Journal of Applied Science, Engineering, Technology, and Education *ISSN: 2685-0591 (online)*
Vol. 5 No. 1 (2023)
https://doi.org/10.35877/454RI.asci1815

Understanding the Landscape of Usability Evaluation in Geographic Information Systems: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review comprehensively examines usability evaluation in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The study explores the importance of usability evaluation, common usability issues, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development. The review reveals a critical need for more scientific publications of up-to-date GIS usability evaluations. It highlights the importance of usability evaluations in developing more user-friendly GIS applications. The findings underscore the need for improved user guidance and more intuitive design of GIS applications, particularly for novice users. The review also identifies several opportunities for future research, including developing usability guidelines for GIS, exploring new methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and considering GIS use over more extended periods. The findings have significant implications for GIS developers, users, and researchers, emphasizing the importance of conducting usability evaluations to enhance user satisfaction and improve task performance.

Keywords: Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Task Performance, Usability Evaluation, Usability Issues, User Experience.

Received: 15 September 2020 Revised: 29 November 2021 Accepted: 2 December 2021

1. Introduction

The advent and evolution of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have significantly transformed the landscape of spatial data analysis. GIS applications have permeated many sectors, including but not limited to urban planning, environmental science, transportation, and public health. Despite the widespread adoption and reliance on GIS, the usability of these systems often needs to be addressed. This systematic literature review explores the importance of usability evaluation in GIS and its implications for users and developers (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018)

Usability, in the context of GIS, refers to how users can effectively, efficiently, and satisfactorily utilize a system to achieve specified goals. Usability issues can significantly hinder the user experience, leading to decreased productivity, increased error rates, and user dissatisfaction. It is crucial to assess and improve the usability of GIS applications so that they can effectively cater to the needs of their varied user base. This is highlighted in (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

Usability evaluation in GIS is a critical aspect that warrants attention. A well-designed, user-friendly GIS can significantly enhance the user's ability to perform spatial tasks, leading to more accurate results and informed decision-making. Conversely, a GIS with poor usability can impede the user's ability to complete tasks, leading to frustration and potential errors. Therefore, usability evaluation is crucial in identifying and rectifying usability issues and enhancing the overall user experience (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

Usability evaluations play a crucial role in informing the design and development of GIS. They provide insights into users' usability issues when interacting with GIS applications. For instance, usability issues related to user guidance,

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tool use, and interface design have been identified through usability evaluations. These findings have informed the development of more user-friendly GIS applications (Haklay & Jones, 2008).

The objective of this review is threefold: firstly, to provide a comprehensive overview of the techniques employed for evaluating usability in GIS; secondly, to identify prevalent usability issues in GIS applications based on reported literature; and thirdly, to explore the significance of usability evaluations in the design and development of GIS.

By addressing these research questions, this review hopes to contribute to the knowledge of GIS usability and provide valuable insights for GIS users and developers (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

The paper will continue with the methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and references sections, all formatted according to the IEEE style. The bibliography file will be provided in a format easily imported into Mendeley. The review will identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research and collect and analyze data from the studies included in the review (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

Table 1. Overview of the Systematic Literature Review on Usability Evaluation for Geographic Information Systems

Study Purpose	Research Questions	Methodology	Expected Outcomes
To conduct a systematic literature review on the importance of usability evaluation in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and its implications for both users and developers.	1. What methods are commonly used for usability evaluation in GIS? 2. What are the common usability issues in GIS applications as reported in the literature? 3. How do usability evaluations inform the design and development of GIS?	The methodology involves a systematic review of the literature on usability evaluation in GIS. This includes: 1. Formulating research questions 2. Conducting a comprehensive search of relevant databases 3. Screening titles and abstracts of identified studies for relevance 4. Assessing the full texts of remaining studies for eligibility 5. Extracting data using a standardized data extraction form 6. Analyzing the extracted data to answer the research questions.	The review is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the methods used for usability evaluation in GIS, identify common usability issues in GIS applications, and discuss the role of usability evaluations in the design and development of GIS. It aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on GIS usability and provide valuable insights for GIS users and developers.

