

Mindfulness Practices as Predictors of Resilience in Alabama Principals

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how mindfulness predicts the resilience of Alabama principals. This study examined how Alabama principals rated themselves as related to mindfulness practices and resilience and explored how their mindfulness practices predicted their resilience levels. A quantitative approach was used to examine principals' ratings for these areas. A survey was emailed to all principals in the state of Alabama, which included one screening question regarding the position and three demographic questions. Ten resilience questions and fourteen mindfulness questions were taken from existing valid instruments and included in the survey. This study found that Alabama principals rated themselves highly in both mindfulness practices and resilience. A statistically significant relationship ($p < .001$) was found to exist between mindfulness practices and resilience. No statistically significant relationship was found between Alabama principals' mindfulness and their age, gender, or years of building-level principal experience.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Teachers and principals are integral parts of the same organization working in the field of education, but their job descriptions and daily responsibilities are vastly different. Although principals may have had some experience as assistant principals, the transition to the role of principal can be a daunting one regardless of prior administrative experience (Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013). This transition can result in elevated stress levels due to the increasing demands and pace of the job (Terosky, 2014). Whereas teachers educate a group of students and occasionally must deal with an upset parent, principals must regularly mediate conflicts and solve problems from any number of individuals or groups (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016). Principals are expected to interact with a wider group of stakeholders and assume ultimate responsibility for any problems that arise in their buildings (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Typical duties of principals include a vast array of tasks, including facilities management; educator supervision and evaluation; data analysis; student discipline; addressing parent concerns, designing, and delivering professional development, and budgeting, just to name a few (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). These are common to most principals regardless of the size of their schools or if they have assistant principals or not. This stress is compounded by the lack of resources for development as many new principals are left to their own devices to either succeed or transition away from the office, resulting in a revolving door for many school leadership positions, with ten to twelve percent of school principals in 2015-2016 deciding to leave the profession altogether (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Goldring, Taie, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], & Westat, 2018). Unfortunately, the trend does not seem to be promising as stress seems to be increasing for principals as they continue to take on more and varied

responsibilities due to many cultural and political factors, many of which are out of administrators' control (Celoria & Robinson, 2015).

Principals new to the profession have unique challenges as they learn the intricacies of this new role in which they must be many things to many people. Their transitions can be impacted by the legacy left by their predecessors, whether that person was effective or not (Spillane & Lee, 2014). They must learn from their mistakes quickly because the demands do not stop even when problems arise as they are the final decision-maker in the building, and often there are disagreements between and within stakeholder groups. As the negative experiences arise and build upon each other, principals' effectiveness may begin to suffer if they are not able to overcome these trials (Ledesma, 2016).

If there is to be any effect on principal attrition, leaders must either have a decrease in the stressors involved in their occupation or a means by which they can overcome and mediate the stress that is causing them to leave the profession (Sogunro, 2012). Because the former is unlikely to occur, principals should search for strategies that will help them reduce the stress associated with their responsibilities (Klocko & Wells, 2015). The notion of resilience can be especially helpful for leaders working in high-stress occupations as it allows them to move on after negative experiences (Ledesma, 2014). A lack of resilience will cause principals to worry excessively about the troubles they face each day, which can cause anxiety over time. This mental state can make it difficult for a principal to lead effectively and make decisions in the best interest of the organization. However, resilience is not built into a person's genetics and can be learned, strengthened, and improved upon by taking specific measures such as developing a positive mindset; learning from others; and using the skills of others in the organization to balance their weaknesses (Patterson, Goens, & Reed, 2009).

Following resilience, mindfulness is another practice and shift in cognition that can positively affect principals' effectiveness (Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013). By thinking more about what is taking place in the present, as opposed to worrying about the past or future, principals can be more engaged with the issues they are facing, better utilizing their cognitive resources (Kruse & Johnson, 2017). The benefits of mindfulness practice for principals and others include better task prioritization, less fluctuation of emotions, and enhanced critical thinking skills (Tierney-Garms, 2013). These positive benefits can enhance principals' abilities to lead their schools as they can rise above the daily annoyances of minutia that keep them from their ultimate goals of implementing deep, real change that enhances the overall climate and culture of the organization as well as student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The principalship is a complex position that demands proficiency in many intellectual, relational, and political skillsets (Cray & Weiler, 2011; Petzko, 2008). Because of the stressful nature of the job, school principals must be able to withstand the negative aspects of the work if they are to have any kind of longevity in their positions. This fact is especially true in the sunrise of a leader's career as they learn to navigate interpersonal conflicts and work to elevate their organizations (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Resilience is a skill that can help leaders to persevere even amid negative situations (Steward, 2014). However, because of the elaborate nature of resilience, principals must work hard to improve in this area (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). Mindfulness may be a solution that will allow leaders to be more attuned to their problems in-the-moment so that they can be cognizant of their non-resilient actions and take steps to remedy them, but more research is needed on this connection, especially when it comes to school principals (Wells & Klocko, 2018).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how mindfulness predicts the resilience of Alabama principals. The findings of this study will serve to inform principals of the factors that can help them better acclimate to the demands of their positions. Furthermore, university leadership preparation programs will benefit from the results, which will assist them in guiding prospective principals. School districts should also use the findings to assist new principals during their transition phase in their first months and years in the role. By acting on the findings, it is theorized that attrition rates of principals will decrease, and these leaders will have more immediate and lasting satisfaction in their roles.

Definition of Terms

- Resilience – "Resilience is the capacity to respond to stress in a healthy way such that goals are achieved at minimal psychological and physical cost; resilient individuals' bounce back' after challenges while also growing stronger" (Epstein & Krasner, 2013, p. 301).
- Mindfulness – "An operational working definition of mindfulness is: the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 145).
- Novelty seeking – "[T]he degree to which an individual is seeking new perspectives" (Pirson, Langer & Zilcha, 2018, p. 169).
- Novelty producing – "[T]he degree to which an individual is engaging in creative activity" (Pirson et al., 2018, p. 169).

- Engagement – "[T]he degree to which an individual is able to engage with the current situation and/or moment" (Pirson et al., 2018, p. 169).
- New principal – A leader of a school building with no more than three years of experience in the position (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Research Questions

This study aims to identify the effect of principal mindfulness practices on their resilience. Data will be collected from Alabama public school principals using quantitative surveys to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do principals report mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - a. To what extent do principals report novelty seeking mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - b. To what extent do principals report novelty producing mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - c. To what extent do principals report engagement mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
2. To what extent do principals' practice of mindfulness factors predict their professional resilience?
3. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to demographics?
 - a. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to years of administrative experience?
 - b. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to gender?
 - c. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to age?

Research Design

This quantitative study will be used to determine how K-12 Alabama public school principals' mindfulness practices affect their resilience. Likert scale survey results will be analyzed to determine the mindfulness practices that best determine resilience factors and how these are related to demographic information. In particular, this study will analyze (a) principals' levels of novelty seeking mindfulness practices, (b) principals' levels of novelty producing mindfulness practices, (c) principals' levels of engagement mindfulness practices, (d) principals' perceptions of the effect of their mindfulness practices on their resilience levels, and (e) how demographic factors affect mindfulness practices. A survey will be administered to examine these factors. The survey comprises the 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale and the 14-item Langer Mindfulness Scale. The participants in this survey will complete this survey anonymously online at their convenience.

Basic Assumptions

School principals are under a great deal of stress from multiple stakeholders each day, problems that can compound and cause a variety of negative outcomes. Therefore, resilience is needed for school administrators to overcome these issues and thrive in leading their organizations. Some assumptions that are integral in forming the basis of this study are as follows:

1. Resilience allows principals to bounce back from negative experiences in their professional lives.
2. Mindfulness practices, when implemented by principals, lead to increased resilience capacity.

3. The first three years of a principal's career are vital to success, and resilience is a key component to surviving this period.

Delimitations

- Time of the study: February 2020 – March 2020
- Location of the study: Alabama
- Sample of the study: K-12 public school principals

Limitations of Study

1. All responses are self-reported and, therefore, may not accurately reflect respondents' levels of mindfulness and resilience.
2. Surveys that are not answered completely will not be included in the survey results.
3. Surveys are only distributed to building-level principals, so the conclusions drawn may not be applicable to other educational administrators or teachers.
4. The sample population is limited to the state of Alabama, so the findings may not translate to other areas of the country or world.
5. Environmental conditions in which respondents complete surveys may affect results.

Significance of the Study

School principals are ultimately responsible for everything that happens in their schools. Dissatisfied stakeholders come to them with their problems and expect them to produce a silver bullet to fix every issue. Principals must also work within budget constraints while attempting to boost school culture and student achievement levels. Because school leaders have such a wide range of sources of stress, they must be resilient in the face of adversity, allowing them to continue functioning at high levels. This study seeks to examine the relationship between principals' levels of mindfulness and how resilient they are. This area of research is slowly

growing, but there is not currently a study addressing this connection. Wells and Klocko (2018) assert that mindfulness and resilience can help principals respond to stress, reducing turnover in the profession, and claim that more research is needed. This study will further this field of study by providing evidence regarding Alabama principals' levels of mindfulness and corresponding resilience levels, a topic that will benefit new principals as well as prospective principals during their formative training.

Organization of Research Study

Chapter one introduces the topic of study, along with the problem statement, definitions, and research questions. A review of the literature germane to the study is found in chapter two. Chapter three outlines the methodology used to conduct the study, including demographics and sampling methods of individuals participating in the study as well as the survey instruments utilized. Chapter four describes how the data collected was analyzed. Finally, chapter five presents a summary of the outcomes of the study as well as the applications relevant to practice and recommendations for additional research related to the topic.

Summary

Principals as instructional leaders, mediators, managers, and a litany of other roles are bombarded by stressors each day. If they are to have any measure of longevity in their professions, they must learn to overcome their negative experiences to best lead their schools. While some school leaders seem to be able to move past negative experiences and trying situations with ease, others seem to be paralyzed by these events. Mindfulness practices can help principals stop a cycle of worrying and regret and develop the resilience that will allow them to move into the future with confidence.

This study will examine the role that mindfulness practices play in helping principals develop the resilience necessary to succeed in their field. The remainder of this study outlines the current body of literature related to these topics as well as the methods used to conduct this study, an analysis of the data, and a summary of how this information can be used to benefit new principals in the state of Alabama.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Principals

School principals have many roles and responsibilities, some of which are urgent and others that simply must be completed. With competing demands for time and attention, principals must prioritize their tasks, and unfortunately, many management issues monopolize this time, leaving only a small percentage of each school day for tasks that can improve instruction, and, ultimately, student achievement (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). Principals are often called away from one task to work on another, adding to the frustration over the number of issues they must now resolve and resulting in feeling that their day has become chaotic, with very little they can do about it (Poirel & Yvon, 2014). In addition, principals are required to lead their schools in serving students in new ways, including the areas of healthcare and socialization, all the while being held to higher academic expectations by state and federal mandates (Terosky, 2014).

As the nature of education continues to evolve with society, principals are now being asked to lead the charge in integrating the use of technology into instruction despite several barriers, including insufficient preparation and funding, as well as the challenge of motivating faculty to buy in (Sincar, 2013). Changes in family structures, shifting student population demographics, and deteriorating school buildings also present issues that principals must navigate (Farmer, 2010).

