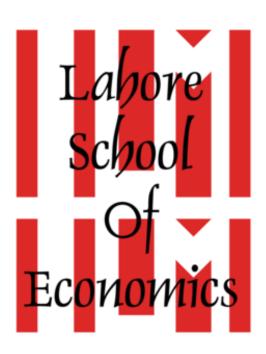
ARE THE PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PREPARED FOR THE DIGITAL LITERACIES CHALLENGE? EXPLORING THE LANDSCAPE

By

ZAHRA MUGHIS



Research Thesis submitted to The Lahore School of Economics in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of M. Phil. Development Studies 2020-2023)

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

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my profound gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Fareeha Zafar for her guidance and constant support throughout this research. I sincerely acknowledge her mentorship that not only allowed me to explore this topic and apply my research skills, but consistently allowed it to be my own endeavour.

Beside my supervisor, I am thankful to Dr. Ahmad Nawaz, Research Director, Graduate Institute of Development Studies (GIDS), for his continued support and invaluable input in this research study.

I am grateful to Dr. Rashid Amjad, Director GIDS, for encouraging research on a novel topic.

Also, for generously funding this study, I would like to thank Dr. Naved Hamid and the Lahore

School of Economics review committee.

Last but not the least, I am sincerely grateful to my family and friends for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement. This research journey would not have been possible without them.