

An Initiative for Digital Resources Consortium for University Libraries In Bangladesh.

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Abstract

The aim of this initiative is to create a high speed state-of-the-art research and education network and a flagship digital library consortium for all public and private universities and research institution of Bangladesh similar in spirit that many other countries have undertaken. The University Grants Commission of Bangladesh would like to invigorate the ICT infrastructure of the universities of Bangladesh befitting to the 21st century and to provide access to the latest ICT tools of education to all students, faculty and researchers in Bangladesh.

Keyword : E-resources, Library Consortia, Bangladesh Research & Education Network (BREN)

1. Introduction

The University Grants Commission Library has been established in 1973. The objectives of the UGC Library are:-

- ◆ to establish a Central Reference Library through cooperative acquisition, stores & retrieval of information.
- ◆ to collect, analyze, preserve and disseminate information of higher education.
- ◆ to co-ordinate and strengthen the library services among the university libraries of Bangladesh.
- ◆ to create library network on university education.
- ◆ to consolidate participation in the national and international information system.

The main objective of the library was to establish a Central Reference Library of the University Libraries of Bangladesh. But it has not been built up accordingly. Though two projects were initiated in this regard. The 'Union Catalogue Project' of 1984 and 'Central Journal Library Project' of 1989 were initiated but not implemented. Afterwards UGC initiated Bangladesh Education and Research Network (BERNET) and University Resources Center (URC) since 1999. BERNET is an important component, it is providing Internet Services to the universities, open-up a database for all to use and maintain UGC website. Presently an initiative for digital resources consortium for university libraries in Bangladesh are peeping at the door.

2. Present Scenario Of Consortium In Bangladesh

There was no library consortium in Bangladesh. In the past the UGC had taken many initiative for sharing information resources of different universities for the benefits of the universities. In a 2005 survey, out of 17 Public Universities 5 and out of 39 Private universities 9 respondent to have some

form of e-library. About three years back the author of this article worked on many issues for the development of the university libraries including information resource sharing in the line of reducing journals prices, inter-library co-operation and strengthening professional relationship among the universities. At that time Balani-Infotech, New Delhi, India (the sole agent for some e-resources of this region) started subscription to very expensive e-journals to some private universities of Bangladesh (In the month of August 2005 Mr. Nirmal of Balami-Infotech came to Bangladesh and the present author of the article arranged a meeting with the member of the UGC, Bangladesh, where some university librarians participated. After a few months, Dr. Javed I. Khan, Fulbright Senior Specialist, Kent State University, USA, visited Bangladesh and expressed his interest to guide for formation of Research and Education Network and Bangladesh Digital library consortium). Few private universities provide access to limited collection namely DOXJ, AGORA, HINARI, IMERLAD, IEEE and JSTOR. Not a single library in Bangladesh could offer the institutional membership to any major medical, engineering or technological collection. In 2003, UGC of Bangladesh recommended in the light of the National Conference of Inter-University IT Professional in Bangladesh to establish "a common library for all universities ..." under one umbrella, obviously, that umbrella should be UGC of Bangladesh.

3. Bangladesh Digital Library Consortium

Bangladesh like many other countries in the developing world is undergoing a phase of rapid expansion in higher education. University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh is facing an uphill battle to keep up the existing libraries. Private Universities are also fighting the same battle. However, the silver lining is that more than 70 institutions are now in the same phase of active collection development. And another 50-70 institutions will be willing participants. There can be no better time to launch a federated digital library. A National Digital Library and Library Automation Initiative will ensure the strategic benefit immediately.

3.1 A Road Map

1. UGC can start by convening a conference inviting all the (a) private and public universities, (b) research organizations, (c) academics and (d) major libraries of Bangladesh. Provides a map of potential member institutions for this initiative.
2. Invite participants from the three communities (a) professional librarians (b) interested faculty researchers from information sciences, library sciences, and computer sciences and engineering and related fields, and (c) chief operating officers. Form a steering committee to decide the mission, membership, planning and budgeting.
3. The next step will be to discuss the concept and collect letter of interest and initial commitment from interested organization. With the concept and a unified platform of the higher education of Bangladesh under UGC leadership seek national and international funding. The new consortia may seek technical cooperation by partnering with some established consortia.

4. Establish key technical committees/working groups in areas including (a) software development (b) standardization & interlibrary cooperation, (c) collective resource procurement, (d) E-catalogue and digitization, (e) publishing and hosting support services (f) user services & training etc. to lead in respective technical areas. Invite past initiators for their experience and involve new bloods for their enthusiasm and new ideas.
5. Initiative signing a memorandum of understanding by members. There should be some commitment such as subscription, library facilitation to make their libraries and campuses digital library enabled, providing REN connectivity, adequate access terminals, reading and browsing rooms, adherence to sharing policies.
6. Roll out the first version of the digital library. UGC and the members should establish an initial budget and may roll out a very basic web based digital library system with open access and already member subscribed materials.
7. Expand access. Take active initiative to join larger multi-national, regional and transcontinental digital library federations as a group to further obtain leverage in gaining access to content.

Thus the higher education community should lead the care to build a strong ICT based Bangladesh Digital Library.

4. Research and Education Network (REN)

Research and Education Network (REN) established by the universities around the world are now opening up whole new set of possibilities to exploit information technology in higher education. Nowhere the benefit of REN is as vivid as it is in the transformation of the libraries and the emergence of digital libraries (DL). The libraries of the world are currently undergoing revolutionary changes. Research library provides two core function (a) collection and archiving of human knowledge and (b) scholarly communication dissemination of quality scientific knowledge. Digital technology is transforming both. Grand projects are now underway to digitize all available books that mankind possess. Some estimate as much as 10 million books will be freely available on our desktops in few years. Some of the most valuable resources used to be available only to the limited scholars in the developed world. Scholarly materials now can be made universally available irrespective of time and distance constraints.