The principalship is not an isolated job as leaders are expected to communicate and engage with many stakeholders each day. In fact, on average, more than thirty-five percent of a principal's day consists of meeting with students and parents alone, not to mention teachers, community members, and others (Lavigne, Shakman, Zweig, & Greller, 2016). School leaders

are among a group of professionals that have been identified as experiencing significant levels of stress that lead to several negative outcomes in areas such as mental and physical wellness and professional fulfillment (Vanhove, Herian, Perez, Harms, & Lester, 2016). A look at the nature of these relationships can help illuminate sources of stress that can wear on leaders as they work to steer their organizations toward success.

Teachers

The most stressful part of a principal's job is dealing with problems stemming from teacher issues, whether with colleagues or with the leader himself (Sogunro, 2012). According to the study, Sogunro (2012) notes that teacher problems can range from seemingly insignificant issues to disagreements about observation feedback. Principals also express that getting their faculty members on the same page, connecting with them as professionals and creating true professional development that works as problems they have in their quest to improve their schools, which would undoubtedly lead to an increase in stress levels (Bisschoff & Watts, 2013). School leaders are pivotal in creating favorable working conditions for their teachers despite reporting that they feel overwhelmed (Schelvis, Zwetsloot, Bos & Wiezer, 2014).

Because the assessment of teachers' instruction can affect their livelihood, it is especially contentious, and when dealing with sub-par educators, this can be very time-consuming as well (Kimball, 2011). Similarly, the steps principals take to terminate the employment of ineffective teachers can be very draining, while alienating them from their faculties and often leave them feeling ill-prepared to present compelling cases for their decisions (Nixon, Packard, & Dam, 2011).

Differing beliefs between principals and their subordinates can cause a strain on professional relationships as their perspectives can result in varying ideas of how problems

should be handled, as Kimber and Campbell (2014) illustrate in their study on principals and counselors. This research examines how principals and counselors approach the same problems from different viewpoints, often putting their expectations for action at odds with each other. The authors show principals' desire to act in favor of the common good of the school while counselors come at problems with the end goal of doing what is in the best interest of the person they are serving. This conundrum can create problems within schools as principals are ultimately in charge, but their faculty and staff members may feel obligated to act in contrast to directives because of their values and beliefs.

Cultural differences can also play a part in developing tensions between faculty members and with the administration as detailed in a study by Madsen and Mabokela (2014) in which homogeneous school districts had recently integrated, resulting in several new Black students, faculty, and administrators. The authors outline the issues the schools faced, including Black assistant principals not feeling respected by their White subordinates and being relegated to the role of carrying out discipline, with little input on instructional matters. Although there were no Black principals in the districts being studied, it is apparent that racial differences can be a source of stress for principals working with a diverse faculty that has not been exposed to other cultures.

Parents

Due to the technological nature of society today, principals are expected to be available to their stakeholders, including parents, and communicate outside of normal business hours (Jentz, 2009; Wells, 2013). Even when exchanges occur during the school day, communication breakdown can take place, as evidenced by a case study on the problems encountered by a principal and her school's parent-teacher organization (PTO) (Lareau & Muñoz, 2012). Lareau

and Muñoz (2012) describe the veteran principal as being highly structured, whereas the PTO is seemingly in need of organization and volunteers. The authors detail an incident in which parents had demanded the principal schedule a PTO-sponsored event that she had agreed to previously. They explain that the principal was out the day of the event, and during the activity, no school staff members were present, and an injury resulted. As a result, the authors say that some parents were angry due to a lack of communication between the principal and the PTO. They explain that both the principal and the PTO volunteers ended up exasperated for their own reasons, ending with the principal taking a hard stance to forbid those types of events in the future.

Though not explicitly stated, it would stand to reason that the principal and parents in the Lareau and Muñoz (2012) study suffered a loss of trust between each other: from the parents' perspective due to the injury and lack of supervision and from the principal's perspective due to the parents seeming to overstep their bounds in demanding the event take place. Principals can harm these relationships in other ways as well by being dismissive of parents' concerns without considering their point of view or if there is a perception that they are disinterested in their students' wellbeing (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). This decrease in trust can be detrimental not only to the relationships involved but also to the principal's mental and physical wellness (Ozer, 2013). Furthermore, as principals work to increase student achievement, the trust that the school builds with parents ultimately adds to that goal (Shelden et al., 2010). Shelden et al. also point out that as the leader of the building, the principal is ultimately responsible for leading the charge in seeking out and modeling these connections.

Addressing parent concerns can be a particularly daunting task for principals, especially when emotions are high. A study by Sogunro (2012) confirms this, claiming it falls second on

the list of stressors principals face. One principal participating in the study noted that when parents have issues with educators, these problems can be more difficult to mediate than student disagreements because they tend to hold a grudge. The tension between parents and schools could be seen to result due in part to a shift in which parents are becoming more apt to team with their children against schools in disciplinary matters, though this could, in turn, be due to frustrations stemming from life events (MacBeath, 2009). Even so, this attitude is making it more difficult for leaders to implement the discipline necessary to run a school effectively (Sogunro, 2012). Sogunro illustrates this point with an account in which parents in Connecticut attempted to persuade school officials to overturn their decision to remove their high school students from their athletic teams due to violation of the school's alcohol policy. The author contends that the parents tried to use a technicality to circumvent this punishment and that the leaders are thinking of altering the rules as a result.

Other Stakeholders

Principals must engage with many stakeholder groups each day, one of which is the reason for their employment: students. Though principals surely have positive encounters with students that help keep them engaged in their work, problems, concerns, and other negative situations will arise. In recent years, bullying has been given more media attention, and has resulted in principals working to allay the fears of students and their parents but who often lack the authority to put a stop to the problem (Englehart, 2014). The principal's influence appears to be more feasible in smaller settings as principals here view their relationships with their pupils more favorably than do those in larger schools (Ozer, 2013). The issue of bullying has the potential to negatively impact principals' relationships with parents as many leaders are perceived as not taking a hard enough stance in following through on bullying procedures,

leaving parents upset and feeling that their concerns were not valued (Brown, Aalsma, & Ott, 2013).

Of particular note to principals' stress levels in their profession is the relationships they have with their superintendents, who ultimately determine their employment status. A study by West, Peck, Peitzug, and Crane (2014) details the stark differences in stress and job satisfaction that can occur from working for different district leaders. The authors contrast a superintendent who is very aggressive and demanding with his relationship-oriented successor in the same district. The study shows that principals experienced differing levels of stress under the two leaders, with several principals becoming ill or passing away during the tenure of the initial superintendent. The study also noted how the workloads as by-products of district expectations changed in both situations and that school leaders made decisions that would be in the best interest of their career, but had unintended negative consequences on their health due to diet and exercise options. This connection between principals and their supervisors can positively or negatively impact performance and individual health by increasing or decreasing workload and stress factors.

Turnover

It is important to research what new principals go through in order to provide them with the help they need to succeed and remain in their positions (Spillane & Lee, 2014). School leaders can impact their schools by setting the tone and direction, leading the way for improved instruction, and making sound personnel decisions (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). Principal turnover, when measured both nationally as a whole and in individual states, has been an issue affecting schools (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). One out of every five school principals in the 2007-2008 school year did not return to the same schools the next year, either because of changing schools

or leaving the field altogether (Battle, 2010). Some of the factors influencing principals' decisions to leave their schools or the profession all together include lack of freedom in decision-making; low academic achievement scores; high levels of student misbehaviors; faculty and staff discord; student demographics including income levels, race; (though minority school leaders are more likely to continue leading schools with high percentages of minority students), and special education status; increasing demands; and lack of professional development (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018; Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011). Inadequate compensation can also affect school leaders' employment decisions, with incremental pay increases being highly predictive of these moves even after controlling for other variables (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011).

Principal turnover is particularly concerning because it is correlated to teachers leaving those schools, namely those that are considered to be more competent (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). Furthermore, when school leaders depart, test scores decrease, and relationships within the building suffer (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). Additionally, changes in school leadership can be detrimental to the rest of the school community, including parents, in part because of concerns about pending changes (Boyce & Bowers, 2016).

According to Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011), not only are principals apt to leave their posts, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to fill their vacancies. The authors contend that filling vacancies is increasingly difficult due to several factors, including mass generational retirement and waning desire of eligible individuals to pursue the field. Furthermore, the authors state that this concern is illustrated by the fact that less than one in five school leaders has a tenure of at least ten years, with almost two-thirds leaving before seven years of service, according to some reports. To make matters worse, more than half of states have reported that the group of candidates from which they are selecting has been shrinking according to the

authors. This problem is more pronounced in rural schools, which tend to have greater rates of principal turnover than others as suggested by the authors. Data is regional as well, according to the authors, with school leaders leaving their professions more often in the southern United States, while those in the northern region being more apt to leave their posts for principalships in other buildings.

Furthermore, secondary schools tend to be more susceptible to principal turnover than do elementary schools according to Tekleselassie & Villarreal (2011). However, as principals become more established, they are less likely to leave their position or the profession as stated by the authors. Education, however, can be a factor that affects turnover as principals with doctoral degrees are more than one-and-a-half times more likely to leave their schools than those with master's degrees per the authors.

If superintendents are serious about retaining principals, according to Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011), they can be mindful about providing high levels of freedom in decision-making; professional development options; and one-on-one constructive. The authors go on to say that when principals see the value in what they are doing, mesh with their systems, and have a passion for the profession, they have a lower chance of leaving than leaders that are dissatisfied with these criteria. Although there are instances in which principals leaving their schools are positive, the authors state that this is the exception rather than the rule as school leader continuity is generally necessary for school improvement efforts.

New Principals

Internal struggles. With any new position comes new challenges, celebrations, and ultimately new sources of stress. The position of a school principal is no exception to this idea regardless of the amount of preparation in anticipation of the change, as immersion in leadership

is the only adequate teacher (Hill, 2007). As Hill (2007) explains, taking the plunge into leadership is akin to becoming a parent as the transition is immediate with no intermediate step. Although most novice leaders have experience in education and possibly even in school administration, the move to the principal's office results in a change in mindset and workload (Spillane & Lee, 2014). New principals often experience cognitive dissonance upon their entry into the profession and encounter many problems ranging from conflicts with employees and parents to discipline and cultural integration issues with students (Bayar, 2016). Not only are these problems often great in number, wide-ranging, and arise without warning, but they also seem to become more exacerbated early on in the leader's tenure (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Even when new leaders anticipate the increase in the demands of their new roles, it is often far more pressure than they had bargained for, especially for those that have been promoted from within (Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013). However, in some cases, these new principals seemed to be better adjusted than their counterparts who were new to their systems as they have some existing knowledge of the capabilities of their faculties (Spillane & Lee, 2014). A contributing factor to this pressure is that new principals now have the final say over what happens in their schools and are held responsible for the wellbeing of all of the people in their buildings (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Gentilucci et al. (2013) also explain that they now have more demands on their schedules and must learn to allocate their time better while also managing to function more independently without a group of peers to which they can turn for advice. This combination of stressors can be plaguing for those expected to possess answers to difficult questions, mediate conflicts between individuals, and manage the performance of the personnel in their buildings. As a result, many new principals find that they feel they are working nonstop, including outside of school hours, and have developed a mindset in which they are in a perpetual

state of searching for things that can go wrong (Spillane & Lee, 2014). They also must now look at problems and solutions from several perspectives to understand how decisions will affect all stakeholders, as opposed to being able to recommend options from their viewpoints in prior roles (Spillane & Lee, 2014). With all the problems that principals encounter each day, new principals are especially taxed because they do not have any prior experience to draw from unlike their veteran counterparts (Steward, 2014). This disadvantage can be especially true in certain requirements of the position such as human resources, facilities, and fiscal management in which principals typically take the lead, making it likely that newcomers will have little to no experience in these areas (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Unlike teachers, principals often must explore their new role alone with no support or guidance from their superiors, sometimes resulting in professional casualties (Eller, 2008). Principals in rural settings can have even more trouble in this area as they often do not have an administrative team to assist them and discuss problems (Ashton & Duncan, 2012).

