



PRINCIPALS' CONFIDENCE IN CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH

CARA CUCCUINI-HARMON, M.S.
HORATIO BLACKMAN, PH.D.
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Principals play a critical role in the use of evidence-based research within school systems. Their knowledge and confidence in research interpretation is a crucial component in decision-making processes around teaching, learning, and organizational activities. Additionally, the evidence requirements of ESSA have placed a focus on schools' use of high-quality evidence-based research. To examine principals' confidence to critically engage with evidence from research, we surveyed over 80 principals/assistant principals about how confident they felt in evaluating various aspects of a research study (e.g., sample size, statistical analysis, or generalizability). The figure below presents results.

Principals' Average Confidence to Critically Interpret Research



In general, principals reported low confidence levels in the critical interpretation of research. Mean confidence levels did not reach “mostly” confident for any of the seven aspects rated. Principals’ had the highest level of confidence in determining whether survey measures used by a study were valid and reliable. Judging the credibility of evidence from a vendor, interpreting results from a research synthesis, and determining if a study used appropriate statistical analyses were the activities with the lowest confidence ratings by principals. These particular research criteria are imperative for determining the quality and accuracy of research evidence used in decision-making.

Principals must weigh multiple sources of evidence when making decisions that impact teaching and learning. Their capacity to critically interpret research likely plays a role in those decisions. Varying levels of school research use in decision-making may be linked to principals’ ability to critically analyze research. This can ultimately determine the effectiveness of these decisions on student outcomes. The restructuring of preservice and in-service preparation for educational leaders to further develop their knowledge and understanding of research could better support decision-making in schools.

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DATA POINTS