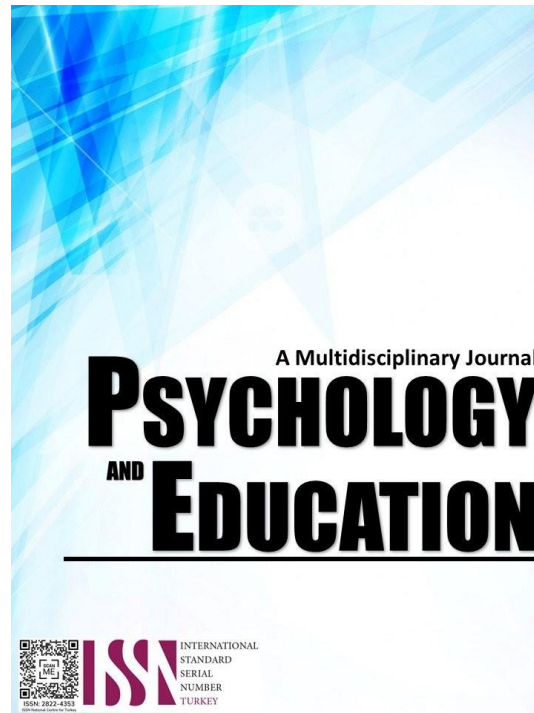


**CYCLICAL METAMORPHOSIS: THE  
ACCREDITATION EXPERIENCE OF MIDDLE  
MANAGERS IN LOCAL COLLEGES IN  
CALABARZON, PHILIPPINES**



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## Cyclical Metamorphosis: The Accreditation Experience of Middle Managers in Local Colleges in CALABARZON, Philippines

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### Abstract

This phenomenological study, which followed Moustakas's qualitative framework, determined the lived experiences of selected middle managers in the accreditation process of local colleges in CALABARZON. Six prevailing themes showed the participants' experience in accreditation. Theme 1 covered the meeting and sustaining standards wherein the participants deemed the importance of orientation on the nature of accreditation. Theme 2 underscored quality and excellence wherein they acknowledged the prestige of recognition once they get the accreditation status sought, which should reaffirm their commitment to the mission-vision-goal statement of their institution. Theme 3 accentuated their experience in the search for innovation, theme 4 focused on hitting the deadline and quality metrics and the challenges of coordination and teamwork. Theme 5 tackled issues on hitting standards which cover financial constraints, facilities and logistics issues, and attracting educators to stay in local colleges. Finally, Theme 6 presented that accreditation is a stress-related endeavor. Still, the participants agreed that institutions of higher learning should be ready for stressors as they are part of achieving recognition and prestige.

**Keywords:** *local colleges, accreditation, middle managers*

### Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are mandated to provide tripartite functions (instruction, research and extension) and are players as well of expansion, diversification, internationalization and globalization of higher education systems. Quality and excellence are the sheer hallmarks that each HEI strives for in order to provide commendable services and programs to its stakeholders. Because quality and excellence in educational services and products are deemed sought after by institutions of higher learning whether in the private or public sector, they incessantly and unfailingly devote sterling efforts and go through processes that will elevate their status. Accreditation is one of the measures being gone through by many HEIs nowadays. Accreditation is a process for assessing and upgrading the educational quality and programs of higher education institutions through self-evaluation and peer judgment (CHED Memorandum Order 1 Series of 2005). It is a system of evaluation based on the standards of an accrediting agency, and a means of assuring and improving the quality of education (Journal of Philippine Higher Education Quality Assurance, 2003). The process leads to a grant of accredited status by an accrediting agency and provides public recognition and information on educational quality.

In the Philippines, accreditation is considered a concept based on selfregulation which focuses on

evaluation and the continuing improvement of educational quality, a process by which institutions or programs continuously upgrade their educational quality and services through self-evaluation and the judgment of peers. It is also a status granted to an educational institution or program which meets commonly accepted standards of quality or excellence (Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities [PAASCU], 2006).

