

AN ANALYSIS INTO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' BAD LIFESTYLE HABITS AND THEIR EFFECT ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Mamoon M. Alaraj^a, Hisham W. Kayal^b, Essam Banoqitah^c

^a Academic Language Support Unit, Faculty of Engineering, King Abdul-Aziz University, KSA

^b Industrial Engineering Department, Faculty of Engineering, King Abdul-Aziz University, KSA

^c Nuclear Engineering Department, Faculty of Engineering, King Abdul-Aziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This study aims at clearly specifying the worst lifestyle habits done by university students, deeply interpreting how these habits could affect students' academic achievement and obviously understanding why students keep on doing such habits. The main objective of this study is to increase students' awareness about a very significant aspect of their lives that they usually neglect, namely their lifestyle habits. A 16-item questionnaire is formulated and randomly distributed to 50 students. Depending on students' perceptions, the worst lifestyle habits most students suffer from are lack of sleep, studying overnights, overuse of multimedia and postponing assignments. Most students believe that these habits either directly or indirectly lead to lack of attention in class, carelessness about assignments, unreadiness for exams and constant feeling of exhaustion and tiredness. Concerning elucidating the most effective reasons that stand behind keeping on doing these bad habits, most students agree that lack of willpower, laziness and disregard of lifestyle lead to this phenomenon. Based on the findings of the study, relevant interpretations are discussed, and some recommendations are suggested.

Keywords: academic, achievement, consequence, effect, habit, impact, lifestyle, performance

1. Introduction

One of the main reasons behind students' low level of academic achievement is their lifestyle habits [1-3]. Lifestyle, as defined by (Collins English Dictionary), is "a set of attitudes, habits or possessions associated with a particular person or group" [4]. According to this definition, lifestyle is a very general word as it includes almost everything a person do throughout his/her daily life. In this study, the concept of lifestyle is narrowed to its negative side only, in which we can see how some students' bad habits, such as erroneous sleeping and eating habits, can affect their academic performance. One of the problems addressed by this study is students' lack of knowledge about the relationship between their lifestyle and their academic performance and how strong it is. The other issue discussed is students' disregard of their own lifestyle, showing no real desire to change some of their bad habits at all. The purpose of this study is to examine the bad lifestyle

habits done by university students, which are usually done without noticing their impact on their academic life. Another main purpose for choosing such a topic is that most people do some of these habits and it is necessary to recognize their possible effects on their academic life. This study gains its importance from the area which this research is related to, education. Education is one of the most important aspects of our life that needs continuous improvement [5, 6], and this try is in this direction. What makes it more important is that lifestyle habits' influence is neglected by most students.

According to Dumuid (2017), poor lifestyle habits such as lack of sleep, poor diet, and long screen time do impact students' academic performance [7]. To prove this impact, Dumuid conducts a study on some Australian school children. This study depends on observation as children combine clusters who have different lifestyles and are examined by a nationally administered

standardized test. The findings suggest that students with unhealthy diets and high screen time have the lowest scores, while students with high non-screen time get the highest. In another study conducted by [8] they find that lifestyle behavior is firmly related to students' academic achievement. Encouraging compliance with sanitary lifestyle commendations could develop both the health and instructive results of school children. School-based health advance ment enterprises that target various lifestyle activities might have a bigger outcome on academic accomplishment than those that concentrate on a sole activity. As part of bad lifestyle habits, sleep deficit is considered an important matter across advanced teaching campuses and has a negative outcome on students' academic accomplishment, mental and physical health, and overall welfare [9]. Low weekday and mean nighttime sleep length are found to associate (statistically significant) with unhealthy eating traditions, sleep manners, school and social achievement, and quality of life procedures [10]. As another part of bad lifestyle habits, greater time on computerized devices is also related to poorer academic results. The more time kids spend using digital media, the less time they tend to spend reading. This has harmful impacts on learning as students progress through school [10].

As known by all researchers, one of the main reasons behind lack of sleep is exams. By the approach of exams, students start doing all-night cramming sessions as they try to finish studying the exam material. These cramming sessions prove to be less effective on the long run as they only help with the short-term memory, as suggested by Allen [11], making us realize that students do not benefit from what they have learned anymore. However, scholars might have different opinions about the worst habits, which would be explored in the questionnaire of this study.

