

January, 2024

1. Inquiries on tertiary students' access to digital education resources in Hong Kong

The present submission is based on two responses to our inquiries.

In Hong Kong, “digital education” is generally considered as academic education in digital form. Young people are generally considered as a group with digital literacy and their access to digital education is well provided. The government-led campaigns for promoting digital education, which provides certain resources to students of social and economical disadvantages, mainly focus on those who are in primary and secondary education.

However, in the tertiary education sector, assistance to local tertiary students, which is usually financial, and support to all tertiary students in response to their daily difficulties are mainly provided by tertiary institutes, including universities and colleges. The concept of human rights is not a main concern in governmental actions nor a perspective adopted by every tertiary institution. The role of tertiary institutes in securing students access to digital education is mentioned and highlighted by all the respondents who responded to our interviews. We haven't received any response on online threats (and counter-measures).

In the first response, the student concerned reported difficulties in socialisation with peers and instructors during the pandemic. Indeed, academic performance is often helped by peer discussion, and the future prospect in education relies heavily on continuous interaction with academic supervisors such as instructors and tutors. Due to limited internet access, the respondent's ability to seek timely assistance from peers and academic supervisors was greatly undermined by frequent internet. The university concerned did not furnish the student with much assistance in this aspect.

The other response voiced similar concerns. The second respondent, an undergraduate student of a local university in Hong Kong, travelled abroad to attend a short term overseas learning programme during the pandemic. During the student's stay at the overseas institute where communications were conducted in a language other than Chinese and English, the respondent could only access courses and teaching information from online. However, the respondent's own laptop computer became defective in the course. Yet, the host institute did not have a 24-hour computer room on campus nor any computers in its student libraries. The Internet connection on campus and in student apartments was inadequate to support a steady connection to live-stream lectures conducted on Zoom.

This resulted in the respondent's constant absence from online lectures, missing of important learning information delivered by lectures, and missing of assignment deadlines, which later severely hindered her academic performance and course grades. The respondent attempted to seek help from her home institute in Hong Kong, but the communication through email was inefficient and often delayed. Besides, the home institute responded bureaucratically and did not provide any remedy, whether technological or administrative, to the respondent's situation. She was not furnished with sufficient information from the peers in the institutions she went to, and the home institution denied her request to make the courses she

took as non-credit bearing, citing lack of precedent. As the incident took place before the respondent's graduation, the anxiety associated with the lack of digital access and the fear of failing to maintain her academic standing had resulted in detrimental impacts on her mental health.

2. Inquiries on tertiary students' access to digital education in Bangladesh

This report is based on five students' responses on our research questions

Bangladesh's "Digital Bangladesh" vision aims to harness technology for development, and digital education plays a crucial role in this ambitious plan. While progress has been made, significant challenges remain. On the positive side, initiatives like e-learning platforms and digitization of educational materials have increased access to education, especially in remote areas.

The life of young people became easier after start using digital education in our country but not for all the students. There are so many students who are facing major level of difficulties. Out of five students four of them reported concern about Limited internet access, Infrastructure and technology. Only about 37% of households in Bangladesh have internet access, with this number dropping significantly in rural areas. This leaves a large portion of young people without the internet connection necessary for online learning especially in rural area. One of them from Gazipur said that during his college admission test he did not able to submit the answer sheet because of sudden drop of internet connection. Only for this reason he missed that chance in that time.

One college student from the village named Hatkhola showed his concern about lack of devices for poverty and limited availability of electricity. As his father is a fisherman, he cannot afford devices like smartphones or laptops, which are essential for accessing online learning platforms for a college student. This leaves some young people dependent on shared devices or public internet cafes, which may not be readily available within short distance or appropriate for learning. He also said about Lack of awareness and digital literacy in his village. Maximum parents and young people lack awareness of the benefits of digital education or the skills needed to use it effectively. This creates a huge barrier to accessing and benefiting from online learning platforms.

Two university students from Dhaka city mentioned about Limited interaction and engagement during Online classes. Due to political instability, last few months their university conducted their classes in different online platforms like google classroom, canvas etc. Online learning platforms often lack the level of interaction and engagement that is possible in traditional classrooms. This makes it difficult for students to stay motivated and focused.

In Bangladesh, there are laws and Securities Against any online threat but in some cases, these are not helpful for the youths. One of the female undergraduate students mentioned that she faced an occurrence that someone did cybercrime with her. An unknown person used her picture and made a gross picture and tried to harass another female person by using that gross picture. So, here it is clear that the laws or

protections are not that strong to protect youths from this kind of harassment. People can easily use AI and harass others especially girls like her. Moreover, that female student tried to seek help from police and cybercrime authorities but she didn't get any help. Here we can see the true lack of national policy that A dedicated national policy framework focused on young people's online safety is absent in Bangladesh.