It is well argued that academic heads (college deans and department heads) at middle management play crucial role to succeed at developing and implementing transformative change in higher education institutions because they have means and opportunities to propose, implement and monitor structural and transformative changes like instructional process, curriculum design, and facilities development, among others. (English & Kramer, 2017). Undoubtedly, academic heads can be described as effective when they champion not only their faculty or subordinates but also the wider administrative goals. It is for this reason that this study was brought to fore in order to gain an indepth understanding of how middle managers (college deans and department heads) of local colleges deal with accreditation and provide a narrative description of their experiences entailing issues and challenges in their educational leadership.

### Research Questions

This phenomenological study described the lived

experiences of selected middle managers (college deans and department heads) in the accreditation process of local colleges in CALABARZON. Specifically, it worked out on the following central questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of selected middle managers in the accreditation process of local colleges in CALABARZON?
2. How do the participants face the challenges in the accreditation process of local colleges in CALABARZON?

## Literature Review

### High Quality Accreditation of Tertiary Education

Perez Gama and Vega Vega (2017) looked for the High Quality Accreditation of tertiary education in two ways: one, involving large amount of information, including issues such as self-assessment, high quality, statistics, indicators, surveys, and field work (process engineering), during several periods of time; and the second, in relation to the information contained there about High Quality, which involves the development of an intelligent architecture based on both knowledge and models towards competitiveness. Mathematical and computational models for dynamic and structural analysis of the academic governability integrated the engine for their architecture. They specially considered that the processes of High Quality Accreditation demand a great effort, with the participation of numerous people and faculty members, and the compliance with government regulations.

### Viewpoints of Stakeholders on Accreditation

The study of Nguyen and Ta (2018) investigated the viewpoints of higher education managers, staff, lecturers and students on the impacts of accreditation in institutional quality management. These views were explored via a case study approach involving semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders at a leading university in Vietnam. The study's results suggested that accreditation influences most of the university's management activities, including programs, teaching activities, lecturers, supporting staff, learners and facilities. The authors argued that the influence of accreditation contributes significantly to enhancing the university's quality of teaching, learning, research and management.

## Impact of Program Accreditation

The study of Sin, Tavares and Amaral (2017) analyzed the impact of program accreditation in Portugal further to the operations of the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education, which were initiated in 2009. Tracking the evolution of study programs, the study found that, out of the initial 5262 programs on offer in 2009/2010, 40% have been either discontinued or not accredited as of July 2015. The analysis revealed differences between the private and the public sectors, with higher proportions of discontinuations and closures in the former. For the discipline with the highest percentage of non-accredited programs (Law), the main reasons for denied accreditation were analyzed. The identified reasons were related to a lack of academic quality, for example, the programs' lack of compliance with legal requirements regarding teaching staff qualifications and full-time employment, the blurred identity of programs, undifferentiated between university and polytechnic sectors, or curricular inconsistencies. The paper suggested that the identified reasons are likely to be symptomatic of the quality shortcomings in the provision of higher education programs in Portugal. The data provided evidence that program accreditation has had a powerful impact, reducing the number of programs, increasing the number of PhD holders among teaching staff and raising institutional awareness of quality.

## Methodology

This paper was specifically designed with psychological phenomenology, largely developed by Husserl, which is a philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeking to understand human experience. Psychological phenomenology, also termed as transcendental and empirical, is grounded in the concept and conditioned upon setting aside all preconceived ideas (epoche) to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity (Sheehan, 2014).

### Participants

The researcher selected ten (10) middle managers from local colleges in CALABARZON. The distribution of participants covered college deans and department heads of the selected institutions. This number of participants is recommended by Polkinghorne (1989) as cited by Creswell (2014) suggesting that researchers need to interview 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon which in this study

centered on the accreditation process of local colleges in CALABARZON, Philippines. Inclusion criteria in choosing the participants included: 1) college dean or department head; 2) should not be an accreditor of ACSC-AAI, PAASCU, PACUCOA, AACCUP and ALCUCOA; 3) at least 5 years of experience in the accreditation process 4) articulate in communication and 5) those who voluntarily signed the consent of participation. Purposive sampling technique was used in determining the participants. Through which, the researcher intentionally selected the individuals based on the aforesaid inclusion criteria because the purposively sampled participants could provide inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study thus providing quality assurance (Creswell, 2014).

