

# To Inspect or to Test? What Approach Provides Better Results When It Comes to Usability and UX?

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**Keywords:** Usability, User eXperience, Usability Inspection, Usability Test, Evaluation Methods.

**Abstract:** Companies are constantly striving to improve their products for satisfying customers. Evaluating the quality of these products concerning usability and User eXperience (UX) has become essential for obtaining an advantage over competing products. However, several evaluation methods exist, making it difficult to decide which to choose. This paper presents a comparison between usability inspection and testing methods and a UX evaluation. We investigated the extent to which each method allows identifying usability problems with efficiency and effectiveness. We also investigated whether there is a difference in UX ratings between inspectors and users. To do so, we evaluated a Web platform designed for a government traffic department. Inspectors used TUXEL to evaluate the usability and UX of the platform, while usability testing moderators employed Concurrent Think-Aloud and User Experience Questionnaire with users. The inspection method outperformed usability testing regarding effectiveness and efficiency while addressing most major problems that occurred in usability testing, even when considering only the results from novice inspectors. Finally, the UX evaluation revealed contrasting results. While inspectors evaluated the platform as neutral, reflecting the problems they identified, users, by contrast, rated it very positively, in contradiction to the problems they had during the interaction.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

For many years, effective and efficient goal achievement was the prime objective of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) (Hassenzahl, 2018), making usability one of the main concerns when designing a product. Although it is necessary, “even the best usability may never be able to put a smile on users’ faces” (Hassenzahl et al., 2006), but User eXperience (UX), “when desirable, can do so” (Law et al., 2007). The concept of usability is more narrow, task-oriented, focusing primarily on user cognition and performance (Law et al., 2009). By contrast, UX is more holistic, considering not only pragmatic aspects (task-oriented) but also augmenting subjective aspects, such as affect, sensations, emotions and value of user’s interaction in everyday life, thus subsuming usability (Law et al., 2009). In this context, practitioners and researchers from academia have been looking for new approaches to the design of interactive products, aiming to accommodate not only product qualities but also

experiential qualities of technology use (Hassenzahl et al., 2010). In a scenario of fierce competition, understanding how technology can be used to promote unique, satisfying, and enlightening experiences seems to provide a competitive advantage for business and industry (Alves et al., 2014), leading practitioners and researchers to debate on how to design products capable of providing positive UX (Ardito et al., 2014). In this context, usability and UX evaluation has become an important activity to assess the quality of the products being developed, aiming to identify improvement opportunities and meet consumers’ expectations.

Despite the importance of usability and UX evaluation and its increasing adoption in the industry, many software development companies are still neglecting these two quality in use attributes due to different reasons, such as the lack of suitable methods (Ardito et al., 2014), resource demands (Alves et al., 2014), and lack of trained personnel (Teka et al., 2017). Moreover, the existence of different evaluation methods might make it difficult for

practitioners to identify which are more efficient or more adequate to a company's needs (Nakamura et al., 2019). As distinct methods allow identifying different sets of problems (Law & Hvannberg, 2002; Maguire & Isherwood, 2018) and require different expertise, resources, and user availability, comparative studies may help practitioners to identify which method meets a company's needs.

This paper presents a comparative study between two of the most employed types of usability evaluation methods: inspection and testing. We carried out the study in a software development company to evaluate a Web platform designed for a government traffic department, for a population of a state with over 4 million inhabitants. Our goal is to verify the extent to which each method allows identifying usability problems with efficiency and effectiveness while providing a good level of coverage of most severe problems. This type of research has been extensively carried out in the 90s. However, due to continuous changes in technology and interaction over time, further comparative studies should be carried out to investigate whether previous findings still apply (Maguire & Isherwood, 2018). Moreover, the shift to the experiential highlight the need for broad research that considers not only traditional usability but also investigate whether and how its results relate to UX. In this sense, we also carried out a UX evaluation study with both inspectors and users to get subjective feedback about the experience conveyed by the platform. We aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between the inspectors' and users' perceptions. The results of this study provide empirical evidence on the benefits and drawbacks of the methods employed and their cost-benefit assessment, helping practitioners to select those that best meet their needs.

## 2 RELATED WORK

The comparison of evaluation methods is a concern of several years, dated back to the 90s, when researchers started to investigate the cost-benefit ratio of the methods in an attempt to bring down the cost and time requirements of traditional usability testing (Hartson et al., 2003). In this section we summarize some of these works.

Jeffries et al. (1991) compared four Usability Evaluation Methods (UEMs): Heuristic Evaluation (HE), Usability Testing (UT), Guidelines, and Cognitive Walkthrough (CW). They evaluated the methods through the number of problems found, problem severity, and cost-benefit ratios (problems

found per person-hour). The results indicated that HE produced the best results, finding more problems, including more of the most serious ones, and at the lowest cost. By contrast, it found a large number of specific, one-time, and low-priority problems. UT was second, finding recurring and general problems while avoiding low-priority problems. However, it was also the most expensive of the four methods.

