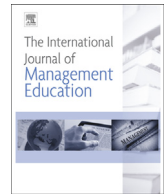


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Research notes

Determinants of acceptance of ERP software training in business schools: Empirical investigation using UTAUT model

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ABSTRACT

Acquaintance with software such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) is claimed to enhance employability of students. However, success of training catering to this goal depends on their acceptance. This research investigates (1) determinants of acceptance of ERP software training by students in business schools in India, and (2) role of gender and experience differences by taking case of ERP software training under SAP University Alliances Program. This research extends the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology by integrating the concepts of convenience from online access and innovativeness in information technology. Survey data was collected from 324 business students and multi-group analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling. Results reveal that convenience from online access, innovativeness in information technology, performance expectancy, and effort expectancy positively impact students' behavioral intention to use, while facilitating conditions and behavioral intention to use positively impact use behavior. Gender moderates the effects of convenience from online access and effort expectancy on behavioral intention to use with stronger relationships for females. Experience moderates the effect of effort expectancy on behavioral intention to use and unexpectedly negatively moderates the effects of facilitating conditions on use behavior. Finally, implications for educational institutions and ERP vendors are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The university level educational system plays an important role in a student's life because it not only provides the necessary education but also prepares the student for earning a livelihood by entering the job market (Tomlinson, 2012). For this reason, educational institutions emphasize on developing industry-preferred skills (Wilton, 2014). However, sometimes there is a considerable gap between institutions' aims for employability and the actual results. Academia, governments, and business organizations have raised the concern that university education doesn't adequately address the employability gap, i.e., need of bridging the knowing-doing gap (Jæger, Rudra, Aitken, Chang, & Helgheim, 2015).

Employability is 'the individual possession, and the ability to convey the possession, of the skills, knowledge and personal attributes, that are positively associated with future job performance and are appropriate to a specific organizational and work setting' (Wilton, 2014). There is continued debate regarding whether university is the correct place to explicitly develop

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employability on behalf of the employers. Even the extent of skill-gap is contested given employers' expectations are not uniform. Despite these debates, understanding the market dynamics and employer needs, and subsequently equipping the students with requisite skills and competences to enable them to get employment they aspire will continue to remain of paramount importance to the educational institutions (Wilton, 2014). The National Employability Report in India found that the employability quotient of graduating business students is very low (DNA, 2013). This suggests the need for focused training programs that reduce the skill gap vis-à-vis industry expectations.

One of the important ways to increase practical exposure and enhance the employability of business students is to introduce them to software useful to organizations and to provide these students with hands-on experience in using such software. One prime example of such valuable software is Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) (Jewer & Evermann, 2014). ERP concepts that are learned experientially by the students are valuable to the companies because such learning is more effective and long-lasting (Jewer & Evermann, 2014). It helps the future employees in getting better equipped while entering the labor market and contribute to the business from the day one (Nisula & Pekkola, 2012). As ERP systems are essential to the organizations, students with ERP skills and knowledge have greater employment opportunities (Hardaway, Harryvan, Wang, & Goodson, 2016; Wimmer & Hall, 2016). The responsibility of equipping the students for working in an ERP environment lies with the academicians (Alshare & Lane, 2011). The introduction of hands-on ERP training in educational institutions helps in this regards as the students acquire the requisite technical skills through solving the real business problems (Cronan & Douglas, 2012). Studies have shown that training on ERP is indeed beneficial for students. For instance, it was found that students with extensive ERP skills receive relatively higher salary offers, even compared to students with higher GPAs (Cronan & Douglas, 2012; Hepner & Dickson, 2013; Sager, Mensching, Corbitt, & Connolly, 2006). The demand for professionally trained ERP specialists in business has motivated business schools to integrate ERP into their curriculum and form alliances with ERP vendors (Hepner & Dickson, 2013; Iriberry, Kwon, & Henson, 2015). Business schools with such alliances train their students so that they can develop ERP competencies which are relevant to the industry. Some ERP vendors aid this process by offering the hosted ERP solutions which reduces or avoids the implementation and maintenance costs for the educational institutions (Hepner & Dickson, 2013; Strong, Fedorowicz, Sager, Stewart, & Watson, 2006).

SAP, a multinational software corporation, drives an ERP software training, called SAP University Alliances Program (SAP UAP). SAP UAP addresses the shortage of man-power with ERP skills (Hardaway et al., 2016). It exposes students to the ERP technologies and helps them get the hands-on experience of using ERP (<http://www.sap.com/about/university-alliances.html>). The program encourages students to explore ERP in depth in order to instill a general awareness about the software which can be instrumental for the students in realizing the value of learning ERP for their careers.

Partnership between ERP vendors and educational institutions is still an evolving concept and currently, there is a scarcity of research on understanding the acceptance of software training arising from such partnerships. The success of such training considerably depends on their acceptance by the actual users, i.e., the students. Therefore, it is important to explore the determinants of their acceptance by students. To accomplish the aforementioned objective, this research uses the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), one of the most popular ways of evaluating users' acceptance of a technology (Williams, Rana, Dwivedi, & Lal, 2011). Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis (2003) integrated the constructs from eight prominent theories to propose the UTAUT model and encouraged the researchers to further develop and validate it in different contexts.

After considering the online accessibility feature and user factors, this research integrates two additional predictive variables into the UTAUT to study the acceptance of ERP software training: 1) "convenience from online access" because students can access the software for training purpose anytime and from anywhere which enables the students to overcome the barrier of time and space (Castaño-Muñoz, Duart, & Sancho-Vinuesa, 2014); and 2) "innovativeness in information technology (IT)" as the user's desire to seek out new stimuli influences the acceptance (Agarwal & Prasad, 1998; Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002). In the literature, convenience to access and innovativeness in IT have been considered as key drivers of the acceptance of online systems and hence may improve the predictive ability of the conventional models (Clemes, Gan, & Zhang, 2014; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014; San Martín & Herrero, 2012). Therefore, this research proposes a model that incorporates the basic explanatory variables of the UTAUT, as well as convenience from online access and innovativeness in IT as independent variables leading to the acceptance of ERP software training. Additionally, as suggested by the UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003), this research attempts to discover whether gender and experience moderate the acceptance of ERP software training.

In summary, this research intends to identify the role of potential determinants and moderating impact of gender and experience in the acceptance of ERP software training among the business students in India. The results will have key takeaways for educational institutions and ERP vendors.

2. Research context and hypotheses

2.1. ERP in education and the SAP UAP

The ERP software supports business process integration and benefits the management (Tsai, Lee, Shen, & Lin, 2012) as it facilitates the flow of information within a company by storing data in common databases (Alcivar & Abad, 2016). Currently, ERP is ubiquitous in commercial organizations and is useful for running business operations (Patterson, 2013). However, learning to use this software is particularly challenging (Bueno & Salmeron, 2008; Rajapakse, 2012) and potential employees

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