



Continuing Education (CE) of LIS Professionals: Need Analysis & Role of LIS Schools



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ABSTRACT

Information explosion, development and applications of ICTs, changing dynamics of information users, and evolving trends in library and information services have promoted the discussion of continuing education (CE) in Library and Information Science (LIS) domain. ICTs are increasingly changing the landscape of libraries and challenging the traditional prevailing roles of LIS professionals. LIS professionals find it hard to remain in context in this technological era. They require the new set of skills and knowledge to address the challenges and issues of their professional life.

The purpose of this study was to explore the opinions of LIS professionals to make an assessment about CE needs and the role of library schools to address these needs. The study opted sequential mixed methods of research. In first phase, an online survey was conducted to meet the objectives of the study. Data was collected by using a structured questionnaire. A total of 144 responses (70% male and 30% female) were received. In 2nd phase, a focus group was conducted to collect the qualitative data. The meta inferences were drawn on the basis of inferences of both QUAN and QUAL strands. The findings of the study revealed that respondents perceive a very active and instrumental role of LIS schools in their continuing education. Workshops, post-master certificate, and post-graduate diplomas were preferred formats of continuing education programs. The respondents preferred week long and 1–6 months long CE programs. In terms of the timings, weekends programs were most preferred. The respondents recommended that course instructor should be based on the contents of the course and a blend of teaching faculty and practitioners may be productive. The study also identified core areas of CE offerings.

The findings of the study are helpful for LIS schools, professionals, trainers, funding bodies and policy makers. The study has the potential to bridge the gap by providing insight about the CE needs and recommend the concrete suggestions to act upon.

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INTRODUCTION

Advancements in information and communication technologies (ICTs) impacted every walk of life. Every profession is adapting itself according to the needs of today's emerging information society. The profession of librarianship is also experiencing wide and sea changes mainly influenced by ICTs especially the internet and world wide web. The information technologies that are used in contemporary information organizations include: digital reference resources, integrated library systems, digital content management systems, CD-ROMs, networks, internet, and imaging systems. These technologies have not

only changed the library processes and practices but also changed the behaviour of library users. Consequently, today we see the libraries on the web through their websites, reference services via e-mail, online chat service and Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs). Libraries are incorporating new technologies, changing their working practices and emerging new set of services to meet the needs of their clientele.

The terms "Continuing Professional Development (CPD)" and "Continuing Education (CE)" are widely used in library and information science field that encompass all activities and efforts whether formal or informal that are employed by an individual to upgrade his/her knowledge, abilities and competencies in order to become more effective professional in exercise of his/her professional duties throughout his/her working life. Broady-Preston (2009) noted different interpretations of the term CPD within the library and information science profession, where some participant called it a plan, a commitment, a process and an activity. There are some variations in using the terms CPD and CE. In North America, continuing education (CE) is widely used in library

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literature whereas this is not necessarily the case in other part of the world where popular term CPD is used (Broadbent & Grosser, 1987). Feather and Sturges (2003) elaborated the concept of CPD in a delicate manner as:

Continuing professional development (CPD) is the acquisitions of professional skills and knowledge beyond those required for initial qualification and learned in formal programs of education. It is an activity strongly promoted by library and information associations, which typically make provision for it by providing seminars and workshops, and perhaps through their publications. It involves a systematic approach to staff development and continuing education, usually consisting of a program of learning opportunities made available over a period of time. The intention is to ensure that information workers continue to acquire and adapt their skills and knowledge to a swiftly changing professional environment. Increasingly, professionals are expected to take responsibility for their own CPD as they plan the enhancement of their skills and the development of their careers.

The importance of CPD could not be undermined in today's world. A professional has to keep her/himself up to date to meet his/her working requirements. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) statement on professional development affirmed that professional development of information professionals is much important in this rapidly changing time so that they might be able to keep themselves up to date with their existing knowledge, skills and competencies. It has been recognized that continuing education strengthens not only knowledge and skills required for competent performance but also attitudes and values essential for the service orientation of a profession (ACRL, 2000).

