Status of Non-Government Secondary School Libraries in Bangladesh:
A Survey

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Abstract
The focus of this survey is to investigate the status of secondary school libraries in Bangladesh. From the online survey, 91 responses were received. In general, the survey revealed that a significant number of secondary schools have a school library but lack of reading materials and inadequate funding are common. Most of the school libraries provide traditional services such as book lending, in-house book and newspaper reading and only a few have ICT facilities and services, for example, computer, internet and online catalogue search. The finding of this survey has original value and suggestions may help to resolve issues that may adversely impact school library development in Bangladesh.

Introduction
The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) aims to provide quality education to all children by 2030. In an effort to improve the quality of education, including secondary schools there are many education campaigns in the country. A World Bank (2018) statement is noted that Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in improving access to education and is among a few developing countries to achieve gender parity in school enrolment.

Since its political independence in 1971, Bangladesh established a number of diverse libraries. Hossain (2018) stated that to emphasize the importance of books, reading, libraries and librarians in everyday lives, Bangladesh celebrates February 5th as 'National Library Day' and from 2018 compulsory library lesson was included in the secondary school curriculum. The GOB stated their motive in the "Library: aims and objective" chapter of the Bangladesh National Education Policy 2010 (cited in Alam, 2012) that students would be availed access to global knowledge through the classroom and school library with the existing ICT facilities.

However, it this still not happening in secondary schools in Bangladesh and the overall attainment of 21st century goals for a well-functioning school library and information system is not encouraging (Imon, 2017 & Rahman, 2016). Despite many initiatives taken in improving the quality of secondary education in Bangladesh, no serious steps have been taken by the GOB and Non-Government Organizations (NGO) to address the problem of extreme shortage of reading materials and absence of facilities designed specifically for libraries in primary and secondary schools. In many schools, where there are libraries, services are not robust and a lack of updated resources is a common challenge which adversely affect

school libraries to achieve their educational potential (Rahman, 2016) and, in turn, for librarians to deliver better services. Hossain (2018) further claimed that generally school libraries are not embedded in the teaching and learning system, but where they exist, they are usually used as spaces to hold students during free periods (Rahman, 2016).

In Bangladesh, access to resources is a significant challenge, with no formal library system in schools and citizens have mixed perceptions regarding the role of libraries, particularly school libraries (Hossain, 2018). Most children in Bangladesh have access only to textbooks at school; additional materials like storybooks and educational games are rare (Katz, 2016). As per the nationwide Bangladesh Literacy Survey 2010 (2011), only 3.54 percent of student respondents reported reading stories and novels of which 2.55 percent do so several times in a month and 2.53 percent daily. Only 3.04 percent of respondents visited local libraries several times in the last three months. Visits to other places such as bookstalls, newsstands and village education community centres were as low as 10.58, 1.72 and 0.78 percent respectively.

Generally, the school library is considered the last item on the school priority list and there is no regular subvention for libraries in the country's annual budget (Hossain, 2019a). Although librarianship is not a new concept to Bangladeshis according to Hossain (2018), the overall development of school libraries and creating qualified school library professionals have been slow due to a lack of governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Islam and Chowdhury (2006), and Hossain (2018 & 2019a) claimed that the importance of school libraries and qualified school librarians have been, for the longest time, overlooked by policy-makers in Bangladesh hence there are no standard rules for educational institutions to ensure the existence of a library in every school.

Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015) stress the significance of a legislated school library policy in spearheading the establishment and sustainability of standardised and well-stocked functional libraries in schools countrywide. Without a legislated school library policy to roll out an active, dynamic and sustainable school library service for all schools, continuity in inequality and huge disparities in resource provisioning in schools will not come to an abrupt end (Mojapelo, 2015). This study, based on the literature review, observation and researcher's experience with libraries in Bangladesh, sought to investigate the status and challenges of secondary school libraries in Bangladesh and how such challenges can be overcome to improve the quality of secondary education in Bangladesh.

