

Korean Elementary English Teachers' Professionalism Development in Using EduTech:

A Grounded Theory Study

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 era and rapid AI advancements have transformed English education through various digital technologies, as highlighted by the Korean 2022 revised national curriculum, which encourages digital competency for teachers and students. This shift has led to the integration of technology in English teaching, introducing tools such as AI chatbots, technology-sharing applications, and AI-based digital textbooks. In this context, Educational Technology (EduTech) is increasingly recognized for its ability to personalize learning experiences, particularly in Korean elementary English education. Notably, the integration of EduTech requires specialized teacher training, with many educators adopting these tools in post-COVID-19 classrooms. However, there is a lack of extensive research on elementary English teachers' experiences and the impact on their professional development using EduTech. This study addresses this gap, utilizing Grounded Theory to develop a theory on the professional development of elementary English teachers through their EduTech experiences, focusing on the main research question of understanding this development process.

METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

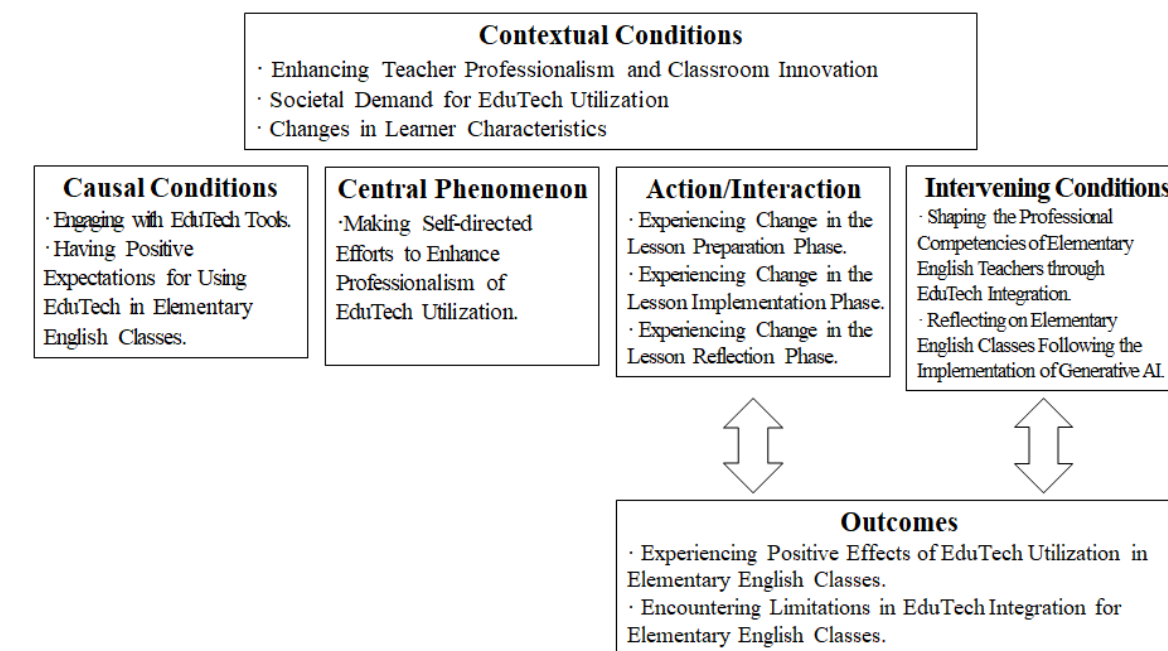
Aiming to derive a substantive theory on the process of professional development based on elementary English teachers' experiences with EduTech, nine elementary English teachers were recruited through theoretical sampling. All participants had extensive experience with EduTech in the elementary English field, having published academic papers on relevant topics, won awards in EduTech teaching case competitions, and so forth. Therefore, they were deemed to be teachers with outstanding expertise in using EduTech.

2. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was applied to naturally derive theory from data in order to elucidate the process of professional development in the utilization of EduTech by elementary English teachers. To achieve this, unstructured questions were used to conduct in-depth interviews with the subjects for data collection. The researchers repeatedly compared and analyzed the data through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding according to the methods of Strauss and Corbin (1998). Consequently, a paradigm model and a core category regarding the professional development process of elementary English teachers in the use of EduTech were derived. Ultimately, a theoretical model related to the research topic was presented.