This study aims at investigating how some students' bad lifestyle habits could impact their academic achievement, and how strong the link between these two factors are. In addition, it aims at seeking the reasons behind doing such habits, to further suggest suitable solutions.

Thus, the research questions (RQs) of the study are as follows:

- 1- What are the worst lifestyle habits that can affect university students' academic achievement?
- 2- How can these habits affect their performance?
- 3- Why do students keep on doing these bad habits?

2. Methodology

This study tried to examine the relationship between lifestyle habits and academic achievement. The data collection tool used in this research was a questionnaire as it was the easiest and most effective way to investigate that relationship. The survey included a total of 16 items. Six items investigated the worst lifestyle habits done by students, while five items explored the effect of these bad habits on students' academic achievement. And the other five items were addressed to consider the reasons behind doing these bad habits. These items varied as some were multiple choice questions and others were check boxes. Some of these questions were quantitative and others qualitative. Some were personal and others general. The sample size used in this survey was 50 university students. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants mainly through WhatsApp groups. The data was analyzed using Google Forms, which had the option of showing tabular results of the data collected, as well as scrutinized by Excel sheets for a more detailed view of the results.

To develop the questionnaire and invent related items, the 3 RQs were given to a 3 focus groups of university students who were asked to create relevant items that could answer those 3 RQs. The output was used to build up the first draft of the questionnaire. To establish a validity for that version, the method of content validity was used. That version was given to a jury of 3 specialists who were questioned to write down comments and recommendations concerning the practicability of the questionnaire items, their probable effects on the students' academic achievement and their potential ability to answer the 3 RQs. After con-

sidering their comments and recommendations, a class of 20 university students were given the second draft. After examining their responses, the ambiguous items were modified and improved to make them clearer and more practical (See Appendix A).

3. Findings

The results of the study were presented based on the three RQs. In the beginning, two general questions were asked to the respondents. They were asked about whether they took care of their lifestyle. The majority (42%, 21 students out of 50) answered “Somehow”. They were also asked whether they thought students’ academic performance was affected by their lifestyle. Most respondents (62%, 31 participants) agreed and strongly agreed with this statement.

The first research question was as follows:

RQ1: What are the worst lifestyle habits that can affect KAU students’ academic achievement?

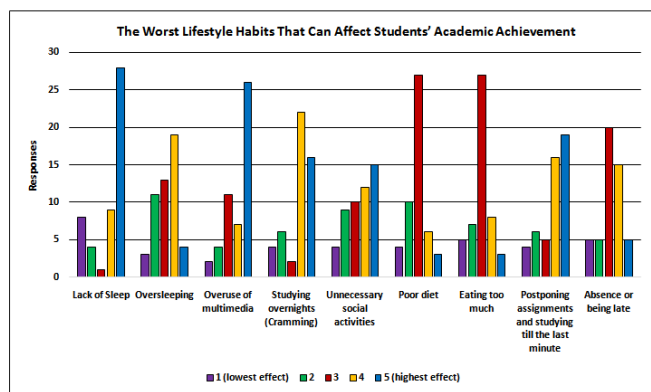


Figure 1: The worst lifestyle habits that can affect students’ academic life (Survey item No. 4)

Fig.1 showed the worst lifestyle habits that could affect students’ academic performance. In a scale from 1 to 5, each bad lifestyle habit was rated in order to determine the worst ones. 1 represented the lowest effect, while 5 showed the highest. This description of the graph only stated the most rated scale for each habit. For the (Lack of sleep) habit, 28 out of 50 respondents (56%) rated it as the first highest, making it the first

worst habit. (Overuse of multimedia) was the second highest, with 26 responses (52%), making it the second worst habit. (Postponing assignments and studying till the last minute) was rated the highest by 19 respondents (38%), making it the third worst habit. Then came (Studying overnights) and (Unnecessary social activities) with 16 and 15 respondents, respectively. (Studying overnights) also had 22 respondents (44%) who chose it to represent scale 4. This bad habit accumulated 38 out of 50 responses for scale 4 and 5 together, whereas (Lack of sleep) accumulated 37 for the two same scales. (Oversleeping) was mostly rated as 4 with about 18 responses (36%). Then came (Postponing assignments) and (Absence and tardiness) with 16 and 15 respondents, respectively. 27 respondents (54%) chose scale 3 for both (Poor diet) and (Eating too much) habits. Finally, 20 respondents (40%) chose scale 3 for the habit (Absence or being late).

