INTERNET TRAINING FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARY STAFF WITHIN GREATER GUWAHATI

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Abstract

Analyses the Internet training for the academic library staff. The study is based on a sample of 6 academic libraries within Guwahati. The study throws light on the importance of Internet in today's academic environment and the importance of Internet training. The study goes into depth to investigate the training methods used, contents of the training and other aspects that are most important before the management to organize Internet training for the academic library staff.

Keywords: Internet, World Wide Web, Academic Library

1. Introduction

Educational institutions are being encouraged by the Government and other organizations to upgrade their resources for research and education. Consequently the academic libraries of the higher education institutions are also being upgraded [1]. Internet has proved to be boon in this endeavor. Internet has helped these libraries to be interconnected and share their resources and also to access resources in remote locations. Internet connections have been growing in the recent years with good connectivity and access [2]. But are these libraries fully geared up especially in terms of their employees' skills to be able to fully utilize the Internet for the benefit of the academic community? It has already been widely discussed that training is essential for the staffs to work in a network and automated environment. The Library Association Working Party on Training (1977) cites in its Policy Statement that training "is of fundamental importance to all levels of staffs working in all types of library", contributing to "greater efficiency and continuity, with real cost benefits". Since technology keeps on changing it becomes even more necessary for the staff to be trained in Internet.

2. Objectives

The present study aims to understand the status of Internet training for the academic library staff within greater Guwahati. Since the importance of Internet is growing in today's academic environment therefore the issue of training the academic library staff in handling Internet is becoming important. So this study will investigate the various training methods used in the academic libraries, the content of such training, problems encountered and whether any evaluation is undertaken for such training. The investigation will also try to reveal the attitudes of the library managers with regard to training their staff on Internet.

3. Scope

The present study was based on a sample of academic libraries from greater Guwahati selected randomly. Since there are many academic libraries within greater Guwahati only those were selected which had a functional Internet connection. These include the following libraries:

1. Hem Barua library (B.Borooah college)
2. KKHandique Library (Gauhati University)
3. Dr. BKB Library (Gauhati Commerce College)
4. Central Library (IIT Guwahati)
5. IASST Library (Institute of Advanced Studies in Science & technology)
6. KC Das Commerce College Library

4. Methodology

In order to understand the status of Internet training for the staffs of the academic libraries a sample of six academic libraries was taken. A questionnaire-based survey of the sample was conducted. The questionnaire contained both close-ended questions and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was prepared based on some existing studies already done on understanding the Internet training of academic library staff. Comprehending the importance of the study the author personally went to the respective libraries to collect the data.

5. Internet and Its use in Academic Libraries

Many of us by now are familiar with Internet especially those working in the academic libraries. This is because the academic libraries have been the pioneer in the field of automation and Internet. Internet has become essential for today's education and research in the academic institutions. Library being a hub of research and academic activities are therefore being provided with Internet connections [3]. The Internet is a unique information resource, bringing a wide range of material from around the world to a local machine.

One of the earliest usages of the Internet was to access the OPAC i.e. the Online Public Access Catalogues of different libraries or within a campus [4]. The union catalogues which lists the holdings of several libraries was another important tool accessible through net. Another area of growing importance for academic libraries is that of electronic journals. Big publishing houses like Elsevier, Springer, ACM etc. are providing packages of their journals to libraries in electronic form via Internet. So at nominal subscription the libraries can access to these costly journals, which are becoming increasingly popular with the users [5]. Thus grew consortia based subscription in India. INDEST, INFONET and CSIR Consortium are the examples of library consortia for sharing journals and bibliographic information. These consortia based journal subscription are available through the Internet.

The Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Science & Technology i.e. INDEST was set up by the Ministry of Human resource Development (MHRD) for subscription to electronic resources for 38 institutions including IISc, IITs, NITs, IIMs, etc. Over 6000 e-journals are accessible through this consortium, which has its headquarters in IIT Delhi [6]. Infonet Contortia is set up by UGC and operated through its INFLIBNET Centre, Ahmedabad. Over 100 Universities are its members. It covers disciplines like Arts, Sciences, Mathematics and statistics etc. About 4000 full text electronic journals from 25 publishers are currently accessible [7]. CSIR e-journal Consortia provides access to 3300+ e-journals from 11 publishers to all CSIR S&T staff of different CSIR institutions located around India. These consortia not only provide full text access but they also give access to bibliographic databases like COMPENDEX, INSPEC SciFinder Scholar, and Web of Science etc.

