Worldwide COVID-19 pandemic and paradigm shift in Off-Campus services in University Libraries of Bangladesh

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of the research paper is to delineate how a rapid shift took place in traditional library services to remote access and changed the entire business model due to Worldwide COVID-19 pandemic by the academic libraries in common and particularly university libraries of Bangladesh.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The paper discusses secondary data extracted from IFLA worldwide survey on COVID-19. It also reviews the initiatives of two Library Associations - LAB and BALID of Bangladesh. Directives of UGC and DSHE have been analyzed to measure the consequences. Besides, literature has been reviewed from traditional and online Media. Websites of a2i, Bangladesh portal, and universities have been analyzed to find the new guidelines due to this pandemic. An interview session also conducted with the Librarian and concerned administrators.

Findings – By the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, 394012 institutes have been locked-down, 3.04 million teachers and librarians are in a panic about their job security and 93.09 million students have become uncertain in their educational life in Bangladesh.

Originality/Value – This paper provides a valuable insight into the new library model caused by COVID-19 in Bangladesh. On a primary investigation, it is evident that all tertiary levels of educational institutions have shifted their traditional library services to online services within one week of lock-down started from March 18, 2020. Major changes took place in the working environment, mostly based on a home office and teleworking mode. The library that has been delayed in digital content subscription, started thinking now.

Keywords – COVID-19 pandemic, Off-Campus Service, University Library, Bangladesh

Research Type – Research Paper

Introduction

Bangladesh is the Ganges delta, which empties into the Bay of Bengal with the combined waters of several river systems. The country had to tackle the disaster of the cyclone, flood, dengue and chikungunya fever, malaria, and diarrhea in an epidemic form years after years but never experienced this kind of pandemic. In any circumstances, the whole educational institution was not locked-down before except the period of the Liberation War in 1971. As a result, no nationwide alternative initiatives were taken like an “online/off-campus education system” to run the educational activities smoothly.
COVID-19 has brought the World in many uncertainties. This is also brought disaster in human civilization and affects every spare of humankind starting from the economics, culture, social behavior, and communication pattern. Its impact is such no one is free from its pandemic nature. It has no choice of affecting scrutinizing rich or poor, developed and developing nations. Everyone is trying to smooth escape from these courses or trying to cope with the prevailing situation. This paper focuses on a new dimension of educational systems, an alternative solution to off-campus services of learning resources and user education which already took place in University Libraries in Bangladesh.

**Beginning of COVID-19 Crisis worldwide**

According to the World Health Organization (2020), the pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China was first reported to the WHO on 31 December 2019. The outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020. On 11 February 2020, WHO announced a name for the new coronavirus disease: COVID-19. This is not a virus only; it also considered the greatest disaster on human civilization after the World War-II.

The journey of COVID-19 started in China and affected South Korea, Iran, Italy, Spain, the UK in a pandemic nature and caused many thousands of deaths. It stretched over Asia, Europe, North America, South America and finally the African Countries one after another. When a particular country first identified the presence of COVID-19, started to lockdown educational institutions first then one after business sector of mass public gathering except for emergency health and supplies and people were forced to be confined at the home. In such a situation, employees of corporate houses and other organizations started work from home and got popularity the concept of staying safe at home and work, remote working, teleworking, a home office, off-campus services, virtual approach to maintain social distancing to resist the contamination of this epidemic.

**The Methodology of the Study**

The paper discusses secondary data extracted from IFLA worldwide survey on COVID-19. It also reviews the initiatives of two Library Associations - LAB and BALID of Bangladesh. Directives of UGC and DSHE have been analyzed to measure the consequences. Besides, literature has been reviewed from traditional and online Media. Websites of a2i, Bangladesh portal, and universities have been analyzed to find the new guidelines due to this pandemic. An interview session also conducted with the Librarian and concerned administrators.

**Effect COVID-19 on Academic Libraries**

Due to closer of educational institutions libraries of all type “around the world is facing hard choices around which services to offer and how ranging from minimal restrictions to full closure. In many countries there are stricter measures still, with tougher limits on public gatherings, specific warnings for people at risk, and closures in the most affected regions (IFLA, 2020). In these situations, libraries are, for example:
- Fully closing spaces and only offering the possibility to borrow or return books at a counter, or via a book drop. Some countries are experimenting with drive-through pick-up and return of books. Others are only allowing visitors who have pre-booked;
- Implementing quarantine policies on returned books;
- Implementing plans to offer remote services for example e-Lending, eLearning, or support to remote teaching;
- Finalizing and testing measures for all staff to work remotely and allowing those who can to do so already (IFLA, 2020).

