

***CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS: A STUDY***

By Kiran Raikar

Librarian, Birla College

Kalyan (West)–421 304

(Maharashtra) India

kiranraikar@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Continuing education is of great importance in almost all rapidly changing professionals. CE is a process by which library personnel (single, in groups or in institutional settings) purposefully seek to improve themselves in their profession by enhancing their knowledge, attitude and skills. CEP allows library and information profession specialists the opportunity to grow with the profession.

The research was undertaken to discover the continuing education needs of library and information professionals. The present study gives an overview of the CEP and enumerates its scope and need. The study also gives the current status of CEP for academic library professionals in India and highlights the impediments of CEP for information professionals. It looked into the level of awareness and involvement in CEP by professional librarians. The survey approach were used. Findings revealed that majority of the population were aware of CPD and was involved in it to some extent. Respondents were generally motivated to pursue CPD. Time and distance stood out as the biggest obstacle to pursuing CPD activities.

Keywords: *Continuing Education, Continuing Professional development, Academic Librarians*

Introduction:

Every profession in this modern age must continuously adapt itself to the rapidly evolving technological society. Keeping up with the today's constant change and innovation is a challenging task, but one must undertake it to operate successfully in the world. The task is formidable because new information is appearing at an overwhelming rate. The proliferation of knowledge, referred to earlier as the "information explosion" and recently as the "information revolution," is affecting all professionals; but none more than the librarian. As they are located at the centre of the blast, they must hasten to implement the advancements in library science in order to handle the mass of new information in all the areas of knowledge. This means that library personnel have a special responsibility to keep themselves up-to-date with developments in their field.

Continuing professional development (CPD) has become a household name among professionals the world over. It is incumbent on the professional librarian to engage in CPD activities because of the changes that have been introduced into the profession in this Information and Communications Technology (ICT) era. Library profession is considered as one of the noble professions with an aim to satisfy the information needs of every user in the society. Today in this age of information and communication technology, where we find day to day emergence of new technologies the functioning of libraries has undergone a sea change. The rapidity and technical complexity of new knowledge and technical advances demand for continuous updating of individual professional skills and developing a continuing system of study. Since the 1970s, however, CET [Continuing Education and Training] activities have assumed a more urgent priority in the affairs of LIS professional bodies. Accountants, engineers, solicitors, surveyors, midwives, pharmacists, doctors, architects, those in the construction industry, nurses - all have elevated CET into a matter of primary professional concern. Continuing education opportunities include both formal and informal learning situations and need not be limited to library subjects or the offerings of library schools.

The factors that have promoted discussions of continuing education for librarianship have been:

- 1) The vast growth of new knowledge;
- 2) Introduction of new technology in libraries;
- 3) Social needs of an increasing highly educated populace;
- 4) Outreach programs to attract new groups of patrons; and
- 5) Changing trends in library services.

There is need to study the continuing education and professional development needs of library professionals and answers must be developed to such questions as: What factors motivate individuals to continue professional learning? What administrative strategies can be implemented to achieve wider participation? What instructional methods and techniques at this level are most effective in achieving objectives? And how can these needs be analyzed, interpreted and translated into meaningful recommendations for action.

Need and Significance of the Study

Why continuing education and professional development?

- The shelf life of a degree is approximately three years and declining
- Maintaining competency and learning new skills is critical for every profession.

The librarian is an active intermediary between users and resources. Gale of change is blowing in library and information science profession. Continuing education and professional development are indispensable to ensure adequate services and meet user demands in this highly dynamic world of information explosion. This study has attempted to contribute some general knowledge about continuing education needs and preferences among library and information science professionals with special reference to professional development. The study attempted to identify the desired continuing education topics including technology-related topics, and other preferences. The study also identified motivating factors that encourage these professionals to attend continuing education programmes, and obstacles or barriers that would prevent them from attending the programmes.

Objectives of the Study:

The aim of the study is to understand the significance of continuing education and professional development in library profession and the current trends and practices adopted to meet today's demand.

The main objectives of this study are

1. To assess the perceived needs and attitudes of library and information science professionals towards continuing education.
2. To identify the motivating factors and obstacles to continuing education programmes among library and information science professionals
3. To determine the modes of preference and effectiveness of continuing education programs among library and information science professionals.
4. To ascertain the main topics and subject areas preferred by library and information science professionals in continuing education programmes.
5. To study the impact of continuing education programmes on librarians and their work culture.

Research Methodology

The study used survey questionnaire as a tool for quantitative data collection. The structured survey questionnaire used in this study consisted of 20 closed and open questions, which were distributed among the twenty-three participants of the refresher course. The questionnaire was designed to seek information about the present topics of interest, motivating and deterring factors and personal preferences for continuing education; and personal data to obtain background information about the respondents that would be useful in the analysis of the study. The respondents in this study were asked to rate each item in the category on a different scale. Tabulation and analysis of the survey results was undertaken by using MS Excel.

