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Surman Journal for Science and Technology
ISSN: Online (2790-5721) - Print (2790-5713)

مجلة صرمان للعلوم والتقنية
Vol 8, No.2. Jun – Dec. 2026
Pages: 101 ~ 112

Evaluating User Experience and Usability Affordances of the Libyan Higher Education Portal: An HCI Perspective

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Abstract

In the domain of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), the structural usability of electronic government platforms deeply governs transactional success and user adoption. This study presents a data-aligned usability evaluation of the unified Libyan Higher Education Portal (mohe.edu.ly), focusing on how core interaction dimensions control user satisfaction and subsequent system advocacy. Utilizing a structured quantitative framework encompassing learnability, efficiency, error management, visual design, and support accessibility, data was gathered from 51 authentic academic stakeholders (students, faculty, and administrators) interacting with the platform. Perceived general satisfaction yielded a moderate mean score of 3.22/5.00, exposing a highly polarized user experience. The empirical results show high baseline scores for onboarding learnability (Clarity of options mean = 4.10) and execution efficiency (Speed mean = 3.90). However, the tracking of operational barriers revealed that 41.2% of all active respondents explicitly encountered critical system latency and prolonged response times during institutional interaction cycles. Furthermore, rigid error-recovery pathways (mean = 3.27) and limited helpdesk accessibility (mean = 3.16) introduce substantial extraneous cognitive load, causing task anxiety and inducing physical dependencies on central administrative offices. To lower user friction, this study provides actionable interface re-engineering proposals, emphasizing architectural infrastructure scaling, client-side progressive caching, and context-aware dynamic wizard prompts for real-time runtime exception handling.

Keywords: *Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Usability Affordances, User Experience (UX), Higher Education Portals, System Latency, Cognitive Load Theory*

Submitted: *24/05/2026* ***Accepted****: 29/06/2026*

1. Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, government and educational institutions increasingly rely on web-based portals to streamline administrative workflows and deliver services efficiently [1]. In the domain of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), the success of these platforms is fundamentally determined by their usability and user experience (UX) design. Usability is defined as the extent to which a specific product can be used by target users to achieve specified goals with

effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction [2]. For academic administrative systems, high usability is critical because the user base comprising students, faculty members, and administrative staff possesses diverse technical backgrounds and distinct operational needs [3].

Interface usability directly influences the cognitive resources required by users to complete tasks, such as registration and data submission. According to Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), poorly designed system architectures inject extraneous cognitive load, causing mental overload, increasing error rates, and degrading user satisfaction [4]. Conversely, optimizing user interfaces through robust error prevention, intuitive navigation, and clear learnability parameters significantly enhances operational speed and system adoption [5]. Testing and evaluating these platforms under real-world conditions provides indispensable empirical insights for engineering user-centered public systems [6].

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Libya launched its unified electronic portal (mohe.edu.ly) to centralize academic registrations, document verifications, and university services. Given the critical nature of this system and its large-scale deployment, conducting an empirical usability evaluation is essential. While generic web usability frameworks exist, there is a lack of rigorous HCI case studies evaluating national higher education portals in developing regions, where infrastructure limitations present unique interface design challenges. This paper addresses this gap by evaluating the user experience of the Libyan Higher Education Portal. Utilizing a structural evaluation framework encompassing learnability, efficiency, error recovery, visual design, and general satisfaction, we analyze data gathered from authentic users. The outcomes of this study provide actionable design recommendations for public sector web interfaces and contribute to the broader HCI literature on educational system usability [7].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Usability Dimensions in Educational Portals

Academic administrative portals serve as critical touch points where users interact with complex institutional databases. HCI frameworks establish that the quality of these interactions is governed by core usability dimensions, primarily learnability, efficiency, and error management [8]. Learnability dictates how easily first-time users can navigate the registration pipeline and comprehend authentication requirements without external assistance [8]. Efficiency measures the operational speed and the optimal number of steps required to execute a transaction, such as completing an academic profile [9].