The tree of modern knowledge has transcended into numerous branches of specializations. The area of scholarly communication is now served by a 43,000+ active journals and periodicals. RENs make it possible full-text resources from at least 14,000 of these to be delivered right at the user's desktop in any part of the world in seconds. There is now new tools for indexing, abstracting, cross-referencing. Integrated electronic processing is also being used to dramatically reduce the edit and publishing time.

Potential benefits of digital libraries are more pronounced for the libraries of the developing countries. An average US university spend about US\$ 5 million in journals and periodicals, about US\$ 2 million in monographs. It has about 3-8 million books and subscribes about 22,500 serials, and it adds about 30,000 books per year. These are astronomical figures (20-150 time more) compared to the ability of most university in the developing world. For developing world the cost of collection and archiving of traditional print media is becoming prohibitively expensive. Particularly, hard hit areas are cost of periodicals and technological journals. Many libraries are rapidly shrinking. Digital content reduces the cost to a library by a factor of ten. A federated model further shrinks the cost per institution. It seems developing countries can benefit more from the digital library technology. Digital technology might be the only way to narrow this access gap.

Since, the inception of the country in 1971, the libraries of its higher education institutions never got a chance to be in a competitive shape. A total of about 220 institution represents the conventional higher education institution in Bangladesh.

Potential Participants for BDLC

Types of Insitutions	Number	No. of Students	No. of Teachers
Public Universities	25	153249	7710
Private Universities	51	123883	6459
Public Medical & Dental Colleges	15	12089	1271
Private Medical & Dental Colleges	27	7736	1235
Open University	1	232359	54711
National University	1	855744	109
Total Conventional Universities	120		
Research Institutes/Centers/Academy	61		
Administrative Centers	10		
Major Library (Non-University)	15		
Museum	8		
Other Institutes & Centers	6		
Total Other Institute	100		

These institutions should be in the initial phase of BREN.

5. A Road Map For Bangladesh Research And Education Network (BREN)

5.1 Initiative And Action Plan

In Bangladesh UGC is the most appropriate body to convene the REN initiative. Already UGC is incurring unnecessary duplicate cost in personnel, library and internet connectivity. Naturally UGC will be the largest benefactor. Besides, almost all the universities surveyed are interested to join

such as initiative under UGC even on cash cost sharing basis. UGC may seek partnership from the Ministry of Science and Technology and Education, as well as national industries.

A high performance national research and education network (REN) should be included as a key strategic element for the Higher Education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plans. A study of all comparable as well as neighboring countries will show this is indeed the case.

UGC should take the lead and convene and organize a non-profit consortium for BREN by initiating all the universities and research institutions of Bangladesh. A proposal should be prepared and submitted to government and International Organizations for capital funding.

UGC and the higher education community should work together to ensure a national commitment to higher education and may ask for the following:

1-5% of public licensed telecommunication capacity available for non-profit educational use (including higher, primary and maddrassa education). National Telecommunication Policy already calls for 1% R & D investment. But it is yet to be enacted.

Additionally, when there is any long term unused capacity (such as for a period of 3 years), about 25% of it should be made available for use by the non-profit education sector on time limited (such as for 2 years) basis.

Non-profit education network should get tax-free and priority access to required communication assets (such as radio, frequency, fiber networks roof-top-tower in government owned buildings) required to build it.

Additionally, government may establish an education superfund to tap the 1% R & D commitment from all national license income.

5.2 Steps Towards Initiative

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh initiated Digital Resources Consortium in Bangladesh. It would unveil enormous opportunities in the field of education and research. At this stage, the initiative envisions two broad phases. The aim of the first phase of this initiative is to organize a consortium and to draw the technical plan. The second phase is the actual implementation. During this first phase, member organization will be invited to draw a consensus membership, governance, administrative, and management plan for the consortium that will be able to meet the ICT needs and expectation of its member institution for years to come. The alliance will try to learn also from the global experience. In this phase the consortium will also draw a detail technical plan. This should be designed to meet the specific technological and ICT service needs for its member at least for five years. It also should be provisioned to evolve beyond the first five years. It should create an aggressive implementation plan that can also begin its operation (Bandwidth and Digital Library

services). It should continue to offer modern and compatible ICT services at global standard and at par with peer-institutions in the sub-continued.

5.3 Preparation Process

A World Bank higher education mission visited Bangladesh from September 23 to 27, 2007 and then again from November 18 to 22, 2007. This mission is a continuation of the earlier short mission fielded in July 2007. The objective of the two missions was to follow up on the request by the Government to the World Bank to support Higher Education in Bangladesh. More specifically, the mission's mandate was to work with the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission on the preparation of a proposed Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project which will concretize this support. The World Bank has provided UGC with technical assistance with a higher education consultant.

5.4 Effecting E-library Services

A Project Proposal Team (PPT) at the University Grants Commission has undertaken, according to the Aide-Memoire (Draft) item 13, the task of exploring intervention in the development of an e-library to determine whether such a development in the universities will fall within the scope of the Project and whether a feasibility study should be undertaken.

The project would be constituted of two components, (i) Academic Investment Fund (AIF), and (ii) Capacity Enhancement components. The second component are still at an early stage.

Sub-component of second component is E-library. It will launch procurement for a rapid needs and e-readiness assessment of pilot E-library implementations in the HEI sector, in particular, e-journals for the support of research and graduate programs.

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