

TRANSITION TO FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING: FROM THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The reopening of schools for in-person instruction in School Year 2022-2023, following two years of distance and blended learning, has introduced unique challenges for junior high school students. This qualitative phenomenological study explored these students' lived experiences as they transitioned from modular distance learning to face-to-face classes at Compostela National High School, Compostela East District, Division of Davao de Oro. The research engaged ten purposely selected students and found that academic readiness for assimilating new knowledge could have been improved. The difficulty was noted with reading comprehension, despite existing programs like Phil-IRI, indicating a need for more targeted, monitored interventions. Task overload emerged as another critical challenge, impacting students academically, mentally, and emotionally. Late nights and stress over prioritizing tasks and meeting expectations were common, especially among students in special programs with additional subjects. To mitigate this, the study recommends strategic coordination of scheduling and assigning specific tasks to specific days. These findings underscore the importance of adaptability in educational strategies, shedding light on areas requiring enhancement in our educational systems. It also emphasizes the need for school leaders and curriculum developers to consider students' experiences and challenges during this transitional phase. Students' coping mechanisms present a valuable perspective that could inform more effective support strategies. In conclusion, this study affirms that students' insights and experiences are invaluable in refining educational programs and adapting to our evolving learning landscape. By acknowledging these challenges and implementing robust interventions, we can better equip students for the demands of academic transitions.

Keyword: - Transition to Face-to-Face Learning, High School Students, Experiences, Challenges, Coping Strategies, Insights, Phenomenological Research.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the official commencement of the School Year 2022–2023 on August 22, 2022, the Department of Education (DepEd) marked a turning point in the history of Philippine education. After two years of the academic world being enveloped by virtual classrooms, students were once again flooding into the physical classrooms and corridors of public schools across the country, signaling a full-scale transition back to in-person learning. This shift allows for direct interaction with educational materials and peers, set within defined contact hours and providing swift feedback—a model of instruction that notably enhances learning outcomes through social interaction with teachers and fellow students (Inagaki, 2022). To ensure a smooth return to face-to-face classes, stakeholders and educators meticulously adhered to the departmental guidelines for COVID-19 prevention in preparing classrooms. Yet, while these preparations were crucial, the success of the transition largely depended on the readiness of the Junior High School students to re-adapt to the traditional learning environment.

Several countries have faced similar challenges to those outlined in your background study, as they attempt to transition back to in-person learning after prolonged periods of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In United States, the transition back to face-to-face learning has also been challenging in many parts of the United States. In many cases, students have found it difficult to readjust to in-person learning after extended periods of remote education. Concerns similar to those raised in your study, such as decreased engagement, increased absenteeism, and a noticeable decline in academic performance have been reported (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom, research has suggested that students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have fallen behind academically during the period of remote learning. As schools have reopened, there has been significant concern about how to address this learning loss and how to support students in readjusting to the classroom environment (Green, 2020). Australian schools have also faced challenges in transitioning back to in-person classes. Like in the Philippines, teachers have noted that many students seem disengaged and are struggling to re-adjust to the structures and demands of in-person learning. There are also concerns about mental health issues among students, which have been exacerbated by the period of remote learning (Haite, 2020).

The gradual transition back to face-to-face learning in the Philippines during the 2021-2022 school year was a clear illustration of the complexities and challenges those students faced. With only 26,344 of the total 60,473 schools offering limited in-person classes, and a mere 6,175,631 out of 27,234,095 students returning to physical classrooms, it suggested a multitude of obstacles students encountered in the process. These could include re-adjusting to the structure of in-person learning, grappling with potential academic lags due to the period of remote education, and managing increased mental health concerns stemming from the pandemic. Even as the 2022-2023 school year witnessed all students registering for face-to-face learning - a significant milestone in the journey towards educational normalcy - these challenges persisted. The Department of Education sought to mitigate these difficulties by releasing guidelines for the School Calendar and Activities for the 2022-2023 school year and implementing a full-time, in-person class schedule from November 2, 2022. However, the journey towards fully restoring educational normalcy required not only policy changes but also a keen understanding and addressing of the struggles that students faced during this critical transition ((Lim et al., 2020: Malabayabas, 2020: Montemayor, 2020: Salazar et al., 2021).

At Compostela National High School, where the researcher is an active educator, a noticeable issue became apparent among Junior High School students. Despite being physically prepared to return to in-person learning, many students exhibited signs of mental and academic unpreparedness, and their focus was far from ideal. This concern was substantiated through interviews with other educators including advisers and subject teachers. They shared various observations including students who, despite scoring zero on quizzes, seemed unperturbed, and those who were frequently absent, especially on assessment days. A worrying trend of disengagement surfaced, with instances of students refusing to participate in class discussions, some even sleeping during lessons. Chronic absenteeism was prevalent among some students, with their absences outnumbering their presence in class. A substantial knowledge gap was also evident, as many students lacked prior understanding of the topics being discussed. More concerning was the identification of non-reader junior high school students, highlighting severe learning deficits. This stark picture painted by these observations underscored a common theme: students were physically present but often mentally absent, signifying significant challenges in the transition back to in-person learning.