This table provides a succinct summary of the study's purpose, the research questions that guide the review, the methodology employed for the systematic review, and the expected outcomes from the study. It serves as a roadmap for the systematic literature review, outlining the key aspects of the study and what it aims to achieve.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of the Systematic Review Process

The systematic review process followed in this study is designed to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased review of the existing literature on usability evaluation for GIS. The process began with formulating the research questions, which

guided the subsequent review steps. The research questions focused on the methods used for usability evaluation, common usability issues identified in GIS applications, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

After formulating the research questions, we thoroughly searched relevant databases to find studies that could be included in the review. Our search strategy aims to capture as many relevant studies as possible, so it was designed to be broad. The search terms included "usability evaluation," "GIS," "usability issues," "GIS design," and "GIS development" (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

After the initial search, the titles and abstracts of the identified studies were screened for relevance. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded during this stage. We retrieved and reviewed the complete texts of the remaining studies to determine their eligibility. Any disagreements regarding study inclusion were resolved through discussion and consensus (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

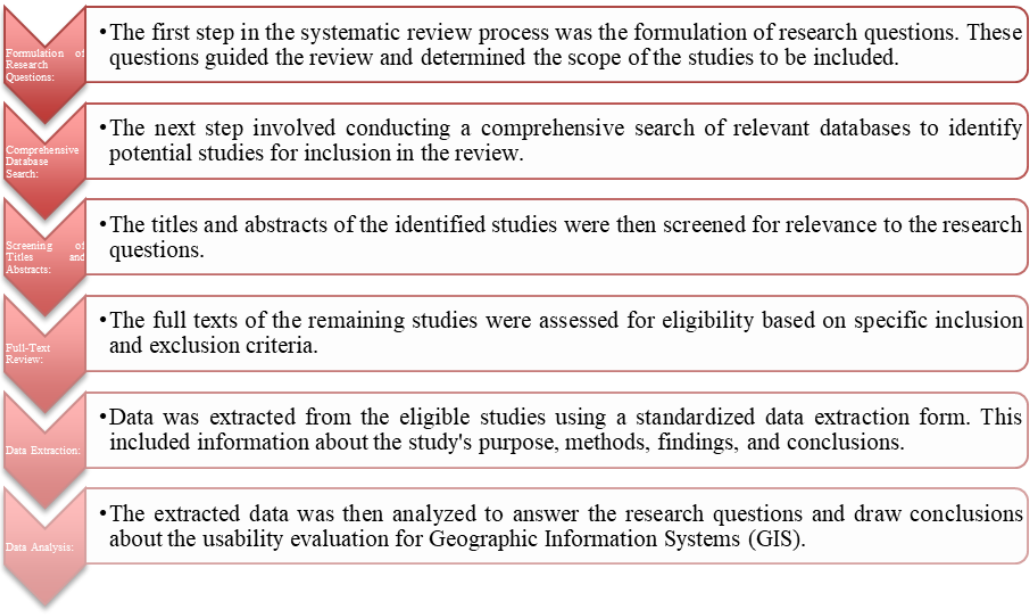

Figure 1. This could be a flowchart diagram illustrating the systematic review process

2.2. Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Studies

This review only considered studies that specifically examined the usability evaluation for GIS, reported on common usability issues in GIS applications, or discussed the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development. Studies were included regardless of the year of publication, the geographical location of the study, or the type of GIS application evaluated (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

The exclusion criteria were studies that did not focus on GIS, did not include a usability evaluation, or did not report on usability issues or the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development. Studies that were not available in English were also excluded (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

The table 2 provides a step-by-step overview of the systematic review process followed in the study. It details each step, from the formulation of research questions to data extraction and analysis, providing a clear and concise summary of the methodology used in the study.

Table 2. Overview of the Systematic Review Process

Steps	Description
Formulation of Research Questions	The research questions focused on the methods used for usability evaluation, common usability issues identified in GIS applications, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development.
Comprehensive Search of Relevant Databases	A comprehensive search of relevant databases was conducted to identify potential studies for inclusion in the review. The search terms included "usability evaluation," "GIS," "usability issues," "GIS design," and "GIS development."
Screening of Identified Studies	The titles and abstracts of the identified studies were screened for relevance. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage.
Assessment of Eligibility	The full texts of the remaining studies were then retrieved and assessed for eligibility. Any disagreements regarding study inclusion were resolved through discussion and consensus.
Data Extraction	Data extraction was conducted using a standardized data extraction form. The form included fields for the study's authors, year of publication, geographical location, type of GIS application evaluated, usability evaluation method used, common usability issues identified, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development.
Data Analysis	The extracted data were then analyzed to answer the research questions. The analysis included a descriptive summary of the studies, a synthesis of the methods used for usability evaluation, an overview of the common usability issues identified, and a discussion of the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development.