Another version of the above survey item was introduced in the survey (Survey item No. 3, See Appendix A). It included the same statements. It asked the respondents to personally select the habits that they usually did. The majority (82%, 41 participants) chose (Lack of sleep) as the habit they constantly did. (Overuse of multimedia) came in the second place with 66% (33 responses).

The second research question was as follows:

RQ2: How can these habits affect students’ performance?

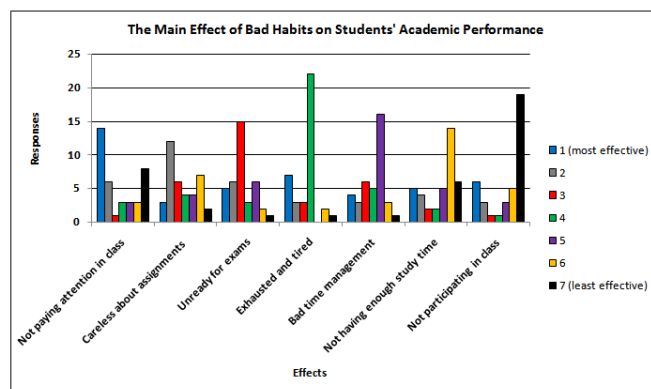


Figure 2: The main effect of bad habits on students’ academic performance (Survey item No. 8)

The bar graph above (Fig. 2) displayed the main effects of bad habits on students’ academic

performance. The effects above were ordered according to their impact from 1 to 7, in which 1 represented the greatest effect and 7 represented the smallest effect. The most effective habit out of the list was (Not paying attention in class). It was chosen by 14 out of 50 participants (28%) as number 1. 12 participants (24%) chose (Careless about assignments) to be the second most effective habit. (Unready for exams) was chosen to be the third most effective habit by 15 respondents (30%). 22 responses (44%) placed (Exhausted and tired) in the fourth place. (Bad time management) was voted as number 5 by 16 participants (32%). In the sixth place was (Not having enough study time) with 14 responses (28%). Finally, 19 respondents (38%) placed (Not participating in class) in the seventh place as the least effective impact.

Another question in the survey introduced the same statements and asked about which impact respondents noticed on their academic life (Survey item No. 7, See Appendix A). The majority chose (Unready for exams) and (Exhausted and tired) with 66% (33 students) for each.

The next graph (Fig. 3) showed different statements from different items in the survey. This graph displayed the number of responses for each statement. These statements were collected from survey items No. 5, 6, 9, and 10 (See Appendix A).

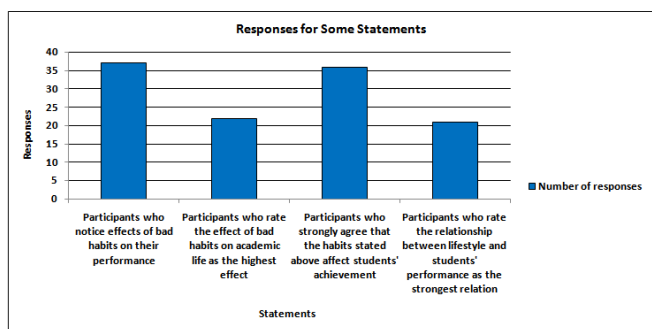


Figure 3: Responses for some statements (Survey items No. 5, 6, 9, and 10)

According to Figure 3, 37 students out of 50 (74% of the participants) already noticed an impact of bad habits on their performance. 22 students (44%) claimed that these habits had a very

high effect on academic life. 36 students (72%) strongly agreed that some of the habits mentioned above really affected students' achievement. And 21 participants (42%) claimed that there was a very strong relationship between lifestyle and students' performance.

The third research question was as follows:

RQ3: Why do students keep on doing these bad habits?

