

**ARE THE PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PREPARED FOR THE
DIGITAL LITERACIES CHALLENGE? EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE**

By

ZAHRA MUGHIS



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Research Supervisor: Dr. Fareeha Zafar

Abstract

The definition and criteria for productive and meaningful economic and social participation is changing as a transformative impact of digital proliferation. This mandates development of multiple transversal literacies or capabilities which extend beyond function know-how of digital technologies. Global evidence suggests that higher education institutions' (HEIs) approach to digital literacies education is based on conjectures on the young adults' natural digital abilities. However, the subject hasn't been studied in the context of Pakistan. On this premise, this mixed methods research explored the relevant perceptions, and development of students' digital literacies – levels and determinant factors – in the case of two (HEIs), one public and one private, in Lahore. Faculty and student representatives across four selected disciplines (Business Administration, Economics, Computer Science, and Physics) were engaged in two sequential phases on enquiry. Qualitative data, collected through qualitative interviews with 16 stakeholders, was analysed using thematic analysis. Analysis highlighted the absence of a holistic DLs education framework, technical and tools-specific focus of the curriculum, inconsistencies in integration of digital concepts across disciplines, and underlying assumptions on students' natural abilities. Quantitative analysis of data from 200 students, collected through questionnaire surveys, illustrated the impact of curricular focus and contextual impact of personal attributes on acquisition of DLs across different domains. Analysis showed that, on average, undergraduate students had moderate levels of digital literacies. Results of Structural Equation Modelling estimated corroborated the hypothesized positive impact of Digital Nativity and Gender. This research highlighted the inadequacy of physical access in holistic development of students' digital literacies and emphasised the need for rethinking curriculum and learning environments for the same.

Keywords: digital literacies, digital literacy, higher education, perceptions

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