional support. Student housing satisfaction, international student experience and the role of higher education policy have been discussed in existing research in Southeast Asia (Aliu & Ariff, 2019; Mok, 2012; Rhein & Phillips, 2024; Singh, 2023; Vinthai Pongsin et al., 2023). However, fewer studies have examined how they develop coping approaches to negotiate challenges associated with off-campus housing. This gap is important because housing challenges cater to financial and physical problems, as well as are shaped by language barriers, information access, social networks, institutional support, and everyday life.

This paper adds to the literature on housing and urban studies by demonstrating how international students gain situated housing knowledge through ordinary coping approaches in the context of off-campus

housing in Bangkok. The question is: how do international students in Ratchathewi perceive off-campus housing challenges, and what coping approaches do they use to address them? This paper aims to unpack the housing challenges faced by international students living off-campus and the coping approaches they employ.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) Housing Challenges

The concept of “housing challenges” is distinct from “housing satisfaction.” While housing satisfaction generally concerns residents’ evaluation of accommodation quality (Amole, 2009), housing challenges refer to the broader difficulties that shape students’ ability to secure, maintain, and live comfortably in their accommodation (Ehlenz et al., 2024; Sotomayor et al., 2022). For international students, housing is not only a place of residence but also a temporary home that supports study, leisure, social life, and everyday adjustment in an unfamiliar urban context (Calder et al., 2016; Collins, 2010). These challenges may include affordability, housing quality, overcrowding, distance from campus, roommate relations, access to information, maintenance responsibilities, and communication with landlords or housing providers.

Off-campus living can intensify these challenges because students must manage financial and maintenance responsibilities more independently than those living in on-campus accommodation. Beiter et al. (2015) suggest that off-campus living is associated with increased stress, anxiety, and depression, partly because students have to deal with responsibilities that are less prominent in university-managed housing. Hastings et al. (2023) similarly highlight that housing costs and housing quality significantly affect academic stress, especially among students from low-income backgrounds or those with less educational support. These studies show that housing difficulties should not be treated separately from academic life, as accommodation conditions may influence students’ well-being, study routines, and their ability to participate in university life.

For international students, housing challenges are also shaped by cross-border mobility and temporary settlement. Calder et al. (2016) show that international students’ capacity to locate affordable housing is affected by rental fees, tuition fees, limited affordable accommodation, living costs, limited access to student loans, restricted working opportunities, and a lack of information. These factors are often combined with immigration experiences, employment barriers, currency fluctuations, and social integration problems. Martinez et al. (2021) further identify several forms of housing insecurity among university students, including roommate problems, unaffordable housing, poor housing conditions, unsafe or distant accommodation, and overcrowding, all of which may place students in precarious living situations. The role of private rental markets is also important. Studies from Nigeria and China show that off-campus student housing is shaped by landlord profit-seeking, limited university housing capacity, and emerging student rental markets, making it a broader urban and institutional issue rather than only an individual accommodation problem (Gbadegesin et al., 2021; He, 2014).

Overall, the literature highlights that international student housing is multidimensional, not limited to rent prices or physical accommodation quality, but also encompasses information gaps, institutional support, mobility, social belonging, and international students' ability to manage everyday life. This study uses "housing challenges" to refer to these intricacies as experienced by international students living in off-campus accommodation.

2) Coping Approaches and Everyday Housing Navigation

Coping refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage crises, chronic stressors, or situations perceived as exceeding one's ability to adapt (Carr & Pudrovskaya, 2007; Fishbain, 2002). In housing and sociological research, coping has been used to explain how individuals and groups respond to housing insecurity, displacement, poor housing conditions, landlord pressure, financial stress, and social exclusion (Harten, 2024; Waldron, 2024; Wilson et al., 2023). However, this study uses the term "coping approaches" rather than "coping strategies." The term 'strategies' may imply deliberate and systematic planning, whereas many student responses to housing difficulties are improvised and shaped by immediate circumstances (Amponsah et al., 2020). "Coping approaches", therefore, better capture the everyday ways international students manage off-campus housing challenges.

Existing housing research has examined coping among groups facing different forms of housing pressure, including elderly residents negotiating neighbourhood change (Lager & Van Hoven, 2019; López et al., 2022), tenants experiencing landlord harassment and displacement pressure (Newman & Wyly, 2006), and gender-diverse individuals managing housing stress (Glick et al., 2019). Hochstenbach and Musterd (2017) show that households may respond to housing problems by sharing housing or moving to surrounding regions. These studies show that coping is shaped by unequal access to resources, housing markets, and social support. However, they do not primarily address international students, whose housing experiences are shaped by temporary residence, limited local knowledge, language barriers, and dependence on university or peer networks.

Research on disadvantaged students provides a closer foundation for this study, such as students facing financial hardship coping with housing difficulties by working overtime, establishing advocacy groups, and using online networks (Sotomayor et al., 2022), and disabled students coping by being open about their disabilities and utilising available resources (Vaccaro et al., 2018). Bhowmik et al. (2018) found that Mainland Chinese students in Hong Kong faced housing concerns after completing their studies, particularly due to financial constraints. Their responses included adaptive approaches such as seeking social support and addressing concerns, as well as maladaptive responses such as alcohol or substance use.