Desurvire et al. (1992) compared three methods: HE, CW, and UT. Rather than comparing the number of problems found by each method as Jeffries et al. (1991) did, they aimed to investigate whether HE and CW find problems that users face in UT, according to the evaluators' level of expertise. The results indicated that HE and CW found 44% and 28% of the problems, respectively, when employed by experts. By contrast, when employed by system designers and non-experts, the percentage of problems found dropped to 16% and 8%, respectively.

Although this is not a new topic, to this day, researchers keep carrying out comparative studies to evaluate new methods or to employ the existing ones in different domains or types of products. As websites and interaction continually change over time, it is important to carry out further studies to verify whether previous findings still apply (Maguire & Isherwood, 2018). Hasan et al. (2012), for example, evaluated the usability of three e-commerce Websites by employing ordinary UT and a specific HE method they developed for this context. To compare the methods, the authors considered the number of problems identified and their severity level. The results indicated that HE found a great number of problems, most of them minor ones. By contrast, UT found fewer problems, but more major ones.

More recently, Maguire and Isherwood (2018) compared two UEMs: UT and HE. The HE group comprised 16 participants with experience in usability evaluation, acting as expert inspectors, while 16 regular computer users without usability knowledge acted as users in usability testing. They compared both methods regarding effectiveness and efficiency by using four metrics: number of problems identified, problem severity, type of problem according to Nielsen's ten heuristics (1994), and time spent to find these problems. Overall, HE was more effective, finding almost five times more individual problems than UT. By contrast, UT identified slightly more severe problems and required less time to complete than HE, excluding the analysis time.

Although recent studies comparing inspection and testing methods do exist, most of them do not use a standardized set of usability metrics for analyzing the data as proposed by Hartson et al. (2003), making it

difficult to compare the results from previous studies directly. Moreover, they have only compared the results based on the overall number of problems, not measuring the effectiveness of HE in identifying problems found during actual user interaction. Finally, these studies have not evaluated the UX to complement the findings from usability evaluations and provide a broader view of the product evaluated. In this paper, we compared two UEMs (inspection and testing) in a software development company by evaluating a Web platform designed for a government traffic department. To have a more holistic view of the methods evaluated, we employed both novices and expert inspectors and used metrics such as effectiveness and efficiency to compare them. We also calculated three standard usability metrics proposed by Hartson et al. (2003) and used by Hvannberg et al. (2007) to evaluate the extent to which an inspection method predicts problems that actual users face during UT: thoroughness, validity, and effectiveness. Finally, we carried out a UX evaluation to obtain subjective data about the platform under evaluation and to investigate whether there is a difference between the inspectors' and users' perceptions of their experiences.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Participants and Materials

We evaluated a Web platform under development by a software development company for a government traffic department. It offers functionalities such as service scheduling and information about driver's licenses and vehicle fines. The stakeholders aimed to evaluate the usability of this platform before its public release to deliver a high-quality product for the target audience. The study involved 20 participants, 10 for each evaluation method. According to (Hwang & Salvendy, 2010), a general  $10 \pm 2$  rule of thumb for optimal sample size in usability evaluations may detect 80% of usability problems.

The inspection group comprised 10 Computer Science students (six men and four women between 20 and 38 years old) from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM), all licensed drivers. Five inspectors had low experience with usability evaluations, *i.e.*, they had learned about it in the classroom and did some exercises, which makes them comparable to typical novice practitioners (Fernandez et al., 2013). The other five had high

experience, *i.e.*, they had already carried out this type of evaluation at least once in the industry in the last six months. All inspectors used Web platforms frequently, but they did not know the application domain, nor the platform under development.

Ten company employees participated in UTs as users (four men and six women, between 25 and 52 years old), all licensed drivers and from different departments unrelated to software development. We chose company employees to avoid confidentiality issues, as it is a common practice by professionals in usability studies and required by the stakeholders. We selected those without too much experience with technology to allow identifying the most common problems that end-users may face while using the platform. Two participants had very low experience with computers, *i.e.*, they knew how to use the computer but rarely used it. Seven participants had low experience with computers, *i.e.*, they knew how to use the computer and used it occasionally. One participant had medium experience with computers, *i.e.*, they knew how to use the computer and used it regularly. None of them knew about the development of the platform, nor had used it before.

We used the following materials in this study: (i) an informed consent form, explaining the study and the subjects' voluntariness and confidentiality of their identities; (ii) a characterization questionnaire; (iii) a script with the set of tasks; (iv) a screen capture tool<sup>1</sup> for recording participants' interactions; and (v) computers and notebooks.

#### 3.2 Evaluation Methods

For inspection, we employed a method developed by one of the authors of this paper, called TUXEL (Technique for User eXperience Evaluation in e-Learning). Originally designed to evaluate e-learning platforms, it comprises three main dimensions: general usability, pedagogical usability, and UX. Previous studies indicated that TUXEL identifies more problems in less time than an adapted HE based on Nielsen's ten traditional heuristics with additional criteria for evaluating didactic effectiveness (Nakamura et al., 2018). We aimed to investigate whether TUXEL can be applied to evaluate other types of software products and how well it performs in comparison to other general evaluation methods. Given that the evaluated platform is not for learning purposes, we removed the pedagogical usability dimension, as it is specific to evaluate e-learning

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.atube.me>

aspects, such as collaborative learning and instructional assessment.