Politics and relationships. A study of school superintendents' views of the areas in which new principals need guidance revealed that strategies for interacting with various groups of people are among the top of the list (Cray & Weiler, 2011). Fortunately, new principals tend to recognize that the ability to build relationships with others as professionals is essential to their role as school leaders (Petzko, 2008) and want a more experienced leader to guide as they learn the nuances of their new position (Gentilucci et al., 2013). New principals must also become accustomed to their new title, which brings with it many issues that may not have been anticipated. They also find that they have a wider variety of people in different roles vying for a moment of their time (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Now that the leaders have been promoted, their new subordinates will change how they speak to and interact with the principals, often in a

negative and possibly offensive manner (Jentz, 2009). Novice principals must appreciate the role that connecting with their teachers plays in their efforts to introduce new initiatives, or else they run the risk of creating a culture of opposition regardless of the merits of their ideas (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2016). This task, however, is complicated as some teachers will actively work against leaders' efforts due to differences in motives for entering and continuing in education (Gentilucci et al., 2013). This conflict can also occur when previous school leaders have caused teachers to distrust administration due to ineffective navigation of the political landscape, reinforcing the need for new principals to understand the need for genuine relationships with all stakeholders in the organization (Brown & Olson, 2015).

Conversely, when following strong, well-respected leaders, first-year principals can struggle with carving out their niches and find that their actions are often compared to those of their predecessors (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Performing the duties of a principal can be more intense in practice than they seem when learned in theory. Leaders new to the profession can struggle with human resource aspects of the position when the behaviors of other adults in the building must be addressed (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Because of this, many new principals make a conscious decision to keep others in the school at arm's length to ensure that there is no room to imply that they are giving some preferential treatment (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

Principals new to the profession often make the mistake of attempting to harness power derived from their new position to solve problems, later realizing the need to generate authority from modeling leadership (Gentilucci et al., 2013). Hill (2007) details this idea as it pertains to the business world, noting that leaders must take steps to prove that they are worthy of being followed. This problem can be amplified when trying to implement new ideas as faculty and staff

can see these alterations as an affront to their established ways of operating (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

New challenges. As if the new problems that first-year principals are introduced to were not enough, the current educational landscape is changing so that today's administrators are facing a new set of problems than were experienced by leaders years ago (Daresh, 2007). Daresh (2007) explains that principals now must fulfill many roles that focus increasingly on cultural issues, engaging various stakeholder groups, and improving curriculum and instruction. Many principals are skilled at what they do, but part of being a successful leader is adaptability as factors such as changing student demographics, accelerating technological advances, and evolving legislative actions can drastically alter the tasks required of them (Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009). Even those new principals who were held in high regard before their promotion can struggle as they work to establish relationships and move their schools in positive directions (Northfield, 2013). Furthermore, with the current emphasis on principals influencing classroom instruction, the adaptation to the role can make it hard for these new leaders to carry out this task as they learn to navigate the many responsibilities that have been thrust upon them (Spillane & Lee, 2014). The struggles that novice principals contend with are not only the problems themselves but also the interactions of the wide array of issues (Crow, 2006).

New principals in Alabama. Little research exists on the topic of novice principals in the state of Alabama. However, a study of over one hundred new principals in Alabama with less than three years of experience in the role showed that procedures for helping them transition into the roles differ greatly across the state, with most districts having no explicit plan for accomplishing this (Wright, Siegrist, Pate, Monetti, & Raiford, 2009). The lack of training or support can be a problem with the number of tasks that school principals are responsible for,

with little experience in performing them. Another study on high school principals in four southeastern states – including Alabama – found that slightly more than half of principals felt that they were adequately prepared to lead their schools concerning situations involving special education (Styron & LeMire, 2009). Another area in which novice Alabama principals indicated they lacked training, as noted by Wright et al. (2009), was career politics. Furthermore, Wright et al. (2009) noted that leaders who had previously served as assistant principals indicated that it aided their transitions to the principalship, most still said that they learned how to do their job along the way. First-year principals feel that they need a means by which they can connect with others who will help them develop as leaders through discussions and guidance relating to the many duties they face for the first time (Wright et al., 2009).

Knowledge of school-related laws is important for principals as they interact daily with stakeholders who can all potentially file suit for a myriad of reasons. Alabama principals, in particular, are not confident in their knowledge of school law in the area of pupil rights (Petty, 2016). Petty found that nearly one in five principals surveyed in Alabama had had no professional development since their post-secondary education. She also noted that over forty percent of those surveyed indicated that their school districts do not offer any opportunities for professional learning in this area. A combination of legal ignorance and demanding stakeholder groups can develop into a stressful first-year experience for any principal, a need that should be addressed by universities and school districts alike.

Resilience

Origins. Studies focusing on the methods by which children cope with and overcome trying situations can be credited for spawning the concept of resilience (Day, 2014). More specifically, studies looked at the offspring of women who had schizophrenia to determine

differences between children that rose above challenges versus those who did not (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Later, research would expand to explore other negative life experiences for children such as poverty, abuse, neighborhood violence, and other undesirable conditions to find those factors that determine which children can survive or thrive whereas others do not (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The goal of this early research was to identify those children who were able to lead seemingly normal lives despite harsh conditions during their upbringing to step in through strategies and legislation to make a difference for children in these environments (Masten, 2001). Masten (2001) adds that early findings suggested that children adapting to impoverished areas had some type of superhuman qualities and that the idea has remained despite further research indicating that resilience is more widespread than originally thought.

Challenging and stressful situations require individuals to possess skills that will allow them to maintain mental strength and fortitude if they are to succeed. Resilience is one such skill that enables people to trudge forward with a positive mindset and effectively manage their feelings when their circumstances seem to be working against them (Steward, 2014). This resilience is likely due to internally held beliefs about the reason for the work at hand, which directs their focus toward the goal and away from the negative environmental conditions (Day, 2014; Steward, 2014). According to Steward (2014), some school leaders have contended that resilience means being able to successfully stay task-oriented, while others evoke imagery of withstanding an onslaught during the war. Both of these explanations can be considered accurate, with the definition of resilience differing based upon the context in which an individual must rebound from, whether it be an extreme situation or an ongoing exposure to constant stress (Vanhove et al., 2016). Although this topic lends itself to an analysis of the psyche of an

individual, resilience can also be affected by interpersonal connections and situational variations (McMahon, 2006).

Importance for principals. Because of the many expectations and causes of stress that principals endure each day, they must be able to manage their emotions in a way that enables them to lead their schools effectively. The need to manage emotions is due in part to the fact that a principal's work often deals with stakeholders who bring strong feelings to the table with them, necessitating the ability to deal with these feelings appropriately and professionally (Day, 2014). Principals also routinely deal with vacillating budgets, and leaders with low resilience levels are apt to mismanage funds in lean years, eliminating or reducing vital programs instead of making decisions in the best interest of the school's goals (Allison, 2012). In addition to this, principals in many contexts are given less autonomy than they previously had (Day, 2014). Moreover, due to the digital, on-demand nature of information, it is harder to find time to disconnect, which makes resilience all the more important (Luthans et al., 2006). A study conducted in England supports this in that only seven percent of principals in secondary schools reported feeling that they had sufficient time to take part in activities they enjoyed beyond the school walls (Day, 2014). Likewise, there is a relationship between how resilient an individual is and how happy that person is, with the happiest leaders scoring highly on a resilience survey by a margin of two to one over their peers who report having the lowest levels of happiness (Allison, 2012).

Some would argue that resilience is the paramount skill leaders must possess in order to be successful (Bennis, 2007). The principals most likely to spur on continual growth are rated as having outstanding levels of resilience (Allison, 2012). This fact is given even more credence in that the principal's resilience affects not only his functioning, but the school's climate as well, whether to its benefit or detriment (Maulding, Peters, Roberts, Leonard, & Sparkman, 2012).

Principals would tend to agree, as a study cited by Steward (2014) indicated that 98% view resilience as necessary to the profession. It is natural, then, to recognize that resilience is essential to the process by which leaders are trained (Bisschoff & Watts, 2013). The way principals view their resilience is a key factor in determining whether or not those leaders will be effective (Maulding et al., 2012).

When adversity hits, those principals who exhibit high levels of resilience go beyond the traditional concept of returning to where they started and go beyond that, realizing that they must move past where they were, using the situation as forwarding momentum to produce extraordinary results (Allison, 2012).

Fixed vs. developable. Some would argue that resilience is a fixed trait that cannot be improved (Lazaridou & Beka, 2015). However, resilience appears to be a skill that principals can hone and develop, allowing principals to be better able to rebound from setbacks as they occur (Patterson et al., 2009). It is not static but can be changed for the better or worse by an individual's intrapersonal qualities and effectiveness in relating to others and the environment (Day, 2014). Researchers are taking note of this belief and developing plans for helping leaders to enhance their resilience (Luthans et al., 2006). Strong resilience in a principal can be linked to the leader's underlying beliefs that ensure a focus on doing what is right for students regardless of the difficult circumstances that may arise (Bisschoff & Watts, 2013). When individuals undergo training to build resilience capacity, they have experienced positive effects both on their physical wellness and ability to perform tasks (Vanhove et al., 2016). Ultimately, the focus on improving resilience boils down to increasing those elements of a person's life that help protect them from the negative effects of stress, known as "protective factors" (Masten, 2001).

Brain research supports the notion that resilience can be improved as a brain-derived neurotrophic factor is produced during exercise, which helps the subject develop resilience (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). The authors also explain that this can indirectly happen because exercise can break down barriers to socializing with others that are derived from the effects of stress. They add that by continually working to overcome stressful situations, individuals can reinforce the brain processes involved, leading to better protection against the harmful effects of stress in the long run. However, they also contend that a person's resilience is very nuanced as it is derived from a wide range of influences, including genetics, gender, income, anatomy, and many others.

Resilience improvement strategies for leaders. The guidance of another can help a leader stay even-tempered and become more resilient (Maulding et al., 2012). Hardy connections with others who provide encouragement and serve as confidants are a common theme among principals with high levels of resilience (Ledesma, 2013). Much of a leader's resilience development, however, stems from the thinking and growth that occur after life events have taken place, which can also help with the continuity of resilience factors (Steward, 2014). Several factors can lead to increased resilience, one of which is simply the process of carrying out the requirements of the job for an extended time, leading to a familiarity with the demands of the position and level of certainty in carrying out those responsibilities (Steward, 2014). By shifting their thinking to a sense of power in which they can manipulate situations to create solutions, as opposed to a feeling of situations determining their fate, leaders can also improve in this area (Luthans et al., 2006; McMahon, 2006). Additionally, when leaders sharpen their focus on the reasons they come to work each day, they will be better equipped to persevere in the face of challenging situations (Luthans et al., 2006; Steward, 2014). They can see the possibility of

positive outcomes during professional storms and exude that confidence in a way that inspires others both inside and outside of their buildings (Day, 2014).