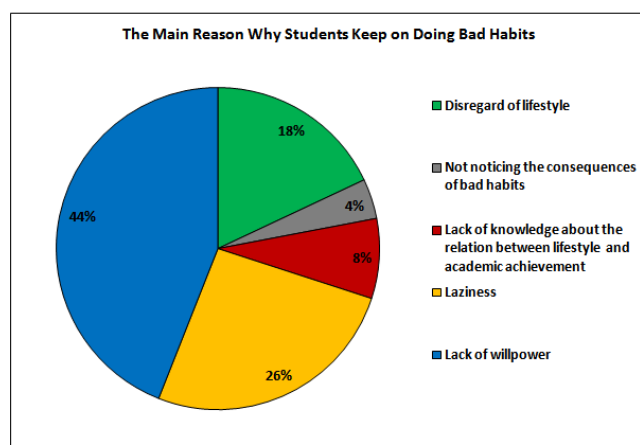


Figure 4: The main reason why students keep on doing bad habits (Survey item No. 16)

This pie chart (Figure 4) demonstrated the main reasons why students kept on doing bad habits. This multiple-choice question had 5 answers. The majority (44%, 22 students out of 50) chose (Lack of willpower) as the main reason why students kept on doing bad habits. 26% (13 students) chose (Laziness). (Disregard of lifestyle) was chosen by 18% (9 respondents). The choice of (Lack of knowledge about the relation between lifestyle and academic achievement) was selected by 8% (4 students). Finally, 4% (2 participants) selected (Not noticing the consequences of bad habits).

The other form of this question (Survey item No. 15, See Appendix A) asked the respondents about why they were still doing some of their bad habits. The majority (78%, 39 students out of 50) chose (Laziness) as the reason why they were still doing some of their habits, followed by (Lack of willpower) and (Disregard of lifestyle) with 54% (27 respondents) per each.

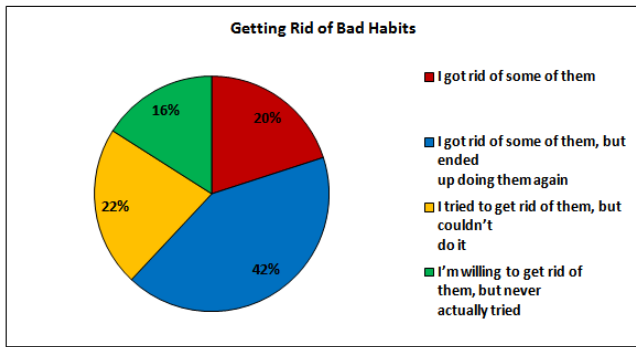


Figure 5: Getting rid of bad habits (Survey item No. 11)

Figure 5 above displayed different situations of students who were trying to get rid of some of their bad habits. The majority (42%, 21 students out of 50) claimed that they actually got rid of some bad habits, but ended up doing them again, 22% (11 participants) tried but couldn't do it, 20% (10 students) got rid of some, 16% (8 respondents) were willing to get rid, but never tried to do it, and (0%) were not willing to change their bad habits.

The following graph (Fig. 6) displayed different statements from different items in the survey. The graph showed the number of responses per each statement. These statements were collected from survey items No. 12, 13, and 14 (See Appendix A).

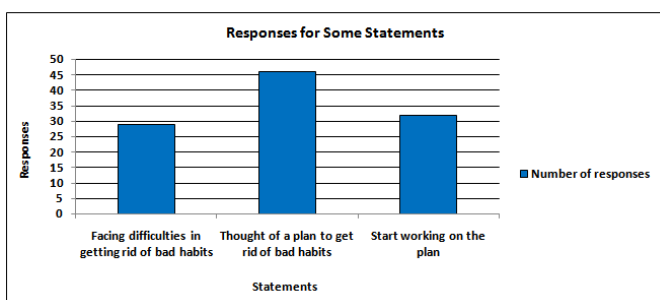


Figure 6: The main reason students keep on doing bad habits (Survey items No. 12, 13, and 14)

According to Figure 6 above, 28 students out of 50 faced difficulties in getting rid of some of their bad habits. 46 participants had previously thought of a plan to get rid of them, and 32 students did start working on their plan.

