

# Student Interest in the IS Specialization as Predictor of the Success Potential of New Information Systems Programmes within the Schools of Business in Kenyan Public Universities

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was to evaluate the success potential of new information systems programmes within the schools of business in Kenyan public universities using student interest in the information systems specialization as predictor. The study argued that student interest in the specialization should inform whether or not new programmes would succeed if launched. Using the survey research method, the study gathered and analyzed data on student interest in the information systems specialization both before and after taking an introductory IS course and was able to establish that enhanced interest, enabled by the course, increased their likelihood of choosing the IS specialization, thereby pointing to the success potential of new information systems programmes within the schools of business in Kenyan public universities.

## KEYWORDS

Awareness, Bachelor of Commerce, Concentration, Impressions, Information Systems, Installation, Interest, Specialization, Success Potential, Understanding

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

From an international perspective, demand for qualified information systems (IS) professionals is on the increase (US Department of Labor, 2012), while enrollments in universities and colleges have declined greatly over the past decade or so (Lenox, Jesse, and Woratschek, 2012). While schools of business in universities and colleges are facing unique pressures related to recruiting and retaining students in the IS discipline, there is no evidence that Kenya has put much effort into the development of skills in that field (Ferratt & Trauth, 2014; Ferratt, Prasad & Enns, 2012). In fact an earlier study by this author (2013) on student specialization choice trends reported that the Kenya public university system does not provide opportunities for students to choose the IS specialization or to select IS as a concentration within the bachelor of commerce specialization (or equivalent). As a result, critical systems analysis skills have been identified as either lacking or inadequate. In the Kenyan context, although public universities are increasingly establishing independent specializations within their schools of business such as bachelor of science in human resource management, bachelor of logistics and supply chain management, and bachelor of entrepreneurship and small business management, the traditional model of offering the different business disciplines as concentrations within the bachelor of commerce specialization was the predominant practice until only recently. Appendix A is tabulation

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of specializations and of the different concentrations within the bachelor of commerce specialization within schools of business in Kenyan public universities. A close scrutiny of the tabulation reveals that of the thirty-one public universities interrogated, none offers a pure IS specialization, only one offers an IS related specialization, and only two offer IS related concentrations within the bachelor of commerce specialization. While these essentials provide impetus for prodding Kenyan public universities to develop strong IS programmes, the objective of the current study was to evaluate the success potential of new IS programmes within the schools of business in Kenyan public universities. By analyzing student interest in the IS specialization, both before and after taking an introductory IS course, it was expected that projection into the success potential of new IS programmes within schools of business and concentrations within the bachelor of commerce specialization would be possible. Interest in the IS specialization was gauged at two levels. The first level of interest was gauged using *IS Awareness* and *IS Understanding* before taking the introductory IS course as proxies. The second level of interest was gauged using *IS Impressions* after completing the introductory IS course as proxy. The study argued that enhanced interest in the IS specialization (and profession), resulting from the introductory IS course, provided the students with the opportunity to form new opinions and attitudes towards the discipline. The students' new opinions and attitudes were presumed to be encapsulated in their reported impressions of the IS specialization. It was speculated that the second level interest, demonstrated by strong positive impressions of the IS specialization, would be a good predictor of the success potential of new IS programmes. A strong association between IS impressions and desire for installation of the IS specialization was considered additional indication of the success potential of new IS programmes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Relatively low enrolments into the IS specialization continue to be a concern in the face of increasing demand for professionals in the discipline. As a result, there are two sides to the IS dilemma, the supply side and the demand side. IS research is awash with both questions and findings relating to the dilemma. On the supply side of the equation, some research findings have shown that one of the reasons for low IS enrolments is that undergraduate business students are not as knowledgeable about the IS specialization relative to other areas of business such as accounting, finance, management, and marketing (Burns, Gao, Sherman, Vengerov & Klein, (2014). Other studies have looked at why students choose specific specializations, some in the hope of identifying possible reasons why they do not choose the IS specialization (Hafer & Schank, 1982; Zhang, 2007; Tabatabaei & Tehrani, 2010; Hogan & Lei, 2011). Case in point is the Walstrom, Schambach, Jones, and Crampton (2008) study that surveyed students in an entry-level business course and found that they were looking for specializations that would be “interesting”, provide them with “job security”, and “pay them well”. The Downey, McGaughey & Roach (2009) study examined differences in students' choices between information systems and computer science specializations, and found that the top motivators for both were “interest in technology” and “financial compensation”. The Ferratt, Hall, Prasad & Wynn (2010) study examined subject matter interests of information systems students and found that there was “interest in technical issues” as well as “linking business and technology”. That study also found that students in the IS specialization were motivated by a general “interest in technology”, “success in the area (self-efficacy)”, “job prospects”, and “potential income”. The Lenox, Jesse and Woratschek (2012) study found that across the majority of studies on motivation of students for choosing information systems (or not), certain perceptions were predominant including individual opinions of “earning potential”, “self-efficacy”, and the likelihood of earning “a good salary”. Some studies have found that the primary reasons students do not choose the IS specialization are that they are ‘not interested’, ‘find another specialization more interesting’; or feel that ‘IS is too hard’ (Burns et al., 2014; Lenox et al., 2011; Walstrom et al., 2008). The Wong, Fiedler & Liu (2007) study examined perceptions of students in the schools of business related to their field of choice to determine if there was a difference

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