Where measures are strictest, libraries have either been forced to close, or have chosen to do so following consideration of the risks to users and staff. In these situations, libraries are, for example:

- Ensuring that all staff working from home unless completely necessary. Where staff are coming into work, ensuring that they can do so while respecting rules around social distancing;
- Librarians are being reassigned to other duties in other departments within their municipalities, for example, using information management skills to support health and social services;
- Providing ongoing communication with users about opportunities to use library resources or services;
- Organizing digital story-times where copyright permits;
- Promoting the use of digital libraries and other tools - including potentially investing in more content/licenses;
- Offering an amnesty on borrowed physical books, and increasing the number of eBooks users can borrow;
- Making library spaces and equipment available for other activities, such as printing personal protective equipment;
- Raising awareness of digital offers, both on the front pages of their websites, and through putting up posters in the windows of library buildings.

Bangladesh Situation

The education system of Bangladesh is consisted of a mix of heterogeneous providers. A variety of schools operate within the country; government-run schools, privately run schools, and madrasah, English medium schools (British Curriculum), schools run by NGOs, and kindergarten schools. Primary education spans grade 1-5; junior secondary grades 6-8, secondary grade 9-10, higher secondary grade 11-12, and tertiary education grades 13 and above (BANBEIS, 2020). All these educational institutions are completely closed down though some public and private institutes have been trying to conduct classes through online platforms.

COVID-19 was first identified on March 8, 2020, in Bangladesh and the Government took measures to the full closure of educational institutions from March 17, 2020, and other sectors except for emergency supplies from March 25, 2020. After March 25, 2020, the Government has extended the lockdown period several times. In a circular from the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) (2020) on 16/03/2020 to close more
than one lakh institutions from 18/03/2020. In another circular, UGC announced closer of all higher educational institutions from 18/03/2020 which is continuing till 30 May 2020 which is very uncertain to reopen after this date. During the period all physical activities have closed but off-campus activities are going on. With a circular on 25/03/2020 DSHE decided to start live class with a slogan “My Home My School” for the students of class 6 to 10 from 29/03/2020, at 09:00 am through Government TV Channel BTV (Sangsad Bangladesh Television) and the telecast of these classes was continued till 07/05/2020. UGC also issued directives on taking online classes, holding examinations, and admission tests against the backdrop of the COVID-19 situation on May 5, 2020, for the private universities. After these announcements, the Government has notified to extend the educational institution till 31 August 2020 but there is no possibility of opening until a permanent stability of the situation.

According to the UGC (2020) there are 46 public universities, 107 private universities and 3 international universities are registered in Bangladesh. According to the UGC Annual Report 2018, a total of 40,94,345 students were studying in 40 public universities and it’s affiliated 3,967 colleges; a total of 129810 teachers used to thought in these tertiary level of education; a total of 33,244 officers and support staff assisted to smooth operation of these institutions. A total of 3,61,792 students were studying in 103 private universities; 16074 teachers thought courses and 12969 officers and support staff assisted to run the academic activities smoothly. By the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, 394012 institutes have been locked-down, 3.04 million teachers and librarians are in a panic about their job security and 93.09 million students have become uncertain in their educational life in Bangladesh. These millions of students, faculty members, and officers and support staff got stumbled with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide.

Climate Change and Disaster Impacts on Educational Institutions

There are a total of 11745 institutions found in Disaster prone areas. Among them, 866 are Junior school including attached primary, 6150 Secondary Schools, 323 School & College, 994 College, and 3412 Madrasahs. 609 institutions are located in surge areas, 2132 in the cyclone, 2830 Institutions located in flood-affected areas, 741 in water logging, 83 in salinity, 465 in Riverbank erosion, 466 in Drought/ Barind tracts, 349 in Earthquake, 67 in Landslide from Hill and 4003 in other disaster-prone areas. Survey data reported that only 347(3%) managed by the government are located in different types of disaster prone areas. Many hazard/losses found due to Climate change and disaster. Survey 2016 data found that about 21% of institutions did not able to recover loss on building, 20% loss on furniture, 19% loss on door/windows, 6% loss on roof, 8% loss on water supply system, 12% loss on sanitation facilities, 11% connecting road, and 2% other losses was not able to recover after the last disaster (BANBEIS, 2020).