4. Discussion

As mentioned, this study investigates the impact of bad lifestyle habits on university students' academic achievement. The problem addressed by this study is students' lack of knowledge about this relationship. By conducting a survey, the researchers reach some findings that can help answer the research questions. The major findings related to the three research questions indicate the following:

The worst lifestyle habits most students suffer from are lack of sleep, studying overnights, overuse of multimedia and postponing assignments. They also believe that these habits affect their academic achievement (See Fig. 1).

Regarding how these habits affect students' performance, most students believe that these habits lead to lack of attention in class, carelessness about assignments, unreadiness for exams and constant feeling of exhaustion and tiredness (See Fig. 2).

Concerning the main reasons behind keeping on doing these bad habits, most students agree that lack of willpower, laziness and disregard of lifestyle are the most effective reasons that stand behind this phenomenon (See Fig. 4).

First of all, the above bad lifestyle habits, the ways they affect university students' performance and the reasons behind keeping on doing them have probably reciprocal and mutual relationships. They are all directly or indirectly affected by each other. Defining these habits, specifying their effects and clarifying their reasons could possibly be positively reflected on most of these mentioned items. For example, strengthening "willpower" as a reason could be a key factor that can help students deal with these bad habits i.e. "postponing assignments" and their effects i.e. "unreadiness for exams" and even getting rid of "laziness" as another reason why students keep on doing these habits. One more example is the relationship between "overuse of multimedia" as a bad habit and "lack of sleep" as another bad habit on one hand, and how these two habits could affect "constant feeling of exhaustion and tiredness" and enhance "lack of willpower" as a reason

on the other hand. Many more examples could be thought of regarding these reciprocal relationships. Such examples can certainly help students be aware of the effect of their lifestyle on their academic performance.

To go deeper we could say that many bad lifestyle habits affect students' academic life, but some of these habits have more impact than others. Seeking the worst out of them give students a clear priority of which lifestyle habits negatively affect them. Moreover, this also gives them a clear indication of which habits they need to get rid of first. Clearly, "lack of sleep" is students' worst habit according to the findings. Most students suffer from this habit, while not knowing its major effect on their performance. Most students choose it as the worst habit possibly because they personally suffer from it as well as feel how difficult it is to get rid of. However, there are some other reasons behind lack of sleep. Overnight cramming sessions could be considered one of the main reasons behind lack of sleep. This bad studying habit is one of the options of the worst habits list in the survey (See Fig. 1). In addition, it is proved to be more harmful to students than to be helpful to them. Many students are not aware of this and thus not even try to change or replace this bad habit. The effect of lack of sleep is not only related to not feeling rested, but it also has much bigger consequences. It negatively impacts learning, memory, and life performance [[12]]. These three aspects can really impact students' academic performance.

To be more specific bad lifestyle habits have several effects on students' performance, but some effects are more serious; others are less. For each bad habit listed in Fig. 1, there is a corresponding effect, or outcome, listed in Fig. 2. For example, "Unnecessary social activities" habit, can lead to "Not having enough study time" effect (See Fig. 1 and 2). According to the findings, students agree that "Not paying attention in class" is the main effect of the bad habits stated before. It could be noticed that this result is logical as it explains why students choose "lack of sleep" as the worst habit. Lack of sleep could surely lead to not paying attention to morning classes in particular, and

this could make the relation between these two findings more logical. In addition to lack of sleep, other habits that can lead to not paying attention in class include using smartphones, social media, being late, or studying overnights. All the previous bad habits are also included in the list in Survey item No. 1. Thus, the fact that this effect could be caused by more than one habit explains why students choose it as the main one. Not paying attention in class has many negative effects on students. Students couldn't understand lectures anymore, leading them to register with private tutors. This could probably decrease the amount of students' independence and waste both their money and time. Students could also miss some important information said in class such as announcement of quizzes, homework, important questions, required course materials, or deadline reminders. Also, teachers might not have a good impression about students who do not pay attention in class. The result could probably be that teachers give less help to those students as teachers do not feel responsible about them anymore. So, students should come to class with a clear mind and be full of will to learn. Anything, such as smartphones, that might distract students during their lectures should be neglected. Some students tend to use laptops for taking notes in class, but this might lead students to misuse them as well. Instead of using their laptops for their current lecture, they might do homework and assignments for other subjects, or even check social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter. This could lead to a similar effect to that of texting on smartphones. Doing so does not only distract students but could also make them take longer time to recall information given during lectures. According to a study by the Southwestern Psychological Association (SWPA), students lose 27% of information given in class when multitasking, and especially when texting [13]. Therefore, using laptops and smartphones can be a wrong way to take notes in class, as it can easily distract students. Perhaps using notebooks would be a better way to do so. According to their personal experience, students encounter fatigue, exhaustion and tiredness a result of their bad habits. In addi-

tion, they claim that they always feel unready for exams because of these bad habits.

