

LIBRARY AUTOMATION IN BANGLADESH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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The library movement in Bangladesh started during the mid-nineteenth century with the establishment of four public libraries in the district towns of Jessore, Bogra, Barisal and Rangpur (Ahmad, 1994:53). Subsequently, public libraries were established in other district towns and municipalities. These libraries were run and maintained by private initiatives and without any assistance from government agencies. The Dhaka University Library was established in 1921. The professional development in the country started with the 3-month training programme (certificate course) initiated by the Dhaka University Library in 1952 (Hossain, 1983:75). The first government public library was established in Dhaka in 1955. The Library Association of Bangladesh (LAB) was instituted in 1956. LAB launched a formal 6-month certificate course in library science in 1958. Post-graduate diploma was instituted in the University of Dhaka in 1959.

The 1960s represent a turning point in the history of the library movement in Bangladesh. The decade witnessed a number of developments which influenced the library movement in the country. They were: the opening of one year masters programme in library science by the University of Dhaka in 1962; the establishment of the Bangladesh National Scientific and Technical Documentation Centre (BANSDOC) in 1962 as a branch office of the then PANSDOC; the publication of the professional library periodical, *The Eastern Librarian*, in 1966 by the LAB; the establishment of the National Library in Dhaka as the name of Central Library of the then Pakistan in 1968 for the procurement of indigenous publication under the coverage of Copyright Ordinance, 1962.

After the independence in 1971, libraries in Bangladesh received more attention than ever before. The most notable events which contributed to further the library movement during this period were: the establishment of the National Health Library and Documentation Centre (NHLDC) in 1974;

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the opening of a two-year masters and a two-year M.Phil. programmes by the University of Dhaka in 1976; the launching of a doctoral programme by the University in 1979; the establishment of the Department of Public Libraries within the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1983; the establishment of the new building for the National Library in 1985; and the opening of the 3-year Bachelor's (Honours) programme in Library and Information Science in 1988 by the University of Dhaka (BANSDOC, 1996:51-2). University of Rajshahi also launched a 3-year Bachelor's Degree (Honours) course in 1993.

Over the last two decades, a good number of various types of libraries were established in the country. But due to the lack of proper initiative by the government and concerned authorities, the scenario of whole library and information system of the country is almost traditional.

The Use of Computers in Bangladesh

Bangladesh entered into the computer era in 1964 with the installation of an IBM 1620 machine at the Atomic Energy Centre at Dhaka. Institute of Statistical Research and Training (ISRT) installed IBM 101 Statistical Machine in 1964. Commercial application of computer was initiated by Janata Bank with an IBM 1401 in 1967 followed by Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd. in 1970. The Government use of computer began in 1973 with the procurement of an IBM 360/30 machine for the Bureau of Statistics. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) started its computer application in 1968 by offering courses in Numerical Methods and Computer Programming, acquiring IBM 029 Data Entry Machines (Patwari, Alam and Rahman, 1983:1-2). Computer systems now have been introduced to several Ministries and many other government department and private sector establishments. It has been pointed out, however, that over 45 medium and larger-sized computers are currently used in Bangladesh (BANSDOC, 1996:30). In addition, microcomputers are used extensively at different offices, organizations, and institutions and at personal level.

The 1980s are considered the beginning of the automation era as far as libraries and information centres in Bangladesh are concerned. The International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh

(ICDDR,B) Library and the Agricultural Information Center (AIC) are pioneers in creating bibliographic data bases on specialized fields using microcomputers (Khan, 1989:38). Very recently, in view of the changing attitudes of information user in getting specific information, a number of libraries and information centres of the country have taken initiative to establish a proper system for providing desired information to their user by using automation facilities.

Therefore, a basic survey is carried out to study the extent of computer applications and use in libraries and information centres in Bangladesh. The main objectives of the study are to look at: the extent of computer use in library functions and services; problems hindering library automation; and future plans.

Methodology

For the purpose of the study, the term "library" was used to mean library, information centre, documentation centre, unit, etc. The population of the study consists of university libraries of all types, government public libraries, national libraries and special libraries in Bangladesh. A short questionnaire on the *application and use of computers in libraries* is devised to determine the extent and use of computers in the libraries in Bangladesh. In most cases, personal interviews and field visit to libraries are undertaken for the collection of data.

Results

Analysis of the data shows that only 58 libraries in Bangladesh use computers in their operations and services. A quick look at the type of these libraries (Table 1) shows that there are 9 government university libraries, 5 private university libraries, 1 public library and 41 special libraries in Bangladesh using the computer. The application of computer in these libraries is still limited and less than optimal, and still at the experimental level.

Problems of library automation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the few countries of the world which started automation in 1964, but today we are still in infancy so far the automation

of libraries is concerned. A number of problems contribute to the low degree on computer utilization in the libraries in Bangladesh. The breakdown of the data collected from the field visit to libraries using the computer and personal interview of the librarians and information specialists, having had automation related experience in Bangladesh, identified the problems leading to the present state of library computerization in the country.

Table 1: Libraries and their use of computers in Bangladesh

Type of library	Total	Use of computer
University (public)	13	9
University (private)	18	5
National	02	2
Public (government)	66	1
Special	125	41
Total	224	58

Table 2 is the list of operations and number of libraries that have computerized the services in Bangladesh.