### Instruments of the Study

The researcher performed multiple in-depth interviews with ten (10) participants using an interview guide that was a predesigned form containing the research questions which are general and open-ended considering the guidelines of Moustakas (1994). This guide was self-made and semi-structured so flexibility in asking questions during the interviews with the participants was ensured. Long and in depth-interview is important to describe the meaning of a phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it (McCracken, 1988) as cited by Creswell (2014). Through the interview guide, the researcher, who served as the primary instrument in qualitative study, was able to take note of the responses of the participants and organize thoughts on items such as headings, information about starting the interview, concluding ideas, information on ending the interview, and thanking the participants.

### Procedure

The researcher secured a consent from the Dean of the Graduate School of UPHSL to conduct the study in his chosen locale and participants. Coordination with the school heads who supervised the participating college deans and department heads was also sought. Through proper communication, the researcher established access and rapport with the participants in order to procure rich, extensive, and quality data. Before composing the overall “essence” of the phenomenon under study, the researcher conducted another meeting with the participants to verify the verbatim accounts they shared during the interview. Before the research report was written and subjected to external review of other researchers, the essence of the study was shown to the participants. The researcher performed it as a

member checking technique so that the participants themselves were able to examine and correct their response with freedom, so the validity of the study’s essence was obtained, and thus its research credibility was established.

### Ethical Considerations

The researcher strictly followed formal stages of communication for ethical consideration. He first informed the Graduate School Dean of UPHSL of his intent in conducting the study involving higher education institutions (HEIs) in CALABARZON. He also coordinated with the participants through a letter of consent to have access and rapport with them. The consent form contains: the right of the participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time; the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in the data collection; comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents; a statement about known risks associated with participation in the study; the expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study; and the signature of the participant as well as the researcher. Also, the researcher did not specify the local colleges in CALABARZON where the participants work for confidentiality. Finally, the researcher obtained the permission of the participants regarding the audio-recorded/video-recorded interview for the verbatim transcriptions of their accounts.

### Results

In this part are the structured elements of bracketing, horizontalization, textural and structural descriptions and overall essence as well as the verification of the lived experiences of the participants in the accreditation of their department. As what was discussed in research methodology, the treatment, analysis and interpretation of data were altogether patterned with the approach of Moustakas (1994).

To follow is the bracketing element of this paper where the researcher expressed what impelled her in materializing this study.

*Having been teaching for decades with invaluable commitment and dedication towards his work and his workplace in a local college in Cavite, the researcher has amassed a significant store of experiences and know-how in his field through countless seminars and training he has attended which have expanded his professional growth which is anchored on lifelong*

learning. Whether in the public or private domain of educational institution, he has observed that accreditation and certification have become the norms in terms of ensuring 'quality education' which is undeniably multidimensional should one try to measure it. As an academic who has himself experienced accreditation, he knows the challenges and issues stemming from accreditation efforts which are all directed to ensuring the educational services are congruent with quality and excellence.

As to his personal disposition, he knows with certitude that accreditation, for one, can elevate the image of an educational provider into a zenith of recognition and prestige. However, he is inquisitive as a student pursuing philosophy in educational management, as to how middle managers like deans or department heads experience accreditation-related works and strategize to achieve the accreditation status goal of their institution. Specifically, he intends to know the context of accreditation in local colleges in CALABARZON Region, Philippines. .

Motivated by this curiosity, the researcher undertook this study with a view of understanding the lived experiences of middle managers in accreditation pursuit of local colleges in CALABARZON, Philippines.

Table 1. *The Horizontalization of Data*

| <i>Sample Significant statements extracted from the transcriptions</i>  |
|---|
| Quality assurance process   |
| Documents cannot suffice the standards of accreditors                   |
| Emotional support for all   |
| High expectations and high level of determination                       |
| Aligning school processes with goals, mission-vision and objectives     |
| Management's confidence in the working committees                       |
| Effective delegations of tasks  |
| Financial, facilities and logic issues                                  |
| Alignment of expertise to training exposure                             |
| Working with the same purpose in mind                                   |
| Active involvement of everyone  |
| Accreditation is about freedom and prestige                             |
| Changed outlook of quality education                                    |
| Strong impact of accreditation on instruction                           |
| Time, commitment and accessibility of documents                         |
| Higher authorities are not mindful of the stress experienced by members |
| Recognition and bigger opportunities                                    |
| Competence of committee members based on their specialization           |
| Outcomes-based education are a good guidepost                           |
| Stressful but rewarding   |
| Accreditation means development and advancement                         |
| Accreditation is embodiment of measuring quality and excellence         |

