

MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION: UTILIZING MINDFULNESS AS A TOOL TO CULTIVATE STRESS COPING SKILLS IN K-12 TEACHERS THROUGH A MINDFULNESS VIRTUAL ONLINE COURSE (MVOC)

Uraipanyawan Pinthong, Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

This study investigated how to decrease teacher stress and burnout by a virtual online mindfulness practice intervention with cognitive apprenticeship, self-determination, and self-efficacy theory as the frameworks. My research project examined instruction and training in mindfulness practice as a tool to cultivate stress coping skills in K-12 teachers through a six-week mindfulness virtual online course (MVOC). This study involved five participants and employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach comprised of quantitative data collection with pre- and post-surveys followed by three qualitative interviews over six weeks to facilitate a case study consideration. The results exhibited reduced stress in participants following an increase in awareness from developing a personal mindfulness practice. Furthermore, the MVOC intervention helped the participants build a daily personalized mindfulness practice that improved their stress coping skills and was beneficial in specific ways. Teachers who practice routine mindfulness will cultivate progressively effective stress coping skills and K-12 teachers can enjoy increased job satisfaction and decreased burnout.

Keywords: multimethodology, teacher stress, mindfulness, coping skill for K-12 teachers, online mindfulness

INTRODUCTION¹

Teaching in the K-12 public school system in the United States is a stressful occupation because of the high level of responsibility that teachers have, which requires resilient coping skills for their overall well-being. “Stress results when an individual appraises the magnitude of demands he or she encounters as exceeding available resources” (Lambert et al., 2018, p. 2), and for teachers it is responding to heavy workloads, a lack of support, and the pressure of high stakes tests. Additionally, the teacher must respond to a variety of problems that involve overcrowded class size, heavy administrative duties, and substandard salary (Anderson et al.,

1999; Herman et al., 2018). The stress teachers face is one of the leading factors in their disengagement, health issues, dissatisfaction with the job, and burnout, which fosters a desire for them to leave the profession. Teacher occupational stress has been a concern among researchers for many years and has impacted educational systems and resulted in the development of teacher stress scales with various approaches to address the negative effects of stress and burnout (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

A report published by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2016, *Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools*, states that teaching is among the most stressful

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occupations in the United States, which affects teacher retention rates and creates a workforce with fewer years of experience. The report also states that school districts that recognize the importance of addressing teacher stress through a wellness program experience a cost-saving of \$3.60 for each dollar invested in such programs (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2016). The K–12 schools in the Phoenix metropolitan area are investing in developing future leaders from within their employee base, and this was the site of this research study.

STRESS AND BURNOUT

Stress is defined as a person’s physiological, biological, and psychological response to tension caused by a pressure arising from within an environmental condition (Csaszar et al., 2018). Another definition conceptualizes stress as “the experience of negative or unpleasant emotions resulting from aspects of work. Thus, teachers may experience stress if the job demands do not fit their perceived capacity to meet the demands or their educational values” (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 182).

Occupational stress is distinguished by the damaging physiological and psychological responses that appear when the requirements of the job do not match the proficiencies, sources, or demands of the worker (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, n.d.). Nevertheless, occupational stress can be difficult to describe because, while it is stress on the job, this stress emerges within a person and every worker carries into their occupation their own stress threshold (Greenberg, 1990).

Burnout is a symptom of and reaction to stress consisting of exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal fulfillment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Leiter, 2008) and results from unaddressed long-term occupational stress (Jennett et al., 2003). Moreover, burnout progresses slowly and is characterized as the end stage of various negative reactions to stress and is accompanied by the appearance of emotional exhaustion, which is considered the key symptom of burnout (Sifferlin, 2016). In the first three years of entering the profession, 40% to 50% of new teachers leave their teaching career and burnout from chronic occupational stress is cited as the most probable cause in North America (Oberle &

Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Mindfulness is one form of intervention that can be especially effective for addressing general and occupation stress before it leads to burnout.

MINDFULNESS AS A SOLUTION

The word mindfulness was first used in the English language academic literature in 1910 by Rhys Davids, who stated the Pali word *sati* usually translated as mindfulness carried the meaning of memory (Brown et al., 2016). In the context of mindfulness practice, *sati* refers to the awareness that allows one “to remember what is otherwise too easily forgotten, the present moment” (Anālayo, 2003, p. 48). Jon Kabat-Zinn developed mindfulness as a science for rigorous and systematic training in stress reduction in 1982. This is a form of meditation first developed in the Buddhist traditions of Asia to decrease the adverse effects of stress. As of 2013, there were over 780 centers worldwide that were successfully applying the practice of mindfulness to reduce stress (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Furthermore, mindfulness training in awareness and the acceptance that the present moment experience of an activity is as essential as the result of the activity has “growing evidence that this form of mental training can promote teacher well-being” (Csaszar et al., 2018, p. 96).