Perhaps the greatest boon to an individual's resilience will be accomplished through improved self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2006; Steward, 2014). Resilient principals are strong in this area and do not have a mindset of inadequacy or incompetence (Allison, 2012). In order to display this feature, leaders seek out the wisdom of others for areas in which they struggle, while continuing to self-assure in regard to their abilities to lead despite changing circumstances (Patterson et al., 2009). Contrarily, leaders who are tentative about their leadership abilities and have frequent feelings of inadequacy will be less likely to exhibit the resilience needed to succeed (Steward, 2014). As Steward (2014) notes, a leader's ability to rebound from adversity will also take a hit when stress from the pressures of the job continues to take a toll.

Although it may seem that resilience would be related to actions taken after a trying time, the concept can be applied to a person's responses before, during, and after the challenge (Poirel & Yvon, 2014). Day (2014) adds that leaders can deal with unfavorable experiences by harnessing the euphoria that accompanies successes. Principals that lack a strong sense of resilience must take steps to improve if they are to persevere through difficult times.

Perseverance is especially crucial because a leader's welfare is the resilience factor most susceptible to damage during times of crisis (Patterson et al., 2009).

Leaders may take steps to become more adaptive to challenges they face, but they do not live and work in a vacuum, so it is essential to recognize those factors that can affect a leader's resilience levels. As posited by Day (2014), leaders' sense of calling to their profession can make an impact in this area. He also suggests that the people that leaders come into contact with and the settings in which they are located can make a difference. Furthermore, school leaders

perceive their physical health as factoring into their ability to act in a resilient manner (Steward, 2014). Steward (2014) also notes that the more in tune leaders are with themselves, the higher their resilience abilities will be.

As stress is introduced into a principal's day, it should only follow that there must be some outlet to allow the leader to continue functioning. Each person is different, but a list of options can only benefit principals as they work to maintain balance in their lives. These tools can help principals as their ability to deal with stressors will predict how stress affects their lives (Thomas, Matherne, Buboltz, & Doyle, 2012). Having social support, engaging in physical activity, establishing rapport with teachers, and pursuing interests that are disconnected from the school setting can help principals let off some steam (Tsiakkiros & Pashiardis, 2006). Highly resilient principals find ways to do things that enrich their personal lives outside of work on many levels, attending to their body, mind, and spirit (Allison, 2012). Additional steps leading to improved resilience include getting a good night's sleep and monitoring caloric intake in a healthy manner (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). Other principals have found that stepping away from the problems momentarily, distributing a portion of their workload to others, or playing music were also beneficial to reducing the strain of stress (Poirel & Yvon, 2014).

Additionally, leaders invest in their success when they solicit competing viewpoints though this can be a painful process (Patterson et al., 2009). One way of doing this is by enlisting the assistance of a coach, something that low-resilience principals pass on by explaining that they do not have time (Allison, 2012). According to Allison (2012), coaching interjects opportunities to look back on their day when things are hectic and is a prime time for posing deep questions, which can, in turn, evoke perceptions that motivate principals to act in resilient ways.

Although some general strategies for coping with stress may help principals when they are facing difficult times, an in-depth look at how principals view stressors can provide more detailed analysis and solutions. The most advantageous mindset for leaders is one that is hopeful about the future while tempered by the facts surrounding the situation at hand (Patterson et al., 2009). Perhaps this hope and a positive outlook can be a byproduct of a healthy spiritual life as religious principals have faith that God will aid them in overcoming obstacles in trying times (Ledesma, 2013). Patterson et al. (2009) continue to assert that administrators who are particularly resilient strive to understand the factors affecting a trying situation completely and subsequently focus on a vision of redirecting them towards a favorable outcome. The best principals are open to collecting information from their schools and are careful to identify both the possible negative outcomes and the possibilities for improvement that will help them increase the school's overall resilience (Allison, 2012). Allison's (2012) finding would suggest that all leaders will encounter similar trying experiences throughout their careers, but that those principals who are especially adept at coping have developed strategies and a mindset that allows them to overcome. Resilient principals use negative feedback to open up lines of communication with stakeholders to collaborate on a plan for improvement (Allison, 2012).

Luthans et al. (2006) state that leaders who are overtly secure in their abilities, bordering on arrogance, are particularly resilient because they believe that they can affect a positive outcome. This mindset can be internalized, as those who are more resilient look at seemingly neutral or ambiguous circumstances with a more positive approach than others would (Wang, Xu & Lo, 2016). Furthermore, simply believing that change is possible and that a person can become more mentally resilient is an important strategy in improving in this area (Tabibnia & Radecki,

2018). A principal's first step in increasing resilience is making a choice to do so, which is possible in part because resilience is such an intimate disposition (Allison, 2012).

When organizations seek to provide training for their employees to enhance their resilience, certain considerations should be taken into account in order to maximize effectiveness. These pieces of training can be conveyed in several ways, but the best results are achieved when instruction can be adapted to various contexts as applicable to different audiences and has a component to follow-up to ensure application by those who have been trained (Vanhove et al., 2016). Also, it is important to note that just as negative experiences can build up over time, the simultaneous use of a wide array of techniques for increasing resilience can build upon each other, leading to a better chance that the individual will become more resilient and better able to handle stressors (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). Tabibnia and Radecki (2018) further explain that when individuals are familiar with some strategies for dealing with stress, they are better able to select one that will be effective in their unique situation, as different techniques work better in different settings. Experienced principals are more proactive in how they lead in comparison to novice principals, which demonstrates the need for principal preparation programs to help these leaders learn resilience strategies, like those that look to them for guidance, expect them to be able to shield them from the negative effects of the evolution of education (Isaacs, 2012).

Mindfulness

With all the demands, disappointments, and distractions that new principals face daily, reflection is likely on a backburner as these leaders struggle to keep their heads above water. Every fire that is extinguished alleviates a small amount of stress, only to be replaced with another fire somewhere else. This vicious cycle can keep new principals chasing their tails and

make progress seem like a pipe dream. Although there are strategies for reducing the negative effects of stress on leaders' physical and mental health, they must develop the ability to identify changing causes of stress and find ways to adapt their practices to reduce those causes more effectively.

The concept of mindfulness involves focusing mental acuity on noticing the finer details of life as they happen without evaluation (Hyland, 2015; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Tierney Garms, 2013; Wells, 2015). With its origin in Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is not a new idea, but the study of its applications to life in the United States has been taking place for less than fifty years (Brendel, Hankerson, Byun, & Cunningham, 2016; Hyland, 2015; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Wells, 2015). An examination of a narrower field of study shows that the impact of mindfulness on the effectiveness of leaders is lacking, giving credence to the necessity of this study (Brendel et al., 2016). However, mindfulness practices are becoming increasingly popular with celebrities, business leaders, and military trainers because of the benefits they provide (Brown & Olson, 2015). Because of the newfound prevalence of mindfulness training in areas of the private sector, it is logical to deduce that school principals can benefit from these strategies as well (Mahfouz, 2018). Due to the principal's influence on the personality of the school in the education realm, it is invaluable to study their mindful practices (Hoy, 2003).

In general terms, the benefits of practicing mindfulness are many and varied. Leaders would be well served to incorporate this and train themselves in this way of thinking as it can even produce physical changes in the brain that will enable them to handle stress and improve interpersonal skills (Brendel et al., 2016; Tierney Garms, 2013). Additionally, Tierney Garms (2013) claims that mindfulness can lead to the ability of leaders to pay attention longer, think creatively, stay organized, and boost their immune systems, among other benefits. Furthermore,

the practice can help with hypertension and aid leaders in being less anxious while boosting their moods (Wells, 2015). Tabibnia and Radecki (2018) note that practicing mindfulness can also aid in the reduction of problems brought on by stress, such as depression, substance abuse, and inflammation issues while increasing desirable effects such as overall wellness and improved interpersonal relationships. Mindfulness also changes the way the brain works in areas that control both automatic responses and reflective thinking – specifically the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, respectively –, leading to the subject being better able to control emotions and reason more effectively (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018).

Becker and Whitaker (2018) suggest that mindful principals build positive relationships with others, are effective communicators, and are less apt to exhibit knee-jerk reactions, especially in trying tense situations. Mindfulness training can also help leaders view their schools through multiple lenses and pursue more nuanced and sophisticated interpretations of what takes place than the surface meanings that are so often accepted because of their convenience (Kruse & Johnson, 2017). Also, mindfulness helps those who practice it to govern their thoughts and feelings better, thereby avoiding large swings in mood and improving their ability to evaluate the severity of stressors (Nila, Holt, Ditzen & Aguilar-Raab, 2016). Mindfulness brings an added benefit of providing those who practice it with a self-awareness that can aid in personal, professional development (Day & Gregory, 2017). Mindfulness is a characteristic that benefits the school as an entity as it is a defining factor in reinforcing teachers' trust of their principal (Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006).

Not only can the shift to a state of mindfulness benefit a principal, but it can lead to an increase in the same characteristics in the rest of the school and help teachers to feel more comfortable with trying new things in their classrooms (Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013).

Promoting new strategies and techniques in the classroom is likewise a method by which a principal can increase the mindfulness of the rest of the school (Hoy et al., 2006). Simply stated, subordinates tend to be more satisfied and effective as employees when their leaders are particularly mindful (Becker & Whitaker, 2018). In particular, principals' mindfulness in discussing instructional observations can cause teachers to be more receptive to their ideas, especially when they reflect on the purpose of this act (Day & Gregory, 2017). This usage of mindfulness, in conjunction with educators' practices, can lead to a narrowing of the gap in what schools often claim to be doing or pursuing and the reality of what is happening (Kruse & Johnson, 2017). In general terms, schools that practice mindfulness is focused on improvement by way of change (Hoy, 2003).

Most importantly, a principal's mindfulness practices have been shown to have a positive effect on student learning (Kearney et al., 2013). On the same note, mindful principals constantly strive for improvement and avoid the trap of slowing down when gains are made, shifting their focus instead to areas that are still lacking (Hoy et al., 2006).

Mindfulness also helps leaders to be able to glean more information about what is taking place at the time, which will help them both to more accurately assess and deal with situations as well as improve their practice through reflection as opposed to trying to remember at a later time what happened (Kruse & Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, because the human brain has a limited capacity for assessing feelings and dealing with them, practicing mindfulness allows a person to better attend to what is happening in the present, as opposed to mulling over prior problems or trying to anticipate problems that may or may not occur later on (Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). This mindfulness gives them an advantage over principals who do not practice mindfulness as

they are more in tune with potential problems and can meet them head-on rather than being caught off guard and trying to recover (Hoy et al., 2006).

When it comes to mindfulness for school leaders, they must be sure to not only be ready for challenges that may present themselves but to be actively seeking out variances that can lead to problems if left unchecked (Hoy et al., 2006). Principals must be able to avoid the rigidity that is commonplace in K-12 education and be on the lookout for ways to break the status quo by modifying practices and traditions to meet best the needs of their schools (Hoy et al., 2006). Fortunately for principals, mindfulness practices can fit into busy schedules as they can be shortened as needed while still providing an opportunity to slow down and be present when dealing with problems (Klocko & Wells, 2015).

