

# REOPENING ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS LIBRARY IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

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**Abstract** Countries are forced to close institutions by COVID-19. Since the first case of COVID-19 found in Ethiopia, a state of emergency was declared to safeguard citizens. Due to this the education system was suspended for 5 months. It was found that important reopening university by taking appropriate care of COVID-19. The ministry of science and higher education of Ethiopia prepare a directive as a precautionary measure to reopen the universities. In this directive there are certain criterions to be fulfilled by the library before providing services. The objective of this paper is to assess higher education library preparedness to reopen their libraries in the context of COVID-19 according to the directive given by the ministry office. The data was collected using a questionnaire and observation method. The questionnaire is constructed based on the ministry directive for the library. Eighty librarians were participated in the study. The results showed that most libraries fulfilled the expected requirements given by the Ministry office. From the study, we can observe that some libraries have budget shortages to implement the directive fully. The period of COVID-19 also determines the future services given to the libraries.

**Keywords:** Reopening University Libraries, COVID-19 and Ethiopian Libraries, Digital libraries

## INTRODUCTION

The history of libraries in Ethiopia which dates back to 2000 years. During this time Church and Monastery libraries were serve as the source of information (Ourgay, 1991). Since then the number of libraries and grow in number and collection. The first modern library of Ethiopia is the National library of Ethiopia which was established in in 1930 by Emperor Haile Selassie I during his coronation. With the advisory and guiding role of the national library, public libraries started to emerge and expand in different cities of the country (Nordstrom, 1995). Haile Selassie I University renamed later to University College of Addis Ababa libraries are considered as the pioneer academic library in Ethiopia. Modern higher education started in Ethiopia in 1950 by the University College of Addis Ababa and its name was changed again in 1975 to Addis Ababa University. Since 1975 the tertiary education has tripled its enrollment. During this time Alemaya University of agriculture (Harmaya University), Tafari Makonnen Polytechnique College, Jimma Junior college of agriculture (College of Agriculture) were having modest books and limited services in Ethiopia. Nowadays in Ethiopia, there are more than 45 public and private universities and 92 private colleges accredited higher education. Along with these numbers of colleges and universities has a library and its latest services is one of the fundamental requirements to get accreditation.

Since December 31/2019, the first case of COVID-19 was reported from Wuhan (China) countries declared a state of emergency from semi-lockdown to fully lock down cities to safeguard their citizens. The Ethiopian government declared a state of emergency that lasts for 5 months from march 16, 2020. The state of emergency includes ban students and teachers meeting and was only permitted to contact online. Schools, Colleges, Universities were suspended to control the pandemic COVID-19. Colleges and Universities were started to teach students using an online platform suggested by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MOSHE) of Ethiopia. In line with the state of emergency college and University, libraries' services were shutdown. Following the end of state of emergency began in march Ethiopian government is preparing to reopen higher education. The reopening starts by accepting only final year graduate students who are suspended due to the pandemic. Then after the graduate class complete their classes the rest of students are allowed to attend the classes according to the schedule made by the universities and their preparedness to combat COVID-19 (Elias Gebreselassie, 2020).

The aim of this paper is to asses Ethiopian higher education libraries preparedness in the context of COVID-19 along with the reopening of Universities guideline directed by MOSHE-Ethiopia.

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## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to assess the preparedness of Ethiopian Higher education libraries reopening in the context of COVID-19.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

COVID-19 emergency has considerable effect on libraries and led some to their closure (Tammaro, 2020). According to (Mestri, 2020) 150 countries in the World have closed the school libraries, in many countries similar situation can be seen about university libraries. As per the global scenario, 84 countries from all the continents in the world have closed their public libraries, 98 countries have closed their national libraries. As stated by (MOSHE, 2020) according to the recommendation of the Ministry of Health of the House of Peoples' Representatives of the FDRE, public and private education and training institutions are sufficient by taking appropriate precautions, respecting restrictions and obligations, and directing them to reopen the Universities. According to this directive sub-article 7.1: the general conditions under which any educational and training institution can provide education to prevent COVID-19 has the obligation to prepare, promote and enforce an enforcement document in accordance with this directive. Article 7.19 of this directive specifically stated that about what looks like the higher education libraries. The following sub-articles are from the directives to Ethiopian higher education libraries must follow and implement:

- When anyone enters to the library, must wash their hands thoroughly with soap and all in the library time should cover the mouth and nose.
- Libraries at any higher education institution with physical distance, in front of students where you don't sit in front (back to back), "sit here" and "don't sit here" must be marked.
- The library should be cleaned at least three times a day, especially the tables with antiseptic chemicals and they must be cleansed.
- Increase the space in the library and must ensure adequate ventilation at all times.
- All institutions should provide all library services to reduce congestion in the library and other necessary controlled readings room should be set up.
- Make softcopy textbooks accessible to students by reducing the congestion around the circuit and a special long-term writing loan system must be developed and implemented.

