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**HOPE AMIDST DARKNESS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE  
COPING STYLES OF TEACHERS IN THE NEW NORMAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study was conducted to explore and narrate the experiences of the teachers in distance learning at Dasmarinas North National High School, division of Dasmarinas City. The study made use of the qualitative-phenomenological design which involved the experiences of nine (9) junior high school teachers who were categorized according to the distance of residence, comorbidities, and technology-related concerns. After translating and transcribing the interview, six (6) themes were revealed. The themes are as follows; Theme 1 - Burning Passion to Reach Out to the Learners; Theme 2 - Resilience to Hardships; Theme 3 - Desire to Learn and Grow Professionally; Theme 4 - Significance of Support and Collaboration; Theme 5 - Value of Time Management; and Theme 6 - Strength from Strong Faith and Optimism. The participants were selected using the purposive sampling and online interview is the main instrument utilized to gather the qualitative data. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the transcribed interviews and arrive at the emergent themes.

**Keywords:** Explore, Narrate, Experiences, Challenges, Coping style

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## Introduction

Teachers have made a tremendous adjustment in the field of teaching and learning with the pandemic outbreak since March, 2020. At present, they have somehow adapted to the situation with limited time and mobility but they still continue battling against stressors brought by change.

This study is relevant to the present context of the teaching and learning process for the coping styles of the teachers in this pandemic outbreak have somehow made the delivery of instruction possible. A paradigm shifts in education caused by COVID-19 pandemic has brought new realities and limitations in the delivery of basic education services and has changed the ways of life of people from normalcy into new normal (Asfani, 2020).

The emerging blended modalities where digital tools, new learning designs, and learning modules are the strategies in the delivery of curriculum and instructions and have brought new faces of teaching and learning processes. These abrupt changes are new to the mental, physical, social and emotional states of the teachers.

The Department of Education recognizes the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the mental health. Prior to the opening of classes for school year 2020-2021, DepEd launched series of webinars on mental and psychosocial support services. World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that a person's mental and psychosocial well-being is also an equally important part of staying safe and healthy during this pandemic. Roy (2020) addressed that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological and emotional impact is also evident. Its emergence and spread create a lot of concern for people leading to increased levels of anxiety.

It is timely and relevant to explore further the coping mechanism which sustain the teachers' enthusiasm and eagerness to continue the delivery of learning. Coping style is the process of responding to a stressor using one or more available techniques or strategies. The coping responses used by teachers to respond to stressors is significant determinant of their psychological adjustment and wellbeing (Gustem-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013; Pyhalto, Pietarinen, Haverinen, Tikkanen, & Soini, 2020; Talbot & Mercer, 2019).

This study aims to explore and narrate the experiences of the teachers and their coping styles during the new normal. This study with the affirmation of Asfani (2020) acknowledges that the shifts in education caused by COVID-19 pandemic has brought new realities and limitations

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in the delivery of basic education services and has changed the ways of life of people from normalcy into new normal.

Roy (2020) addressed that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological and emotional impact is also evident. Its emergence and spread create a lot of concern for people leading them to adapt and adjust to the present situation. This study will navigate both the meaningful and challenging experiences and the coping responses of the teachers as determinant of their psychological adjustment and wellbeing (Talbot & Mercer, 2019).

## Materials and Methods

The participants of the study were the nine (9) junior high school teachers at Dasmariñas North National High School. The participants are currently handling either modular or online distance learning. The researcher used the purposive sampling technique in selecting the nine (9) participants. The main criterion in selecting the participants is that they were handling distance learning modalities during the school year 2020-2021. The participants were classified according to the number of years in service such as 0-10, 11-20, and 21 and more years in the teaching profession to hear varied perspectives from different generations. To ensure an equal distribution of participants, three (3) teachers were selected for every classification. They represented the participants with varied distance in terms of their residential location and their competence in the use of technology.

Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative studies. Creswell explained that the purposeful sampling strategy involves the researcher selecting the participants purposively since they can understand the phenomenon; thus, the researcher can decide whether participants share significant and meaningful experience concerning the phenomenon under the investigation. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The limited number of participants will give the researcher the ample time to explore the phenomenon in an in-depth manner. According to Moustakas (1994), the ideal number of

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participants for a qualitative study is ten or less to better understand the lived experiences of each individual. This was affirmed by the study of Abuan (2018) that the few number of participants even made the qualitative study more meaningful and substantial. In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

## Results and Discussion

1. What are the challenges or experiences encountered by the teachers in terms of;  
1.5 Online/Modular Distance Teaching

### Significant Statements

The following statements are extracted from the transcribed interviews with the nine (9) participants. The participants were categorized according to the distance of residence from the school location, the comorbidities they currently possess, and the concerns related to the use of technology.