The benefits of mindfulness practices in promoting teachers’ increased awareness, being in the present moment, and being engaged with compassion are well documented (Anderson et al., 1999; Brown et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2007; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Greeson et al., (2014) demonstrated that mindfulness practice is associated with decreased emotional distress, increased positive states of mind, and improved quality of life. Furthermore, the study showed that the practice of mindfulness has a positive influence on the brain and the autonomic nervous system by reducing the production of stress hormones, increasing the functioning of the immune system, and exhibiting healthier behaviors when eating, sleeping, and using substances for relaxation (Greeson et al., 2014). These benefits of mindfulness are the motivation for my examination of how to utilize mindfulness to assist K–12 teachers develop stress coping skills.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The problem of practice addressed by this study was K–12 teacher’s general and occupational stress,

which leads to burnout. Addressing teacher stress by providing coping skills is vital for creating a beneficial working condition that reduces burnout.

The study consisted of a six-week online mindfulness training course with five participants who had no experience with online mindfulness courses. The course included information on the comprehensive understanding of the physiology of the stress response by the nervous system and on mindfulness techniques to develop a daily mindfulness practice. The weekly instructional sessions were followed by daily guided practice on the mindfulness techniques highlighted for that week to aid the participants in developing their self-directed mindfulness at home. At the end of the week, the participants were prompted to complete a mindfulness reflection log to record the amount of mindfulness practice completed. They also responded to open-ended questions that allowed them to discuss their progress and the quality of their personal mindfulness practice. The participants started the course between September and October 2020, and all five participants completed initial and follow-up interviews to explore each participant's psychological and cognitive response to sensations while coping with the stress they were experiencing.

Self-determination, self-efficacy, and cognitive apprenticeship theories were the theoretical frameworks employed to build teacher's coping skills to address general and occupational stress and assist them in becoming healthy. The mindfulness intervention was conducted through pre-post quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected via the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills Questionnaire (KIMS-Short), and the Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS) with Linkert scale questions, and the qualitative data included three qualitative interviews over the six weeks. The research questions concentrated on determining the level of occupational stress and how mindfulness activities built coping skills.

Rational Training Through MVOC

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the university required all research to be conducted via virtual intervention. This situation also impacted the institutional review board approval and participant recruitment because teachers who had previously agreed to participate in the study faced difficult

situations that caused them not to proceed with the study. After implementing the required revisions to the proposed methods to accommodate the COVID-19 protocols, I continued the study as a case study with five participants from various school locations—referred herein by pseudonyms (Alex, Lora, Madison, Pan, and Smit)—who each completed the six-week Mindfulness Virtual Online Course (MVOC).

My qualification to create and administer the MVOC come from my background in developing skills in meditation and mindfulness practice from the Buddhist traditions of Southeast Asia since 1999. My first multiday residential practice was at Daen Mahamongkol International Meditation Center foundation to support the world, in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. In 2010, I further refined and expanded my practice during a nonsectarian ten-day retreat at S. N. Goenka Vipassana Meditation Center in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. My practice was influenced and further developed by receiving instruction from a superior forest monk from Chantaburi, Thailand, in 2015. In 2016, I undertook a deeper meditation experience in Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh, India, for three months at a branch of Daen Mahamongkol Meditation centers. During the day, I practiced mindful working as I assisted with the construction of the stupa and kitchen. In the evening, I practiced walking meditation and quiet reflection on the day's activities. When I returned to the United States, I studied the science of mindfulness by taking EXW 540 Mindfulness, Stress, and Health at Arizona State University. All these experiences increased my interest in exploring how to use mindfulness in education for the benefit of students and teachers.

Research Questions

There were three research questions for this study:

1. What is the level of reduction of occupational and general stress through MVOC?
2. What level of change does a mindfulness intervention have on mindfulness subconstructs, which include observing, describing, acting with awareness, accepting (or allowing) without judgement, and awareness?
3. How do participants utilize mindfulness activities in daily life to cope with stress?

