

Exploring Students' Perspective on University Exit Exam

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Abstract:

The University Exit Exam is a pivotal assessment for graduating students, yet its effectiveness and relevance are subject of debate. This study investigates architectural engineering students' perspectives on the University Exit Exam at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) to better understand its impact and identify areas for improvement. Responses were obtained from 26 architectural engineering students through a survey questionnaire comprising both structured and open-ended responses. The responses reveal mixed perceptions regarding the University Exit Exam. While the majority (53.8%) remained neutral, 34.6% agreed that passing the exit exam had a positive impact on their careers. This was primarily attributed to the method of implementing the exam, with a majority (76.9%) indicating a preference for a pass/fail system over a grading system. Over 70 % participants reported some level of stress when higher stake in terms of grades is allocated to the exit exam. It is suggested to rationalize the assessments along with supportive preparatory materials to alleviate anxiety and improve exam relevance. The findings can help improve the design and administration of University Exit Exams by addressing students' perspectives, concerns, and incorporating recommendations. This can enhance exam effectiveness and relevance, leading to improved educational outcomes benefiting both the academia and the professional sphere.

Keywords: exit exams, stress, measuring student's success, exit exam design, student's perspectives

1. Introduction

The University Exit Exam is a comprehensive evaluation conducted by higher education institutions to assess students' academic readiness for entry into their respective professions or further academic pursuits. These exams serve as a standardized assessment tool to evaluate the overall effectiveness of educational programs and the competency of students (Dharmasaroja, 2020). This examination typically occurs towards the end of a student's academic program, serving as a capstone assessment of their knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired throughout their course of study. This assessment is pivotal in determining whether students have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed in their chosen fields (Al Ahmad & Al Marzouqi, 2013).

Exit exams are a crucial component to ensure that educational institutions are effectively delivering their curriculum and that students are meeting the desired learning outcomes. Studies have examined the implementation of exit exams in various contexts to assess their effectiveness and consequences. For example, a case study on the impact of state-wide exit exams in Germany, which aimed to understand both the intended and unintended effects of these exams as a governance tool in education, suggests that a low-stakes testing approach could be more effective in maintaining both rigor and student motivation (Ackeren et al., 2012). Additionally, the significance of exit exams as academic indicators has been emphasized, particularly in their role in evaluating educational processes and benchmarking academic programs (Al Ahmad & Al Marzouqi, 2013). Studies have indicated that increased teacher accountability, often enforced through exit exams, can lead to a reduction in leniency in grading, thereby enhancing the comparability of student outcomes (Puhani & Yang, 2020).

Research has discussed the importance of higher education exit exams in Ethiopia, aiming to validate graduates' mastery of core competencies outlined in curricula to enhance employability (Ayenew & Yohannes, 2022). Furthermore, quality assurance mechanisms, including exit exams, can contribute to student retention and success in academic settings (Martinez, 2015). Research has also explored the effects of curriculum-based external exit exams on student achievement, shedding light on how these assessments influence learning outcomes (Bishop, 2000).

Exit Exams serve as a critical tool in education for ensuring accountability by providing a standardized benchmark for evaluating student performance and institutional effectiveness. Research by Fuchs and Wößmann (2008) has shown that students in school systems with external exit exams tend to perform significantly better in mathematics compared to students in systems without such exams, indicating its positive impact on student achievement. Moreover, the implementation of high school exit exams has been linked to increased accountability in education, as discussed by Ou (2010), who underscores their role in promoting educational standards in the United States. Another study suggests setting higher standards for graduation through exit exams can incentivise low-achieving students to improve their performance and enhance overall educational quality (Reardon et al., 2010). Additionally, Baker and Lang (2013) discuss how exit exams can impact various aspects of students' lives, including their employment opportunities and wages, highlighting the broader implications of these assessments beyond academic achievement.

However, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of exit exams on certain student groups. Solórzano (2008) points out that specific racial and ethnic groups in United States may face challenges in performing well on these exams, highlighting issues of equity and fairness in the testing process. Furthermore, studies emphasize the influence of high school exit exams on graduation rates and dropout rates, revealing a complex relationship between these assessments and student outcomes. (Caves & Balestra, 2018; Hemelt & Marcotte, 2013). Studies suggest concerns about the negative consequences for students who fail these assessments, raising questions about the equity and fairness of using exit exams as the sole determinant of student success and institutional effectiveness (Warren & Grodsky, 2009). Despite the potential benefits of exit exams in promoting accountability and driving educational improvements, ongoing debates persist regarding their effectiveness and implications.

University Exit Exams are essential for assessing students' core competencies and knowledge acquired during their academic journey to ensure they meet educational standards (Brannick et al., 2011). Objective structured examinations are widely used in medicine and nursing to evaluate clinical competence. These exams are crucial for determining students' readiness to enter the workforce and perform effectively in their respective fields (Stoopler et al., 2020).

Continuous evaluation, feedback, and adherence to accreditation and quality standards are essential for enhancing education quality and providing students with a comprehensive learning experience. In this context, exit exams are a standardized assessment procedure for educational accountability in the United States (Ou, 2010). Exit exams serve as competency tests that students must pass to graduate, making them a critical requirement for obtaining a degree in nursing and midwifery in Indonesia (Samidah, 2021). Research has shown that exit exams have a significant impact on various aspects of education in United States, including student achievement and graduation rates (Holme et al., 2010).

Exit exams are assessments that play a crucial role in evaluating students' comprehensive understanding of the curriculum (Ou, 2010). These exams are specifically designed to test all subject matter learned, providing a comprehensive overview of students' knowledge and skills. The results obtained from exit exams are valuable in identifying areas where the curriculum may require improvement (Holme et al., 2010). By analysing students' performance on these exams, educational institutions can gain insights into the effectiveness of their teaching methods and the curriculum itself, allowing for targeted interventions to enhance educational outcomes (Marcotte, 2011). By assessing the performance of incoming students on these exams, universities can customize their programs to address any identified weaknesses in students' foundational knowledge. This tailored approach can lead to improved educational outcomes and better prepare students for the challenges of higher education.

Concerns have been raised about the potential harm caused to students who fail exit exams, without clear benefits for those who pass (Warren & Grodsky, 2009). Research demonstrates a negative correlation between anxiety levels and exit exam scores (Moore et al., 2021). In the context of exit exams, additional stressors include the need to cover multiple subjects within a single exam, unclear exam questions, and the broader scope of content, which can significantly impact student grades. Prolonged exposure to stress and anxiety during exam preparation and disruptions can exacerbate stress levels (Fernández-Castillo, 2021). The prevalence of test anxiety highlights the importance of understanding its predictors and correlates (Kavakci et al., 2014). Stressors such as inefficient study habits, lack of review, and irrational exam-related concerns contribute to anxiety and may lead to depression (Bashir et al., 2019). The emotional toll of exam stress manifests in somatic symptoms, with anxiety, neuroticism, and depression playing significant roles (Zunhammer et al., 2013). Academic expectations and motivation are key factors influencing exam anxiety, highlighting the interconnected nature of psychological variables in shaping exam experiences (Çelik & Yildirim, 2019). The knowledge about exam-related anxiety and stress is essential for developing targeted interventions to support students in managing stress, enhancing well-being, and optimizing

academic performance in high-pressure exam settings. Interventions such as solution-focused brief counselling and mindfulness-based stress reduction have shown efficacy in alleviating test anxiety and related emotional pressures (Altundağ & Bulut, 2019; Mousavi et al., 2022).

The exit exams have been reported to effectively measure student's readiness level for professional roles thereby improving their employability (Hunduma & Seyoum, 2022). It is reported that exit exam can act as an instrument to align and improve course learning outcomes (Teshome, 2024). Recent research by Yasin et al. (2025) highlighted procedural weaknesses in the administration of exit exams, particularly regarding preparatory materials, student awareness, and institutional support. Similarly, Teshome (2025) reported a negative impact of exit exams on participants' mental health due to exam-related stress.

While existing studies provide valuable insights into the efficacy, benefits and challenges of exit exams from institutional and academic standpoints, a noticeable gap exists regarding students' perspectives and how students perceive and experience these exams. Understanding students' viewpoints is crucial for evaluating the exam's impact, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring that the exam aligns with students' needs and expectations. By bridging this gap in research, the study strives to inform educational practices and policies that better support student learning and success within the context of exit exams in higher education. This study aims to address this gap by investigating students' perspectives on the University Exit Exam at the department of architectural engineering in United Arab Emirates University (UAEU).

Architectural Engineering Exit Exam at UAE University:

At the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), all graduating students are required to take the exit exam including College of Engineering (COE) in accordance with the standards of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). Besides ABET accreditation, the exit exam helps faculty members in enhancing their courses through measurable specific learning outcomes partially assessed through this process.

The exit exam is offered twice a year: fall and spring semesters. A department level exit exam committee oversees all aspects of this exam. The committee adheres to university guidelines and follows established procedures in the exam preparation and administration. These procedures include offering an online workshop to students, covering the exam format, the number and types of questions, and the areas of the curriculum included in the exit exam to help students prepare effectively. Additionally, students are surveyed online to determine the most suitable date and time for the exam, which is typically scheduled towards the end of their final semester. Faculty members within AE program contribute by providing relevant questions from their areas of expertise, which are added to a securely maintained question pool used for exam preparation.

In the AE department, the exit exam contributes 10% towards the final grade of the graduation project. This exam is subject to specific conditions and is conducted online using Blackboard, integrated with Respondus LockDown Browser to proctor fairly. However, it is essential to note that this online exam necessitates physical presence on-campus under the vigilant supervision of invigilators. Furthermore, students are allowed only one attempt at the exam, which all exiting students must undertake simultaneously. Once initiated, the exam must be completed within a single session lasting for a designated period of 2 hours. Additionally, the exam questions are randomized, and students are strictly prohibited from bringing any smart phones or electronic devices into the examination hall.