Purpose of the Survey
The primary purpose of this survey is to investigate the status of secondary school libraries in Bangladesh with a particular focus on library collection, usage, services and facilities at rural non-government secondary school libraries. It further examines the challenges of secondary school libraries and how to overcome them to provide quality service in secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Methodology
An exploratory mixed method approach was undertaken in this study. The data reported here derive from an ongoing study conducted by the author namely "Status of Secondary School Libraries and Librarians in Bangladesh: Opportunities and Challenges". In the quantitative phase of the study, a questionnaire was developed based on the outcomes of the qualitative phase that focused on literature review and professional interviews with professional school librarians. The online survey consisted of five sections, which are professional status, library facilities and services, workplace challenges, and opportunities for professional development with a few demographic questions. The survey then shared with the target population, school librarians in English and Bengali, on the School Library Association of Bangladesh (SLABD) Facebook group. The responses were automatically recorded and tabulated on Google Forms

and MS Office suite. Some respondents omitted to answer all of the questions, and the missing responses reflected in the varying sample size (*n*) values. For this paper, the authors mainly applied the data from the 'library collection and services' section.

Literature Review

The role of libraries in their many forms, around the globe, share a common purpose: to enhance learning and promote a literate society. School libraries are said to be the second class for pupils because of the important role they play in enhancing the quality of education (Mubofu & Malekani, 2019). There is a significant correlation between well-resourced school libraries staffed with professional school librarians and students' academic success (Gretes, 2013; Scholastic, 2016). Research (Krashen, 2004) also claims that access to reading materials is a critical factor in developing enthusiastic and skilled readers and there is a direct link between reading levels and learning results. Hence, school libraries are an almost necessary and complementary element to any robust education system.

School libraries are important for every long-term strategy to improve the quality of education in terms of literacy education, information provision, and economic, social and cultural advancement. Human capital development starts on the first day a child arrives at kindergarten and, according to global data, a 10% increase in the number of students who are able to read results in a 0.3% rise in a country's gross domestic product (Hossain, 2019b). This means the government through national, regional and local authorities must initiate various campaigns of building school libraries and equip them with well-trained library staff and materials (Mubofu & Malekani, 2019). Yang (2011) stated that school libraries, teachers and teaching facilities as well as equipment are the three backbones for quality education in any country. Hence, the quality of school education is closely related with the libraries as they hold a more serious position and importance in every school.

The central function of a school library is to provide physical and intellectual access to information, knowledge and ideas (Hossain, 2018). Yang (2011) further stated that school libraries are the extension of classrooms for many pupils as school librarians are there to help them to improve and expand pupils' knowledge by providing rich information resources, and by creating a reasonably quiet, well-designed, aesthetic environment with a civilized reading atmosphere. Librarians help students hone their reading and research skills, particularly in information evaluation such as in determining the credibility of a source. Because of their role in the school library, librarians work with everyone within the building, creating connections like no one else can between students.

According to the American Association of School Libraries (AASL) (2013), school librarians collaborate with others to provide instruction, learning strategies, and practice in using the essential learning skills needed in the 21st century. Research also suggests that the presence of school librarians has a long-term, cumulative effect. In the Pennsylvania study, Lance and Hofschire (2012) claimed that if schools had full-time librarians, reading scores would constantly be better for all grade levels of students. They found that the proportional difference in advanced reading scores grew from elementary to middle to high school.

From the literature, it is evident that literacy activities directed at children rely on a strong relationship between libraries and schools (Hossain, 2016). Williams et al. (2002) pointed out that if the school library operates a system allowing student access on a need-to basis, quality in a variety of resources, including ICT provision, can be significant factors in student learning. Hossain (2019a) related that the importance of school libraries is not overstated as cruxes of knowledge for young minds especially to inculcate sustainable reading habits and digital citizenship because the purpose of today's school libraries is not only to maintain the traditional roles of promoting reading and providing access to a collection of books

and other resources but also as stated by Tait et al. (2019) to facilitate information and digital literacy, and developing critical evaluation of information. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school libraries to provide ICT facilities for the students, so that the students will not be left behind regarding technological advancement (Ismail et al., 2018), and again, to reduce the gaps in the digital divide.

Findings
The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

From the online survey, 91 (n=91) responses representing 37 out of 64 districts (provinces) in Bangladesh were collected. Most of the respondents were male (88.4%) and working in the rural non-government secondary school libraries.

Table 1. Frequency distribution by gender (n=91).

Gender	No.	%
Male	80	88
Female	11	12
Total (n)	91	100

Library Services and Facilities
Regarding the common services and facilities provided by the secondary school libraries, most of the respondents' libraries have a reading room and a few of them have internet and printing services presented in Figure 1. It seems that most of the libraries have traditional reading room facilities but there are no arrangements for internet access that might hamper students' quest for learning and research online.