In public service systems, authentication interfaces represent a frequent source of interaction friction. The integration of multiple verification methodologies such as matching telephone numbers with national identification databases can introduce technical and cognitive bottlenecks if the interface fails to guide the user transparently [10]. Studies in e-government usability emphasize that when registration options are ambiguous, user error rates spike, directly lowering overall system trust and user satisfaction [10, 11].

2.2 Error Prevention, Recovery, and Affective Outcomes

An essential attribute of a highly usable interface is its capacity for error prevention and seamless error recovery. When users commit data-entry errors, the system must provide explicit, contextual feedback indicating the exact nature of the error and clear pathways to rectify it [8]. Inadequate feedback mechanisms result in user frustration and task abandonment. In the context of Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), system-generated friction such as vague error messages or slow response times constitutes extraneous cognitive load, which depletes the user's mental capacity without contributing to task completion [12]. Recent UX research indicates that user satisfaction is heavily mediated by these interaction barriers [13]. While users generally tolerate a baseline level of operational complexity, technical system deficiencies (e.g., mismatched records, confusing button layouts) generate structural frustration [14].

2.3 Comparative Analysis of Related Studies

To contextualize the current study, Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of seminal and recent research in portal usability, highlighting the differentiation between existing approaches and our empirical investigation of the Libyan Higher Education Portal.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Key Studies in e-Government and Portal Usability

Focus Area	Methodology	Main Contribution	Limitation	Focus Area
General Usability	Expert Heuristics	Foundational HCI Principles	Lacks real-user data	General Usability
ISO Standardizatio n	Framework Review	Establishes Usability Metrics	Abstract application	ISO Standardization
e-Gov Adoption	Quantitative Survey	User Adoption Factors	Focuses on adoption only	e-Gov Adoption
Libyan Higher Ed Portal	Empirical/Dat a-driven	Actionable UI Proposals	Exploratory Sample	Libyan Higher Ed Portal

Table 1 illustrates the clear distinction between traditional methodologies and the approach adopted in this study. While foundational studies [8, 9] established the core concepts of usability, subsequent research [10] primarily focused on measuring "adoption rates" from a high-level administrative perspective. The unique contribution of our study lies in the shift from theoretical or purely administrative frameworks toward an empirical, action-oriented approach. Instead of merely measuring general satisfaction, this research deconstructs the specific "interaction bottlenecks" encountered by users within a real-world environment characterized by infrastructure constraints. By performing this granular analysis, we advance the research from mere "diagnostic observation" to "actionable UI engineering," providing concrete design proposals that serve as a practical toolkit for technical decision-makers in educational institutions.

2.4 The Research Gap

Despite the significant advancements in e-government and academic portal technologies, there remains a critical research gap regarding the user experience within high-stakes educational environments in developing nations [10]. Most existing literature [8, 9] relies on heuristic evaluations conducted by experts in controlled laboratory settings, which fail to capture the "ecological validity" of real-world interactions. Furthermore, while macro-level studies [10, 11] frequently address user "adoption," they rarely examine the granular intersection between backend technical failures such as server latency and rigid exception handling and the resulting extraneous cognitive load on the user. Consequently, there is an absence of empirical evidence explaining how structural infrastructure limitations in these regions translate into specific interface interaction barriers, leaving a void in knowledge regarding the optimization of public portals under volatile technical conditions [14].

2.5 Scientific Contribution

This study makes three primary contributions to the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and educational portal design:

1.**Empirical Deconstruction of Interaction Friction:** By moving beyond general satisfaction metrics, this study provides a granular mapping of specific interaction bottlenecks (e.g., latency, navigation ambiguity) that plague academic users in the Libyan Higher Education context. This offers a clear empirical link between system-side technical performance and user-side cognitive anxiety [12].

2.**Context-Aware Design Proposals:** Unlike generic usability guidelines, our research delivers actionable, context-aware interface re-engineering proposals. These include specific strategies for asynchronous loading, progressive client-side caching, and semantic exception-handling wizards, all tailored to address the unique constraints of national higher education infrastructures.