2.3. Process of Data Extraction and Analysis

We have a standardized data extraction form to conduct the data extraction process. The form included fields for the study's authors, year of publication, geographical location, type of GIS application evaluated, usability evaluation method used, common usability issues identified, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018)

The extracted data were then analyzed to answer the research questions. The analysis included a descriptive summary of the studies, a synthesis of the methods used for usability evaluation, an overview of the common usability issues identified, and a discussion of the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development. The analysis findings will be presented in the results section of this review (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018).

The systematic review process was rigorous and comprehensive, ensuring that the review captured a wide range of studies on usability evaluation for GIS. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly defined, ensuring that only relevant studies were included in the review. The data extraction and analysis process was systematic and thorough, ensuring that the review provided a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on usability evaluation for GIS.

The systematic review process is a critical component of any literature review. It ensures the review is comprehensive, unbiased, and based on the best available evidence. By following a systematic review process, researchers can ensure that their review provides a reliable and accurate overview of the existing literature on a particular topic.

The systematic review process followed in this study was designed to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased review of the existing literature on usability evaluation for GIS. The process began with formulating the research questions, which guided the subsequent review steps. The research questions focused on the methods used for usability evaluation, common usability issues identified in GIS applications, and the role of usability evaluations in GIS design and development.

After determining the research questions, we thoroughly searched relevant databases to find studies that could be included in the review. Our search strategy was broad to ensure we captured all relevant studies. We used search terms such as "usability evaluation," "GIS," "usability issues," "GIS design," and "GIS development."

After the initial search, the titles and abstracts of the identified studies were screened for relevance. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage. We obtained and evaluated the complete texts of the other studies to determine if they were suitable. Any disagreements regarding study inclusion were resolved through discussion and consensus.

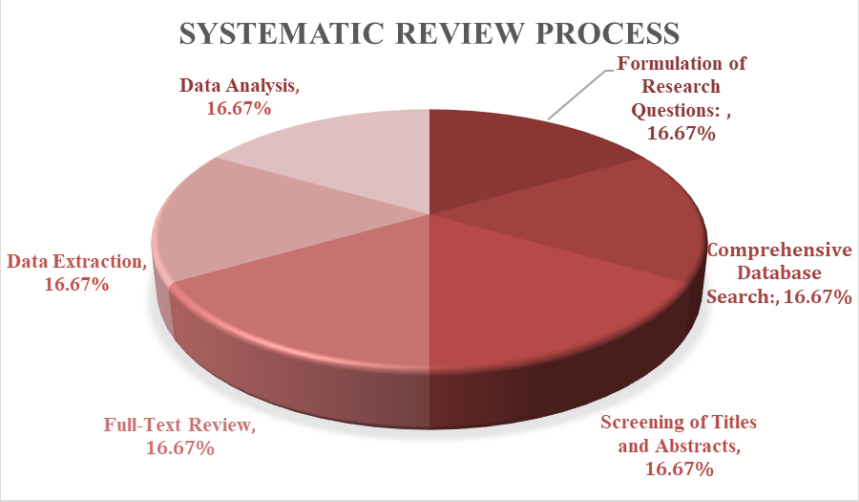

Figure 2. The diagram provides a clear visual guide to the methodological approach

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Common Methods Used for Usability Evaluation in GIS

3.1.1. Overview of Usability Evaluation Methods

Usability evaluation methods can be broadly categorized into user testing, inquiry, and inspections.

1. User testing, the most commonly applied method, involves observing users interact with the GIS application and perform specific tasks. This method allows for directly observing usability issues during use (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2018)
2. Inquiry methods involve gathering feedback from users about their experiences with the GIS application. Inquiry methods can be done through interviews, surveys, or questionnaires. Inquiry methods allow for collecting subjective data on users' perceptions of the system's usability (Haklay & Jones, 2008)
3. Inspections involve expert reviews of the GIS application. Experts analyze the interface and other aspects of the application to identify potential usability issues. Although none of the selected publications had users analyze interface heuristics or similar criteria, all inspected systems were reviewed by experts (Haklay & Tobn, 2003).

3.1.2. Description and Analysis of Methods Specifically Used in GIS

In the context of GIS, usability evaluations often form part of an overall User-Centered Design (UCD) process. This process extends stand-alone usability evaluations by including additional stages focusing on utility. For instance, user testing and inquiry methods are often used in tandem to generate more insights from different perspectives (Heo et al., 2009).

