

UNIVERSITY PORTAL USER EXPERIENCE: A CASE STUDY OF UNIDEL

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University portal websites play a crucial role in providing academic information and services to students, faculty, and staff. Research has shown that usability and user experience are key factors in the success of these portals. This paper evaluates the usability and user experience of UNIDEL's portal to improving digital experience in universities. Quantitative method was used to obtain data from undergraduate students at UNIDEL. A google form was created and dropped randomly in various WhatsApp groups. 70 responses was obtained. The result shows that while the portal effectively supports administrative tasks, its potential as an engagement tool remains underutilized. Enhancing interactivity by linking to learning management systems or adding richer, more responsive support materials could transform the portal from a predominantly transactional service into a more dynamic hub that encourages daily use and deeper academic involvement.

Keywords: Academic information, Portal, university, User experience**INTRODUCTION**

University web portals have become essential tools for higher education institutions, serving as communication channels and interfaces for academic staff and students (Cláudia Pinho et al., 2018). These portals offer numerous benefits, including improved information management, decision-making support, and integration of various services (Bajec, 2005). Students primarily use portals during critical phases of the academic calendar and for accessing specific, immediate information (Lukaitis and Davey, 2008). To ensure effectiveness, portals should be designed with user satisfaction in mind, focusing on informational and transactional content, website design, and overall student satisfaction (Abdelhakim et al., 2011). Despite their importance, there is a notable lack of research on best practices for portal design and content (Abdelhakim et al., 2011). Implementing appropriate web portals can provide universities with competitive advantages and help transform their information systems more effectively and at lower costs (Bajec, 2005).

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital platforms across various sectors, reshaping public service provision, healthcare delivery, and social interactions. Government-sponsored platforms have facilitated the transition from recovery to transformative resilience in city-level services (Shen et al., 2022). In healthcare, digital platforms and artificial intelligence have improved access, affordability, and quality of care (Sosa, 2020). However, the growing reliance on digital platforms has led to concerns about market monopolization and the colonization of economic and social spaces (Gavrilenko and Markeeva, 2020). The pandemic has blurred boundaries between work and home life, creating a hyper-dependence on private digital platforms and exacerbating existing digital inequalities (Risi et al., 2020). While digital platforms have proven essential in managing the crisis, their increasing dominance raises questions about the need for balanced regulations to protect citizens' interests and maintain institutional reciprocity between businesses, governments, and the public (Gavrilenko and Markeeva, 2020).

Universities face several challenges in optimizing portal user experience (UX). These include managing vast amounts of organizational data, redefining business practices, and ensuring user adoption (Todd Zazelenchuk and E. Boling, 2003). Information overload due to technological ubiquity is a significant concern, necessitating the optimization of user-system interaction (Maia et al., 2014). Unresponsive interfaces, outdated designs, and poorly highlighted features can negatively impact user experience, as demonstrated in a study of Portal Unand (Arief et al., 2021). To address these issues, universities must focus on organizing study materials for quick access, optimizing e-learning portals for user-friendliness, and reducing page load times (Tugelbayev and Zhamanov, 2021). Implementing design thinking methodologies and conducting usability testing can lead to improved portal interfaces that meet user needs and expectations (Arief et al., 2021). By addressing these challenges, universities can create more effective and satisfying portal experiences for their users. This paper evaluates the usability and user experience of UNIDEL's portal to improving digital experience in universities and contribute to UX research in African higher education contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS**Review of Related Works**

Research on university portal user experience consistently demonstrates that usability, accessibility, and responsiveness are fundamental to student satisfaction and effective service delivery. A'yun et al. (2023) found that website quality, encompassing usability, accessibility, and responsiveness, positively correlates with user satisfaction, with students engaging in more repetitive interactions on well-designed platforms.

User experience design significantly impacts Learning Management System (LMS) adoption and effectiveness. Mobile-oriented interface design presents challenges for desktop users, including oversized fonts and icons designed for touchscreens, and navigation elements requiring additional clicks (Zorica & Klindzic, 2023). Systematic reviews confirm that focused attention on interface design and

user experience is crucial for effective learning in higher education, emphasizing the importance of UX/UI design in e-learning platform success (Miya & Govender, 2022).

