Evaluation of the myCHOICE@UNISA brochure for undergraduate students

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INTRODUCTION

The UNISA HCI laboratory consists of an observer room and a participant room, separated by a one-way mirror. Data for this part of the evaluation were collected through live video recordings of participants using the brochure to find information. The following task list was given to the student:

You are considering to study for a degree in Psychology after you have completed grade 12.

1. Can you study Psychology at Unisa?
2. Are there different options if you want to do this or is there one fixed curriculum?
3. How do you apply for studies at Unisa? (Try do go as far as possible with this process.)
4. What are the closing dates if you want to enroll for studies in 2012?
5. You have applied to study. What do you think will happen next?

We encountered some problems with this part of the evaluation:

1. The lab set up does not allow a proper view on the pages of the brochure. This means that we could not always see on the video what exactly the participant was looking at. They mostly scanned the brochure to find the answer for the particular question, making the content of what he were looking at difficult to identify.

2. The testing conditions are different from those under which a real prospective student would use the brochure. The participants were too focused on finding the answers to the specific questions and did not take time to place themselves in the shoes of a real reader. Many parts of the brochure were therefore skipped (e.g. the assistance in making a decision about a career).

To compensate for the above problems a heuristic evaluation of the brochure was done by two usability experts. The following set of heuristics were used as guide during this evaluation:

Table 1: Checklist for Evaluation for Brochure ‘myChoice@unisa’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Cognition Facilitation</strong> – supports cognition limitations of user</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There is irrelevant information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The symbols and terminology used, support meaningful comprehension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Real World Match</strong> – match users’ expectations, familiarization, fit intended user group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The user understands the terms/expressions in the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The information is organised in a logic way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Aesthetics</strong> - graphical elements, colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The text is easy to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The graphics convey information clearly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The layout is satisfactory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Consistency</strong> – provide standard and reliable layouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The positioning of the information is appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The positioning of the information is consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It is easy to find required information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Readability</strong> – supports readability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below we report on the results of analysing the videos as well as of the heuristic evaluation.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

1. Insufficient differentiation between different kinds of users.

   The layout does not accommodate different type of users. A table of contents is very important and some users will expect to get an Index to use for navigation. This is particularly important while students are completing the application form which often refers them back to sections of the brochure.

   A user has to search sequentially through the brochure to get information.

2. The target users may have limited knowledge about the university and its terms. They will not necessarily know that College = Faculty, School = Department, etc. Readers may not be familiar with acronyms used, such as KCSE, IGCSE and HIGCSE (p.18)

3. Section and columns headings are not always a good indication of the information below it. For example:
   - ‘Course offerings’ should rather be ‘Possible Career options’ (Heading 5, p.30)
   - ‘Admission’ or ‘Admission requirement’? (p.32)

4. Problems specific to the summary on page 2:
   a. Each item should have a reference to the relevant page number.
   b. Point 5 refers to a pre-addressed envelope. Is there not a chance that the student could get the brochure in a way that such an envelope will not be included?
   c. The details given on page 52 could have been given here – that description is not that much longer and the jump to a different page is not really necessary. A student may read point 6, for example, and immediately wonder what the possible methods of payment are.
   d. We have seen with most participants in the overall study that they do not distinguish between application and registration. The ‘Very important’ section of the summary should therefore clearly state that they will receive a registration form to complete after the application has been finalised.

5. The images on pages 4 and 5 were either ignored or not noticed by our participants.

6. In step 5 on page 6, it says that a list of qualifications offered by Unisa is given on page 30. That list is rather a list of careers supported by Unisa.
7. The CONTENTS on page 8 is insufficient for this brochure. No pages numbers are given and it is positioned where readers will easily miss it.

8. The map on page 11 should indicate the locations of all the regional offices as seen on page 22. The purpose of the current map isn’t clear.

9. On p. 19 the last block in some of the rows refer to the ‘above’ conditions, while the conditions actually appear to the left. In row 2, the last block refers to ‘column F’ while it should be ‘row F’.

10. On p. 19 in the leftmost block the reference to ‘the M30’ will have no meaning to a new reader.

11. On page 22 students who already know what they want to become are directed to page 30, but the path stops there.

12. The list on pages 30 and 31 should have a page number in each row where students will find the qualification associated with the career.

13. Before the table starting on page 32, a short explanation should be given of the table and how the information in the table relates to the application form. This can also include a list of the colleges with the page numbers where they start.

14. The fact that the application form appears in the middle of this table caused several problems:
   Some readers saw it as part of the ongoing table.
   Some readers thought the table ended where the form started.

15. The heading of the second column of the tables starting on page 32 should be ‘Name of qualification’ and the heading of the fourth column should be ‘Admission requirements’.

RESULTS SPECIFIC TO THE APPLICATION FORM

NOTE: The best feedback w.r.t. the application form can be obtained from the administrative people who physically process the completed forms. They will know from how students completed the form, where the problems lie.

The potential problems we identified are:

1. The form should appear at the end of the brochure.
2. There should be a clear, centred and large heading saying ‘APPLICATION FORM’. The current first page will not necessarily be interpreted as the first page of a form.
3. What if students obtained the brochure in a way that did not include the pre-addressed envelope?
4. What is a ‘conduct certificate’ and when will it be applicable?
5. In Section A, 1b refers to a ‘Specialisation’. This word should be used clearly in the myChoice brochure so that students will know what to fill in here.
6. Readers may not understand what ‘statistical purposes’ means (Section C heading).
7. In part c of Section E, points 1, 2 and 3 may not be understood by all readers.
8. In part c of Section E readers may miss the pointer to section J because the text is small and quite dense. It may help to put this in bold face.
9. In the beginning of SECTION J it must clearly be stated who should complete this section. Some readers who did not need to look at part c of section E may not understand that they can just skip this.
10. In SECTION K, say what NSFAS stands for.