These questions focused on evidence for the validation of the theories involving mindfulness, namely self-determination and self-efficacy.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Three theoretical frameworks provide insight into general and occupational teacher stress and were used in this study for designing interventions aimed at building stress coping skills:

1. The social cognitive theory (SCT) of Albert Bandura, which incorporates the subtheories of perceived control, self-efficacy, and social support (Yeh et al., 2016).
2. Self-determination theory (SDT), which incorporates the concepts of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation when considering ways to ensure that the required psychological nutrients of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are addressed for each individual in the educational system (Martela et al., 2016).
3. The cognitive apprenticeship model, which takes a constructivist approach to examine human learning using the ideas of situated learning and enculturation (Brown et al., 1989).

These frameworks are discussed below in the research exploring teacher stress, and they are followed by implications for designing an intervention that uses these frameworks to address stress and burnout in teachers.

Foundations for Mindfulness

The three amalgamated theories of social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, and cognitive apprenticeship can support teachers in acquiring the coping skills needed to deal with stress and burnout and provide the capability for teachers to develop a classroom environment more conducive to joyful and successful student learning (Brown et al., 1989; Martela et al., 2016; Yeh et al., 2016).

Social Cognitive Theory

I use social cognitive theory in my study as a basis to discuss the emotionally draining work conditions of teachers through integrating the concepts of self-efficacy, perceived control, and social encouragement. These act as protective factors against the negative effects of school-based stress

when using coping skills to transform them into positive opportunities for growth and satisfaction.

According to the stated problem of practice, the strategy for social cognitive theory was to help teachers increase their perception of self-efficacy, which can be accomplished when individuals develop self-regulation to improve their aptitudes, capability, and self-confidence to proficiently interpret and adjust personal actions within their environment. The theory of social encouragement requires that teachers build confidence and open-mindedness to be able to successfully develop a mindfulness practice. Related studies address mindfulness activities that involved breath and body awareness, which increased self-efficacy through increased self-regulation. Additionally, these activities were associated with feelings of compassion and the appearance of beneficial teacher coping skills for stress. This would lead to an increased capacity to manage and control emotions and improve the operative classroom environment (Cieslak et al., 2013; Shoji et al., 2014; Yeh et al., 2016).

Self-determination Theory

Self-determination theory was employed within the intervention, including training in mindfulness techniques, to support teachers to enhance their self-motivation and confidence in using mindfulness by fostering intrinsic motivation, which is when an activity is initiated and enjoyed for its own sake because a person finds it interesting and satisfying in itself. This is opposed to doing an activity to obtain an external reward or avoid a punishment, which is extrinsic motivation. Mindfulness practice develops more fully when a participant feels satisfaction in using the mindfulness experience learned due to intrinsic motivation. This leads to the highest level of success with the processes and the participants receive the greatest benefits from the practice (Anderson, et al., 1999; Herman, et al., 2018; Nie et al., 2015; Raufelder et al., 2014; Shih, 2015).

Cognitive Apprenticeship

The theory of cognitive apprenticeship is connected to the problem of practice of teacher stress and anxiety through building a collective experience that builds a comprehension of mindfulness. Using natural social, physical, and cultural situations, a rich learning process results that leads to the

acquisition of knowledge and perceptive skills about mindfulness from an instructor who has mastered these skills. By receiving coaching in an authentic learning situation, the hidden internal processes become openly visible so that novices can observe, emulate, and successfully engage in the practice through assistance from an expert. The result is an increased comprehension of situations and improved ability to cope with circumstances. Additionally, through cognitive apprenticeship, participants receive feedback and guided direction on how to appropriately apply these skills to their personal situations at school (Brown et al., 1989; Kopcha & Alger, 2014).

Benefits of Mindfulness Training

A study by Crowley and Munk (2017) began with the premise that stress “is often produced by a future oriented thought process” (p. 92), so if a practitioner learns how to focus on the present, this will reduce negative reactions because mindfulness has taken away the stress of the unknown forthcoming events that are the object of concern. The main point of this research study was to use a qualitative methodology to examine how a “15-week meditation course which blended techniques from the Buddhist and mindfulness traditions” (p. 91) could impact participant well-being. The meditation practice used in the study helps to expose and enlarge one’s consciousness and awareness of thoughts and feelings through observing the mind without focusing on a single object. The study found three major areas where participant’s outlook on life and relationships were impacted, with 86% reporting an increase in reflective thinking which forms “the bridge between experience and learning”, 96% reporting greater psychological well-being, and 79% describing an increase in compassion (Crowley & Munk, 2017, pp. 94–95). Csaszr et al. 2018, completed a study on how loving kindness meditation (LKM) affected reported levels of teachers’ stress and empathy. LKM includes the components of intention, attention, and attitude, which are part of mindfulness meditation with the added component of connectedness. There was a significant relationship between both the quality of and the time spent in loving kindness meditation with increased empathy and reduced stress. Other studies have shown that reducing stress through meditation is correlated with fewer mental health