University portals are evolving beyond simple transactional platforms toward comprehensive digital ecosystems that enhance both operational efficiency and academic engagement. They now operate within highly interconnected global landscapes where digital platforms play pivotal roles in attracting students, researchers, and industry collaborators (Anvari et al., 2024). Academic library portals exemplify this evolution, incorporating single authentication processes, metadata access, personalization features, and instructional capabilities while continuously adapting to maintain relevance through new resources and services (Blummer & Kenton, 2021).

Concept of Portal Usability

Web portals have become vital communication interfaces between academic staff, supporting information management and decision-making processes in higher education institutions (Pinho et al., 2018).

Pandey et al. (2023) analyzed academic web portals at Tribhuvan University, revealing that while institutions use standardized technologies like PHP and WordPress, many suffer from slow loading speeds and poor optimization, affecting user experience. Gkonos et al. (2018) conducted a comparative study of geoportal interfaces, showing that GUI adaptations positively influenced efficiency, user experience, usability, and reduced cognitive workload.

Usability is a critical factor determining the success of student academic portals. Oliha (2014) found that despite informative features, the University of Benin web portal failed to encourage student usage due to inefficiencies in completing specified tasks, regardless of students' computer competencies. This highlights how poor usability directly impacts student interaction with portal systems. Rosmasari et al. (2018) emphasized that usability evaluation methods like Think Aloud and Heuristic Evaluation are essential for

identifying problems that affect portal service capabilities and user perceptions.

Poor usability significantly hinders portal adoption and effectiveness across various domains. In healthcare, Ali et al. (2018) found that despite iterative improvements to an electronic patient portal, users still encountered significant difficulties with tasks like setting up proxy accounts, particularly when they lacked clear understanding of available functions.

Method

Quantitative method was used to obtain data from undergraduate students at UNIDEL. A google form was created and dropped randomly in various WhatsApp groups. 70 responses was obtained and the distribution shows the responses were 34 computing students, 32 students from the faculty of Management and social science, 1 student from the faculty of education, 1 student from the faculty of arts and 1 from the faculty of basic medical science. For the analysis, data obtained from the Google Form questionnaire were exported into Microsoft Excel for processing. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were generated to summarize the responses, and results were presented in charts for clarity. Excel was chosen because of its accessibility, ease of use, and suitability for handling survey data in studies that focus on descriptive user experience metrics. This approach provided a straightforward yet reliable means of highlighting patterns in students' interactions with the UNIDEL portal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The distribution of the responses showed students from various departments as shown in Figure 1. 35 of which were 400 level students, 17 from 200 level and 11 from 100 level. Also, in Figure 2 the faculty of computing had 34 responses from students, 32 students from the faculty of Management and social science, 1 student from faculty of education, 1 from faculty of arts and 1 from faculty of basic medical science, giving a total of 70 responses.