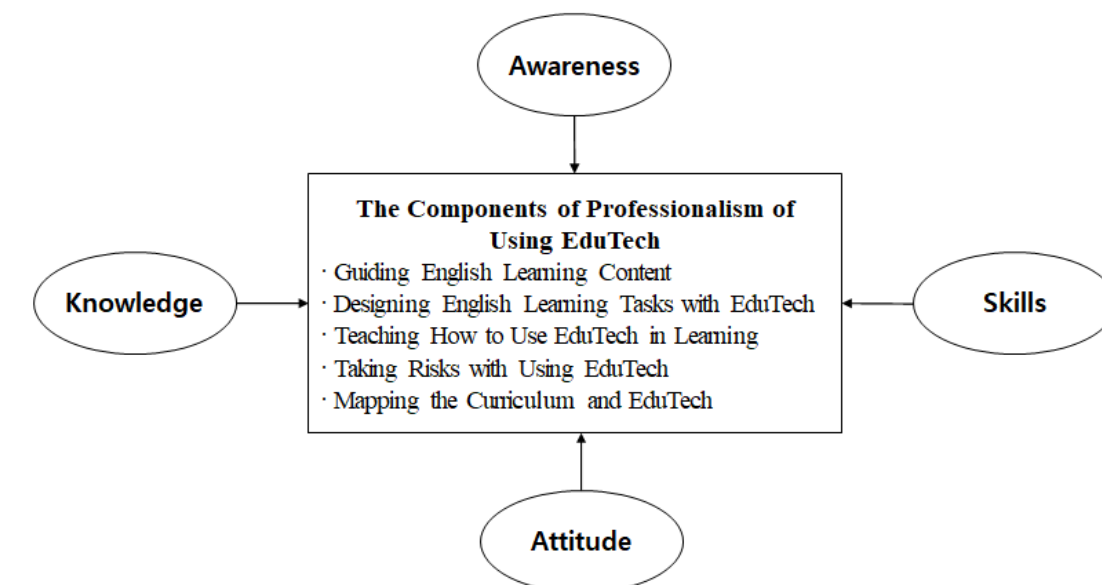
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Paradigm Model of the Elementary English Teachers' Professionalism Development in Using EduTech



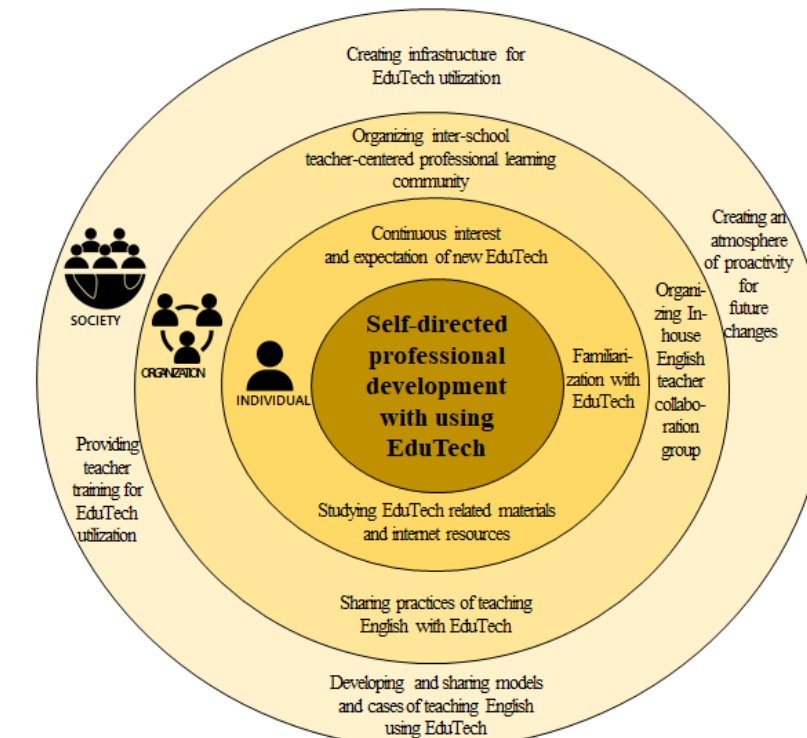
Strauss and Corbin (1998) proposed the paradigm model, a framework for analyzing and linking the context of a phenomenon with the action process of specific events. This systematic structure enables an understanding of the entire process by connecting relationships between categories revealed during data coding. Building on this, Creswell (2002) specifically suggested components for constructing the paradigm model, including central phenomenon, contextual conditions, causal conditions, intervening conditions, actions/interactions, and outcomes. In this study, based on Creswell's (2002), the process of the elementary English teachers' professionalism development in EduTech utilization was structured using the paradigm model. Through this procedure, 'Self-directed enhancement of professionalism as an English teacher through the experience of utilizing EduTech' was identified as the core category.

2. Components of the Elementary English Teachers' Professionalism of Using EduTech



During the analysis of interview data, elements of English teacher professionalism in EduTech utilization were identified. These elements are fundamentally linked to professionalism factors highlighted in previous studies (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Richards, 2010). However, in the evolving educational context of EduTech use, the importance of traditional professionalism factors has shifted, with new factors emerging. Understanding these EduTech professionalism elements is crucial for examining the specific aspects of elementary English teachers' professional development in EduTech utilization. More specifically, the participants of this study simultaneously internalized these detailed elements, allowing them to plan and apply EduTech more proactively in their English lessons.