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the countries affected by COVID-19 pandemic: 100,320 cases, 1,537 deaths, 61,516 until November 11, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic stances

strong threats to Ethiopia's transformations and relatively strong economic growth, impacts across Africa's second most populated country (UNDP, 2020). The impact affects the education sectors highly. From primary to tertiary education are closed due to the state of emergency. Along with the closure of education institutions libraries are suspended providing their usual services. In order to create accessibility of resources to higher education institution the MOSHE implement a digital library portal in collaboration with Addis Ababa university libraries. The digital library is equipped with more than 80, 000 online reference books, freshman students' modules, pictorial explanatory tools and course materials all fields of studies available in higher education institutions in Ethiopia, according to the ministry (FBC, 2020). The digital library is intended to ensure continuity of the teaching learning process online as COVID-19 pandemic to academic activity in the country. Libraries are opened with the beginning of education according to the MOSHE directives.

This paper covers Ethiopian Higher education libraries preparedness to combat COVID-19 during the beginning or reopening since from October 1, 2020. The research also suggests how the pandemic can affect the future tertiary education library.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research design, Data collection and sampling techniques, data analysis and interpretation are used with the aim of achieving the research objective of the study.

### Research Design

The study is cross-sectional and both quantitative and qualitative designs are used. The likert scale and observation method used are used to collect the data.

### Data Collection and Sampling Techniques

For this research a data collection was made from structured survey questionnaire and an observation to collect relevant data. The data collection was conducted from 20 September to 15 October 2020. The data were collected a total of 80 questionnaires were distributed to librarians via their email and responses are collected. The structured questionnaires, are designed according to (MOSHE, 2020) requirements stated in the literature review section for libraries criteria must fulfill to reopen Ethiopian Universities and colleges. Simple random sampling i.e lottery method was used to select participant libraries from the population. Each library from the population assigned a number and numbers are drawn randomly from the box to choose sample. Private and government higher education institutions are taken for this study from all over the country geographical location.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation was carried out according to the research objective. Therefore, the data collected from the questionnaire and observation was analyzed and interpreted by using table and graphs with the help of Microsoft Excel.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section the data collected will be analyzed and discussed. From the total of 80 respondents all participants correctly filled the questionnaire. Librarian was asked questions in the form of likert scale. The likert scale questions are constructed from the directive designed by MOSHE for higher education academic libraries.

**Table 1: Librarian Responses to MOSHE Guideline**

Sr. No.	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1	Water and soap are adequately available to students on the library get	65 (81.25%)	10 (12.5%)	5 (6.25%)	0	0
Q2	Readiness to control students wearing face-mask	72 (90%)	8(10%)	0	0	0
Q3	Chairs are marked with "sit here" and "don't sit here"	53 (66.25%)	15 (18.75%)	0	12(15%)	0
Q4	Readiness to control students sitting position back to back	76 (95%)	4 (5%)	0	0	0
Q5	Availability of staffs to clean the library three times a day	71 (88.75%)	4 (5%)	5 (6.25%)	0	0
Q6	Availability of cleaning materials and antiseptic chemicals	41 (51.25%)	9 (11.25%)	0	30 (37.5%)	0
Q7	Siting chair and tables are adequately spaced	78 (97.5%)	2 (2.5%)	0	0	0
Q8	The library is well ventilated	75 (93.75%)	5 (6.25%)	0	0	0
Q9	Additional reading rooms are prepared to reduce congestion	26 (32.5%)	7 (8.75%)	31 (38.75%)	10 (12.5%)	6 (7.5%)
Q10	Availability of digital library to access textbooks and handouts	9 (11.25%)	18 (22.5%)	30 (37.5%)	23 (28.75%)	0
Q11	Special long-term loan plan is prepared	72 (90%)	0	6 (7.5%)	2 (2.5%)	0

Table 1 Q1 shows that 65 (81.25%) of respondents are strongly agree on the availability of water and soap on the library entrance get, 10 (12.5%) of them agree and 5 (6.25%) are neutral. Q2 readiness to control students are using face-mask 72 (90%) are strongly agree, 8 (10%) of them agree. Q3 Chairs are marked 53 (66.25%) marked strongly agree, 15 (18.75%) are agree and 12 (15%) of them disagree. Readiness to control students sitting position is back to back 76 (95%) of the respondents strongly agree, and 4(5%) agree. On Q5 respondents was asked about availability of adequate staffs to clean the library three times a day 71 (88.75%) of respondents strongly agree, 4 (5%) of respondents agree, and 5 (6.25%) are neutral. Q6 was the availability of cleaning and antiseptic chemicals 41 (51.25%) Strongly agree, 9 (11.25%) agree and 30 (37.5%) respondents are disagreed. Siting chair and tables are adequately spaced (Q7) 78 (97.5%) respondents strongly agree and 2 (2.5%) are agreed. For the question Q8; 75 (93.75%) strongly agree and 5 (6.25%) of them are agree on the libraries are well ventilated. Q9 preparing additional reading to reduce congestion; 26 (32.5%) of them responded that strongly agree, 7 (8.75%) of them agree, 31 (38.75%) of them are neutral, 10 (12.5%) of them disagree and 6 (7.5%) of them strongly disagree. Availability of textbook and