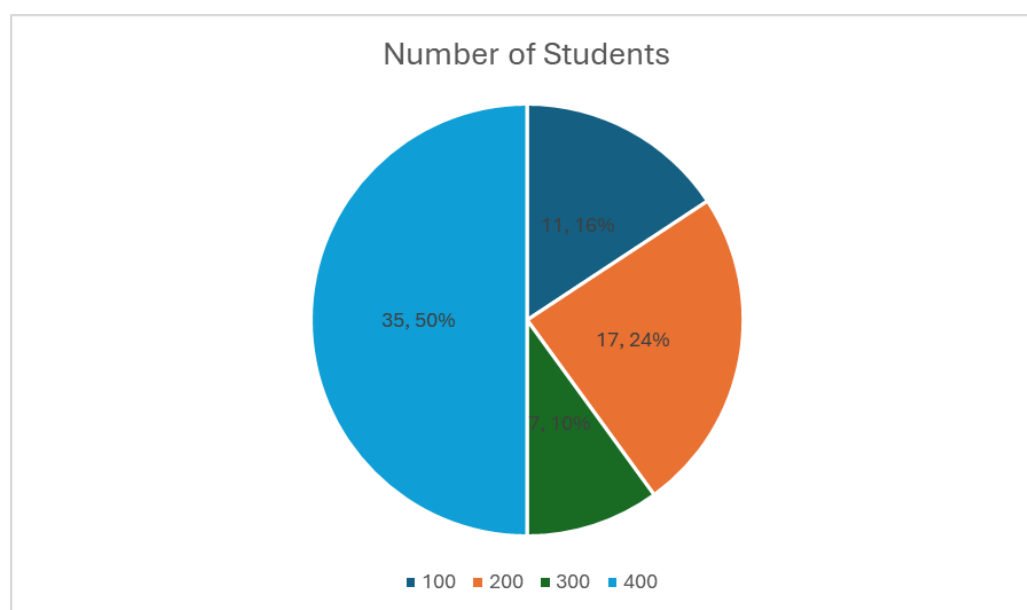


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Study

The distribution of respondents across study levels shows a strong representation from senior students. Out of the 70 participants, 400-level students formed the largest group

(50%), followed by 200-level students (24.3%), 100-level students (15.7%), and 300-level students (10%). This suggests that final-year students are more engaged with the portal,

likely due to their frequent need to access academic records, process payments, and complete graduation-related activities. The lower representation of 100- and 200-level students may

reflect limited familiarity with the portal, while 300-level students appear to engage the least with portal-related services.

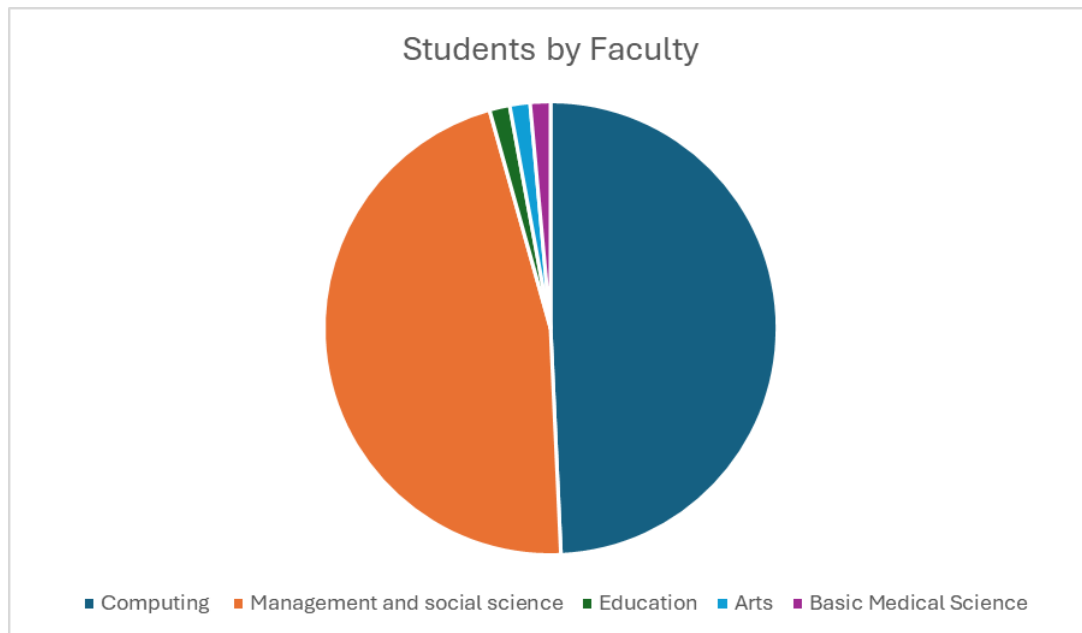


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Faculty

Distribution further indicates that the majority of responses came from two faculties: Computing (48.6%) and Management and Social Sciences (45.7%), with only minimal participation from Education, Arts, and Basic Medical Sciences (1.4% each). This imbalance suggests that students in Computing and Management & Social Sciences are more

active users of the portal, possibly because their academic processes are more digitized or because they have greater exposure to ICT-based tools. The limited responses from other faculties may indicate underutilization of the portal or weaker integration of portal services into their academic activities.

