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A transformational approach to addressing the needs of a new generation of 'left behinds: a preliminary exploration of the dominance of 'it/digital literacy' in organisational processes

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ABSTRACT

There are two parts to this paper. In the first part, the paper takes a preliminary look at an emerging dominant literacy, IT literacy, and its potential impact on some members of relevant communities. Drawing on the perception of literacy as social practice, the paper locates organisational processes within institutions as belonging to a specific social practice and explores the pattern of dominance of IT literacy that is beginning to emerge within this practice. Using qualitative methods of interviews and a focus group discussion, the study conducted a preliminary exploration of the views of staff within one organisation on the impact of this new dominant literacy. Some of the emergent views elicit the notions of exclusion, inadequacies, and imposition. The second part of the paper explores how this potentially excluding process could be addressed in a democratic way. It suggests that organisations can avoid the negative impact by drawing on transformative approaches to literacy development. It emphasises the use of dialogic engagement with staff to identify needs and map out the processes for meeting the identified drives and advocates that employers should shift from a reductive model and instead build a transformative approach into their needs analysis processes to promote a cycle of empowerment.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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KEYWORDS

IT/Digital literacy;
dominance; exclusion

Background

Oftentimes, the focus of a study simply emerges as a happenstance. The study reported here is one such study. As noted by Alter and Dennis (2002, p. 314), 'decisions about research topics are often made as decision opportunities present themselves rather than following an overarching planned strategy'. This study is inspired by anecdotal evidence and researcher experience which is often referred to as the garbage can model for explaining the choice of research focus (Cohen et al., 1972; Dennis & Valacich, 2001; Martin, 1982). It emerged from the author's experience while; trying to engage in one of the more mundane activities of day-to-day experience of ordering food and the struggle to utilise the dominant form of IT/Digital literacy without which he was unable to accomplish the simple task of ordering a meal from a restaurant. The experience re-focused attention on literacy and its ability to marginalise, brutalise and limit access and opportunities for some people within the society (Ade Ojo, 2014; G. Ade Ojo & Duckworth, 2014, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d; G. O. Ade Ojo & Duckworth, 2019), but also to transform lives.

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In contrast to the 1980s and 1990s, IT/Digital literacy/use has made significant progress in our day to day lives. Similar to various spheres related to the use of technology, indeed, its use has advanced to a point where it is unimaginable that we had ever existed without its use. Commenting on Technology in general, Gove (2012) noted, ‘the world has changed in previously unimaginable and impossible ways’ (p. 1). As in many other aspects of our existence, in the academic context, IT related facilities are now labelled as instruments of autonomous learning and empowerment (Knobel & Lankshear, 2022). In spite of this newly found dominance, however, 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, p. 1). More importantly, there is limited exploration of the approaches towards preparing people for engaging with this transformative development in their day-to-day engagement with their lives and work. This study is therefore set up to draw attention to the ethnographic realities of people’s engagement with IT/Digital literacy and highlights the possibility that its dominance might in fact result in leaving a group of people behind. The experience alluded to above led the authors to further observations in different contexts with a focus on workplaces, and these quasi-ethnographic observations informed three research questions which this study aims to answer:

RQ 1: How dominant is IT/Digital literacy in workplace corporate processes and in what workplace corporate processes is IT/Digital literacy dominant?

RQ 2: What impact does the dominance/imposition of IT/Digital literacy have on workers?

RQ 3: How are workers prepared for gaining the IT/Digital literacy skills required for using the IT infrastructure dominant in their workplace and how adequate did they find the approach in preparing them?

Because of the centrality of the term IT/digital literacy in this study, it is important that we clarify what the term refers to for us. Drawing on our recognition of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984), we recognise that several processes in the workplace now combine to constitute a particular type of practice and therefore attract a particular type of literacy skills. In this context, therefore, we see IT or digital literacy as the ability and skill that is required to enable users to find, evaluate, utilise, share, and create content using information technologies, often through some form of inter/intranet involvement. It is important to understand that this differs from regular literacy in that the latter is usually offline and is generally erroneously seen to involve reading, writing, grammar, and syntax.