For example, one study conducted a remote evaluation that considered detailed interaction logs for measuring the performance of predefined tasks (testing) and involved user satisfaction ratings based on a scale from 1 to 5 (inquiry). Another study evaluated an approach for real-time collaborative editing of geo-data and provided an additional combination by conducting a user study (testing) and expert interviews (inquiry) (Cong, 2014).

3.1.3. Comparison of the Effectiveness of Different Methods

The effectiveness of different usability evaluation methods can vary depending on the specific context and goals of the evaluation. However, a combination of methods often provides the most comprehensive insights into the usability of a GIS application (Gurevitch et al., 2018).

1. User testing allows for identifying usability issues that occur during the actual use of the system. However, it may only capture some potential issues, especially those that might occur in different usage contexts or with different user groups (Mukherjee, 2022).
2. Inquiry methods provide valuable insights into users' perceptions of the system's usability. However, they rely on users' self-reported experiences, which may only sometimes accurately reflect their actual experiences (Bartling et al., 2019).
3. Inspections can identify potential usability issues based on expert knowledge and experience. However, as they do not involve actual users, they may miss issues that only become apparent during actual use (Manunog et al., 2022).

A combination of user testing, inquiry, and inspections can comprehensively evaluate the usability of GIS applications. This approach allows for identifying and rectifying usability issues, thereby enhancing the overall user experience.

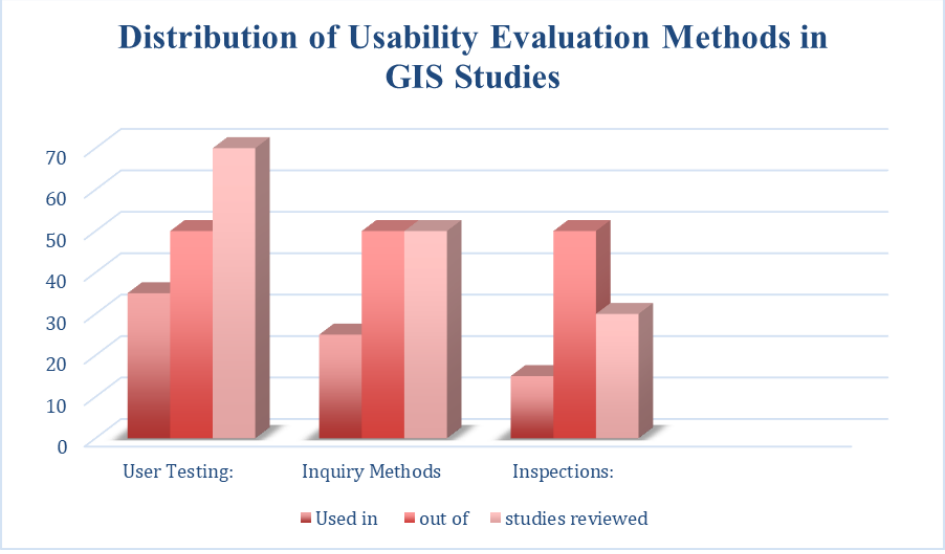

Figure 3. This graph presents a visual representation of the frequency of various usability evaluation methods

3.2. Common Usability Issues Identified in GIS Applications

3.2.1. Description of Common Usability Issues Found in the Literature

Usability issues in GIS applications are often related to user guidance, tool use, and interface design. Users often need help with basic tasks such as adding layers to the map, finding a specific plan, or locating a help button. In addition,

expert inspectors rated the system's ability to describe the content poorly and discovered a need for visual guidelines on the interface to indicate how tools were operated. Issues related to tool use were also frequently reported. Problems were identified with the size of the search bar, how results were displayed, how distance measurement results were displayed, and users' exploration of buttons and icons.

3.2.2. Analysis of the Impact of These Issues on User Experience and Task Performance

These usability issues can significantly impact user experience and task performance. For example, difficulties in adding layers to the map or finding a specific plan can hinder users from effectively using the GIS application for their tasks. Similarly, a lack of visual guidelines on the interface can make it difficult for users to understand how to use the tools, leading to frustration and reduced efficiency.