handouts in digital format (Q10); 9 (11.25%) of respondents strongly agree, 18(22.5%), agree, 30 (37.5%) are neutral and 23 (28.75%) of the respondents disagree. Finally, the respondents were asked whether special long-term loan is prepared 72 (90%) of them strongly agree, 6 (7.5%) neutral and 2 (2.5%) of them disagree.

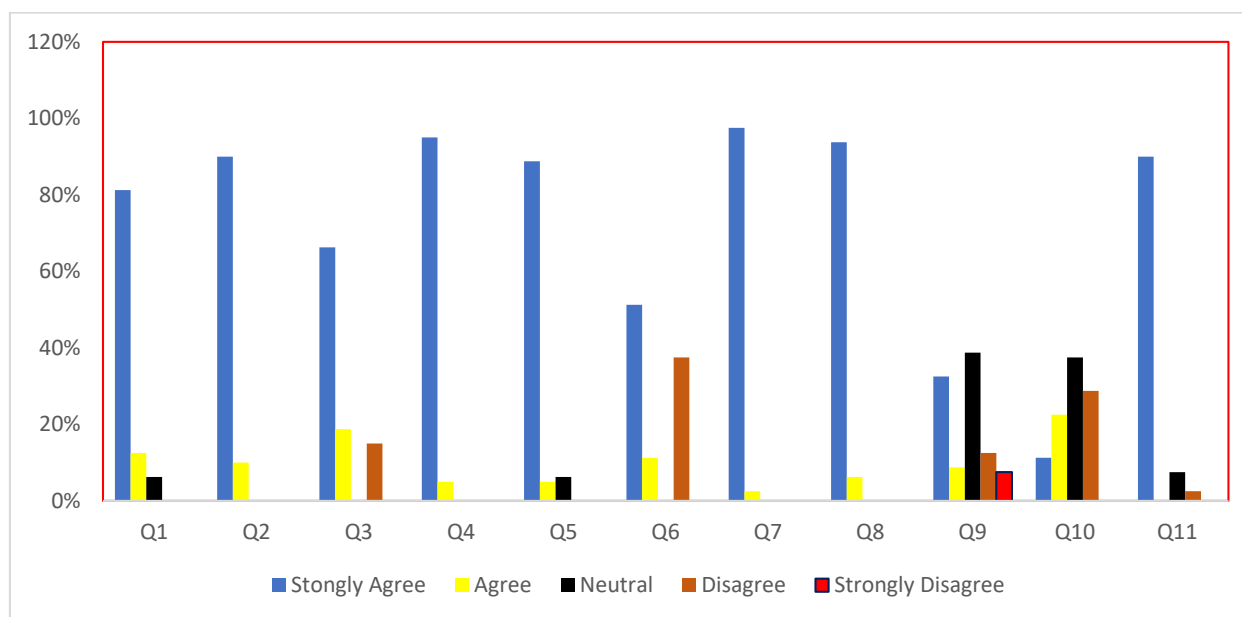
Respondents also mention at the end of the questionnaire the main challenges that hinder them to implement the COVID-19 directive by MOSHE-Ethiopia to the libraries. Some of the challenges stated by the respondents are:

- There is no allocated budget specially for antiseptic chemicals.
- Internet Infrastructure is very poor to access and deploy digital library.
- Lack of budget to build contact free/automated handwashing station at the gate of library.
- There are no additional spaces designed to minimize congestion in the library.
- Lack of professional library staffs that support students to access the digital resources.
- Unreliable water supply to handwashing station.

## Discussion

The discussion is performed according to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education-Ethiopia (MOSHE)

guideline prepared for academic libraries in the tertiary education. The data collected using the questionnaire and observation was interpreted based on the directives given by MOSHE-Ethiopia.



**Fig. 1: Librarian Responses to MOSHE Guideline**

Fig. 1 Q1 shows most of the libraries are ready in terms of affording water and soap to the students. In addition to this I observed that some of the colleges washing sink was not contact free and constructed from 10-20 liter water tanker fitted with water taper to close and open. The method these washing tapers are constructed have significant means to spread COVID-19.

Fig. 1 Q2 shows that most of the institutions are ready to control students who are not using face-mask. I can observe that in most of the institution don not permit students who are wearing face-mask into the compound. This action saves the lives of the staffs and students.