Many open access materials important for education and research are available on the Internet. They are very useful in the context that they are not fee based and also don't have restricted access and are thus becoming very popular with students and researchers [8].

Communicating with users is very important in academic libraries. Widespread access to the Internet has also created new means of communicating with users. In some cases, Internet technologies (e.g. email and publishing on Web pages) are used to reproduce an existing service in another medium, such as online "suggestion boxes". However, there is "added value" to such a service as users can mail in their suggestions from terminals on or off campus at a time convenient to them. Email enquiry or reference services also represent an extension of mainstream library activity - although some academic librarians initially had concerns about being able to meet the demand of such a service. Reference and enquiry services in academic libraries in the main seek to teach their users how to search for information themselves, rather than answering the enquiries themselves, as is more likely to be the case in a special library. A significant number of British academic libraries have adopted electronic mail enquiry or information services - at the University of Hull the "email help line" is treated as an extension of the Enquiry Desk service. Anecdotal evidence suggests that electronic enquiry services are not overwhelmed, and most users do stay within the parameters of the service. The most successful email enquiry services have developed their procedures and boundaries prior to the service going live. As many enquiries fall into the category of Frequently Asked Questions, these can thus be answered by existing position statements.

Electronic mail also has great potential to cut down on the mountain of paperwork involved in sending out recall notices, notifying readers that items can be collected etc. Some library systems allow students to renew loans (provided no other reader is waiting for the book) directly via the OPAC or to request a renewal via email.

Similarly, weblogs or simply blogs are now becoming very popular on the Internet as a communication medium. A library weblog can be used to

- Providing news information for users
- Providing links to recommend internet sources
- Book reviews, information about new books
- Providing entertainment or amusement for users
- Providing news or information for librarians
- Book discussions
- Provide news or information for the trustees
- Provide research tips
- Communication among the librarians (in a library system)

The library can make good use of the electronic mail system of Internet i.e. Email to communicate reservation alert, current awareness services like SDI, new arrivals of books and journals, receiving interlibrary loan request and sending overdue notices to the users.

In addition to these specialist services academic librarians also make use of the Internet information that is available to all users. Much bibliographical and price information can be found from online bookstores and Web sites for professional organizations and publishers. A wide range of factual information from government and NGO sources is available too. Although librarians have more skepticism about the well-publicized Web search tools than most users, such services can be valuable, particularly for easily defined topics (such as names or abbreviations) and the sheer range of material indexed, subjects covered and the speed with which they search can make them useful when a clear starting point is not obvious. They may not always retrieve a full answer, but may give helpful clues.

Internet resources are just another information medium academic librarians are extending their skills to encompass it. So they may offer a current awareness service to teaching and research staff to inform them of new Web sites and discussion lists; they will apply established criteria to assessing the content of information sources or the effectiveness of secondary services like search tools. The hypertext nature of the Web makes it easy to make additional explanation or instruction for a resource as an optional choice. This concept of instruction at the point and time of use is harder to achieve in the physical library.

6. Why Internet Training is Necessary

In the Internet age there is acute need of Internet specialists. These specialists will be armed with the necessary skills and training to help the users to locate their information pin pointedly and efficiently on the net. Libraries specially the academic libraries would have a great demand for these specialists. Internet connectivity in the academic libraries is growing day by day. So, the present administration of the academic institutions should take necessary steps to equip the library

staff with the required skills and training on Internet. Training can help to understand many essential aspects of the Internet such as follows:

- Are we using the right type of Internet connection for our needs? Are we getting a good deal?

- How quickly can we find what we looking for on the Internet? We should be able to find useful information about virtually any topic in less than a minute. If you're taking longer, you're doing something wrong.

- How do we know if we are safe? Most people who contract viruses or other nastiest thought they were protected.

- Are we using email correctly? Or are we really annoying we our colleagues and they are too polite to tell us? We might be unpleasantly surprised to learn the truth.

- How do we avoid those terrible pop-up windows?

- How do we know if information is real or a hoax?

- How can we make surfing faster?

- How can we get the maximum satisfaction without spending more time on net?

As noted by Paula L. Matthews [9] while employing Internet in academic libraries one of the important issues for the administrator is the implementation library staff training. "A lack of training can result in :
- Poor staff performance;
- Lack of motivation;
- High staff turnover;
- Resistance to change;
- Costly errors or accidents;
- Unfulfilled objectives;
- Undesirable low standards of service.

Academic librarians may well draw on training materials available on the Internet for the higher education community. Recently the issue of whether librarians should learn HTML (Hyper-Text Markup Language) was debated on a North American discussion list. The conclusion was that knowledge of basic HTML was necessary in order to prepare presentations and information guides, which are an integral part of the librarian's professional role. As an increasing number of academic libraries experience some measure of "convergence" with other academic support services, library staff has many opportunities to augment their IT skills and collaborate with colleagues in other services. The combination of technical knowledge and the ability to evaluate information sources is a powerful argument for the continued need for LIS professionals in higher education.

The users of the Academic libraries including some faculty member do not have net skills. In such cases the academic library staff has to come forward to help them. For readiness the staff should have some kind of net skills. The transition of traditional library resources to technology based library resources has put a lot of pressure on the academic library staff. Unless the staff is kept up-to-date on Internet skills he will face more pressure to work in such conditions. So training of staff has become a necessity in today's context

7. Survey Analysis & Discussion

Kirpatrik [10] on his study on the training of academic library staff on IT found that a high 52.9 % of the staff responded that they received individual training by coworker. This means that the most preferred method of training as founded on this study was internal training. Matthews (1997) has also found on his investigation that internal training was the most popular choice (100%) of the 15 libraries that were included in his exploratory study. External training was least preferred. The high cost involved in external training was the cited as the chief cause for discouragement. Another factor was time. The library mangers cited lack of manpower as the reason for not preferring sending staff to receive external training.

Commonly used training methods include both formal and informal. Formal training or off – the – job training involves practical courses on specific topics in a developed programme for new conceptual, analytical and problem solving skills whereas, on – the – job training is a basic training method where a trainee is being shown the ways a job can be done through instruction and supervision. The present study was however concentrated on the internal and external training methods. The internal training methods are basically on the job training. The internal training methods for Internet training includes lectures, presentations, demonstrations, workshops, tutorials, free search/browsing time and handouts.

In the process of the above investigation as tabulate in Table I it is found that 5 out of the 6 academic libraries i.e. 83% of the respondents identified in Guwahati have undertaken internal Internet training. Only 1 out of the 6 libraries has opted for external training citing it as more effective than internal training. Regarding the methods adopted or likely to be adopted in Internet training as tabulated in Table II, majority 5/6 (83%) has not preferred lecture as a good training. A co-worker or the librarian himself gives lecture on specific topics. Demonstrations were another method found suitable for Internet training as it was opted by 5 (83%) out of the total libraries surveyed. Other methods found popular among the libraries includes free searching or giving browsing time (67%) to staffs. This method although very effective is also difficult because the staff has to give sufficient time which

may not be practical in difficult circumstances like busy schedule, budget constrains. It was surprising to find in the study that none of the libraries had opted handouts for internet training of staff (0%). Because of the nature of Internet, which changes on a daily basis, guidance documentation is difficult to provide, as it can very soon be out of date. But as founded by Matthews et al. handouts are very popular and staff are often anxious to have a document they can refer to when they are no longer in a situation where help is at hand. Workshops were also sparsely selected as a training method as only 17% opted for it. The common disadvantage cited included time and budget constraints.

Only 1 out of the 6 libraries has opted for external training citing it as more effective than internal training. Majority of the libraries cited cost as the main. Since such Internet training in specifically applicable in libraries are not conducted locally. Mangers are ill prepared to send some staff to take training outside.

The contents of the Internet training did not very much among the six surveyed libraries as show in Table III. The common contents included E-mail, WWW and browsers. Those libraries i.e. mainly the college libraries felt that training on accessing e- journals were unnecessary as none of them had e- journals in their library. IIT- Guwahati, IASST and Gauhati University which has a sufficient collection of e- journals had answered that they had trained or likely to train their staff on e-journals.

Many of the staffs that got Internet training had developed the skills to use Internet as a reference tool and as a communication tool such as Internet. Assisting users in Internet was another skill developed by such training. But none of the libraries reported on the development of publishing skills as an outcome of the training. The common reason cited was that it was felt too sophisticated in the present context. Information on Internet training was not available to the staff readily. Many of the respondents felt that remoteness of this part of the world as factor for this. Only two of the respondents viz. IIT- Guwahati and K. C. Das Commerce College cited that such information are readily available to them. The most common problem cited by the respondents was that the staff was mostly technically unqualified for Internet. This was especially in the case of the college libraries where mostly no technical persons worked in the library. However none of the libraries had done any evaluation on the training of the staff in Internet. Workload and time constraints were sited as the major reason for not undertaking such evaluations. On the future plans majority of the respondents showed willingness on their part to participate in Internet training. However their viewpoint was that some local leading institutions like Gauhati University, IIT Guwahati or the likes of National Informatics Centre (NIC) should organize such skill development programs where they are ready to participate.

Table I Internal vs External Training preference for Internet training of staff

Sl. No.	Name of the Institution	Internal Training	External Training
1.	Hem Barua library(B.Borooah college)	Yes	No
2.	KKHandique Library (Gauhati University)	Yes	No
3.	Dr. BKB Library (Gauhati Commerce College)	Yes	No
4.	Central Library (IITG)	Yes	No
5.	IASST Library	No	Yes
6.	KC Das Commerce college Library	Yes	No
	Percentage (%)	5/6 (83)	1/6(17)

Table II Internet Training methods employed/to be employed

Sl. No	Name of Library /Institutions	Lectu-res	Presen-tations	Demon-strations	Work-shops	Tutori-als	Free search /browsing	Handouts
1.	Hem Barua library (B. Borooah college)	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
2.	K K Handique Library (Gauhati Univer-sity)	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
3.	Dr. BKB Library (Gauhati Commerce College)	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
4.	Central Library (IITG)	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
5.	IASST Library	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
6.	KC Das Commerce college Library	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
	Percentage (%)	Y=(17) N=(83)	Y=(33) N=(67)	Y=(83) N=(17)	Y=(17) N=(83)	Y=(17) N=(83)	Y=(67) N=(33)	Y=(0) N=(100)

(Note: N=No, Y=Yes)

Findings

- Nearly all the libraries reported that they did not have a formal programme on Internet training as they felt such training was not needed in the present context.

- In majority of the libraries internal training was the most preferred.

- E-mail, WWW, browsers were the most common contents included in the training.

- Majority of the respondents said that information on Internet training were mostly unavailable to them.

- Majority felt that publishing skills on internet were not required for them

- Majority felt that basic skills developed by such training included ability to use Internet as a reference and communication tool and also ability to assist users.

- Majority cited that having non-technical staff in library as the main problem in Internet training.

- Constant electric failure was another problem cited by the respondents in conducting Internet training.

- No formal evaluation was done in any of the surveyed libraries.

- On future plans majority of the respondents had shown the willingness for Internet training provided that some reputed institutions of this reason comes forward in giving guidance for such training.

8. Suggestions

- Internet training of the staff should be given due importance.

- Individual libraries should develop a formal program for giving Internet training to their staff.

- Librarians should explore all the options including external training courses on the Internet.

- There is strong need for some leading Institutions of the region to take initiative where the staffs of academic libraries can be sent at periodic intervals to update their skills on Internet. Such programs are taking place outside Assam as in DRTC, INFLIBNET centres etc., but institutions are not willing to sent staff for such training due to financial and other constraints.

9. Conclusions

Libraries are becoming increasingly modernized in hardware resources and other facilities. But correspondingly if the manpower is not made up-to-date then there is trouble. In order to attract respect from the users of the library the staff of the academic libraries need to update in technologies such as Internet. If the library acquires costly items such as e-books and e-journals and if the users cannot access them properly on the Internet then it is failure for library itself, however

modernized it be. A lot many of the users fail to get the right kind of information from the Net because of their low Internet skills. In that respect if the library staff can guide them to get the right information then the fruit of such modernization will be truly achieved. Also the library staff in future will themselves have to deal more in the Internet in their day to day routines in library. If his skills are note properly toned on time then much of the work will be hampered. That is why there is the strong necessity of Internet training of the staff.

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