Mindfulness practices are not limited to their application to workplace problems. Leaders can improve their ability to be mindful by practicing the related concepts during routine tasks they undertake daily by being present as they might otherwise go through the motions with thoughts of problems and to-do list tasks running through their heads (Klocko & Wells, 2015).

To promote and develop mindfulness, principals must actively assess situations rather than simply following a pattern that they have always used in similar instances (Hoy, 2003). Furthermore, leaders must make a mental shift from looking only at what they wish to accomplish and instead critique the effectiveness of the steps they are taking to work towards those aims (Hoy, 2003). Another hindrance to achieving a mindfulness approach is accepting all facts as being true all the time in all contexts rather than testing them in different settings (Hoy, 2003). The field of scientific inquiry provides an example of this, an arena in which facts are relied upon and based on years of research. It is widely accepted that water freezes at thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit, but this is true of water at sea level; water has been found at high altitudes to

have temperatures down to negative forty degrees Fahrenheit (Zielinski, 2011). Mindful leaders are not satisfied with nor do they accept the status quo, but continually look for ways to push the envelope and try new approaches to solve difficult problems, understanding that facts are, in many instances, conditional. On that same note, a significant attribute of those with high levels of mindfulness compared to others is the plasticity of thoughts, feelings, and actions, as they are better suited for employing a variety of options for navigating difficult situations (Wang et al., 2016).

On the contrary, leaders can fall into mindlessness and reduce their mindfulness by falling into routines and letting kneejerk reactions stand in place of contemplative thought and deliberation (Hoy, 2003). Principals must put forth the effort to become mindful in practice by looking for different ways of viewing others' actions as well, accepting that though one's response may be viewed as brash, it may also be valued for its honesty when viewed in another light (Hoy, 2003). Mindful leaders realize that though it may be easy to find data to support what they are doing, it is beneficial to search out the data that opposes their views in order to identify problems that may surface in the future (Hoy, 2003). Likewise, principals that are committed to mindfulness are not sidetracked with achievements, but rather look to improve other areas that are lacking, realizing that settling for a temporary gain can jeopardize future growth (Hoy, 2003).

Mindful principals maintain a wide lens when considering others' views of problems and pursue a variety of options rather than blindly following one theory (Hoy, 2003). This thought has been applied to the hiring process:

Some principals look for candidates who are a good match, teachers who will fit in and become like their school. Great principals have a different goal: to have the school become more like the new teacher. If this is not our goal and our outcome, then we are

hiring the wrong people. It's simply impossible to improve a school by hiring people who fit right in with its average teachers. (Whitaker, 2012, p. 49)

Mindful leaders likewise seek out and employ those teachers with the skillset necessary to address their schools' issues, recognizing that those with the most years of experience are not always the best equipped to guide every problem (Hoy, 2003). Principals that practice mindfulness creates mindful cultures in their schools by encouraging their staffs to be transparent about their shortcomings and honestly critique the status quo regardless of who may be perpetuating it (Hoy, 2003).

Mindfulness practices can train those practicing it to be better able to control their focus and direct it without their mind deviating to other thoughts (Jha, Morrison, Parker & Stanley, 2017). One can accomplish this by concentrating on breathing – both inhaling and exhaling – as it happens genuinely, without evaluation or management of the process (Wells, 2015). Other strategies for boosting mindfulness include the art of tai chi, practicing yoga, or visualization exercises (Day & Gregory, 2017). Individuals can also engage in role-playing exercises in which they employ mindfulness strategies during tense circumstances or mindfully think about their feelings (Mahfouz, 2018). Fortunately for school leaders, this does not have to be a lengthy process and can be done in just a few minutes and the midst of stressful situations if necessary (Klocko & Wells, 2015).

Mindfulness and Resilience

Perhaps most germane to this study is the positive boost that mindfulness can provide to leaders' resilience (Brendel et al., 2016; Hyland, 2015; Wells, 2015). Although the research on links between mindfulness and resilience are scarce, the current body of reports is cause for optimism that this relationship is beneficial (Kraayenbrink, Skaar & Clopton, 2018). Tabibnia

and Radecki (2018) explain that mindfulness is a critical step in building resilience. This notion extends to the private sector as several studies have indicated that mindfulness practices can help those who work in the arena to become more resilient (Chin, Slutsky, Raye & Creswell, 2018). Research has also suggested that resilience can be a means by which one can become mindful (Wang et al., 2016). Wang et al. (2016) contend that resilience serves as a sort of arbiter linking one's feelings to mindfulness practices. Additional research has shown that a resilience-building program can be beneficial in significantly improving participants' levels of mindfulness (Burton, Pakenham & Brown, 2010).

Mindfulness in educational leadership has become a focus for curbing the negative aspects of the profession (Becker & Whitaker, 2018). Mindfulness results from leaders developing the ability to regain composure when surprising events cause them to act uncharacteristically (Murphy, 2011). The principals that practice mindfulness also tends to be more resilient as they understand that setbacks will occur at times regardless of the amount of preparation that is in place (Hoy et al., 2006). School leaders that have taken up a mindfulness strengthening program reported being more predisposed to thinking before responding to frustrating student discipline issues (Mahfouz, 2018). Another principal, according to Mahfouz (2018), decreased her usage of profanity and was able to intercept adverse feelings, which allowed her to connect with her stakeholders more deeply. Mahfouz (2018) also illustrates how engaging in mindfulness helped a principal to identify the true source of parents' anger, move past it quickly, and begin the process of having meaningful conversations.

Furthermore, a school leader has also been able to – because of mindfulness training – exhibit resilience in a school board hearing as a parent spoke negatively about him, as he was able to reflect on his actions and understand he acted properly, realizing he could not affect the

parent's behavior (Mahfouz, 2018). There is a strong connection between mindful leaders and resilience, as these principals know that they must have an ability to overcome the difficulties that will inevitably throw a wrench into the gears of the school machine (Hoy, 2003).

Mindfulness strategies can help leaders take those unpleasant situations and come out of them with a Zen-like attitude of harmony and composure (Wang et al., 2016).

In undertaking efforts to increase resilience, school leaders would be wise to employ practices that improve mindfulness as research has shown the two to be linked, with overall wellness increasing as a result (Kraayenbrink et al., 2018). Furthermore, students can improve their ability to be resilient through mindfulness practices, which may be especially helpful in high-stress situations (Gouda, Luong, Schmidt & Bauer, 2016). Gouda et al. (2016) also contend that teachers can improve their resilience through the use of mindfulness training, which can also help them to connect with others in the building.

Outside of the realm of education, mindfulness seems to strengthen resilience in those working in high-stress situations as well (Wells & Klocko, 2018). Through mindfulness training, resilience can be increased, which can result in a decreased chance of participating individuals later having mental health issues and other side effects of repeated experiences with stress (Nila et al., 2016). This resilience growth through the use of mindfulness helps those who practice it to focus less on the events leading up to stressful, negative situations, and instead look for opportunities to solve their problems (Bajaj & Pande, 2016). Promising results show that using mindfulness as a means of increasing resilience has been effective even months after training has concluded (Kraayenbrink, Skaar & Clopton, 2018).

Resilience comes in two seemingly diametrical manifestations: developing positive feelings or overcoming negative feelings (Wang et al., 2016). According to Wang et al. (2016),

the former is of greater value in the pursuit of stabilizing an individual's mental state than the latter. Leaders can benefit from both of these situations by expressing happiness amid a negative event or, conversely, using data gleaned from the negative event to improve in the future, leading to a strengthened ability to move past unfavorable conditions with ease (Wang et al., 2016). A temperament of mindfulness can help individuals gain those competencies that lead to increased resilience when dealing with occupational problems (Becker & Whitaker, 2018).

Not all mindfulness training formats are created equal as those that are implemented in several sessions over a long time are more beneficial than those that may be conducted in a single session (Chin et al., 2018). Furthermore, Chin et al. (2018) posit that extended mindfulness training helps workers to have lower levels of stress both at single points in time and in general over some time, a claim they make by using a system in which research participants can self-report their feelings throughout their day via electronic means. The authors also note that due to restructuring in the employing company in their study, it is likely that a long-term mindfulness program can better shield participants from the negative results of these changes as the participants reported better welfare while those receiving a one-time training reported feeling worse at the end of the study.

Data suggests that social workers benefit from mindfulness as those reporting the greatest levels of individual welfare indicate the practice as being crucial to the finding (Crowder & Sears, 2017). Furthermore, social workers participating in mindfulness training seem to have grown in their resilience as they felt less stressed and were buffered against the negative emotions that result from empathizing with those they assist, as reported by Crowder & Sears (2017).

Public servants in high-stress occupations – namely police officers and firefighters – are often exposed to situations that make them susceptible to negative cognitive disorders, many of which can be fatal (Kaplan, Bergman, Christopher, Bowen & Hunsinger, 2017). The authors found that through mindfulness training, individuals in these occupations can improve their resilience, and as a result, be better insulated from nervous exhaustion, which is common in their professions.

The mindfulness-resilience link has also been studied and shown to be effective in the military, whose members often see high-stress situations (Jha et al., 2017). The authors found that practicing mindfulness helps this group stay focused during simulated training exercises and contend that other studies have shown mindfulness to help prevent the loss of the ability to maintain focus when intense situations eventually occur. Furthermore, they found that additional mindfulness iterations in addition to prescribed sessions received a boost to their memory compared with their peers who did not have extra practice as well as those who were not exposed to mindfulness.

Chapter III: Methods

“Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information regarding successful programs that intervene for the stress-related issues that affect educational leaders” (Wells & Klocko, 2018). Further study on the applicability of mindfulness practices to principal resilience is necessary to mediate the stressors that plague those in the profession, and in particular, those with less than or equal to three years of experience as a building-level principal. Because of the dramatic shift in practice that takes place as novice principals transition to their new roles, it is wise to determine what new administrators need to weather the storms that they will undoubtedly face during this vulnerable time in their careers.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the extent to which mindfulness practices improve the resilience of principals in Alabama. A survey was distributed to Alabama principals to collect data in addressing this aim. Statistical analysis was utilized in the pursuit of answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent do principals report mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - a. To what extent do principals report novelty seeking mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - b. To what extent do principals report novelty producing mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - c. To what extent do principals report engagement mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
2. To what extent do principals' practice of mindfulness factors support their professional resilience?

3. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to demographics?
 - a. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to years of administrative experience?
 - b. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to gender?
 - c. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to age?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how mindfulness affects the resilience of Alabama principals. The findings of this study will serve to inform new principals of the factors that can help them better acclimate to their new positions. Furthermore, university leadership preparation programs will benefit from the results, which will assist them in guiding prospective principals. School districts should also use the findings to assist new principals during their transition phase in their first months and years in the role. By acting on the findings, it is theorized that attrition rates of principals will decrease, and these leaders will have more immediate and lasting satisfaction in their roles.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this study was to determine to what extent principals' mindfulness practices impact their professional resilience. The researcher has eight years of experience as a classroom science teacher and coach of various sports at the high school level. In addition, the researcher has two years of experience as a middle school assistant principal and another two years of experience as an elementary principal. At the time of this study, the researcher was in his third year as a middle school principal. All of the aforementioned educational backgrounds were gained in rural schools. The researcher's experiences at grade levels spanning kindergarten through twelfth grade, as well as multiple levels of administrative

experience, provide the researcher with a thorough knowledge of the challenges present in both primary and secondary education settings. Building-level principal experiences both as a novice principal and as a leader with more than three years of practice in the state of Alabama may present a level of bias in interpreting the data.