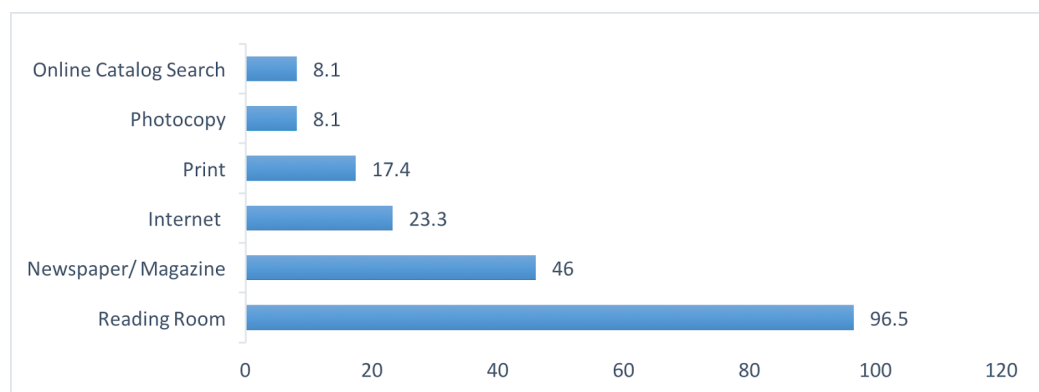**Figure 1:** School library services and facilities (n=86)

Figure 2: School library collection (non-textbooks) (n=87)

Most of the respondent libraries have between 1,000 to 2,000 books in their collection. Besides books, a number of school libraries (43.4%) subscribed to or received complimentary newspapers and periodicals

to add value in their collections and to attract more patrons. However, to minimize the collection gaps, no school library recognized itself connected with local public or private libraries.
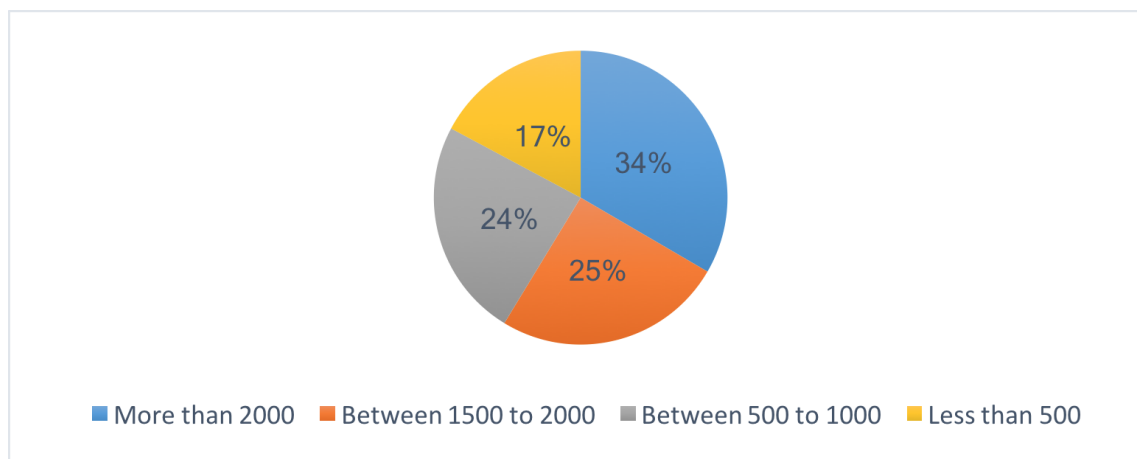

Figure 3: Number of library users per day (n=87)