TUXEL employs a guided inspection approach so that either experts or non-experts can apply it. It provides a set of items similar to heuristics, but at a fine-grained level, in addition to tips that guide the inspector through examples or actions that they should perform to identify the problem. TUXEL also provides a tool to facilitate both evaluation and analysis process, especially for consolidating usability defects. According to Hornbæk (2010), matching similar descriptions from different inspectors is not straightforward, given that usability reports usually contain brief and context-free descriptions. As a result, researchers can err when extracting or merging actual discrepancies to produce a single set of problems, corrupting problem counts and biasing the study (Cockton et al., 2004). The TUXEL tool (a Google Chrome extension) minimizes this issue through its screenshot and markup feature. By visualizing the screenshot tagged with the selected item, together with the description provided by the inspector, the researcher can easily identify where and what the problem reported is.

First, the inspector performs the tasks while evaluating the usability of the platform by checking the items from TUXEL and selecting an adequate one according to the problem identified. Next, the inspector marks the area where the problem occurs and provides additional information about it. The tool then captures a screenshot with the selected area and the item identifier associated with it by TUXEL. Then, the inspector evaluates the overall usability of the platform through a checklist comprising items related to ease of use and help and documentation. In this step, the inspector can provide details about the items they checked. Finally, the inspector fills a UX questionnaire comprising 7-point semantic differential scales using adjectives extracted from the User Experience Questionnaire (UEQ) (Laugwitz et al., 2008) to evaluate six UX dimensions: Attractiveness, Perspicuity, Efficiency, Dependability, Stimulation, and Novelty. The inspector evaluates their experience with the evaluated platform by marking the point that is closest to the adjective that better describes the UX conveyed by the platform. The questionnaire also has two open-ended questions where the inspector can make criticisms based on their ratings and provide improvement suggestions. Finally, the tool generates a report with the inspection time, the problems reported with their corresponding items, and the URL where each problem occurred.

For UT, we looked for methods that: (i) are easy to apply; (ii) do not require additional equipment

(*e.g.*, eye-tracking devices); (iii) are not much time consuming; (iv) requires no more than one observer per participant; and (v) provides real-time information without obstructing the participant's interaction with the platform. Considering these criteria, we selected Concurrent Think-Aloud (CTA). According to Alhadreti & Mayhew (2018), CTA is one of the most widely used UT methods and allows the detection of a high number of problems with less time than its retrospective and hybrid versions. CTA is a variation of the Think-Aloud method that provides "real-time" information during the participant's interaction with a system (Alhadreti & Mayhew, 2018). The participant performs tasks as they verbalize their thoughts while being observed by a moderator that takes notes about their interaction in a problem reporting form. The moderator can identify the problems through three approaches (Van den Haak et al., 2004): i) observation (*i.e.*, from observed evidence without verbal data); ii) verbalization (*i.e.*, from verbal data without accompanying behavioral evidence); and iii) a combination of observation and verbalization. We also considered using Retrospective Think-Aloud (RTA) in order to not interfere with the participant's thought process. However, given that RTA requires double the time of CTA, and that CTA outperformed both RTA and the Hybrid Method (HB) (Alhadreti & Mayhew, 2018), we decided to use CTA. Finally, given that CTA does not evaluate UX specifically, we looked for a method that was fast, easy, and low cost. As the UX dimension of TUXEL is derived from UEQ (Laugwitz et al., 2008), we decided to use UEQ to make a fair comparison.

### 3.3 Empirical Procedures

The experiment comprised two sessions, each session in a different day. Each participant took part in only one session. The first session involved the inspection group and was conducted by two researchers in a laboratory at UFAM. Before the evaluation, we asked the participants to review and sign a consent form, explaining the importance of the study and the confidentiality of their personal information. Next, we introduced the participants to TUXEL, explaining its purpose and how to use and report problems with it, without giving much detail to avoid bias. We also explained the purpose of the target platform and provided the script with the set of tasks to be performed during the inspection process (see Table 1). Each participant inspected individually, and all the interaction process was recorded for further analyses. Given that it would be important to identify every

problem found in the platform, we oriented the participants to report problems that did not match any of TUXEL items in a notepad.

Table 1: Description of the functionalities of the platform.

Functionality	Description
Registration	It allows users to create an account to manage information regarding their vehicles and driver's license.
Scheduling	It allows scheduling a service related to vehicles or drivers' license.
Driver's license consultation	It allows users to check their driver's license status and infringements.
Vehicle's consultation	It allows users to consult the vehicle's information, fines, and status.