Table 2. *9 Clusters Categorized Into Textural and Structural Themes*

| <i>Textural Themes</i>                                 |
|--|
| Theme 1: Meeting and Sustaining Standards              |
| - Orientation on the nature of accreditation           |
| - Internal surveys                                     |
| - Need for quality assurance                           |
| - Setting clear expectation                            |
| Theme 2: Quality and Excellence Against All Odds       |
| - Prestige of recognition                              |
| - Harmony with mission-vision-goal statement           |
| Theme 3: Search for quality instruction and innovation |
| - improving instruction, research and extension        |
| - opportunity to grow and continuously learn           |
| Theme 4: Working under Pressure                        |
| - hitting the deadline and quality metrics             |
| - coordination and teamwork                            |
| Theme 5: Issues on Hitting Standards                   |
| - financial constraints                                |
| - facilities and logistics issues                      |
| - instructional force                                  |
| Theme 6: Stress-Related Endeavor                       |
| - the presence of pressure                             |
| - working beyond school hours                          |
| <i>Structural Themes</i>                               |
| Theme 7: Macro and Micro-Level Engagement              |
| - support from top management                          |
| - confidence in working groups                         |
| - leadership strategies                                |
| Theme 8: Competence in Documents Preparation           |
| - tapping the right individuals                        |
| - monitoring of individual and group tasks             |
| Theme 9: Right Mind-setting                            |
| - improved outlook on quality education                |
| - all hard work pays off                               |

## Discussion

### As to the participants' experience in accreditation

**Meeting and Sustaining Standards.** Accreditation as viewed by the participants is an avenue to subject their educational processes and operations to external review in order to measure the extent to which their standards meet the set criteria of an external evaluator. It is clear among the participants that accreditation is a means to ensure that they offer quality education. For this reason, they see to it that there is an internal survey conducted first before the actual accreditation so they can look into the present status of their programs in terms of their strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve. Almost all of the participants disclosed that accreditation is pivotal for quality assurance, thus in meeting and sustaining standards; it is really so members of the academic community can internalize its value. In so doing, setting clear expectations and directions to the stakeholders of local colleges applying for accreditation is foundational so they can understand why their educational institutions are subjected to external reviews. It can be reasonably argued that accreditation promotes a holistic approach and so the level of engagement and participation of all



concerned should be ensured.

**Quality and Excellence Against All Odds.** As accreditation of higher education institutions (HEIs) promotes quality and excellence in school services, HEIs whether in the public or private domain ensure that quality and excellence serve as their guidepost. For this reason, middle managers create groups or committees who are willing, efficient, committed and competent to perform accreditation-related tasks. This is not to say that everyone who has been tapped is willing, but through proper channelling and communication, they are encouraged to participate driven by work ethics and commitment as well. The desire for quality education provides committee members an opportunity to work as a team, despite of personality differences and degree of job competencies, all anchored on their desire to provide quality education to their main stakeholders, i.e. students. As one participant mentioned, accreditation is need to crusade for quality and excellence. In his own words, “Outmost recognition of the program with production of highly skilful graduates, fully competent teachers, highly standardized facilities and equipment, good leadership, and research and extension, participation of faculty and students for community involvement with research journals and with international linkages.” The multidimensional aspects that accreditation measures and tries to improve when there are gaps in development and growth should be implicative of HEIs’ desire toward quality and excellence.