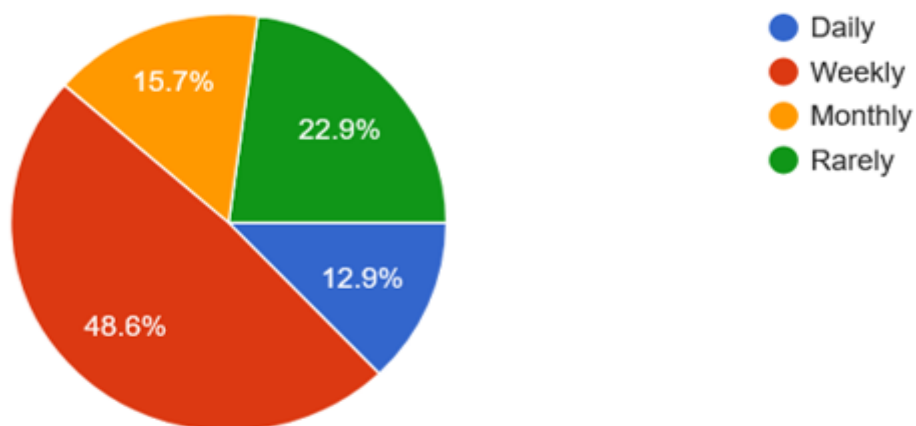


Figure 3: How Often do you use the School Portal

For the question, how often do you use the school portal, 34 students (i.e. 48.6%) used the school portal on a weekly basis, 9 students (i.e. 12.9%) use you the school portal on a daily basis, 11 students (i.e. 15.7%) on a monthly basis and 16 students (i.e. 22.9%) rarely used the school. it indicates that

while almost half of the students are moderately engaged with the portal (weekly use), only a few are highly engaged (daily use), and a significant portion of students are not using the portal frequently at all.

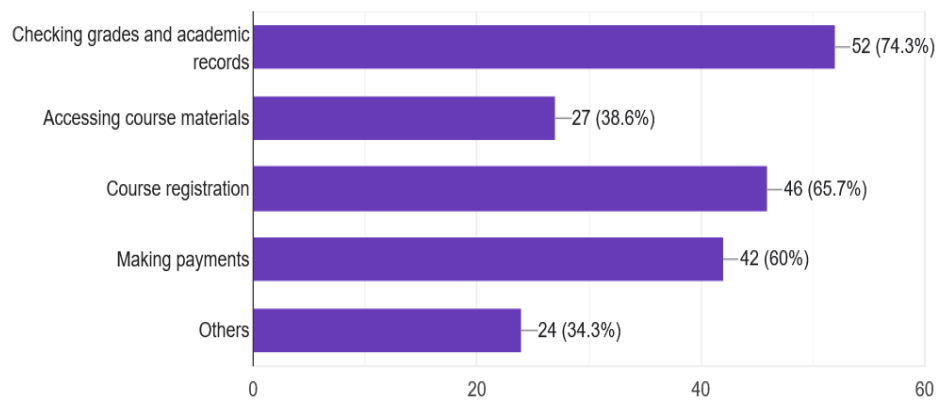


Figure 4: What Primary Task do you use the School Portal for

For the question, what primary task do you use the school portal for, 52 students (i.e. 74.3%) uses the portal for checking grades and academic records, 27 students (i.e. 38.6%) use the school portal for accessing course materials, 46 students (i.e. 65.7%) use the school portal for course registration, 42

students (i.e. 60%) use the school portal for making payment and 24 students (i.e. 34.3%) use the school portal for other tasks. This data indicates that the school portal is predominantly used for administrative and academic management tasks.