The second session involved the UT participants and was conducted by three researchers who acted as moderators in a computer lab at the software development company. Each researcher carried out the tests with one participant at a time, and we recorded all the interaction process for further analyses. Initially, we presented ourselves to the participants and explained the concept of usability and the importance of the study. Then, we started the testing process. First, we introduced the platform to the participants, explaining its purpose. Next, we provided the script with the set of tasks and asked them to perform one task at a time, in order. We also asked the participants to verbalize their thoughts and feelings during the accomplishment of the tasks. We took notes in the problem reporting form, describing the problem faced by the participant and registering the start and end time of each task. When a participant was not able to accomplish a task after many attempts, we instructed them to skip to the next task. After performing the tasks, we provided them the UEQ to evaluate the UX conveyed by the platform, explaining its purpose and how to fill it.

### 3.4 Consolidation and Extraction of Usability Problems

We divided the extraction process among three researchers. First, we created a spreadsheet in Google Sheets to facilitate the process. The spreadsheet was an  $N \times M$  matrix, where 'N' is the description of the discrepancy extracted from the participants and 'M' is the participant id. Discrepancy means every description of a potential problem provided by the participant that was not validated yet. Each researcher filled the spreadsheet by including the description of the discrepancy and assigning it to the ID of the

participant from whom it was obtained. Before including a new discrepancy, the researchers read the previous ones to verify whether it was already reported by another researcher. After including all the discrepancies in the spreadsheet, we assigned a unique ID for each of them. Similar discrepancies were merged into a single one, with a clear and complete description. Discrepancies that addressed more than one potential problem were split into different discrepancies. This process was carried out by one researcher and reviewed by the other two researchers. After consolidating the discrepancies, we analyzed each one and discussed whether it was a problem, false positive (*i.e.*, did not represent a real problem) or suggestion (*i.e.*, did not describe a problem, but a participant's opinion).

We set up a presentation with all usability problems identified and presented them to the stakeholders and to the development team, which comprised three team leaders (software architecture, software quality, and Web design), a designer, two programmers, a web designer, and two analysts. We assured that all information that could lead to the identification of the participants was removed from the presentation. We asked the development team to rate each problem according to its level of severity, as follows (Nielsen, 1994): 1) **Cosmetic**: not need to fix unless there is extra time available; 2) **Minor**: fixing this should be given low priority; 3) **Major**: important to fix, should be given high priority; 4) **Catastrophic**: imperative to fix this before product can be released.

## 4 RESULTS

For comparing the methods quantitatively, we calculated effectiveness, efficiency, thoroughness, and validity. We defined **effectiveness** as the ratio between the number of problems identified by the participant/inspector and the total number of all problems identified in the study. With regards to **efficiency**, ISO 9241-11 defines it as "resources used in relation to the results achieved", which includes time, human effort, costs, and materials (International Organization for Standardization, 2018). Given that usability inspection requires only one person (the inspector), while usability testing requires at least two persons (the participant and the moderator), we calculated the cost-efficiency using the formula  $Effic_i = P_i / (time_i * n)$ , where  $P_i$  and  $time_i$  refer to the total number of problems found by participant  $i$  and the time they spent in the evaluation, respectively, and  $n$  is the number of people required to perform the

evaluation (n=1 for inspection and n=2 for testing). To investigate the extent to which TUXEL predicts problems that actual users face during usability testing, we calculated two standard usability metrics proposed by Hartson et al. (2003) – **thoroughness** and **validity** –, as follows:

$$Thoroughness = \frac{hits}{(hits + misses)}$$

$$Validity = \frac{hits}{(hits + false\ alarms)}$$

Hits are the number of problems found in both inspection and testing. Misses refers to the number of problems that were found in testing but not during inspection. Finally, False Alarms are the number of problems identified in the inspection but not confirmed during UT.

We formulated the following hypotheses (null and alternative, respectively):

**H1:** There is no difference in effectiveness between inspection and testing.

**HA1:** The effectiveness of inspection is greater than that of testing.

**H2:** There is no difference in efficiency between inspection and testing.

**HA2:** The efficiency of inspection is greater than that of testing.

We also compared the number of major and catastrophic problems identified per method, given that methods that address a higher number of these problems may be more useful than those that identify only minor ones (Hartson et al., 2003). Additionally, we calculated the number of problems identified by inspectors according to the level of knowledge in usability evaluation to evaluate whether novices can employ TUXEL without losing effectiveness. Thus, we formulated the following hypotheses:

**H3:** There is no difference between the number of major/catastrophic problems identified by inspection and testing.

**HA3:** Inspection identifies more major/catastrophic problems than testing.

**H4:** There is no difference in effectiveness in the detection of major/catastrophic problems between novice and expert inspectors.

**HA4:** The effectiveness of expert inspectors in the detection of major/catastrophic problems is greater than that of novice inspectors.

**H5:** There is no difference in efficiency in identifying major/catastrophic problems between novice and expert inspectors.

**HA5:** The efficiency of expert inspectors in identifying major/catastrophic problems is greater than that of novice inspectors.

