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Delivering E-governance services in Bangladesh through Libraries and Information Centers: Realities, Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

Bangladesh is trying to achieve Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041 to put the country on a new, sustainable path of growth while also serving as a role model for other developing nations. With that goal in mind, the government is trying to introduce e-governance services in every government sector. This study looks into user perspectives, obstacles, and suggestions for offering e-governance services through libraries and information centers. A proposed e-governance service delivery model for public libraries is also presented in this paper.

Keywords: E- governance, Library and Information Center, E- governance promotion, Bangladesh

Introduction

The term "e-governance" refers to electronic governance. It denotes a government that uses ICT to enhance its interaction with both its citizens and the outside world (defined by the UN). Because it can serve the needs of accountability, operational efficiency, transparency, and the promotion of political involvement in every nation, it is now a buzzword among those who value democracy. Since it allows the public to learn about the projects the government is working on and the laws that are passed, e-governance may increase government transparency in developing nations. E-governance will replace the existing paper-based approach which is its main advantage. There will be significant time, financial, and environmental benefits as a result of using less paper. Another benefit of e-governance is the significantly enhanced information flow from people to government, government to citizens, and within the government itself. E-governance makes important strides in updating administrative procedures for the information era. The use of e-governance can improve communication between the public and commercial sectors.

Libraries are valuable institutions that support their communities' educational, economic, and social needs. By providing people with access to electronic information in a variety of ways, including public internet access, access to their databases, and reference services that use both electronic and paper resources, libraries play a significant role in the information industry. The Bangladeshi government has approved "Vision 2041" following "Vision 2021" to promote the nation's aspirations for growth. The Smart Bangladesh Vision 2041 strives to be inclusive and concentrate on the people of Bangladesh in addition to developing a futuristic, developed country. To eliminate the digital gap, sustainable digital solutions must be created and scaled so that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, and every organization, regardless of size, may benefit from them. A library and information center may be very helpful in implementing or guaranteeing the success of e-governance. Free internet access in libraries and information

centers can promote e-participation and the use of e-services, bridging the digital divide and enhancing society's digital readiness for the transition to e-governance.

Literature Review

Public libraries have long been the only or major means of gaining access to e-government services, education, and support in many nations throughout the world (Bertot, McClure, and Jaeger 2008). By the time the federal government started putting a great deal of attention into e-government in the late 1990s, public libraries had already developed the Internet infrastructure to act as the primary access point for e-government operations, communication, and information (Jaeger and Bertot 2011). The first well-known politician to promote the establishment of libraries as a means of providing the populace with access to governmental and educational resources was Benjamin Franklin, who personally founded multiple libraries (Gray 1993; Harris 1976). There are several significant advantages to using the public library as a point of entry for governmental information. Access to information is seen as the core responsibility of libraries. For those who work during such hours, libraries are usually open considerably later than government offices. In 2010, 89.7% of public libraries in the USA helped patrons find their way around government websites, 80.7% helped them seek e-governance services, and 67.8% helped them fill out e-government forms (Bertot, Sigler, DeCoster, et al., 2011). Jaeger and Bertot (2011) found that the great majority of public libraries (78.7%) directly assist customers who are signing up for or utilizing e-government services in their 2011 research of a nationwide survey from 2009 that got responses from 7,393 public libraries.

A client frequently receives a referral to the library from the government entity they want to contact. For instance, the "Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants" booklet by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services recommends public libraries as a source for assistance and Internet access during the immigration process (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2007). Users are advised to visit the Tennessee Electronic Library for information on vocations, health, and small companies, as well as the real locations of the Tennessee State Library and Archives system for assistance with computer classes and job searches, according to the state of Tennessee's website. Occasionally, government agencies specifically urge individuals to direct their inquiries to the library (Tennessee Government, 2011).

In all professions, change is a constant. By fostering information literacy among users, the librarian's job is changing substantially in this technological era. Perera (2011) looked at the reasons for the change and the skills Sri Lankan librarians need to have to fulfill their current duties in the era of e-governance. Using networks and free internet databases, librarians may help their patrons locate relevant academic resources.

According to Majumdar (2005), participation in the e-governance process is gaining ground, and Indian libraries, especially government libraries, have been preparing themselves for the new tasks being taken up by other sectors of society. He proposed machine-readable catalogs, machine-readable full-text documents, and the standardization of such advancements by adopting international standards as a means of effectively implementing e-governance in public libraries.

The importance of government and library collaboration in e-governance efforts needs not highlighting. Even though the majority of African countries are still in the early phases of e-

government development, several government organizations throughout the continent provide some kind of e-governance through their official websites. Libraries should not be seen by governments as supplemental packages in an e-governance partnership, according to Mutula (2005). To create content and provide information services to the general public, libraries need to work with the government since they have competent information professionals and an increasing number of ICT-savvy personnel. Two of the most notable instances of library connections with e-governance are FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and disaster assistance. Public libraries acted as a hub for people asking for aid and safety following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, rather than any other governmental organization (Red Cross, 2010). Librarians helped the relief workers by preparing food, delivering supplies; working with insurance companies, interpreting, and disseminating information. Libraries served as emergency operations centers (Jaeger, Langa, McClure, & Bertot, 2007).

The association between public libraries and e-governance has been extensively studied with regard to the services, training, education, and other crucial areas that have changed the responsibilities of libraries in communities. Although the implementation, outcomes, and growth of e-governance in Bangladesh have been extensively studied over the years, the role of libraries and information centers in this process has been disregarded. This can be seen as a result of Bangladesh's inability to create an efficient e-governance infrastructure. The United Nations E-Government Survey 2022 identified Denmark, Finland, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Sweden, Iceland, and Australia as the top emerging countries for e-government in its evaluation of the condition of e-governance in 193 Member States. As they shift from the medium to the high EGDI (E-Government Development Index) category in 2022, Rwanda, Nepal, and Zambia join Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Cambodia (who had made the identical step in 2020) as the leaders in e-governance development among the least developed countries. Bangladesh was ranked 111 with an EGDI score of 0.5630, which was higher than the score of 0.5189 in 2020 (United Nations, 2022).

Over time, there has been a significant increase in the creation of government information, and the development of e-governance has made online government information, communication, and services essential for both interacting with governments and participating in society. Libraries are now one of the few free public Internet connection locations in most cities since the sources of free public access to government information and e-governance have shrunk over time. As a consequence, libraries act as a social guarantee for access and support to e-governance services and information. People mostly look for access to e-governance information to complete crucial personal requirements, such as applying for unemployment benefits, registering to vote, renewing their licenses, paying taxes, enrolling their children in school, or applying for immigration. Accessibility for all citizens is the main goal of developing e-governance. To close that gap, libraries and informational institutions can step forward. There is still room to investigate how libraries and information centers might support e-governance, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. The developed countries have already successfully integrated their libraries with e-governance delivery. There is a gap that has to be investigated between how they have accomplished this and why the developing world is lagging behind. This is the first attempt to examine how e-governance services are delivered in Bangladesh using libraries and information centers. While providing Internet access to those without other means of access is similar to the role that libraries play in providing access to print materials, the development of libraries and information centers into hubs for Internet and e-governance access has significant implications for the roles that libraries are expected to play in their communities.

Methodology

The research employed a quantitative method to explore how e-governance services are perceived, used, and challenged when they are implemented in libraries and information centers.

A sampling of the study

To assemble precise and reliable information on how libraries are promoting e-governance, three different categories of libraries—public, academic, and special—were selected. In developed countries, e-governance delivery is primarily restricted to public libraries, according to the authors' analysis of the literature. As Bangladesh additionally contains a large number of academic and specialized libraries, the authors therefore attempted to gather information from such libraries as well, in an effort to determine which library an e-governance infrastructure model will be most ideal for. The authors collected data from 29 libraries, of which 16 were public, 6 were academic, and 7 were special libraries. Data from students and professionals who are proficient with technology, such as faculty members, were collected from the academic libraries of renowned public and private universities in Bangladesh. Specialized libraries such as administrative libraries, research organization libraries, corporate libraries, and museum libraries were selected for acquiring information from a varied variety of individuals. Since public libraries have the highest number of amateur users, government and non-government public libraries from various cities and towns were selected while taking into consideration the demographic diversity.

Table 1: Sampling of the survey participants

Sl. No.	Sampling of the participants		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Total Number	
1.	Library Users	Male- 756	Public	279	36.90%	830
			Academic	222	29.36%	
			Special	255	33.73%	
	Female- 74	Public	31	41.89%		
		Academic	17	22.97%		
		Special	26	35.13%		
2.	Library Professionals	Male- 74	Public	34	45.94%	107
			Academic	19	25.67%	
			Special	21	28.37%	
	Female- 33	Public	13	39.39%		
		Academic	9	27.27%		
		Special	11	33.33%		
Total					937	

Instrument Design

To accumulate information from the respondents, a structured questionnaire that included both open-ended and closed-ended questions was created using Google Forms. Before beginning

the first survey, the questionnaire underwent a pilot test. All of the questions were self-developed by the investigators. Different questionnaires were created for both library professionals and users. Library users were questioned about their opinions about the role of the library in e-governance after providing demographic information. The presence, effect, and, in the event of an absence, the reason for the absence, of an e-governance services collection were also evaluated using the questionnaire. The library professionals were questioned about the e-governance services they provided in their libraries, how users felt about using these, and any challenges they faced while implementing the services.

Data Collection and analysis

From the final week of November 2022 to the last week of February 2023, the whole data-collecting procedure took place. By collecting responses from both online and offline questionnaires, a total of 937 responses were obtained. 637 of them responded after the link to the survey was shared on the participants' various social media accounts. The participants also received 300 printed questionnaires in addition to the online survey. MS Excel and MS Word were used to analyze the collected data. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were used.

Findings of the study

The frequency of participants' visits to the library for e-governance services was questioned. 68.67% (N=171) of those who visit public libraries reported doing so most often. (Figure 1). The majority of college students (48.14%, N=91) tended to often visit the library. (Figure 2). However, patrons of specialized libraries, such as those for corporations, legal firms, hospitals, museums, and news organizations, reported using them rarely (56%, N=98) (Figure 3).

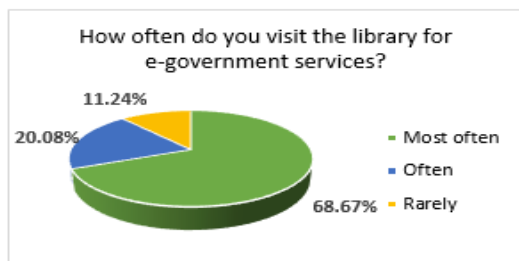


Figure 1: Public Library

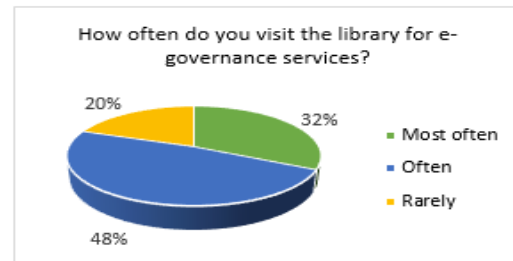


Figure 2: Academic Library

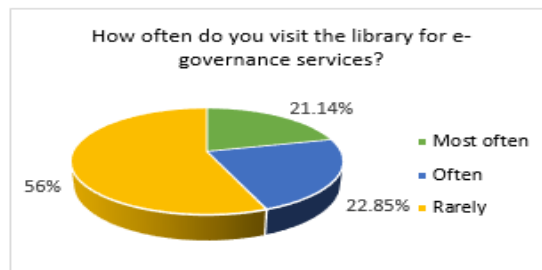


Figure 3: Special Library

The perception of users of a library's contribution to e-governance was evaluated. In each instance, the vast majority of users concurred that libraries can contribute to e-governance. Just 19.67% (N=61) of public library users (N=249) disagreed that libraries may assist in the delivery of e-governance services. The majority, 80.32% (N=249), agreed. Regarding a

