E-Learning and Continuing Education in LIS

■   **Susan Mathew K.**   ■

Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the relevance of e-learning in continuing education of library professionals in the universities in Kerala. As part of a survey of library professionals in the seven major Universities in Kerala to find their continuing education needs, it was found that majority of the library professionals attend continuing education programmes (CEP) to be trained in the latest technologies. Internet resources were the preferred mode of information source by 38.9 per cent of the library professionals. The importance of continuing education in developing the competencies of library professionals is also stressed.

Keywords: E-learning, Continuing Education, E-resources, Information Sources, Library Professional

1. Introduction

Continuing education is a vital factor in human resource development in all fields. It implies any education beyond the initial professional qualification, updating a person's education or diversification to a new area within a subject field. Continuing education is fundamentally a responsibility of the individual professional not only in the library science profession, but also in all service sectors. Digital learning environment or E-learning, facilitated by the application of information, communication, and technology (ICT), has revolutionized continuing education for learners of all ages. The effective utilization of information technologies has helped in the rapid expansion of education transforming the traditional educational system to 'lifelong learning'. The concept of E-learning has been coined in various ways like web-based learning, networked learning, online-learning etc by different authors. Any programme that uses the communication technologies as mediating devices to access learning resources may be considered under the category of E-learning. In universities and colleges, E-learning involves three main modes namely technology-enhanced classroom teaching, distance education, and distributed learning (Bates, 2001). Most of the Indian universities are not adequately equipped to meet the requirements of E-learning, due to inadequate internet connections, non availability of competent staff trained in technologies etc. (Powar, 2002).

Library and Information Science courses all over the world are offering e-learning programmes to provide easy access to professional qualifications for those who face barriers to entering traditional education, such as work or family commitments and/or geographical location. In a survey of E-Learning programmes, it was reported that there are 44 programs in the USA, 6 each in the UK, Australia and India, 5 in Canada, and 2 each in Germany and South Africa. (Islam et al, 2011).Thus the geographic distribution of   e-learning programmes in LIS education indicates that programs are still limited to some economically advanced regions of the   world. Several studies have reported the influence of e-learning on distance education, continuous learning (Pamfilie et al, 2012) and online learning (Chandra and Patkar, 2007). The resources and services that can be accessed in the e-learning environment are e-resources, institutional repository, online courseware, discussion forums, social networking and web 2.0 tools (Pujar and Kamath, 2009). Fewer studies have reported about E-learning and continuing education in Library and information science education. In LIS education in India, there is no specialization for any specific information technology or depth education on designing tools like ontology or a digital library. E-learning offers the opportunity to get trained in a specific subject and will help LIS professionals to perform to the optimum extent (Kumbhar, 2009). E-learning developments in India and its impact on library and information science professionals and the need to develop competencies in use of web-technologies has also been discussed in detail (Lobo,2006). The availability of different e-resources has increased the research productivity of library professionals as they have access to many useful resources in the field of library and information science.

2. Methodology

Data for the study is based on a questionnaire survey of library professionals in seven universities in Kerala, viz. University of Kerala (UOK), Mahatma Gandhi University (MGU), Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), University of Calicut (UOC), Kannur University (KAN), Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit Kalady (SSU), and Kerala Agricultural University

(KAU). The study is limited to the permanently employed professional library staff in central libraries and departmental libraries in the main campuses of the universities. Out of the population of 252 library professionals, questionnaires were distributed to 203(80.6 per cent) and 185 appropriately filled questionnaires returned were selected for analysis. The data was processed using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

1. Results and Discussion
3.1. Attitude towards Continuing Education Programmes (CEP)

The Library professionals were asked to indicate the motivation for attending Continuing Education Programmes (CEP) and the results show that 72 per cent of the library professionals attend CEP to be trained in the latest technologies and 60.5 per cent to acquire new skills. The results show that developments in Information and Communication Technologies have a positive influence on majority of library professionals. While 53.5 per cent of the professionals preferred to attend CEP to update knowledge on basic education, 53 per cent attended CEP to improve library services. Other reasons included training junior staff (8.6%), to improve relation with fellow professionals (27%) and 9.2 per cent for promotion. Ramaiah and Moorthy in a survey of participants in continuing education programmes had similar findings and suggested that majority of professionals attended CEP to improve basic knowledge/skills and improve library services (Ramaiah and Moorthy, 2002).