2. Research Method

For this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants from graduating architectural engineering students at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). Specifically, students who appeared in the Spring 2024 exam or had participated in the exam in the previous three semesters (Fall 2023, Spring 2023 and Fall 2022) were targeted. This approach ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences and insights regarding University Exit Exams, aligning with the study's focus on understanding students' perceptions and recommendations in this context.

The data collection involved the administration of a structured questionnaire designed specifically for the study, hosted on Google Docs. The questionnaire comprised both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data obtained from closed-ended questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions underwent narrative analysis. This methodological approach was deemed appropriate as it facilitated the selection of participants with firsthand experience of the exit exam, enhancing the depth and relevance of the data collected for the study's objectives.

The questionnaire covered multiple domains, including participants' familiarity with exit exams, perceptions of exam effectiveness, preparation experiences, emotional well-being, and suggestions for improvement. It was developed through a comprehensive review of relevant literature and consultation with experts in the fields of educational assessment and architectural engineering.

Quantitative data gathered from closed-ended questions underwent analysis using descriptive statistics, which encompassed examining frequencies and percentages. This analytical approach was instrumental in summarizing and interpreting the distribution of responses, thereby offering valuable insights into participants' attitudes, opinions, and behaviours regarding different aspects of the University Exit Exam.

Qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions underwent narrative analysis to explore participants' experiences and perspectives. This process involved systematically reviewing the students' responses, identifying recurring viewpoints, and organizing them into thematic categories. The analysis examined the underlying meanings, interpretations, and sentiments expressed by students, providing deeper insights into how they perceive and engage with the University Exit Exam and its influence on their academic development and future career prospects.

Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the study, with participation being voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study process, with data stored securely and identifiable information removed during analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the survey questionnaire, with responses from 26 students. Among these respondents, 25 disclosed their gender, revealing that the majority (96%, or 24 students) were female. This finding aligns with the demographic distribution of the Architectural Engineering program at UAEU, where the student population is predominantly female. Majority of respondents, 46.2%, took the University Exit Exam in Spring 2024. This is followed by 23.1% who took the exam in Fall 2023, and 19.2% in Spring 2023. A smaller number of respondents, 7.7%, took the exam in Fall 2022, and only 3.8% took it in Spring 2022. No respondents reported taking the exam in Fall 2021 or Spring 2021. This distribution highlights that the participants predominantly completed their exams recently, within the last year, providing current insights into the University Exit Exam experience.

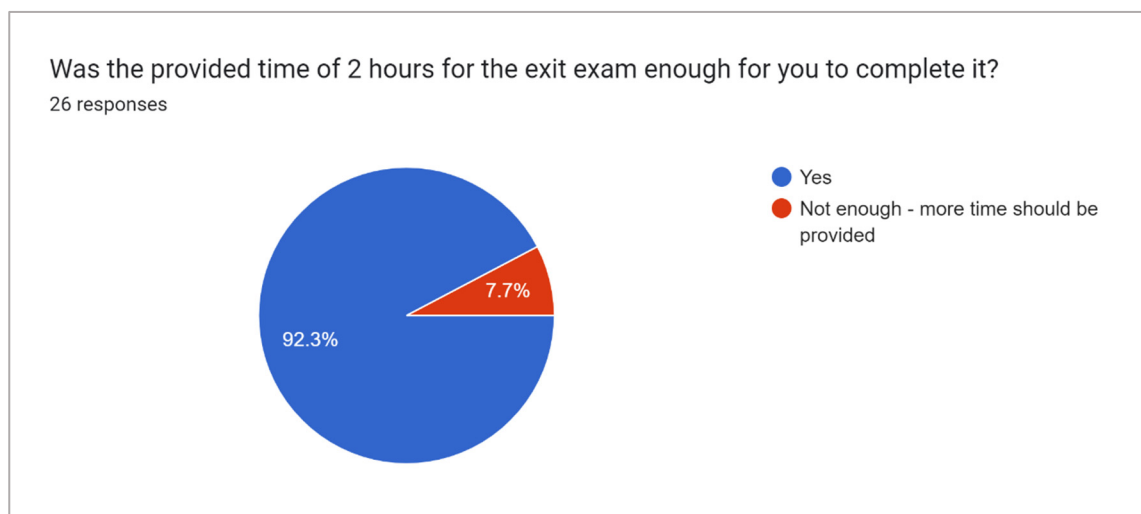


Figure 1. Student Feedback on Exit Exam Duration

The survey results show 92.3% of students found the two-hour duration for the University Exit Exam sufficient, as shown in Figure1. This indicates that the time allocation is adequate for most students to complete the exam without undue time pressure. While the majority response supports the sufficiency of the current time frame, the feedback from the minority group (7.7%) points to the need for potential adjustments or accommodations to ensure equitable assessment conditions for all students. Future studies should further investigate the specific reasons behind the need for extended time, which may inform more tailored and inclusive exam policies.

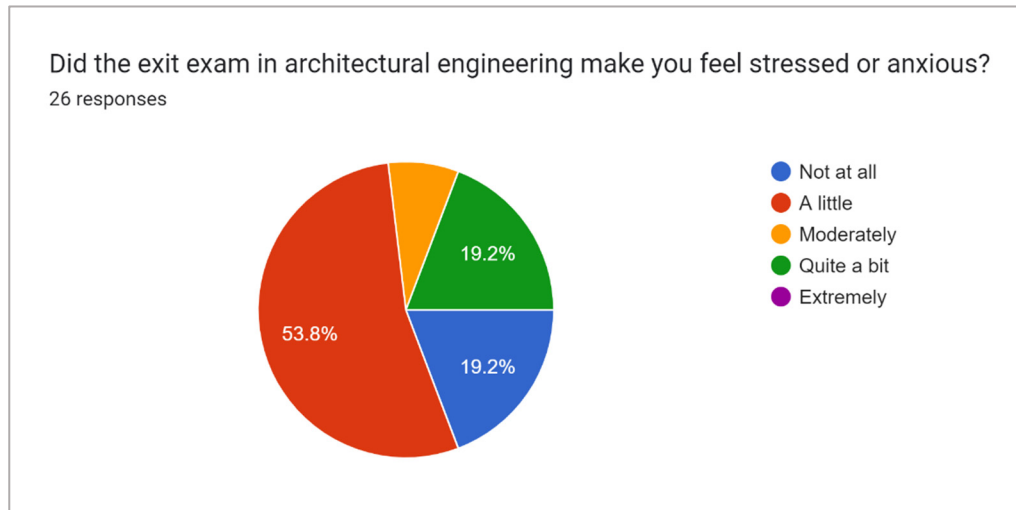


Figure 2. Levels of Stress Experienced During the Exit Exam

Regarding the question about stress or being anxious due to the exit exam, a significant majority experienced stress or anxiety, with 53.8% feeling "Moderately" stressed and 19.2% feeling "Quite a bit" stressed, indicating that over 70% experienced considerable anxiety, as shown in Figure 2. Conversely, 19.2% felt "Not at all" stressed, and 19.2% felt "A little" stressed. The absence of "Extremely" high-stress responses suggests that while challenging, the exam does not push students to extreme anxiety levels, which is a positive aspect. However, these findings highlight the need to address exam-related stress among students, as high stress and anxiety can negatively impact performance and well-being. Supportive measures such as stress management workshops, better preparation resources, or exam design adjustments could help mitigate undue stress. Understanding the sources of stress can provide insights to improve the exam experience and enhance student performance and their overall educational experience.

Students offered several suggestions to reduce stress related to the University Exit Exam. Key recommendations include clear communication from faculty about the exam's content and difficulty, which helps manage anxiety. As one student mentioned, "The instructions that we got from our professor regarding the content for exams were promising that the exit exam will not be difficult, so that helped a lot, so no stress." Providing more sample exams and access to past exams can familiarize students with the format and types of questions. One student suggested, "Give us more samples or past exams," while another emphasized the need for "more test bank questions" and "more helpful workshops" to offer more practice and reinforce key concepts.

Simplifying the exam by focusing on general questions and excluding non-essential courses, such as fluid dynamics and thermodynamics, can prevent students from feeling overwhelmed. A student commented, "Provide just general questions without detailed ones" and suggested to "make it less confusing by not adding general engineering courses such as fluid/themo." Clear, specific guidelines on exam topics can also help reduce stress. One student noted, "I wasn't stressed but I think maybe what can help is to make the exam more exact (specify the topics) so the students won't feel that all material for four years is going to be asked." Additionally, organizing review sessions and providing key information documents can help students recall essential knowledge. Overall, these measures emphasize the need for comprehensive support and clear guidelines to ensure students feel well-prepared and confident in their ability to succeed in the exit exam.

The survey results about the impact of preparing for exit exams on other academic submissions indicate that 57.7% of students feel that preparing for exit exams negatively affects their ability to complete other academic submissions, while 42.3% do not see this impact, as shown in Figure 3. This suggests that exit exam preparation imposes a significant burden on many students, potentially hindering their overall academic performance. This may be due to the time management challenges, allocation of time away from other courses or increased stress levels. To overcome these issues, universities should consider scheduling adjustments to minimize overlap with other academic deadlines, providing additional academic support, introducing more flexible assessment methods, and ensuring clear communication about exam expectations to help students balance their academic responsibilities more effectively.