We selected these metrics because they reflect aspects that companies with budget and time constraints may consider when choosing a method. According to Ardito et al. (2014), practitioners state that usability/UX evaluation requires several resources in terms of cost, time, and people involved. In this sense, it is important that the selected method: i) address as many problems as possible (effectiveness) in less time (efficiency); ii) do not require experts for being employed, helping to reduce costs; and iii) address most of the high-priority problems.

To test the hypotheses, we performed statistical analyses by using IBM SPSS v25 to verify whether there was a significant difference between the results of each method per evaluated metric. Before running each statistical test, we needed to know how the data were distributed, given that different experiment designs and data distribution require different statistical tests (Wohlin et al., 2012). To do so, we performed a Shapiro-Wilk normality test (Shapiro & Francia, 1972). If *p-value* >= 0.05 (i.e., the data

Table 2: Raw data from usability evaluation.

Usability Inspection										
Participant	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I7	I8	I9	I10	
Discrepancies	21	20	27	26	16	37	28	23	19	
False Positives	2	2	2	0	1	3	1	0	3	
Total Problems	19	18	25	26	15	34	27	23	16	
Time (min)	108	94	101	81	98	111	96	114	92	
Effectiveness (%)	15.0	14.2	19.7	20.5	11.8	26.8	21.3	18.1	12.6	
Efficiency (%)	10.6	11.5	14.9	19.3	9.2	18.4	16.9	12.1	10.4	
Usability Testing										
Participant	U1	U2	U3	U4	U5	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10
Total Problems	11	8	13	5	8	7	14	7	9	7
Time (min)	33	25	69	15	30	20	29	27	57	39
Effectiveness (%)	8.7	6.3	10.2	3.9	6.3	5.5	11.0	5.5	7.1	5.5
Efficiency (%)	10.0	9.6	5.7	10.0	8.0	10.5	14.5	7.8	4.7	5.4

follow a normal distribution) in both groups for a given metric, we applied the Student's t-test. By contrast, if  $p\text{-value} < 0.05$  (*i.e.*, the data do not follow a normal distribution) in at least one group for that metric, we applied the Mann-Whitney non-parametric statistical test.

Finally, regarding UX evaluation, we compared the outcomes between inspectors and users. We aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between the perceptions of inspectors and users about the UX conveyed by the platform.

#### 4.1 Usability Problems Overview

A total of 157 unique discrepancies were identified. Among them, we classified 5 as suggestions and 9 as not applicable (*i.e.*, aspects related to features that were not implemented in the platform yet, such as links for functionalities under development). After removing these discrepancies, 126 were identified as problems and 17 as false positives. Table 2 presents an overview of the discrepancies per participant, per group. It is worth mentioning that inspector I6 performed the inspection in two days due to their time constraints. As this can affect the results, we removed the data from this participant from both usability and UX evaluations.

Regarding usability problems, the registration task was the one that had the highest number of issues identified: 9 out of 10 participants from the usability testing had difficulty in finding the registration option, which was only visible when clicking on the login button. Among them, four participants were not even able to complete this task. This issue was also reported by 6 out of 9 inspectors.

Participants from both groups had difficulty in defining the password, as it required a combination of numbers, letters, and one capital letter. Moreover, this requirement was only informed by a warning message that appeared when trying to submit the registration form. This message also appeared at the bottom of the page for only a few seconds, making it difficult for the participants to read the entire message. Overall, the registration task also demanded much time (9 minutes on average).

#### 4.2 Effectiveness and Efficiency

The analysis indicated that the effectiveness and efficiency of the inspection group (18.6% and 13.7%) were, on average, higher than of the usability testing (7.4% and 8.6%), indicating that the former allows identifying a higher number of usability problems in less time. With regard to these metrics, it is important

to highlight some issues. The time recorded in the usability inspection included the time spent by inspectors during the UX evaluation step, given that it is part of TUXEL. For usability testing, we only recorded the time spent during the execution of the tasks. By contrast, the dual task of thinking-aloud while working may have interfered on the accuracy of the time-on-task metric.

The normality test showed that the data were normally distributed for effectiveness and efficiency in both groups, thus we performed Student's t-test. The results evidenced that the inspection was significantly more effective ( $t(11.096) = 6.089$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and more efficient ( $t(17) = 3.294$ ,  $p = .004$ ) than the testing, thus rejecting both  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  null hypotheses.

#### 4.3 Problems by Severity

The analysis of the severity of the problems identified per evaluation method showed that the inspection group identified a greater number of cosmetic and minor problems in comparison to the UT group (see Figure 1). Additionally, they identified most of the problems pointed out by the participants of the UT group, while addressing a higher number of unique major problems. None of the groups pointed out catastrophic problems in the platform. The t-test revealed that TUXEL identified significantly more major problems than CTA ( $t(17) = 3.349$ ,  $p = .004$ ), thus rejecting the  $H_3$  null hypothesis.

