

Private University Librarian's Experience on Procurement of Books in Bangladesh

Muhammad Hossam Haider Chowdhury
Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), Dhaka, Bangladesh

The private universities in Bangladesh are playing an important role in modernizing the higher education system in the country and the role of librarians is also different and challenging. Specially, procuring books and monographs is an exigent function being this lost its demand very quickly. In some cases, titles bear only one semester necessity. Suppliers frequently fail to supply books needed in a semester and late arrival of books is another phenomena which frustrate private university librarians in the country. In these circumstances, IUB (Independent University, Bangladesh) is trying to establish a method for working with the best book suppliers. Experience shows that apparent goodwill or gorgeous showrooms of vendors sometimes mislead the librarians. The best way is to determine some criteria and each criterion should be weighted. The weight may differ from criterion to criterion. Performance in the latest year may receive maximum number in the weighted formula. Goodwill, interest to work with the university, up-to-date-ness, availability of resources, maximum discount, etc., may be included in the weighted formula. Performance of the consecutive three years would guide one to select a vendor from the old panel of suppliers. This paper describes the situation of procurement and the crisis faced by the private universities particularly the IUB.

Keywords: book procurement, acquisition process, vendor evaluation, university library, foreign resource dependency, timely procurement

Introduction

The author is working in a private university which intends to produce globally competitive graduates within the local environment, with knowledge and skills to provide leadership at different levels and in different fields of the country. This university offers courses related to business, development, science and technology under its four schools. The private universities are the pioneers to establish the American style of education in Bangladesh. Inevitably foreign books and journals are the main ingredients to develop courses and to use as text in the university. The librarians of the private universities are facing some confrontations that are new in the country.

Background

The author may share some of his experiences here. When joining in this private university in 1993, the author was alone in the library. The authority advised him to set up the library such a way so that one man can run it easily. The private university concept was new to many of us at that time. Eventually, we understand that

Muhammad Hossam Haider Chowdhury, head of library, Independent University, Bangladesh.

this is USA type education. The semester completes within 17 weeks, which is, we seem, very short. Our experience in DU (Dhaka University), where the author studied, was different. One-year course at DU used to complete in 18 months. Being an American type university, IUB (Independent University, Bangladesh) follows syllabus of the US universities, mostly and accordingly, teachers referred students to American books for their texts. At that time, it was so hard to have US books from our local market. The author was alone in the library. The author had to stay in the library from morning to evening. What only the author could do was to request the local vendor to send the book(s). Sometimes, they failed to supply. When a teacher found that his/her referred book(s) was not on the shelves, they had immediately become upset.

The author can portray two incidents here. Some books author could not procure due to unavailability at our local market. In the initial stage, the university had a position of secretary general. One faculty reported to the secretary general about the author's failure. He (secretary general) was sad and came to and told the author "What are you doing? Why are you not procuring books according to teachers demand?". The author tried to explain his position. But he did not give the author chance. Moreover, he added, "We do not want to listen anything. We want to see the books to be here in time whatever happened in the world that is not our headache". Then, he moved to his room. The author was struck, but did not get time to think about that much, because he had to face students rushing as a class near to library which was just been off, though later he got opportunity to explain the situation and he was convinced. Some other professional friends working in different other private universities also told the author their experiences. All of us in fact are facing almost identical problem.

Another day, maybe it was the author's fault, a very senior professor suggested him to procure some copies of a book which is yet a very popular title throughout the world and also available at our local market at that time. But his library had two copies of that particular title and that course had only five students at that time. As he checked the copyright year, the author thought new edition already published and after three/four months, we might get new edition from our market and students could share the existing two copies in the meantime. So he delayed. But the professor became annoyed and reported to the then president of the university. In the evening, the president came to and quietly asked the author why he did not procure the professor's book. The author explained him his stand. The president, though the author thought he was convinced, told him with a soft voice that if once those were gone out of market then the author might not add more copies in his library in time. But on the basis of his connection, the author was almost sure that it would be available within a few months at our market and he delayed. The author was lucky because he could add new edition in multiple copies before the next semester commence.

The author has both experiences of special library and public library. He worked about five years in special library and about two years in public library and has never faced above type of situation in those places. There procurement moved in structured way and users were not pressuring librarians for their particular items that much. Users of those places were always happy if they got their required items, if even those who did not arrive timely. But in private universities time, it is an important factor. If some titles do not arrive timely, sometimes that might become useless. Because, teachers have their own way of teaching method and they referred to different titles. In the private universities, it was very high at the initial stage, teachers used to switchover from one place to another place. Almost in every semester, we saw some course teachers were changed and new titles were referred for the texts. There were chances to loss the usability of books.