Fig. 1 Q3 shows that most of the institutions are agreed to mark the chairs with “sit here” and “don’t sit here”. But what I observe in the libraries rather than labeling the chair, they prefer to maintain adequate space between the chair. This approach reduces the mistakes done by students carelessly. In addition to this I observe that some libraries post announcement on the wall and reading table that states “Moving sitting chair is strictly prohibited”.

Fig. 1 Q4 shows that most of the respondents are agreed on sitting the chair back-to-back position according to the guideline. But I can observe that chairs are well spaced to each other but the suggested position is not maintained

in most libraries. Sitting back-to-back position have high positive significant to control the spread of the disease.

Fig. 1 Q5 shows that most of the respondents addressed that they agree that they have adequate staff to clean the library three times a day.

Fig. 1 Q6 shows that almost half of the respondents are agreed on the availability of cleaning and antiseptic chemicals. But significant number of respondents claim that they have no adequate budget to buy disinfecting spike machines, gloves and chemicals. Disinfecting the library walls is vital to reduce the spread of the disease. Washing the walls of the library three times a day seem not to be realistic.

Fig. 1 Q7 shows that chairs are adequately well spaced in almost all libraries. Physical distancing is one means of combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fig. 1 Q8 shows almost all libraries are replied that they have enough ventilation. Well air circulated or ventilated rooms helps to minimize the risk of COVID-19.

Fig. 1 Q9 shows preparing additional space became very challenging to the institution. Specially some private colleges and university are working on rented buildings and there is no option to expand the services. Preparing this additional reading space became a challenge to implement the MOSHE directive as it is.

Fig. 1 Q10 most of the libraries have no adequate ICT infrastructure including, internet, electric power, servers and ICT personnel to render the virtual digital library service. Unreliable Internet connection and electric power found that the dominant problem.

Fig. 1 Q11 shows that most libraries prepare themselves to provide long-term service to the users. Providing long-term load reduces the rate of circulation of books among students.

The university and college COVID-19 task forces should strictly follow the directives set by MOSHE. In addition to this awareness creation among the students play paramount role in fighting the COVID pandemic.

## The Future Higher Education Libraries in Ethiopia

In this section the author discusses his observation and personal experiences about the future tertiary education library services in the context of library COVID-19. Digital library services become more dominant than the traditional library service in the future tertiary education of Ethiopia. COVID-19 is the inflection point to Ethiopian library services. Due to COVID-19 many users are enforced to hear and use about the digital library services for the first time. Some users are Savvy to technology and some others have cyberphobia. Specially for those who have cyberphobia the future libraries become a panic place for them. Digital librarians are more expected to promote the usage of online-public access catalogue (OPAC), digital library services and journal databases. Traditional library services will face more challenge in keeping their service active for users during the COVID-19 period. Librarian on the other hand practice a new way of providing services both from home and offices. Users education are expected to render via online platform. Acquisition librarian needs to improve the negotiation skill to buy the latest eBooks for the users.

The Pandemic does not seem to be eradicated entirely. Librarians in all countries particularly in Ethiopia are looking forward, exciting to discover new services and opportunities to build a stronger library-user interface in the future. In order to met these objectives libraries need to be dressed with latest, information communication technologies, infrastructure and skilled manpower.

## CONCLUSION

Libraries around the world are challenged by COVID-19 to provide library service. The government faces difficult challenge to counterpart government decision with library services and the COVID-19 pandemic on the other area. We are aware that in some countries government decided from

semi-lockdown to lockdown of organizations/institutions and some others leaving the decision to the librarian. The governments from different countries are in the process of reopening higher educational institutions in near future, ultimately the libraries have also required to re-open with well prepared strategies.

Like the rest of the world COVID-19 has leave its bad mark in Ethiopia. In order to safeguard the students and the staff, MOSHE-Ethiopia prepare directive as precaution to reopen the university. The directive includes criteria's to be fulfilled by the university and college libraries. The criterions are derived from the guideline given by world health organization and from nature/behavior of the disease. Most of the university and college task forces in collaboration with the librarian implement the guideline to reopen the libraries. Some library face challenges to expand or add additional reading rooms; having disinfecting chemicals; contact free hand washing sink and reliable water supply. The fate of the traditional library service in Ethiopia determined by the solution given to the pandemic.

As a recommendation; the University/College around the world, particularly in Ethiopia COVID-19 task forces should strictly follow how the libraries are implementing the government guideline and the instruction given by WHO and updating their COVID-19 security directive and manual.

Based on the level of how the pandemic spread, libraries in the world should focus on the number of clients/patrons rendering the service. The level of reopening can be *more-or-less as usual*; *few restrictions*; *minimum service*; and *complete close* based on the number of active cases found in the country.

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