library's function in providing e-governance, 79.07% (N=189) of participants at academic libraries agreed, while 20.92% (N=50) disagreed. Regarding a library's function in offering e-governance services, 62.27% (N=175) users at the special libraries concurred, while 37.72% (N=106) users disagreed. Government public library professionals (80.85%, N=38) responded affirmatively to the question of whether their libraries offered e-governance services, whilst non-government professionals (19.14%, N=9) responded negatively. Private university libraries (25%, N=7) did not offer e-government services, compared to public university libraries (75%, N=21). Moreover, the vast majority of specialists in special libraries (93.75%, N=30) claimed they did not offer e-government services, while just a few (6.2%, N=2) did (Table 2).

Table 2: Library users' and professionals' opinion on whether a library can help provide e-governance services and whether their libraries do so

Sl. No.	Do you think a library can help provide e-governance services?		Frequency	Percentage	Total Number	
1.	Library Users	Public- 310	Yes	249	80.32%	830
			No	61	19.67%	
	Academic- 239	Yes	189	79.07%		
		No	50	20.92%		
	Special- 281	Yes	175	62.27%		
		No	106	37.72%		
Does your library provide e-governance services?						
2.	Library Professionals	Public- 47	Yes (Government)	38	80.85%	107
			No (Non-government)	9	19.14%	
	Academic- 28	Yes (Public)	21	75.00%		
		No (Private)	7	25.00%		
	Special- 32	Yes	2	06.25%		
		No	30	93.75%		

The authors questioned the participants on the availability of e-governance services at their local libraries. The majority of patrons in each library—public library: 52.61% (N=131), academic library: 64.02% (N=121), and special library: 80.57% (N=141)—said there weren't enough e-governance services available. If the participants additionally acknowledged the services, the quality would be below par [public library = 19.27% (N=48), academic library = 18.51% (N=35), special library = 17.14% (N=30)]. (Figure 4).

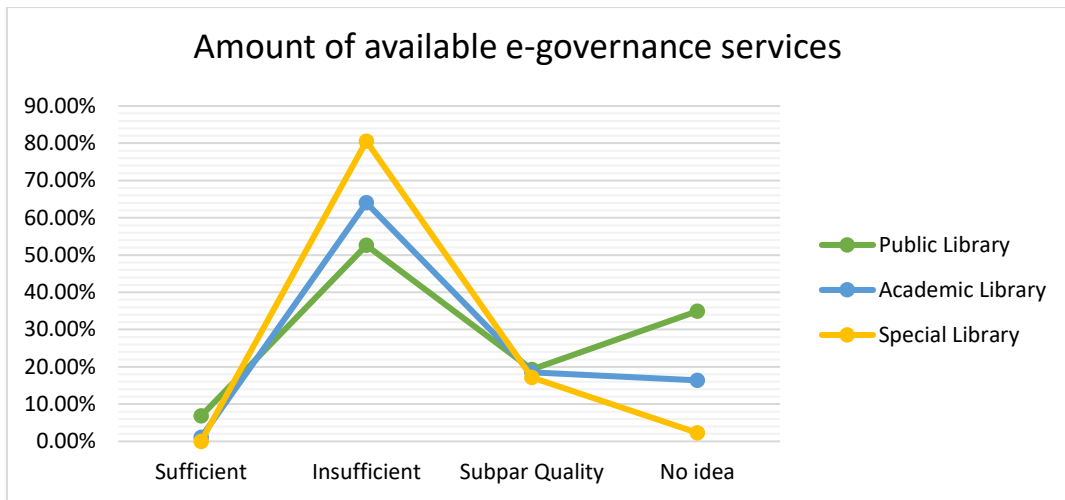


Figure 4: Users' opinion on the number of available e-governance services in the library

It was also assessed how interested users were in using the services. While 7.89% of patrons at the public library showed no interest at all, 47.36% of them were interested in the services. Users from academic libraries expressed a strong interest in using the services in 66.66% of cases. 50% of those surveyed indicated interest in the specialized libraries. Most public library users (67.21%) and academic library users (63.46%) who were asked why they did not use the available e-governance tools answered that they were unaware of the services. Nonetheless, most patrons of special libraries acknowledged that they did not utilize the services on purpose because they were not part of their library' purview (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Users' level of interest in using e-governance services and the reasons for those not using these services