Given the contemporary dominance of computer usage, we see digital literacy as extending far and beyond the mere ability to read and write online or using technology such as computers, smartphones and Kindles, to include a wide range of skills like uploading content on YouTube to sharing things on Facebook. It is, therefore, clear that there are some essential digital literacy skills that in order for us to be able to function at work, or just live our daily lives and respond to some of the social demands we are confronted with. In essence, a specific literacy has evolved around the social events of just surviving at work and at home within the community. In the context of this study, therefore, references made to IT usage in the work process does not refer to the computer as an infrastructure, but to the specific literacy that is associated with it and which we use the term IT/Digital Literacy.

Transformative learning and the workplace learning

There is no doubt that one of the most dominant features of many contemporary workplaces is the use of IT in its various forms. Neendoor (2023) noted that

It seems like there are new technological advances on a daily basis, and those advances are beginning to embed themselves into the workplace. Technology in the workplace is truly changing the way we work — we are no longer chained to our desks, but rather always have a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone in hand.

An immediate implication of this is that there is the emergence of a dominant literacy, IT/Digital literacy which is naturally affiliated with the dominant IT practices without which some workers are bound to be left behind. The simple fact is that people can struggle to engage with the expectations of their work roles without engaging with IT. This dominance raises the legitimate question of how workers, particularly those who are of a certain age group are prepared and offered the required IT/Digital literacy to enable them to function in the context of the dominance of IT/Digital literacy. Acknowledging this gap in terms of what some have called ‘the digital divide’, (Van Dijk, 2020), Colom (2020, p. 1) notes that there is now a shift from the ‘optimism’ that essentially relies on ‘trickle-down access in the late 1990s’ to the realisation that ‘the gap is in reality not closing’ and that technologies are not ‘offering the expected transformational potential’. In essence, scholars like Van Dijk are sounding the alarm bell that IT/Digital literacies is ‘exacerbating inequalities (Colom, 2020, 1706; Unwin, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018) A salient question arising from this context is whether the development of staff in readiness for the use of IT in workplaces is informed by a transformative paradigm or by what Paulston (1996) labels “the orthodoxy view of education” (p. 32). The orthodoxy paradigm aligns with the notion of deficit and aims to “reproduce and strengthen the dominant culture” and seeks to bring about change in strictly limited and controlled directions’ (Rogers, 2006, p. 129). But we challenge this orthodoxy and argue in consonance with UppSem (2001) that there is an underpinning fallacy that the desired dominant position is satisfactory to, and achievable by all concerned. Lessons from the late 20th and early 21st centuries around engagements with social exclusion suggests that the dominant goal is never really totally desirable when it is informed by a deficit model which purports to use specific interventions, usually in the form of training, to meet the needs of particular groups so that they can fit into the desired dominant model (Rogers, 2006). We transfer this argument to the context of the contemporary workplace and argue that the ad-hoc deficit approach to developing the IT skills of some groups within the workforce is not likely to be totally effective and risk leaving some people behind just as the perceived lack of the dominant form of literacy which manifested in reading and writing skills, did for a similar group of adults in the 20th century.

In response to this, we suggest the need to explore a transformative approach to promoting IT/Digital literacy which gives less prominence to the deficit but promotes what Rogers (2006, p. 129) calls ‘the diversity paradigm’. In this context, we draw on Mezirows’ core principles of transformative learning, (1991, 2000, 2009a & 2009a) of disorientation, cognitive conflict, motivation, and support (Wilhelmson et al., 2015). Given this overarching understanding of transformative learning, this study aims to explore the extent to which actual transformation of perspectives occur with the participants in the context of the introduction of the literacy associated with the dominant IT processes in the workplace. Are they adequately prepared so that the introduction of the associated new literacy triggers cognitive conflict that can result in the assimilation of a different way of doing things? This is one of the questions we hope this study will contribute answers to. A final issue to be considered in this context is what happens when the necessary change in mindset is not triggered. What, in reality, happens to the workers that have not experienced the required transformation? Are they left behind? Answering this question is another focus of this study.