While there is an existing body of research that delves into students' lived experiences in the context of distance learning, a significant knowledge gap persists concerning the unique challenges and insights students face during their transition from distance to face-to-face learning. This identified void in scholarly understanding underscores the urgent need for this study, which aims to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and insights of junior high school students navigating the shift back to traditional classrooms after prolonged distance education. By spotlighting these largely unexplored experiences and identifying potential strategies and support mechanisms, the study aims to enhance our understanding of students' transitional challenges. The dissemination of its findings will provide critical insights for educators, school administrators, parents, and policymakers, significantly contributing to the evolving discourse on post-pandemic education and fostering informed interventions to facilitate a successful return to face-to-face learning.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study's conceptual framework is grounded in Thorndike's Law of Readiness (Thorndike, 1911), which suggests that a learner's physical and mental preparedness significantly influences their learning experience. By applying this theoretical lens, the study will explore the transitional experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights of Junior High School students in the Philippines as they shift from a remote learning environment to face-to-face classes.

Students' mental and physical readiness to adapt to new classroom dynamics, adhere to a physical school schedule, and adjust to varied social interactions is a crucial factor that shapes their overall learning experience during this transition. Students' perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction can be a significant indicator of their readiness to adapt, as suggested by Thorndike's law.

In the conceptual framework, students' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights are interconnected elements that significantly influence their readiness to shift from remote to face-to-face learning. These elements shape students' perceptions and attitudes toward the transition and play a key role in their successful adjustment to the new learning environment. By understanding these elements, educators and institutions can develop responsive pedagogical strategies and support systems to facilitate a smoother transition for the students. Additionally, these insights provide invaluable information for future educational policies and practices, enabling the improvement of the learning experience amidst evolving educational landscapes. Ultimately, the successful transition from remote to in-person learning hinges on students' readiness to adapt to new classroom dynamics, as articulated by Thorndike's Law of Readiness. The experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights of students during this transition phase serve as key factors to ensure an effective and rewarding learning experience. This forms the core of our conceptual framework, the objective of which is to facilitate an enriched learning environment promoting student readiness, successful adaptation to the shift in learning mode, and consequently, enhanced academic performance.

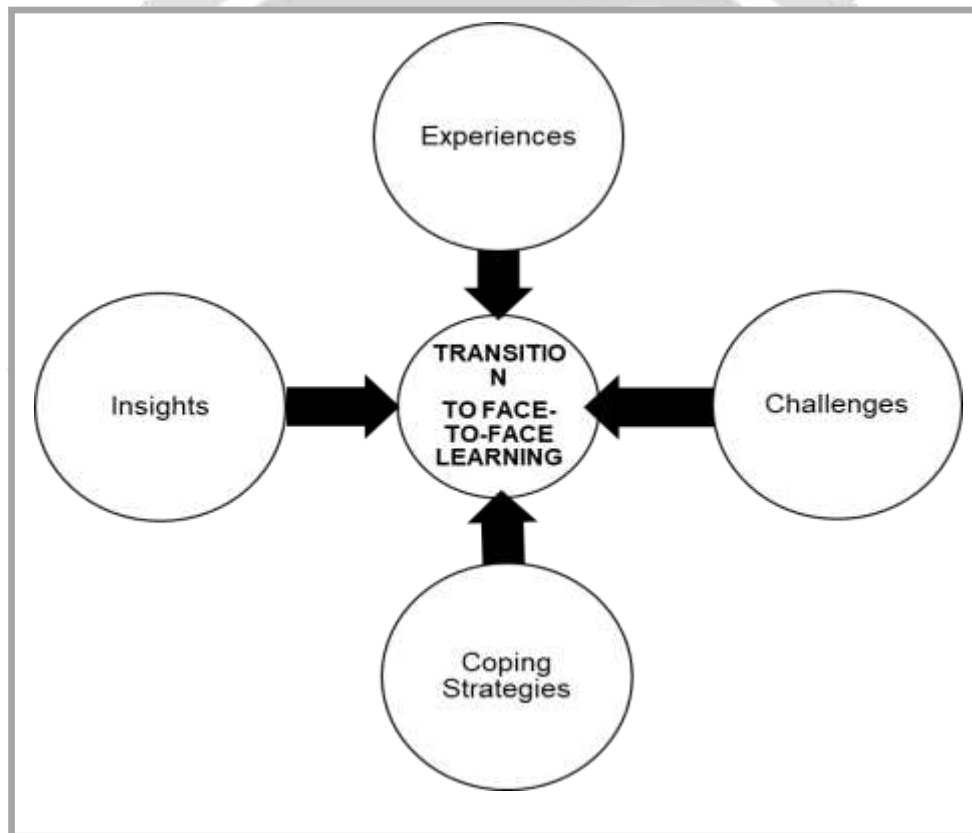


Fig -1: Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a phenomenological methodology, well-suited for exploring Junior High School students' lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies transitioning from distance to face-to-face learning. As an approach to qualitative research, phenomenology strives to capture the essence of specific phenomena. Investigating whether these students confront struggles or difficulties during their transition is crucial. The inward consciousness of the participants, often shaped by personal emotions, remains a focus throughout the research, thereby enabling a more holistic understanding of their experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights.