Building from these studies, coping approaches in international student housing can be understood through several interconnected forms. First, financial coping refers to efforts to manage rent, utilities, deposits, and everyday living costs, such as sharing accommodation, reducing expenses, working additional hours where possible, or seeking temporary financial support. Second, social coping involves relying on friends, roommates, co-national communities, religious communities, or student networks for practical and emotional support. Third, informational coping involves using online platforms, senior students, local

contacts, or peer recommendations to identify housing options, understand building rules, or communicate with landlords. Fourth, spatial coping involves trade-offs between location, rent, commuting time, housing quality, and proximity to campus. Fifth, attitudinal coping includes acceptance, resilience, modesty, or adjustment of expectations when students cannot easily change their housing situation.

These coping approaches should not be interpreted solely as signs of resilience. They also reveal the limits of formal housing support and the unequal burden placed on students to solve housing problems themselves. For example, relying on friends for translation may help students communicate with landlords, but it also shows the absence of accessible multilingual housing support. Sharing accommodation may reduce costs, but it can also lead to roommate conflict or reduced privacy. Accepting poor facilities may allow students to remain in a strategic location, but it can also normalise compromised housing conditions. Therefore, coping approaches are both practical responses and indicators of broader housing constraints. For this reason, this study treats coping approaches as part of everyday housing navigation, understood through the concept of situated knowledge, which refers to knowledge derived from specific social positions and experiences (Haraway, 1988). In this study, international students' housing knowledge is shaped by their temporary residence status, financial capacity, language skills, peer networks, and familiarity with Bangkok. They learn about convenient areas, manageable rents, translation resources, utility cost reduction, and acceptable housing compromises. Their coping approaches reflect both individual resilience and practical knowledge gained through daily interactions with Bangkok's off-campus rental market. This practical knowledge is influenced by their financial resources, language abilities, peer support, and local familiarity. Consequently, coping approaches are not fixed but rather everyday practices that help students adapt to city life.

a. Student Housing in Southeast Asian Urban Contexts

Most existing studies on international student housing have been conducted in North American, European, Australian, African, and East Asian contexts. These studies have examined affordability, overcrowding, housing insecurity, academic stress, private rental dependence, institutional support, and studentification (Gbadegesin et al., 2021; Gu & Smith, 2020; Hastings et al., 2023; He, 2014; Holton, 2016; Kinton et al., 2018; Smith & Holt, 2007; Sotomayor et al., 2022). While this literature provides important insights, international student housing in Southeast Asian cities remains less developed as a research focus.

This gap is important because Southeast Asian cities have distinct housing and urban conditions. In Bangkok, these issues may take a particular form because international students often make housing decisions based on private rental availability, proximity to campus, public transport, food access, religious amenities, and social or co-national networks. Their housing experiences are shaped not only by affordability but also by language barriers, neighbourhood familiarity, mobility, cultural and religious needs, and the availability of informal support (Navaporn Sanprasert Snodin et al., 2021; Veenunkarn Rujiprak, 2016; Vinthai Pongsin et al., 2023). These conditions make Southeast Asian cities important sites for examining how international students navigate housing challenges in everyday life.

Existing research in Southeast Asia has examined student housing satisfaction and international student experiences (Aliu & Ariff, 2019; Mok, 2012; Singh, 2023). In Thailand, studies have addressed international students' mental health and policy discussions around higher education internationalisation (Akiyama et al., 2013; Vinthai Pongsin et al., 2023). Other studies have examined international students' broader experiences but have not focused specifically on student housing (Jiang et al., 2024; Rhein & Phillips, 2024). As a result, less is known about how international students in Bangkok experience off-campus housing challenges and develop coping approaches in response to them. In summary, the literature suggests that international student housing challenges are shaped by affordability, accommodation quality, access to information, institutional support, social networks, and urban location. However, less attention has been paid to how international students develop everyday coping approaches in off-campus student housing contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how international students in Ratchathewi District experience off-campus housing challenges and navigate them through social networks, financial adjustment, spatial compromise, self-help, and acceptance.

b. Ratchathewi as an Off-Campus Student Housing Site

Ratchathewi is a university-adjacent district in central Bangkok where students may seek off-campus accommodation due to its accessibility and concentration of private rental options. The district is connected to major public transport routes, including BTS Ratchathewi and BTS Phaya Thai, making it accessible to university campuses, commercial areas, food facilities, and everyday services. For international students, such accessibility is important because housing decisions are shaped not only by rental price but also by commuting time, neighbourhood familiarity, safety, and access to social and cultural amenities (Basiri et al., 2026; Pillai et al., 2024).

