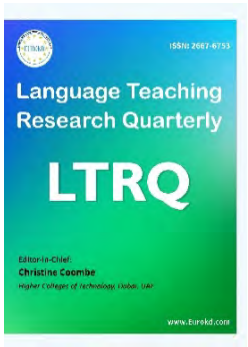

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Students' Perceptions of Applying the GRASPS Framework from the Backward Design Model in Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

The present study investigates the students' perceptions of applying performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework, exploring and seeking to explain the relationships between these tasks and English language learning. Data was collected over one semester in 14 public secondary schools in Ecuador, and it consisted of a questionnaire applied to 283 EFL students and two focus-group interviews with 12 EFL learners. After receiving a two-week workshop, sixteen Ecuadorian EFL teachers planned three units following the three stages based on the Backward Desing Model (Wiggings & McTigue, 2005); however, this study focuses on the students' perceptions of the GRASPS framework. Overall, the students showed high levels of awareness of the benefits of developing performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework. The main benefits encountered by these students were improving English skills, fostering creativity, and autonomous and lifelong learning. Subsequently, the primary takeaway from this study proposes applying the GRASPS framework as a potential support for EFL learning. Theoretical and practical implications are presented, and further research suggestions are provided.

Keywords: *Authentic Tasks, Backward Design Model, GRASP Framework, EFL Learners*

Introduction

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) presented the Backward Design Model (BDM) as a method for planning syllabi, courses, or units where the students' learning outcomes are the principal aspects of the teaching-learning process. Thus, explicitly specifying students' learning outcomes is the foundation for developing instructional activities and content (Richards, 2013). According to Ozyurt and Kiyikci (2021), developing 21st-century skills and achieving learning outcomes can only be accomplished through conscious and practical learning; therefore, the Backward Design "is a model that aims to realize meaningful and permanent learning with

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student-centered practices based on understanding in teaching designs" (p.1). The logic of the BDM is to teach toward the desired results. It ensures that the content taught remains focused and organized, avoiding the *twin sins* of activity-based and coverage-based design by planning the units or course based on worthy tasks to be accomplished at the end of the learning process. Thus, "backward design calls for us to make our goals or standards specific and concrete, in terms of assessment evidence, as we begin to plan the unit or course" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 19).

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) pointed out that the BDM is a three-stage approach where teachers or designers must begin to think about assessment before deciding what and how they will teach. The first stage of planning backwards focuses on determining the desired results. In this stage, teachers analyze the learning objectives, examine established content standards, and review the curriculum requirements to encourage students' creative thinking while focusing on the desired learning outcomes (Utami & Bram, 2023; Maldonado, 2022). The second stage is determining assessment evidence. McTighe and Wiggins (1999) indicated that in this stage, teachers reflect on the unit or course regarding the assessment evidence needed to document and validate that students have achieved the desired learning outcomes. In this stage, the GRASPS is the primary framework for designing performance tasks that validate the students' achievements. It stands for the goal, role, audience, situation, performance, and standards students follow to accomplish the performance tasks efficiently. Finally, the third stage emphasizes designing action plans, learning experiences, and instructions by aligning the established goals from Stage 1 and the evidence of students' performances (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The foreign language learning domain is one of the essential areas in which the BDM has proved beneficial. Richards (2013) claimed that the BDM "is a well-established tradition in curriculum design in general education and in recent years has re-emerged as a prominent curriculum development approach in language teaching" (p.20). According to Richards (2013), the most widespread example of the BDM is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018). Cadena et al. (2018) stated that the primary connection between the BDM and the CEFR is that it aligns learning outcomes with the teaching methods, assessment, and content to be taught from a functional point of view.

