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Designer Teacher Project: Insights from a Hybrid Professional Development Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to increase teachers' instructional effectiveness by developing and implementing a professional development program that aims to improve teacher quality. Consistent with this purpose, the study included developing a mindset of different roles of teachers and varying definitions of a teacher as a profession, raising an awareness of being a designer teacher through face-to-face and online activities, and helping teachers gain knowledge and skills related to pedagogy and effective instruction. As a theoretical approach, Desimone's (2009) path model was used. Within the scope of this model, teachers gained knowledge and skills by participating in a professional development program (Path 1), then they implemented these knowledge and skills in the classroom (Path 2), which aimed to make a positive change in student outcomes (Path 3). The learning activities in this study were designed based on critical features of effective professional development that included a three-day-long Designer Teacher camp, three-month-long online activities, and a teacher conference.³ Experts and teacher facilitators provided support and guidance through the process. Every teacher implemented the lesson plan developed throughout the program. Convergent parallel mixed method design was used throughout the study. A total of 150 teachers with varying ages, experiences, subjects, and grade levels participated in the study. Data collection tools included Designer Teacher Scale, Teacher Knowledge and Skills Surveys, and focus group interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed by using repeated measures, multilevel tests and regression models. Qualitative data was analyzed with content analysis. Quantitative portion of the study indicated that our professional development program led to an increase in the designer teacher knowledge. Further, the program fostered all sub-dimensions of the role of designer teacher, namely, design, implementation, professional development, digital competency, and leadership. The gain of knowledge in



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these dimensions showed no statistically significant differences based on teachers' gender and level of education. The qualitative analysis demonstrated that the teachers stressed the importance of program outcomes which were quite parallel to quantitative results. Also, they referred to their experiences in the implementation process, the emergence of a professional learning community during the program as well as some facilitators and barriers in their learning process. Our findings suggest that for positive effects on teacher-related outcomes, teachers need high-quality PD experiences supported by leaders and frequent live meetings and follow-up.

Keywords: Designer teacher, professional development, effective instruction, curriculum development, Understanding by Design (UbD).