At some point of their lives, students almost realize some of the undesirable habits they do. The question is why do they keep on doing them? The fact that a student does some bad lifestyle habits is acceptable. Failing to get rid of them is not. Students should discover why they continue doing these habits. When asked, they claim that the two main reasons are willpower and laziness. According to (Olivares, 2015) laziness hinders students' academic progress as their work always seem to be submitted late, they start working on projects just before deadline, they postpone homework and they start studying one day before an exam [14]. Considering the main reason behind keeping on doing bad habits, students agree on lack of willpower. It is possibly logical as lack of willpower is also the reason behind laziness. Students wouldn't become lazy and careless about their work if they had a strong willpower. A student's ability to accomplish what he/she wants shows how strong his willpower is. With more self-control, students may aim at achieving a lot of what they want. A student's will is not only about aiming to do something desirable, but also resisting doing undesirable things. Self-control and decision-making are two terms related to willpower. They all fall into some part of our brain and have many scientific and psychological explanations. Same as our body, our brain should also be rested by sleeping to prevent it from being exhausted. Scientifically, saving our brains from being depleted helps it to maintain its energy and thus increasing self-control over the body [15]. This piece of information links us to the first question of the study where lack of sleep was considered as the worst lifestyle habit. Here, we discover a new outcome of lack of sleep which seems to be a less self-control on ourselves. Another finding that relates to this one is in survey item No. 11. Students are asked whether they ever try to get rid of some of their bad habits. The majority answered, "I got rid of some of them, but ended up doing them again". This shows how lack of willpower affects their progress in getting rid of their bad habits.

Finally, the three main findings of this study can show great reciprocal relationships. Discovering such relations can help students realize how to deal with their bad lifestyle habits and eventually motivate them to get rid of them.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, lack of knowledge about the reciprocal relations between lifestyle habits and academic achievement may explain why students neglect such habits. The main problem investigated by this study is students' disregard of lifestyle which forms a major issue to their academic performance. The importance of this issue gains its importance from its relationship with education, which is an imperative field. Students should know more about this relation and discover its consequences. Thus, this study gives students more knowledge about the problem and aims at raising their awareness of this vital issue. Bad lifestyle habits could hinder students' academic achievements. One main question of this study is to define the worst lifestyle habits done by students and this has been achieved. It can be said that the worst habits done by students are the lack of sleep time, studying overnights and overuse of multimedia. With that being said, students should try to avoid doing such habits especially after knowing their consequences. This research clearly shows that students' lack of attention in classroom, carelessness about assignments, unreadiness for exams and constant feeling of exhaustion and tiredness are considered as the main effective impacts that the bad habits has on our students. Lack of willpower and laziness are two findings that explore why students keep on doing these bad habits. Students should take those two reasons into consideration when trying to get rid of their bad habits because these two factors can deeply affect their academic progress. In addition, the above discussion suggests an overview about how students can overcome some of the bad habits as well as the consequences that might occur if they neglect these habits. Finally, it is worth pointing out that this study gives some ways of dealing with this issue, which is mostly related

to students' way of thinking. Further studies are needed to suggest new ways of dealing with these bad habits or add up to the existing ones. A person's good management of the way he/she lives is a key factor of success. No one should be caring about a person's lifestyle more than he/she does, thus, it is necessarily important to note out that changing it is his own choice.

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Appendix A

An Analysis into KAU Students' Bad Lifestyle Habits and Their Effects on Academic Achievement

Hello! We are Mamoon Alaraj, Essam Banoqitah and Hisham Kayal, two professors and a first-year engineering student in the Faculty of Engineering at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah. We are conducting a survey about the effect of bad lifestyle habits on students' academic achievement. Its aim is to raise students' awareness about how their bad lifestyle habits can affect their academic performance. Please take a moment to answer this 16-item survey.

