

Post-Pandemic Discourse in Academia: Workplace Management and Communication in Hong Kong Higher Education

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated unprecedented shifts in workplace dynamics, with academia experiencing distinct challenges due to cyclical policy changes and rapid technological adaptation (Klein et al. 2022). This study investigates the evolving linguistic and discursive strategies within Hong Kong's higher education sector, focusing on how institutional policies and stakeholder communication have shaped post-pandemic workplace practices. Building on prior research exploring instructor resilience amid fluctuating teaching modes (online, hybrid, "HyFlex") along administrative and institutional practices, this project extends its scope to analyse the discursive construction of post-pandemic workplace norms in academia, particularly through the lens of administrators, documents and internal communications, instructors, and stakeholder narratives. Using a mixed methods approach, the study combines an analysis of university policy texts and administrative communications with qualitative data from interviews and surveys of academic staff and administrators. It examines how linguistic choices and rhetorical framing in policy documents reflect institutional responses to pandemic-induced disruptions, as well as how these discourses align or conflict with frontline experiences. The analysis also explores narratives of adaptation and resistance among educators, particularly in light of Hong Kong's "dynamic zero-COVID" policy, which mandated abrupt transitions between teaching modalities (Moorhouse/Kohnke 2021; Klein et al. 2022) and the emergence of Generative AI applications immediately after the pandemic. By comparing discourse and perspectives during the emergency phase (2020–2022) with post-restriction periods (2023–present), the study highlights continuities and ruptures in workplace communication strategies, offering insights into how language perpetuates or challenges power dynamics in academia in a mega-urban setting like Hong Kong. Findings aim to contribute to broader discussions on the role of discourse in mediating workplace wellbeing, policy efficacy, and institutional accountability in crisis contexts. This research underscores the interdependence of linguistic practices and organisational resilience, proposing recommendations for equitable, transparent policy communication in academia.

Keywords

workplace discourse, COVID-19, academia, Hong Kong, resilience