**Search for Quality Instruction and Innovation.** In this theme, the participants disclosed that accreditation gave them opportunities to explore on providing quality education for their students. This entails the meeting of minds to create and innovate effective platforms of learning for the present generation. Considering that the present time lives and breathes technology, educational managers of local colleges see to it that their instructional processes highlight technology-based, customized and engaging learning environments without abandoning the wisdom of time-tested methodologies. They add that through accreditation, their understanding of quality instruction bettered because what they do is outcomes-based and promote higher level of learning. Additionally, the present time which highlights Industry and Education 4.0 calls for creative and innovative minds, thus, they ensure that students are given platforms to synthesize, create and produce something new of what exists, depending on the programs they are pursuing. It can be inferred that promoting quality and innovation should come first from the instructional force of institutions of

higher learning. Thus through accreditation, middle managers of local colleges in CALABARZON have become promoters of discovering new ways of teaching and learning and innovating ideas which can help promote better opportunities for both educators and learners to expand their knowledge and skill horizons.

**Working Under Pressure.** As accreditation covers many areas for evaluation like instruction, research, extension, facilities and laboratories to name a few, it entails a multifarious tasks and daunting challenges on the part of middle managers who receive general directives from higher management and work in close monitoring with the corking committees. The moment that accreditation visit is set by the management, middle managers have to instruct the Internal Assessment Board to conduct internal survey through self-survey instrument so concerned stakeholders are aware of the indicators and measures of various areas of operation. What comes next is the delegation of tasks which primarily include preparation of documents. In context, pressure comes in because it entails working deadline and hitting goals in terms of document completion, sufficiency, relevancy and timeliness as well. In other words, the competence of the working group is crucial along the quality of documents that are prepared and produced. It is worth noting that the participants disclosed the double pressure and challenge when it comes to writing reports considering that not all are gifted with communication skills especially writing skills. This dilemma is further complicated by hitting quality metrics while ensuring that committee member can coordinate and work as a team despite of their differing level of work proficiency and mastery. Nonetheless, the participants shared that despite these challenges, the working force is able to hurdle the challenges by informing them of high expectations from the upper management, so they have to work with grit and tenacity toward achieving a common goal of escalating their status in a higher ladder of recognition.

**Issues on Hitting Standards.** The participants in this theme are in unison that accreditation in their institutions is not without issues. They said that although the management supports the endeavor all throughout, there are times when financial issues come in because accreditation budget is not part of the five-year financial allocation of school expenses. There are also facilities and logistics issues which are common among the recommendatory remarks of previous accreditors. They are open to saying that there are times when the recommendation offered by the

accreditors cannot be immediately addressed by the management considering school budget, manpower, and other limited resources.

**Stress-Related Endeavor.** It is a common response for middle managers when asked about accreditation challenge that it almost always relates to stress because the pressure is always present in terms of documents preparation and assessment and evaluation of the papers and reports presented to both internal and external accreditors. Common stressors they experience include insufficiency of support for research-related endeavors, i.e. low productivity of faculty researchers in terms of presentation and publication as well as membership and attendance in professional organizations. In terms of time management, they disclose reporting to school earlier than expected and leaving the institution beyond the work hours, implying their commitment to keep with the expectations of the upper management and in setting good example to their subordinates that commitment and patience are significant contributors to getting the job done.

#### **As to how the Middle Managers Coped with the Challenges brought by Accreditation**

**Macro and Micro Level of Engagement.** What prevails in this theme is about the kind of management style employed by middle managers in handling accreditation demands. Asked as to the level of engagement they receive from the top management, they disclosed that the former is usually confident with the composition of the working team so they are not that visible in terms of documents preparation.

**Competence in Documents Preparation.** Manifested in this theme is the exposure and competencies of committee members in documents preparation which should be promptly addressed by the middle managers. Their strategies covered partnering seasoned faculty with novice instructors who are skilled at writing and editing. Issues come in when records present misalignment of training with the expertise of personnel who were tapped to attend such. In this issue, discerning and critical decision should be present from the middle managers because quality of records in terms of relevance is at stake. To address this, they would report to the top management that records may have misrepresentation and so future plans of sending personnel to training and seminars should follow relevance and profiling, and not just mere discretion as to personal preference of sending personnel. It can be considerably noted that the middle managers should have a meticulous eyes in examining

documents that are prepared by the working committees. Strategies employed by middle managers include individual and group monitoring of reports, so quality check of documents becomes twofold and not unilinear.