symptoms and increased overall wellness (Baer, 2003; Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Brown et al., 2007). The importance of building empathy is that it acts as a mediating factor to reduce classroom induced stressful situations because empathetic teachers are able to understand the difficulties a student is facing and respond with compassion and kindness to foster a stronger bidirectional learning relationship (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Csaszr et al., 2018).

Mindfulness Training for Teachers

Mindfulness can be thought of as both a process (practice) and an outcome (awareness) (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Although there are different definitions of mindfulness, a predominant one is that:

mindfulness is moment to moment, nonjudgmental awareness ... cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment’s thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of agency, control, and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacity for paying attention and on the awareness, insight, and compassion that naturally arise from paying attention in specific ways. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. xlix).

Mindful awareness, or the outcome of mindfulness practice, has also been described as bare attention, or “simply knowing what is arising while it is arising without adding anything to it” (Shapiro and Carlson, 2009, p. 5), such as conditioned patterns of perceiving, reacting, evaluating, or other conceptual interpretations. While this way of being and knowing is inherent in everyone, it can be cultivated and deepened through practice.

Mindfulness practice, or the process of mindfulness, has been conceptualized as the self-regulation of attention on the components of experience (e.g., sensation, thoughts, and emotions) in the present moment with an orientation toward experience that includes openness, receptivity, and kindness (Bishop et al., 2004; Carmody, 2015). In most mindfulness-based programs, the modes of instruction for helping participants learn how to practice mindfulness vary from practice at home, facilitator lead group discussions, and guided training in mindfulness practice that includes “meditation, breath work, body scans, walking,

and visualization exercise all intending to bring awareness to the present moment” (Zarate et al., 2019, p. 1703).

Klingbeil and Renshaw (2018) examined 29 studies that employed different mindfulness training methods for use in teachers’ occupational settings. Their meta-analysis “suggests that mindfulness interventions are effective in reducing psychological distress and increasing educator wellness” (Zarate et al., 2019, p. 1702). Mindfulness interventions help develop teachers’ insight into working conditions and provides a means for them to manage stress to improve retention rates and support the effective delivery of instruction for a more positive classroom environment. Additionally, mindfulness is correlated with “improved mental and physical health outcomes and reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression” (Zarate et al., 2019, p. 1703). These positive results have been documented to occur over diverse training regimens that include programs with daily meetings to those that have group practice at intervals that are weeks apart.

Mindfulness Intervention

The intervention for the action research study was an adaptation of a learning strategy developed over many centuries in the Buddhist tradition. This tool for the direct observation of the mind and actions provides a method of inquiry that brings accurate, philosophically logical analysis and scientific experimental investigation (Brown et al., 2016) to the science of mindful education and mindful life to help cultivate stress coping skills. The intervention provided a six-week MVOC that included information on the comprehensive understanding of the physiology of the stress response by the nervous system along with mindfulness techniques to develop a daily mindfulness practice. Mindfulness logs were provided for participants to discuss their experiences of using mindfulness each week.

The course concluded with instructions for the teachers to continue the personal mindfulness practice on their own. Follow-up interviews with the five participants for the case study were conducted every three weeks via Zoom in November and December 2020 to discuss the progress and quality of their personal mindfulness practice as they continued on their own.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

During, the intervention, I instructed, guided,

and worked in partnership with the participants by creating the MVOC content and being available for individual coaching sessions through email and the Zoom online meeting platform. The content and instructional methods for the online mindfulness training course were based on academic research on mindfulness and personal training that I received from skilled mindfulness masters. The participants were able to contact me via phone or email during the six-week training course to address questions or concerns that arose about their personal practice.