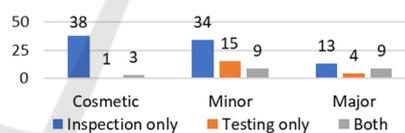


Figure 1: Problems identified by the level of severity.

#### 4.4 Problems by Evaluator Experience in Usability Evaluations

Usability inspection highly depends on the inspectors' expertise to identify usability problems (Følstad et al., 2012; Hornbæk, 2010). As employing expert evaluators to perform an inspection may be costly, it is important to verify how well novice inspectors perform in comparison to expert ones.

Figure 2|a presents the average number of problems grouped by inspectors' expertise in usability evaluation. The results indicated that inspectors with low experience tended to identify more major issues than those with a high level of experience. By contrast, the former was not as effective in identifying minor and cosmetic problems.

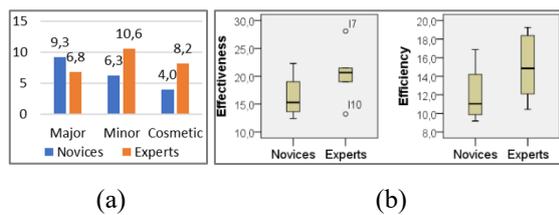


Figure 2: (a) Average number of problems and (b) effectiveness and efficiency by evaluators' level of experience in usability evaluation.

We also calculated the effectiveness and efficiency of novices and experts (see Figure 2(b)). The results showed that experts were more efficient than novices. The t-test, however, indicated that the differences were not significant, neither for effectiveness ( $t(7) = -1.271, p = .244$ ) nor for efficiency ( $t(7) = -1.219, p = .262$ ), thus not rejecting the  $H_4$  and  $H_5$  null hypotheses.

#### 4.5 Usability Problems Coverage

As stated before, a method that identifies a high percentage of major problems may have more utility than those that identify a larger number of minor ones (Hartson et al., 2003). However, given that two or more participants can report the same problem, it is also important to analyze the level of coverage per evaluation method and per level of experience in usability evaluations, rather than just verifying the average number of major problems identified. This will highlight how broad, *i.e.*, how many unique problems each method allowed to identify.

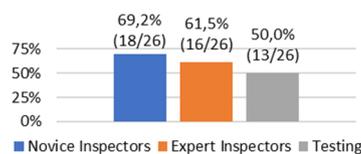


Figure 3: Level of coverage of major usability problems per method and experience in usability evaluation.

First, we calculated the ratio between the number of major problems identified by each evaluation method and all major problems identified in the study, grouping the results according to the level of experience in usability evaluation (see Figure 3). The results showed that both novice and expert inspectors outperformed UT. Novice inspectors identified 18 out of the 26 major problems (69.2%). In contrast, UT identified only half of all major problems.

#### 4.6 Thoroughness, Validity, and Effectiveness

When employing inspection methods, they should identify the highest number of problems that could occur during actual user interaction. Thus, we calculated the thoroughness, validity, and effectiveness as proposed by Hartson et al. (2003).

TUXEL identified a total of 21 out of 41 problems that occurred during UT, which gives a thoroughness of 51.2%. This value is greater than those obtained by traditional HE in previous works, such as those by Hvannberg et al. (2007) and Desurvire (1992), which resulted in 36% and 44% of thoroughness, respectively. Regarding validity, TUXEL identified 106 problems. However, only 21 were confirmed in UT, yielding a validity of 19.8%.

Among the 13 major problems that occurred in usability testing, 9 (69.2%) were predicted by novice inspectors and 7 (53.8%) by experts. All the 7 problems identified by experts were also identified by novice inspectors.

#### 4.7 Problems by Experience in Usability Evaluations

The results from the UX evaluation revealed a different perspective of the experience between the participants who acted as users in UT and inspectors (see Figure 4). The bars represent the mean for each dimension evaluated by the participants. The ratings range from -3 to 3, where values greater than or equal to 1 indicate a positive perception about the UX of the platform, while values less than or equal to -1 indicate a negative perception. Finally, values between -1 and 1 indicate a neutral perception.

The results indicated that, for the participants who acted as users in UT, despite the usability problems they faced during the test, the UX conveyed by the platform was positive, as the average rating for each dimension ranged from 1 to 2 approximately (Figure 4a). On the other hand, the results from the inspection group revealed a quite different perspective on the UX (Figure 4b). The results indicated that inspectors tended to be more consistent about the UX conveyed by the platform, as the ratings reflected the problems they identified during the evaluation. The mean for each dimension ranged from -1 to 1, indicating a neutral perception of the experience. The t-test statistical analysis revealed that inspectors evaluated the UX significantly lower than users in all UX dimensions: ATTRactiveness:  $t(10.013) = -3.802, p = .003$ ; PERSPicuity:  $t(11.624) = -3.303, p = .007$ ; EFFiciency:  $t(16) = -2.616, p = .019$ ; DEPendability:

$t(12.170) = -3.561, p = .004$ ; STIMulation:  $t(16) = -3.653, p = .002$ , except for NOVeltY ( $t(16) = -1.981, p = .065$ ). It is worth mentioning that one participant from UT had to leave the experiment before evaluating the UX.