The study unfolded in Compostela National High School, Poblacion, Compostela, Davao de Oro, a public school 26 kilometers from the Division Office in Nabunturan. This locale provides a unique viewpoint on the research, given the dominant livelihoods in Barangay Ngan, mining and lumber manufacturing. For the School Year 2022-2023, the school housed 3,289 diverse Junior High School students who had to navigate through various learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, further underlining the relevance of the research. The participants were carefully chosen using purposive sampling, targeting those enrolled in face-to-face classes during the School Year 2022-2023 and those who had yet to experience limited face-to-face learning in the previous school year.

The researcher's roles encompass Fink's seven functions (2000), including Thematising, Designing, Interviewing, Transcribing, Analysing, Verifying, and Reporting. This included gaining insights into participants' thoughts and feelings, often personal and intimate. Endorsement letters were secured, interviews were conducted, and ethical research practices were maintained. The responsibility for data collection and analysis, privacy and security assurance for participants, and adherence to the ethical standards of qualitative research fell within the researcher's purview. A narrative-based approach was employed to analyze the data, which involved reading and re-reading interview transcripts, developing interpretive meanings, clustering these meanings to form themes, and condensing the findings into a precise statement. This meticulous analysis was then shared with participants for verification.

Data collection procedures leveraged an interview guide to encapsulate participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights. Confidentiality was assured, and information was gathered through comprehensive interviews over a month. The data collected were processed by categorizing responses and creating themes. Trustworthiness and credibility were ensured by adopting well-established research methods, establishing familiarity with the participant culture, and ensuring accurate transcription and interpretation of participant views. The ethical considerations addressed included acquiring informed consent, ensuring participant privacy, using data exclusively for the research, and preventing or mitigating bias or self-deception. Confidentiality was maintained through numerical marking and coding methods, and participant anonymity was ensured. To collect data on sensitive subjects, conversational methods were used to assure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

4. DISCUSSION

The structured and emerging themes were made as a foundation for broadening the discussion of the findings in this study. As each theme was linked to related literature and studies, a substantial argument was made to find their alignment with the theme.

Reasons that Excite Students to be Back to School for the Face-to-Face Classes. The prevailing themes identified from the structured interviews with junior high school students were the desire to learn, understand lessons deeply, form new friendships and bonds with teachers, improve scores and grades, complete their education, and experience learning directly from a teacher. These motivations reflect their experiences transitioning from two years of modular learning to face-to-face classes.

The data reveals that the primary motivation for students to engage in in-person classes was to gain a deeper understanding of their lessons with direct instruction from teachers. This aspiration is largely fueled by their past experiences with the self-learning module learning modality, which left many feeling as though they did not fully comprehend or remember their lessons (Jones, 2020).

These students believed that with the guidance of a teacher, their understanding of the material would improve, leading to higher scores and improved grades. Their dissatisfaction with their performance during the modular learning period further reinforces this belief (Brown & Chen, 2020). Another prevalent reason for students' excitement to return to face-to-face learning was their drive to finish their education and subsequently secure a job to support their parents. This transition has brought renewed hope and determination for students regarding the completion of their studies (Garcia, 2019).

Furthermore, participants expressed anticipation about reuniting with familiar peers and teachers and forming new relationships. The past two years of virtual interaction have left students eager to expand their social circles in person. Existing literature corroborates the students' feelings. For instance, Lynch (2019) argued that a student's academic progress is greatly influenced by their interaction with teachers, emphasizing the irreplaceable role teachers play in supporting students, particularly those at risk of academic failure.

Preparations for the Face-to-Face Classes. The key themes identified from the interviews were self-preparation, preparation of school materials, the absence of preparation, and mental readiness. These themes

illustrate the participants' various approaches and coping strategies as they prepared to transition from two years of home-based learning to in-person classes. The findings indicate that students and their parents were eager to return to school routines, evident in their preparations such as buying school supplies and selecting appropriate attire for school. This attention to tangible preparations not only reflects an excitement to re-enter the school environment but also showcases a psychological readiness to transition back into familiar educational settings (Lau & Lee, 2020).

Aside from tangible preparations, students also mentally prepared themselves for the upcoming change. Introverted students, who found the relative solitude of remote learning comfortable, faced the challenge of re-integrating into a more socially demanding environment. Despite these initial hesitations, they demonstrated resilience by preparing themselves for increased social interaction in face-to-face classes (Wang et al., 2020).

Interestingly, during remote learning, students often depended on resources like answer keys, assistance from parents and siblings, and the internet to complete their modules. This may suggest that their cognitive engagement with the material was somewhat superficial. Anticipating a more immersive learning experience in face-to-face classes, students indicated a desire to ready themselves cognitively for more profound engagement with the learning material (Verhoeven et al., 2020). However, some students disclosed they did not undertake specific preparations due to personal reasons or anxiety about their assigned sections. These students, though initially unprepared, appeared to gradually adjust to the new learning situation as in-person classes resumed.

In essence, readiness for learning involves both students' current capacities and their willingness to engage in learning activities. A proactive approach to learning can lead to better achievement of educational objectives. The level of preparation among students might aid them in better adjusting to challenging situations and thus achieving stronger learning outcomes (Greenberg et al., 2020).

Feelings About Being Back to School Learning in Actual the Lessons with the Presence of a Teacher.

The emerging themes were feelings of happiness, enjoyment, pleasantness, nervousness, pressure, and excitement. The results showed that not all informants were simply happy and excited, but also felt pressured and nervous about the return to face-to-face classes (Schleicher, 2020). Informants expressed that it was nice and enjoyable to be back in school again, as they could now listen to their teachers' discussions and participate in tasks with their classmates. This brought them a sense of joy (Kraft et al., 2020).

In contrast, some reported feelings of pressure and nervousness. The anxiety stemmed from a fear that they might not be able to answer the questions posed by their teachers. The pressure, they felt, was due to the competitiveness of their classmates and the fact that they had not attended the limited face-to-face classes, which most of their classmates had attended. They were concerned about falling behind the others (Bonell et al., 2020). Teachers have a significant presence in the educational journey of students. Engaging with students, not just academically but also personally, contributes to a comprehensive educational experience. This presence extends beyond the confines of a classroom and includes various aspects of the school environment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Feelings About the Different Activities in School Particularly in the Class. The emerging themes of this study include happiness, nervousness, pleasantness, and pressure. Results highlighted that some informants were not only excited about the engaging activities planned by their teachers but also experienced a certain level of anxiety and pressure (Merritt et al., 2020). Many informants described their experiences as both enjoyable and exciting, being able to actively participate in various activities they had missed for two school years. They were finally able to perform and express themselves openly in front of the class (Kraft et al., 2020).

On the other hand, some students expressed feeling nervous and pressured, as these engaging activities were unfamiliar territory after being home-bound for two years due to pandemic restrictions. The shift from a solitary, module-based learning system back to an active, classroom-based environment appeared overwhelming for some. The sheer volume of activities assigned by the teachers contributed to the feelings of pressure (Bonell et al., 2020). Classroom activities are recognized widely for their role in fostering active learning and enhancing students' communication skills. These activities allow students to engage practically with the content, receive immediate feedback, maintain their interest and enthusiasm, and provide teachers an opportunity to work with a diverse range of student abilities (Steen-Utheim & Foldnes, 2020).

Moreover, it's crucial to acknowledge that students' emotional states significantly impact their academic success, motivation, performance, identity formation, and overall well-being. While positive emotions generally contribute positively to these aspects, negative emotions can lead to behavioral issues, decreased concentration, risky behaviors, and feelings of helplessness (O'Connor et al., 2020).

Challenges Encountered from Home in the Transition from Distance Learning to Face-to-Face Learning. The study uncovered various emerging themes such as feelings of isolation, witnessing parental disputes, negotiating permissions with parents, concerns about mental health, financial challenges, adjustment to school schedules, and balancing academic tasks with household duties. The findings suggest that while parents were

generally supportive of their children's education and their return to face-to-face classes, the students still encountered several challenges (Khan, Begum, & Imad, 2019).

It was revealed that some informants experienced feelings of loneliness when left at home alone. Instances of parental quarrels were also reported, which led to discomfort among the children. Moreover, balancing household responsibilities and school tasks posed a significant challenge, given that both required considerable time and effort (Parveen, 2007). The issue of school tasks being assigned with tight deadlines and requiring outside-school-hours meetings emerged as a major concern. Such situations necessitated students to ask for their parents' permissions to meet up at agreed locations, sometimes leading to conflicts when parents withheld permission. It was reported that this tension even led one student to tears due to missing out on a task (Codjoe, 2007).