Let's think a case. One faculty member, who stayed for only one/two semesters only in the university, requisitioned for some titles to be procured in multiple copies. He/she did not get them within his/her stay

period. New instructor joined. New teacher referred to new titles. But library received the books ordered earlier at the beginning of the new instructor's phase. Such situation used to appear several times in the author's university and the books were mostly found untouched. Note that our libraries need to keep some text books for supporting both students and faculty. The book market is not smart enough to collect books from abroad timely and the students have little opportunity to have their own book, even the text books.

We procured multiple copies of textbooks due to scarcity of books in our local market. We value usefulness of a title. Accordingly, timely arrival of learning resources is the central issue of the private university libraries. Other sector libraries may not need to take so much stress for procuring information materials. Of course, some have high workload, but not mental stress.

Private universities are not only giving the librarians stress, but also they are opening opportunities to take new challenges which can change the shape of library services in the country. The leading private university libraries of Bangladesh do not hesitate to invest money for information resources procurement if that can be proofed useful. The author's experience is that his authority gave him autonomy to procure learning resources as per student and faculty need, either for study or research. But it makes him more economic, because he has to think his performance evaluation which is done at the year end. Of course, he regularly takes permission for buying learning resources from the Vice Chancellor. Even so, it does not mean that he can avoid the responsibility.

Timely arrival of materials is not easy in Bangladesh. Book vendors of Bangladesh are basically able to supply those books which are popular. We also found that sometimes they even failed to supply popular books. In fact, it depends on the relationship between the vendor and the publisher. Recently, vendors are failing to supply Prentice Hall books. Most of the suppliers are not interested to receive orders for the Prentice Hall books. Selecting vendor becomes a great challenge. Merely through competition, best vendors cannot be selected. The vendor providing maximum discount on catalogue price may not be able to supply books timely, and even they fail to supply many titles, some of which might be very important at that time. One can apply mechanism to control through forfeiting their caution money. But only it cannot ensure the supply of books. At the same time, our main focus is students, their suffering cannot be removed. So trial and error will not solve the problem, rather it will increase the burden.

Gorgeous launch of a new book vendor in Dhaka once impressed the author, who collected catalogue from them and distributed catalogues among the respective teachers of our university. Teachers selected many books. On the basis of teachers' request, the author placed two orders to them. From first order, they supplied only one third of the books and informed the author that others were on the way. He placed another order to them on good faith, but did not receive any more books from those orders. Eventually, the author understands that they have relation with specific publishers only. They cannot establish good connection with others. Of course, the author did not black listed them, because they might be found useful for the specific publishers and later the author has really found them good for some definite publishers. Of course in the meantime, this vendor established as a prominent supplier of the country.

Again, once the author visited a well-known book supplier's office to know about their stock situation. He found many titles relevant to our purpose and selected them. They supplied them immediately and provided us maximum discount. The author was again impressed with their service. They convinced him to select some books from a particular publisher's catalogue. With the help of concern faculty, the author selected some titles and placed order for importing those books for us. Such a large supplier and importer cannot supply even a single item from his order.

So, what should be the process for procuring books? Who should get preference? The author's opinion is to depend on experience of librarians. The best way is to determine some criteria and each criterion should be weighted. The weight may differ from criterion to criterion. Performance, in the author's opinion, may receive maximum number in the weighted formula in the latest year. Then goodwill, interest to work with the university, up-to-date-ness, availability of resources, maximum discount, etc., may be included.

Complicacy of Procurement and Probable Solution

In most cases in Bangladesh, large purchases are done through tendering process. Books procurement is not an exception. The vendor(s) who can provide maximum discount on the list price usually selected for book supply. This process makes lots of obstacle for procuring appropriate books. In many cases, vendors failed to supply appropriate titles due to unavailability at the local market. For tendering the libraries usually collect list of books readily available from the local suppliers. Finalization of order list usually takes time. In the meantime, some important books may go to other libraries. Besides, it is almost impossible for the government sector to place an order for import books. Government libraries neither can give vendors sufficient time for procuring books, nor proceed for direct import. Once a vendor selected and if he/she fails, then those titles procurement in that particular library would have very little possibility. The short period given the vendors for book supply discourages them for importing the appropriate titles. The LAB (Library Association of Bangladesh) has been demanding the withdrawal of tendering process for procurement of learning resources. Some international organizations pay service charge to confirm timely receipt of the appropriate titles. Private university may follow the system, but the audit may not approve the system at the year end.