The present study

The study sought to measure the prevalence of IT in work processes and the impact that this dominance might have on staff, particularly those who struggle with its use. Further, the study explored the approaches that have been used in developing users in readiness for their engagement with the transformative dominance of IT in their work context. The notion of readiness

resonates with the findings of Reder (2015) which confirms that ‘digital access, digital taste, digital readiness, and digital literacy’ will vary across groups when explored on the basis of ‘embeddedness and equity’ (p. 2). The study was conducted in two phases with each phase associated to specific research questions. The first phase involved the use of a survey questionnaire to find answers to research question 1 and 3, while the second phase used semi-structured interviews to find answers to research question 2. Analysis of the responses to the survey helped to identify candidates for the semi-structured interview. Following the above, we offer theoretical arguments on how transformational approaches (Ade Ojo, 2014; G. Ade Ojo & Duckworth, 2015a) could be used to prepare workers for engaging with this emergent new dominant.

Methodology

The study was designed as simple exploratory research which draws on the twin traditions of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research data collection. It was essentially a sequential mixed method – with an explanatory goal and sequential with quantitative data first collected and followed by qualitative data. This enabled us to strengthen the validity of the conclusions reached from the findings (George, 2022).

The data collected was subjected to thematic analysis using the initial findings from survey to frame the qualitative data. In applying the thematic analysis framework for data analysis, the study utilised the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The use of findings from the survey questionnaire to frame the thematisation of the data from the interviews provided the opportunity to triangulate findings from the quantitative data with findings from the qualitative data

Sample

The sample was self-selective as it was essentially on a voluntary basis with the use of a gatekeeper. The use of a gatekeeper reflects the researchers’ awareness of issues of reflexivity. An organisation with a similar structure to the ones where the researcher had previously observed corporate processes was selected through the support of a gatekeeper. Through the gatekeeper, a total of 400 survey questionnaires were sent out electronically. Of this, there were 63 responses. From the 63 respondents, 10 requested to be interviewed. We considered this number to be sufficient for two reasons. First, the inevitability of voluntary participation came into play. We could only interview willing participants. Second, we felt that the scope of coverage of the survey was broad and because everyone had responded to all aspects of the survey, we have an even chance of exploring all potential issues through the 10 volunteer participants.

Breakdown of survey responses

Age distribution of respondents to the survey

- 70% aged between 20 and 40 = 42
- 20% aged between 40 and 60 = 14
- 10% aged between 60 and 70 = 6

Gender

Approximately 58% (36) of survey respondents were males while 42% (26) were female. Of the ten interviewed, 7 were males while 3 were females. This pattern was informed by the respondents who offered to be interviewed. 8 of the interviewees were in the 60 to 70 age group while the other two were in the 40 to 60 age group. Again, this was informed by the demographic constitution of the

volunteers. Because of the small-scale nature of this study, we could not explore whether age or gender was particularly significant in terms of our findings.

Ethics

In recognition of the issues of participant rights and integrity (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018), guarantees around anonymity, confidentiality and data protection were put in place. Only participants who agreed to participate were sent the questionnaire and only those who confirmed their willingness were interviewed. Another central issue relating to ethics was the potential for harm to participants. In recognition of this, no mention of organisation type, nature of business and other such distinctive features has been included in this report as has been guaranteed to participants (BERA, 2018).

Theoretical underpinning: Literacy as social practice

This study draws on the theoretical framework that is informed by the understanding that literacy is not exclusively cognitive but draws on socio-cultural realities. This understanding and the varied form into which it has evolved is developed from the work of Street (1984) in which he identified two views of literacy, the autonomous and the ideological understandings of literacy. While the literature is replete with the many further engagements and modifications of this position (See e.g. G. Ade Ojo & Duckworth, 2014, 2015b, 2015c; Barton et al., 2000; G. O. Ade Ojo & Duckworth, 2019; Duckworth & Ade Ojo, 2014), three key developments are particularly significant for us in this study and contribute to the position that underpin the arguments inherent in the study.