#### A. Teachers living in Distant Areas from the School

At the start there is anxiety on the communication process. It is really difficult in the midst of COVID 19, how to collect their output, assessing their works. We used other ways to reach out to the learners. We build connection thru weekly home learning plan sent thru messenger or Google mails. We make video calls once a week thru the group chat. We also use the RBI (Radio-Based Instruction) recorded topics for students who have no module.

New experiences, during my 1st year there is face to face, may contact with the students. This new normal there is deeper relationship, I can't see them only their outputs. When a learner has no outputs, you will wonder why. If there is no contact, home visitation is done. The adviser holds the ball. She needs to know the problem of the learner.

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Physical reporting is a challenge due to distance. I can't distribute the modules so I send it thru messenger or FB page. No own vehicle/ commute has the danger to be infected. Internet connection in the previous year. Challenges in the new set-up, bad weather can affect. Distraction in the community. Transportation/ Vendors/ Noise

## B. Teachers with Comorbidities

I have Mioma so I can't carry heavy things and move fast. Since I am handling modular distance learning, I can't avoid carrying heavy loads and work fast in preparing the modules. I don't go for consultation to my doctor because I am afraid due to COVID-19. I take medication before I go to school to make sure that I am feeling better. You cannot complain because this is our job. Honestly, I do not experience anxiety because I pray a lot. I know God will never let me down.

I have arthritis in my left leg to my knee. It is always painful caused by tuberculosis of the bone. Medication for more than a year. I have difficulty in walking. I am advised for surgery. My doctor advised me to avoid carrying heavy load (preparing the modules) but I have no choice because this is our job.

I can cope with the stress because there is support from the department. When there is heavy workload, paper works, carrying heavy things, trainings, concerns of parents, can add up to stress. We explain to the parents when they rant. I could range it to 8 when in terms of stress.

Work at home and school obligations combine. There is a mix up of the paper works and the household chores.

I have hypertension because of high cholesterol. The Year 2020 was a tough and challenging year for me, because I had to craft some modules that will use for MDL/ODL classes. I had to attend webinars about some learning platform for students which is new for me. And because I am not a techy person, I had to learn on my own how to operate some app by asking some colleagues or had to learn on my own watching youtube tutorials plus I had to take over our head teacher's function temporarily because he's on leave.

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## C. Teachers with Concerns on the Use of Technology

We need to study, check the output. We use a modern way, far from the traditional way. It is challenging on the use of technology. Everything is a challenge. As an ODL teacher, every challenge is an experience. I always take things positively no matter how negative it is. We have many ways to make it positive. We have many reasons to be happy. It is my destiny to be an ODL teacher.

I am not techy so it is really a challenge for me. I accept the fact that my memory is no longer lengthy so before the teachings sink in, it takes me 2 days. So I just listen well. It can't be that I always ask the assistance of my colleagues so I just review the recorded instruction. Let us accept the current situation. We are compensated, we have a job so let us also do our work. All things if we take it positively, everything can be possible.

Teaching in the new normal set up is a challenge itself. I have to adjust with the work from home set up and manage my time well to perform all the tasks related to work and at home. Online Distance Learning requires a skill of a teacher to use some gadgets and platforms to teach well, I have learned to use Moodle, Google Meet, Zoom, Facebook Live, Messenger and GSuite all at once just to cope up with this distance learning. Modular Distance Learning on the other hand is quite difficult and laborious. I have to come to school from time to time to prepare the modules for the learners and collect them as well. Checking the student's submitted output is very tiring and takes most of my time

### 1.6 Professional growth (Virtual seminars, LAC sessions, Meetings etc.)

I attend webinars provided by the school. I watch the you tube to be aware of the apps. I study the 3D print. If I do not understand, I ask from the IT because it is needed. Practice makes perfect.

I watch trainings webinars. I study new modalities and platforms/ how to use google meet, zoom/ apps to use.

I can't really say if I had professional growth because I just ask from the new teachers. I ask for help on ICT. Difficult because we ask questions from the newbies. The webinars were able to help but still difficult. We cannot learn fast. This is far from our usual ways. Webinars

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should have classes that we were taught on ICT. Basic skills on ICT. All old teachers should have been given an hour daily to teach us on ICT.