This case study employed qualitative data consisting of individual interviews conducted using Zoom Meeting with audio and video recording and transcripts created from these recordings. Coding analysis was completed with the use of Hyper Research for all five participants. Initial interviews were completed as participants completed the MVOC, with two follow-up interviews conducted at approximately three-week intervals to gain insight into the participants continuation of mindfulness practice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study began by recruiting five teachers who experienced high-level occupational stress and were interested in receiving training on how to apply mindfulness to increase their stress coping skills. These educators committed to participating in a six-week MVOC training in mindfulness techniques that they could use in their daily lives to develop a regular, consistent, and personalized mindfulness practice. In creating the six-week MVOC course, I brought into practice key findings from my own experience of being trained by mindfulness masters in developing a regular practice.

To be able to ascertain the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, a mixed-methods research approach was used that kept the “weight of quantitative and qualitative method in the study-relatively equal” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 124). Moreover, integration is an important tool to intensify the connection between both methods and to certify that the reported elements “fit together in jointly addressing the study purpose” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 153). Additionally, a discussion will focus on how the results are connected to the theoretical frameworks to explain how they are comparable to previous studies. While this current study was conducted with a reduced number of participants due to the pandemic, which

does not allow for a high level of statistical power, the significant quantitative results were found to coincide with the qualitative data. To compensate for the reduced statistical power, a case study approach was used on the qualitative data that allowed for an analysis of individual results to provide evidence of the efficacy of the mindfulness factor of awareness to increase stress coping skills.

Research Questions

To answer Research Question 1 (What is the level of reduction of occupational and general stress through MVOC?), a t-test was employed with a one tailed alpha level of 0.05 with both the pre- and post-score to determine if the 44% change in the mean stress level was significant. The t-test result was significant at this level with a value of $t(4) = 3.57, p = .012$ and $(n=5)$. This was reflected in the individual percent decrease ranging from 23% for Lora, Alex at 25%, 36% for Smit, Pan at 62%, and 73% for Madison. Overall, every participant's $(n=5)$ level of stress decreased to the national mean score or below showing that after practicing MVOC the participants were better able to cope with stress. To continue with an example from Research Question 1, after completing the MVOC intervention, post-PSS results exhibited a 44% reduced level of mean stress among the participants and was substantiated by interview comments such as Madison's about how she applied mindfulness to cope with stressful situations: "I sit and walk mediate and be quiet and mindful, feel positive around me . . . I feel reduced stress, I never believed mindfulness alone will help me reduce stress but now I think so." This exhibits a corroboration between both methods and confirms data trustworthiness.

The data from all sources were analyzed to address Research Question 2: What level of change does a mindfulness intervention have on mindfulness sub-constructs, which include observing, describing, acting with awareness, accepting (or allowing) without judgement, and awareness? The data showed a statistically significant increase in the mindfulness factor of awareness at the 0.05 level $(t(3) = 4.26, p = .023$ and $(n=4)$).

According to Cardaciotto et al. (2008), "awareness is characterized as a continuous monitoring of experience with a focus on current experience rather than preoccupation with past or future events" (p. 2). The analysis of the data

showed an increase in the level of mindfulness for each of the components measured from the pre- to post-surveys, which includes observing, describing, acting with awareness, and accepting (or allowing) without judgment from the KIM-Short questionnaire and awareness and accepting from the PHLMS. Additionally, there was an overall reduction in the level of stress for each participant. Furthermore, the t-test analysis confirms that there was convincing evidence that the increased awareness measured by the PHLMS and the decreased level of stress measured by the PSS resulted as a consequence of participation in the MVOC. Incidentally, this awareness corresponds with the training experience I received from various mindfulness masters, personal practice, and teaching students to stay in the present moment. Throughout the course, I mentioned for participants to "stay in the present moment and make it a wonderful day." This analysis focused on coding with participant case study interviews in which they discuss awareness or being in the present moment consistently, such as Lora's comment about mindfulness, "is just being aware." Smit replied that "mindfulness is to be aware of what you're doing," and Alex stated the need to "be aware of my speaking and listening." In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to identify themes and fruitful data implications that accounted for the reduced number of participants. The following section will provide a more robust explanation of the conclusions.

In answering Research Question 3 (How do participants utilize mindfulness activities in daily life to cope with stress?), the data indicated that during the study participants' average daily time practicing mindfulness ranged from 10 to 22 minutes over the six-week virtual mindfulness course. To determine how participants applied the techniques in daily life to cope with stress, the interview employed the follow-up questions: Have you continued mindful practice in everyday life? Do you feel you have gained greater benefit from continuing mindfulness practice? What happens when you do not practice mindfulness?