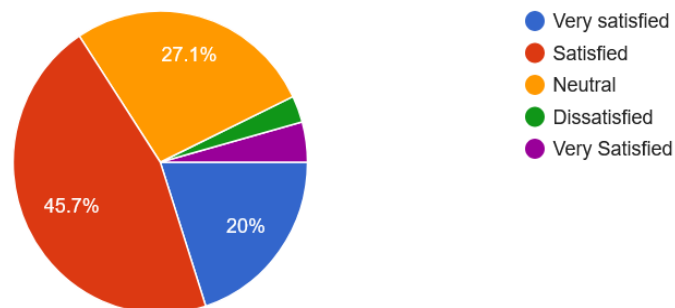


Figure 5: How Satisfied are you with the Overall user Experience of the School Portal

For the question, how satisfied are you with the overall user experience of the school portal, 14 students (i.e. 20%) were very satisfied with their overall experience with the school portal, 32 students (i.e. 45.7%) were satisfied, 19 students (i.e. 27.1%) had neutral opinion about their experience with the

school portal, 2 students (i.e. 5.7%) were dissatisfied and 3 students (i.e. 1.4%) were very dissatisfied. This data indicates that the majority of students have a positive overall experience with the school portal.

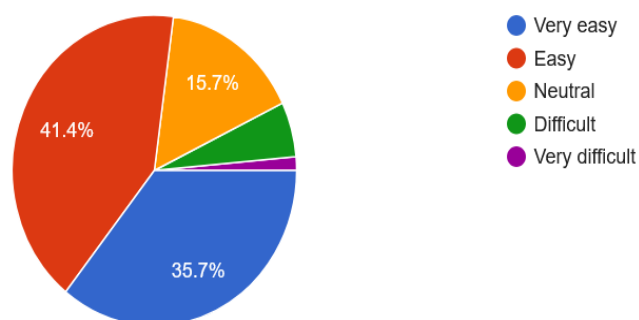


Figure 6: How Easy is it to Register Courses Through the Portal

For the question, how easy is it to register courses through the school portal, 35.7% find it very easy to use, 41.4% find it easy to use, 15.7% had neutral opinion, 5.7% find it difficult,

and 1.4% find it very difficult. This shows that a significant majority of respondents find the course registration process user-friendly on the school portal.

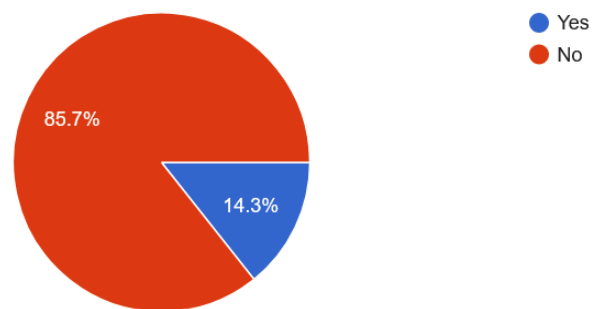


Figure 7: Do you Face any Difficulties Using the Portal Across Different Devices or Browsers

For the question, do you face any difficulties using the portal across different devices or browsers, 10 students (i.e. 14.3%) responded yes and 60 students (i.e. 85.7%) responded no. This shows that a vast majority of students (85.7%) do not face difficulties when using the portal across different devices or

browsers, indicating that the portal is generally compatible and accessible. Only a small fraction (14.3%) reported experiencing issues, which suggests that while the portal performs well for most users, there is still some scope for improvement in cross-platform support.

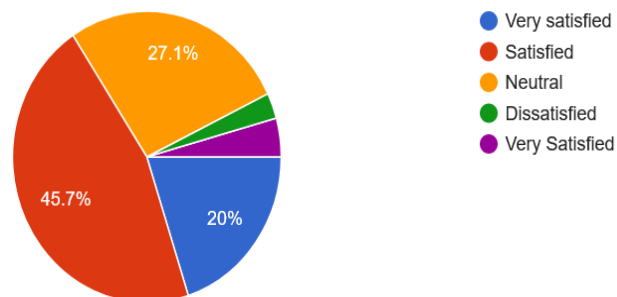


Figure 8: How Satisfied are you in the Overall user Experience of the School Portal

For the question, how satisfied are you with the overall user experience of the school portal, 14 students (i.e. 20%) were very satisfied with their overall experience with the school portal, 32 students (i.e. 45.7%) were satisfied, 19 students (i.e. 27.1%) had neutral opinion about their experience with the

school portal, 2 students (i.e. 5.7%) were dissatisfied and 3 students (i.e. 1.4%) were very dissatisfied. This indicates that the majority of students have a positive overall user experience with the school portal.