Sl. No.	What is the level of interest of your users using e-governance services?	Frequency	Percentage	Total Number	
1.	Public- 38	Very interested	17	44.73%	61
		Interested	18	47.36%	
		Not interested at all	3	07.89%	
	Academic- 21	Very interested	14	66.66%	
		Interested	4	19.04%	
		Not interested at all	3	14.28%	
	Special- 2	Very interested	1	50.00%	
		Interested	1	50.00%	
		Not interested at all	0	00.00%	

If you are not using resources, indicate the reasons for not using resources:

Public- 61	I don't find interest	10	16.39%
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			It is not useful	10	16.39%	
			I don't know about it	41	67.21%	
2.	Library	Academic- 52	I don't find interest	11	21.15%	
	Users		It is not useful	8	15.38%	217
			I don't know about it	33	63.46%	
		Special- 104	I don't find interest	13	12.50%	
			It is not useful	0	00.00%	
			I don't know about it	0	00.00%	
			Others- It is not related to objective of special library	91	87.50%	

The authors questioned library staff members about why their institutions did not maintain any e-governance systems. Professionals at public libraries said that 66.66% (N=6) of institutions lacked cooperation and 33.33% (N=3) of users were not sufficiently engaged in these services. According to 28.57% (N=2) respondents, there is not enough user interest in academic libraries, and 71.42% (N=5) respondents report that there is not enough institutional collaboration. All of the responders from the special libraries (N=30, 100%) claimed that their patrons were not sufficiently engaged in e-governance services (**Figure 5**).

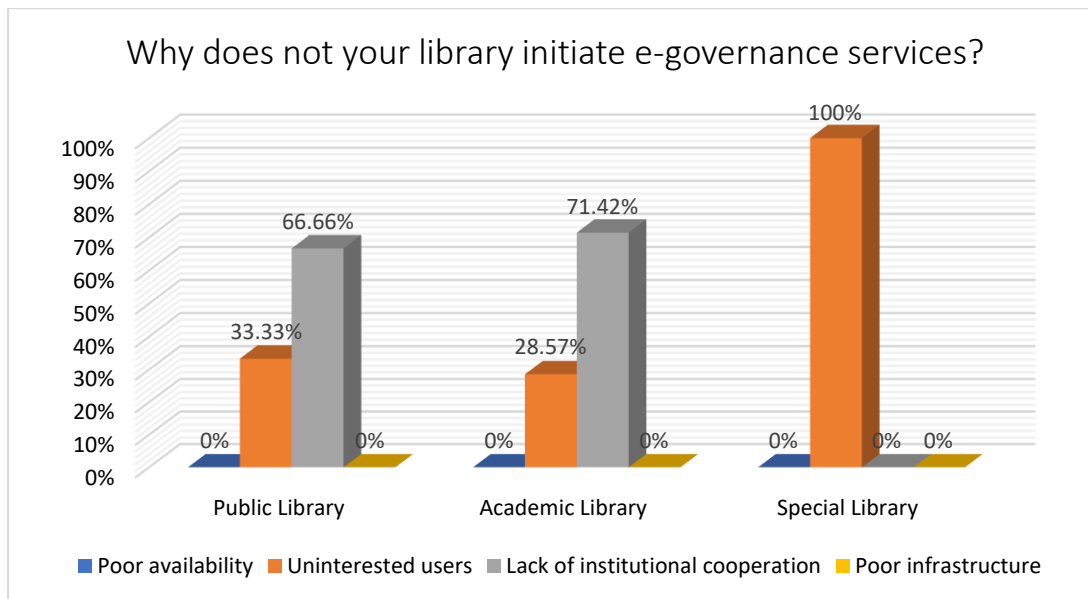


Figure 5: Reasons libraries do not initiate e-governance services

The authors questioned library professionals about any challenges they encountered while creating a collection focused on e-governance. Public library professionals said that there was a lack of institutional policy (61.70%; N=29) and that there were insufficient resources (38.29%; N=18). A lack of institutional policies was mentioned by 75% (N=21) academic library workers, whereas a lack of relevant resources was mentioned by 25% (N=7). Regarding special libraries, 68.75% (N=22) said that there was a lack of institutional policy, while 31.25% (N=10) claimed that there were no accessible resources. (**Figure 6**).