First this study draws on Street's further argument that there are many literacies (1995). Second literacy practices are situated and therefore reflect specific situations through specific events (Barton et al., 2000), and third, literacy can be structured for specific purposes (Ade Ojo, 2014). These three positions are the foundation for our recognition of IT/Digital literacy as a distinct form of literacy that can be deployed as an element of different social events which are associated with different social practices.

Findings

We present the findings from the two data collection sources together, as we see this as a 'nested study' (Schatz, 2012, p. 183). Such integration of sources is labelled 'data-linked nesting' (Schatz, 2012) and enables us to use samples from survey to probe further into the phenomenon under investigation. This approach provides us with a further opportunity to triangulate findings in real time (Rossman & Wilson, 1985 p. 7 Schatz, 2012) and offers us the analytical advantage of the potential to 'examine data quality through substantive contradictions or corroboration in the findings drawn from the two samples' Schatz (2012), p. 184. Thus, there is an immediacy associated with getting explanations and peeling back layers of meanings.

We have framed our findings around each of the research questions the study sets out to answer.

RQ 1: How dominant is IT/Digital literacy in workplace corporate processes and in what workplace corporate processes is IT/Digital literacy dominant?

Responses from the survey was unanimous in recognising the dominance of IT in the corporate working of their workplaces. All of the respondents confirm that the need to use IT/Digital literacy is totally dominant in their workplace. Further, they listed several aspects of their work that they perceive as requiring IT/Digital literacy including. This provided the platform for us to explore this issue during our interviews. We extended this to further identify the aspects of their work that now requires the use of IT/Digital literacy. There was a near unanimity in the list

generated in response to this enquiry. The most prominent aspects of their corporate engagement listed include: *HR processes including staff development, appraisal, training, access to CPD, other entitlements; Financial processes including claims and salaries: all forms of processes involved in accessing documents, as well as what might be classified as general communication processes including accessing news, and any kind of development in the organisation.* Overall, therefore, we can argue that participants consider IT/Digital literacy as essential in all of their workplace activities.

Interview findings corroborate the survey findings above. There was further elaboration of some of the points identified in the survey findings. Dominant themes revolve around imposition and inescapability. Illustrating these are responses as presented below. One participant raised the spectre of futility when they commented: *'what can you do outside of IT'* (part 4). Another respondent highlighted the element of compulsion that is associated with the use of IT/Digital literacy noting: *'they won't let you do anything unless through IT'* (part 7) Following the same trend, another noted: *'Feels like you cannot work anymore if you are not ... em, em, ready to live on your computer' almost like, if you get what I mean'* (Part 2)

With these findings, there appears to be an undertone of resentment. A poignant comment from one participant when pressed about comments like the one above was. *'of course, we could do these things in other ways. Did we not do them before?'* All of the above suggest that the need to use IT/Digital literacy is dominant and that participants felt that there could be other ways of doing things.

The interviews further revealed a similar unanimity to that which was reflected in respect of the dominance of IT/Digital literacy. Participants indicated that it was seemingly all-encompassing. More importantly, there was a similar resonance with the notion of the compulsory and the mandatory, as illustrated by some of the responses below:

They even make you do your appraisal online and you need to log on and off and submit online forever
(Part 6)

While still highlighting the element of compulsion, another participant suggested that it did not matter what argument is put across to the organisation, it seems they remain adamant about the need to use IT and the requirement for staff to engage with it regardless of where they stand in readiness for its use. This participant commented:

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)

Another dimension introduced the controlling nature of the expectation on staff. It seems that there is a feeling of the all-pervasive nature of IT becoming rather oppressive. Reflecting this view are the comment below:

'You try and book for a training programme then tell me who is the master. It is the blxxxx computers, man'.
(Part 10)

'If you want to see your claims come through, get online ... no explanations' (Part 8)

As discussed above, there is unquestionably an indication of resentment and resistance.