Thank you.

* Required

1- Are you taking care of your lifestyle? * (Mark only one.)

- Yes ()
- Somehow ()
- Not really ()

2- Do you think students' academic performance is affected by their lifestyle? * (Mark only one.)

- Strongly agree ()
- Agree ()
- Strongly disagree ()
- Disagree ()

3- Which of the following bad lifestyle habits do you constantly do? * (You can tick more than one.)

- Lack of sleep ()
- Oversleeping ()
- Over use of multimedia ()
- Studying overnights(Cramming) ()
- Unnecessary social activities ()
- Poor diet ()
- Eating too much ()
- Postponing assignments and studying till the last minute ()
- Absence or being late()
- Other: -----

4- In your opinion, what are the worst lifestyle habits that can affect students' academic life? * (Rate the effect of each habit from 1to5,1list the lowest effect & 5 is the highest effect.) (Mark only one box.)

Lifestyle habit	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of sleep					
Oversleeping					
Over use of multimedia					
Studying over nights (Cramming)					
Unnecessary social activities					
Poor diet					
Eating too much					
Postponing assignments and studying till the last minute					
Absence or being late					

5- Did you notice any effects of bad habits on your academic performance? * (Mark only one.)

- Yes ()
- No ()
- Maybe ()

6- In a scale from 1-5,how do you rate the above bad habits effects on students' academic life? *(1 is the lowest effect &5isthehighesteffect.) (Mark only one box.)

Low effect	1	2	3	4	5	High effect
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7- Which of the following bad habits effects did you strongly notice on your life? *(You can tick more than one.)

- Being careless and irresponsible about home work and assignments()
- Not pay in gat tention in class()
- Being lazy and unready for quizzes and exams()
- Becoming tired and exhausted frequently ()
- Managing time badly ()
- Not having enough time for studying ()
- Not participating and interactinginclass ()
- Other: -----

8- What do you think is the main effect of these bad habits on students' academic performance? *(Order the effects from 1 to 7, 1 is the most effective & 7 is the least effective.) (Mark only one box per row.)

Bad Habit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lead students to not pay attention in class							
Result in students being careless and irresponsible about their home work and assignments							
Lead students to be lazy and unready for quizzes and exams							
Cause students to be always tired and exhausted							
Lead students to have bad time management							
Result in students not having enough time for studying							
Lead to lack of participation and interaction in class							

9- Do you think the habits stated above really affect student's academic achievement? * (Mark only one.)

- Strongly agree ()
- Agree ()
- Strongly disagree ()
- Disagree ()

10- How strong the relation between these bad habits effects and students' performance? *(1 is the weakest & 5 is the strongest.) (Mark only one box.)

Weak relation	1	2	3	4	5	Strong relation
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11- Have you ever managed to get rid of some of your bad habits? * (Mark only one.)

- Yes, I got rid of some of them. ()
- I got rid of some of them but ended up doing the same again. ()
- I tried to get rid of them but couldn't do it. ()
- I'm willing to get rid of them, but never actually tried. ()
- No, I'm not willing to get rid of any of them. ()

12- Are you facing difficulties in getting rid of some of your bad habits?*(Mark only one.)

- Yes ()
- No ()
- Sometimes ()

13- Have you ever thought of a plan to get rid of any of your bad habits?*(Mark only one.)

- Yes ()
- No ()

14- If yes, did you start working on your plan? (Optional) (Mark only one.)

- Yes () - No ()

15- Why are you still doing some of your bad habits? * (You can tick more than one.)

- Disregard of your lifestyle ()
- Not noticing the effects of these bad habits and their consequences on your life ()
- Lack of knowledge about the relation between lifestyle and academic achievement ()
- Laziness ()
- Lack of willpower ()
- Other:

16- What do you think the main reason that students keep on doing their bad habits is? * (Mark only one.)

- Disregard of students' lifestyles ()
- Not noticing the effects of these bad habits and their consequences on life ()
- Lack of knowledge about the relation between lifestyle and academic achievement ()
- Laziness ()
- Lack of willpower ()
- Other: -----

Thanks a lot