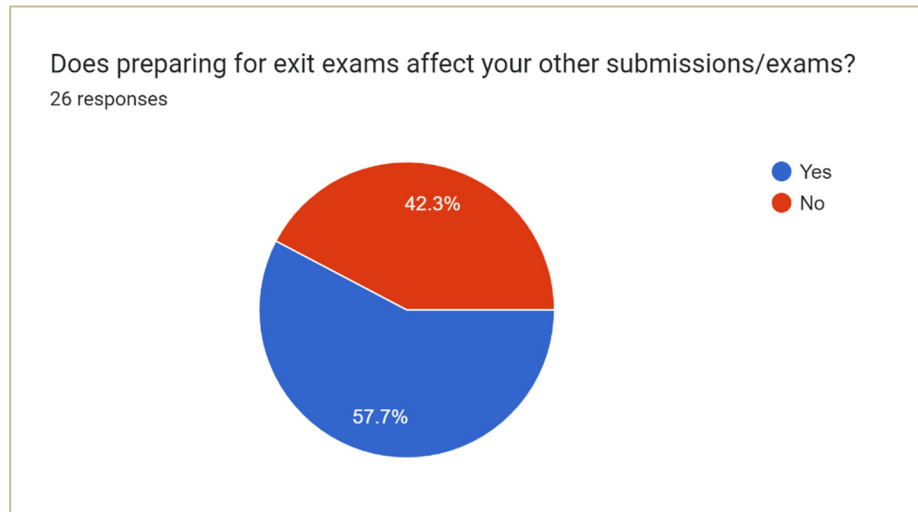


Figure 3. Reported Interference of Exit Exam with Other Assessments

The survey results on student satisfaction with multiple-choice and true/false exam question formats reveal a predominantly positive reception, as shown in Figure 4. Out of 26 responses, 57.7% of students indicated they were "Very satisfied," and 42.3% were "Somewhat satisfied," with no respondents finding the question types "Unsatisfactory and should be changed." This suggests that the current formats align well with student preferences and effectively assess their knowledge. However, the fact that 42.3% of students are only "Somewhat satisfied" indicates room for improvement. While the absence of negative responses confirms the adequacy of the formats, this moderate satisfaction suggests a need for possible enhancements or greater variety in assessment methods. Future research should explore specific areas for refinement to further increase student satisfaction and cater to diverse learning styles. Overall, while the current exam formats are effective, there is potential for optimization to better meet student needs.

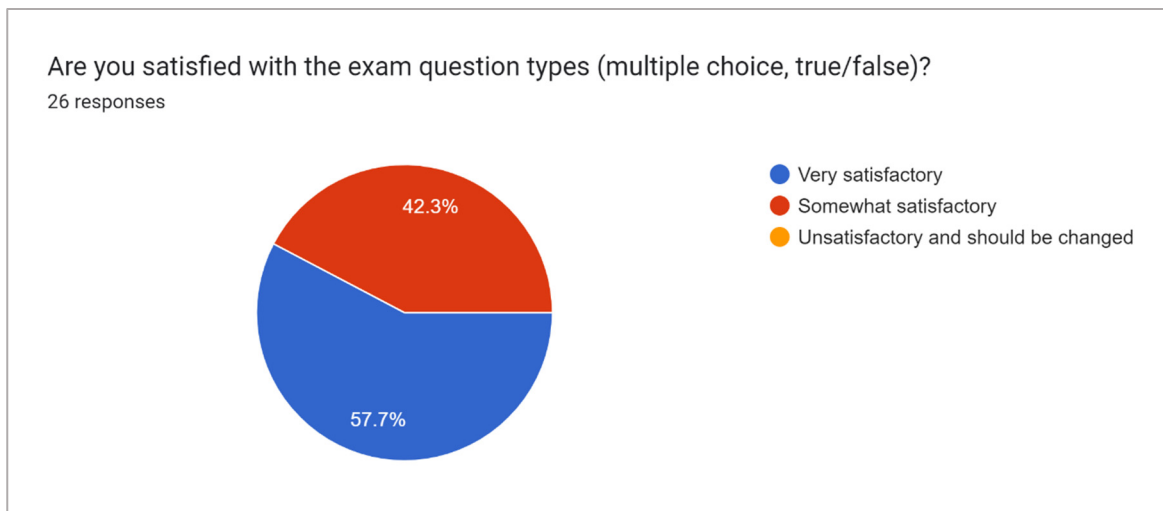


Figure 4. Student Satisfaction with Exam Question Formats

The figure 5 shows students' opinions on the number of questions (50) in the university exit exam, based on a survey of 26 participants. Results indicate 57.7% are "Satisfied" with the current number, 38.5% want fewer questions, and 3.8% prefer more. The majority satisfaction suggests the number of questions is generally appropriate and manageable. However, the significant minority advocating for fewer questions points to potential issues with time pressure and cognitive fatigue, highlighting a need for reassessment. The small percentage favoring more questions

suggests a desire for a more comprehensive evaluation.

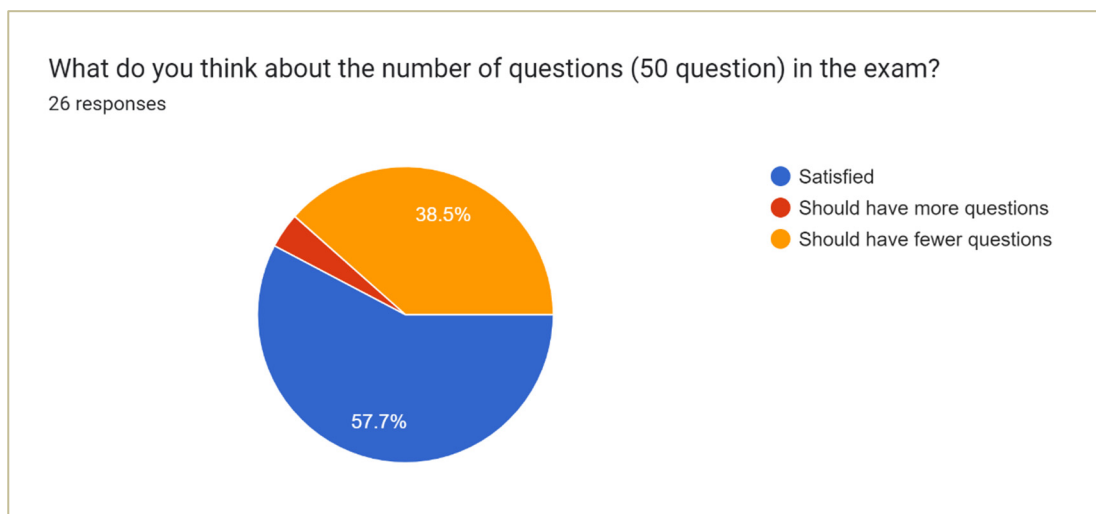


Figure 5. Student Feedback on the Number of Questions in the Exit Exam

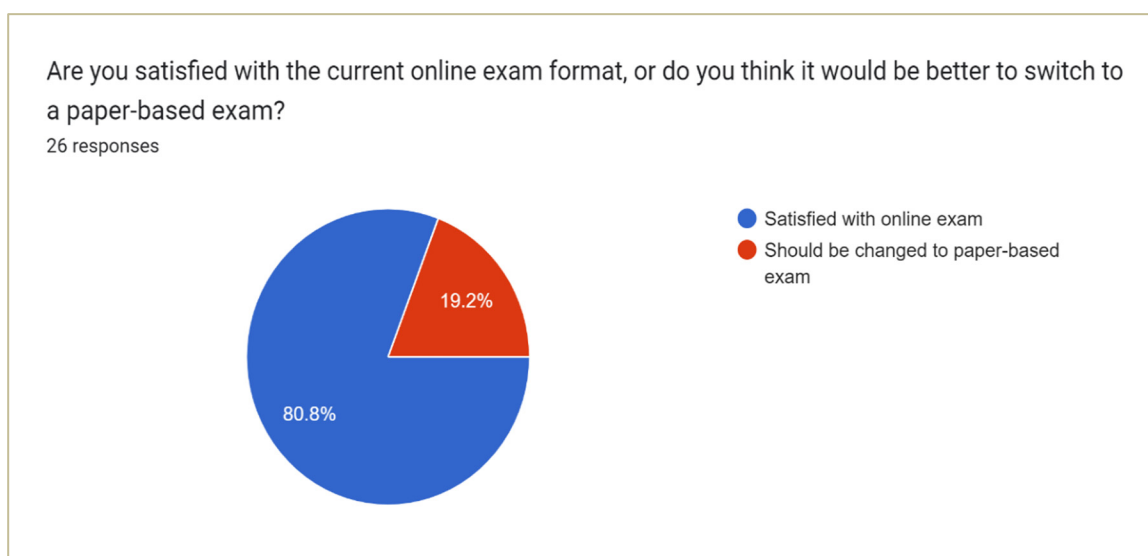


Figure 6. Student Preference for Online Versus Paper-Based Exam Formats

The figure 6 shows survey results on student satisfaction with the current online exam format versus a preference for a paper-based exam, based on 26 responses. The data reveals that 80.8% of respondents are satisfied with the online format, while 19.2% prefer switching to paper-based exams. The strong majority satisfaction indicates that the online format meets students' needs and expectations, likely due to factors such as convenience, familiarity with digital tools, and fewer logistical issues. However, the perspectives of the minority who favour paper-based exams should not be disregarded. It is essential to investigate the underlying reasons for their preference and to explore potential solutions that could improve their online exam experience, such as ensuring robust technical support, providing practice sessions to build familiarity, or considering hybrid models that combine elements of both formats.