There are free trainings and conferences, we grow professionally. If we just attend and don't take it seriously, we will also suffer.

My colleagues are active in attending webinars. I am not so techy so my colleagues share their learnings to me. They have been so supportive. It is really difficult particularly on the online app (canva) I cannot cope with the instruction unless it will be a one-on-one mentoring.

I am already familiar with ICT. I have enhanced it more due to certificates, webinars, etc. There is additional learning when there is technical instruction yet the internet connection is an issue. We are bombarded with webinars but less learning. The time frame is too lengthy. The attention is fully hooked to the internet which is not the usual practice.

Acceptance to the challenges is the key. I accepted the new set up of teaching and opens my mind to the new learning. There's a saying that a teacher should never stop learning, and I apply that to myself. Aside from continuing my studies in graduate school, I attended lots of webinars/seminars online as a preparation. I studied how to navigate the different platforms to teach well at my best and I think I succeeded in some way.

I am attending some webinars, meetings to know the latest trending in teaching.

## 1.7 Urgency of submission of reports

I did not find it difficult because our chairman is very supportive. We have stable internet connection.

So far, I meet the deadlines. A matter of time management. In our department, we have a GC, we ask questions. We learn, we help and support each other. The work is divided.

We have no problem when we are asked to submit it online. The struggle is on physical reporting because I don't have my own vehicle.

It is very difficult for me because I am not fully equipped with technology. I ask for assistance from the new teachers to submit my reports.

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Yes, because in the online submission. I do not want to put all the blame to my students on the low grades. Difficulty on the collection of outputs of students. Misplaced outputs.

I do it right away. My colleagues assist me my children. The problem is more on the internet connection. I do not delay doing the reports.

Lacking documents when the students do not submit yet like form 137 of transferees. When you are done with paper works and there are changes. We have limited mobility.

Since I am fully equipped in using GSuite, I did not encounter difficulty in submitting school reports. We do submit it via Google drive or email and Facebook Messenger.

## 1.8 Fear or anxiety towards the COVID-19 virus

As a mother, my fear is I might bring home the virus. I can't do all the household chores because I have work to do.

How to help my students to learn and become productive so they will learn and pass. How can I give the needs and what is worthy to the students because we are compensated by the government?

As a teacher, I am uncertain if all the students have learned my lesson. As a member of the family, my fear is my loved ones might get infected. It might be expensive.

At my age, my resistance is low so I'm afraid to go out of the house. I have experienced light COVID. My children might get infected.

I do not watch the news so I wouldn't get worried. I rather listen to hymns or gospels.

My fear is on my children. For me though DEPED really exerts effort, it is still different when the students attend face to face classes. They have learned something but it still better with F to F. even for college students, it seems online is not enough. Actual application is still necessary.

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I have fear because I have weak immune system. I have fear on meeting with parents who we are uncertain of their health condition but we have no choice.

Like everybody else, I fear to catch the virus whenever I am going to school. I have to commute all the way from Indang to Dasmariñas. Another one is, I worried a lot in the delivery of all the lessons, I fear that there would be internet problem when I am having online class and malfunction of my gadgets such as microphone, speaker and computer.

Every time I need to go to school, I am afraid to be infected of Covid.

2. What are the coping styles used by the teachers in dealing with pandemic related stresses?

I managed my time. I spend more time in the school.

I bought a bicycle to do the home visitation and reach put to my struggling learners.

I pray, I keep my body and family healthy. I eat food to booth my resistance, stay happy. I don't go out if nothing is important. Think positive.

I pray because this is an unseen enemy.

I do not spend time on things that would cause me worries.

I stay positive, I pray a lot. I do my best because we can never tell until when is pandemic.

I just smile because we have no choice. We practice health protocols. I avoid contact with my family members unless fully cleaned, disinfected. I eat a lot when I'm stressed. This is our profession so we need to be responsible. We are front liners. I think that I am more fortunate than other front liners.

I prepared ahead of time. Fear would just eat you alive if you did not do anything about it. When I am going outside, I make sure that I am protected with mask and shield and sanitized all the time. On my online class, I checked all my equipment before starting my class and prepare all the necessary back-ups in case there might be an internet problem. I prepared my visual presentation a few days before the class so I can check it and edit it if needed.

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Praying and follow safety protocols

Thematic Analysis: Formulated Meanings and Emergent Themes

Upon in-depth analysis and interpretation of the responses of the participants, the researcher has arrived at the following formulated meanings and emergent themes.