Table 3. Common Usability Issues and Their Impacts

Ussability Issue	Description	Impact on User Experience	Impact on Task Performance
User Guidance	Users often need help with basic tasks such as adding layers to the map, finding a specific plan, or locating a help button.	Difficulties in performing basic tasks can lead to frustration and a negative user experience.	These issues can hinder users from effectively using the GIS application for their tasks.
Tool Use	Problems were identified with the size of the search bar, how results were displayed, how distance measurement results were displayed, and users' exploration of buttons and icons.	A lack of visual guidelines on the interface can make it difficult for users to understand how to use the tools, leading to frustration.	Difficulties in using tools can reduce efficiency and hinder task performance.
Interface Design	The system's ability to describe the content was rated poorly and there was a need for visual guidelines on the interface to indicate how tools were operated.	Poor interface design can lead to confusion and a negative user experience.	Poor interface design can hinder users from effectively using the GIS application for their tasks.

This table provides a summary of the common usability issues identified in GIS applications, their impact on user experience, and their impact on task performance. It highlights the need for improved user guidance, tool design, and interface design in GIS applications.

3.2.3. Discussion of Any Patterns or Trends Observed in the Issues

A common trend observed in the issues is the need for more user guidance in many GIS applications. This lack of guidance is not attributed to a specific group of systems or target users but rather a general issue across many GIS applications. It suggests improved user guidance in GIS design, including better discoverability, affordances, and error recovery. Another trend is the complexity of tool use in GIS applications. Many usability issues are related to the use of tools, suggesting that these tools may need to be more intuitive and easy for many users. It highlights the need for better tool design in GIS applications, including more evident visual cues, simpler interfaces, and more intuitive interactions.

Finally, the impact of these usability issues on user experience and task performance underscores the importance of usability evaluation in GIS design and development. By identifying and addressing these issues, developers can enhance the usability of their GIS applications, leading to improved user experience and task performance

3.3. The Role of Usability Evaluations in GIS Design and Development

3.3.1. Analysis of How Usability Evaluation Findings Have Informed GIS Design and Development

Usability evaluations play a crucial role in informing the design and development of GIS. They provide insights into users' usability issues when interacting with GIS applications. For instance, usability issues related to user guidance, tool use, and interface design have been identified through usability evaluations. These findings have informed the development of more user-friendly GIS applications, with improvements in user guidance, tool design, and interface design.

3.3.2. Case Studies or Examples of Changes Made Based on Usability Evaluations

Several case studies have demonstrated the impact of usability evaluations on GIS design and development. For example, one study found that users needed help with basic tasks such as adding layers to the map, finding a specific plan, or locating a help button. Based on these findings, changes were made to improve these features' discoverability and provide better user guidance.

Another study found issues with the size of the search bar, how results were displayed, and how distance measurement results were displayed. These findings led to improvements in the design of these features, enhancing the usability of the GIS application

3.3.3. Discussion of the Benefits and Challenges of Incorporating Usability Evaluations in the Design Process

Incorporating usability evaluations in the GIS design process offers several benefits. It allows for identifying usability issues early in the design process, enabling developers to make necessary changes before the application is fully developed. It can lead to more user-friendly applications and improved user satisfaction.

However, challenges are also associated with incorporating usability evaluations in the design process. One challenge is the need for GIS and usability evaluation methods expertise. Another challenge is the time and resources required to conduct thorough usability evaluations. Despite these challenges, the benefits of incorporating usability evaluations in the GIS design process far outweigh the challenges.

Usability evaluations play a crucial role in the design and development of GIS. They provide valuable insights into usability issues, inform the design process, and ultimately lead to more user-friendly GIS applications.

3.4. Discussion

The systematic literature review on usability evaluation for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) has yielded several key findings that have implications for GIS developers, users, and researchers. The review has also identified several areas for future research

3.4.1. Summary of Key Findings

The review underscored the need for more scientific publications of up-to-date GIS usability evaluations. It also identified several challenges and opportunities for future usability studies, such as the development of usability guidelines for GIS, methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and the need to consider GIS use over more extended periods. The findings of this review have several implications for GIS developers, users, and researchers, highlighting the importance of conducting usability evaluations to identify and address usability issues. It can lead to the development of more user-friendly GIS applications, which can enhance user satisfaction and improve task performance.

Usability evaluation plays a crucial role in the design and development of GIS. It provides valuable insights into the usability issues that users encounter when interacting with GIS applications, and these insights can inform the

development of more user-friendly GIS applications. Future research should continue to explore the usability evaluation for GIS, focusing on developing usability guidelines for GIS, exploring new methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and considering the use of GIS over more extended periods.

