

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Websites are developed to present information resources and services to users. A website should be usable and helpful. With respect to educational and research mission of academic libraries, their websites have an important role in communication with users and presenting information resources and services. Therefore academic libraries' websites should have suitable designs and be user-friendly and effectively meet users' needs. These websites should be evaluated and one of the methods to evaluate websites' usability is heuristic method in which a small group of evaluators examine the website according to predetermined heuristics. With regard to the importance of academic libraries, we conducted a study to evaluate the usability of central libraries' websites of Iranian medical universities, type 1 and the relationship between their usability rate and webometrics rank.

Methods: This is a descriptive- analytical and cross sectional research which used heuristic method to evaluate the usability of central libraries websites of Iranian medical universities, type 1 including Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Kerman, Mazandaran, Uromia, Kermanshah and Zanzan in 2013. Three evaluators independently examined the websites according to Nielson's heuristics. A list of problems was provided in which the place of the problems was also determined. We used a severity rate to classify the problems based on their severity. The relationship between usability and webometrics score was also calculated. Spss₂₀ and Excel were used to analyse the data.

Results: We explored 668 problems. Some problems repeated in some websites. Therefore, websites had 1070 violations. The most of problems belonged to "flexibility and efficiency of use" (34/2%) And the least of observed problems were related to "error prevention" (1%). Majority of problems were major ones (33/6%). The most of problems in central libraries of Mashhad and Zanzan medical universities were Minor. The most of problems in central libraries of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti, Isfahan, Tabriz, Ahvaz, Kerman, Mazandaran, Uromia and Kermanshah medical universities were Major problems. Majority of problems in central library of Shiraz medical university were Catastrophic problems. No significant relationship was observed between websites' usability score and webometrics rank.

Conclusion: According to the findings, the websites of central libraries' of top universities have some problems, designers should attempt to improve the websites. There our findings can be used in redesigning the websites and improving their interfaces.

Keywords: Academic library website, usability, heuristic evaluation