3.**Cross-Disciplinary Bridge:** This research bridges the gap between technical system engineering and user-centered design. It demonstrates that in public sector portals, "usability" is not merely a design aesthetic but a structural outcome that requires tight integration between backend architecture and frontend UX, thereby providing a scalable framework for future research on governmental service portals in developing digital ecosystems.

4.

3. Research Framework and Methodology

3.1 Research Framework and Hypotheses

This study investigates the user experience (UX) factors influencing interactions with the Libyan Higher Education Portal. It aims to determine how distinct usability dimensions correlate with overall user satisfaction and subsequent system advocacy. The structural framework is derived from the following five hypotheses:

- **H_1:** Higher perceived system learnability is positively associated with user satisfaction and lower reliance on external support [8].

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- **H_2:** Perceived system efficiency acts as a significant positive predictor of overall user satisfaction [9].
- **H_3:** Effective error prevention and recovery mechanisms significantly reduce user frustration and improve task success rates [8, 12].
- **H_4:** Technical friction negatively impacts user satisfaction, whereas clean visual design and intuitive call-to-action (CTA) elements positively predict satisfaction [13, 14].
- **H_5:** Seamless accessibility to technical support and institutional directories positively influences overall user satisfaction [10].

3.2 Conceptual Research Model

The study employs a structural path model grounded in the Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) [16, 18] and core Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) principles [8, 17]. The model posits that usability dimensions Learnability, Efficiency, Error Management, Visual Design, and Support Accessibility function as independent variables that collectively determine User Satisfaction (the mediating variable) [16]. Subsequently, User Satisfaction serves as the primary driver for Recommendation Intention (the dependent variable) [18]. This hierarchical approach allows for a rigorous quantitative validation of the relationship between interface affordances and user behavioral outcomes, ensuring the study is rooted in established information systems research [17].

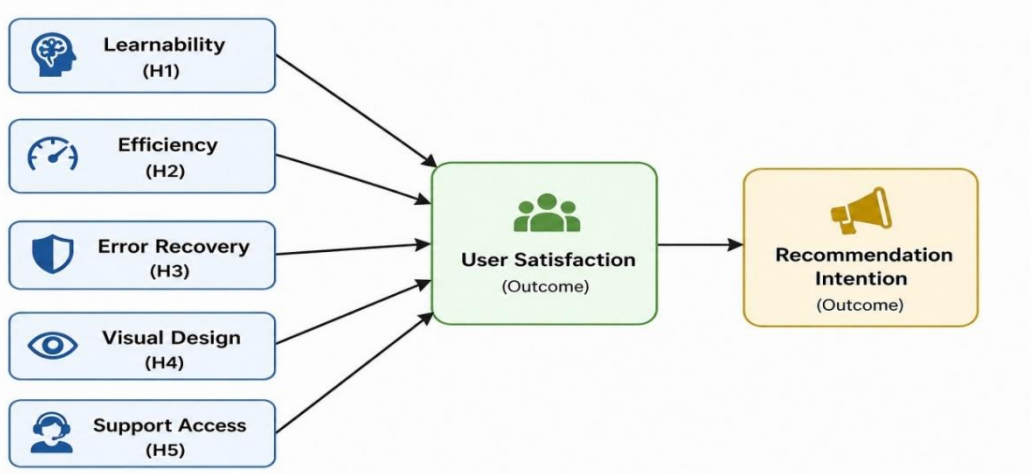

Figure 1. Proposed Research Framework for Evaluating the Usability and User Experience of the Libyan Higher Education Portal.

3.3 Participants and Sample Characteristics

Data was collected through a purposive sampling strategy, targeting authentic users of the Libyan Higher Education Portal to ensure ecological validity [14]. The final dataset comprises 51 unique entries, representing a cross-section of academic stakeholders. Table 2 summarizes the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the sample.