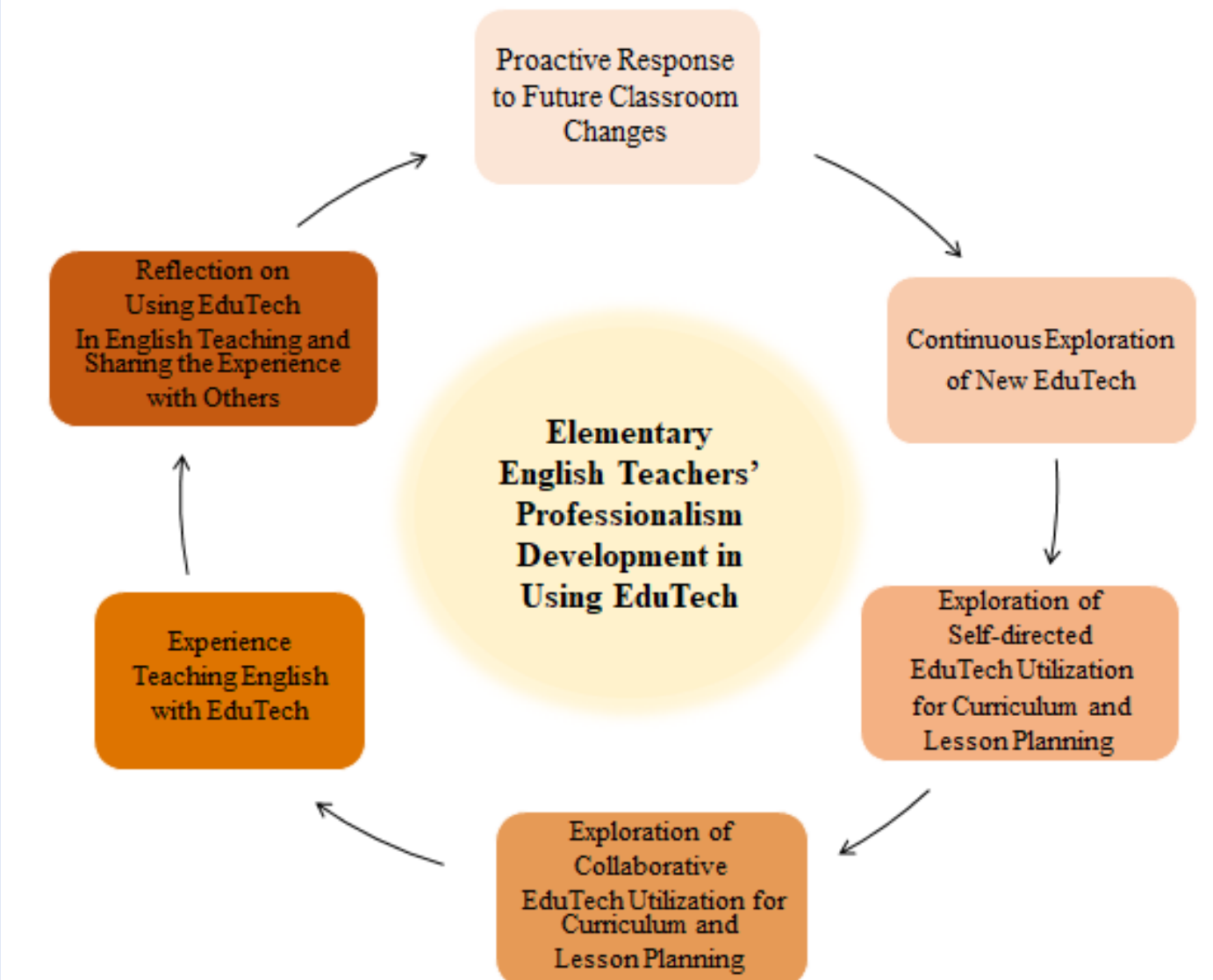
3. Matrix Analysis of the Core Category



In Grounded Theory, matrix analysis elucidates how conditions related to a key phenomenon impact outcomes in both micro and macro contexts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on this, the core category of this study, 'Self-directed professional development with using EduTech,' was analyzed using matrix analysis. This core category was detailed in individual, organizational, and societal dimensions. Through this, it is evident that factors of teacher professionalism in EduTech utilization are shaped diversely according to the teacher's personal context and the multi-layered surroundings.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and following the procedures of Grounded Theory, a theoretical model was developed to illustrate the process of professionalism development in elementary English teachers based on their EduTech utilization experiences. Teachers, with an active approach to future instructional changes, explore and implement new EduTech both independently and collaboratively. These experiences accumulate and are periodically reflected upon. It's vital to note that this process is cyclical, leading to a progressive enhancement in the professionalism of elementary English teachers using EduTech.



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