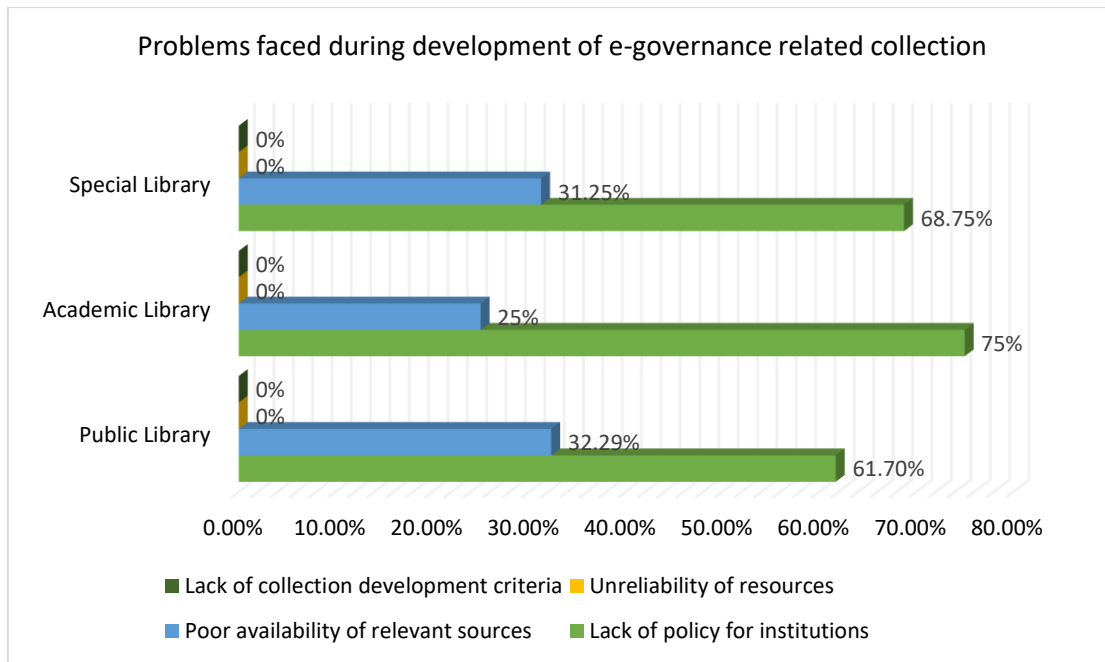


Figure 6: Problems faced in libraries while developing e-governance related collection

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to determine how people view e-governance and what role libraries and information centers can play in supporting it. The authors noted that when library users and library professionals were first questioned about e-governance, they had no idea what it was. They were able to respond to the questions after the authors explained. This shows that many people are still unfamiliar with the notion of e-governance.

Finding out what challenges librarians experienced while establishing e-governance services was another goal of the research. It was discovered that libraries aiming to promote these services came up against obstacles such as a lack of institutional support, inadequate infrastructure, and uninterested users. Lack of policy was a challenge that each library encountered while attempting to create a collection on e-governance. The libraries have lagged in this area, even though certain organizations work to inform and assist the public on how to utilize e-governance services. The non-government public libraries have lagged, although the majority of government public libraries provide these services. This occurs as a result of non-government public libraries being very autonomous and without a parent organization to supervise them or to put them under a clear set of rules or infrastructure.

Unlike academic and specialized libraries, which have a narrower focus, the public library serves a wide range of individuals who visit it to learn about a variety of topics. In comparison to academic and special libraries, people access e-governance services at public libraries more frequently. For this reason, the authors have made an effort to offer a framework for e-governance delivery in public libraries.