Preliminary observations of online rental advertisements indicate that private accommodation is prominently advertised in Ratchathewi. As shown in Table 1, the observed listings on RentHub.in.th advertised monthly rents ranging from THB6,000 to THB8,500. These listings commonly highlighted proximity to rail transit, major roads, and shopping malls. Although they do not represent the entire rental market, they illustrate how off-campus housing in Ratchathewi is marketed through price, accessibility, and student-oriented features.

Table 1 Observed listings

Area/listing location	Rent	Accessibility claim	Wording/feature
Ratchathewi/ Phetchaburi Road	6,000	Near BTS Ratchathewi and Siam	Apartment in Ratchathewi near public transport
Ratchaprarop/ Ratchathewi	6,500- 6,800	Ratchaprarop Road, Ratchathewi	Promotion for students staying 12 months or more
Ratchathewi/ Phetchaburi Road	8,000- 8,500	Near Ratchathewi, Phaya Thai, and Samyan	Female dormitory/student-oriented housing

Source: Author's observation of online rental platform *RentHub.in.th*, accessed 7 June 2026.

These observations provide contextual evidence that off-campus housing in university-adjacent districts is offered at a range of prices, with varying levels of accessibility, safety, and student-oriented facilities. This makes Ratchathewi an appropriate site for examining how international students experience housing challenges and develop coping approaches in Bangkok's private rental context.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative case-study design to examine how international postgraduate students experienced and managed off-campus housing challenges in Ratchathewi District, Bangkok. A case-study approach is appropriate for examining a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly where the phenomenon and context are closely connected (Yin, 2018).

Qualitative inquiry was used because the study focused on participants' experiences, interpretations, and everyday coping approaches rather than measuring housing satisfaction through predetermined indicators (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Ratchathewi was selected as an off-campus housing context because of its concentration of private rental accommodation, public transport access, proximity to universities, and availability of everyday student services. As discussed in Section 2.4, the district provides a useful setting for examining how international students navigate affordability, accessibility, language barriers, private rental conditions, and informal support networks.

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling identified international postgraduate students with direct experience of seeking, living in, or maintaining private rental accommodation in Ratchathewi (Patton, 2015), specifically international postgraduate students who had sought, lived in, or kept off-campus accommodation in Ratchathewi. Snowball sampling via student networks and peer referrals facilitated recruitment of students connected through social and community-based networks. Participants met four criteria: they were international postgraduate students in Bangkok; they lived in Ratchathewi; they had experience in searching for or maintaining private rental

accommodation; and they were able to reflect on housing challenges and everyday responses during their stay in Bangkok.

The study involved 12 international postgraduate students, comprising Master's and doctoral students. Their experiences varied by degree level, length of stay, scholarship status, academic field, and living arrangement. The study does not seek to represent all international students in Bangkok. Rather, it offers an exploratory qualitative account of housing experiences within a particular off-campus housing context. Table 2 provides an overview of the participant profile.

Table 2 Participants profile

Code	Nationality	Sex	Degree	Years of stay	Scholarship	Academic field	Living arrangement
P1	Bangladeshi	F	PhD	1	University scholarship	Natural Science	Alone
P2	Indonesian	M	PhD	2	University scholarship	Nursing	With roommate(s)
P3	Pakistani	M	PhD	2	University scholarship	Nursing	Alone
P4	Pakistani	M	PhD	1	University scholarship	Health Science	With roommate(s)
M1	Filipino	M	Master	0.5	Privately funded	Architecture	Alone
M2	Indonesian	M	Master	1.5	University scholarship	Natural Science	With roommate
M3	Indonesian	M	Master	2	University scholarship	Natural Science	With roommate
M4	Indonesian	F	Master	4	University scholarship	Arts	With roommate
M5	Indonesian	F	Master	1	Company scholarship	Veterinary Science	Alone
M6	Indonesian	M	Master	1.5	University scholarship	Natural Science	With roommate
M7	Burmese	F	Master	0.5	University scholarship	Architecture	Alone
M8	Burmese	F	Master	0.5	University scholarship	Natural Science	Alone

Note: 1) M refers to master's students, and P refers to doctoral students. Some demographic details are reported broadly to protect participant anonymity; (2) Living arrangement refers to whether the participant lived alone or shared accommodation with roommate(s), not to the formal accommodation category.

Source: Prepared by the author

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between February and March 2023. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to describe their housing experiences in depth while maintaining sufficient consistency across interviews to identify shared themes (Dunn, 2021). Interviews lasted

approximately 30–45 minutes. Most were conducted in person on campus, including in canteens, laboratories, and library spaces. One interview was conducted via Zoom to accommodate the participant’s schedule. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent and transcribed for analysis. The interviews focused on participants’ housing search process, accommodation conditions, rental costs, location choices, communication with landlords or building staff, social support, coping approaches, and perceptions of university support. The interview guide was flexible, allowing follow-up questions to explore issues raised by participants. Core interview questions included: “Could you describe your current accommodation?”; “How did you find your current place to live?”; “How do housing costs affect your monthly budget?” “Why did you choose to live in this area?” “Have you experienced difficulties communicating with landlords or building staff?” “Who helped you find or manage your accommodation?” and “What do you usually do when housing problems occur?”

