Workplace Learning Among Library Professionals of University Libraries in Kerala

Mohammed Irfan P.P.*, Mohamed Haneefa K.** and Shyni K.G.***

Department of Library and Information Science
University of Calicut, Kerala-673 635
E-mail: *ppmirfan@gmail.com; **dr.haneefa@gmail.com; ***shyniganga@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the workplace learning among the library professionals in university libraries in Kerala. Structured questionnaires were employed to collect data from a representative sample of 100 library professionals from the central libraries of the University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, and University of Calicut. The analysis shows that majority of the library professionals are engaged in workplace learning. It is found that formal learning methods contribute much for workplace learning in the libraries. The library professionals engage in workplace learning to keep them up-to-date. Most of the professionals are self motivated and they acquire the skills for digital library development through these learning interventions.

Keywords: Workplace learning, training and development, continuing professional development

1. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology (ICT) acts as a catalyst for developments in all walks of human life. The developments in libraries and information centres are no exception to this. The application of ICT has dramatically changed the information access, management, and dissemination in libraries. Modern libraries are extensively exploiting new and innovative technologies for information handling. These technologies allow libraries to offer a wide range of services to library users and equip them to access information through a wide variety of interfaces.

To keep in tune with the rapid changes in ICT, and flow with the trends in the field of library and information science, library professionals need to equip themselves. The most effective way to keep up with these changes is to seek out professional development opportunities[1]. Learning is necessary to adapt with changes, for professional growth, and to manage the workplace. As far as library professionals, the workplace can play a significant role in the process of learning. Learning occurs in the workplace by formal, informal, and incidental means.

Workplace learning is a process whereby employees acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance their individual performance and organisational tasks[2]. It comes as a result of autonomous self-directed learning by employees to satisfy their organisational needs at the workplace[3]. For library professionals are concerned, workplace learning is a process by which they learn in the workplace, from basic skills to high technology and management skills. The explosive growth of new knowledge; widespread use of ICT; increased reliance on e-resources; and changing trends in library services have promoted workplace learning in libraries[4]. It is essential in the personal, and professional development of library professionals and a key strategic element in achieving their library objectives and goals.

This study investigates the methods, obstacles and the facilitators of workplace learning among the library professionals in the university libraries in Kerala.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace learning in libraries has been a topic of serious discussion very recently from the inception of Working Group on Continuing Professional Development, and Workplace Learning (CPDWL) for libraries by the International Federation of Library Associations, and Institutions (IFLA). There have been some studies focused on workplace learning in libraries.

Li[5] conducted a study on librarians' informal learning in the workplace in Taiwan universities. The results showed that librarians primarily learn

through interaction with others, and utilise multiple sources, and strategies in the learning process. Hall[6] examined the job rotations as a workplace learning tool in the Graduate Trainee Librarian Program at Flinders University Library, Australia. The findings indicated that job rotation is as much positively useful as job training. Adanu[7] studied continuing professional development in state-owned university libraries in Ghana. The study revealed that the work environment of librarians encouraged professional development leading to job advancement, and updated skills. The study also pointed out that continuing professional development was a shared responsibility of the library, and the individual.

Gadagin[8] argues that explosion of knowledge, and information technology has virtually altered the characteristics of the learning environment, paving the way for new learning experiences. These drastic changes have impact on the Library and Information Science profession and leads to changes in the continuing education system for library professionals. Rabindra, Lochan, & Dillip[9] noted that library professionals used to improve their skills, and update their knowledge by attending continuing professional development programmes such as workshops, seminars, conferences, refresher courses, symposiums, etc.

Mathew[10] observed that developments in ICT have a positive influence on majority of the library professionals' attitude towards continuing education programmes. According to Corrall[11] staff development is ideally a shared responsibility of individuals and employers. The study shows that workplace learning is being pursued through numerous diverse routes, from conventional external courses and summer schools on special interests to managed learning in the workplace. Bitter-Rijpkema, Verjans & Bruijnzeels[12] illustrate how learning at work is understood to encompass a variety of both formal, and informal elements. Fontanin[13] observed that the e-learning platform created in university library of Trieste, Italy, was a successful attempt where library professionals explored the possibilities of Moodle, a Learning Management System, to assist them for workplace learning.

3. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the study is to assess the workplace learning among the library professionals of university libraries in Kerala. To fulfill this aim, the following specific objectives were identified:

(a) To find out the methods of workplace learning among the library professionals,

(b) To assess the skills acquired through workplace learning by the library professionals, and

(c) To analyse the factors that promoted or hindered workplace learning among the library professionals.

4. METHODOLOGY

The universe of the study consists of the library professionals working in the university libraries of Kerala. Three university libraries, viz., Kerala University library, Mahatma Gandhi University library, and Calicut University library were selected for the study. Since these are the most prominent state universities in Kerala which are located on south, middle, and north of the State. There are 326 library professionals working in these libraries, and the investigators selected a representative sample of 100 library professionals. Structured questionnaires were used for collecting data. Out of the 100 questionnaires distributed among the library professionals, 99 were received back. Among these, 2 questionnaires were found as not usable. Finally 97 responses were selected for the study with a response rate of 97 %.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Frequency of Workplace Learning

Libraries are resourceful in the sense that there are enough opportunities for learning in the workplace of libraries. A library professional can identify and make use of the facilities for informal learning. If a library professional keeps away from continuous learning it may lead to incompetence. The library professionals were asked to indicate the frequency of workplace learning and the responses are consolidated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of workplace learning

S. No.	Frequency of workplace learning	Responses
1.	Very often	28 (28.86 %)
2.	Often	42 (43.29 %)
3.	When required	24 (24.74 %)
4.	Rarely	3 (3.09 %)
	Total	**97 (100%)**

It is found that a good number of the professionals engage in workplace learning often. It indicates that workplace learning is essential to perform the library tasks effectively. The adoption of latest Information, and Communication Technology, increased reliance on e-resources, and the use of web-based interfaces for information handling necessitates the formal, and informal learning in libraries.

5.2 Reasons of Workplace Learning

The core purposes for workplace learning identified from previous studies were used to analyse the

relative importance assigned to various factors that necessitate workplace learning. The professionals were asked to indicate the reasons for which they engage in workplace learning and the responses are given in the Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons of workplace learning

S. No.	Reasons of workplace learning	Mean value
1.	To acquire new skills	337
2.	To keep up-to-date	687
3.	To get trained in the latest technologies	424
4.	To improve library services	456
5.	To develop personal growth	228
6.	For career development	263
7.	To improve relation with fellow professionals	223

The analysis shows that most of the professionals engage in workplace learning to keep them up-to-date and to get trained in the latest technologies. This is very essential to provide value added library services and to perform their library tasks effectively.

5.3 Methods of Workplace Learning

There are numerous methods and types of activities which library professionals can adopt for workplace learning. The methods can be broadly classified into formal and informal. The professionals were asked about methods they adopt for learning at the workplace. The responses are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Methods of workplace learning

S. No.	Methods	Responses (n=97)
1.	Attending seminars, conferences	97 (100 %)
2.	In-house training	97 (100 %)
3.	Vendor sponsored training	31 (31.95 %)
4.	Web-based learning/using online training sites	53 (54.63 %)
5.	Attending in continuing education programmes	97 (100 %)
6.	Visiting other libraries	79 (81.44 %)
7.	Self directed reading of professional literature	88 (90.72 %)
8.	Assistance from colleagues	93 (95.87 %)
9.	Self-taught: gaining hands-on experience with technologies	61 (62.88 %)
10.	Research and creative writing	11 (11.34 %)
11.	Distance education/correspondence course	36 (37.11)
12.	Refresher courses	88 (90.72%)
13.	Participation in user education programmes	26 (26.80%)
14.	Trial and error method	8 (8.34%)

It is revealed that there are ample opportunities for formal, and informal learning in libraries. However, the library professionals should have a positive attitude for workplace learning. All the library professionals use the methods of seminars, and conferences, in-house training, attending in continuing education programmes for learning events. These are the easiest way of updating knowledge in Library and Information Science. Visiting libraries of premier institutes will enable the library professionals to get first hand information in the adoption of latest technologies. Online training provides plenty of opportunities to get trained in latest technologies, and services. Lack of awareness, and lack of full-fledged internet connection may be the reason of the underutilisation of online training facilities.

5.4 Motivators of Workplace Learning

The learning potential of library professionals depends on numerous factors. Organisational factors affecting workplace learning include the climate of libraries, and the managerial support from the authorities. These factors have been identified as strong facilitators of workplace learning[14]. If the climate is healthy, it will attract, and motivate the talented professionals to adapt to changes, navigate challenges, and plan succession more effectively[15]. The library professionals were asked to indicate what motivates them for workplace learning, and the responses are presented in the Table 4.