Population and Sample

The state of Alabama has 139 local school systems, with a total of 1,436 public schools. This total includes 1,060 elementary schools, 519 middle schools, 214 junior high schools, 499 senior high schools, and 66 career/technical centers. The researcher obtained email addresses for participating principals from an online source. The researcher distributed the survey in this study to building-level principals across the state of Alabama, utilizing a random sampling method of all eligible participants statewide, including principals in urban, suburban, and rural schools. Furthermore, principals served in elementary, middle, and high schools. Principals from both county and city school systems were included in the study. Incomplete surveys were not included in the data presented in the results of this study. Years of experience of principals taking part in this study ranged from zero to three years to over twenty years of experience.

Instrumentation

The quantitative survey used in this study addresses both mindfulness and resilience. The principals' levels of mindfulness served as the independent variable in this study to determine how it affected their resilience, which was the dependent variable in this study. Additional independent variables included gender, years of experience as a building-level principal, and age of the participants.

The instrument used in this study is a combination of two different surveys used in conjunction in order to gather the needed data. Both of the instruments used are valid and reliable and have been used in numerous previous studies.

Mindfulness instrument. The instrument used to determine principals' levels of mindfulness in their work is The Langer Mindfulness Scale (LMS14). This is a 14-item survey that uses a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *slightly disagree*, 4 = *neutral*, 5 = *slightly agree*, 6 = *agree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and was developed by Pirson et al. (2018). The authors originally developed a 21-item instrument as a result of the consultation of the extant literature and experts on the subject but later reduced it to 14 items in order to obtain a better fit based on feedback. Pirson et al. found the alpha values for reliability to be greater than 0.8 up to 0.9, with subgroup alpha factors ranging from 0.65 to 0.9. Multiple independent samples were used by the researchers to establish internal consistency reliability and also serving to assess item integrity and factor structure further. The questions in this survey identified overall mindfulness practice levels, and a final confirmatory factor analysis confirmed a three-factor model with subscales related to novelty seeking mindfulness practices, novelty producing mindfulness practices, and engagement mindfulness practices, completing the final 14-item instrument. Furthermore, across samples, the comparative fit index (CFI) had a range of 0.92 to 0.95 and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) range of 0.52 to 0.63.

Resilience instrument. The 10-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) which is a unidimensional instrument used to determine the overall resilience levels of participants, was also used in this study. Factor analysis procedures and three samples were used to conduct a series of exploratory and confirmatory analyses, which resulted in an assessment of the factor structure of the CD-RISC (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007). The authors ultimately

found that a single-factor model provided the best fit for this 10-item CD-RISC. The final confirmatory factor analysis, employing all three samples, resulted in a CFI of 0.97 and an RMSEA of 0.50. This survey is based on the original 25-item CD-RISC and was found to have a reliability of 0.85, as noted by the authors. The survey uses a five-point Likert scale (0 = *not true at all*, 1 = *rarely true*, 2 = *sometimes true*, 3 = *often true*, 4 = *true nearly all of the time*).

Demographic data were also collected in this survey to determine participants' years of experience as a building level principal, gender, and age. Data related to mindfulness and resilience were analyzed about demographic data to determine possible links between the factors.

Research Design

This quantitative study sought to determine to what extent principals reported mindfulness practices and how that affected their resilience in their professional capacity. The study also examined possible relationships between mindfulness and principals' age, gender, and years of administrative experience. A quantitative study was chosen because the goal of the research is to explore a relationship between mindfulness and resilience factors in Alabama K-12 public school principals and how those factors relate to demographic variables. The quantitative design allows the researcher to distribute a survey to a large number of people to generalize the group. According to Johnson & Christensen (2004), quantitative research is aimed at testing or validating existing researchers' hypotheses to generate results that can be generalized to a group.

Research Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought and obtained using a human subject research application (see Appendices A and B). An expedited form was used as the survey instrument used in the study was completely voluntary and anonymous, with no personally identifiable data having been collected. The application detailed the type of research

to be conducted, the significance of the study as related to the intended outcomes, methods for selecting participants; consent form verbiage; and precautions taken to protect the confidentiality of participants and to protect their data.

Data Collection Procedures

An email was sent to all K-12 public school principals in the state of Alabama, which contained the consent form and all survey questions. The list of Alabama principals' email addresses was obtained from an online source. Surveys were constructed on the Qualtrics program, which collected all anonymous data with no identifying information included, and participants were made aware of this before starting the survey. The time required for each participant to complete the survey was not expected to exceed 15 minutes. Emails were sent to principals as a reminder for those that may not have yet participated but wished to do so. A link to the survey was also shared in a newsletter distributed to Alabama administrators by the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS). The principals were also informed that declining to participate would in no way adversely affect their relationship with the research institution and that they could decide against participating and withdraw their data at any time during the survey. The surveys were administered at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year throughout a six-week time frame.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher analyzed participants' response data using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0. Alpha values for each test were set at $p = .05$. Research question 1 was analyzed using descriptive statistics relating to principals' self-ratings of their mindfulness practices overall and for each of the subscales. To determine how mindfulness practices supported resilience (question 2), a simple regression was used for overall mindfulness

while a multiple regression was used for mindfulness subscales. Univariate one-way analysis of variance was used for research question 3 to determine the effects of demographics on mindfulness practices.

Limitations

Certain factors of this study served as limitations. The scope of the study did not extend outside of the state of Alabama, which means that findings may not be generalized to other states and countries. Although the survey was sent to all Alabama public K-12 school principals using an online source, recipients that took the survey may have shared the link with others who do not meet the criteria to participate in the study. By administering the survey in the fall semester, it is possible that many principals are busy with the demands of their job and therefore did not take the time to participate, thus limiting the number of responses. Because responses are self-reported,

Summary

This chapter presented a detailed account of the methods used to conduct this research study. The focus of the study was to examine the impact that Alabama public K-12 principals' levels of mindfulness affected their resilience to occupational stressors. All principals meeting the criteria mentioned above were invited to participate in this online, anonymous survey through the Qualtrics program. The quantitative data analysis provided insights towards this topic that has received little attention in the academic literature

The following chapter examines the findings of this study. It contains an overview of participants' demographic data as well as how their levels of mindfulness impacted their resilience as school leaders.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter details the findings that resulted from the study. As outlined in the introductory chapter, the purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the extent to which mindfulness practices improve the resilience of principals in Alabama. The research questions used to direct the study were as follows:

1. To what extent do principals report mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - a. To what extent do principals report novelty seeking mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - b. To what extent do principals report novelty producing mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - c. To what extent do principals report engagement mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
2. To what extent do principals' practice of mindfulness factors support their professional resilience?
3. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to demographics?
 - a. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to years of administrative experience?
 - b. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to gender?
 - c. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to age?

Data Collection Procedures

Two instruments were utilized in this study in the same survey with one measuring mindfulness practices and the other measuring resilience. Demographic information (years of

experience as a building-level principal, gender, and age) was also collected to explore any relationship to mindfulness and resilience. The survey was emailed to all 1,427 K-12 public school building-level principals in the state of Alabama. Two follow-up reminder emails were sent during the survey administration period. The survey link was also shared in a newsletter distributed to Alabama school administrators by the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS). Responses were collected from 358 individuals, with 286 principals answering every question for a return rate of 20%.

Surveys were emailed directly to principals from a list of Alabama principal emails purchased from an online source. Several emails were returned as undeliverable, and corrections were made when possible, though some schools did not have current email information listed on their school websites. The response rate was also negatively affected as some districts had protocols in place requiring outside individuals conducting surveys to request approval through a central office administrator, though that permission was not sought.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0 program with alpha values being set at $p = .05$. Reliability for the scales and subscales were calculated. Questions 2, 4, 5, 9, 12, and 14 of the mindfulness scales were reverse coded, while no questions on the resilience scale received this treatment.

Reliability

Data for each scale and subscale was analyzed to determine reliability. The overall mindfulness scale included 302 valid responses out of 358 total responses (84.4%). Table 1 indicates that an acceptable level of reliability for the mindfulness scale was reached.

Table 1

Reliability of Mindfulness Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.736	14

The novelty seeking subscale of the mindfulness scale was shown to have an acceptable level of reliability (Table 2). Novelty producing and engagement subscales demonstrated borderline acceptable levels of reliability, as illustrated in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. Valid responses for the subscales are 307 out of 358 (85.8%); 310 out of 358 (86.6%); and 313 out of 358 (87.4%) respectively.

Table 2

Reliability of Novelty Seeking Subscale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.716	5

Table 3

Reliability of Novelty Producing Subscale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.511	5

Table 4

Reliability of Engagement Subscale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.563	4

The resilience scale included 304 valid responses out of 358 (84.9%), and a good level of reliability was demonstrated by the .804 alpha level, as noted in Table 5.

Table 5

Reliability of Resilience Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.804	10

Research Question Findings

Research question one. Research question one asks, “to what extent do principals report mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?” Research question one also includes three sub-questions. These sub-questions include: (a) To what extent do principals report novelty seeking mindfulness practices in their professional capacity? (b) To what extent do principals report novelty producing mindfulness practices in their professional capacity? And (c) To what extent do principals report engagement mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?

A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents’ mindfulness practices. A score of 4 would be considered neutral, with 1 being the lowest levels of mindfulness practices and 7 being the highest levels of mindfulness practices. Table 6 shows descriptive statistics indicating that the mean score for respondents was positive for mindfulness practices both in regard to overall mindfulness practices and for each subscale. Valid responses for this item totaled 317 out of 358 (88.5%).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Mindfulness Practices

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mindfulness	317	5.7002	.52361
Novelty Seeking	317	5.9899	.62735
Novelty Producing	317	5.1241	.76418
Engagement	317	6.0628	.65765

Principals rated themselves highest in the engagement category of mindfulness practices with a mean score of 6.1 and the lowest in novelty producing mindfulness practices with a mean score of 5.1. The overall mindfulness mean score of 5.7 indicates that principals are mindful.

Research question two. Research question two asks, “to what extent do principals’ practice of mindfulness factors support their professional resilience?” A 5-point Likert scale measured respondents’ answers to a 10-question resilience survey. A five on the survey indicated that the statement was true for the respondent nearly all of the time, whereas a response of one indicated that the statement was not true at all. Three hundred ten valid responses out of 358 produced an 86.6% response rate (Table 7).