In Ecuador, despite the continuous attempts of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) to improve EFL education in the country, the expected outcomes have not been achieved efficiently. In fact, according to the international standardized exam provided by Education First (2022), Ecuadorian EFL students from secondary and university were ranked 82nd out of 111 countries worldwide. In the same vein, factors such as the ineffective connection between the national curriculum principles and teaching reality, the lack of teachers' training, participation in extra-curricular activities, and the lack of adequate infrastructure have contributed to the lack of students' English skills improvement (Salinas, 2017; Kuhlman & Serrano, 2018; Sevy-Biloon et al., 2020). Regarding course or unit design, only a few studies have been conducted in Latin America to explore the impact of the BDM in EFL classrooms.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

Wigging and McTighe (2005) introduced Understanding by Design (UbD) as a planning process and structure to guide learning objectives, assessment, and instruction. "Its main two key ideas are contained in the title: 1) focus on teaching and assessing for understanding and learning transfer, and 2) design curriculum "backward" from those ends" (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012, p.1). Therefore, the view of UbD and BDM processes are compatible with a range of prominent educational initiatives where teachers are designers of syllabi, assessments, materials, and learning experiences to meet specified purposes and determine whether the specified purposes are achieved or not by learners.

The UbD is based on seven fundamental principles:

1. Learning is enhanced when teachers think purposefully about curricular planning. The UbD framework helps this process without offering a rigid process or prescriptive recipe.
2. The UbD framework helps focus curriculum and teaching on the development and deepening of student understanding and transfer of learning (i.e., the ability to effectively use content knowledge and skill).
3. Understanding is revealed when students autonomously make sense of and transfer their learning through authentic performance. Six facets of understanding—the capacity to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess—can serve as understanding indicators.
4. Effective curriculum is planned **backwards** from long-term, desired results through a three-stage design process (Desired Results, Evidence, and Learning Plan). This process helps avoid the common problems of treating the textbook as the curriculum rather than a resource and activity-oriented teaching in which no clear priorities and purposes are apparent.
5. Teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere purveyors of content knowledge, skill, or activity. They focus on ensuring that learning happens, not just teaching (and assuming that what was taught was learned); they always aim and check for successful meaning-making and transfer by the learner.
6. Regularly reviewing units and curricula against design standards enhances curricular quality and effectiveness and provides engaging and professional discussions.
7. The UbD framework reflects a continual improvement approach to student achievement and teacher craft. The results of our designs—student performance inform needed adjustments in the curriculum and instruction so that student learning is maximized (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012, p.1-2).

The Three Stages of the Backward Design Model

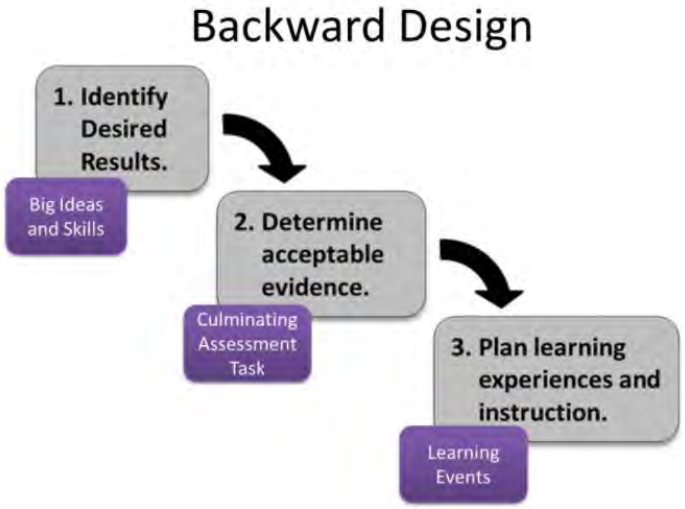
Wiggins and McTighe (2005) stated that syllabi, courses, or unit planning based on the BDM "should be logically inferred from results sought, not derived from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable" (p.14). Therefore, this model allows teachers to design organized and structured courses or units where the lessons, projects, tasks, assignments, teaching methods, and materials collaborate in the achievement of the learning

purposes, which makes it easier for students to learn what teachers want them to know (González et al., 2023). Wiggins and McTighe (2005) provided a three-stage process to achieve efficient planning backwards. These three stages emphasize effective instructional practices in teaching to state standards by creating result-oriented plans to identify desired results, analyze multiple data sources, and determine appropriate action plans (McTighe & Thomas, 2003).

