

Chapter 6

Perceived Importance and Resource Constraints of Graduate Information Systems Courses in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Education is an expensive process and the quality of an education program is largely affected by resources devoted to it. Availability of qualified instructors and physical amenities such as labs are the most important resources that determine the educational quality. Based on the graduate Information Systems curriculum recommendation of Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and Association for Information Systems (AIS) this article investigates the perceived importance of each course taught in graduate Information Systems programs in Turkey. The perceived importance is also compared with the availability of instructor and technological resources for each course to get an insight into educational resources and constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, Information Systems (IS) discipline investigates the effectiveness and efficiency of computers in an organizational setting where the level of investigation can be in micro level such as a commercial company or in macro level such

as national ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) strategies. Since the discipline is at the cross-section of several technical and social disciplines, it borrows several theories and ideas from a diverse set of reference disciplines such as computer science and sociology. On the positive side, this diverse nature results in relatively

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easier obtainment of instructors for IS programs because some courses can be taught by instructors coming from other disciplines. However, the diversity has also some negative aspects which lead some researchers to regard the discipline as eclectic, lacking a theoretical base at the core, impractical, and merely following the advances in the industry (Benbasat & Weber, 1996; Benbasat & Zmud, 1999; Ciborra, 1998, Davenport, 1997). These critics to the nature of the IS discipline are opposed by a growing number of researchers who assert that IS is in the process of establishing itself as a mature discipline with theoretical and methodological soundness (Cheon et al., 1991; Cushing, 1990; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) and with reputable journals and established conferences.

The requirement for a distinct IS education, however, is not debated anywhere. Today's penetration level of computers to all aspects of life and the relevant expectancy of efficiency and effectiveness evades such a debate.

Like the other computer-related education programs IS undergraduate and graduate programs are quite popular in Turkey. Unlike some industrialized countries where enrollment rates suffered after the dotcom crash there has been no decline of interest in computer-related programs in the country. However, the education system in Turkey has to struggle with severe constraints some of which has the potential to plague the long-term benefits supposed to be incurred by education. This article seeks to investigate the nature and severity of these constraints in IS graduate programs in Turkey. Since the severity of an educational constraint can only be meaningful with the relative importance attributed to the perceived importance of the relevant course, the perceived importance of each course are also investigated.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The following section describes graduate IS programs in Turkey and it is followed by the theoretical framework section where resource-based

and outcome-based accreditation approaches in education are explained. The resource-based approach which is commonly used today is the essence of this paper where resource constraints are investigated. The next two sections elaborate the research methodology employed and data collection. Data are analyzed and results are discussed in the subsequent section which is followed by conclusion and future work.

IS GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN TURKEY

As of September 2008 there are 94 public and 36 private universities in Turkey. The private universities are run by foundations that have been established solely for educational purposes. Currently, there are 12 undergraduate and 13 graduate IS programs in the country. The 13 graduate programs are offered by four public and four private universities. Seven of the 13 programs are offered by the public universities. All students who want to have a postgraduate study have to sit an exam called ALES that is conducted all over the country twice a year. Three of the graduate IS programs in Turkey (all from the public universities) require some small tuition fees, but these programs usually require high ALES grades. Although the grade requirement of the remaining 10 programs is usually lower, they cost the students in excess of USD 10,000 for a two-year study and some institutions demand about twice that figure. This is quite high in Turkish standards and can be mainly be afforded by the students who are working in diverse areas and aiming an IS-related career.

There is a continuing debate about the education language in the country. In six of the 13 IS graduate programs the medium of instruction is English and in one of them German is used as the instruction language. The remaining six programs are either totally in Turkish or in Turkish-English

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