Discussion

The finding here indicates a convergence and a near-unanimity across participants. It was interesting to pick up the undertone of resistance/rejection that was expressed by participants. This raises salient questions round the issues of autonomy and determination of preferences by learners. It is inevitable that IT/Digital literacy assumes a pride of place in the contemporary workplace given its predominance in real life. However, there is a question of attitudes towards it. A salient question here is why there seems to be some

form of resistance towards its dominance. One might hazard a guess about the possibility that resistance might be induced by imposition. Drawing from other contexts, the issue of resistance to change emerges. The comment by one of the participants about having a previous way of doing things suggests that we might, potentially, be contending the possible impact of resistance to change. Rehman et al. (2021) highlight the role of organisational ‘justice dimensions in coping with the resistance to change through the intervening role of perceived organizational support (POS), leader-member exchange (LMX), and readiness for change (RFC) in a sequential framework’. Given that there is an indication of resistance or even resentment, legitimate questions around readiness for change, nature of organisational support towards change can be raised. How were these participants prepared for the change in behaviour that is embodied in the introduction of IT/Digital literacy into working processes and practices?

In the context of literacy and drawing on the pattern of resistance to imposition on adult literacy learning, it could be argued that participants in this study raise the spectre of what was once referred to as ‘more powerful literacies’ (Tett et al., 2012). In our view, it is possible that this finding merely highlights the routine way in which people’s real-life experience with this literacy is ignored in workplace literacy practices. Further, the response from participants brings to mind the reflection of scholars when looking at the dominance of the cognitive form of literacy towards the turn of the century. For example, Street and 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 marginalize them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate?’ (P. 72). We hypothesise that a similar dominance to the one perpetrated by a particular variety of literacy might be emerging here, as it seems IT/Digital literacy in the workplace is assuming an extremely dominant position.

In answer to RQ1, therefore, the answer seems to be that IT/Digital literacy is very dominant in various workplace processes and requirements and induces substantial resistance and resentment from the participants who we can see as the workers.

RQ 2: What impact does the dominance/imposition of IT/Digital literacy have on workers?

Responses to the survey highlight three key impacts of the dominance of IT on participants. Although varying terms were used, the three emergent themes can be summed up as: feeling of *inadequacy, disengagement, and no sense of belonging*. The responses were unanimous in conceptualisation of the impact although varying terms such as ‘*feeling not capable or competent, ‘this is not for me’ and ‘I feel like I don’t think this is for me’* were frequently used. The interviews essentially corroborated the findings from the survey questionnaires. Some of the comments below indicate the views of participants on the impact that the dominance of IT/Digital literacy seemed to have on participants. Sub themes adding up to a sense of inadequacy emerged from comments. However, there are different undertones to this feeling of inadequacy. For some, it emanates from a sense of being ignored when clearly, they needed help. This sense of being ignored is encapsulated in the response below.

‘You feel left behind, no one really bothers to know whether you could do these things with the computer’
(Part 9)

A different sub-theme raises the notion of ‘inability’. There is a sense that some participants felt that they are considered cognitively deficient in a way, if they expressed their inability to engage with the use of IT. This resonates with the traditional views of literacy as a reflection of cognitive capabilities that was so dominant in the late 20th century. Illustrating this position are the two comments below:

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)

All of the above paint a picture of inadequacy which in some cases relates to a sense of self-deprecation. Building up the theme of disengagement are comments/sub-themes such as:

'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)

Discussion

The findings in relation to this research question again echoes the ways in which users of 'other literacies' were marginalised and alienated in the context of adult literacy. In a way, it suggests that there is the potential of the same happening to another group of citizens and it is important that we pay attention to it before it manifests fully as an instrument of alienation. The salient question here relates to why these participants felt inadequate, marginalised and disengaged. It would seem that a possible reason could be that the approach utilised in introducing the relevant IT/Digital literacy has not been transformative. Wilhelmson et al. (2015, p. 219) note that educational interventions can be most effective when managers and employees are seen to be 'sharing responsibilities and having the strength to engage in the development process in the workplace'. Further, they submit that transformative learning could be supported in the workplace by using interventions that in addition to facilitating the development of managers, it also encourages employees 'to think and act in new ways, aiming at integrated autonomy, increased interaction, and learning' (P. 219).