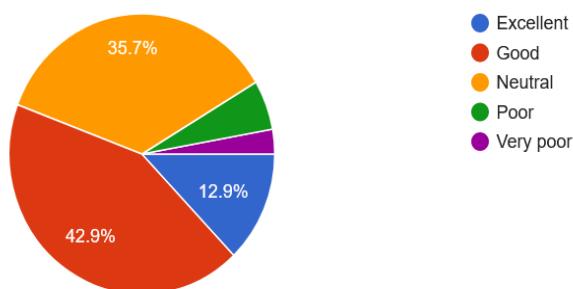


Figure 9: How Would you Rate the Availability and Quality of help or FAQs on the Portal

For the question how you would rate the availability and quality of help or FAQs on the portal, 12.9% found it excellent, 42.9% found it good, and 35.7% found it neutral.

This suggests that although many users are satisfied, there is still room for improvement in making the help resources more useful or engaging.

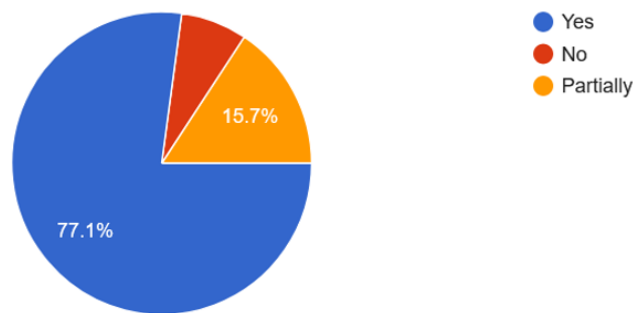


Figure 10: Is the Layout of the Portal Easy to Navigate

For the question, is the layout of the portal easy to navigate, 54 students (i.e. 77.1%) responded yes, 5 students (i.e. 7.1%) responded no and 11 students (i.e. 15.7%) find it partially easy to use. Indicating that although the overall navigational

structure is well-received, there might still be specific areas where usability could be improved for a more seamless experience.

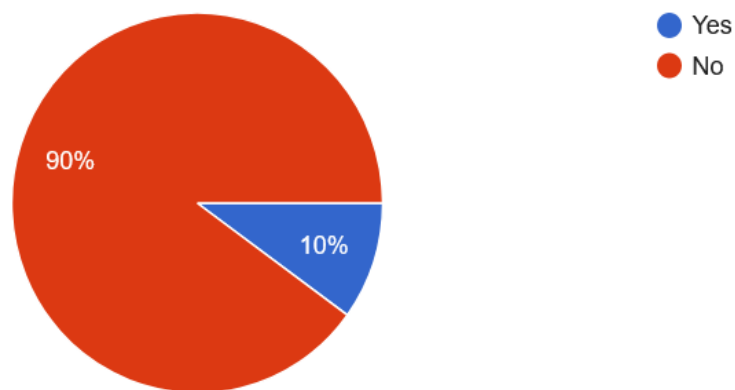


Figure 11: Have you ever Contacted Customer Support to help with the Portal

For the question have you ever contacted customer support to help with the portal, 90% responded no, while 10% responded yes. Suggesting that the portal is generally user-friendly and

that users rarely encounter issues requiring additional assistance.

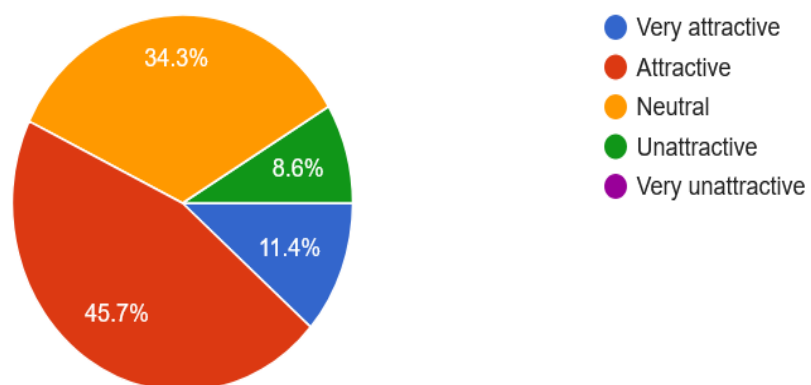


Figure 12: How Visually Appealing do you find the Design of the School Portal

For the question, how visually appealing do you find the design of the school portal, 8 students (i.e. 11.4%) find it very attractive, 32 students (i.e. 45.7%) find it attractive, 24 students (i.e. 34.3%) had neutral opinion, 6 students (i.e.