Late-night study sessions brought about by the sheer volume of school tasks raised concerns among parents about their children's mental health. Moreover, some parents had yet to adjust to the school's schedule, causing misunderstandings about the late homecoming of students participating in special programs (Muola, 2010). Financial constraints were another worry as face-to-face classes resumed, requiring parents to provide allowances, meals, and fare money. Some students reported not receiving allowances or fare money at times (Mukama, 2010). The home environment plays a pivotal role in a child's learning process. It serves as the initial institution that impacts a child's life significantly (Khan, Begum, & Imad, 2019). The home environment comprises both physical and psychological aspects, including the relationships between family members, respect, voice in family decisions, as well as physical necessities like water, food, and shelter. All these factors significantly influence a child's overall development (Mukama, 2010; Muola, 2010). Additionally, a report from Oxford Learning (2018) mentions that one of the significant frustrations for high school students is the substantial amount of homework. After spending a long day in classes, having to devote additional hours to academics can be overwhelming and lead to frustration.

Challenges Encountered in the Face-to-Face Learning with Classmates. The study explored several emerging themes like the challenges of being a classroom president, pressure of answering questions, experiencing difficulties, instances of bullying, competition, and differential treatment. The results highlight the inherent diversity within a classroom, requiring adaptive adjustments from all participants (Saeed, 2020). Having spent two years mostly interacting with family members at home, students find themselves reintegrating into the classroom's physical environment, necessitating the resumption of responsibilities such as serving as classroom officers or group leaders. For some, handling these duties, particularly in dealing with uncooperative classmates or dependent group members, presents significant challenges (Saeed, 2020).

With teachers bearing their teaching responsibilities along with ancillary assignments, classrooms are often left unattended, leading to overcrowded environments and heightened chances of conflict. In such situations, bullying may arise, which may go unaddressed or unnoticed by students. The classroom environment can potentially deteriorate without a teacher's presence during lunch hours due to obligations like biometric compliance (Saeed, 2020). For students, classrooms should ideally serve as a second home - where they feel comfortable staying for extended periods. However, this comfort can be disrupted if students are treated differently, their ideas are disregarded, or if they find themselves in an environment of undue competition (Saeed, 2020).

Saeed (2020) emphasizes in her article the numerous challenges students face within schools. These issues range from academic difficulties, such as not understanding mathematical problems, to social issues, like not getting along with classmates. All these factors significantly affect a student's overall academic performance. Among these problems, bullying is a serious concern that greatly harms a student's mental health and self-worth. It is the teacher's responsibility to note any potential issues, especially if a student exhibit withdrawn or shy behavior in class, as these could be indicators of bullying.

Challenges Encountered in the Face-to-Face Learning with Teachers. The emerging themes were none, teachers with bad attitudes, problems with teaching style, and giving projects/activities simultaneously. The result revealed that not all informants experienced challenges with their teachers. They were happy and appreciated the efforts exerted by their teachers.

On the other side, this study revealed that there were teachers who showed bad attitude and there's a problem with their teaching style. During distance learning, one intervention of teachers was to send video lessons for asynchronous instruction and to help learners understand the lesson in the modules. But as for some informants, this wasn't helped enough. Video lesson was another instructional material as we embraced modern technology in schools. For some informants, video lessons made the class bored that they don't anymore understand the discussion on it. For them, it's better if it was elaborated or cleared out by the teachers. Another was, they were shy to ask the teachers to repeat the explanation if they don't understand the discussion.

To add was the different tasks given by the teachers to the informants. Tasks were given simultaneously that they do not know anymore what to do first. Teachers also didn't give the informants enough time to accomplish the tasks. It also made them deprived sleeping early.

Teachers must be reminded of their roles and responsibilities. According to Isaac, Haastruo & Osalusi (2010), when determining whether or not the expected educational achievements have been obtained, teachers are extremely important. Observations during the past ten years revealed that the characteristics that once distinguished the teaching profession—the excitement and dedication of teachers to their work in schools—were no longer present. Recently, teachers have shown signs of having a bad attitude about carrying out their responsibilities. They arrive late for class, treat teachers rudely, and engage in trading instead of instruction. When they instruct, their lack of subject-matter expertise is evident, they fail to regularly assess students or maintain accurate records of their performance, they are slack in their duties, and incidents of indiscipline have consistently hampered not only the students' ability to achieve educational goals but also the quality of education they receive.

Challenges Encountered in the Face-to-Face Learning Regarding Lessons. The predominant theme that emerged in this context is the difficulty students faced in understanding certain subjects, including Science, TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education), English, ESP (Education for Sustainable Development), Mathematics, and Research. Several factors were identified as contributing to these difficulties.

Understanding new vocabulary and concepts posed a significant hurdle for students, particularly in English and Research subjects, with Research being a novel area of study for them (Johnson & Watson, 2019). In TLE, students grappled with the demand for extensive memorization. Mathematics presented a unique challenge in that the understanding of new concepts depended heavily on prior knowledge, which was not adequately discussed during distance learning (Brown & Jones, 2019). Reading skills also surfaced as a potential area of concern. Some students expressed difficulty with reading, which could further inhibit comprehension across various subjects (Watkins & Edwards, 2020).