A Proposed Model for E-governance Delivery

All of the library professionals stated in the survey that their libraries did not maintain any desk, model, or repository for providing these services. After analyzing the data from special, academic, and public libraries, the authors found that this proposed model will be best suitable for public libraries only. So, the authors tried to devise the following workflow for the e-governance service delivery corner of a public library:

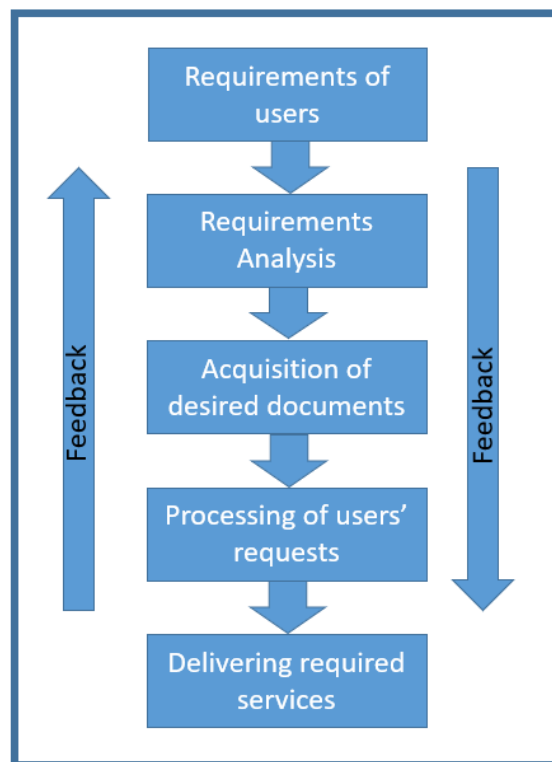


Figure 7: Workflow of e-governance service delivery corner

Functions of acquisition division: The acquisition team is skilled at discovering fresh ideas and negotiating their implementation into the library. They will be tasked with receiving requests for certain e-governance services from the users, analyzing those requests, and using the internet to research if these government services have been made available online and if it is financially feasible for the library to adopt them. An assistant librarian will be assigned to this section and he will be in charge of acquiring and adopting new e-governance services. Since e-governance services-related documents are produced by the government itself, the librarian will negotiate with the proper authorities to acquire the desired documents and figure out what new documents he can adopt in the library. Also, he will set up partnerships with qualified experts from adjacent union information centers or organizations with a focus on e-governance. Once a week, the specialists will come to the library to interact with the users and instruct the staff members responsible for the e-governance department.

Functions of processing division: The processing section has equipment and expertise for organizing, cataloging, and presenting materials. It will be the responsibility of this division to process the requests and work accordingly to serve them efficiently. There will be a deputy

librarian in charge of this department. He will be in close contact with the acquisition section so that he can determine which services are already in use and which new ones are required.

Functions of document delivery division: The document delivery section will be in charge of providing the services to the users properly and taking notes on any complaints and recommendations of users which will be then forwarded to the acquisition section. This section will also handle any inquiries and requests made online or through the library website. There will be a reprographic section closely connected with the document delivery section. This section will deal with document spiral binding, laminating, photocopying, and printing. Through this section, users may download their passport, visa, tax, and vaccination forms. This area will be managed by a library assistant.

Recommendation and conclusion

It is commonly acknowledged that the primary benefit of e-governance is simply a better government. E-governance contributes to better policy results, more public involvement, and service delivery of higher quality. Developing nations must take a more active position in the creation of national plans and policies that support the information economy, library services, and e-governance in particular. E-governance may aid development by fostering an atmosphere that is suitable and supportive. To establish the benefits of ICT and e-governance, it is necessary to overcome the numerous problems and barriers that now exist. Bangladesh has to improve its e-governance delivery to keep up with the rest of the world and place higher than 111th in the United Nations E-governance Survey. Throughout that quest, a library or information center may be really helpful. Regrettably, our nation's libraries are now not set up to facilitate that trip. There is a ton of untapped potential. To do this, the following suggestions are provided for redefining a library to enable it to serve e-governance services and contribute to Bangladesh's development:

- 1.** Since nothing significant can be accomplished without first creating a plan, the formation of an executive committee to supervise the development of an e-governance service delivery policy is the first step. The procedure of delivering these services to everyone in the community will be much more widely used if there is a policy as to when, where, and how to use e-governance services.
- 2.** Libraries and information centers should receive adequate financing. With the right budget, the challenges the respondents claimed to confront can be overcome. A desk or repository for providing the services, like the one the authors proposed may go a long way with the right financing, infrastructure, and execution of the services.
- 3.** It is quite difficult to achieve anything on your own; we need assistance. The government has established 6,686 Union Digital Centers (UDC) in 4,501 union parishads of the country which has opened the way for information and services at the earliest, including participation in the free flow of rural people by providing 270 types of services, including those related to passports, birth registration, land transfer and registration, mobile finance, and several other services. Similar services are also offered by libraries. Each library should be a part of a consortium that includes these Union Digital Centers and organizations that offer e-governance. Through the use of their referral services, libraries will coordinate the partnership and make up for any weaknesses of associated institutions. Any issues in a library may be resolved through institutional cooperation. With the right assistance and implementation, a library may be transformed into the equivalent of a union information center, where visitors

can come to resolve their queries in addition to reading books.

4. The non-government public libraries should be brought under a framework and partnerships with associated e-governance delivering institutions. With uniform collaboration, those libraries' efficiency will rise quickly.

At its finest, e-governance fosters possibilities, new connections, and a shared perspective between the government and its constituents. E-governance implementation will be impacted by a variety of structural, cultural, political, and economic variables, but it is quickly becoming a major issue in public administration.

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*[Dear Sir/ Madam, please follow the instructions to answer the following questions. This survey aims to collect data about **Role of Library and Information Center in e-Governance promotion in developing countries: Bangladesh perspective**. We would be grateful if you take a few minutes to fill up the survey. These responses will use only for research purposes. Your response will be kept strictly confidential]*

Please provide tick mark (✓) in the answer area or provide pertinent information where applicable.

1. Name:
2. University:
3. Department/Institution:
4. Gender: Male Female
5. Do you think library can help to provide citizen centric services (e-governance)?
 Yes No, I don't think so [Please go to Q.9]
6. How often do you go for citizen centric services?
 Most often Often Rare
7. Does your library hold enough citizen centric service Resources?
 Sufficient in number Not sufficient in number
 Quality is not up to the mark I have no idea
8. If you are not using resources, indicate the reasons for not using resources:
 I don't find interest. It is not useful
 I don't know about it. Others (please specify)
9. Does your library own any prescribed citizen centric services model for providing information?
 Yes No
10. Does the library maintain any desk to provide citizen centric services
 Yes No
11. Any additional comments or suggestions, please write in below (If you have any)

*[Dear Sir/ Madam, please follow the instructions to answer the following questions. This survey aims to collect data about **Role of Library and Information Center in e-Governance promotion in developing countries: Bangladesh perspective**. We would be grateful if you take a few minutes to fill up the survey. These responses will use only for research purposes. Your response will be kept strictly confidential]*

Please provide tick mark (✓) in the answer area or provide pertinent information where applicable.

1. Name:
2. University:
3. Designation:
4. Does your library provide citizen centric services (e-governance)?
 Yes No [Please go to Q.09]
5. Does your library connect with any national or international consortium for citizen centric services (e-governance)?
 Yes No
6. Does the library maintain any desk or repository to provide citizen centric services
 Yes No
7. What is the level of interest of your patrons using citizen centric service related resources?
 Very frequent
 Frequent
 Not interested at all
8. If your answer is 'No' in Q.4, then why your library does not initiate citizen centric services (e-governance)?
 Poor Infrastructure lack of institutional cooperation
 Users are not interested enough in these services. due to the poor availability of resources
9. What are the problems during develop citizen centric service related (e-governance) collection?
 Unreliability of Resources Lack of collection development criteria
 Poor availability of relevant resources Lack of policy for institutions
10. Any additional comments or suggestions, please write below (If you have any)