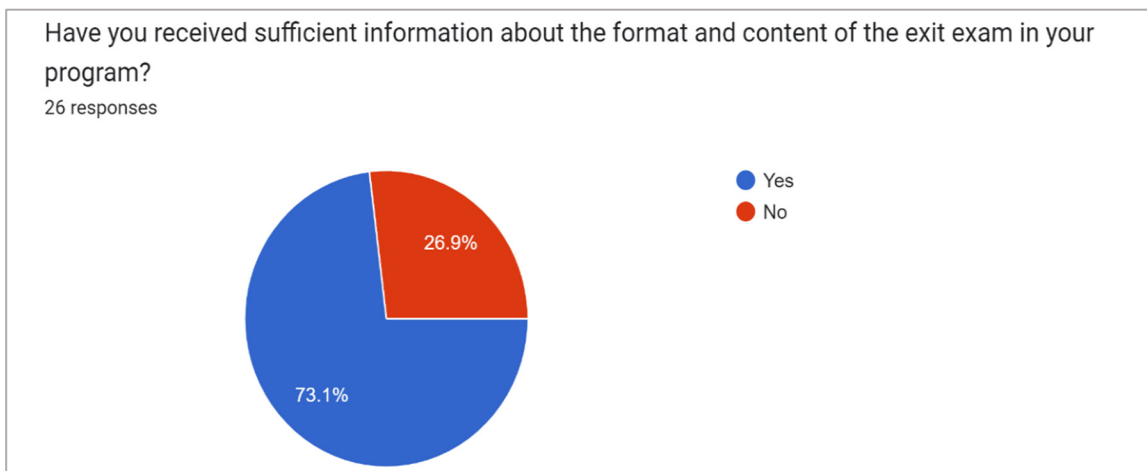


Figure 7. Student Awareness of Exit Exam Format and Content

The survey results show that a significant majority of students (73.1%) feel they have received sufficient information about the format and content of the University Exit Exam, as shown in Figure 7. This high percentage indicates that the program's communication strategies are effective and meet most students' informational needs, likely reducing anxiety and improving preparation by clarifying expectations. However, the 26.9% of students who reported insufficient information reveal a communication gap that could impact their preparedness and performance, increasing stress and uncertainty. This discrepancy suggests that while overall communication is effective for most, targeted strategies are needed to ensure all students are adequately informed. Addressing this gap with detailed briefings, additional review sessions, or accessible resources could lead to a more uniformly prepared student body and enhance the exam's fairness and efficacy.

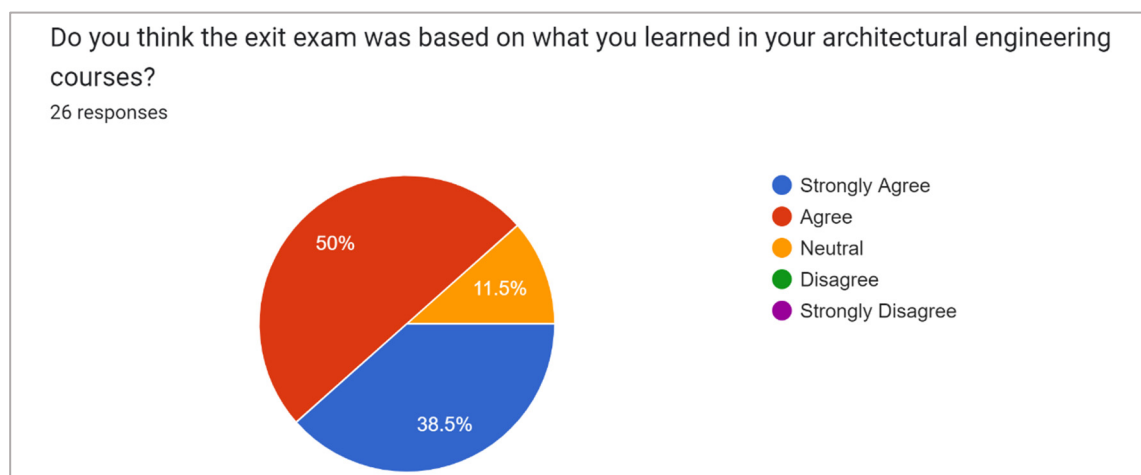


Figure 8. Student Perception of Exit Exam Alignment with Coursework

As shown in Figure 8, the survey results reveal that 50% of respondents believe the exit exam was based on their architectural engineering courses, with 38.5% strongly agreeing and 11.5% agreeing. This suggests that half of the students felt the exam content was relevant to their academic coursework, indicating good alignment between the curriculum and the exam. Such alignment is crucial for accurately assessing students' knowledge and competencies. However, the other half of the respondents did not share this positive perception, indicating a potential disconnect between the curriculum and the exam content. This significant divide suggests that many students feel unprepared and frustrated, impacting their performance and perception of the exam's fairness and validity. The mixed responses highlight the need for a thorough review of the exam content to ensure it aligns closely with the courses taught. This may involve revising the exam or enhancing the curriculum to better match the exam's focus. Ensuring coherence

between what is taught and what is tested is essential for accurately measuring students' knowledge and skills, maintaining the exam's integrity and effectiveness. There may also be a reason that students do not remember what was taught many semesters ago.

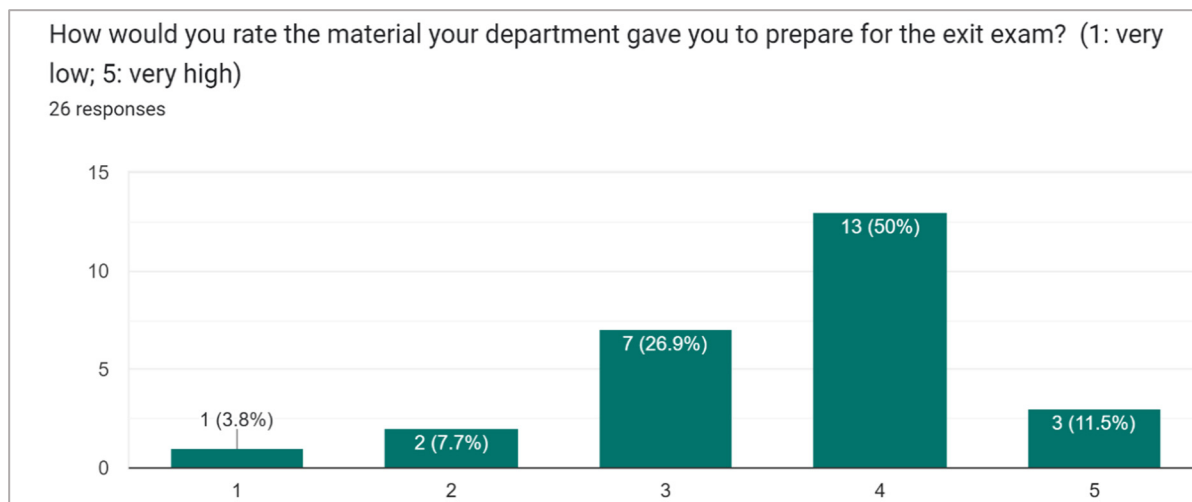


Figure 9. Student Rating of Departmental Exit Exam Preparation Materials

The survey indicates a generally positive view of department-provided preparatory materials for the University Exit Exam, with a majority rating them highly, as shown in Figure 9. However, a notable proportion of students rated them less favorably, indicating that some perceived them as insufficient. This highlights the need to gather detailed feedback to address potential gaps in content coverage, depth, or alignment with exam format. Overall, while the materials are generally well-received, there's room for improvement to meet the diverse needs of all students for better preparedness and confidence in the exit exam. The survey responses indicate a generally positive assessment of the preparatory materials provided by the department for the University Exit Exam. A significant proportion of respondents rated the materials highly, with 50% rating them a 4 and 11.5% rating them a 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 represents a very high rating. This suggests that the majority of students found the preparatory materials to be useful and of good quality, contributing effectively to their exam preparation. However, there is still a notable minority of students who rated the materials less favorably. Specifically, 26.9% gave a rating of 3, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction, while 7.7% rated the materials a 2, and 3.8% rated them a 1, reflecting low satisfaction. This variation in responses highlights that while many students benefited from the provided materials, a significant number found them inadequate. The disparity in ratings suggests that the department's preparatory resources may not comprehensively address the needs of all students. Those who rated the materials lower might have experienced gaps in content coverage, insufficient depth, or a lack of alignment with the exam format. To enhance the effectiveness of these materials, it could be beneficial to gather detailed feedback from students on specific areas for improvement. This might include expanding the range of topics covered, providing more practice exams, or offering additional support sessions.

As shown in Figure 10, The survey results reveal students' perspectives on departmental preparation activities for the University Exit Exam. Out of 25 respondents, 76% participated in these activities, indicating strong engagement. However, the 24% who did not participate suggests potential issues in communication, accessibility, or perceived value that need addressing. In terms of perceived helpfulness, out of 26 responses, 88.5% found the activities at least moderately helpful, with 53.9% rating them as extremely or very helpful, as shown in Figure 11. This shows the positive impact of these sessions on students' preparedness for the exit exam. Nonetheless, 11.5% of students found the activities only slightly helpful, indicating room for improvement in the content and delivery of these sessions. Overall, the department's preparation activities are well-received and beneficial, but addressing the reasons behind non-participation and slight dissatisfaction will be crucial for further enhancing these initiatives. Continuous feedback and adaptation can help to ensure that all students are adequately prepared for their exams.