8.6%) find it unattractive. It suggests that the design is generally well-received, though there is room to enhance its appeal for those who are neutral or dissatisfied.

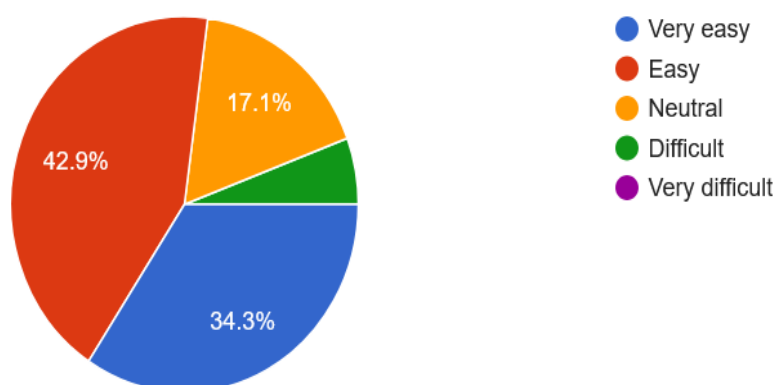


Figure 13: How Easy is it to Make Necessary Payments Through the Portal

For the question, how easy is it to make necessary payments through the school portal, 25 students (i.e. 34.3%) find it very easy, 30 students (i.e. 42.9%) find it easy, 12 students (i.e. 17.1%) had neutral opinion, 4 students (i.e. 5.7%) find it difficult. This indicates that a substantial majority of students (77.2%, combining 34.3% who find it very easy and 42.9% who find it easy) experience the payment process as user-friendly. Meanwhile, 17.1% are neutral about the ease of making payments, and only a small minority (5.7%) find it difficult.

Discussion

Several clear patterns emerge regarding the portal's role in students' academic lives. First, although almost half of the respondents use the portal weekly, only a small fraction (about 13%) use it daily. This suggests that most students see the portal as a tool for managing specific administrative tasks rather than as an interactive, continuously engaged platform. The primary functions include checking grades (74.3%), course registration (65.7%), and making payments (60%). This indicates that the portal's strength lies in delivering essential academic services. In contrast, the lower use for accessing course materials implies that students might be relying on alternative systems for instructional content. This division is consistent with external findings that stress the importance of specialized systems for content delivery versus administrative functions (Grossniklaus and Norrie, 2002). Overall satisfaction is high with around 66% of students rating their experience as positive, even though about 27% remain neutral. Users find processes like course registration and fee payment user-friendly (over 77% report ease), and technical compatibility is strong (85.7% encounter no cross-device issues). However, the help resources and navigational subtleties, where roughly one-third of respondents are neutral or only partially satisfied, highlight potential areas for enhancement. Integrating these insights, it appears that while the portal effectively supports administrative tasks, its potential as an engagement tool remains underutilized. Enhancing interactivity by linking to learning management systems or adding richer, more responsive support materials could transform the portal from a predominantly transactional service into a more dynamic hub that encourages daily use and deeper academic involvement.

CONCLUSION

University portal is an essential tool for higher education and a good user experience is paramount. The COVID-19 accelerated the adoption of digital platforms which needs to

be fully utilized in case of any post COVID-19 eventuality. This study evaluates the usability and user experience of UNIDEL's portal to improving digital experience in universities. The results point to a dual reality: the portal is well-regarded for critical functions like registration and payment, yet there is a missed opportunity in not fully integrating it into the broader academic experience. This overall picture aligns with broader research on student satisfaction with educational e-services, which emphasizes that system and service quality are key drivers of user satisfaction and engagement. Addressing these gaps could not only enhance daily engagement but also contribute to a more cohesive, student-centered digital environment that supports both administrative efficiency and learning outcomes.

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