## Theme 1 - Burning Passion to Reach Out to the Learners

Many repeated responses were recorded which dwelt on the burning desire of the teachers to communicate to their students despite the risk of the pandemic. This theme has been formulated with the support of the following statements:

Participant 1 has expressed her desire to reach out to the learners as she stated, "At the start there is anxiety on the communication process. It is really difficult in the midst of COVID 19, how to collect their output, assessing their works. We used other ways to reach out to the learners. We build connection thru weekly home learning plan sent thru messenger or Google mails. We make video calls once a week thru the group chat. We also use the RBI (Radio-Based Instruction) recorded topics for students who have no module."

This was affirmed by another statement from participant 2 who said that, "New experiences, during my 1st year there is face to face, may contact with the students. This new normal there is deeper relationship, I can't see them only their outputs. When a learner has no outputs, you will wonder why. If there is no contact, home visitation is done. The adviser holds the ball. She needs to know the problem of the learner. I bought a bicycle to do the home visitation and reach put to my struggling learners."

Participant 3 also shared that, "Physical reporting is a challenge due to distance. I can't distribute the modules so I send it thru messenger or FB page."

## Theme 2 - Resilience to Hardships

There are participants who aired their struggles in the new learning delivery modalities but they remained resilient to perform their jobs well.

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Participant 1 has asserted her resilience towards hardships by stating, "I have Mioma so I can't carry heavy things and move fast. Since I am handling modular distance learning, I can't avoid carrying heavy loads and work fast in preparing the modules. I don't go for consultation to my doctor because I am afraid due to COVID-19. I take medication before I go to school to make sure that I am feeling better. You cannot complain because this is our job."

Participant 2 affirmed by saying, "I have arthritis in my left leg to my knee. It is always painful caused by tuberculosis of the bone. Medication for more than a year. I have difficulty in walking. I am advised for surgery. My doctor advised me to avoid carrying heavy load (preparing the modules) but I have no choice because this is our job."

This was further affirmed by Participant 3 who shared, I have hypertension because of high cholesterol. The Year 2020 was a tough and challenging year for me, because I had to craft some modules that will use for MDL/ODL classes. I had to attend webinars about some learning platform for students which is new for me.

### Theme 3 - Desire to Learn and Grow Professionally

The participants have expressed a consistent response on the continuous desire to grow and learn more as professionals.

Participants 3 and 4 expressed the same points of view to participant 2 on their desire for professional growth as she stated, I attend webinars provided by the school. I watch the you tube to be aware of the apps. I study the 3D print. If I do not understand, I ask from the IT because it is needed. Practice makes perfect.

Participant 5 shared a notable statement, "There are free trainings and conferences, we grow professionally. If we just attend and don't take it seriously, we will also suffer.

Participant 8 asserted, "Acceptance to the challenges is the key. I accepted the new set up of teaching and opens my mind to the new learning. There's a saying that a teacher should never stop learning, and I apply that to myself. Aside from continuing my studies in graduate

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school, I attended lots of webinars/seminars online as a preparation. I studied how to navigate the different platforms to teach well at my best and I think I succeeded in some way.”

#### Theme 4 - Significance of Support and Collaboration

There were numerous responses which emphasized the support and unity that made the work easier and more convenient for the participants.

Participant 1 shared the support from her colleagues, “And because I am not a techy person, I had to learn on my own how to operate some app by asking some colleagues or had to learn on my own watching youtube tutorials plus I had to take over our head teacher’s function temporarily because he’s on leave.

Participant 2 added, “ I am not techy so it is really a challenge for me. I accept the fact that my memory is no longer lengthy so before the teachings sink in, it takes me 2 days. So I just listen well. It can’t be that I always ask the assistance of my colleagues so I just review the recorded instruction.”

Participant 6 affirmed by saying, “My colleagues are active in attending webinars. I am not so techy so my colleagues share their learnings to me. They have been so supportive. It is really difficult particularly on the online app (canva) I cannot cope with the instruction unless it will be a one-on-one mentoring.”

#### Theme 5 - Value of Time Management

The value of time management was mentioned several times which helped the participants cope in the submission of reports and other responsibilities related to their teaching profession.

Participant 1 shared her notion on the submission of reports, “I managed my time. I spend more time in the school.”

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Participant 2 asserted the value of time management in submitting reports as she stated that, "So far, I meet the deadlines. A matter of time management. In our department, we have a GC, we ask questions. We learn, we help and support each other. The work is divided.

This was affirmed by participant 6 who stated, "I do it right away. My colleagues assist me my children. The problem is more on the internet connection. I do not delay doing the reports."