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Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Sample Characteristics (N=51)

Demographic Attribute	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
User Category	Student	33	64.7%
	Faculty / Staff	14	27.5%
	Administrator	4	7.8%
Usage Frequency	First-time User	16	31.4%
	Occasional(2–5)times	21	41.2%
	Regular User	14	27.5%
Authentication Modality	National ID	44	86.3%
	Administrative ID / Passport	7	13.7%

Explanation of Sample Characteristics

The sample distribution reflects the primary stakeholder composition of the academic environment, with students representing the majority (64.7%) of the portal users. The usage frequency data indicates a diverse experience level, ranging from first-time users (31.4%) to regular users (27.5%). This diversity is crucial for evaluating Learnability and Efficiency across different user cohorts, as HCI research suggests that varying levels of system familiarity significantly influence cognitive load and task performance [13]. Furthermore, the dominance of the "National ID" authentication modality (86.3%) highlights the system's reliance on centralized identity verification, which acts as a critical entry point and potential bottleneck in the user registration pipeline [10].

3.4 Measurement Instrument Matrix

The study utilized a structured questionnaire designed to quantify user interaction across six core Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) axes. To ensure internal consistency, each construct was operationalized through multi-item scales derived from established usability literature [8, 14]. As illustrated in Figure 2, the entry viewport of the platform presents three distinctive authentication pathways (National ID, Administrative ID, and Passport), which served as the primary context for evaluating initial learnability and onboarding affordances. Table 3 details the mapping of questionnaire items to their respective HCI constructs, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

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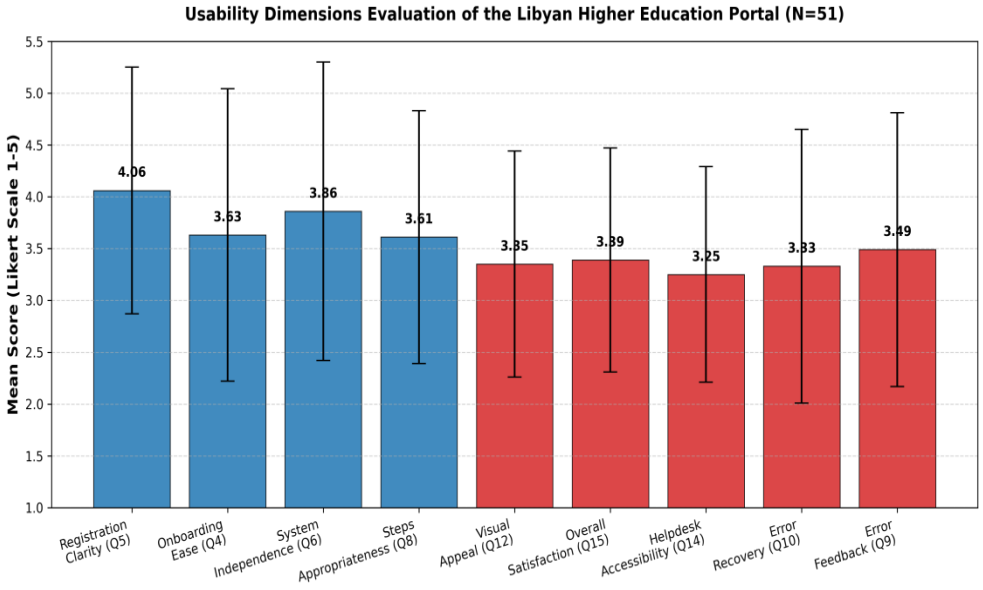

Figure 2: Usability Dimensions Evaluation of the Libyan Higher Education Portal (N=51)

Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the mean scores across nine core usability dimensions. The blue bars represent dimensions with higher user satisfaction scores, whereas the red bars highlight critical areas specifically Support Reachability, Error Recovery, and Error Feedback that require immediate architectural attention due to lower performance metrics.