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, which helps identify and interpret patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved five stages: familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding of participants’ actions and concerns (e.g., “sharing rent,” “seeking accommodation recommendations,” “communicating with Thai-speaking friends,” “staying near BTS,” “accepting old facilities,” “reducing electricity use,” “cooking together”), focused coding to group related codes, theme development reflecting housing challenges and coping approaches, and interpreting these themes in relation to existing literature on international student housing and coping approaches. This analysis was essentially inductive, as themes developed from participants’ accounts. However, the literature on housing challenges and coping approaches offered concepts that guided interpretation without serving as a fixed codebook. This meant that the analysis did not simply apply predetermined coping categories to the data. Instead, it examined how coping approaches emerged from students’ everyday experiences regarding affordability, location, language barriers, social networks, and private rental conditions. Figure 1 provides a visual narrative of the analysis, illustrating the five stages and the iterative movement between coding, theme development, review, and interpretation.

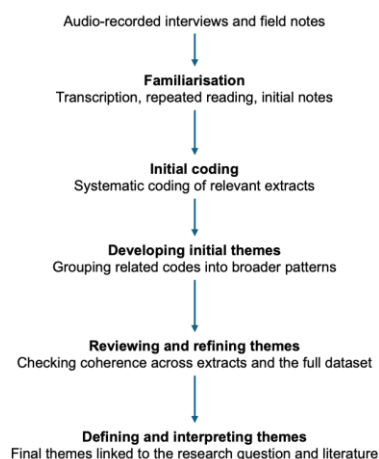


Figure 1 Five-stage thematic analysis process

Source: Prepared by the author

The researcher's position as an international graduate student was considered reflexively throughout the study. Reflexivity is important in qualitative research because knowledge is produced through interactions among participants, researchers, shared experiences, and interpretation (Lichterman, 2017; Rose, 1997). This positionality helped establish rapport and supported discussion of potentially sensitive issues, including rent, housing discomfort, financial stress, and social support. At the same time, the researcher avoided assuming that participants' experiences were identical to their own. Participation was voluntary. Participants received information about the study before the interviews, and consent was obtained before audio recording. Participant identities were anonymised using codes, and identifying details were removed or generalised to protect confidentiality within a relatively small international student community.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis identified five interconnected themes that explain how international students experience and navigate off-campus housing challenges in Ratchathewi: affordability and financial adjustment; spatial trade-offs between access, cost, and housing quality; language barriers and informal mediation; peer networks as housing infrastructure; and acceptance, self-help, and the limits of coping. These themes show that housing challenges are not experienced in isolation. Rather, rent, location, communication, social support, and housing quality intersect in students' everyday housing decisions.

a. Affordability and Financial Adjustment

Affordability was one of the most visible housing challenges among the participants. Although Ratchathewi is attractive for its accessibility, participants repeatedly described rent and utility costs as pressures that shape their daily routines and housing choices. Based on observations of housing providers and participants' accounts, monthly rent in Ratchathewi commonly starts from approximately THB5,200, excluding water and electricity. Most participants reported monthly housing costs ranging between THB5,200 and THB8,000, including utilities. Students who shared accommodation reduced their individual housing costs to approximately THB3,500–5,000. Participants responded to housing costs through various financial adjustments. For some, sharing accommodation was the most practical way to reduce rent and utility expenses. M2 explained that sharing a room made rising electricity costs more manageable, especially during Bangkok's hot season:

"The basic fee is THB6200, and there is no common fee, so the rest is water and electricity. During Songkran, it was hot. The electricity went up by THB3. And it immediately started to skyrocket, eventually THB1800-2000. So maximum THB8000. But so far, because of the roommate, it's still normal." — M2

This shows that affordability was not only about monthly rent but also about fluctuating utility costs. Sharing accommodation allowed students to absorb these additional costs collectively. However, sharing also required students to negotiate privacy, cleanliness, and different living habits. In this sense, financial coping could create new social and domestic challenges.

Other students adjusted their daily routines to reduce housing-related costs. M7, for example, described spending more time at the university to minimise electricity and water use in the dormitory:

“I think it’s a fair price. I only spend THB5900/month. I don’t want to spend more on water and electricity; last time, it only cost me THB200 over 20 days. I also spent more time in the university.” — M7

Housing affordability influenced daily time-use, as the participant opted for cheaper accommodation and reorganised their life around university facilities. The university library, canteen, and campus areas became essential to their coping approaches, helping to reduce both time and costs associated with renting. For students without full scholarship support, financial adjustment took different forms. M1, who was privately funded, continued working remotely while studying in Bangkok:

“I can’t do that, that’s why I must work. As much as possible, I don’t want to [borrow money].” — M1

M5, by contrast, was supported by her workplace and therefore experienced fewer financial constraints:

“Ask for more money from the office, haha. Money isn’t a big deal for me.” — M5

These contrasting experiences show that housing affordability was mediated by students’ funding arrangements. University scholarship recipients were often careful with monthly expenses, while privately funded or employer-supported students had different financial capacities. However, even when students could technically afford rent, the cost of housing still shaped their decisions about living alone, sharing, cooking, commuting, and using campus facilities.

b. Spatial Trade-Offs between Access, Cost, and Housing Quality

Participants’ housing decisions were strongly shaped by spatial trade-offs. Ratchathewi was valued because of its central location, proximity to campus, and access to public transport. However, this accessibility often came at the cost of higher rent or compromised housing quality. Students did not simply choose accommodation based on price; they weighed rent against commuting time, transport access, room condition, safety, and familiarity with the area. Several participants described remaining in Ratchathewi despite dissatisfaction with the condition of their accommodation. M6 explained that although rent had increased, the facilities remained the same:

“The price has risen to 6700, but the amenities offered are still the same. We can either go farther and spend more on transportation or live nearby but pay a higher rent.” — M6

This statement captures a central dilemma. Moving farther away might reduce rent, but it could increase transport costs, commuting time, and uncertainty. Remaining in place meant accepting higher rent or limited facilities. For this participant, accessibility outweighed the possibility of finding cheaper housing elsewhere. M5 expressed a similar calculation. The participant recognised that the building and furniture were old, but the location remained valuable:

“The location [Ratchathewi] is very strategic. Finding a new place is more complex and expensive than I pay now. The furniture is ancient. The only advantage is the location; you can go anywhere.” — M5

This shows that students may tolerate poor physical conditions because the location provides broader urban convenience. Ratchathewi's accessibility to transport, campus, commercial areas, and daily services allowed students to remain mobile and connected, even when the accommodation itself was not ideal. P2 also described compromised living conditions, especially in relation to building age and facilities:

"Diana is 5000, but it's still relatively okay. The downside is that it's an old building, so the facilities like water and all sorts of things fall into the unfit category, but it's still usable." — P2

The phrase "still usable" is important. It suggests that students often evaluate accommodation through minimum acceptability rather than ideal comfort. Their coping approach is not necessarily to seek the best housing, but to remain in housing that is affordable, accessible, and tolerable. Room modification was another way students managed spatial limitations. Some participants rearranged furniture, added personal items, or made minor changes to create a more comfortable temporary home. M3 explained:

"Extreme redecorating isn't allowed because it will be difficult to reverse. I added furniture to make it like my room in Indonesia by buying a fridge, a mirror, and a piano." — M3

M2 described a more limited form of modification:

"We often changed the bed position. It is limited to the point that we could only move furniture, not decorating or painting." — M2

These examples show that students used minor environmental changes to make their accommodations more livable. However, such changes were constrained by rental rules, room size, cost, and the temporary nature of their stay.

c. Language Barriers and Informal Mediation

Language barriers were another major housing challenge. Most participants did not report direct harassment or mistreatment by landlords, but they experienced difficulty communicating with landlords, building staff, and management. This affected their ability to understand rules, request repairs, interpret announcements, and negotiate housing-related problems. M6 explained that communication difficulties with landlords created misunderstandings, for facilities maintenance:

"We've had communication issues with landlords who don't speak English, leading to misunderstandings. Whenever there's a problem with facilities, they should fix it, but we're often the ones paying for it." — M6

This quote shows that language barriers can have financial consequences. When communication is unclear, students may end up paying for repairs or handling problems themselves. Housing difficulties, therefore, emerge not only from physical defects but also from unequal access to information and communication. P3 similarly described difficulty understanding Thai-language announcements:

"However, one issue arose when I received a broadcast message in Thai, which I couldn't understand." — P3

Such situations show how ordinary housing communication can become exclusionary for international students. A building announcement, repair notice, or rule update may be routine for Thai-

speaking residents but difficult for students with limited Thai proficiency to interpret. In response, students often relied on informal mediation. P4 explained that a Thai-speaking friend helped secure accommodation:

“Yes, it’s tough to find an apartment. The reason is that we’re not native or Thai. When I got to the apartment, my friend introduced me to the landlord so I could easily get a room.” — P4

Language support and social connections significantly influence students’ housing access. Those who know someone who speaks Thai or can connect them with landlords often find it easier to secure accommodation and resolve issues. In contrast, students without such networks face challenges in navigating the rental market. Language barriers complicate tasks like finding a room, understanding rules, requesting repairs, and communicating with landlords. It can be inferred that without formal multilingual support, students depend on friends and peers to overcome these communication hurdles.

d. Peer Networks as Housing Infrastructure

Peer networks were crucial to students’ housing experiences, providing friendship and informal housing support. Friends and co-national networks helped students find accommodation, navigate neighbourhoods, reduce costs, communicate with landlords, cook together, and foster a sense of belonging. Several Indonesian participants highlighted how these co-national networks influenced their housing decisions. M5 explained that accommodation recommendations came from friends and that the presence of other Indonesians influenced the decision to rent in the area:

“I got apartment recommendations from my friends. While in Indonesia, I googled how to get to campus and other amenities. When I searched online, I found a mosque and decided to rent the place. Also, because there are ten Indonesians.” — M5

The quote illustrates that housing choices were influenced by online information and peer knowledge. The participant considered transport, amenities, religious facilities, and co-national friends, indicating that housing is a socially mediated process rather than a private decision.