## Theme 6 - Strength from Strong Faith and Optimism

Most of the participants affirmed that prayers and positive outlook in life have made them stronger amidst the pandemic.

Participant 3 shared her source of strength, "I pray, I keep my body and family healthy. I eat food to booth my resistance, stay happy. I don't go out if nothing is important. Think positive."

This was affirmed by participant 4 who said, "I pray because this is an unseen enemy."

Participant 5 also stated, "I do not spend time on things that would cause me worries."

Participants 6, 7, and 9 almost shared the same perspective as they stated, "I stay positive, I pray a lot. I do my best because we can never tell until when is pandemic. I just smile because we have no choice. We practice health protocols. I avoid contact with my family members unless fully cleaned, disinfected. I eat a lot when I'm stressed. This is our profession so we need to be responsible. We are front liners. I think that I am more fortunate than other front liners.

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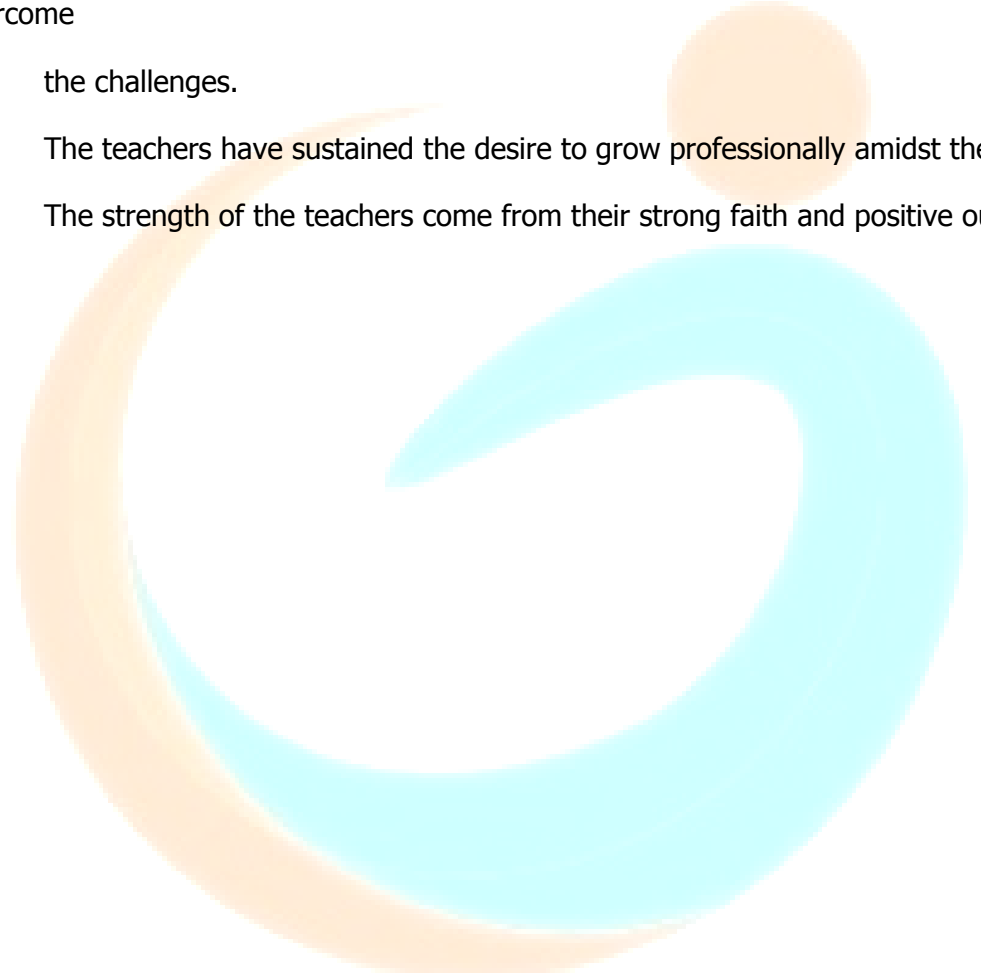


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## Conclusion

After a thorough analysis of the findings of the study, the researcher has arrived at the following conclusions:

1. The teachers have adapted many ways to reach out to their learners.
2. There is resilience, support, time management, and collaboration for the teachers to overcome the challenges.
3. The teachers have sustained the desire to grow professionally amidst the pandemic.
4. The strength of the teachers come from their strong faith and positive outlook in life.



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