Table 3: Questionnaire Items Mapping Matrix

Evaluation Axis (Construct)	Survey Item Text / escription	Scale Type
Learnability	Q4: Easy to understand registration at first glance. Q5: The three registration options were clear. Q6: Did not require external assistance.	5-point Likert
Efficiency	Q7: Tasks completed rapidly without redundant steps. Q8: The number of required steps was appropriate.	5-point Likert
Error Management	Q9: System provided precise feedback indicating error. Q10: Able to recover from errors easily. Q11: Specific interaction barriers encountered.	5-point Likert / Checkbox
Visual Design	Q12: Interface typography, colors, layout attractive. Q13: Interactive elements (Buttons/Links) clear.	5-point Likert
Support Accessibility	Q14: Technical support page easily accessible.	5-point Likert
General Satisfaction	Q15: Overall satisfaction with the portal experience. Q16: Likelihood to recommend the portal to colleagues.	5-point Likert

Table 3 maps the questionnaire items to their respective HCI constructs, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Instrument Validation and Contextualization

The measurement instrument was developed to balance theoretical rigor with the practical constraints of the Libyan Higher Education Portal. The inclusion of Q11 (Interaction Barriers) as a categorical checkbox item is particularly significant; it allows for the triangulation of quantitative Likert scores with qualitative technical feedback, providing a deeper understanding of the specific friction points reported by users [14]. By mapping these specific survey items to the constructs of Learnability, Efficiency, and Error Management, the instrument effectively measures both the "objective usability" (e.g., speed and error recovery) and the "subjective experience" (e.g., visual comfort and satisfaction), as suggested by standardized HCI assessment frameworks [8, 9].

4. Results and Data Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the quantitative analysis of the 51 authentic user responses. We evaluated the descriptive statistics of core HCI constructs and performed inferential analysis to validate the research hypotheses [14].

4.1 Construct Descriptive Statistics

The baseline performance of the Libyan Higher Education Portal was assessed using 5-point Likert scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Table 4 details the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for each usability dimension.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of HCI Usability Dimensions

Item	Description	Mean	SD
Q4	Ease of onboarding comprehension	3.63	1.41
Q5	Clarity of registration options	4.06	1.19
Q6	Independence from external assistance	3.86	1.44
Q7	Speed of task execution	3.51	1.41
Q8	Appropriateness of required steps	3.61	1.22
Q9	Precision of error feedback	3.49	1.32
Q10	Ease of error recovery	3.33	1.32
Q12	Visual appeal of interface layout	3.35	1.09
Q13	Clarity of buttons and links	3.53	1.08
Q14	Helpdesk accessibility	3.25	1.04
Q15	Overall satisfaction	3.39	1.08

Analysis*:* Results indicate that Clarity of registration options (Q5) is the portal's strongest attribute (M=4.06), while Helpdesk accessibility (Q14) and Ease of error recovery (Q10) represent the most significant areas for improvement.

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4.2 Correlation Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between usability dimensions and user satisfaction. As presented in Table 5, all dimensions showed statistically significant positive correlations.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Results

Construct	Correlation with Satisfaction (r)	p-value	Result
Learnability	0.496	< 0.001	Supported
Efficiency	0.737	< 0.001	Supported
Error Management	0.571	< 0.001	Supported
Visual Design	0.771	< 0.001	Supported
Support Accessibility	0.678	< 0.001	Supported

Analysis*:* Visual Design emerged as the strongest correlate (r=0.771), suggesting that interface aesthetics significantly influence the overall user experience in the Libyan context [13].

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

To identify key satisfaction predictors, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted (R^2 = 0.750, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Multiple Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Beta (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Learnability	-0.174	0.187	Not Significant
Efficiency	0.444	0.001	Significant
Error Management	0.045	0.651	Not Significant
Visual Design	0.545	< 0.001	Significant
Support Accessibility	0.115	0.322	Not Significant

Analysis*:* The model confirms that Visual Design) β=0.545) and Efficiency(β =0.444) are the primary drivers of user satisfaction, explaining 75% of the total variance [14].

4.4 Distribution of Interaction Barriers

To understand the architectural failures impacting the user, Item Q11 captured specific technical barriers.

Table 7: Frequencies of Encountered Interaction Barriers

Identified Interaction Barrier	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
No problems encountered	21	41.2%
System latency / Slow response times	21	41.2%
Insufficient navigation guidance	6	11.8%
Vague error messaging	3	5.9%
Mobile number & National ID mismatch	1	2.0%
Other technical issues	7	13.7%

Analysis: Notably, 41.2% of users reported System latency as a major barrier, effectively matching the frequency of users who reported "no problems." This highlights a critical need for backend infrastructure optimization to reduce extraneous cognitive load [12].