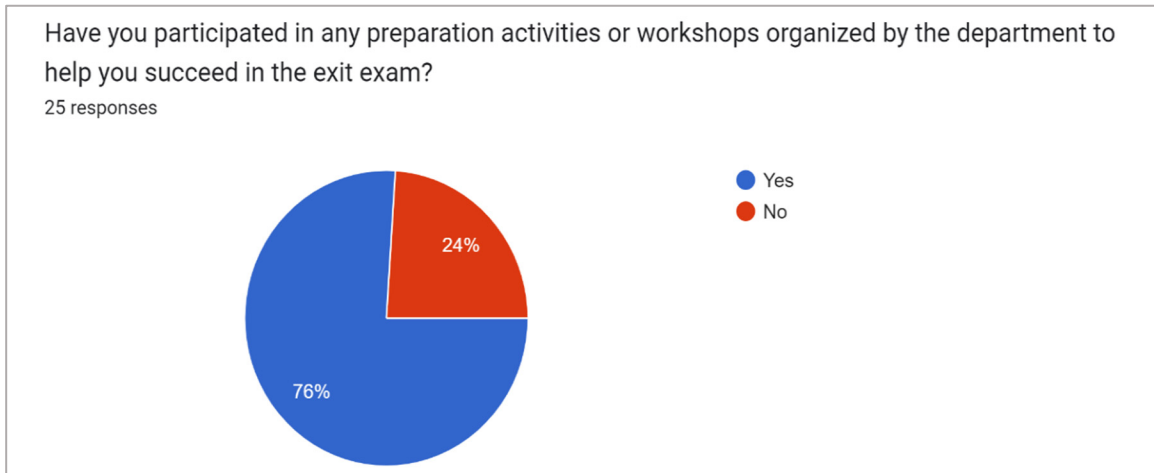


Figure 10. Survey Results on Involvement in Preparatory Sessions

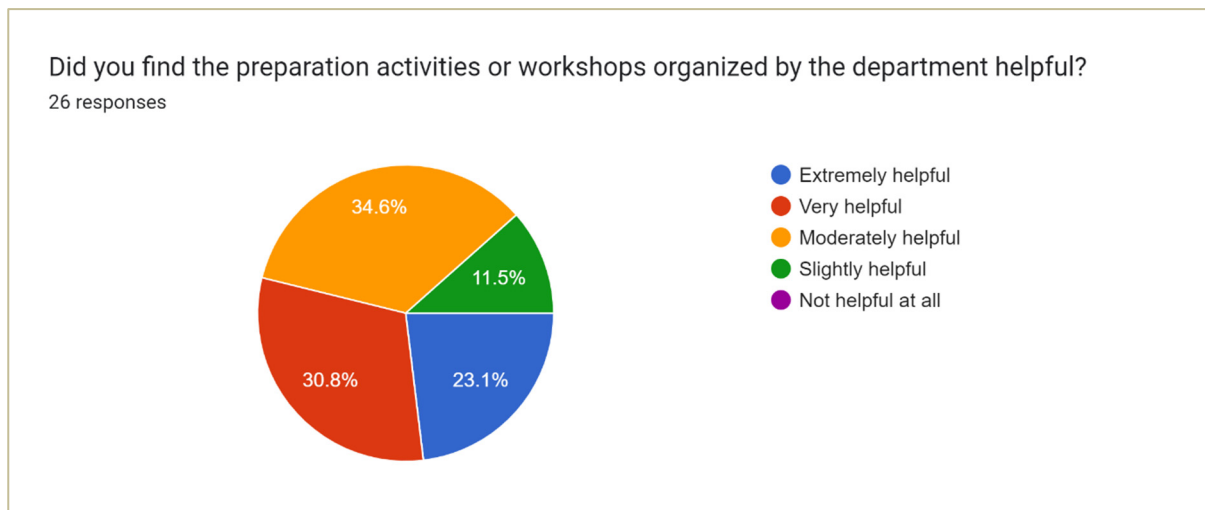


Figure 11. Survey Results on Effectiveness of Preparatory Sessions

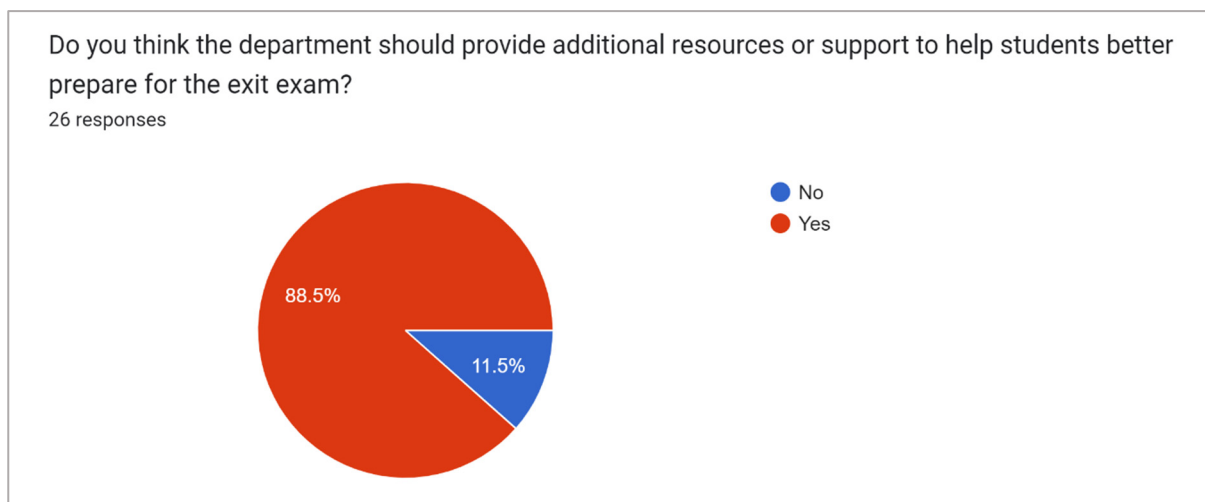


Figure 12. Feedback on Adequacy of Current Exam Preparation Support

As shown in Figure 12, an overwhelming majority of 88.5% of the 26 respondents indicated that additional resources or support from the department would be beneficial for better preparation. This significant demand underscores a perceived inadequacy in the current support mechanisms, suggesting that the existing preparatory resources may not be sufficiently addressing students' needs. The 11.5% of respondents who did not see the need for additional support might represent students who felt adequately prepared, potentially due to their personal study strategies or better alignment of their coursework with the exam content.

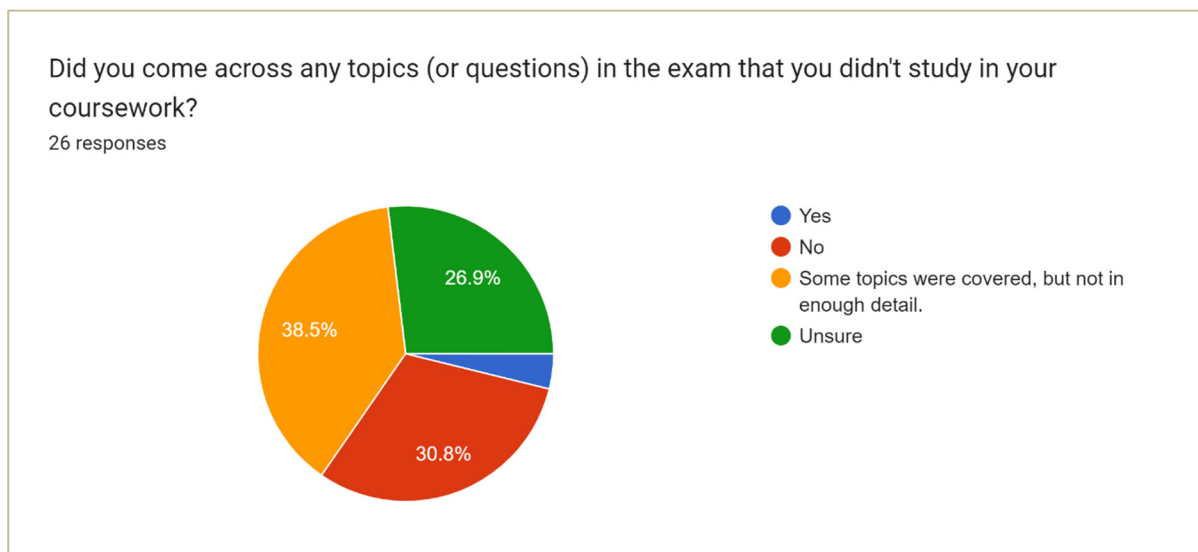


Figure 13. Alignment of Exit Exam Content with Taught Curriculum

Figure 13 further elucidates the preparation challenges faced by students, with a small percentage (3.8%) of respondents encountering topics or questions on the exam that were not covered in their coursework at all. However, a considerable percentage of respondents (38.5%) reported that some topics were covered, but not in sufficient detail, highlighting gaps in the depth of coverage. This finding points to a discrepancy between the curriculum and the exam content, which could undermine students' confidence and performance. The 26.9% who were unsure and 30.8% who did not encounter unfamiliar topics suggest variability in individual experiences and perceptions. These results collectively suggest that while a substantial portion of the student body recognizes the need for enhanced preparatory support, there are also critical gaps in the curriculum that need addressing to ensure comprehensive coverage of exam-relevant topics. The department might benefit from a thorough review of the curriculum and the integration of targeted support initiatives, such as additional workshops, detailed study guides, and tailored review sessions, to bridge these gaps. Continuous feedback from students should be solicited to adapt and refine these support mechanisms effectively, ensuring that all students feel adequately prepared for their exit exams.

Figure 14 illustrates student satisfaction with the diversity of topics covered in a University Exit Exam, with a focus on areas like building design, construction, management, building science, and structure. Out of 26 respondents, 96.2% expressed satisfaction with the range of questions across these topics, indicating a comprehensive and well-balanced exam structure. This high satisfaction rate underscores the effectiveness of the exam in covering essential domains and reflects a robust curriculum design. However, the 3.8% of dissatisfied students highlight potential areas for improvement, such as ensuring an equitable distribution of questions and incorporating qualitative feedback into exam design processes. These findings suggest that while the current curriculum adequately prepares students, continuous evaluation and refinement based on student feedback are essential to maintain the exam's validity and reliability as a measure of student learning and professional readiness.