In the context of this finding, we hypothesise that the link with employees in terms of designing and utilising the IT/Digital literacy might be missing. In other words, the participants do not have any sense of ownership and indeed empowering dialogic engagement (Duckworth & Smith, 2019) and therefore do not really see the benefit of utilising the new IT/Digital literacy. This may mean that the necessary cognitive conflict might not have occurred. Transformative learning transcends routine attempt at promoting acquisition of skills farmed around what Freire (1970) calls the banking model framework to induce changes in the frame of reference (Choy, 2009) such that the recipients of the training are able to abandon their 'habits of mind' (p. 66). It would seem that the participants in this study have not been offered the opportunity to be able to step out of their 'habits of mind'. It is, therefore, not surprising that they experienced a sense of inadequacy, disengagement, and marginalisation. What the ongoing leads to are questions about how the IT/Digital literacy was introduced to the participants. Did the approach take into consideration the injunction of Taylor (2007), who argues that transformational learning in the workplace can only be fostered if the intervention integrates key elements such as 'active learning experiences, use of a variety of medium, appropriate pedagogical entry point, and a consideration for the nature and importance of support' (p. 182–183). Did the learning design for IT/Digital literacy take into consideration these factors? Engaging with the next research question might be able to shed some light on this.

RQ 3: How were participants prepared for using the IT infrastructure used in their workplace and how adequate did they find the approach in preparing them?

From the survey, there was a unanimous sense that the training provided in relevant IT/Digital literacy was not effective. All participants felt that either the training was not adequate or could be better. They all identified the duration as usually one-off and sometimes none at all. Overall, therefore, participants response indicates that the degree of effectiveness of the training they were provided was entirely limited.

The interview findings revealed a conceptual convergence with the survey findings. Though expressed in a more qualitative sense, there is an alignment in terms of the perceptions of participants on the degree of effectiveness of the training they were provided prior to been required to utilise the relevant IT/Digital literacy.

Four main themes emerged in relation to this research question. Although they could all be subsumed under the heading of inadequate, each carries a particular semantic inference which makes it important to highlight them individually. The first theme revolves around the notion of tokenism. Participants suggested that the preparation were usually interventions that are administered in order to provide evidence. Comments such as; ***‘they offer you training for just that reason. So they can say training has been provided and a recording is available.’*** (part 4). Another relevant comment which indicates tokenism was offered by a participant who noted: ***‘I wouldn’t call it training. It is sometimes just a verbal outpour of instructions’*** (Part 7). Another participant noted: ***‘You are invited to check the portal for instructions that are usually incomprehensible, but they can always say we have given training or instruction. Just tokenism really’.***

A second theme that emerged from exploring this research question relates to the ad-hoc nature of the training provided. This seems to relate to the initial theme discussed above. Participants suggested that training towards the use of IT/Digital literacy is sometimes only provided when it is demanded for. Participants gave an indication that training is sometimes only provided when resistance by workers culminated in their challenging the responsible units of the organisation. Encapsulating this is a comment from one participant who said,

Many times, you have to squeeze the training out of them. Only when you rave and rant about these IT things will they remember to arrange a one-session thingy. No use at all. (part 8)

Another said,

‘well, maybe if you yell loudly enough, they’d do something for ya’ (Part 1).

The third theme emerging from this research question, which again ties into the view of the transient nature of the training intervention is the notion of ‘one-offness’. Participants expressed the view that the training provided is often on a one-off basis. They explained that most training programmes that have been made available to them were designed as one-off sessions. Participants who expressed this view further indicated that they did not perceive the one-off sessions they have been offered as sufficient or adequate. Typifying this position were comments such as:

‘They seat you around listening to one fella droning on for one hour and that is it. You can now go get the world. Seriously, how can you begin to grapple with some these complicated processes after a one-hour training . . . diabolical, really’ (Part 2). And

‘sit around listening to some bloke for one hour and that is it. You are now an IT guru . . . ludicrous, really’. (Part 7)