**Right Mindsetting.** What surfaced in this theme is the disposition of the participants to cope with the challenges of accreditation. They argue that complex and overwhelming tasks become doable if one begins with a right mindset or perspective. In the context of accreditation, they view it with positivism, more than an academic and administrative burden, believing that it is a platform for development and progress. Although they experience difficulties in handling the multifaceted aspects of accreditation considering its many evaluated areas, they are confident that they can undergo the process and confidently participate in it and comply with the standards and outcomes-based criteria of the accreditors by ensuring that all the operations and processes of the institution are dovetailed with its vision, mission, goals and objectives. Without doubt, they embrace accreditation as a great opportunity to promote team work, professional and organizational growth all towards quality education.

**Textural Description.** As presented, six prevailing themes showed the participants' experience in accreditation. Theme 1 covered meeting and sustaining standards wherein the participants deemed the importance of orientation on the nature of accreditation, the need for internal surveys to fortify quality assurance mechanisms and setting clear expectations for the concerned stakeholders. Theme 2 underscored quality and excellence against all odds wherein they acknowledged the prestige of recognition once they get the accreditation status sought for which should reaffirm their commitment to the mission-vision-goal statement of their institution. Meanwhile, Theme 3 accentuated their experience in search for innovation, arguing that in the modern time, educators and learners should be challenged to look for better platforms in the educative process. Theme 4 focused on hitting the deadline and quality metrics as well as the challenges of coordination and teamwork. Theme 5 tackled issues on hitting standards which cover financial constraints, facilities and logistics issues and attracting educators to stay in local colleges. Finally, Theme 6 presented that accreditation is a stress-related endeavor but the participants agreed that institutions of higher learning should be ready for stressors as they are really part of achieving recognition and prestige.

**Structural Description.** There are three emerging

themes explaining how the participants coped with the demands and challenges of accreditation. Theme 7 covered macro and micro level engagement of top management as well as the subordinates who belonged to the working committees as well as the leadership strategies employed by the middle managers. Theme 8 presented the challenge in competence as to documents preparation wherein the participants utilized strategies to get things done. Lastly, Theme 9 showed the participants' right mind-setting strategy wherein they argue that their optimism makes complex and daunting tasks achievable by looking at the bright side of accreditation.

**Essence.** The shared accounts of college deans and department heads who form the middle management of local colleges in CALABARZON reaffirm the stand of educational leaders in terms of their unity to ensure quality and excellence in their educational services through accreditation which promotes internal and external review mechanisms which are standards and outcomes-based. To say that accreditation is challenging and rewarding is an understatement because its multidimensional aspects cover macro and micro engagements, collaboration and assessments from stakeholders who should be guided by a clear orientation as to why they are engaging in accreditation and to what directions their institution is heading. Searching for innovation and working under pressure are but a significant elements and motivators of those engaged in the accreditation process, however, as the participants disclosed, right mind setting can provide a pivotal foundation of overcoming challenges they face. Issues on financial support, laboratories and facilities, hitting the recommendations proposed by the accreditors, intensifying instructional competence of educators, research and extension capability and empowerment are but prevalent concerns that educational managers in the academe face. But with proper leadership style and trusting on the power of unity and cooperation among concerned stakeholders, they are able to surpass the issues and challenges related to accreditation, no matter how overwhelming and daunting, because at the end of the day, institutions of higher learning need to be adaptive and flexible to the ever changing landscape of excellence indicators that are used to promote and sustain quality education in the country. True enough, whatever the position of academics and experts is about accreditation, educational institutions who are undergoing such need to be in a cyclical metamorphosis, that is, they should be open to turning new leaf of changing their standards and system in order to keep with the needs of time and society.

**Verification.** For the verification part of the study, the researcher conducted another meeting with the participants first, to present the synthesis of the responses to make sure that they were transcribed, analyzed and interpreted with accuracy and second to extend his appreciation towards them. The corrections of the participants were considered in the writing of the essence so credibility was established.

## Conclusion

Analyzing the textural and structural accounts of the participants, the following conclusions were drawn. The lived experience of the participants in accreditation at local colleges in CALABARZON cover meeting and sustaining standards, quality and excellence against all odds, searching for innovation and working under pressure, stress-related endeavor, and issues on hitting standards. Moreover, the participants coping mechanisms include macro and micro level engagement, competence in documents preparation, and right mind-setting.

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