It is estimated that within ten to twelve years of receiving their formal professional education, most of the information professionals are just about half as competent to meet the demands of their library profession as they were at upon graduation (Cromer & Testi, 1994). Afterwards, there come CPD activities that fill the gap of formal education and provide opportunities to upgrade one's existing knowledge. The CPD activities enhance one's competencies and these competencies are essential for the practitioners of any profession in order to keep current their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to function effectively (Chan & Auster, 2003).

Weingand (1994) stated that participation in CPD activities should be mandatory rather than optional for information professionals as it is necessary for the effective functioning and survival of an information organization. In United States, state laws and regulations made mandatory for beginner teachers to get successful completion of professional development programs before they receive their professional licenses – is a manifestation of importance attached to professional development activities (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010). ACRL made it clear that making effort for the professional development of librarians was the shared responsibility of individual librarian, library education institutions and professional associations.

At the First World Conference on continuing education for the Library and Information Science Professionals held in August 1985, continuing library education (CLE) was advocated as an essential element of a librarian's lifetime education. The publication explosion, the birth of new information technologies, and the highly educated population—all demand that information professionals especially academic librarian must have expertise to meet the ever increasing needs of growing information society; so that they are not merely seen as a keeper of books but acknowledged as a network navigator and an information professional (Rice-Lively & Racine, 1997).

A developing country like Pakistan needs to fill the educational needs of her citizens if she has to emerge as a developed nation. Today, the educational needs are mostly met by using the ICT technologies along with traditional face to face teaching methods. The

availability of information resources on the web maximizes the access to information. It is the use of information resources that matters most. In this respect, the role of information professionals is important in providing access to these information resources by providing guidance to information seekers and making the provision of required information systems.

In recent times much emphasize has been given to the continuing education (CE) activities for keeping the professionals abreast of the new developments in this age of information technology. The abundance of literature in this area is itself a manifestation of the importance attached to this activity around the world. However, the local literature shows scarcity on the topic.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Information professionals are facing core challenges to their existence in Pakistan. They have to prove their usefulness to the society in general and their legislative user communities in particular. However, they find it hard to remain in context in this technological era. They require the new set of skills and knowledge to address the challenges and issues of their professional life. CE programs offer the solution to turn the challenges facing by information professionals and libraries into opportunities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and success of CE programs largely depends on the appropriateness of such programs according to the needs and requirements of information professionals. The context of a developing country, like Pakistan, is significantly different from developed countries where professional association and bodies are very strong, and play a very active and pivotal role for the CE of professionals. Their CE programs are aligned with the market needs and follow a vision of future directions. On the contrary, library associations in developing countries, like Pakistan, are passive in majority of cases. The CE programs being offered by developing countries usually lack the vision and unable to meet the needs of the LIS community. Hence, a gap exists in terms of CE activities in Pakistan. LIS schools with a formal role of education, having highly educated faculty and better infrastructure, and continuously gauging the market needs, are in better position to fill this gap. The scarcity of empirical literature in local context is exposed that ultimately hinder the ability of planners of such programs to plan accordingly.

The current study is focused to identify the CE needs of informational professionals and most importantly explore their perceptions about the role of LIS schools to address these needs. The findings of the study will be helpful for LIS schools as well as other stakeholders (library associations, funding bodies, etc.) to comprehend the CE needs of LIS professionals and chalk out the programs accordingly. It is necessary to make these programs workable and enhance the knowledge and skills of the professionals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature search shows that a lot has been written on CPD and CE of LIS professionals in different contexts majorly international. However, the focus of literature search for this study was the role of LIS schools in CE programs. A small number of studies were chosen and presented here.

Cooke (2012) discussed the continuing professional education (CPE) as basic need for professionals to survive in the modern society while fulfilling their users' needs and insisted that it is compulsory for professionals to know the technological changes and its usage. Flatley and Weber (2004) discussed professional development activities in context of new academic librarians. They reviewed as well as critiqued on different professional development activities.

Maesaroh and Genoni (2009) surveyed Indonesian academic librarians to know their qualification, skills and trend of services whether to meet their expectations or not. They also focused the short comings in the level of education. The study considered that due to complex nature

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