A number of participant libraries have more than 100 users per day, which is a positive notion of a functioning school library. Further data analysis revealed that the number of library visitors were mixed proportion and it does not depend on the number of students in a particular school or the collection of the library but probably correlated to the function of a particular library and the proactive attitudes of the school librarian.
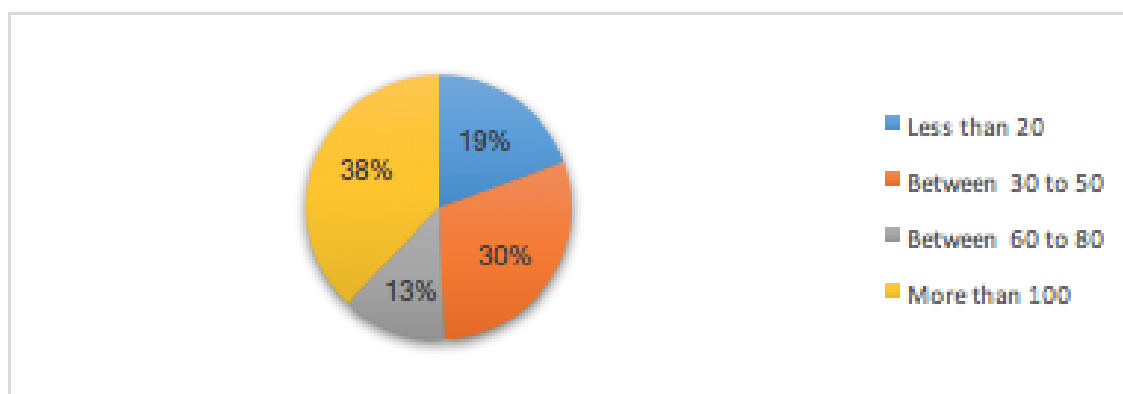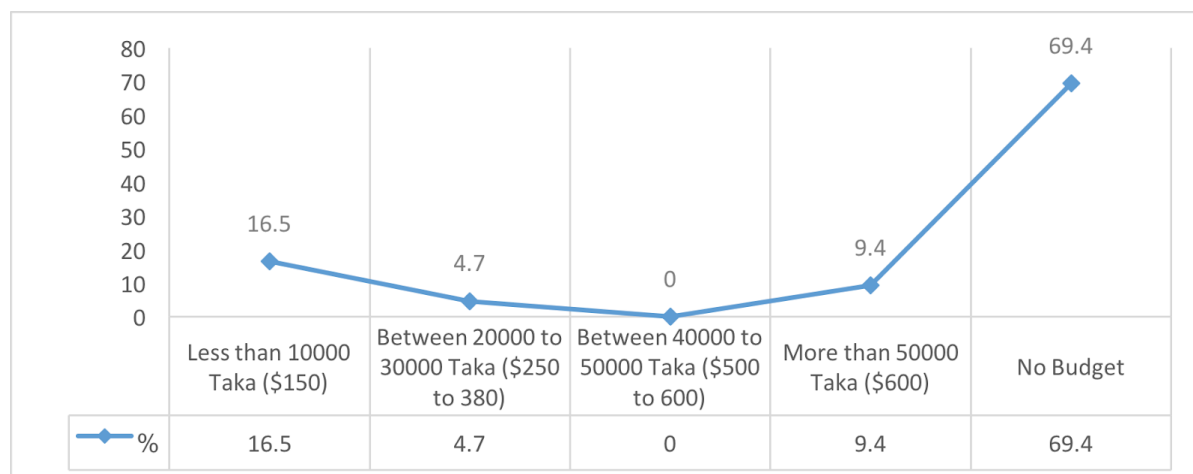

Figure 4: Annual budget for school libraries (n=85)

From Figure 4, it is clear that among all, the most vulnerable situation of secondary school libraries in Bangladesh is budget allocation. There is no national or provincial fund for school libraries (Hossain, 2019a) therefore, many (69.4%) of them suffer from financial difficulty and in turn affect the functions and services of the concerned libraries and librarians.

	Less than 10000 Taka ($150)	Between 20000 to 30000 Taka ($250 to 380)	Between 40000 to 50000 Taka ($500 to 600)	More than 50000 Taka ($600)	No Budget
%	16.5	4.7	0	9.4	69.4

Discussion

Most of the secondary school libraries in Bangladesh regardless of their type are facing budgetary problems besides poor collection and accommodation, inadequate ICT infrastructure and a lack of 21st century services. This is in line with Lawal-Solarin (2016) study findings, which distinguished that in spite of the role played by school libraries in promoting the quality of education, there is gross neglect of them in many developing countries due to some vivid challenges that school libraries experience such as inadequate finance allocated for the library to run properly. Most of the secondary schools in Bangladesh do not have proper library buildings that are purposefully designed for libraries. An AASL (2013) study revealed that school library services help to stimulate children's reading by supporting their literacy and developing their information skills. Further, when comparing schools with and without librarians, the AASL study claimed that the presence of a qualified school librarian can make a difference in the reading achievement of students in primary and secondary schools.

