

THE RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTING SIMS IN ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Adrie Visscher¹, Phil Wild² and Debbi Smith²

¹ *Faculty of Educational Science & Technology, University of Twente, The Netherlands*

² *Department of Education, University of Loughborough, United Kingdom*

Abstract: This paper describes an evaluative study of the implementation of the School Information Management System (SIMS) which is used to support management and administration in the majority of English secondary schools. There has been very little large-scale research on the use of computerised school information systems despite the massive growth since the early 1980s. The large-scale survey carried out for this study shows that SIMS use is particularly clerical and the use of SIMS to support school managers is still very limited. Problems identified include the reliability of SIMS, the degree of user training (especially managers), user support if problems occur, and the clarity of the innovation process. Relevant factors relating to the promotion of SIMS use are identified. Users are in general positive on the effects of SIMS use. It is concluded that wider and better SIMS use would be promoted by more carefully designed user training based on a thorough analysis of the needs of user groups.

Key words: School information system, usability, effectiveness, implementation

1. INTRODUCTION

At two previous conferences of Working Group 3.7, the evaluation of the implementation of computerised school information systems (SISs) in Hong Kong and The Netherlands were presented. Here, we will present the results of similar research in England. The rationale for these studies was to fill the gap in our knowledge on this important type of computer use in schools, and, by that, to gain insight into the factors that prove to promote successful SIS-implementation. In England SIMS (School Information Management System) has the largest market share of computerised school administration systems. SIMS is a modular but integrated system in that once entered, data is available between modules. Briefly, SIMS consists of about twenty modules that support the work of clerical staff and school managers and teachers (for details see Wild & Walker 2001).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The following questions were addressed:

- The extent of, and ways in which SIMS was used in schools;
- The user opinion on the quality of SIMS;
- The nature and effects of the implementation process, and the characteristics of the schools into which SIMS was introduced;
- Factors affecting the degree of SIMS use.

The variables relating to the above issues that were investigated in this study fell into five distinct categories according to Visscher's model (see Figure 1), i.e., features of SIMS use, the implementation process, school organisation, and the intended/unintended effects. The study assumed possible interrelationships between all these variable groups. System use was expected to be more intense if users' evaluations of the qualities of the SIMS implementation process and the school organisation are more positive. More intense SIMS use was expected to lead to more intended and/or unintended effects. For an overview of the variables included in each block, the reader can refer to page 86 in Visscher et al., 2001.

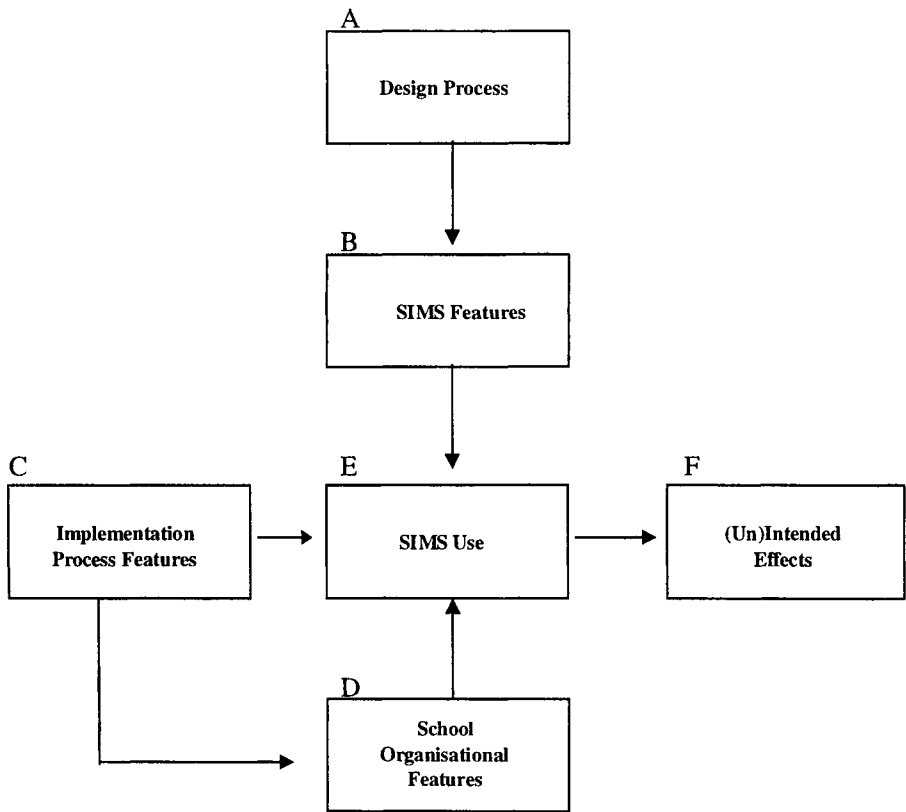


Figure 3-1. The variable groups influencing SIMS use and its effects (Visscher et al. 2001)

3. METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

A thousand sets of questionnaires were sent out to a selection of secondary schools in Local Education Authorities (LEAs), in the Midland Counties of England. The LEAs were chosen as they were known to support and promoted the use of SIMS. The schools represented about 25% of secondary schools in England. Each school was sent three questionnaires, which were to be completed separately by the principal, the SIMS system manager and a member of the clerical/administrative staff. The return rate after follow-up activities was 45%.

Data analysis started with descriptive statistics with respect to all variables studied. Furthermore, to investigate to what extent variance in

Management of Education in the Information Age

The Role of ICT

Selwood, I.D.; Fung, A.; O'Mahoney, C.D. (Eds.)

2003, X, 210 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-7430-1