A final theme that emerged from responses to this research question was the notion of one-size-fits-all. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction about the standardised form of the training they have experienced. In essence, they wondered how the providers can assume that all members of staff can be at the same level and derive the same measure of benefits from the training. One participant noted:

‘See, both me and you have the same needs. We have the same competence levels in IT, so just shovel the same thing to us. Have they never heard of differentiation?’. (Part 3)

What the findings here indicate is a sense of total dissatisfaction with the quality, quantity and relevance to individuals. Overall, it is safe to conclude that they found the training programmes they have experienced as inadequate and even ineffective.

Discussion

There is no doubt that the overwhelming view in terms of the approach to providing training and the effectiveness of the training is very negative. It becomes apparent that the type of training that

has been described as tokenistic, ad-hoc, one-off, and one-size-fits-all simply does not prepare all workers for engagement with the dominant IT/Digital literacy. It is, therefore, not surprising that many participants experience a sense of inadequacy and ultimately become disengaged when they need to use the dominant IT/Digital literacy.

We suggest that what this has thrown up is the difference between a transformative approach and a banking model approach. We argue that the approach that has been described by participants in this study is not one that can induce the required cognitive conflict. As a result, the training they experienced does not facilitate the process that can culminate in an alteration of the habit of mind. Indeed, the approach fails to promote any significant transformation in their learning. The description of the training provided to our participants does not appear to take cognisance of the injunction of Taylor (2007) in its design. In particular, there appears to be a palpable absence of staff engagement. Not one of our participants mentioned that they contributed to the design of the training programmes. In the context of this finding, we hypothesise that the link with employees in terms of designing and utilising the IT/Digital literacy dominant in this particular workplace might be missing. We might draw a conclusion from this that training packages that hope to be effective and transformative, must, as a matter of necessity, take cognisance of the trainees. The message that comes out of this finding is that the approach to designing and administering the training programmes that our participants have engaged with does not converge with the principles of transformative learning. We go further to argue that this approach does not encourage members of staff 'to think and act in new ways' and does not facilitate the achievement of 'integrated autonomy, increased interaction, and learning' (Wilhelmson et al., 2015, p. 219). The result is the sense of inadequacy and disengagement that participants in this study have expressed.

Conclusions and Implications

Though a small-scale study, there is some evidence that there is a new group of potentially excluded people in the workplace. Going by the evidence from this small-scale study, this group might be classified as a group of 'educated illiterates' in the context of IT/Digital literacy.

In terms of the three research questions, the findings portray a totally negative picture in terms of impact and effectiveness of the training provided in the workplace studied. It also reveals that the approach towards developing the IT skills of staff is certainly not transformative. This, in spite of the fact that IT/Digital literacy has emerged as a new dominant in the workplace investigated in this study. The crucial issue is that this group of participants might not be able to function properly in situated settings because they are either unable to acquire the now dominant IT/Digital literacy or are attitudinally disinclined towards acquiring it. In an ironical twist, the 'plight' of this group echoes what the groups that were alienated in the mid/late 20th century by the dominance of the cognitive form of literacy.

A pertinent question emerging from this study for practitioners and advocates, particularly those who subscribe to the social view of literacy is: As the narrow view of literacy did before, is IT/Digital literacy now so powerful and possibly excluding others? This is a real possibility and demands our attention as teachers, policy makers and social advocates.

This is a preliminary study, and the evidence is not yet sufficient for us to arrive at any far-reaching conclusion. Nonetheless, the possibilities it raises are worth reflecting on and underscores the need for further study. There is no doubt that the findings of this small-scale study has potential implications for corporate workplace practices relating to literacy teaching and learning, literacy development, and curriculum/pedagogical exploration. It is essentially a call for practitioners and policy makers to be alert so that we do not sleepwalk into the problems of alienation and exclusion that many faced in the mid to late 20th century. More importantly, it calls on training providers in

workplaces to begin to consider how they can creatively utilise the principles of transformative learning in the design and delivery of IT/Digital literacy in the workplace.

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