As shown in Figure 1, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) provided the three stages of planning backwards: identifying the desired results, determining acceptable evidence, and designing learning experiences and instruction.

Figure 1

Stages of the Backward Design Model (Adapted from Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)



The BDM begins with developing a clear conception of the students' desired outcomes. Apart from each unit's general objectives, the unit's BDM objectives are illuminated within the framework of transferability, meaning-making, and acquisition of enough knowledge for lasting and lifelong learning for students (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). These academic objectives guide the planning process by asking the following essential questions: "(a) what should students know, understand, and be able to demonstrate? (b) what content is important for understanding? and (c) What enduring or long-term understandings are desired?" (Emory, 2014, p.123). McTighe and Willis (2019) explained that in the first stage, teachers consider the big ideas and long-term goals students need to understand to transfer their knowledge to different situations. Thus, teachers examine the established content standards and related curriculum or course outcomes, typically including national, state, local, or professional standards, course objectives, and district learning outcomes (McTighe & Wiggins, 2004). Korotchenko et al. (2015) claimed that the principal difficulty that educators frequently encounter is a large amount of information to be taught within a limited number of academic hours; for that reason, in the first stage, it is vital to set priorities and overlap the content of the educational program with the educational requirements for each country. In this study, the desired outcomes needed to overlap with the requirements of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2016) and the standards of the Common European Framework Reference of

Languages (2018), which are the main stakeholders of the EFL teaching-language process in Ecuador.

The second stage is based on thinking about the unit or course to determine the assessment evidence needed to validate that the desired outcomes from Stage 1 were achieved. Emory (2014) claimed that the BDM could facilitate quality improvement and achieve desired outcomes through student evidence in the six facets of understanding. These facets are demonstrated by the students' ability to explain, interpret, apply, perceive, empathize, and self-evaluate (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Similarly, Korotchenko et al. (2015) indicated that in the BDM, monitoring and evaluation knowledge is more extensive and considers four main principles: inclusiveness, variety, complexity, and reflection that enable students to foster their socio-cultural competence. Iter (2017) claimed that achieving the desired results can be evaluated using formative and summative assessments, such as projects, quizzes, tests, assignments, homework, student-self assessments, discussions, and academic prompts. However, in the BDM, the essential evidence is based on performance tasks from the GRASPS framework (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). Iter (2017) claimed that "performance task-GRASPS is a design tool to develop a performance task emphasizing context and role-playing, p.553". The GRASPS framework stands for the goal, role, audience, situation, product-performance-purpose, and standard, which are the criteria for success. According to McTighe and Wiggins (1999), performance tasks anchor a unit or course by providing evidence that students can use their knowledge in authentic contexts. Based on this, the teacher can construct different scenarios by considering real-world objectives and applications, authentic or simulated audiences, and meaningful roles for students. To validate the achievements of students' outcomes, the teachers define the performance tasks by establishing rubrics, which are designed for each task for each type of product (Nagahara & Iemoto, 2023; Iter, 2017; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Finally, the third stage is directly connected with curriculum or syllabi development. It focuses on determining the teaching methods, teaching materials, and sequence of lessons that help students achieve the final learning outcomes and develop the performance tasks efficiently. McTighe and Wiggins (1999) stated that at this stage, with clearly identified results and appropriate evidence of understanding in mind, the educators plan instructional procedures by considering the following key questions:

> 1) What enabling knowledge (facts, concepts, and principles) and skills (procedures) will students need to perform effectively and achieve desired results?
> 2) What activities will equip students with needed knowledge and skills?
> 3) What will need to be taught and coached, and how should it best be taught in light of performance goals?
> 4) What materials and resources are best suited to accomplish these goals? And
> 5) Is the overall design coherent and effective? (p.38).

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) indicated that, in the BDM, "teaching is a means to an end" (p.19). Therefore, Stage 3 demands teachers to list the crucial activities and lessons by discerning the content using the WHERETO framework to cause student learning, performance success, and goal accomplishment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), in the WHERETO framework, questions for each letter were designed to encourage teachers to consider the learners' perspective. It consisted of the following elements:

W = How will I help learners know what they will be learning? Why is this worth learning? What evidence will show their learning? How will their performance be evaluated?

H = How will I hook and engage the learners? In what ways will I help them connect desired learning to their experiences and interests?

E = How will I equip students to master identified standards and succeed with the targeted performances? What learning experiences will help develop and deepen understanding of essential ideas?

R = How will I encourage the learners to rethink previous learning? How will encourage ongoing revision and refinement?

E = How will I promote students' self-evaluation and reflection?

T = How will I tailor the learning activities and my teaching to address my students' different readiness levels, learning profiles, and interests?

O = How will the learning experiences be organized to maximize engaging and effective learning? (p.121-126).

The researchers explained that the WHERETO framework intends to guide a series of steps during a lesson, where each element is applied according to the scope of the topic. The BDM proves beneficial and applicable to the design of courses, programs of study, or individual units in different educational fields since it clearly aligns the state educational standards, learning outcomes, students' needs, and syllabi contents where the starting point in the course or unit design is the determination of students' understandings, skills, and knowledge to be achieved.

Related Studies on the Application of the BDM for Teaching EFL

There is a growing body of research on applying BDM in education. Most of these studies have explored the benefits of using the three stages of the BDM and its main features' principles in conjunction with educational models to strength curricular models in nursing education (e.g., Emory, 2014), to target depth of understanding for all learners (Childre et al., 2009), to offer a design process for creative and coherent curriculum design for teaching 21st century capabilities (Drake & Reid, 2018), to use performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework for the design of authentic summative assessment (De Las Peñas et al., 2021), to develop syllabi and unit plans for programming at software education (Lee & Koo, 2015), to make tough choices about what content to focus on planning assessment before designing if learning experiences and instruction plans in accounting (Fischer, 2016), to develop of active learning for improving the capacities of abstraction, comprehension, and development of cognitive and relationship skills of the students (González et al., 2023).

Some studies have explored the benefits of applying the BDM and its features in teaching EFL. Utami and Bram (2023) found that implementing this model in foreign language learning was beneficial for fostering students' motivation to learn the language authentically. Likewise, Akbas and Basaran (2023) claimed that planning backwards is a comprehensive and goal-directed approach that allows teachers to address all students' interests and learning styles. Regarding reading skills, Chaisa and Chinokul (2021) claimed that applying the BDM enhanced students' reading comprehension skills and learning experiences that stimulated social responsibility. Similarly, Hosseini et al. (2019) determined that the BDM was pedagogically and significantly superior to the FDM in improving students' EFL writing skills.

Regarding listening skills, applying the BDM was more beneficial than the traditional model in increasing students' listening skills and sub-skills, such as critical, literal, and inferential comprehension (Abd El Ghany et al., 2019). Finally, concerning speaking, this model helps students improve this skill by participating actively in learning and developing authentic performance tasks (Chaisa & Chinokul, 2021; Ibrahim, 2022). After a detailed exploration of the existent research on the application of the BDM, it was found that there is a scarcity of studies focusing on teaching EFL by planning backwards and using performance tasks in teaching EFL. Celikman and Eveyik (2023) stated that the BDM provides a performance task tool, the GRASPS framework, to help teachers create authentic and meaningful tasks where students can apply their knowledge and skills in real-life situations. Similarly, Dari et al. (2023) claimed that applying the GRASPS framework allows students to explain, interpret, viewpoint, empathize, apply, and transfer knowledge according to their context. However, only a few pieces of research have investigated the benefits of applying the GRASPS framework for increasing EFL students' English skills (Betchoo, 2023; Celikman & Everyk, 2023; Martínez, 2023; Utami & Brand, 2023). Therefore, this study is of crucial importance as it investigated what contributions the application of the BDM had on students' foreign language learning within the GRASPS framework to answer the following research questions:

RQ_1: How do students perceive the implementation of the Backward Design Model in learning English as a Foreign Language?

RQ_2: How do students perceive the application of performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework to improve their motivation and English language skills?

RQ_3: What other skills do students perceive were stimulated by implementing performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework?

Method

Setting and Participants

This study examined whether students' perceptions about applying the GRASPS framework foster their English language skills and other skills such as autonomous learning, lifelong learning, and creativity. It was conducted in Ecuador at 14 public high schools that offer English as a compulsory subject. The number of students in each class ranged from 25 to 35, and they attended from three to five English lessons of 40 minutes each week. A convenient sample of 16 EFL teachers (5 males and 11 females) and 283 EFL students (133 males and 150 females) participated in this research. All the participants were native speakers of Spanish. Regarding teachers' information, ten teachers hold BA degrees in teaching EFL, two hold a MA in Linguistics, two in TEFL, and one teacher has a BA in education. Of the 283 EFL students, 53% were girls, and 47% were boys. The student age distribution was as follows: 14 years old (13%), 15 years old (13%), 16 years old (33%), 17 years old (28%), and 18 years old (13%). When collecting data at different schools, different types of classes were selected, most characteristically in Year 1 of BGU (30%), in Year 2 of BGU (20%), and in Year 3 of BGU (50%). According to self-reported perceptions of their English proficiency, most students (21%) and (79%) were at A1 and A2, beginner and intermediate levels, respectively. The students from Year 1 and Year 2 of BGU (50%) attended English classes five academic hours per week, while Year 3 of BGU (50%) had three hours per week. The students who participated

in the focus group were asked to fill out a Google spreadsheet document to find their demographic information; their information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Information

Name	Gender	Age	Native Language	Class
Estefanía	F	17	Spanish	3rd
Lourdes	F	17	Spanish	3rd
Diego	M	17	Spanish	3rd
Martín	M	16	Spanish	2nd
Carolina	F	16	Spanish	3rd
Laura	F	16	Spanish	2nd
Camila	F	15	Spanish	1st
Oscar	M	16	Spanish	2nd
Gabriela	F	15	Spanish	1st
Vinicio	M	15	Spanish	1st
Esthela	F	17	Spanish	3rd
Cristian	M	16	Spanish	3rd

Research Approach and Design

A mixed-method approach was applied to examine the students' perceptions of using the GRASPS Framework from the Backward Design Model in Learning English as a Foreign Language. The empirical data in this paper were obtained from a longitudinal study that compared the participants' perceptions before and after applying the GRASPS framework. A point worth mentioning is that before using the GRASPS framework, the sixteen teachers received a two-week workshop; during this workshop, they planned three units following the stages of the Backward Desing Model (Wiggings & McTigue, 2005). Nevertheless, this study only focuses on findings on the students' perceptions after developing the performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework.

Instruments

Questionnaire

After finishing three units, students were asked to complete a questionnaire about their perceptions of applying performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework. It consisted of 36 questions on a five-point Likert scale divided into totally disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and totally agree. Besides, the questionnaire was divided into five constructs: students' perceptions of performance tasks, lifelong learning, English skills, creativity, and autonomous learning. Finally, the questionnaire showed a reliability of .0947, which indicated that "none of the scales should be discarded for future analysis" (Csizér, 2020, p.90).

Focus-group interviews

After completing the questionnaires, the students were asked if they wanted to participate in the focus-interview process. This process aimed to explore and gain in-depth insights into the results obtained from the questionnaires. Of the 283 students who participated in this study,

twelve students decided to participate in this process. Thus, two focus-group interviews were conducted with six students in each group. Each interview consisted of eight questions and lasted one hour. The constructs of the interview were divided into an introduction, opening questions, and prompts. Before asking questions from the interview, the students were asked to fill out a Google spreadsheet document to find their demographic information.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The necessary data were collected in the winter semester of the 2021 academic year. The teachers received a two-week workshop related to the BDM. They planned three units and applied them from September 2021 to February 2022. At the end of the semester, students were asked to complete a questionnaire to find out their perceptions about using performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework. Furthermore, twelve students voluntarily participated in two focus-group interviews to explore the perceptions of using the GRASPS framework to improve their English and other academic skills. As for analyzing the quantitative data, the questionnaires were exported from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel; then, the data was organized, categorized, cleaned for analysis, and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25). The descriptive statistics measures were calculated to describe and summarize the main characteristics of the sample and calculate the mean, frequency, and percentages for each scale of the questionnaire (George & Mallery, 2018). This dissertation was designed to be exploratory research; therefore, no factor analysis was needed to be conducted (Csizér, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic and content analysis. This analytical process involved describing, coding, and developing themes and emergent themes from the qualitative data (Terry et al., 2017). The Cronbach's alpha of the scales of the questionnaires was the following:

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha of the Four Scales of the Questionnaires

Scales	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Performance Tasks	11	.798
Learning English	6	.869
Creativity	6	.872
Autonomous Learning	11	.873

Results

This section presents the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire and compares it with the students' interview answers regarding using the GRASPS framework in learning English as a Foreign Language. It is necessary to indicate that the GRASPS framework was introduced to students; however, the final product was nominated as the *final project.* Furthermore, the terms strongly agree and agree were used as positive perceptions to describe the results. The terms *disagree and strongly disagree* were applied as negative perceptions to refer to students' insight on applying the BDM and the GRASPS framework in their English lessons.

Research Question 1: Students' Perceptions of Implementing the BDM in Learning EFL

Descriptive statistics of the questionnaires are presented in Table 3. The results suggest that students' perceptions of applying the BDM in their English lessons were positive, supported by their' answers from focus group interviews. Most students (84,2%) agreed that by integrating the BDM, their teachers provided all the necessary knowledge to create their final projects efficiently and transfer the acquired knowledge and skills to real-life situations. Besides, they indicated that applying the performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework allowed them to reinforce and align their previous and new knowledge. Therefore, for almost all the participants (81,3%), making the final projects was more meaningful than taking traditional tests or exams. *From the focus-group interviews,* Lourdes stated *that doing the final projects was easy because they only had to organize all the knowledge and content they had already obtained during each unit.* Besides, Diego claimed that *having clear criteria of how the final project had to be done was the most essential aspect of achieving performance tasks efficiently.* Oscar indicated that the *final projects were more authentic than the test because they allowed me to use my English skills, grammar, and vocabulary in real scenarios.*

Table 3

Distribution of the Percentages of Student's Perceptions of the Application of the Backward Design Model

Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I perceived changes in how my teacher taught English during the last three units.	27.9	32.5	25.4	8.1	6.0
My teachers provided all the necessary knowledge to create the final projects.	66.8	23.0	8.5	1.1	0.7
I could easily follow the teachers' instructions to do final projects.	39.9	42.4	14.1	2.5	1.1
Creating final projects is better than taking a test.	64.0	17.3	12.4	3.5	2.8
By creating final projects, I could transfer my knowledge to real-life situations.	44.2	40.3	13.4	1.8	4
The final projects helped me focus on the essential ideas of the content I learned.	47.7	36.7	12.7	1.4	1.4
I could better understand the final projects I had to do.	35.0	43.5	17.0	3.2	1.4
Creating the final projects could reinforce what I learned during the units.	62.0	19.3	10.4	5.5	2.8
I better understood what steps to take to create the final projects.	32.5	45.9	17.3	3.2	1.1
I used my methods to learn vocabulary words related to the final projects.					
I would love to continue doing the final projects to improve my English skills in the future.	27.6	41.3	24.7	5.7	0.7
	58.0	28.3	11.0	1.8	1.1

Research Question 2: Students' Perceptions of Applying Performance Tasks to Improve their Motivation and Language Skills

