

Chapter 12

Evolving Roles of East West University Library During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 is a global pandemic disease that was first identified in Wuhan, China. The global reaction to the COVID-19 is varied, but on the whole, the world economy has been seriously deteriorating. COVID-19 has impeded the world's democratic, social-economic, cultural, and religious systems. Globally, educational institutions have been shut down, but their learning activities are being shifted online. Therefore, libraries have been providing diversified resources and services that are important to the needs of users during this pandemic situation. This study aims to comprehensively discuss the ways East West University Library (EWUL), Bangladesh transformed its role during COVID-19 pandemic situation as well as delineate the challenges faced in this quest. This study is basically exploratory in nature. A systematic literature review and document analysis has been conducted, and the author's viewpoints and experiences have also been incorporated in this chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh detected its first COVID-19 patient back on March 7, 2020. “Bangladesh confirms its first three cases of coronavirus - Reuters,” March 8, 2020. Currently, total cases are 119,198 among 70,898 active cases, where the total number of deaths is 1,545 according to the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) (“Corona Live Update,” 2020), though there is a significant gap of knowledge as news reported of a massive shortage of testing kits in the country (“No new Covid-19 cases as testing declines 50%,” 2020).

The current population of Bangladesh is 164.8 million as of Thursday, August 13, 2020, based on Worldometers and according to the latest United Nations data. Bangladesh’s population is equivalent to 2.11% of the total world population. Bangladesh ranks number 8 in the list of countries (and dependencies) by population. The median age in Bangladesh is 27.6 years. The literacy rate for people aged 15 and above stands at 73.9 percent, revealed by Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2018 and released by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in May 2019. Data Reportal reported that there were 66.44 million internet users in Bangladesh in January 2020. The number of internet users in Bangladesh increased by 5.8 million between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Bangladesh stood at 41% in January 2020.

Several studies addressed the situation of lack of collaboration among local, national (intergovernmental and intragovernmental), international bodies (Alam, Alam, Nazir, & Bhuiyan, March 22, 2020; Anwar, Nasrullah, & Hosen, April 30, 2020; Hossain, Mazumder, Tasnim, Nuzhath, & Sultana, June 5, 2020; Islam & Siddika, April 2020; Mannan & Mannan, 2020), as the health system may hardly offer limited capacity for critical patients. From the beginning of the crisis, mismanagement got the spotlight as it exposed the lack of strategy to address the situation (“Bangladesh government downplays COVID-19 threat as job losses mount - World Socialist Web Site,” March 16, 2020.). This situation is addressed by Mannan & Mannan (August 12, 2020), the study suggests significant knowledge gaps between the amount of information available about COVID-19 and the depth of knowledge among the healthcare personnel and general people, particularly about the mode of transmission and incubation period of COVID-19. As far as observing the situation, it is clear that the global threat of COVID-19 continues, indicating the improvement of critical knowledge and perceptions of general people and health professionals. Considering the global crisis the Government of Bangladesh has directed to close down all the educational institutions from March 15-31, 2020, obeying the government decision East West University (EWU) had closed down on March 17, 2020 for all students, faculty members, administrative officers, and staff (“University will remain closed from March 17-31, 2020,” Monday, March 6. 2020). The university decided to start online classes to complete the syllabus of the offered courses of Spring Semester 2020 within May 16. 2020 (“Online Classes at EWU (Except Pharmacy),” Monday, March 16. 2020). During this period availability of education, resources was a practical challenge for both instructors and students, to make the useful course materials available was the concern. The entire country was under lockdown, resulting in zero movements and insecurity, also a good number of students, faculties, and staff were out of the city.

The situation was enlightened by the library. East-West University Library (EWUL) established several services to support the institution during the crisis. IFLA -- COVID-19 and the Global Library Field (26 June 2020) highlighted the online information literacy and underlined article request service of EWUL with a special recommendation to the freely available resources developed by the university library. Some prominent university libraries such as North-South University Library, Ayesha Abed Library, Asian University of Women, etc. launched dedicated virtual services to support the online semester.

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