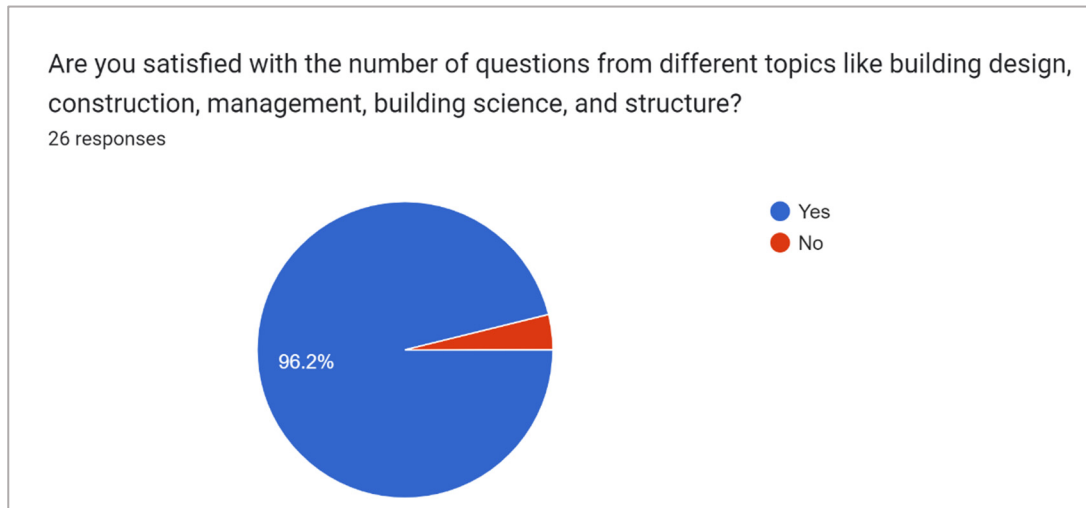


Figure 14. Survey Results on Diversity of Topics in Exam Structure

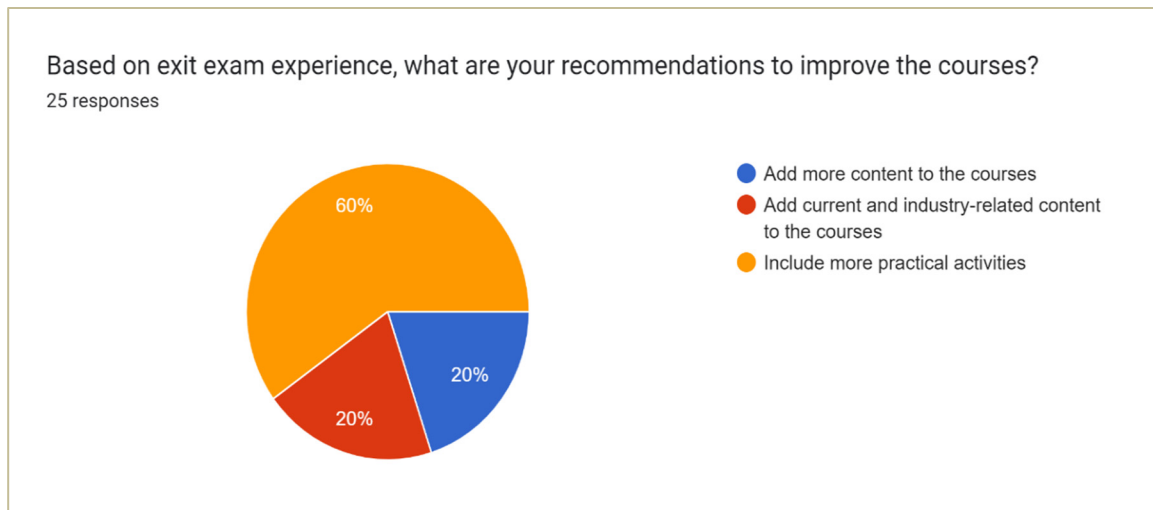


Figure 15. Student Recommendations for Course Improvement Post-Exit Exam

The survey results depicted in the figure 15, which gathered recommendations for course improvements based on students' exit exam experiences from 25 respondents, reveal several critical insights. The dominant preference among respondents (60%) for including more practical activities in courses highlights a perceived gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, emphasizing the importance of hands-on learning experiences to bridge this divide and enhance student engagement and understanding. Additionally, an equal portion of respondents (20%) advocates for integrating current and industry-related content into courses, reflecting a desire for curricula aligned with contemporary industry trends and practices. Another 20% of respondents recommend expanding course content, suggesting that some students feel the existing material may be insufficient or lacking depth. These findings underscore the need for curriculum developers to prioritize practical training through labs, workshops, and project-based learning, incorporate up-to-date industry content, and carefully balance breadth and depth in course offerings. Addressing these recommendations can enhance the educational experience, better prepare students for professional roles, and align academic programs with both student expectations and industry requirements.

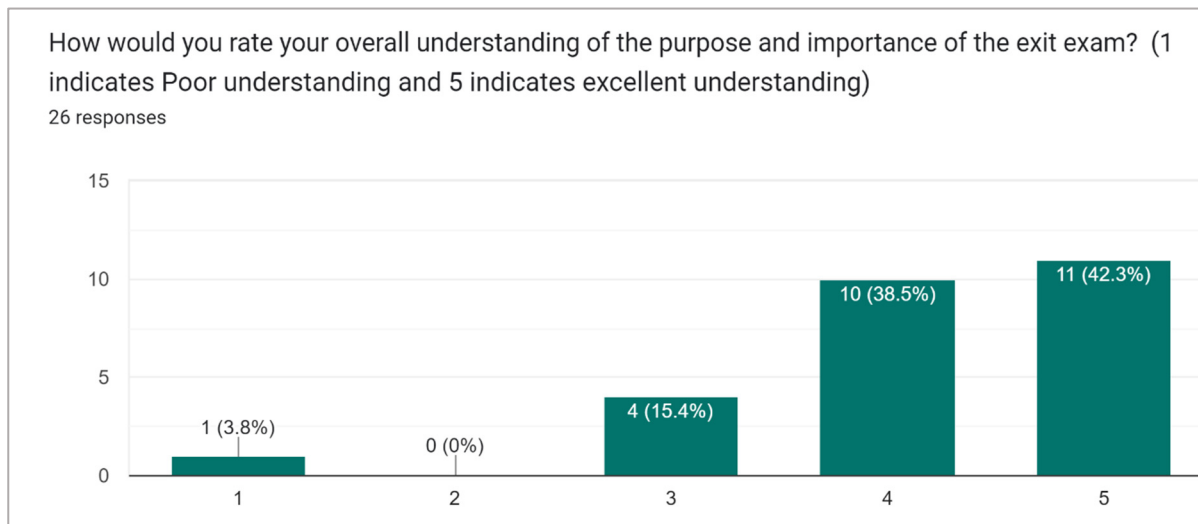


Figure 16. Student Understanding of Exit Exam Purpose and Significance

Figure 16 presents students' self-assessment of their overall understanding of the purpose and importance of the exit exam, based on a survey with 26 respondents using a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Analysis of the responses indicates a strong perception of understanding among students, with 42.3% rating their comprehension as excellent (5) and 38.5% rating it as good (4), totalling 80.8% with a good to excellent understanding. A moderate level of comprehension was reported by 15.4% of respondents (rating of 3), while a small fraction expressed poor understanding, with 3.8% rating their comprehension as 1. These results suggest effective communication and orientation by faculty, although the presence of students with poor understanding highlights the need for targeted interventions such as additional informational sessions, detailed guidelines, and opportunities for clarifications to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the exam's purpose and significance across all students.

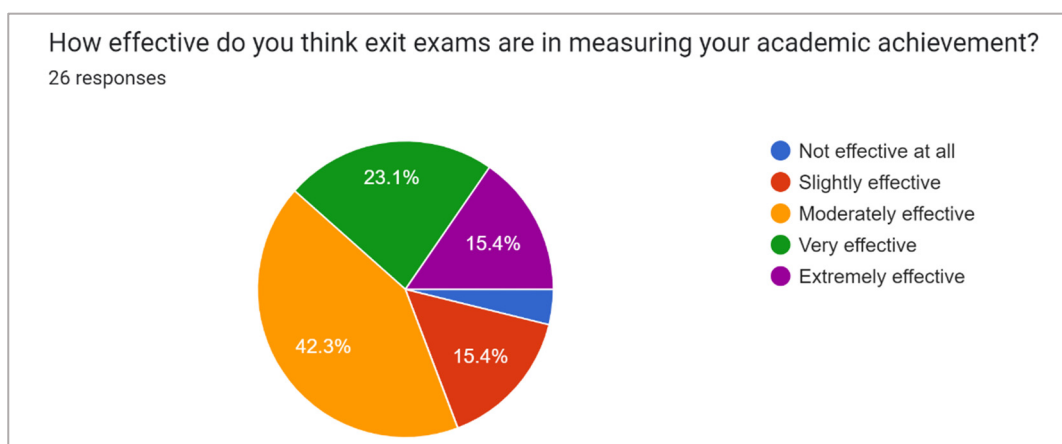


Figure 17. Reported Effectiveness of Exit Exams in Assessing Academic Achievement

Figure 17 presents survey of 26 students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of exit exams in measuring academic achievement. The results indicate a varied range of opinions among students, with 42.3% viewing exit exams as moderately effective, implying recognition of their value alongside perceived limitations in capturing academic performance fully. Additionally, 23.1% consider exit exams very effective, showcasing confidence in their ability to accurately measure academic success. However, 15.4% rate exit exams as slightly effective, and an equal percentage rates them as extremely effective, highlighting differing levels of trust in these assessments. A minority, 3.8%, deems exit exams not effective at all, likely due to encountered challenges or limitations. Overall, while a majority of students (65.4%) find exit exams moderately to very effective, indicating general acceptance of their role, a significant proportion (34.6%) remains either less convinced or highly convinced of their effectiveness. These results underscore the need for ongoing evaluation and potential refinement of exit exam structures to ensure they

comprehensively and accurately gauge student learning and achievement.