Table 2: Operation-wise Analysis of Computerization

Operations	Number of libraries that have computerized the process
Database creation	47
CAS and SDI	5
Serial control	5
CD-ROM search	14
E-mail	9
Serial control	5

Not all the problems discussed below were mentioned by all individual libraries and librarians, but everything that was mentioned has been included. The names of librarians and institutions are not identified for the purpose of anonymity.

(a) Lack of technically trained staff

Library personnel in Bangladesh, in general, has inadequate knowledge in computers and their uses in libraries. Lack of suitably trained library staff in computers and their uses in libraries hindered the automation process of the libraries in Bangladesh.

(b) Lack of funds

The libraries in Bangladesh are handicapped by a shortage of funds. As a result measures are not fully taken for financing the automation process. Sometimes the parent organization allocates funds for the purchase of a computer, but not its maintenance.

(c) Administrative problems

Administrators, policy-makers and government executives are not fully aware of the importance of the use of computers in libraries. Lack of awareness by these key individuals of the role, capacity, and capabilities of computers impedes their use in libraries which could benefit from using computer technology.

(d) Software packages

Lack of software packages especially designed to serve Bangladeshi libraries' needs. There are readily available packages, which do not adapt themselves to the local situation and to the Bangladeshi library environment, or to the libraries' particular needs.

(e) Standardization problems:

Another major problem is that the computerization efforts of different libraries appear individualized. Every library approaches the task in its own way. Bangladesh has no national models or standards for the libraries to participate in or to follow. Some systems have been created without the essential infrastructure and without due regard to interlibrary compatibility.

(f) Other problems:

Lack of belief in computer technology and preference for manual operations. Lack of communication and co-operation among various

institutions engaged in library automation. Lack of adequate and uninterrupted power supply and surges and drops in power voltage, etc.

Future Plans

Department of Public Libraries clarified its future plans in the following areas and services: prepare a complete list of books available in government public libraries; and networking of divisional and district level public libraries with the Central Public Library at Dhaka (Dept. of Public Libraries, 1997).

The National Library of Bangladesh is using computers in compiling the National Bibliography of Bangladesh. It has further plans to introduce CD-ROM and internet facilities to the users.

Dhaka University Library is planning to acquire proven library software which will be equipped with a 'network server' and a number of PCs distributed in a local area network (LAN) within the library and faculty buildings of the university. The system will be used for creating bibliographic data bases, controlling acquisition, cataloguing and serials, effecting bar-coded circulation, reservation and recall systems, current awareness services (CAS), selective dissemination of information (SDI) services and on-line literature searches of the national and international data bases through CD-ROM and also via internet. It will also have full management module towards budgetary control and management information (Alam, 1996).

BANSDOC has an ongoing project of the government of Bangladesh namely "Automation and Networking on Science and Technology Libraries in Bangladesh (1995-98)." The "Bangladesh National Scientific and Library Information Network (BANSLINK)" will be implemented in three phases (Rahman, 1994). The participating libraries are already provided with computer systems required to participate in the network. BANSDOC also prepared a BANSLINK/CCF Data Entry Form for the participating libraries.

Department of Library and Information Science, University of Dhaka has introduced practical courses in computer applications in libraries from the academic session 1996-97 (Dept. of LIS, 1996). At present the Department

is equipped with 4 PCs and planning to provide a wide range of computer facilities for the students including full-fledged personal computer laboratory with multimedia and internet facilities. Department of Library and Information Science of Rajshahi University is also introduced computer training courses for the students.

Suggestions

We would like to emphasize on the following suggestions to use computers at a proper and accepted level by the libraries in Bangladesh:

- (a) The Government of Bangladesh should allocate sufficient funds to support the purchasing and maintenance of computer system by libraries.
- (b) Library and information science teaching and training institutions should introduce special training programmes for the students on the use and applications of new information and communication technologies and organize special advanced training courses for professional librarians on the use of computers in libraries.
- (c) Librarians should influence administrators at the higher level of the importance of the use of computers in libraries and convince them that automation will improve the effectiveness of information services and access to information which they need for decision making.
- (d) Libraries with the help of software development firms should develop indigenous software packages for the use of computers in libraries in Bangladesh. They should also develop a standardized thesaurus in Bengali language for the use of computer system employed in the libraries in Bangladesh.
- (e) Libraries should also develop a centralized database to include all documents and sources of information available in the country in order to support scientific research and studies, and to provide decision makers easy access to needed information. Such a database is needed to be linked with other international networks.
- (f) The library associations of Bangladesh should organize seminars, workshops, etc., to create awareness among librarians about the potential advantages of automation and thus encourage more and more libraries to go in for automation.

Conclusion

It is a recognized fact that the coming century is going to rely heavily upon information. The libraries will, therefore, have to play an increasingly important role in functioning as information servers. In order to meet the challenges of the 21st Century, modern information technologies must be introduced in their services without any delay. It may be pointed out that strong interest in the automation of library and information services in the country has been observed during the last 3-4 years. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh has decided to withdraw taxes on computers and accessories. It is expected that, during the next 5-6 years, all major libraries of the country will come under the automation process. There is now pressing need to train such manpower which would be capable of handling computer system for information processing and management.

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