Sometimes, some leading private universities of Bangladesh try to procure books from abroad directly. But without license, only a limited amount of foreign currency can be spent for book procurement. This limited amount is not sufficient for a university. Customs recently imposed different types of charges, and sometimes, this amount reached at half of the list price. It means that procurement cost rose (not only for custom duties, but also for adding shipping and handling charge by the foreign suppliers) and the cost of books comes in an average of 170% as per the author's experience. Single volume procured is very costly, sometimes, it may reach 250%. In the present market, a vendor charges less than 30%. Even so, it cannot be imposed because audit will say that some are giving discount, why this particular vendor is charging for service instead of discounting. In some places, this vendor is giving discount why this particular vendor has been allowed for service charge for book delivery. Yes, we can give explanation and audit will note that. Even so, we have to resolve the question on vendor selection process. Probably private university librarians of Bangladesh have to mostly depend on their previous years' experience, because they cannot take the risk of choosing new vendor as main supplier who may lead to make the respective title(s) unavailable at due time. At least, the author does so. A weighted method for performance evaluation would be a great help. The appendix contains a method which the IUB intends to follow. It is not very hard and fast rule practiced in the university, but it gives us a guide with which we should deal in the coming year. Instead of keeping one vendor, we always keep at least three suppliers active as main vendors throughout the year to get the best result. Some new suppliers may also be kept active along with old suppliers.

Conclusions

The process needs more attentions and dialogues among the librarians to make an acceptable general

evaluation method to accelerate the import-based procurement process of the libraries, especially in Bangladesh. The author does accept his ignorance about vendor evaluation practiced in libraries elsewhere. Due to inadequate access to literature of the author's, he failed to review literature on the topic but found some management articles which support this view. Babu and Sahrma (2005) mentioned that the most important measure of the supplier service is that his/her record of past performance. Though they mentioned some factors to be considered for evaluating vendors, such as financial aspects, quality, price, technical compatibility, capacity of the firm, reputation, quality certifications, management outlook and delivery performance mainly. Dickson (1966) also gave importance almost on same factors (Demirtas & Ustun, 2006). Barbarosoglu and Yazgac (1997) used three broad factors for evaluating vendors' performance assessment, capability assessment and quality management assessment. Weber, Current, and Benton (1991) and De Boer, Lebro, and Morlacchi (2001) gave an extensive literature review on supplier selection on the light of business management (De Boer & van der Wegen, 2003). Several factors are taken into account by the researchers and the performance indicators are summarized into one score (Roodhooft & Konings, 1996). Many management researchers have addressed the strategic importance of the evaluation process of vendors (Banker & Khosla, 1995; Burt, 1984; Burton, 1988; Dobler, Burt, & Lee, 1990; Tullari & Narasimhan, 2003). In the author's opinion, the librarians also need to address to this management strategic issue to ensure timely service to our patrons.

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Appendix

Weighted Formula for Vendor Selection

Criteria and weights:

Stock availability	5
Import performance	15-20
Relation with publishers	
Comparing with supplied items and total items	15-20
Comparing with ordered items and supplied items	10
Supplied items and Total items received ratio	10
Discount rate—depends on supply	
Handling charge—score deducted according to supply	
Delivery Time average	20
Goodwill	1-3
Work Interest	1-3

Formula:

$$R_S / S_B * 5 + (R_I / I_R + P_V / P_T) * Y_S + \{(R_S + R_I) / T_Y + P_V / P_O\} * 10 + \{(D_R * M / 10000) + (D_R * M / 10000) + \dots\} - \{(H_R * M / 10000) + (H_R * M / 10000) + \dots\} + T_A + G + W$$

Where:

/Division

* Multiplication

S_B Books selected from stock

R_S Received from stock

I_R Books import request

R_I Received from import request

P_T Total number of publishers of books received in a year

P_V Number of publishers of books received from a vendor

P_O Number of publisher related to orders of a vendor

Y_S Score of year (Latest year = 20; One year earlier = 18; Two years earlier = 15)

T_Y Total books received in a year

D_R Discount rate

H_R Service charge or hiring rate

M Money on the bill or value of the books delivered

G Goodwill—Librarian will allocate weight maximum 3

W Work interest—Librarian will allocate weight maximum 3

T_A Delivery Time Average, i.e., average of $-200 / \{(D_D - D_O) + 10\}$

D_D Delivery Date

D_O Date of Order

Note: The figure 10000 is taken to keep the weight within the limit of 20 in IUB at this moment, being discount value from a single vendor did not yet exceed Tk.100000 in a year. IUB do not have experience of giving service charge for books.

Final Performance for selection $(P_S) = (P_{Y_1} + P_{Y_2} + P_{Y_3} + \dots) / Y_N$

Where:

- P_{Y_1} Latest year of evaluation
- P_{Y_2} One year earlier performance
- P_{Y_3} Two year's earlier performance
- Y_N Number of Years taken for calculation