However, Mathematics and Science were particularly challenging subjects for most of the students. The inherent complexity of Mathematics and its wide application across various sciences make it a tough subject to master (Jones & Clark, 2020). Similarly, the cognitive and psychological demands of science can make it a more challenging subject compared to others (Murphy & Smith, 2019).

Effective study habits, or lack thereof, were identified as significant determinants of academic performance. Students who fail to develop good study habits can experience detrimental effects on their academic outcomes (Patterson & Monroe, 2019). Efficient study habits play a critical role in academic success, helping students assimilate useful and relevant information. In their absence, academic performance can suffer (Evans & Morrison, 2020).

Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered from Home. The themes that surfaced were giving time to oneself, obeying parents, balancing household chores and studies, studying hard and practicing thrift, praying to God, and watching motivational videos. The results suggested that the informants demonstrated a range of coping mechanisms to deal with the difficulties they encountered at home. Some informants, when confronted with parental conflict, chose to distance themselves and take some time alone to alleviate their discomfort (Jennings, 2019). Others who were denied permission to participate in group tasks chose to respect their parents' decisions and communicate their circumstances to their group mates, reflecting the importance they placed on obeying their parents (Makombo, 2020).

The responsibility of managing household chores and academic obligations was also handled well by some informants, indicating a strong sense of duty and time management skills (Lee & Kim, 2020). Some who had financial constraints responded by being thrifty and studying harder, demonstrating their understanding of their families' financial situation and their maturity (Rowe & Stewart, 2020). One informant, feeling isolated from her family, used motivational videos to provide emotional support, showing the power of digital resources in influencing emotional states (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2019). Lastly, an informant sought solace in prayer during times of difficulty, highlighting the role of faith as a coping mechanism (Makombo, 2020).

These strategies highlight the resilience of students in coping with challenges and demonstrate the importance of familial obedience, self-care, hard work, thrift, digital support, and faith. These findings are in line with the research indicating that the role of parents is crucial in child development, including their education (Kiral, 2019). Respect for rules and obedience to authority figures like parents can influence children's behavior in other aspects of their lives, including school (Shareef, 2016).

Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered Being with Classmates. The emerging themes revolved around maintaining a calm demeanor, reprimanding misbehavior, compensating for damages, ignoring unhelpful influences, and embracing acceptance. The results highlight that the informants have developed various coping strategies to manage the diverse behaviors of their peers and to prevent undue stress. Some informants opted for a relaxed or "chill" attitude to avoid getting embroiled in classroom conflict, showcasing a preference for peace and stress-free environments (Rashid & Selamat, 2020). For those in classroom officer roles,

the responsibility of addressing and correcting wrong behaviors became evident, signaling a strong sense of duty despite recurrent behavioral problems (Gronlund, 2019).

One participant who paid for the damages he caused within the classroom demonstrated his acceptance of his actions' consequences. This reveals a strong sense of personal responsibility and discipline (Gronlund, 2019). The informant who decided to ignore and distance herself from a peer who treated her differently exhibited a self-care strategy aimed at maintaining her emotional well-being (Rashid & Selamat, 2020). Lastly, the informant who felt unrecognized in group settings decided on acceptance. This suggests a level of resilience and adaptability in challenging social situations (Rashid & Selamat, 2020).

Such results propose that students possess diverse strategies for dealing with behavioral challenges amongst peers, contributing to a more harmonious classroom setting. Nevertheless, these strategies' effectiveness becomes paramount as behavioral issues within the classroom could potentially increase stress levels and disrupt learning processes.

Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered Being with Teachers. In addressing the challenges related to simultaneous tasks from different teachers, some students chose to directly engage with these tasks with a diligent approach (Rosário et al., 2019). In addition to that, Lee (2019) discussed the importance of self-regulated learning, which includes setting learning goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. These strategies may be useful for students dealing with overwhelming workloads.

The absence of teachers and lack of immediate guidance sometimes led students to resort to inappropriate coping mechanisms, such as cheating and seeking distractions. However, some students found ways to work around this by seeking answers from their peers (Gonzalez, 2020). They utilized the potential of peer learning, which is known to benefit academic performance.

Difficulty in understanding lessons led students to seek assistance from siblings or classmates and commit to more intense study, even memorizing critical parts of lessons when necessary. Park et al. (2020) underscore that the positive effects of social support from family and friends can promote adaptive academic behaviors and better academic performance.

Reading difficulties were addressed by students through further practice and dedication. Grønneberg and Kirschner (2019) noted the role of practice in the development of reading skills, with more practice leading to better fluency and comprehension. The importance of sleep-in maintaining energy and cognitive function to handle academic tasks has also been acknowledged. According to Gruber et al. (2020), adequate sleep is crucial for optimal academic performance.

Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Regarding the Lessons. To respond to challenges in understanding lessons, students resorted to various coping mechanisms. Some chose to engage intensively with the material, demonstrating the value of hard work and perseverance in overcoming academic challenges (Lee, 2019). When students were unable to understand the subject matter, some found solutions in peer learning. They asked their classmates for explanations, validating the role of peers in learning processes (Gonzalez, 2020).

Notably, others benefited from having siblings who could provide further instruction, highlighting the role of family in education (Park et al., 2020). Some students opted for independent learning strategies, such as taking notes and self-review, providing evidence for the value of self-regulated learning (Lee, 2019). Furthermore, students who preferred to be prepared for future lessons turned to digital resources like online videos. This speaks to the evolving nature of learning strategies, where technology plays an increasingly crucial role (Kırılmazkaya & Kukul, 2020).

Lastly, informants struggled with English-medium instruction, suggesting that reading comprehension is a critical aspect of learning. To overcome this, students dedicated time to repeatedly read materials until they understood them. This demonstrates how repetition and exposure can be instrumental in understanding and learning a language (Jeon, 2019).

Insights Gained Regarding the Transition from Distance Learning to Face-to-Face Learning. The transition from distance learning to face-to-face (F2F) instruction elicited multiple themes from the informants, including positivity, joy, motivation, striving, parental influence, learning enhancement, and social interaction. The transition was seen as a positive change that brings joy and happiness to students, who are eager to resume their learning in a physical classroom after the challenges of distance education (Lin, 2019). The move to F2F learning was also seen as a big help in terms of learning new things, reaffirming the role of traditional classroom settings in facilitating academic progress (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Moreover, the informants reported an increase in motivation and the determination to strive harder, perhaps due to the more engaging and interactive nature of F2F learning (Hill et al., 2020). This motivation was further

bolstered by parental support, underscoring the role of familial influences in students' academic attitudes and achievements (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2020).

Lastly, the shift to F2F learning helped introverted students to interact more with others, emphasizing the social benefits of traditional classroom settings (Baker et al., 2019).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary of the Study: This study explored the experiences of junior high school students transitioning from distance learning to face-to-face classes at Compostela National High School in Compostela East District, Division of Davao de Oro. Ten students from Grades 7 to 10 were selected through purposive sampling, serving as the study's informants. The phenomenological research design involved in-depth interviews and thorough data analysis. The study discovered that students were eager to return to school for face-to-face classes, driven by a deeper understanding of lessons, forming new friendships, improving grades, and experiencing direct learning from teachers. Preparation for face-to-face classes varied among students, with themes of self-preparation, preparation of school materials, mental readiness, and absence of preparation emerging. Students experienced mixed feelings about being back to school and engaging in-class activities, ranging from happiness and excitement to nervousness and pressure.

Challenges surfaced during the transition, including feelings of isolation, parental disputes at home, concerns about mental health, financial issues, adjustment to school schedules, and balancing academic tasks with household chores. Additionally, students faced challenges interacting with classmates, dealing with the pressure of answering questions, instances of bullying, and differential treatment. Difficulties were also encountered with teachers and understanding lessons in certain subjects. In response, students employed a variety of coping strategies. At home, these included giving time to oneself, obeying parents, balancing chores and studies, studying hard, praying, and watching motivational videos. With classmates, coping involved maintaining a calm demeanor, reprimanding misbehavior, compensating for damages, ignoring unhelpful influences, and acceptance. When addressing challenges with teachers, students directly engaged with tasks diligently, while coping with difficulties understanding lessons involved intensive engagement with the material and peer learning. Overall, the transition from distance to face-to-face learning elicited positive responses from students. They felt joy and motivation and appreciated the influence of their parents, learning enhancement, and social interaction in the process. The transition was considered beneficial for learning new things and facilitated academic progress.

Implications. Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered.

On Feelings About the Different Activities in School Particularly in the Class. Findings from the research highlighted the students' eagerness to return to in-person classes. The participants expressed their challenges during distance learning, such as difficulty understanding lessons and contacting their teachers through virtual communication. They believe that the physical presence of their teachers will foster a better understanding of lessons and improve their academic performance. This data underscores the importance of educators recognizing their role in students' eagerness to return to physical classrooms. It's clear that students miss the direct engagement with teachers and peers and the opportunity to learn in a shared environment. Managing the transition back to in-person learning might come with challenges, such as overwhelming feelings among students. To maintain a conducive learning environment, it's important to establish classroom rules with the student's active participation.

On Challenges Encountered from Home in the Transition from Distance Learning to Face-to-Face Learning. To tackle the issues students have faced at home, schools must host orientations for parents and guardians before the commencement of classes. These meetings can inform parents about new education policies and provide a platform for them to express their concerns, leading to the formulation of suitable interventions. Parents should also be motivated to engage in candid conversations with their children about potential issues. One common concern highlighted was getting parental consent for off-site task completion. To counter this, teachers can assign tasks that can be accomplished within the school's hours and premises. Utilizing Independent/Cooperative Learning periods for such tasks can ensure student safety, simplify progress monitoring, and negate the need for off-site meetings.