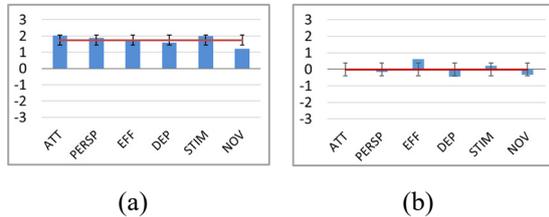


Figure 4: Results of each dimension evaluated by the users from usability testing (a) and inspectors (b).

We also investigated the correlation between time spent, number of problems identified, and UX dimensions. Since the analysis involves ordinal and interval scale types, we calculated, for each group, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (Mukaka, 2012). We did not find any significant correlation between these variables except for the Stimulation dimension, which had a high negative correlation with number of problems for the inspection group ( $r = -.724, p = .028$ ). This indicates that, the more problems inspectors find in the platform, the less they are motivated to use it.

The qualitative analysis from the open-ended questions of TUXEL allowed us to identify which aspects affected the ratings by the inspection group. We coded the sentences (Corbin & Strauss, 2014) by analyzing the inspectors' answers and creating codes that represent the concepts identified in them. For example, participant I5 stated: "*The platform is little intuitive. I think that it lacks shortcuts to access the platform's option more easily. I could not read some feedback messages because they were little highlighted and faded out quickly". The underlined words are key points identified in these sentences, which we used to start coding and understanding the phenomenon. As we wanted to identify what affected the inspectors' UX with the platform, we analyzed these key points and created codes for UX-related issues. For example, for the key point 'little intuitive', we assigned the code 'hard to understand', and for 'little highlighted and faded out quickly', we assigned the code 'low visibility of the feedback message'. After coding the sentences, we grouped those that represent the same idea, creating a broader code that addresses the concepts identified in these sentences. The first code indicates that the platform is not intuitive. Inspector I2, for instance, reported "*Sometimes I do not know where to go, which limits**

*its utilization. Therefore, I found it a little complicated to use*". The second code relates to the low contrast of interface's color, which may impair the visibility of options and notifications. Inspector I10 pointed out "*[...] when choosing the place and time [for scheduling], the font color was not visible*". Finally, the third code reveals the difficulty in visualizing the feedback messages. Inspector I6 stated "*Something recurrent is the lack of helpful feedback to the user because the existing ones are not significant or much visible*".

## 5 DISCUSSION

The results of our study reinforce previous findings from the literature, where inspection allowed identifying a greater number of problems in comparison to usability testing (Hasan et al., 2012; Hvannberg et al., 2007; Maguire & Isherwood, 2018). The inspection was, overall, more effective and efficient than the UT, indicating that it is still a cost-effective method for identifying usability problems.

The analysis of problem severity showed that, proportionally to the total of problems identified by each method, inspection led to the identification of a higher number of cosmetic and minor problems than major ones, while usability testing identified more minor and major problems than cosmetic ones. As usability testing is task-oriented, *i.e.*, more focused on the accomplishment of the tasks, it may identify more severe problems than cosmetic ones, given that it does not evaluate the interface as a whole. By contrast, inspection methods guide inspectors to search for many specific aspects that may influence the usability of the product/system, leading to the identification of details that may be missed during usability testing. However, although inspection proportionally identified fewer major problems than minor and cosmetic ones, the number of major problems reported by inspectors surpasses those found in usability testing. Additionally, inspectors addressed most of the major problems reported in usability testing while identifying a greater number of unique ones, highlighting the effectiveness of TUXEL in addressing potential high priority problems that can occur during actual user interaction.

When considering the level of experience in usability evaluation, the results showed that novice inspectors identified as many problems as experts, indicating that TUXEL supports the identification of problems even by inspectors without much experience with usability evaluation. Moreover,

novices identified slightly more major problems than experts. These results are contrasting to those found by Desurvire et al. (1992), where non-experts using HE identified less than half of the problems found by experts. This indicates that TUXEL supports novice inspectors to find problems during the evaluation process. By contrast, experts reported a higher number of cosmetic and minor problems in comparison to novices. Given that experts are more familiarized with this type of evaluation, they probably were more meticulous in identifying every aspect that was not in compliance with the evaluated items, which would have led to the identification of those many minor and cosmetic issues. However, as it may be costly for companies to employ experts, TUXEL may be a good alternative for reducing costs without impairing the results of the evaluation, as significant differences in effectiveness and efficiency between novices and experts were not observed.

Regarding thoroughness, our results were better than those obtained by Hvannberg et al. (2007) and Desurvire (1992) who employed inspection methods, such as Nielsen's HE. Although we cannot make a direct comparison, as the evaluated product is different and we did not employ Nielsen's HE in this study, the results indicate good effectiveness, especially given that TUXEL was primarily designed for the e-learning context. Moreover, the fact that novices predicted 69.2% of all major problems found in UT highlights that TUXEL is cost-effective. By contrast, TUXEL led to the identification of many other problems that were not confirmed during UT, resulting in low validity. It is probably because four out of ten users from UT failed to create an account on the platform, hindering them from performing tasks that required logging in. Consequently, usability problems related to these tasks could not be addressed in UT. Although it cannot be guaranteed that these unconfirmed problems will occur, they highlight opportunities for improving the platform.