M6 described the importance of Indonesian social support through the idea of *gotong-royong*:

“I spend much time with my Indonesians. The sense of *gotong-royong* is there.” — M6

Gotong-royong, or mutual assistance, helped students feel at home away from home. It provided emotional support and practical help in managing everyday life. For students living abroad, such networks helped reduce uncertainty and isolation. Cooking together was another important form of peer-based coping. M5 described communal cooking as a way to recreate cultural familiarity and strengthen social ties:

“For cooking Indonesian dishes with Indonesians. We cooked and ate together. It felt great. We are in a country where people are far from home.” — M5

M2 also connected cooking together with financial savings:

“One of the reasons is to save money because if you eat together, it is cheaper.” — M2

Cooking together served various purposes, including lowering food costs, strengthening friendships, and fostering cultural identity, which made living environments feel more familiar. Peer networks helped students navigate both economic and emotional aspects of housing. For Muslim participants, access to

mosques and halal food significantly influenced their housing choices. P1 described feeling comfortable because the surrounding area was Muslim-friendly:

“No, I don’t feel culture shock in my apartment or surroundings. Because it’s a Muslim area, I see food stalls during the festival, that’s it.” — P1

P4 also described cooking Pakistani food because of the difficulty adapting to Thai food:

“We cook because we cannot eat Thai and spicy food, so we cook Pakistani food by ourselves.” — P4

These examples show that housing decisions are connected to cultural and religious needs. Access to familiar food, religious spaces, and co-national or co-religious networks can make off-campus housing more livable. Peer networks also helped students manage exclusion or limited social connections within their accommodation. M3 described feeling excluded from dormitory-based social activities and responding by connecting with other friendship circles:

“How come they could have fun without me? I decided to leave and stick to my circle outside the apartment. I am a social butterfly, and I play with my sports friends. I also felt FoMO until I updated on Twitter.” — M3

Rather than relying only on dormitory-based relationships, the participant developed social support outside the housing environment. This shows that coping with housing-related exclusion may involve building alternative social spaces beyond the apartment. Overall, peer networks functioned as an informal housing infrastructure, helping students access housing information, reduce costs, overcome language barriers, maintain cultural practices, and create belonging. However, this also means that those without strong networks may be more vulnerable in the off-campus housing market.

e. Acceptance, Self-Help, and the Limits of Coping

Not all coping approaches solved housing problems. In many cases, students coped by accepting imperfect conditions, normalising discomfort, or making small adjustments rather than changing their housing situation. This theme is important because it shows the limits of coping. Students’ responses may help them endure housing difficulties, but they do not necessarily remove the underlying problem.

Some participants expressed acceptance or neutrality toward social and housing discomfort. M5 explained:

“I don’t care because, at the end of the day, people come and go, and if there is a mismatch between one and another, I will tolerate it.” — M5

M7 similarly described a neutral position toward inclusion or exclusion:

“I don’t feel like I’m included or excluded. It’s neutral, but I’m well-informed about the rules, so I don’t feel excluded. I also got the same service as a Thai local.” — M7

These statements show that some students cope by lowering expectations or refusing to dwell on discomfort. This can be read as resilience, but it can also reflect the limited choices available to students in temporary housing situations.

Overcrowding and neighbourhood density were also interpreted differently by participants. P1 described overcrowding not only as a problem but also as something that reduced loneliness:

“I don’t get disturbed. The good thing is that I don’t feel so lonely, I always hear someone walking.”

— P1

M2 also described crowded surroundings as a sign of urban life:

“There are fights in the apartment, and the neighbourhood next to mine has conflicts too. I don’t know. I think it’s because there’s life. If it’s quiet, I’m not happy.” — M2

These accounts complicate the assumption that crowded surroundings are always experienced negatively. For some participants, density and noise can cause discomfort, but they can also create a sense of presence and liveliness. Students’ interpretations of housing conditions were therefore shaped by personal preference, cultural background, and prior urban experience.

Safety was another area where coping involved acceptance and hesitation. Most participants described Bangkok and their buildings as relatively safe, especially where key cards, fingerprint scanners, or security guards were present. However, M8 expressed concern about weak building security:

“But sometimes, I feel unsafe because they don’t care who enters the building; they don’t check it. But right now, I’m still hesitating to stay or move.” — M8

This quote shows the limits of coping. The participant identified a safety concern but did not act immediately. Moving would cost money, involve effort, uncertainty and the problem of finding another suitable place. Hesitation was thus part of the coping process.

Self-help was also evident in students’ responses to housing problems. Some students dealt with issues themselves when communicating with landlords was difficult, or they were unclear about maintenance support. This was particularly so in the matter of repairs, the arrangement of rooms, cooking and the daily routine. But self-help should not be seen as just empowerment. It also suggests that students may not have dependable support from their institutions or landlords.