On Challenges Encountered in the Face-to-Face Learning with Classmates. Navigating social dynamics after prolonged minimal interaction posed significant challenges for students in face-to-face learning, leading to conflicts and breaches of school rules. In response, schools should refresh students' knowledge of these rules through comprehensive and regular classroom-based re-orientation sessions. The distribution of a school handbook would further reinforce understanding of school policies. A potential solution to manage unsupervised classrooms during breaks could be placing additional biometric devices near classrooms, allowing teachers to monitor student behavior closely and minimize conflicts.

On Challenges Encountered in the Face-to-Face Learning with Teachers and Lessons. While students valued in-person learning, certain teaching styles posed difficulties. Initial diagnostic tests could identify prerequisite knowledge for new lessons, possibly facilitated by a dedicated intervention period in the school calendar. Teachers should supplement video lessons with further discussions and get trained on leveraging instructional tools effectively. Schools could devise a task scheduling system to prevent students from being overwhelmed by multiple tasks, mitigating student stress and health issues.

On Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered from Home. Participants demonstrated resilience in managing personal challenges at home. Teachers, acting as secondary parents, should strive to understand these unseen struggles, as they often influence student behavior, such as absenteeism. Emphasizing the significance of home visits, despite potential inconveniences, can aid in grasping the students' situations, thereby enabling schools to devise appropriate interventions. Teachers should remember they are not alone in this endeavor; they are supported by the school and community.

On Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered Being with Classmates. Participants faced bullying and judgment from their peers, choosing to ignore such behavior as a coping mechanism. However, these actions need addressing, with the perpetrators being made aware of their inappropriate behavior. Simultaneously, victims should be empowered to stand up for themselves. Discipline is key, and it should start at home. While integral in fostering discipline, teachers face limitations due to child protection laws prohibiting corporal punishment. While vital for safeguarding children's rights, these laws may be misinterpreted, leading to overprotective parents who discredit educators' perspectives. The Department of Education and Senate should consider reviewing these regulations to ensure they promote discipline while protecting student welfare and contributing to the development of responsible citizens.

On Coping Strategies Employed in Addressing the Challenges Encountered Being with Teachers and Regarding the Lessons. The transition from distance learning to in-person instruction involves reorientating student expectations. Teachers must guide students to understand that activities and interactive tasks form integral parts of their learning process, moving beyond merely writing answers as they did during remote learning. Awareness of the Multiple Intelligences theory can help students appreciate their diverse skills and understand that only some excel at everything. Teachers can leverage this knowledge to design activities catering to their classrooms' varied bits of intelligence. Furthermore, instilling the values of academic integrity is critical, and teachers must innovate ways to discourage cheating. Creativity in assessment design plays a crucial role in promoting honest academic practices.

On Insights Gained Regarding the Transition from Distance Learning to Face-to-Face Learning. The primary takeaway from the research participants is to seize the current opportunity for face-to-face learning and give their best efforts, especially considering the previous challenges during modular learning. They urge students to stay motivated and persistent in their quest for knowledge. Another key insight is maintaining a positive outlook, regardless of the unpredictability of pandemics or personal problems, and seeking guidance from a higher power. The transition back to in-person classes serves as a steppingstone for students, helping them prepare and train for the realities of the world beyond the classroom.

Limitations. The focus of this study was to explore the experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights in terms of academic readiness of Junior High School students who were identified as students that had never undergone in-person instruction, even during the conduct of limited face-to-face classes. The participants of this study were 10 Junior High School students from Compostela National High School, Compostela, Davao de Oro, during the School Year 2022-2023. The ten students were selected from different grade levels. There were three selected students from Grade 7, 2 from Grade 8, 2 from Grade 9, and 3 from Grade 10. The sample size gathered was considered representative of the total population. An in-depth interview was utilized in the data-gathering process.

Suggestions for future Studies. While the current study offers valuable insights into the experiences of junior high school students at Compostela National High School transitioning from distance to face-to-face learning, its focus is limited to a specific student group and geographical area. Future research should consider broadening the study population to include other learner demographics such as elementary and senior high school students, as well as those enrolled in special program classes. It would also be beneficial to replicate this research in different locations to account for regional variations in the transition experiences. Additionally, expanding the research participants to include teachers and parents could provide a more comprehensive understanding of this transition, revealing whether their insights align with those of students. Given that this study was conducted in a public-school setting, future research could explore similar transition phenomena in private schools, which may present different challenges and coping strategies due to potentially distinct resources and teaching methods. Lastly, exploring teaching styles and interventions used by teachers to address academic issues arising from the two-year period of distance learning could yield effective pedagogical strategies for smoother transitions to face-to-face learning.

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