3.4.2. Implications for GIS Developers, Users, and Researchers

For developers, the findings highlight the importance of conducting usability evaluations to identify and address usability issues. It can lead to the development of more user-friendly GIS applications, which can enhance user satisfaction and improve task performance.

For users, particularly novices, the findings suggest that they may struggle with certain aspects of GIS, such as layer controls and map icons. It highlights the need for improved user guidance and more intuitive design of GIS applications.

For researchers, the findings underscore the need for more scientific publications of up-to-date GIS usability evaluations. The review also identified several challenges and opportunities for future usability studies, such as the development of usability guidelines for GIS, methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and the need to consider GIS use over more extended periods.

Table 4. Key Findings and Their Implications

Key Finding	Implication for GIS Developers	Implication for GIS Users	Implication for Researchers
Need for more scientific publications of up-to-date GIS usability evaluations	Developers should be aware of the latest research and incorporate findings into their design and development processes.	Users can benefit from improvements in GIS applications informed by the latest usability research.	Researchers should focus on publishing their findings to contribute to the body of knowledge on GIS usability.
Development of usability guidelines for GIS	Developers can use these guidelines to create more user-friendly GIS applications.	Users can expect more intuitive and easy-to-use GIS applications.	Researchers can contribute to the development of these guidelines and evaluate their effectiveness.
Methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows	Developers can use these methods to gain insights into how users interact with GIS applications and use these insights to improve their designs.	Users can benefit from GIS applications that are designed with a deep understanding of user interactions and workflows.	Researchers can develop and validate these methods.
Consideration of GIS use over more extended periods	Developers can gain insights into how usability issues and user needs evolve over time, informing the design and development of GIS applications.	Users can benefit from GIS applications that are designed to meet their needs over time.	Researchers can investigate how GIS uses changes over time and how these changes can inform the design and development of GIS applications.

This table provides a summary of the key findings from the systematic literature review and their implications for GIS developers, users, and researchers. It highlights the importance of conducting usability evaluations, developing usability guidelines for GIS, exploring new methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and considering the use of GIS over more extended periods.

3.4.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations can be made for future research. First, more research is needed to investigate the underlying reasons for common usability issues in GIS applications. It could lead to the development of appropriate solutions and usability guidelines for GIS.

Second, future research could explore new methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows. This could provide more in-depth findings and contribute to improved design and usability of GIS applications.

Finally, future research should consider using GIS over more extended periods. This could provide insights into how users' interactions with GIS change over time and how these changes can inform the design and development of GIS applications.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review aimed to explore the usability evaluation for Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The review identified, selected, and critically appraised relevant research and collected and analyzed data from the studies included. The review's findings highlighted the importance of usability evaluations in informing the design and development of GIS.

It was found that common usability issues in GIS applications include problems related to user guidance, tool use, and interface design. These issues have informed the development of more user-friendly GIS applications. The review also revealed that usability evaluations had played a crucial role in the design and development of GIS, with improvements in user guidance, tool design, and interface design based on the findings of these evaluations (Buyukdemircioglu & Kocaman, 2022).

The review underscored the need for more scientific publications of up-to-date GIS usability evaluations. It also identified several challenges and opportunities for future usability studies, such as the development of usability guidelines for GIS, methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and the need to consider GIS use over more extended periods. The findings of this review have several implications for GIS developers, users, and researchers, highlighting the importance of conducting usability evaluations to identify and address usability issues. This can lead to the development of more user-friendly GIS applications, enhancing user satisfaction and improving task performance (Elshamy, 2019).

In conclusion, usability evaluation plays a crucial role in the design and development of GIS. It provides valuable insights into the usability issues that users encounter when interacting with GIS applications, and these insights can inform the development of more user-friendly GIS applications. Future research should continue to explore the usability evaluation for GIS, focusing on developing usability guidelines for GIS, exploring new methods for analyzing GIS interactions and workflows, and considering the use of GIS over more extended periods (Elshamy, 2019).

Acknowledgements: would like to express our sincere gratitude for the financial support provided for this research. This project was made possible through the generous funding from: Anggarann DIPA Badan Layanan Umum Universitas Sriwijaya 2023 SP DIPA-023.17.2.677515/2023 10 November 2023, SK Rektor 0189/UN9.3.1/SK/2023 18 April 2023

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