3.2. Information Sources Accessed for Continuing Education Needs
The library professionals were asked to indicate their preference for different information sources to support their educational and information needs. The results showed that Internet resources was preferred mode of information source by 38.9 per cent of library professionals, while all print resources including Journals/Periodicals (20.0%), Books (24.3%) and Conference papers (5.4%) was preferred by 49.4 per cent of library professionals , and 11.4 per cent indicated other types of sources for their information needs. In a gender based analysis while 41.3 per cent of male professionals preferred internet sources, the preference to internet sources is comparatively less among the female library professionals (37.3%). It was also seen that the professionals in the younger age group have an increasing tendency to access internet sources (51.8%), while in the age group, 36-45, the use of internet sources is (37.1%), the older group of professionals use internet sources comparatively less (28.8%). It was found that in some Universities there is an growing trend towards the use of web-based information sources, may be because of the ease of access to electronic resources in such institutions.

3.2.1. Use of Electronic Information Sources
In the case of electronic information sources, search engines are the most preferred form of electronic information source among the library professionals in all the Universities.

While 60.6 per cent of the professionals depend on search engines, only 15.0 per cent access online journals to meet their information needs. The use of Library websites is 10.6 per cent, Online databases 6.1 per cent, Library Networks 3.9 per cent, Web Opacs 2.2 per cent , Email List Serves 1.1 per cent, and Institutional repositories 0.6 per cent.

3.2.2. Use of Online Educational Sources
Online education has influenced education sector to a great extent and is expected to play an important role in future education in all areas of knowledge. IGNOU has been engaged in providing educational courses in the distance mode in many disciplines including Library and Information Science. In addition, IGNOU through its online programmes supplement the teaching and learning processes for professional, need-based, vocational and other academic programmes. In order to study the educational sources accessed, the library professionals were asked to indicate whether they have accessed any educational programmes through different media. It was found that only 48.1 per cent viewed such programmes of educational interests, while 51.9 per cent of professionals have not viewed any educational programmes.

3.2.2.1. Use of E-learning Programmes
The analysis of the use of e- learning programmes shows that of the total library professionals surveyed in different universities, only 23.2 per cent have accessed online modules or e-learning modules, while a great majority (76.8 per cent) have not made use of any of the e-learning course modules available for their informational or educational needs.

Among the total professionals who have accessed E-learning it was seen that the most preferred module is that of IGNOU (76.7%), followed by few who used NPTEL modules (9.3%), MIT course modules and other E-learning programmes available(7.0%).

Some of the other E-learning programmes available in Library and Information science include Online Degrees in Library Science provided by Drexel University Online, and I-Mark an E-learning initiative in agricultural information management developed by FAO and partner organizations. The I-Mark module includes creation of digital libraries and the preservation of materials in digital format. Also included are lessons covering copyright issues, electronic formats for text and images, metadata standards and subject indexing, as well as a comprehensive overview of the creation and management of digital documents, digital library software – Greenstone etc.

2. Conclusion

Internet and its wide spectrum of applications has changed the type of services delivered through University libraries in the state, but a dynamic change is not yet reflected in the infrastructure and manpower development in the university libraries and the whole of library profession. Consequently, continuing education and training programmes in ICT applications need to be made mandatory for library professionals irrespective of their experience or category to develop basic competencies and thereby improve the quality of library services. E-Iearning or online learning can be considered as a tool to promote educational development, enhancing professional knowledge for Library and information science professionals. With the availability of diverse learning environments, there are now greater opportunities for continuing education which will help the library professionals to become information experts. Library or Information professionals will also need to remain aware of the potential opportunities that the Web offers for the development of learning in educational institutions and as part of lifelong learning.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Dr Susan Mathew K.
Assistant Librarian (Sr.Gr)
University Library, CUSAT, Cochin-682022
E-mail: susankarott@gmail.com