Assignment 5: User Evaluations of Pingala Course Recommendation Prototype

Rohan (241110057)

1 Overview

This document reports the results of a usability evaluation of the Pingala Course Recommender prototype. The prototype was created in **Assignment 1** as a static image-based mockup (not a functional interface). The evaluation aimed to identify how well users understood the screens, labels, and intended interactions.

Three participants viewed the prototype images independently. Since no real system was implemented, participants conceptually interacted with the screens—explaining what they expected each button or option to do and how they would perform tasks within the design.

What was evaluated: The layout and logic of requesting AI course recommendations, using filters and prompts, viewing suggested courses, and applying for a course based on the design mockups.

2 Tasks and Procedure

Test Objective: Evaluate how clearly users understand the prototype's design, purpose, and workflow based on static screen images, and identify usability concerns that might arise during actual implementation.

Tasks given to each participant:

1. View the provided sequence of prototype screens.
2. Identify where they would click to request course recommendations.
3. Describe what they expect the "Apply Recommendations" button to do.
4. Explain how they would use the filters and prompt for personalization.
5. Indicate what they think would happen after adding or applying a course.

Procedure:

- Each participant was shown the static prototype images in sequence.
- They were asked to think aloud and describe their interpretation of each interface element.
- The observer noted what they found intuitive, confusing, or unclear.
- **Audio** recordings were captured for all sessions (required for the two non-classmates; captured optionally for the classmate). Participants did **not** consent to video recording, so no videos were taken.

Ethics & Consent All participants provided consent to be observed and audio recorded for coursework purposes. Names are included with permission; audio files are shared only with course staff. No sensitive personal data were collected.

3 Participants and Evidence

Participant	Type	Evidence / Observation Summary
Anand Shinde	Not a classmate	Easily identified the "Request Course" button and correctly inferred its purpose. Recognized that courses were AI-based recommendations. Asked what exactly can be done using the prompt option. Indicated that applying a course seemed straightforward. Slight confusion about how AI selects courses. Audio: Anand_Shinde.mp3.
Sevak Shekokar	Classmate	Recognized the interface as the normal Pingala layout. Mentioned that recommended courses seemed personalized. Used filters conceptually to refine choices. Successfully searched for a course. No issues or suggestions. Audio: Sevak_Shekokar.mp3.
Paras	Not a classmate	Carefully read all page details and understood the system's description. Misinterpreted that recommended courses were the only "best" courses for him. Audio: Paras.mp3.

4 Lightweight Thematic Analysis

Method: Notes and audio recordings were coded manually and grouped into recurring themes. Counts denote how many participants surfaced each theme.

Theme	Count	Participants
Ease of Use	3	Anand Shinde, Sevak Shekokar, Paras
Clarity of System Feedback	2	Anand Shinde, Paras
Mental Model of Recommendations	2	Anand Shinde, Paras
Interface Familiarity	1	Sevak Shekokar
Visibility of Controls	2	Anand Shinde, Sevak Shekokar

Example coded evidence: "What can I do with the prompt?"; "Thought AI picks only 'best' courses".

5 Findings — Usability Problems (List)

U1. Ambiguous purpose of the Prompt box
Severity: Medium

Evidence: Anand Shinde asked about the use of the prompt option.
Recommendation: Add sample placeholder text, e.g., "Describe what kind of course you want (topics, workload, type)."

U2. Misinterpretation that recommendations = only good courses
Severity: High
Evidence: Paras assumed AI recommendations are the only valid courses.
Recommendation: Add clarifying text such as "These are suggested matches—you may explore other electives too."

U3. Add a dismiss control for individual recommendations (design improvement)
Severity: Low
Rationale: Supports curation and helps users remove irrelevant suggestions without overwhelming the list.
Recommendation: Add a small "X" or "Not relevant" button to remove unwanted recommendations.

U4. Need for short onboarding guide
Severity: Low
Evidence: Non-classmates asked clarifying questions, while the classmate did not.
Recommendation: Provide a one-time hint or step-by-step overlay for first-time users.

6 Summary

All participants completed the tasks successfully, showing that the prototype is broadly understandable. The main issues relate to understanding how AI recommendations are generated and how they should be interpreted.

Appendix A — Raw Observation Notes

Anand Shinde (Non-classmate):

- Found "Request Course" easily.
- Recognized AI recommendations.
- Asked what can be done with the prompt.
- Completed tasks smoothly.
- Slight confusion about how AI chooses courses.

Sevak Shekokar (Classmate):

- Identified normal Pingala interface.
- Felt courses were personalized.
- Used filters correctly.
- Used search successfully.
- Reported no issues.

Paras (Non-classmate):

- Read all text and understood the system.
- Misunderstood that recommended courses are the only valid ones.

- Completed other steps easily.

Appendix B — Evidence (Audio Recordings)

- Anand_Shinde.mp3
- Sevak_Shekokar.mp3
- Paras.mp3