Of the new dominant: a preliminary exploration of the dominance of 'IT literacy' in organizational processes

Prof. Gordon Ade-Ojo
University of Greenwich, UK

- **The study**

- **Context: Social and academic with research questions**

- **Issues of methodology**

- **Theoretical framing of literacy underpinning the study**

- **Findings**

- **Conclusion**

The study

❖ Essentially a small scale study which aimed to explore two crucial issues

❖ The study is inspired by anecdotal evidence and researcher experience – Garbage can model for explaining the choice of research focus [Cohen and March, 1972; Dennis and Valacich, 2001;Martin, 1982]. 'decisions about research topics are often made as decision opportunities present themselves rather than following an overarching planned strategy'

❖ Sought to measure the prevalence of IT in work processes and the impact that this dominance might have on staff

❖ Conducted in two phases with each phase associated to a specific research question

❖ Survey and semi-structured interview

❖ Survey helped to identify candidates for the semi-structured interview

Context

In 2022 Technology knows you better than you know yourself.

Context: Social and Academic

❖ Social: IT literacy/use has made significant progress in our day to day lives- Contrasts with the 80s, 90s and early 2000s IT literacy/use has advanced

❖ IT literacy/use has made significant progress in our day to day lives- Contrasts with the 80s, 90s and early 2000s IT literacy/use has advanced). Academic

❖ In academic context, IT related facilities now labelled as instruments of autonomous learning and empowerment (Knobel and Lankshear, 2022, xxxx)

❖ Limited attention is paid to 'situated examples of ordinary people using digital devices and networks in their daily lives' (cf. Knobel & Lankshear, 2022; Kalman & Hernández, 2018; Kania-Lundholm & Torres,2018) and no 'ethnographic-style accounts' of real encounters by real people (Knobel & Lankshear, 2022, p1).

Issues of methodology

❖ Design/approach: Essentially sequential mixed method– explanatory sequential with quantitative data first and followed by qualitative data to strengthen the validity of your conclusions (George, 2022)

❖ Methods: Survey and semi-structured interviews

❖ Analysis: Thematic analysis using the initial findings from survey to frame the qualitative data. Steps proposed by Braun and Clarke, (2006) Allows us to triangulate quant findings with qual findings

❖ Sample: Self selected as on voluntary basis with use of gatekeeper (indication of researcher reflexivity) 63 responses to survey and 10 additional interviews- all volunteers

❖ Ethics: Typical guarantee about anonymity, confidentiality. Central is potential for harm to participants and therefore, no mention of organisation type, nature of business etc. Only assurance is that it is not the researcher's place of work.

Theoretical underpinning: Literacy as social practice

❖ An understanding that literacy is not exclusively cognitive but draws on socio-cultural realities (Developed from Street 1984– autonomous and ideological understandings of literacy)

❖ Three developments on this position with relevance to this study:

▶ 1. There are many literacies– Street (1995)

▶ 2. Literacy practices are situated and therefore reflect specific situations through specific events (Barton and Hamilton)

▶ 3. Literacy can be structured for specific purposes (Ade-Ojo, 2014)

Findings

Breakdown of survey responses:

➢ Age distribution to survey: 70% aged between 20 and 40 = 42

➢ 20% aged between 40 and 60 = 14

➢ 10% aged between 60 and 70 = 6

Interviews breakdown:

➢ 10 participants all volunteered from the survey and all indicated that IT dominance has impact on them.

➢ 60% aged 60 to 70 = 6, 20% aged 40 to 60 = 2 and 20% aged 20 to 40 = 2

➢ All corroborate findings from survey with statements such as

Findings

Research question	Survey findings	Interview findings	Synthesis/ reflection
How dominant is IT literacy in workplace corporate processes?	Unanimous about dominance of IT literacy in corporate processes	Corroborates survey findings. Dominant themes revolve around imposition and inescapability. ' what can you do outside of IT' (part 4), 'they won't let you do anything unless through IT' (part 7) 'Feels like you cannot work anymore if you are not…e mem, ready to live on your computer' almost like, if you get what I mean' (Part 2)	Convergence across participants. Participants raise the spectre of what was once referred to as 'more powerful literacies'(Tett, Hamilton & Crowther, 2012). Highlights the routine way in which people's real-life experience with this literacy is ignored in workplace literacy practices. Interesting that age group was not in any way significant. So, assumption about age dominance might not necessarily be relevant
In what workplace corporate processes is IT literacy dominant?	Almost all aspects of workplace engagements are listed including HR processes—staff development, appraisal, training, access to CPD, other entitlements Financial processes—claims, salaries, documents General communication processes—News, any kind of development in the organisation	Total unanimity regardless of age group. Similar resonance with the notion of the compulsory and the mandatory. ' They even make you do your appraisal online and you need to log on and off and submit online forever' (Part 6) ' It is a joke…. I had to log on and off and on and off for my induction. I know they are going to scream COVID, but that is long gone and they still do the same thing' (Part 4) ' You try and book for a training programme then tell me who is the master. It is the blxxxx computer, man' (Part 10). 'If you want to see your claims come through, get online… no explanations' (Part 8)	Again, unanimity across age divides. Street (1995) once asked: 'how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalise them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate?' It seems the same is happening with IT literacy in the workplace.

| What impact does the dominance/imposition of IT literacy have on workers? | Feeling of inadequacy
Disengagement
No sense of belonging | ' Reiteration of what came out of the survey. Subthemes adding up to a sense of inadequacy emerged from comments like
' You feel left behind, no one really bothers to know whether you could do these things with the computer' (Part 9)
You know, it makes you feel like you are a dolt or something, totally incompetent'(Part 3)
' I am ashamed to say it, but I sometimes feel like an educated illiterate' (Part 1)

'If I can, I just don't get involved. I don't make claims and so, I don't do anything that will make me spend my own money, no training for me, thank you very much… I only do the appraisal bit but leave that with my manager to fiddle around with the thing' (Part 6) | |

Conclusions and Implications

❖ Small-scale and exploratory study and so, more questions than answers

❖ Obvious that there is a new group of potentially excluded people in the workplace (A group of educated illiterates) who might not be able to function properly in situated settings

❖ In a sense, a one-sided/dimensional study as only explored the views of those with issues– so no universality

❖ As the narrow view of literacy did before, is IT literacy now so powerful and possibly excluding others?

❖ Totally preliminary study but there is the need for further study

❖ Potential implications for corporate workplace practices and development and curriculum/pedagogical exploration?

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