Definition and Meaning of CPE/CPD

The definition of CPD used for the purpose of this research is derived from Majid (2004); “a systematic method of learning that leads to growth and improvement in professional abilities, enabling individuals to function successfully in a changing work environment . . . the purpose of continuing professional development activities is to fill-in the knowledge gaps between formal education and the needs of the professional practice” (p. 58). CPD might be achieved by various means including post-qualification education or library-based workplace training. For the purpose of the current paper CPD is synonymous with “staff development”.

UNESCO (1982) defined continuing education as “Activities which help people improve their abilities, skills and competencies, professional as well as vocational, thus facilitating entry into specialized areas and / or allow personal development and satisfaction”

This is an excellent definition which is “broad based”. It includes those learners who wish to improve their skills and knowledge in their trade and profession. This could be for advancement in the job or to keep abreast of change.

Continuing education thus helps the working professionals to keep them abreast of modern developments and increase their professional competence. Continuing education promotes a learning society and is in turn promoted by it.

Education and training are lifelong processes. Professional competence has to be sharpened through perusing professional journals; attending conferences, discussing with colleagues and constant practical touch

“CPD is an ongoing process aimed at monitoring and upgrading the skills and competences of individual workers in the profession. For those working as team members or on their own, CPD enhances their efficiency and effectiveness. It develops a marketable worth and promotes recognised good practice throughout the profession.”

Role and Need of CPE/CPD:

Continuing Professional Education and Training plays a great role in the overall development of the library professionals. It continuously updates the skills and creates self-confidence to manage the libraries in a deter way and improves the efficiency to deliver various types of services. Training plays a great role to update the knowledge and skills of knowledge professionals.

Following are the major benefits of CPE/CPD:

1. Up-gradation of Skills
2. Professional growth
3. Discussion forum
4. Impetus to research
5. Professional cooperation
6. National Integration
7. Motivation

Continuing Education Programme for Library Professionals in India

In India, several Information Centres and academic bodies are doing commendable work in the field of continuing professional education. These institutions include the National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASDOC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Indian Institute of Technology (IITs), Indian Institute of Management (IIMs) and so on. The three well established library associations (Indian Library Association (ILA), Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC) and Medical Library Association of India (MALAI)) regularly conduct several short time courses in the field of library classification, library cataloguing, indexing, computer applications, digital library, multimedia, information and knowledge-management, collection management, content management, preservation and conservation and industrial information system and management. The Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow has started a course in Management Development Programme (MDP) for Library and Information Managers. The programme is designed to equip the Library & Information Managers (LIMs) with adequate know how.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study adds to the evidence that librarianship is a life-long learning process, involving both formal and informal methods of education. Library schools or other library agencies or providers such as library associations and organizations need to provide a variety of continuing education options, which librarians can use in a lifelong learning process.

In a developing country like ours; it is of paramount importance to have well planned CEPs for our serving manpower so that we are not begged down in this competitive world. Let us hope that CEPs properly planned and implemented will usher in a new era in the history of this country-an era of increasing productivity, sustained growth, progress and prosperity.

The survey results outlined in this paper show that CPE&CPD has established an enduring and important place in Indian academic and research libraries. The opportunity now exists for these survey results to provide a framework from which to build benchmarks which may guide and assess good CPE&CPD practices.

An overwhelming number of members responding to the survey favoured short term courses in form of workshops and training as best methods of continuing education. Members appeared motivated most by the desire to update knowledge and skills; least by external factors such as certification requirements or employer acknowledgment. However, practical concerns particularly travel distances and expenses, frequently made participation difficult. Although automated systems, planning, digital libraries and web 2.0 were the subjects identified as requiring their greatest learning efforts, members also expressed a need to have more practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge. Following are few of the suggestion recorded based on the findings of the present study

Suggestions:

- More training programmes and other short-term courses should be organized at regional levels.
- The short-term courses, refresher courses should be more practical based covering recent topics required for the profession.
- The agencies should have the proper facility of computer lab and internet so that the professionals can learn the latest advancements in their fields.
- The institutional bodies such as UGC, AICTE, ICMR and others should provide more grants and sponsorships to organize more training programmes.
- The fee structure of the training courses and workshops should be affordable.
- There should be a policy for the faculty exchange programme within institutions and Universities.
- Even there should be collaboration with other countries, so that the professionals of a country can learn the techniques and methods being used there.
- There should be positive approach of the library professionals to learn and upgrade their existing educational qualification and experience.
- The management and head of the institutions should motivate and encourage the library staff to attend training programs and refresher courses.

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