Assertions

The next theme of managing stress emerged in forming Assertion 1: Occupational stress has negative effects on physical health as well as emotional well-being. Four participants, Lora, Alex,

Madison, and Pan, commented on the negative effects of stress; for instance, Madison indicated that “I noticed when I feel so stressed, I started to feel headache and tightness pain in my shoulders and eyes.”

Moreover, Research Question 3 was addressed by confirming the application of mindfulness techniques through Assertion 2: Participants applied mindfulness techniques from MVOC to daily circumstances. The finding that emerged was that the participants used mindfulness every day to deal with the effects of stress on physical health. For example, Lora applied techniques of mindfulness in her daily circumstances: “I’ve also tried doing a scan while washing my hair in the shower and that got rid of a headache.” Additionally, all participants applied mindfulness for schoolwork before class and determined that the benefit of mindfulness was being able to help their students. For instance, Pan commented in her mindfulness log that “mindfulness is a very important part of my life. I am now part of a mindfulness committee at school.” Madison stated, “I see the benefit from it, and I want all my student to be happy and get the benefit from mindfulness as I am.”

Furthermore, Assertion 3, Mindfulness helps build stress coping skills with regular practice, was achieved through participants staying in the present moment, applying increased awareness, and dealing with multiple demands. Smit commented that “Mindfulness is to be aware of what you are doing.” Assertion 4 emerged from the qualitative data analysis: Participants overcame challenges when neglecting to employ mindfulness practices every minute by calling to mind reminders from the course. All five participants mentioned the challenge of remembering to apply mindfulness every minute throughout the day after they no longer had the daily course reminders to guide their practice.

EFFICACY OF MVOC

This study provided evidence that an MVOC can assist teachers to assemble stress coping skills to aid in alleviating the adverse effects of occupational and personal stress. Additionally, the six-week format of the course and its daily activities provided consistent and timely guidance to help participants build a personal daily mindfulness practice through the theoretical frameworks of cognitive apprenticeship, self-efficacy, and self-

determination theory as explanatory concepts that were employed during the intervention.

The foundational aspects for building a long term, permanent, lifelong mindfulness practice that were implemented in the MVOC course design included:

1. Daily virtual contact with participants through a beginning of the week instructional video that provided an understanding of the connected network of mind, body, and spirit that produced and regulated physical and emotional well-being along with guidance on how to perform mindfulness activities to gain an inner understanding of the workings of these systems within their own lives, followed by guided practice for 15 to 20 minutes. On days 2 and 4, additional daily videos provided further instruction in the mindfulness techniques for that week and how to apply these techniques within the participants’ daily schedules. For the last three days of the week, the participants were provided with brief virtual contact as reminders to set aside time for their weekly mindfulness techniques. After day 7, they would reflect on and record their week’s experience in a weekly mindfulness log. On the first day of the new week, the process would begin with a new mindfulness technique. This course design allowed participants to fit the daily course instruction and activities into their busy schedules over six weeks.
2. This course design was a crucial component in creating a successful training program that allowed participants to learn and apply mindfulness techniques, develop their personalized variations, and come to enjoy practicing mindfulness daily.
3. Additionally, after completing the six-week MVOC course, participants continued to contact me with questions and comments about their mindfulness practice during the follow-up interviews. This extended contact over the six weeks following the course provided the participants with additional reminders and motivation to continue their mindfulness practice as they experienced the benefits of reduced stress.

CONCLUSION

Teaching in the K–12 public school system in the United States is a stressful occupation because of the high level of responsibility within schools that requires resilient stress coping skills for overall well-being. The purpose of this research project was to examine instruction and training in mindfulness practice as a tool to cultivate stress coping skills in K–12 teachers through a mindfulness virtual online course (MVOC). The results of this action research study showed that stress was reduced following an increase in awareness from developing a personal mindfulness practice.

Furthermore, the MVOC intervention helped the participants build a daily personalized mindfulness practice that improved their stress coping skills and also benefited them in specific ways. Using quantitative and qualitative data, this study showed that participants experienced reduced levels of stress and increased awareness after the MVOC, which holds promise for teachers for whom routine mindfulness practice can cultivate progressively effective stress coping skills. Along with assisting K–12 teachers to enjoy increased job satisfaction, the leading cause of burnout will also be reduced. Following up this study after the pandemic with in-person mindfulness professional development workshops is already in the planning stages.

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