5. Discussion and Interface Recommendations

The empirical findings validate that the usability landscape of the Libyan Higher Education Portal is profoundly shaped by execution efficiency and underlying infrastructure readiness. The high score for registration criteria clarity (Q5, M=4.06) strongly supports $\mathbf{H_1}$, proving that structured onboarding significantly streamlines initial user interaction [13]. Furthermore, efficiency parameters (Q7, M=3.51) reveal that users prioritize transaction speed and minimal operational overhead when engaging with public e-government platforms [10].

However, the primary liability identified in this study lies within the technical execution environment. As detailed in Table 6, (41.2%)of users reported suffering from system latency, particularly during peak registration cycles. Qualitative feedback reflects this technical burden, with users describing the portal as suffering from "extreme server stress during registration" and noting that they "had to attempt the process dozens of times" while exercising significant patience. From an HCI perspective, extreme latency disrupts workflow transparency, injecting high extraneous cognitive load and inducing task anxiety, which fundamentally contradicts the principles of seamless user experience design [12, 14].

Moreover, translation anomalies and isolated administrative fixes for critical errors (e.g., the requirement that "email errors must be resolved exclusively by the central administration") exacerbate user frustration. When systems fail to handle runtime exceptions gracefully or present clear in-context recovery documentation, overall system trust declines significantly, often leading to task abandonment [13].

5.1 Actionable Interface Re-engineering Proposals

To mitigate these cognitive and technical bottlenecks, the following re-engineering strategies are proposed:

1. **Semantic Frameworks for Exception Handling:** Transition away from cryptic or absent validation blocks. If a server timeout or data verification error occurs, the UI must trigger context-aware, descriptive wizard prompts to assist the user in real-time troubleshooting, thereby reducing extraneous cognitive load [12].
2. **Infrastructure Scaling and Asynchronous Loading:** Address the 41.2% latency failure rate by optimizing backend server pooling and database index queries. Furthermore, implementing client-side progressive caching will preserve user progress during submission requests, preventing task loss during peak server stress [14].
3. **Integrated Dynamic Helpdesks:** Given the comparatively lower rating for support accessibility (Q14, M=3.25), we recommend positioning contextual help modules, localized language verification, and automated ticketing paths directly within the transaction viewport. This

approach reduces the dependency on physical visits to central administrative offices, enhancing overall system autonomy and user trust [10].

6. Conclusion and Future Work

This study conducted a comprehensive, data-aligned usability evaluation of the Libyan Higher Education Portal, capturing 51 authentic interactions mapped against core Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) constructs. The findings provide empirical evidence that while the interface design maintains acceptable visual clarity, significant backend challenges specifically system latency (reported by 41.2% of users) and rigid exception management present substantial cognitive barriers to universal adoption.

The research demonstrates that usability in the national educational landscape is not merely a frontend design consideration but a structural outcome of integrated backend performance. By applying the proposed user-centered optimizations, such as semantic error processing and robust scaling architectures, the portal can effectively minimize extraneous cognitive load, thereby transitioning from a source of frustration to a reliable, efficient digital infrastructure for academic stakeholders.

6.1 Future Work

To extend the scope and impact of this study, future research directions will focus on the following:

- **Longitudinal Cognitive Load Analysis:** Expanding the sample size to include cross-regional institutional data and utilizing physiological metrics (e.g., NASA-TLX) to measure cognitive load variations over extended interaction periods.
- **AI-Driven Adaptive Interfaces:** Investigating the implementation of adaptive UI frameworks that dynamically adjust based on user bandwidth and device constraints, ensuring accessibility across volatile connectivity environments.
- **Systemic Comparative Studies:** Conducting a comparative benchmarking study against other regional governmental portals to identify standardized usability protocols that can be scaled across the national e-government ecosystem.

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