With the country moving towards a digital future, it is essential that school libraries also evolve in Bangladesh. According to Hossain (2019b), one of the significant returns on investment of having functioning school libraries and qualified school librarians in Bangladesh would be lifelong reading promotion and sustainable textbook management. It has been reported that in 2019, the Bangladesh government provided over 350 million copies of textbooks to over 40 million students from pre-primary to 10th grade. If Bangladesh can ensure robust school libraries and pro-active school librarianship in primary and secondary schools, then 80% to 90% of those distributed books can be reused for at least three to five years (Hossain, 2019b) which it will cut off textbook printing cost, and obviously, reduce environmental damage to produce paper.

In Bangladesh, the government is working towards lifelong reading promotion with its national and international donors and Hossain (2019b) suggested that the government should focus on and secure adequate high-quality library facilities that work in harmony with the education system in order for a nationwide lifelong reading promotion. School libraries should be considered as an actor in the education system as Morrow and Torres (2002) in their functionalist theory stresses that "societies function like biological systems in that they have differentiated parts that function together to ensure the smooth operation and survival of the organism as a whole" (p.20). In Bangladesh, to function our educational biological system we not only have to nurture our school library system but also to ensure a functioning school library in every school run by a qualified library professional.

Recommendations

Form a National Plan for School Library Development

In Bangladesh, it is important to launch a national campaign for the promotion and advocacy of the use of school libraries for developing self-study and reading culture among the young ones at all the levels. The government through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs should bring together educationists both local and global, and other experts in the field of library science to work on how standard school libraries can contribute to quality education in the country. This will also help to assess the extent to which government officials are aware of the contribution of school libraries towards quality education. A legislated school library policy is crucial for a country to roll out effective school library and information services (Mojapelo, 2015). Hossain (2019a) proposed a comprehensive national plan for school library development in Bangladesh and urged that school libraries be made a statutory requirement.

Allocate Budget for School Libraries

Funding is crucial to the development of libraries and their services; it is the sine qua non of performance improvement too. The lack of a national policy and funding for school libraries has a negative impact on the establishment of school libraries. This study found that the majority (69.4%) of school libraries in Bangladesh do not have any budget. The lack of funding also affected the library collection that confirms the stock in all these school libraries are mostly old, unappealing and not perceived as relevant to the children the libraries are trying to serve. Therefore, the GOB needs to allocate financial support for the development of the school library sector. Combined efforts are encouraged to be made by the appropriate supervisory bodies to monitor the effective utilization of funds allocated to school libraries.

Building Partnerships with Multiple Dimensions

With the governmental bodies, NGOs of the country have an important role in developing libraries as part of the 'Corporate Social Responsibility' and the GOB should encourage this partnership by offering tax exemption to patronizing organizations. Public libraries and school cooperation are at the heart of the "Want to Read" programme (Hossain, 2016). Schools that do not have libraries or lack reading materials can be taken on excursions to public libraries or libraries in other schools to introduce the library and its resources.

The Library Association of Bangladesh (LAB), Bangladesh Association of Librarians, Information Scientists and Documentalists (BALID), School Library Association of Bangladesh (SLABD) and other professional bodies should work hand in hand to promote the importance of school libraries and libraries in general. LIS faculties and practitioners should work hand-in-hand to convince policymakers and other donor agencies for funding in school libraries. Radio, television and online media could also do more to promote reading and libraries, for example by broadcasting books on air or featuring school library programs. Better collaboration between these various bodies would also help to close the gaps between urban and rural areas and between different districts.

Conclusion

Although school libraries are important resource centres that support curriculum delivery and important pedagogical matters, it is alarming that, in Bangladesh, only a minority of schools have well-stocked functional school libraries and qualified librarians. It can be inferred that in Bangladesh, the policymakers and school management do not recognize school libraries in most cases and they usually do not see their contribution towards quality education. This study explored the general environment of secondary school libraries particularly in rural areas and found that they are not on par with providing necessary services required by the latest national education policy.

Based on this study's findings and from the author's experience several recommendations were proposed for improving the school library sector through building competencies in Bangladeshi secondary school library professionals. Since this study is mainly based on a limited number of survey participants and secondary sources, there is a strong need to undertake more a robust investigation. It is suggested, future studies should cover the broader population including students, teachers and administrators. It is also encouraged that future scholarships go beyond questionnaires, and use interview and observation methods for an in-depth look at the impact of functioning school libraries and the return on investment of the school libraries having a qualified librarian. More research, discussion and strategies need to be adopted for building a functioning school library system in Bangladesh because to function our educational biological system we have to nurture our school library system and need to ensure a functioning school library in every school run by a qualified library professional.

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