The results indicate ambivalent coping approaches, therefore. They help students to deal with housing problems, but they may also normalise poor housing conditions. Room sharing cuts expenses, but can cause domestic stress. Ratchathewi is more accessible, but they may have to compromise with older buildings or higher rents. Having a friend translate can help with communication, but it also highlights the lack of formal multilingual support. Acceptance and resilience help students stay in their studies, but they can mask unresolved housing issues.

The findings collectively suggest that international students in Ratchathewi cope with off-campus housing through situated coping approaches. These approaches are shaped by financial capacity, location, peer networks, language barriers, cultural needs and the private rental market. Students are not passive recipients of housing but active adjusters, negotiators and improvisers. But their coping approaches also reveal the uneven burden placed on students to solve housing problems that are partly produced by institutional gaps and urban rental conditions.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that international students' experiences with off-campus housing in Ratchathewi are shaped by a combination of affordability, accessibility, housing quality, language, friendship networks, and institutional support. These issues are not experienced in isolation. Instead, students address them through everyday coping approaches such as sharing accommodation, reducing daily expenses, relying on friends for housing information, seeking help from Thai-speaking friends, cooking together, using university spaces to lower utility costs, and accepting imperfect housing conditions. This supports previous research showing that student housing problems are closely connected to financial pressure, academic life, social support, and well-being (Bhowmik et al., 2018; Calder et al., 2016; Hastings et al., 2023; Sotomayor et al., 2022).

A key contribution of this study is to show that coping approaches are also forms of situated housing knowledge. International students do not enter Bangkok's rental market with complete information. They learn to navigate housing through everyday experience: finding affordable rent, identifying convenient locations, understanding building rules, communicating with landlords, negotiating shared living arrangements, and deciding which compromises are tolerable. In Ratchathewi, this knowledge is shaped by access to BTS stations, proximity to campus, food and religious amenities, language barriers, and co-national networks. In this sense, coping is not simply an individual response to stress; it is a process through which students learn how to live in a particular urban environment.

Figure 2 summarises these relationships as an interpretive synthesis of the findings. Rather than presenting coping as a fixed sequence from vulnerability to resolution, the figure shows how financial, material, spatial, social, and informational vulnerabilities interact with situated coping responses. These responses are shaped by the wider housing and institutional context, including students' degree level, financial resources, mobility needs, language capacity, and access to social support. The outcomes of particular coping decisions may reduce one difficulty while shifting pressure to another domain. For example, choosing lower-cost accommodation may relieve immediate financial pressure while increasing commuting time, reducing housing quality, or deepening reliance on peer networks. The figure, therefore, highlights the contingent and uneven character of coping rather than suggesting that all students follow the same process.

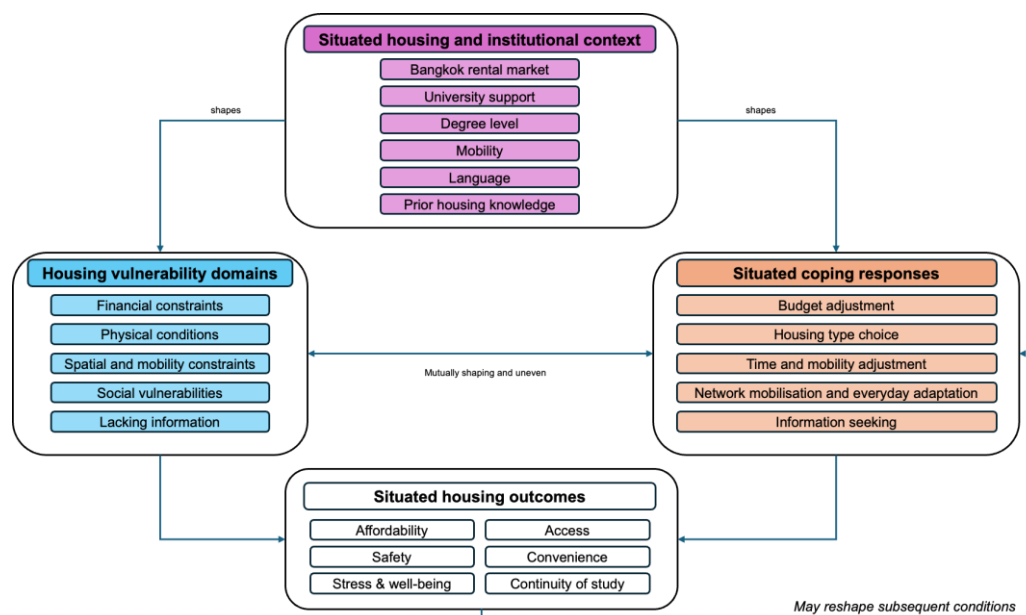


Figure 2 Situated coping loop among international students

Source: Prepared by the author

The findings also show that peer networks function as an informal housing infrastructure. Friends, roommates, co-national groups, and Thai-speaking contacts help students find rooms, interpret neighbourhoods, reduce costs, translate information, and create a sense of belonging. This finding extends existing student housing research by showing that informal support networks not only provide emotional comfort; they also perform practical housing functions. However, this reliance on peer networks also produces unequal outcomes. Students with stronger social networks or better access to local-language support may navigate the rental market more easily, while those without such support may face greater uncertainty.