It is found that positive attitude with self motivation is the major motivator for workplace learning. However, support from higher authority, and increased resource availability is very essential for formal and informal learning in libraries. Young, and techie professionals need challenging work environment. Autonomy in work promotes job satisfaction and it will be a motivating factor for workplace learning.

5.5 Skills Acquired Through Workplace Learning

Learning nurtures skills. Skills are the backbone for professional success. To be more effective, libraries should give training to their professionals and promote workplace learning. The library professionals were requested to indicate the skills they have been able to acquire through workplace learning. Their responses are given in the Table 5.

It is found that workplace learning helps the professionals to acquire the skills of the design and development of digital libraries and institutional repositories, e-resources management, information searching, library automation, etc. Library automation is the basic task of the modernisation of libraries. There is no formal course on library automation. Similarly, the design and development of digital

Table 4. Motivators of workplace learning

S. No.	Motivators/facilitators	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Increased resource availability	15 (15.46 %)	67 (69.07 %)	10 (10.30 %)	5 (5.15 %)
2.	Support from higher authority	37 (38.14 %)	42 (43.29 %)	15 (15.46 %)	3 (03.74 %)
3.	Self motivation	48 (49.48 %)	32 (32.98 %)	16 (16.49 %)	2 (2.06 %)
4.	Challenging work	21 (21.65 %)	65 (67.01 %)	8 (8.25 %)	3 (03.74 %)
5.	Having autonomy in work	19 (19.59 %)	58 (59.79 %)	19 (19.59 %)	1 (1.03 %)
6.	Job satisfaction	12 (12.37 %)	37 (38.14 %)	29 (29.89 %)	19 (19.59 %)
7.	Promotion	7 (7.21 %)	20 (20.62 %)	41 (42.27 %)	29 (29.89 %)

Table 5. Skills acquired through workplace learning

S. No.	Skills acquired	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Automation skills	15 (15.46 %)	40 (41.23 %)	14 (14.43 %)	28(28.86 %)
2.	E-resource management skills	18 (18.55 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-	43 (44.32 %)
3.	Presentation skills	14 (14.43 %)	22 (22.68 %)	20 (20.61 %)	41 (42.26 %)
4.	Digital Library/Institutional Repository development skills	29 (34.02 %)	64 (65.97 %)	4 (4.12 %)	-
5.	Networking skills	3 (3.74 %)	42 (43.29 %)	24 (24.74 %)	31 (31.95 %)
6.	Communication skills	18 (18.55 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-	43 (44.32 %)
7.	Research skills	3 (03.74 %)	16 (16.49 %)	77 (79.38 %)	4 (4.12 %)
8.	Information searching skills	18 (18.55 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-	43 (44.32 %)
9.	Personal growth and self identity	7 (7.21 %)	56 (57.73 %)	17 (17.52 %)	17 (17.52 %)

libraries and institutional repositories are the latest trends in libraries. Networking skill is very essential to work in an automated online environment. Workplace learning enables the library professionals for personal growth and performs their organisational tasks effectively.

5.6 Membership in Online Discussion Groups

Library professionals can use online discussion groups and forums to acquire latest developments in their fields and for collaborative learning. The subscription to online discussion forums will enhance workplace learning in the digital environment. The library professionals were asked to indicate in which of the online discussion groups they take part. Table 6 shows the membership in online groups.

Table 6. Membership in online discussion groups and professional organisations

Online discussion groups	Responses
LIS-Forum	73 (75.26 %)
LIS Links	18 (18.56 %)
LISWiki	9 (9.27 %)
Facebook Groups	91 (93.81 %)
Professional organisations	
State level	65 (67.01 %)
National level	46 (47.42 %)
International level	5 (5.16 %)

It is revealed that a large majority of the professionals use online media and mailing lists to up-to-date their knowledge and sharing of information. These interfaces provide multimedia facilities for information handling. Modern libraries use social media to extend their value added information services. However, Indian libraries especially university libraries are lagging behind in using social media in their libraries.

5.7 Membership in Professional Organisations

Professional organisations have vital importance in the professional growth of library professionals. Membership in professional bodies indicates their positive attitude towards the profession. The library professionals were asked to indicate in which of the professional organisations they have membership. The responses are given in the Table 6.