Prompt initiative to tackle the situation

In Bangladesh, private sector education is costly as well as stable than the public/government sector. There is hardly session jams in the private sector whereas public/government educational institutions had to face different obstacles. As a result, COVID-19 created much pressure on finishing the running semester as well as starting the new semester. Another reason private institution totally depends on the student’s tuition
fee to maintain its expenditures. Though classes were closed, staff salary, house rent, payment of interest, and installment of the loan were to continue in a pandemic situation. Moreover, students who have lost their only earning person in the COVID-19 pandemic were also in humanitarian consideration to wave full tuition fees of the semester.

According to the Private University Act 2010, no university is permitted to launch online courses to offer a particular degree or diploma. For the case of public universities 34 virtual classrooms has been set up in 33 public universities (UGC annual report 18). On a directive from the UGC and Ministry of Education all the private universities were to complete their ongoing semester using ICT and all the possible electronic and virtual Media. All the academic and administrative activities were to maintain from a home office and started thinking to adjusted their processes of business models from physical to remote access, as well as how to provide new capacities to re-envision the future.

Different media to host online classes

The following are the Medias through which the traditional classroom model shifted to an online learning platform using edX (a massive open online course (MOOC) provider created by Harvard and MIT) and popular IT-based organizations:

1. CMOS (Course Management and Operations Systems)
2. Google Classroom
3. TalentLMS
4. iTunes U
5. Thinkific
6. Schoology
7. Zoom Classroom
8. Google Meet

Public Universities

Ahmed (2020) conducted a research for the “Daily Prothom-Alø” a popular newspaper in Bangladesh which revealed that Jahangirnagar University has started online classes from 12 July. An assistant professor in the university's Department of Journalism and Media Studies said he was taking classes online using the Zoom app. He said, in class for the first year, 22 out of 40 students took part in the class. Of these, 10 students in this class did not have the device for joining classes online. Only 32 out of 44 students were taking the classes in the third year while 20 out of 28 students were present at the post-graduation classes. The students use mobile phones or laptops to join online classes. Other findings of the study were:

1. About half of the students in different departments were not participating in online classes;
2. At least 10 universities were taking classes online using the Zoom app;
3. Apart from the issue of device and internet cost, many students in remote areas were also having problems with internet connection;
4. Students cannot afford devices to take part in online classes and the internet was not easily available for the students.

Services

While physical buildings were closed, Libraries staffs remain available to help students and faculty access online resources and support 24/7.

Changes to Operations

For the health and safety of all employees, all Libraries staff were working remotely, and physical collections were unavailable to scan or pick-up at this time. Librarians were to help navigate alternate solutions. A great change has been taken place in circulation policy during the closure. For example:

- **Returning items:** all book returns were closed requested keep all items until reopening;
- **Fines:** Overdue fines accrued between March 6, 2020, and the day the Libraries re-open will be canceled;
- **Due dates:** was extended when possible while services are limited;
- **Renew books online:** Libraries Remote Resources and Service for instructions on how to renew online;
- **Requesting physical items:** at this time, and until further notice, will not have access to any of the physical collection, including journals, books, and media, and will not be able to fulfill requests for these materials;
- **Interlibrary Loan services:** Interlibrary Loan continues to fill requests for articles and book chapters. Any requests that cannot be filled with electronic resources will be requested from other libraries. Requests may take longer than normal. Some requests may be canceled if another library is unable to fulfill the request.

Research condition

There was no significant progress in research. Enrollment into Ph.D. and M.Phil program was stopped which are still continuing. Faculty members who were home quarantined did not able to publish a sufficient number of research papers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Few faculty members were asked for resources available through online and remote access facilities were not possible due to technical constraint.

Conclusion

After 66 days of complete lockdown of Government offices, the Government is trying to tackle the situation by opening offices one by one. Educational institutions of all types are still closed and there is no decision when it will resume. Few officers have been trying to open library offices voluntarily though there were health risks but to keep all the resources safe and damage from humidity, dust, and insects. The uncertainty that posed on educational institutions, no one knows when it will normal again. But it can be said that the
alternative service model already took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, will be acute in the days coming.

References:


