Exploring the Application of the Backward Design Model in EFL Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions and Practices

Explorando a Aplicação do Backward Design Model em Salas de Aula de ILE: Percepções e Práticas dos Professores

Explorando la Aplicación del Modelo de Diseño Inverso en las Aulas de Inglés Como Lengua Extranjera: Percepciones y Prácticas de los Docentes

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Abstract
This qualitative approach study aimed to explore and illustrate the teachers' perceptions in applying the Backward Design Model (BDM) in designing the Ecuadorian teaching syllabi for secondary public schools. Sixteen teachers were selected, and the data was gathered through the teachers' unit designs based on the BDM, teachers' reflections on the implementations of the BDM, and focus-group interviews. The analysis was done using a thematic approach. The researchers followed an interactive process by going forwards and backwards in reading, coding, and creating common themes that emerged from the collected data. The results indicate that the participants found the BDM planning a complex but fruitful process which allows them to better align the students' learning outcomes of each unit with the instructional materials, strategies, and teaching content based on a specific goal. The implications of this research lead to a possible consideration by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education to enact this syllabus design according to the classroom context fully.
Keywords: Backward design; EFL; Teachers' perceptions; Syllabi design.

Resumo
Este estudo de abordagem qualitativa teve como objetivo explorar e ilustrar as percepções dos professores na aplicação do Backward Design Model (BDM) na concepção dos programas de ensino equatorianos para escolas públicas secundárias. 16 professores foram selecionados e os dados foram coletados por meio de projetos de unidades de professores com base no BDM, reflexões dos professores sobre as implementações do BDM e entrevistas com grupos focais. A análise foi feita por meio de uma abordagem temática. Os pesquisadores seguiram um processo interativo avançando e retrocedendo na leitura, codificação e criação de temas comuns que emergiram dos dados coletados. Os resultados indicam que os participantes consideram o planejamento do BDM um processo complexo, mas frutífero, que permite um melhor alinhamento dos resultados de aprendizagem dos alunos de cada unidade com os materiais instrucionais, estratégias e conteúdo de ensino com base em um objetivo específico. As implicações desta pesquisa levam a uma possível consideração pelo Ministério da Educação equatoriano para promulgar totalmente este projeto de programa de acordo com o contexto da sala de aula.
Palavras-chave: Backward design; ILE; Percepções dos professores; Desenho de programa de estudos.

Resumen
Este estudio de enfoque cualitativo tuvo como objetivo explorar e ilustrar las percepciones de los docentes en la aplicación del Modelo de Diseño Inverso (BDM) en el diseño de los programas de enseñanza de escuelas secundarias

públicas ecuatorianas. Se seleccionaron 16 docentes y los datos se recopilaron a través de los diseños de unidades docentes basados en el BDM, las reflexiones de los docentes sobre las implementaciones del BDM y las entrevistas de grupos focales. El análisis se hizo con un enfoque temático. Los investigadores siguieron un proceso interactivo avanzando y retrocediendo en la lectura, la codificación y la creación de temas comunes que surgieron de los datos recopilados. Los resultados indican que los participantes encontraron en la planificación del BDM un proceso complejo pero fructífero que les permite tener un mejor alineamiento de los resultados de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de cada unidad con los materiales didácticos, estrategias y contenidos didácticos basados en un objetivo específico. Las implicaciones de esta investigación conducen a una posible consideración por parte del Ministerio de Educación ecuatoriano para promulgar completamente este diseño del plan de estudios de acuerdo con el contexto del aula.

Palabras clave: Diseño inverso; Inglés como lengua extranjera; Percepciones de los docentes; Diseño del programa de estúdios.

1. Introduction

Curriculum design is the fundamental aspect of planning to teach a course (Dodd, 2021). This is because the Design provides a general description of the course and its requirements, teaching materials, and a direction of the teaching-learning process over a certain period. Most importantly, it takes into account predictable students' achievement. When thinking of designing such a course, teachers and curriculum designers must reflect on one single question: what they hope their students still remember a few years after finishing the course. This question is a guiding criterion for critical reviews of current curricula. Darby and Lang (2019) state that if teachers do not establish a clear purpose for the course, they do not have a clear sense of how the teaching elements are aligned to support students in efficiently achieving the learning outcomes. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), teachers help students learn, become more engaged and achieve better results by Design, not by good luck.

When it comes to language teaching, Richards (2013) explains that the programs can be designed by following three primary curriculum approaches, namely Forward, Central, and Backward Design which differ from each other in aspects related to input (linguistic content), process (methodology), and output (learning outcomes). For Richards (2013), the Forward Design Model (FDM) "starts with syllabus planning, moves to methodology, and is followed by assessment of learning outcomes" (p.5). In contrast, the Central Design Model (CDM) begins with classroom processes and methodology, and learning outcomes are addressed while the syllabus is implemented. What represents a shift from the traditional perspective of the curriculum development approach is the Backward Design Model (BDM), which starts from the specification of learning outcomes, and the whole decisions on methodology and assessment procedures are developed and aligned with those learning outcomes. Furthermore, adequate teaching activities and materials are also formed from the learning outcomes (Richards, 2013).

Even though the existing studies explore the application of the BDM for language purposes (Hosseini et al., 2019; Ibrahim, 2022; Utami & Bram, 2023), little has been done on teachers' experience and perceptions in applying this model to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in different contexts, particularly in Ecuador. This paper derives from a PhD study which aims to contribute to the growing body of research on using the BDM and its elements to improve students' English skills. The paper, therefore, explores and illustrates the teachers' perceptions of applying the BDM in the Design and implementation of school-based Ecuadorian teaching syllabi for secondary public schools. Within this context, the following research questions were proposed to guide the current study:

1. How do teachers perceive the application of the BDM in teaching EFL?

2. How does the implementation of unit plans influence Ecuadorian EFL teachers' planning and teaching?

3. How do teachers perceive the implementation of performance tasks in fostering students' skills?

2. Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature regarding the BDM. The three primary stages of the model are analyzed, and the BDM template, referred to as the Understanding by Design (UbD) template (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), is provided to guide the planning.

The Backward Design Model

The BDM is an approach to designing a curriculum, teaching programs, courses, or units where teachers start with the result they want their students to achieve and then develop elements of the course with that result in mind (Whitehouse, 2014). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2011), "teaching is a means to the end, and planning precedes teaching" (p.7). Thus, the most successful teaching begins with desired learning outcomes and evidence showing that learning has occurred; specific lessons are then developed in a more comprehensive unit design context.

As shown in Figure 1, Richards (2013) states that the BDM starts from the specification of the expected outcomes and then establishes the decisions on methodology (process) and syllabus planning (content). Consequently, every task and piece of instruction has a specific objective aligned with the course's expected outcomes.

Figure 1 - The Backward Design Model.
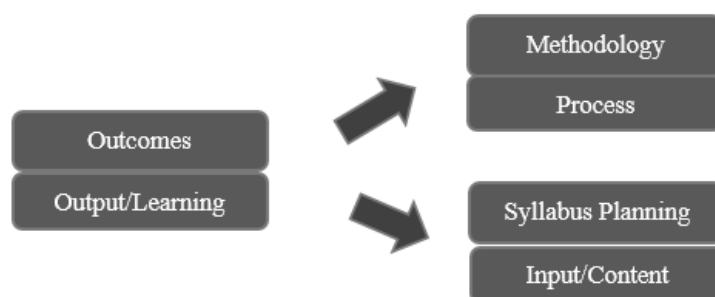
Note: Adapted from *Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central, and Backward Design*: by J. C. Richards, 2013, *RELC*, *44*(1), 5–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212473293

The planning process based on the BDM begins with a clear understanding of the ends in mind, which are the basis for developing instructional strategies and teaching content. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) establish three primary stages for designing a teaching course, syllabus, or unit based on the BDM. These stages are: 1) Identifying desired results, 2) Determining acceptable evidence of learning, and 3) Planning the learning experiences and instruction.

Identifying desired results

The approach to a course-planning process starts with Stage 1 by focusing on desired results. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) refer to these desired results as *enduring understanding.* The authors explain that for understanding to qualify as enduring, it should be both valuable and essential since it has endured not only over time and across cultures but also in the mind of students helping them understand the content and transfer the *big ideas*. An understanding has two general connotations: to apply students' understandings, knowledge, and skills effectively in new situations results in successful transfer and to make inferences and connections to support learning. McTighe and Willis (2019) state that understanding involves comprehending abstract and transferrable ideas. Therefore, "it should be learned so that it does not fly away from memory once the unit is over or the test is completed" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 136).

Identifying what constitutes enduring understanding or desired results is a learning goal or an outcome, defined as the course design's thesis statement. Learning goals or outcomes describe what students can do and value at the end of the course or unit. The desired results are written from the students' perspective and include action verbs, such as differentiate, synthesize, or explain. "Everything must be anchored in the goals for enduring understanding; everything stems from those goals" (Darby & Lang, 2019, p.8). That way, the BDM helps students prioritize content and connect important facts, skills, and actions to solve problems in different contexts.

Determining acceptable evidence

In this Stage 2, it is crucial to have a broad range of evaluation tools to ensure the desired results have been met. The action verb of the learning outcomes determines the choice of feedback and assessment. In the BDM, teachers and curriculum designers are encouraged to *think like an assessor* before planning a specific course or unit. They will determine if their students have achieved the desired understanding by looking at the continuum of assessment methods: from simple to complex, from short-term to long-term, from decontextualized to authentic contexts, and highly structured to nonstructured (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

While summative assessments, such as final exams, papers, and performance tasks or projects, allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the course learning outcomes, formative assessments, such as low-stakes quizzes or weekly reflections, help teachers to know whether students are making good progress. Due to the nature of assessing essential knowledge and skills that contribute to the culminating performance, diagnostic and formative assessments are included in determining acceptable evidence; pre-assessments and ongoing monitoring are to advance learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The central element of Stage 2 is applying performance tasks as evidence of students' understanding to use the knowledge to solve various problems, issues, and situations in different contexts (Abd El Ghany et al., 2019). As examples of summative assessments, the performance tasks are essential elements in the BDM design because they are multi-faceted, open-ended, complex challenges that can be evaluated with established criteria and rubrics. To get evidence of desired understanding, students need authentic performance typically presented in real-life problems, set in a realistic context, and where the student knows the evaluative criteria in advance.

This understanding as knowledge transfer is shown through *six facets of understanding* (explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-understanding). The performance verbs in the six facets provide frames for determining the right task, indicating the depth of student understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). In order to assist in creating performance tasks, a design tool, GRASPS, is introduced (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The acronym stands for the elements: the real-world **G**oal, a meaningful **R**ole for the student, an authentic **A**udience, a contextualized **S**ituation that involves the real-world application, students-generated culminating **P**roducts or **P**erformances, and the **S**tandards for **S**uccess criteria by which student products or performance will be assessed. Together, these assessment elements validate the significance of life-long learning in students.

Determining learning experiences and instruction

Following determining acceptable evidence, a learning plan focuses on designing a lesson for the students, and it is the final step in engaging students in teaching and learning activities. Fink (2013) affirms that students should be encouraged to learn by doing. Teachers can incorporate activities such as role-playing, case studies, debates, gaming, and direct observation of phenomena. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) argue that hands-on activities, although engaging, may not necessarily be sufficient or adequate.

Planning learning experiences and instruction involves determining what enables knowledge and skills for students to perform effectively and reach desired results; what activities enforce the knowledge and skills in students; what is the choice of assessment methods knowing the performance goals; what materials to use to accomplish these goals and whether the Design is engaging and effective. Consequently, in this stage, teachers prioritize the instructional content and methods and apply resources to make the students learning outcomes from Stage 1 happen. "The essence of backward design is to be scrupulous in asking this question: Given the desired results and the targeted performances, what kinds of instructional approaches, resources, and experiences are required to achieve these goals?" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 191). The answer to the question is the explicitness of class activities (Darby & Lang, 2019).

In Stage 3, teachers plan for the most appropriate learning experiences and needed instruction to enable students to achieve the desired results. The BDM logic dictates that the learning plan aligns with the goals (Stage 1) and their corresponding assessments (Stage 2); hence, the focus is on learning rather than teaching. The plan must be engaging and effective, so WHERETO elements are introduced by being essential in aligning the content with assessments and desired outcomes. This acronym stands for the following: (**W**)hat, (**W**)hy, and (**W**)here, ensuring that all students understand what the unit is, where it is heading and why. (**H**)ook and (**H**)old, hooking the students at the beginning and holding their attention throughout the lessons. (**E**)quip, (**E**)xperience, and (**E**)xplore, equipping the students with experiences, tools, and knowledge to meet the performance goals successfully. (**R**)ethink, (**R**)evise, (**R**)efine, and (**R**)eflect, allowing students to rethink big ideas, reflect on progress and refine/revise their work. (**E**)valuate, having opportunities for students to evaluate progress and receive formative assessments. (**T**)ailor, personalizing learning to each student according to their needs, interests, and learning styles through differentiated instruction, and (**O**)rganize, organizing/sequencing the lesson for the most engagement and effectiveness (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Development of unit plan using the BDM template

The BDM Template is a tool which guides the backward Design in allowing teachers to cover the materials by organizing the three main stages and elements of the BDM. In doing this, teachers focus their unit plan on the goal of understanding (Hodaein & Biria, 2015). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) explain:

> The form of a template offers a means of succinctly presenting to the design unit; its function is to guide the design process. When completed, the template can be used for self-assessment, peer review, and sharing the completed unit design with others (p.23).

Table 1 displays how the three main stages of the BDM are distributed, and it is referred to as the UbD Template 1.0. The 3-stage design process aligns learning goals, assessments, activities, content, and materials, reflects the principles of a good curriculum, helps develop effective unit plans, and prevents common weaknesses in unit designs (Hosseini et al., 2019; Drake & Reid, 2018). The BDM is the way of thinking, not simply filling in the template boxes.

Table 1 - UbD Template (version 1.0) with Design Questions for Teachers.

Title:	Subject/Course:	
Topic:	Grade:	Designer(s):
Stage 1- Desired Results		
Established Goals: • What relevant goals (e.g., content standards, course or program objectives, learning outcomes) will this design address?		
Understandings: Students will understand that… • What are the big ideas? • What specific understandings about them are desired? • What misunderstandings are predictable?		Essential Questions: • What provocative questions will foster inquiry, understanding, and transfer of learning?
Students will know… • What key knowledge will students acquire as a result of this unit? • Think in terms of nouns and in terms of content		Students will be able to … • What key skills will students acquire as a result of this unit? • Think in terms of verbs.
Stage 2- Assessment Evidence		
Performance Tasks: • Through what authentic performance tasks will students demonstrate the desired understandings? • By what criteria will performances of understandings be judged?		Other Evidence: • Through what other evidence (e.g., quizzes, tests, academic prompts, observations, homework, journals) will students demonstrate achievement of desired results? • How will students reflect upon and self–assess their learning?
Stage 3- Learning Plan		
Learning Activities: What learning experiences and instruction will enable students to achieve the desired results? How will the design W= Help students to know **W**here the unit is going and **W**hat is expected? Help the teacher know **W**here the students are coming from (prior knowledge, interests)? H= **H**ook all students and **H**old their interest? E= **E**quip students, help them **E**xperience the key ideas and **E**xplore the issues? R= Provide opportunites to **R**ethink and **R**evise their understandings and work? E= Allow students to **E**valuate their work and its implications? T= Be **T**ailored (personalized) to the different needs, interests, and abilities of learners? O= Be **O**rganized to maximize initial and sustained engagement as well as effective learning?		

Note: From *Understanding by Design* by G. Wiggins & J. McTighe, 2005, ASCD.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005; 2011) and Biggs and Tang (2011) agree that by following the BDM template, teachers avoid the *twin sins* of planning and teaching. The first sin is more related to elementary and middle school classes being more activity-oriented teaching where teachers ensure kid-friendly activities. Such activities are often described as *cotton candy,* pleasant in the moment but lacking long-term substance. The second sin happens more at higher levels where teaching consists of rushing through the topic, materials, and textbook. Neither case gives an answer to the important question of the effectiveness of learning and how students can meet their obligations. Neither case has big ideas guiding teaching and ensuring learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Consequently, the benefits of the BDM are two-fold. The BDM template greatly helps teachers develop a practical and engaging class experience for their students. At the same time, the performance tasks ensure that students understand and

apply the knowledge and skill to the new contexts. If teachers can create a learning design beyond short-term memory where students can recall the learned information later, it will lead to better success in life.

3. Methodology

The current qualitative research explores the application of the BDM for the Ecuadorian EFL syllabi in secondary public schools. This study comprises 16 EFL teachers and follows a 3-phase design and three primary data sources.

3.1 Context and participants

In Ecuador, a reformed English curriculum for primary and secondary schools was officially implemented in 2016 by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), emphasizing the communicative approach and learner-centeredness as the main objective of EFL education (MINEDUC, 2016). After years of such practice, the need for evaluation and new approaches to curriculum design emerged. Hence, this qualitative approach study of applying the BDM design was conducted in a public upper secondary school from different provinces in Ecuador where English is taught as a foreign language. The study explored the teachers' perceptions of applying the BDM in designing and implementing the school-based Ecuadorian teaching syllabi for secondary public schools.

The data collection started after obtaining all consent from the participants and the school principals and the ethical approval being granted (Kaewkungwal & Adams, 2019). Furthermore, purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007) was employed to choose the participants for this study, and 16 experienced teachers were selected (Table 2). All the communications and permissions were written in Spanish since it was the first language of all research participants.

Table 2 - Detailed background information of EFL teachers participating in this study.

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Native Language	Experience teaching EFL (years)	Degree
Maria	F	31	Spanish	5	Bachelor in EFL
Karla	F	28	Spanish	4	Bachelor in EFL
Carlos	M	30	Spanish	6	Bachelor in EFL
Gabriela	F	40	Spanish	16	Master in Linguistics
Silvana	F	32	Spanish	12	Bachelor in EFL
Elvia	F	48	Spanish	23	Bachelor in EFL
Danilo	M	40	Spanish	14	Master in Linguistics
Wilson	M	42	Spanish	4	Bachelor in Informatics
Norma	F	42	Spanish	16	Bachelor EFL
Diana	F	36	Spanish	18	Master in Language Pedagogy
Patricia	F	55	Spanish	30	Bachelor in EFL
Nelly	F	54	Spanish	31	Bachelor in EFL
Mauricio	M	34	Spanish	17	Master in Language Pedagogy
Andrea	F	34	Spanish	11	Bachelor in Language Pedagogy
Luisa	F	31	Spanish	8	Bachelor in EFL
Andres	M	34	Spanish	10	Bachelor in Basic Education

Source: Authors.

Data collection methods

This research followed a 3-phase design which involved a 2-week teacher training on the BDM, the Design of three units following the BDM template, and the application of these three units during one semester of teaching EFL. In addition to the 3-phase Design, the research employed three primary data sources collected in the following order: Teachers' unit designs based on the BDM, Teachers' reflections on the implementations of the BDM, and Focus-group interviews with the teachers.

Before applying the BDM in teaching EFL, the participants attended a 2-week training to learn the essential features of the BDM. The participants worked collaboratively to design three units to be applied in the first semester of the school year. The teachers designed the units following the BDM template and its three main stages.

The teachers' reflections were employed to probe teachers' thoughts, ideas, and perceptions regarding applying the BDM in their English classes. The written reflection consisted of 10 questions teachers answered individually using Google Docs. The participants were asked to answer these questions based on their experience applying the BDM, pointing out its benefits and challenges. The participants' answers allowed the researchers to create the questions for the Teachers' focus-group interviews.

The last primary data source involved the focus-group interviews (Rabiee, 2004). It was conducted after applying the three units based on the BDM. The interviews consisted of nine questions to investigate the teachers' perceptions of their experience using the BDM in their English classes. The questions focused on comparing the traditional model and the BDM, the planning process, and applying performance tasks to enhance students' language skills. This research technique was applied to refine and further explain the findings by triangulating data from the other research instruments used in this study.

Data analysis

A thematic approach (Michelle & Lara, 2020) was applied to analyze the data of this study. The researchers followed an interactive process by going forwards and backwards in reading, coding, and creating common themes that emerged from the collected data. The participants' answers were recorded and transcribed verbatim in Spanish; only quotes used in this study were translated into English.

The coding process started with the teachers' reflections, which aimed to find how teachers had perceived applying the BDM and its elements in the classroom and creating the potential questions for the focus-group interviews. Having conducted the two focus-group interviews, the answers were transcribed verbatim. Following Williams and Moser (2019), the collected data was organized by finding similar words and phrases and concepts-indicators leading to thematic patterns and recognizing emerged themes. The researchers independently selected and organized common themes in this study by assigning different colours for each coding data. The classified themes from the two researchers were afterwards cross-checked to make agreements on the chosen themes and to redefine them.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discusses the main themes which have emerged from the interviews. It analyzes the Ecuadorian EFL teachers' perceptions of applying the Backward Design Model in teaching EFL, the influence of the implementation of unit plans planning and teaching, implementing performance tasks based on the Backward Design Model, and the influence of the implementation of the BDM on enhancing students' English language skills.

Teachers' perceptions on applying the Backward Design Model in teaching EFL

The thematic analysis of the focus-group interviews and written reflections revealed a common agreement among teachers on applying the BDM and its main features in teaching EFL. The participants indicated that designing the syllabus and

units based on the BDM principles was a complex but productive process. For instance, Diana stated: "Planning using the BDM was challenging initially because it was the first time I learned about this approach. However, I found this model more convenient and useful than the traditional model because it focused on authentic learning".

The participants also indicated that having an authentic and specific goal allowed them to teach towards this goal; thus, applying the three stages of the BDM ensured that the instructional content would remain focused and organized. For instance, Mauricio explained that "using the three stages based on the BDM helped me to have a clear idea of what, how, and why I applied different teaching strategies, activities and resources according to the students' needs". Similarly, Maria indicated that "the activities based on the BDM are more practical than the traditional model because all the activities and materials were aligned with the main objective, students received scaffold learning, which helped them start from the most basic and easiest activities which gradually increased."

Despite all teachers' positive perceptions about implementing the BDM in their English classes, some teachers stated that planning using the BDM could not be applied in Ecuador because the Ministry of Education already provides them with a template to plan their syllabus, which is mandatory in public institutions. Diana, for instance, claimed that "Ecuadorian EFL teachers plan their syllabus by following the Ministry of Education guidelines, which are not based on the BDM planning." Similarly, Maria stated that "most Ecuadorian EFL teachers do not know about the BDM; consequently, if the Ministry of Education would like to apply in EFL classes, all the teachers must be part of intensive training."

The influence of the implementation of unit plans on Ecuadorian EFL teachers' planning and teaching

The results show that teachers are not satisfied with the planning process that the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education provides them. The teachers stressed that the Ministry of Education asked them to design the syllabus based on general objectives, codes, and out-of-context activities that most teachers simply fill in mechanically. For instance, Oscar claimed that "most teachers only copy and paste the syllabus since designing the syllabus wastes time." Similarly, Norma indicated that "the code system provided by the Ministry of Education to plan the syllabus is confusing, demotivating, and it is not based on the reality of Ecuadorian public schools."

In general, the implementation of the BDM templates has a positive influence on the participants. All teachers indicated that working collaboratively to fill in the BDM templates allowed them to work more effectively in planning their syllabi. Gabriela commented that "designing the syllabus by applying the BDM template allows me to have a decisive view of the main objective of each unit. Thus, I could prioritize the teaching content and choose the best techniques to evaluate my students." Similarly, Luisa stated that "following the BDM template is more practical and authentic than the one provided by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education since it is based on tangible goals according to our contexts."

Implementing performance tasks based on the BDM in teaching EFL

From the focus-group interviews, the participants mentioned common themes: authenticity, real-life situations, roles, autonomous learning, creativity, and language skills. According to all participants, the performance tasks based on the BDM are similar to the final projects that students usually develop at the end of the unit or school year. However, the teachers claimed that the GRASPS elements allowed them to make the performance tasks more structured and organized than the traditional projects.

For example, Cristian claimed that "the performance tasks based on the BDM are the key to connecting what the students have learned during each unit with real-life situations in different contexts." Besides, Gabriela stated that "by applying the GRASPS element, students have a clearer idea of what I was expecting from them in the project. Compared with the traditional projects, the performance tasks were more organized and clearer for my students."

All teachers mentioned that creativity was one of the primary skills students presented in the performance tasks. Mauricio claimed: "My students showed and led their creativity by designing the performance tasks because they had the flexibility to choose how they would present the final performance task." Similarly, Diana stated: "My students showed their creativity when presenting the final projects by creating original and beautiful projects using different ways to attract attention, such as images, ideas, and figures in an organized and coherent manner."

Autonomous learning is another common theme found in the written reflections and interviews. The teachers explained that their students could autonomously learn or practice the content covered in each unit by designing performance tasks. Luisa said: "I noticed that my students increase their autonomous learning because, to create the final performance tasks, they found information from other sources to accomplish these tasks effectively."

The influence of the implementation of the BDM on enhancing students' English language skills

All the teachers agreed that applying the BDM helped the students improve their English skills. For instance, Patricia stated that "students improved their English skills because they had a clear idea of building their performance tasks and could practice the language by transferring their knowledge and understanding in authentic contexts." Likewise, Diego assured that "applying the BDM helped my students to link and practice the English skills, knowledge, and understandings covered during the whole unit was needed to transfer to new scenarios." Luisa claimed that "she was stunned by how easy it was for students to carry out a one-minute speaking task, and some even continued speaking more without difficulty." Cristian stated in terms of listening skills: "I could notice that the group where I implemented the BDM participated more actively when doing listening exercises; I felt they were more motivated and confident when answering listening questions."

The participants agreed that writing and reading were the most developed language skills. For instance, Nelly indicated that "writing was the skill that students improved the most because it was difficult to manage the speaking activities by teaching online to more than forty students per class." Gabriela also stated: "I noticed that my students improved their writing skills because all the content and the teaching process were more organized and aligned to the final performance tasks than the traditional model." Regarding reading, all the teachers agreed that applying the BDM helped those students to understand and comprehend the texts better and to answer the reading questions more accurately than the students from the other classes. Patricia revealed: "the organized content based on the three stages of the BDM allowed me to provide students meaningful activities where I could notice they improved their reading comprehension, vocabulary, and expressions covered in the unit."

The analyses of the written reflections and the focus-group interviews indicate that the teachers positively perceive applying the BDM in teaching EFL. As reported by the participants, using the BDM was a complex but productive process, and they highlighted the importance of planning based on an original and specific goal. These findings align with previous studies in various contexts, including the studies in Egypt (Abd El Ghany et al., 2019); Canada (Drake & Reid, 2018); Iran (Hosseini et al., 2019), suggesting that the BDM is a significant planning process that allows for creative and coherent syllabus design to improve EFL learners' skills.

Considering Wiggins and McTighe (2005), the teachers emphasized the significance of using the BDM template to align the teaching strategies, activities, and materials with the students' desired outcomes based on the final performance tasks. The findings indicate that, according to the participants, the BDM is a practical, coherent, and organized planning approach that allows them to know the unit's primary objective and align the teaching content with it. Consequently, following the three main stages based on the BDM, every task and piece of instruction have a significant purpose that fits with the learning goals of the unit or course (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The analyses of the performance tasks indicate that all the teachers perceived them as similar to the final projects students usually designed at the end of each unit during the school year. Nonetheless, the teachers highlighted that using the GRASPS elements of the BDM provided their students with a more precise and structured authentic task. Besides, the teachers claim that applying the performance tasks also provided students with different opportunities to use their acquired knowledge and skills to transfer to various authentic contexts. These findings are corroborated by Abd El Ghany et al. (2019), who indicate that using performance tasks based on the BDM allows students to monitor their progress by following the well-defined criteria while completing the final performance tasks based on meaningful and authentic contexts.

Regarding English language skills, all the teachers perceived that applying the BDM in teaching EFL helped students increase the four macro-skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. Still, most teachers believed that writing and reading skills were the essential skills students fostered during the three units. Furthermore, the teachers perceived that by applying the BDM and performance tasks, the students were more flexible in showing their creativity, working collaboratively, and learning autonomously. These findings are corroborated by Hosseini et al. (2019) and Hodaeian and Biria (2015), who show that applying the BDM in EFL teaching helps students to increase their language skills, mainly writing and reading.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the teachers' perceptions of applying the BDM and performance tasks in teaching EFL. The qualitative analysis of the multiple data sources demonstrated that all 16 teachers strongly valued this application as it helped students to increase their language skills and to use the acquired knowledge and skills in authentic contexts. The participants found the BDM planning a complex but rewarding process that allowed them to better align the students' learning outcomes of each unit with the instructional materials, strategies, and teaching content to achieve these goals. Furthermore, all teachers indicated that implementing performance tasks based on the BDM helped students improve their English skills, use their creativity, and foster autonomous learning.

Even though the positive perceptions regarding applying the BDM for language purposes, the teachers explained that, unfortunately, implementing this type of syllabus design in Ecuadorian public institutions would be challenging because the Ministry of Education already provided a prescribed mandatory syllabus planning. Therefore, this research offers a prominent option for consideration by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education to endorse this syllabus design according to the classroom contexts.

This research has some limitations that warrant further research. It comprised 16 participants; this might limit the generalizability of the findings. Besides, due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was conducted 100% online. Further research, therefore, could use qualitative methods to increase the number of participants to generalize results to other Ecuadorian contexts. Likewise, it is suggested to apply this study to face-to-face classrooms and other research techniques, such as classroom observations, to explore how effectively applying the BDM could help teachers' actual practices.

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