The analysis shows that the professionals have membership in either state-level or national-level professional organisations. This is a good indication of their professional involvement and commitment.

5.8 Barriers of Workplace Learning

There are numerous factors that slow down the workplace learning in libraries. These factors differ from one library to another. Library professionals sometimes face situations that make workplace learning difficult like tight working schedule, poor

infrastructural facilities, lack of cooperation from the authority, lack of support from the co-workers, lack of awareness in modern learning techniques, lack of job rotation in libraries and so on. Job rotation is an effective workplace learning method to promote employee learning as well as employer learning[16, 17]. The library professionals were asked to indicate the barriers of workplace learning and the responses are summarised in the Table 7.

It is found that there are barriers that hinder workplace learning in libraries like poor infrastructural

and a good number of the professionals are of opinion that the information sharing inside the libraries has to be improved. It was also found that lack of job rotation and lack of recognition hinder the workplace learning. Hence the study in overall suggests that the current state-of-the-art workplace learning in university libraries in Kerala need to be improved. As the workplace changes in libraries are so quick and inevitable, the library professionals need to develop a positive attitude towards workplace learning. They need to fully exploit

Table 7. Barriers of workplace learning

S. No.	Barriers	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Tight working schedule	15 (15.46 %)	28 (28.86 %)	40 (41.2 %)	14 (14.43 %)
2.	Poor infrastructural facilities	18 (18.55 %)	43 (44.32 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-
3.	Lack of cooperation from the authority	14 (14.43 %)	41 (42.26 %)	22 (22.68 %)	20 (20.61 %)
4.	Poor in-service training provision	-	-	64 (65.97%)	33 (34.02 %)
5.	Personal inabilities	-	31 (31.95 %)	42 (43.29)	24 (24.74 %)
6.	Financial constraints	18.55 (18.24 %)	43 (44.32 %)	36 (37.11)	18 (18.24 %)
7.	Lack of support from the co-workers	-	4 (4.12 %)	16 (16.49)	77 (79.38 %)
8.	Lack of recognition	18 (18.55 %)	43 (44.32 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-
9.	Lack of awareness in modern learning techniques	7 (7.21 %)	17 (17.52 %)	56 (57.73 %)	17 (17.52 %)
10.	Lack of job rotation	18 (18.55 %)	43 (44.32 %)	36 (37.11 %)	-
11.	Lack of interest	-	-	60 (61.85 %)	37 (38.14 %)

facilities, financial constraints, lack of recognition, and lack of job rotation.

Library professionals engage in workplace learning if they get professional development and recognition. Authorities should provide opportunities and facilities for workplace learning in the libraries. It is to be noted that positive attitude and support from the co-workers will enable collaborative workplace learning in libraries.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Workplace learning is an essential element in the personal and professional development of library professionals. It is a key strategic element in achieving their library objectives, and goals. Library professionals must continue learning in the workplace, transforming the library into a learning organisation. The inbuilt learning environment in libraries provides ample opportunities for workplace learning.

The ability of library professionals to provide creative and innovative services could depend on the extent to which they expose themselves to workplace learning. Major findings shows that the library professionals in universities in Kerala are engaged in very few workplace learning activities

the in-built learning environment of the libraries. Therefore, serious attempt have to be made at creating awareness among the library professionals that would enable them to transform libraries into learning organisations.

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About the Authors

Mr. Mohammed Irfan P.P. is research scholar in the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Calicut. He obtained his MLISc from University of Calicut, Kerala. His areas of interest include: Library and information management, ICT application in librarianship, and TQM in library services.

Dr. Mohamed Haneefa K. is Assistant Professor in the Department of Library & Information Science, University of Calicut, Kerala. Prior to this, he worked at NIT Calicut, IISR Calicut, and TKM College of Engineering, Kollam. He has published several research papers in professional journals and presented papers in many national, and international conferences. His current research interests are: Application of innovative information, and communication technologies to solve information access, and retrieval problems, and information tools used to facilitate formal, and informal learning in online, and face-to-face environments.

Ms. Shyni K.G. is working as Junior Librarian at Centre for Women Studies, University of Calicut. Presently, she is a research scholar in the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Calicut. Her areas of interest include: Quality of work life and work place learning in libraries.