A simple regression analysis was used to address research question 2, and the descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. Mean values for responses to resilience and mindfulness instruments were 4.3 out of 5 and 5.7 out of 7, respectively (Table 7), indicating that respondents rated themselves highly in these areas. The p-value (Sig.) for the correlation between resilience and overall mindfulness practices is less than 0.001 (Table 8), which indicates that the relationship is statistically significantly different than 0. The raw score beta for this test was 2.477 (Table 9), indicating a positive relationship between respondents’ mindfulness practices and resilience levels. The null hypothesis that resilience practices of principals do not support their mindfulness practices can be rejected. It can be reasonably deduced that an Alabama principal’s mindfulness practices are an accurate predictor of his/her resilience levels.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Simple Regression of Resilience v. Mindfulness

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resilience	310	4.2556	.41654
Mindfulness	310	5.6983	.52709

Table 8

Correlations for Simple Regression of Resilience v. Mindfulness

		Resilience	Mindfulness
Pearson Correlation	Resilience	1.000	.398
	Mindfulness	.398	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Resilience	.	.000
	Mindfulness	.000	.
N	Resilience	310	310
	Mindfulness	310	310

Table 9

Coefficients for Simple Regression of Resilience v. Mindfulness

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.477	.235		10.552	<.001
	Mindfulness	.312	.041	.398	7.612	<.001

Descriptive statistics for resilience scores and mindfulness subscale scores were analyzed (Table 10), and principals rated themselves positively in each category.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Resilience v. Mindfulness Subscales

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Resilience	310	4.2556	.41354
Novelty Seeking	310	5.9838	.63050
Novelty Producing	310	5.1231	.76273
Engagement	310	6.0602	.65449

Multiple regression analysis was used to address the relationship between resilience practices and mindfulness subscales. The p-value for each subscale of mindfulness practices (novelty seeking, novelty producing, and engagement) as related to resilience practices of principals was less than .001 (Table 11), which indicates they are statistically significantly different from 0. Therefore, the null hypothesis that principals' resilience practices do not predict their practices in each mindfulness subscale can be rejected. Furthermore, the standardized beta weights (Table 12) indicate that while all mindfulness subscales statistically significantly predict resilience, the novelty seeking subscale is the best predictor followed by the novelty producing subscale and, finally, the engagement subscale ($\beta = .209$; $\beta = .161$; $\beta = .152$).

Table 11

Correlations for Resilience v. Mindfulness Subscales

		Resilience	Novelty Seeking	Novelty Producing	Engagement
Pearson Correlation	Resilience	1.000	.333	.302	.281
	Novelty Seeking	.333	1.000	.434	.363
	Novelty Producing	.302	.434	1.000	.334
	Engagement	.281	.363	.334	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Resilience		<.001	<.001	<.001
	Novelty Seeking	<.001		<.001	<.001
	Novelty Producing	<.001	<.001		<.001
N	Engagement	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	Resilience	310	310	310	310
	Novelty Seeking	310	310	310	310
	Novelty Producing	310	310	310	310
	Engagement	310	310	310	310

Table 12

Coefficients for Multiple Regression of Resilience v. Mindfulness Subscales

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-Order	Partial	Part
(Constant)	2.410	.249		9.664	.000			
1 Novelty Seeking	.137	.039	.209	3.469	.001	.333	.195	.182
Novelty Producing	.087	.032	.161	2.700	.007	.302	.153	.141
Engagement	.096	.036	.152	2.637	.009	.281	.149	.138

Research question three. Research question three asks, “Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to demographics?” Research question three also asks three sub-questions. These sub-questions are (a) Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to years of administrative experience? (b) Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to gender? And (c) Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to age?

Univariate one-way analysis of variance was used to address research question 3. Respondents’ years of experience had means ranging from 5.6389 for 21+ years of experience to 5.7292 for 4-10 years of experience while standard deviations ranged from .47011 for 4-10 years of experience to .70731 for 21+ years of experience (Table 13). The results for research question 3a indicate that years of building-level principal experience do not statistically significantly affect mindfulness practices (Table 14), $F(3, 307) = .300, p = .825$, which fails to reject the null hypothesis. Any variances in mindfulness are likely due to chance.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Years of Principal Experience as Predictor of Mindfulness

How many years of experience as a building-level principal do you have?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
0-3	77	5.6756	.52215
4-10	141	5.7292	.47011
11-20	75	5.6845	.58928
21+	18	5.6389	.70731
Total	311	5.6999	.52706

Table 14

One-way ANOVA for Years of Principal Experience as Predictor of Mindfulness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter
Corrected Model	.252 ^a	1	5806.229	.300	.825	.003	.901
Intercept	5806.229	1	5806.229	20760.175	.000	.985	20760.175
Experience	.252	3	.084	.300	.825	.003	.901
Error	85.862	307	.280				
Total	10190.239	311					
Corrected Total	86.114	310					

Respondents' gender was very near even with 157 male principals (50.6%) and 153 female principals (49.4%) out of 310 (Table 15). Results for question 3b (Table 16), indicate that gender did not reach statistical significance, $F(1, 308) = .482, p = .488$. The null hypothesis that gender does not predict principals' mindfulness practices, as a result, cannot be rejected. Any variances in responses between genders are likely due to chance.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Gender as Predictor of Mindfulness

What is your gender?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	157	5.6798	.52143
Female	153	5.7215	.53526
Total	310	5.7003	.52786

Table 16

One-way ANOVA for Gender as Predictors of Mindfulness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter
Corrected Model	.135 ^a	1	.135	.482	.488	.002	.482
Intercept	10072.374	1	10072.374	36088.730	.000	.992	36088.730
Gender	.135	1	.135	.482	.488	.002	.482
Error	85.963	308	.279				
Total	10159.198	310					
Corrected Total	86.098	309					

Respondents' ages had means ranging from 5.5762 for 61+ to 5.7473 for 51-60 and standard deviations ranging from .45295 for 51-60 and .95471 for 61+ (Table 17). For question 3a (Table 18), age did not reach statistical significance, $F(3, 306) = .529$, $p = .662$. Therefore, the null hypothesis that age does not affect principals' mindfulness practices cannot be rejected, and any variances in responses by age bracket are likely due to chance.

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for Age

What is your age?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
31-40	60	5.6942	.48983
41-50	149	5.6937	.52361
51-60	85	5.7473	.45295
61+	16	5.5762	.95471
Total	310	5.7024	.52605

Table 18

One-Way ANOVA for Age as Predictors of Mindfulness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter
Corrected Model	.442 ^a	3	.147	.529	.662	.005	1.588
Intercept	5282.616	1	5282.616	19002.409	.000	.984	19002.409
Age	.442	3	.147	.529	.662	.005	1.588
Error	85.067	306	.278				
Total	10166.002	310					
Corrected Total	85.509	309					

Summary of Results

Respondents in this study reported on average that they consider themselves to have both high mindfulness practices and high resilience. Furthermore, principals' mindfulness practices were shown to predict their resilience levels statistically significantly. This finding was true both for overall mindfulness practices as well as each of the three subscales (novelty seeking, novelty producing, and engagement). However, no demographic indicators (years of experience as a building-level principal, gender, or age) were predictors of mindfulness practices for this group of administrators.

This chapter presented the findings of the study, including an analysis of data and interpretation of results. In Chapter Five, a conclusion will be presented, including the study overview, an interpretation of the results; limitations of the study; and suggestions for future research on the topic.

Chapter V: Discussion

This chapter summarizes the overall research study and comments on findings presented in chapter four. The researcher will first provide a summary of the study, including an overview of the problem and a purpose statement followed by the purpose statement of the study. Research questions that were addressed will follow. The methodology of the study will be rehashed, and major findings resulting from data analysis in chapter four will be discussed.

Next, the findings will be related to the literature review found in chapter two. Major themes include principal stressors, resilience, mindfulness, and the interaction between mindfulness and resilience. The significance of the study to the existing literature will be explored next. Finally, implications of the study and recommendations for future research will be detailed.

Summary of the Study

Principals experience a great deal of stress, and this leads to negative outcomes in mental and physical wellness as well as professional fulfillment (Vanhove et al., 2016). Not coincidentally, principal turnover has become an issue across the nation in recent years (Battle, 2010; Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). Several work sectors, including high-stress fields such as the military, have experienced increased resilience levels as a result of mindfulness training. (Crowder & Sears, 2017; Gouda et al., 2016; Kraayenbrink et al., 2018; Jha et al., 2017; Kaplan et al., 2017; Wells & Klocko, 2018). The purpose of this study was to determine how mindfulness predicts the resilience of Alabama public school principals. A quantitative approach was used, and a survey was distributed to building-level principals across the state of Alabama. Data were analyzed to determine how principals' mindfulness practices supported their resilience.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do principals report mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - a. To what extent do principals report novelty seeking mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - b. To what extent do principals report novelty producing mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
 - c. To what extent do principals report engagement mindfulness practices in their professional capacity?
2. To what extent do principals' practice of mindfulness factors predict their professional resilience?
3. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to demographics?
 - a. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to years of administrative experience?
 - b. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to gender?
 - c. Is there a difference in mindfulness practices according to age?

Methodology Review

A quantitative research design was used in this study to statistically determine Alabama principals' mindfulness practices and the effects that these and their demographics have on their resilience. An introductory question was included in the survey to disqualify any participants who were not currently serving as building-level principals. Two well-established instruments were used to measure principals' levels of mindfulness practices and resilience. Demographic

questions were used to collect information about participants' age, gender, and years of experience as building-level principals.

The instrument was emailed to all Alabama K-12 public school building-level principals using an online email database. Some recipients responded that they were no longer serving as building-level principals, while others replied that their district required central office permission in order to participate. Ultimately, out of 1,427 emails sent, 286 participants answered every survey question, resulting in a 20% response rate.

Major Findings

The data analysis conducted during this study was unambiguous and made clear how principals view themselves in terms of their mindfulness and resilience. Furthermore, the findings show plainly how principals' mindfulness and resilience are connected. Demographic data was also explicit in its relationship to principals' mindfulness practices. Fortunately, this study provides a positive outlook on the future of the principalship in Alabama both in leaders' current mindsets and the implications for assisting those who may be struggling under the stress of the occupation.

Principals' mindfulness and resilience. A principal's mindfulness has many benefits including increased student learning; decreased stress-induced side effects; improved interpersonal relationships; and better governance of their thoughts and feelings (Becker & Whitaker, 2018; Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013; Nila, Holt, Ditzen, & Aguilar-Raab, 2016; Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018). The benefits of mindful practices to school leaders are many, and it naturally follows that those practicing the profession would self-identify as mindful leaders. The results of the study showed that Alabama principals' mean mindfulness scores were positive.

Resilience may be the most important skill that successful leaders possess (Bennis, 2007). This sentiment is one on which principals agree almost unanimously (Steward, 2014). Although it is highly possible that principals are not happy in their roles, being happy in the principalship is a benefit which can be promoted through high levels of resilience (Allison, 2012). On the same note as the mindfulness results, principals rated themselves on average as being resilient leaders as would be expected when compared with the results of the previously mentioned review of the literature.

The mindfulness-resilience link. After reviewing the importance of resilience to principals' work, the aid that mindfulness practices can bring to this area is essential (Brandel et al., 2016; Hyland, 2015; Wells, 2015). The literature indicates that the more resilient principals are adept at mindfulness practices as well (Hoy et al., 2006). Anecdotal evidence shows a principal's behavioral changes in resilience stem from mindfulness training (Mahfouz, 2018). It is logical, therefore, that principals who rate themselves highly in the area of mindfulness also rate themselves as being resilient. The results of this study show that this connection is strong for Alabama principals and is statistically significant.