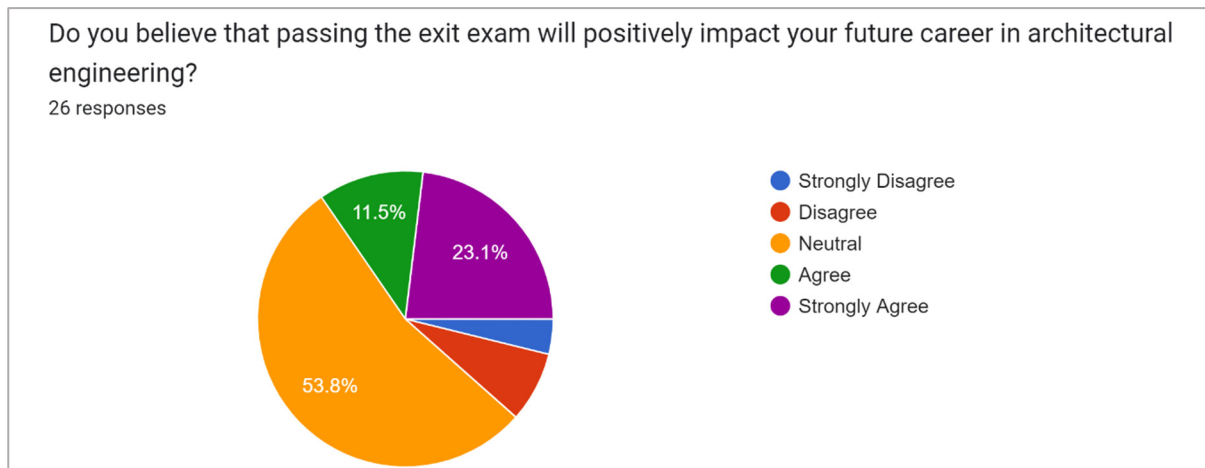


Figure 18. Student Perception of Exit Exam Relevance to Career Advancement

Figure 18 encapsulates the perspectives of 26 students regarding the impact of passing the exit exam on their future careers in architectural engineering. A substantial majority (53.8%) believe that passing the exit exam will positively influence their career trajectory, with 23.1% strongly agreeing with this notion. Conversely, 11.5% remain neutral, 7.7% disagree, and 3.8% strongly disagree with the statement, expressing varying degrees of skepticism or uncertainty about the exam's role in enhancing their career opportunities. These findings reflect a predominant belief among students in the exam's significance for career advancement, albeit with a notable minority questioning its value or impact. This highlights the necessity for ongoing evaluation and potential adjustments to ensure the exam effectively aligns with students' career aspirations and industry demands in architectural engineering.

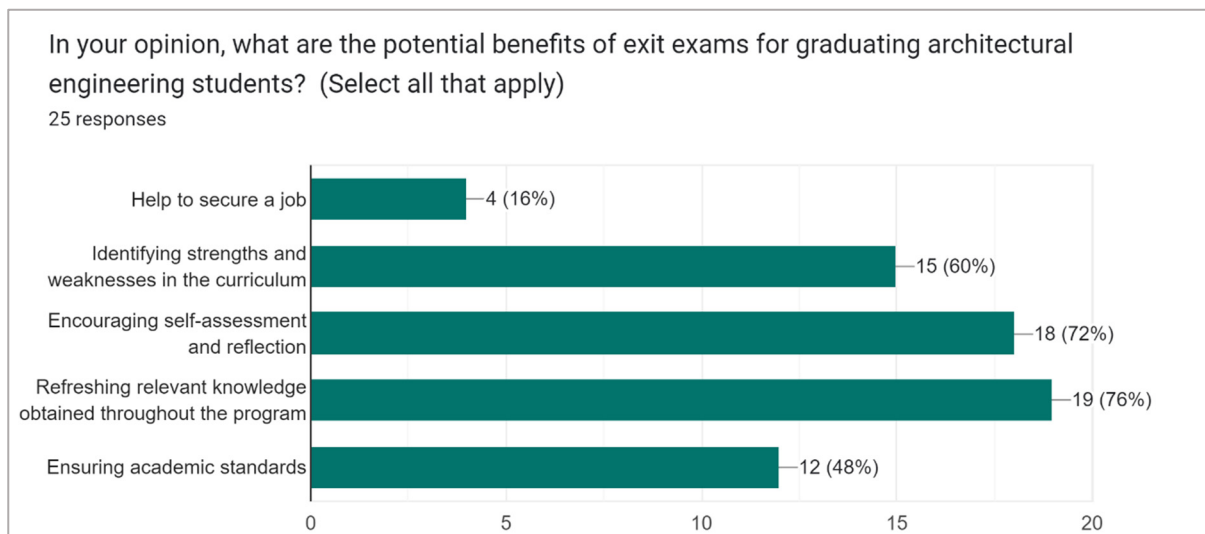


Figure 19. Perceived Benefits of Exit Exams for Architectural Engineering Graduates

The survey of 25 graduating architectural engineering students reveals a multifaceted appreciation for the benefits of exit exams. A significant 76% of respondents view the exams as an opportunity to refresh and reinforce knowledge acquired during their coursework, indicating their value as comprehensive review mechanisms. Additionally, 72% highlight the role of exit exams in encouraging self-assessment and reflection, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and personal growth. Sixty percent of respondents recognize the exams' utility in identifying strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum, providing essential feedback for future curriculum development. Ensuring academic standards is seen as a benefit by 48%, underscoring the exams' role in maintaining competency levels

before students enter the professional field. However, only 16% believe that exit exams directly help secure jobs, suggesting a potential disconnect between academic evaluations and industry hiring practices. Overall, the data indicates that while students appreciate exit exams for knowledge retention, self-assessment, and curriculum evaluation, there is less consensus on their direct impact on job acquisition, highlighting the need for a balanced approach in their design and implementation to serve both educational and career-oriented outcomes.

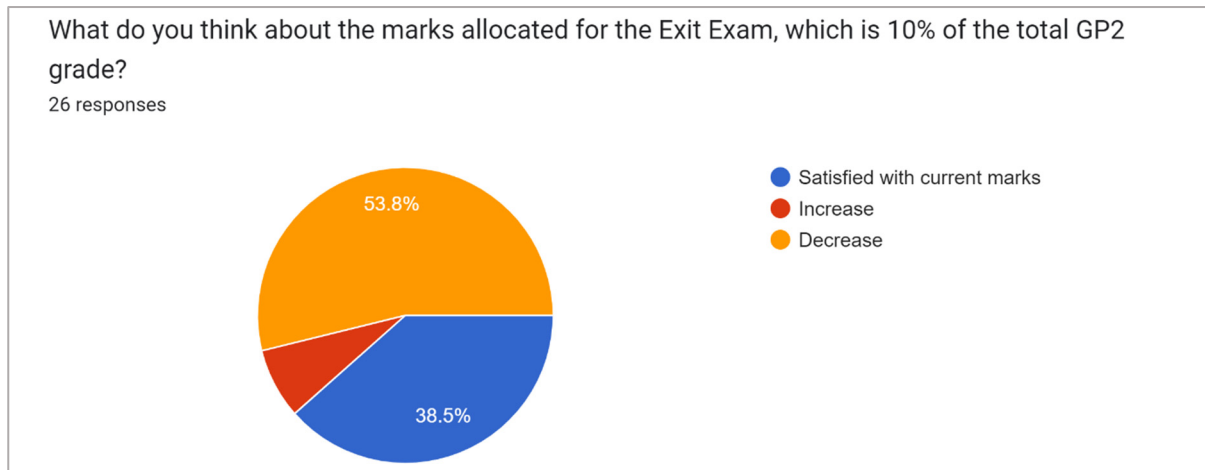


Figure 20. Survey Results on Exit Exam Contribution to Final Grade

Figure 20 illustrates students' opinions on the marks allocated for the exit exam, which constitutes 10% of the total GP2 grade, based on a survey of 26 respondents. A significant proportion, 53.8%, advocate for a decrease in the marks allocated to the exit exam, suggesting that more than half of the students perceive the current weightage as disproportionately high and potentially unfair. In contrast, 38.5% of the respondents are satisfied with the current allocation, reflecting a belief in the exam's importance and appropriateness in their final evaluation. A smaller segment, 7.7%, suggests an increase in the marks allocated, indicating that some students feel the exam should play a more significant role in their academic assessment. These divided opinions highlight the complexity of achieving consensus on assessment weightage and underscore the necessity for a nuanced approach in designing assessment frameworks that consider the diverse perspectives and rationales of the student body to ensure fairness and effectiveness in academic evaluations.

