PRINCIPALS' CONCERNS AND PROFESSIONAL NEEDS IN USING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify (i) the concerns of school principals towards the use of School Management Information System (SMIS) that is available in their schools, (ii) the professional needs of these principals to foster the use of SMIS, and (iii) the factors that inhibit the use of SMIS. A survey method using two instruments was employed to collect the data. One of the instruments is the Stages of Concerns Questionnaire (SoCQ) that measured the concerns of the principals and enabled the researcher to identify their stages of concern towards SMIS. The second instrument, SMIS Professional Needs Survey, was used to capture the professional needs of the school principals in terms of availability and relevance of resources and factors that inhibit better adoption of SMIS. A sample of 31 Malaysian school principals who are using the SMIS participated in this study. The primary stages of concerns (SoC) of the principals towards use of SMIS indicate a pattern where 22.6 % of them are still in the awareness stage, 48.4% in the informational stage, 9.7% in the personal stage while the rest (19.3%) are in the management stage of concern. A high stage 3 (management concerns) suggests that the principals have intense management concerns at the moment. The low intensity at stage 4 (consequence concerns) is an indication that these principals are less bothered and concerned about the actual impact of SMIS upon the other members of the school, at least at the time of the study. Their primary concerns still belong to those of incompetent users. An overview of the principals' professional needs in the five subsystem of a school quite clearly indicates that the principals in this study give more priority to managerial needs, followed by technical needs, psychosocial needs, goals & values needs, and finally structural needs. With regards to technical needs, the understanding of how to manage the change and knowledge of the impact become the immediate need as compared to the adoption techniques required for implementation which might arise later. It could be that the principals feel that they only need to manage and use SMIS and all this may be possible with the little technical skills they already possess. Among the eight resources given as options for principals to choose from, only two have been reported as available by more than 60%. They are 'A guide on how to manage SMIS effectively' and 'An action guide on how to use SMIS effectively'. The other eight resources seem to be unavailable to more than 64% of the principals. Yet they are reported as very useful by more than 60% principals. As for the inhibiting factors for better adoption of the SMIS, lack of understanding /knowledge of concepts, attitude problems, lack of training & support seem to be the responses of the principals. Through the evidence of this study, it is noted that these principals need to be provided the right professional skills, training and sufficient resources so that they are able to use SMIS with more confidence.

Keywords : Innovation, Concerns, School Management Information System, Professional Needs, Inhibiting Factors.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) permeating into aspects of school practice has been reported by many. Yet little research work or none has considered the concerns and the professional needs of the users in school management. School management information systems (SMIS) seems to be one innovation that school administrators and instructional staff are utilizing. Telem (1990) reports that the introduction of a management information system into a school environment can contribute to improved performance, strengthened educational leadership, and goal achievement. Further it can assist the school in overcoming stagnation. However, schools have historically lagged behind non-educational organizations in the implementation and utilization of innovation such as the management information systems (Telem, 1996).

One of the intents of school management information system implementation is to provide information to the instructional managers in complex and ill-structured decision situations (Isherwood, 2004).