Despite the advantages of identifying many problems, TUXEL also requires more effort from the practitioners for analyzing and consolidating all the discrepancies and verifying whether they are real problems or not. In this sense, UT has the advantage of not requiring further analysis for false positives, as only real problems faced by users and identified by the moderator are reported. Moreover, as UT focuses only on the problems that actually occurred during the interaction and not on those that violated a given heuristic or standard, the number of discrepancies to analyze and consolidate is reduced. A drawback of UT is that it is costly, given that more participants are needed for identifying more problems, while

inspection requires only few inspectors, even those without too much experience (in the case of TUXEL). If the company has access to users, UT is a good option. By contrast, if the product involves confidentiality issues or is under early stages of development, employing an inspection method may be more suitable. A combination of both approaches, however, may provide the best results.

Finally, regarding UX evaluation, given that inspectors found a higher number of problems, their perception about the UX of the platform may have been influenced by the inspection process, leading to neutral evaluation. By contrast, the participants from UT evaluated the UX of the platform very positively, even those who had many difficulties, could not perform some tasks, or took a long time to accomplish them. Previous works have already pointed out this phenomenon (Nakamura et al., 2019), indicating that other factors may have had stronger influence on UX than the problems they faced during the interaction. As they knew that the platform was being developed by the company, they may not have felt at ease to criticize it, although we explained the importance of being honest and that the object of study was the platform, not the participants themselves. Another possibility is related to the profile of the UT participants. As they did not use computers very often, they probably had never used this type of platform before, thus everything was new to them. Previous works, for example, have demonstrated that participants' expectations influence UX evaluations (Kujala et al., 2017; Kujala & Miron-Shatz, 2015). As they had not used this type of platform before and only use computers occasionally, they probably did not have any expectations about the platform, nor a basis for evaluating their experience, leading to a more positive evaluation.

It is worth mentioning that the small sample size limits the generalization of the results. However, it is representative for empirical studies in the industry, where not many subjects are available. We also selected participants whose profiles reflect the target population. Although we involved employees in user testing, we selected those from different departments, with varied digital literacy, low experience with technology, and were not part of the development team. For the inspection group, we selected both participants with and without experience in usability evaluation to reflect companies that may or may not have usability experts available. Finally, the platform domain and its specificities also limit the generalization of the results, as it did not require domain knowledge to be evaluated.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Inspection remains a cost-effective approach for evaluating the usability of current Web platforms, allowing the identification of a greater number of problems in comparison to usability testing. These problems highlight many points that can be improved, leading to the development of high-quality products. Our results also showed that it is possible to employ an inspection method with novices and still maintain its effectiveness in identifying problems, which can help companies to reduce costs.

Although usability testing identified considerably fewer problems, it allowed the identification of a great number of major ones, considered by the development team as important to fix with high priority. As the effort for consolidating and analyzing the data is proportional to the number of problems reported, usability testing is a good alternative for focusing on the main and recurrent problems that users may face during their interaction.

It is worth mentioning that combining these approaches might provide more complete results, allowing practitioners to have a broader view of the quality of the product being evaluated. However, this implies more cost due to the need for more personnel and time for consolidating and analyzing the results. In this sense, practitioners should decide according to the company's constraints and needs.

Regarding UX evaluation, the differences in the results between inspectors and users raise doubts about which results to rely on and indicate that other factors may have influenced their subjective evaluations. The lower ratings from inspectors indicate a possible influence of the problem detection process inherent to inspection, leading them to focus on the negative aspects of the platform. The higher ratings of the participants from usability testing, in turn, may be related to their profile. As they only use computers occasionally, they may have had no expectations about the platform nor a baseline for comparing their experience with previous ones. The fact that they were also employees of the company that developed the Web platform may have also contributed to a more positive evaluation.

In contrast to usability, research in the UX field is challenging, given that different factors can affect users' evaluations due to the subjective nature of experiences. Future studies may investigate what factors (e.g. previous experience with similar products and UX evaluations) influence the perceptions about their experiences. By doing so, it would make it possible for practitioners and researchers to focus on the factors that influence UX,

either by reducing their effects during evaluations or by considering them when designing new products. Another possibility is to investigate the impact of different outcomes on practitioners' decisions in the development process. As practitioners rely on the results from this type of evaluation for improving their products and planning future releases, contrasting results as those found in our study may lead to different design decisions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Brazilian funding agency FAPESP through process number 062.00478/2019, the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) process 175956/2013, and CNPq processes 204081/2018-1/PDE, 311316/2018-2, 311494/2017-0, and 423149/2016-4. We especially thank all the subjects who participated in this research.

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