Ratchathewi itself appears as both enabling and constraining. It supports student life through its central location, public transport access, proximity to campus, and availability of private accommodation. At the same time, these advantages are accompanied by rent pressure, uneven housing quality, old buildings, limited facilities, and communication barriers with landlords or building staff. Students, therefore, make spatial trade-offs among affordability, accessibility, comfort, and uncertainty. For some participants, remaining in Ratchathewi meant accepting accommodation that was not ideal but was still considered “usable” because of its strategic location.

These findings suggest that coping approaches should not be romanticised as a form of resilience alone. Sharing rooms, accepting old facilities, staying in crowded areas, or relying on friends for translation may help students continue living in Bangkok, but they also reveal the limited formal support available to international students in the off-campus rental market. When students must rely on informal networks to understand rent, contracts, maintenance responsibilities, or building rules, the burden of housing adjustment is placed on students themselves. This is especially important in contexts where universities recommend off-campus areas but provide limited practical support for navigating private rental arrangements.

The study, therefore, has implications for both universities and housing providers. Universities should provide clearer multilingual housing information, verified off-campus accommodation lists, pre-arrival housing briefings, guidance on deposits and utility costs, and peer mentoring systems for new international students. Housing providers should improve transparency around rent, maintenance responsibilities, building rules, and communication procedures. These measures would not eliminate all housing challenges, but they could reduce students' reliance on informal support and make navigating off-campus housing less uncertain.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on international students' experiences in Ratchathewi District, Bangkok. The challenges of off-campus housing and the coping approaches used to overcome them. Results highlight that student housing problems stem from affordability, location, housing quality, language barriers, peer networks, and a lack of institutional support. Students did not face these challenges alone but under their everyday coping approaches, which included sharing accommodation, reducing daily expenditure, seeking information about housing from friends, seeking assistance from Thai-speaking fellow students, sharing meals, changing rooms, using university spaces and tolerating sub-standard housing.

This study contributes to student housing and urban studies by illustrating how international student coping approaches can be conceptualised as contextualised housing knowledge. Students learn to navigate the off-campus rental market in Bangkok through everyday experience, peer support, financial adjustments, spatial compromises, and self-help. This knowledge is shaped by the district's central location in Ratchathewi, access to public transportation, student-friendly rental options, food and religious amenities, and communication issues with landlords or building staff. The findings, thus, reveal that international students are not passive occupants of off-campus housing. They are not passive recipients of the urban housing conditions they find themselves in, but active interpreters, negotiators and adaptors.

The findings reveal the limits of such coping approaches. Some coping mechanisms help students to deal with housing difficulties, but do not necessarily address the underlying problems. Sharing accommodation can reduce rent costs, but it can also lead to household tensions. While living in Ratchathewi may provide more accessibility, it may also mean living in older buildings or paying more. Friends translating support students in talking to landlords, but also reveals a lack of accessible multilingual housing support. Student coping mechanisms, in this sense, demonstrate resilience, but they also reflect the disproportionate burden that international students bear in navigating housing challenges independently.

Yet, the findings also suggest that coping strategies are shaped by students' degree level and institutional conditions. PhD students appeared to have more limited coping options because their routines were often structured by laboratory work, research commitments, fixed institutional schedules, and a limited stipend. These conditions could reduce their ability to relocate, adjust commuting patterns, or seek additional income when housing costs became difficult to manage. In contrast, Master's students appeared

to be leaning on flexible social networks, including peer advice, shared accommodation arrangements, and informal support from friends or co-national communities, highlighting the practical implications for universities in Bangkok. Housing support should not assume that international students experience accommodation challenges in the same way. Universities should provide more targeted assistance to PhD students with fixed schedules and limited financial flexibility, while also strengthening peer-based housing information and support networks to Master's student.

The study has practical implications for universities and private housing providers. Universities should provide multilingual housing information more transparently, a vetted list of off-campus housing options, pre-arrival housing briefings, advice on deposits and utility fees, and a peer mentoring program for new international students. Private housing providers need to provide greater information on rents, maintenance obligations, building regulations, and communication procedures. These measures will not solve every housing problem, but they can reduce uncertainty and make the search for off-campus housing less reliant on informal networks.

Limitations of this study include a small sample size and, therefore, limited generalizability to all international students living off-campus in Bangkok. Moreover, focusing on graduate students does not capture the full diversity of the larger international student population. Future research should investigate international student housing in other districts of Bangkok, and compare experiences by a more complete demographic profile as well as the views of other actors (e.g. universities, landlords and housing providers) in order to better understand how off-campus international student housing support can be improved in rapidly urbanising Southeast Asian cities.

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