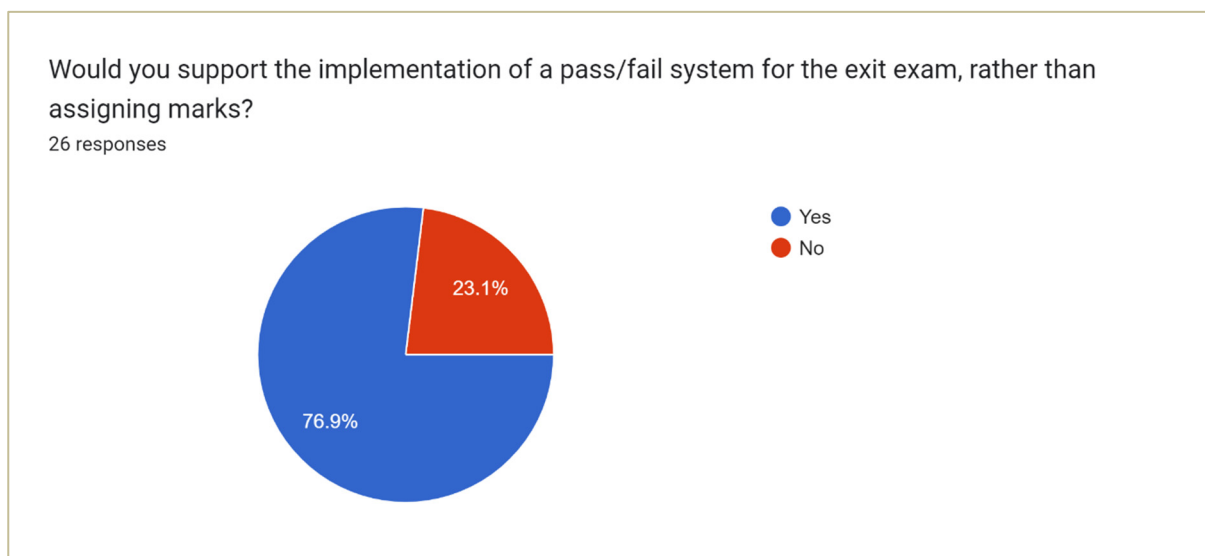


Figure 21. Feedback on Proposed Shift to Pass/Fail Evaluation Method

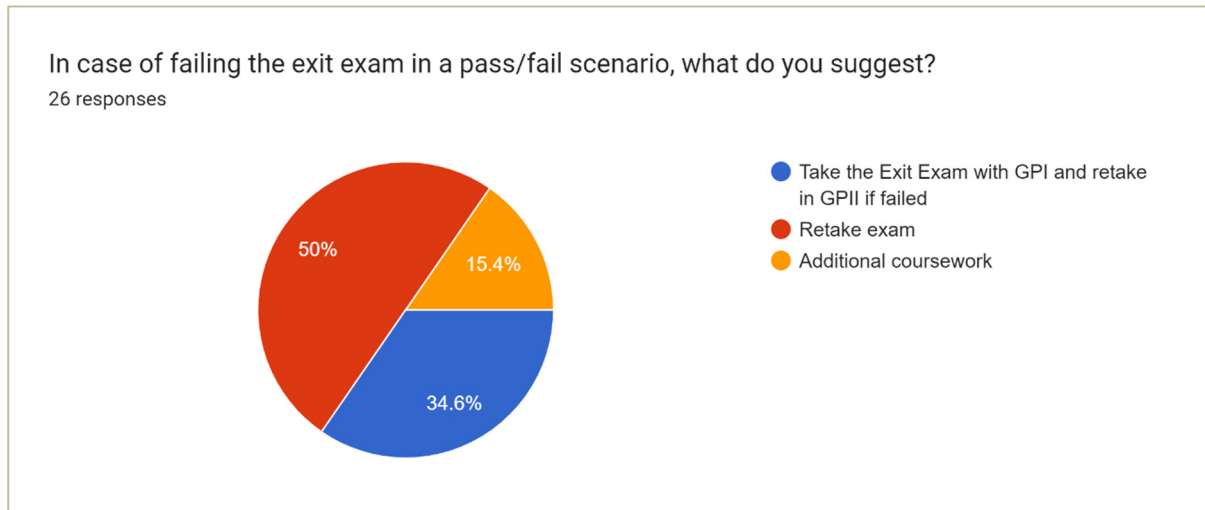


Figure 22. Student Recommendations for Handling Exit Exam Failure under Pass/Fail System

Figures 21 and 22 present survey results on students' perspectives regarding the implementation of a pass/fail system for the exit exam and their preferred course of action in the event of failing such an exam. 76.9% of respondents support the adoption of a pass/fail system, indicating that students perceive it as less stressful and more equitable, potentially leading to a more accurate assessment of their knowledge without the pressure of fine grade distinctions. Conversely, 23.1% are against the shift, believing that a detailed grading system provides a more nuanced evaluation of performance and is important for future academic or professional opportunities. Figure 22 addresses preferences for remediation in case of failing a pass/fail exam, with 50% suggesting retaking the exam, favouring a straightforward reassessment, while 34.6% recommend taking the exit exam with GP1 and retaking in GP2 if failed, allowing for multiple opportunities. A smaller proportion, 15.4%, advocates for additional coursework, suggesting a belief in a more comprehensive approach to addressing knowledge gaps. These insights reveal a clear preference for a pass/fail system among the majority of students, likely due to perceived stress reduction and increased fairness, while also recognizing the need for robust remediation strategies.

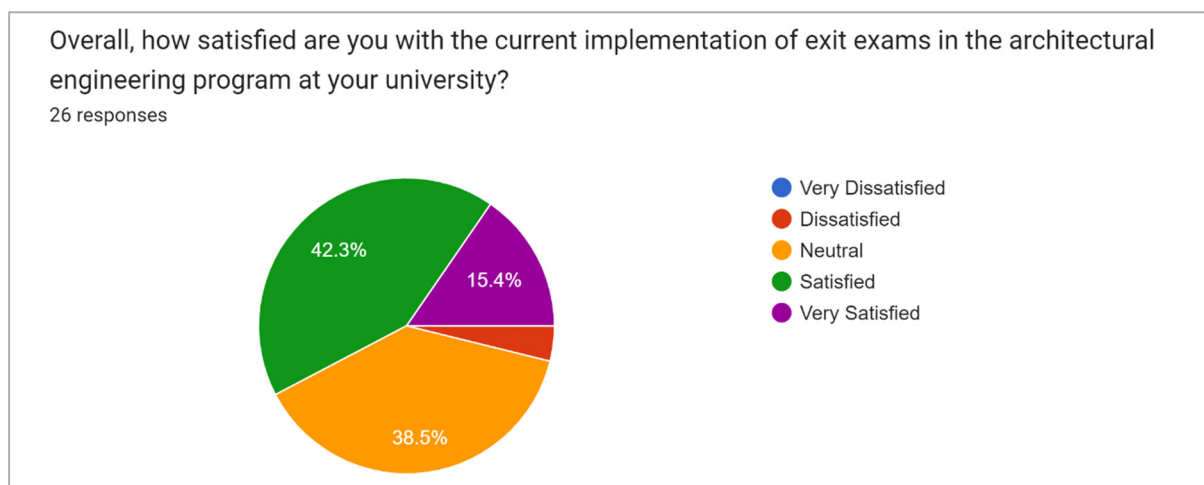


Figure 23. Student Satisfaction with Exit Exam Implementation

Figure 23 illustrates student satisfaction levels with the current implementation of exit exams in the architectural engineering program, revealing significant dissatisfaction among respondents. Specifically, 38.5% expressed dissatisfaction and an additional 15.4% indicated they are very dissatisfied, making up a combined total of 53.9%. On the other hand, 42.3% of respondents reported being satisfied, but this positive feedback is outweighed by the negative responses. Only 3.8% expressed a high level of satisfaction, while 15.4% were neutral or undecided. This

distribution suggests potential issues with the administration or perceived value of the exit exams, indicating a need for a comprehensive review and possible restructuring to better align with student expectations and educational goals. Further qualitative research is recommended to identify specific areas of concern and gather detailed feedback for improvement.

Finally, students' qualitative responses to the question "Any additional comments or suggestions" about the current University Exit exam for the architectural engineering program provide valuable insights, revealing a mix of appreciation and concern. While several students expressed gratitude for the foundational education they received, noting its importance in shaping their career paths, many voiced concerns about the exam's focus on memorization rather than practical skills. One respondent specifically questioned the utility of memorizing information without the ability to apply it in design or problem-solving, indicating a need to balance theoretical knowledge with hands-on skills. Additionally, some students criticized the relevance of certain exam questions, such as those on STAAD Pro commands, highlighting a disconnect between the exam content and the tools they commonly use, like AutoCAD and Revit. Suggestions for improvement included providing additional preparatory materials, incorporating practice sessions and field trips, and including practical questions like hand sketching. Overall, while students value the strong foundation provided by the program, they call for the exit exam to better reflect practical skills and industry relevance, suggesting that curriculum adjustments and enhanced preparatory resources could improve the exam's effectiveness and reception.

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on exit examinations and comparable large-scale assessments in higher education. In this study, many students reported experiencing considerable stress during the exit exam, a finding that mirrors patterns observed in engineering education by Jensen and Cross (2021), among others, showing that such anxiety is frequently associated with perceptions of exam relevance and the adequacy of preparatory resources. In alignment with the present results, earlier studies by El-Hassan et al. (2024) and Teshome (2024) have underscored the critical role of transparent communication, provision of exemplar materials, and curricular congruence in mitigating stress and enhancing student satisfaction. Furthermore, the differing views expressed by students regarding the grading weight of exit exams and the potential adoption of a pass/fail evaluation model mirror the findings of Bialas et al. (2024), emphasizing the concerns about the equity and efficacy of conventional grading systems in evaluating professional competence. The strong emphasis on practical application and industry-relevant skills further underscores the need for curricula and assessments that integrate theoretical knowledge with hands-on competencies. These findings suggest that while the current implementation presents notable challenges, it also offers opportunities to adopt targeted strategies that promote equity, reduce anxiety, and strengthen the connection between academic preparation and professional readiness.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate architectural engineering students' perspectives on the University Exit Exam at United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to graduating architectural engineering students, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures. The study's findings indicate a mix of positive aspects and areas for improvement in the University Exit Exam for architectural engineering students. While most students find the exam duration sufficient and appreciate the online format, there are concerns about stress levels, alignment with coursework, and the need for additional support and resources. Suggestions include reducing stress through clear communication, enhancing exam content alignment with industry practices, improving preparatory materials, and offering practical training. These insights highlight the importance of ongoing evaluation and refinement to ensure the exam effectively measures student learning and prepares them for professional roles, addressing concerns while building on positive aspects to enhance the exam's overall effectiveness and reception.

Future research directions could explore longitudinal studies to track the impact of exam reforms on student outcomes and career trajectories. Additionally, investigating the perspectives of faculty in exam design and administration could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in optimizing university exit exams. Furthermore, conducting follow-up studies across multiple institutions would provide valuable insights.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Abdul Rauf, Dr. Ahmed Hassan, Prof. Kheira Anissa & Dr. Mahmoud Hagag were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Abdul Rauf was responsible for data collection. Dr. Abdul Rauf drafted the manuscript, and Dr. Ahmed Hassan revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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