Mindfulness and principal demographics. New principals often experience a swift change in mindset in what could be described as a baptism by fire due to the increased workload and the number of problems they have not experienced before in their previous roles (Bayar, 2016; Spillane & Lee, 2014). The odds are that a new principal in Alabama will navigate the change to the role without any formal transition plan provided by the employing district (Wright et al., 2009). Because of the vulnerable nature of new principals as they learn the many facets of their positions – hit by a barrage of negative experiences they have not previously encountered – it would make sense that they would need to be highly mindful in order to continue in the field. It

would furthermore be logical to assume that mindfulness would be a trait that would be more developed in veteran principals who have weathered many storms and learned to reflect on their experiences in order to produce successful outcomes in the future. However, the results of this study show that veterans with decades of experience as building-level principals are no more mindful than their novice counterparts. The same holds when comparing males and females in addition to the age brackets of survey participants.

Significance of the Study

Research on mindfulness as related to resilience is scarce (Brendel et al., 2016; Hyland, 2015; Wells, 2015). This study provided a look at how Alabama principals' mindfulness practices affected their resilience levels. The data analysis in this study resulted in strong evidence that mindfulness practices in principals can statistically significantly predict their levels of resilience. The results of this study can inform principal preparation programs, school districts, and professional organizations with information to help principals prepare for a stressful occupation or improve their existing practices regardless of their age, gender, or years of experience.

Implications

Alabama principals' self-ratings in this study as related to mindfulness were positive on average. In addition to rating themselves highly in overall mindfulness, Alabama principals in this study scored themselves positively in each of the mindfulness subscales (novelty seeking, novelty producing, and engagement) as well. These results are cause for optimism regarding the state of Alabama schools as mindfulness can help these leaders communicate more effectively; build positive relationships with others; be less apt to exhibit knee-jerk reactions especially in

trying, tense situations; and better govern their thoughts and feelings (Becker & Whitaker, 2018; Nila et al., 2016).

Perhaps the most revealing and pertinent finding from the study is that Alabama principals' mindfulness practices are statistically significant predictors of their resilience. By practicing mindfulness in their lives, Alabama principals can more easily bounce back when stressful situations present themselves. This information is important for university educational leadership programs as they can proactively increase future principals' resilience capacity by implementing mindfulness training exercises into their coursework. School districts and school administrator professional learning organizations can also benefit from this information by providing the training for their current and prospective administrators.

The final research question addressed in this study shows that there is no statistically significant differentiation in Alabama principals' mindfulness practices based on their age, gender, or – most surprisingly – years of building-level principal experience. It would seem that the more years a principal has served in that position, the more experience he or she would have in navigating trying experiences, which would lead to more mindfulness and resilience through the reflection process. However, with any differences in demographics as predictors of mindfulness being likely due to chance, this study shows that principals at any point in their career are equally likely to be both mindful and resilient leaders. Based on this information, principals, whether novice or veteran, male or female, young or old, can expect to become more resilient through increasing their mindfulness practices. This information should inform both district-level administrators and leadership consulting organizations as mindfulness practices can help principals that are struggling with the negative effects of stress on their lives, whether physical, mental, or both.

The literature is promising that mindfulness is an effective way for leaders to become more resilient (Brendel et al., 2016; Hyland, 2015; Wells, 2015). Therefore, the recommendation posed for principals is to implement mindfulness practices into their lives, which can, in turn, increase their resilience (Kraayenbrink et al., 2018). The optimal conditions for principal mindfulness training are several sessions over a long period (Chin et al., 2018). “Training that focuses on dialogue and promotes mindful listening, self-compassion, and mindfulness practice may contribute greatly to the workplace of the well-being of principals” (Wells & Klocko, 2018). Though there will always be challenges and sources of stress for principals, by implementing mindfulness practices and ultimately strengthening their resilience, they can be happier in their roles and produce extraordinary results as a result of adversity (Allison, 2012). Ultimately, this improvement in principals’ resilience and resulting happiness can help with the principal turnover problem, which has been an issue for years (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is closely related to the theoretical literature posited by Wells and Klocko (2018). The findings detailed in this research align with Wells and Klocko’s assertions within their work. The researcher, as a result of the findings of this study and a review of the relevant literature, provides the following recommendations for future research on the topic of principal mindfulness and resilience.

1. Replicate this study in other geographical areas. This study was limited to the state of Alabama. Principals in different areas of the United States or internationally likely face different stressors and may report varying levels of mindfulness practices and resilience. Likewise, a nation-wide study may produce different results as well.

2. Replicate this study with other education professionals. This study assessed the mindfulness practices and resilience strictly for individuals currently serving as building-level principals. Other leaders (i.e., superintendents, directors, assistant principals), teachers, classified staff, and various education professionals may have different experiences with mindfulness practices and resilience in their unique roles as related to varying responsibilities.
3. Conduct a study to determine which mindfulness practices in particular best serve to improve principals' resilience levels. Though the literature suggests different methods and strategies that can aid principals in their efforts to improve, little research has been conducted on which strategies are most effective for principals in particular.
4. Conduct a longitudinal study to track principals over several years to determine how mindfulness practices and resilience determine their longevity in their roles and the field of education. If mindfulness and resilience improve principals' happiness and wellness, it would be logical to assume that those who rate themselves higher would stay in their positions or the field of education (through promotions) for a longer period than those who rate themselves lowly in mindfulness practices and resilience.
5. Conduct a study to determine how principals' mindfulness practices and resilience affect student achievement. If mindfulness practices and resilience make principals more effective leaders, student achievement should be higher in schools in which principals rate themselves highly in mindfulness practices and resilience than in schools in which principals rate themselves poorly in mindfulness practices and resilience.

Conclusion

This study expanded the existing literature on principal mindfulness and resilience. Alabama principals rated themselves highly in mindfulness practices and levels of resilience, which is possibly the most important leadership skill that principals can possess (Bennis, 2007). This finding is a positive sign for the future of education in the state of Alabama.

With an overwhelmingly strong significance ($p < .001$), Alabama principals' mindfulness practices predicted their levels of resilience. If principals want to become more resilient in order to withstand the stressors of their profession and move forward to push their schools to excellence, they should participate in mindfulness training and implement the tactics into their daily lives.

Principals' age, gender, and years of experience as building-level principals do not statistically significantly affect their mindfulness practices. At any point in their career, principals can decide to participate in mindfulness training and improve their resilience. Principal turnover is a real problem across the country, and solutions are needed to retain leaders in these important positions (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). The field of education is changing, which means principals are continually facing new challenges that their predecessors did not have to deal with (Daresh, 2007). It is unlikely that this trend will change, so if principals are expected to navigate this changing landscape effectively, resilience is needed, and this study shows that mindfulness practices are a key to meeting that need.

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Appendix A
Institutional Review Board Approval

Auburn University Human Research Protection Program

EXEMPTION REVIEW APPLICATION

For information or help completing this form, contact: THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE,
Location: 115 Ramsay Hall Phone: 334-844-5966 Email: orc@auburn.edu

Submit completed application and supporting material as one attachment to orc@auburn.edu.

1. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

Date December 15, 2019

a. Project Title Stress-Reduction Practices as Predictors of Resilience in School Principals

b. Principal Investigator Brandon Kiser Degree(s) PhD

Rank/Title Student Department/School EFLT

Phone Number 334-319-3952 AU Email kiserbi@auburn.edu

Faculty Principal Investigator (required if PI is a student) Or Ellen Hahn

Title Professor Department/School EFLT

Phone Number 334-844-3067 AU Email ehahn@auburn.edu

Dept Head Sherida Downer Department/School EFLT

Phone Number 334-844-3060 AU Email downesn@auburn.edu

c. Project Personnel (other PI) – Identify all individuals who will be involved with the conduct of the research and include their role on the project. Role may include design, recruitment, consent process, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. Attach a table if needed for additional personnel.

Personnel Name _____ Degree (s) _____

Rank/Title _____ Department/School _____

Role _____

AU affiliated? YES NO If no, name of home institution _____

Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

Personnel Name _____ Degree (s) _____

Rank/Title _____ Department/School _____

Role _____

AU affiliated? YES NO If no, name of home institution _____

Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

Personnel Name _____ Degree (s) _____

Rank/Title _____ Department/School _____

Role _____

AU affiliated? YES NO If no, name of home institution _____

Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? _____

d. Training -- Have all Key Personnel completed CITI human subjects training (including elective modules related to this research) within the last 3 years? YES NO

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
1/14/2020 to _____
Protocol # 20-018 EX 2001

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD REQUEST for MODIFICATION

For Information or help completing this form, contact: THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE (ORC)
Phone: 334-844-5966 E-Mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu Web Address: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/fvr/ohs>

In MS Word, click in the white boxes and type your text; double-click checkboxes to check/uncheck.

- Federal regulations require IRB approval before implementing proposed changes.
- Change means any change, in content or form, to the protocol, consent form, or any supportive materials (such as the Investigator's Brochure, questionnaires, surveys, advertisements, etc.). See Item 4 for more examples.
- Form must be populated using Adobe Acrobat / Pro 9 or greater standalone program (do not fill out in browser). Hand written forms will not be accepted.

1. Today's Date	2/10/2020
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2. Principal Investigator (PI) Brandon Kiser	
Principal Inves. (title): Graduate Student Department: EFLT Phone: 334-319-3952 AU E-mail: kiserbl@auburn.edu	Faculty PI (if PI is a student): Dr. Ellen Hahn Department: EFLT Phone: 334-844-3067 AU E-mail: reamseh@auburn.edu
Contact person who should receive copies of IRB correspondence (Optional) Name: Phone: AU E-mail:	Department Head: Dr. James Witte

3. AU IRB Protocol Identification	
3.a. Protocol Number	20-018 EX 2001, Kiser
3.b. Protocol Title	Stress Reduction Practices as Predictors of Resilience in School Principals
3.c. Current Status of Protocol—For active studies, check ONE box at left; provide numbers and dates where applicable	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Study has not yet begun; no data has been entered collected
<input type="checkbox"/>	In progress If YES, number entered Adverse events since last review
<input type="checkbox"/>	Data analysis only
<input type="checkbox"/>	Funding Agency and Grant Number: AU Funding Information:
<input type="checkbox"/>	List any other institutions and/or IRBs associated with this project:
Approval Dates: From January 14, 2020 To -----	

4. Types of Change	
Mark all that apply, and describe the changes in item 5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change Key Personnel Attach CITI forms for new personnel.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Additional Sites or Change in Sites, including AU classrooms, etc. Attach permission forms for new sites.

Version 02/6/2020 Version Date (date document created): _____ pages x of y

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from 1/14/2020 to _____ Protocol # 20-018 EX 2001

Appendix B
Information Letter



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
"Stress-Reduction Practices as Predictors of Resilience in School Principals"

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine how building-level principals' stress-reduction practices predict their resilience. The study is being conducted by Brandon Kiser, Graduate Student, under the direction of Dr. Ellen Hahn in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations Leadership and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a building-level school principal and are age 19 or older.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to respond to twenty-eight survey questions on the Qualtrics platform. You will be asked four demographic questions, fourteen stress-reduction questions, and ten resilience questions. Your total time commitment will be approximately five minutes.

There are no risks associated with participating in this study. Your personal information will not be collected.

If you participate in this study, you will not receive any direct benefits. If you participate in this study, you may request access to the final report findings by emailing the researcher at kiserbl@auburn.edu.

You will not be compensated for participating in this study. There is likewise no cost to you to participate.

Page 1 of 2

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460; Fax: 334-844-3072

www.auburn.edu