The second research question explored the students' perceptions of applying the GRASPS framework to increase their motivation and English skills. As the results in Table 4 indicate,

most learners strongly agree and agree with all the established statements. Likewise, all students who participated in the focus-group interviews said that developing the final projects in each unit is better than taking traditional exams. They also claimed that creating and customizing the final projects motivated them to learn and continue practicing their English skills. Regarding motivation, most students indicated that applying the GRASPS framework made them feel more motivated to learn English. Laura, for instance, explained that *developing the final projects motivated me to be more interested in learning English because I could use the new knowledge to help my community. I could see that I could apply this language for meaningful purposes, like creating campaigns to stop deforestation in my community.* Similarly, Oscar claimed that *customizing the final project according to my preferences was the essential aspect of these units. I felt more comfortable and motivated to use my knowledge to create projects for my community; this does not happen when you only take traditional exams.* Regarding improving English skills, most EFL students participating in the study perceived that applying performance tasks helped them foster their English skills, explicitly speaking (69.6%), reading (73.9%), listening (68.2%), and writing (78.4%).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Perceptions of Applying Performance Tasks to Improve their Motivation and Language Skills

Scale	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
By creating final projects, I felt more motivated to learn English.	38.8	42.8	15.9	2.5	0
All the materials and activities applied during these units helped me develop the final projects better.	38.2	40.8	16.0	2.7	2.3
Creating the final projects helped me improve my English-speaking skills.	27.2	42.4	25.1	4.9	0.4
Creating the final projects helped me improve my English reading skills.	33.6	40.3	21.2	4.6	0.4
Creating the final projects helped me improve my English listening skills.	27.9	40.3	26.1	4.2	1.4
Creating the final projects helped me improve my English writing skills.	33.9	44.5	17.3	3.5	0.8

Research Question 3: Other Skills that Students Perceive were Stimulated by Implementing Performance Tasks based on the GRASPS Framework

The rationale behind this question was to explore in-depth the students' perceptions of other skills improved by applying performance tasks based on the BDM. The data was collected at the end of the implementation. All students mentioned creativity, autonomy, and lifelong learning as the skills the performance tasks allowed them to show or improve. The students' initial attitudes toward performance tasks to increase creativity were positive. In focus-group interviews, the students agreed that applying the GRASPS framework allowed them to flexibly use and show their creativity. Furthermore, they felt more confident and more accessible to demonstrate and customize their ideas to create the final projects.

Vinicio, for instance, claimed that

> *I love doing projects in all subjects; however, it was sometimes hard in English because the teachers just asked us to take an exam. By focusing on final projects, I could increase my English skills and use my creativity.*

Estefanía also indicated that

> *I could show and improve my creativity by creating final projects that were interesting and significant for my community and me.*

Likewise, Oscar said that

> *Having a role like being a doctor made me start thinking that way. Thus, I use my creativity to create the final project as best as possible.*

Carolina affirmed that

> *Creating final projects made her think of creative ideas for presenting the projects to their specific audience.*

Students also mentioned that customizing the performance tasks was interesting to show their originality. Similarly, most students perceived that applying the performance tasks allowed them to foster autonomous learning. They explained that developing their final projects permitted them to find information from different resources, decide content to be part of the projects, be responsible for their own learning, and learn from their classmates. For example, Carolina stated that

> *Developing the final projects for me was relevant because I could learn from my teachers and the different resources I found on the internet. Besides, creating my last project made me feel responsible for my learning.*

Similarly, Vinicio claimed that

> *Customizing the final project and deciding which images, content, and resources I would use made me feel responsible and independent of my learning.*

Lourdes said that

> *The final projects allowed me to learn autonomously since we used the materials our teacher provided and had to find more information to create the final projects.*

Besides, according to Oscar,

> *following the teacher's rubric allowed me to self-assess my progress, set my learning path, and provide feedback to my classmates.*

Camila claimed that

> *Creating the final projects promoted my autonomous learning because I used all the activities and materials provided by teachers to practice outside and inside the classroom.*

The participants pointed out lifelong learning as one of the main features of using performance tasks in learning English. The students indicated that transferring the acquired knowledge in authentic scenarios and customizing their final projects according to their preferences made them feel self-motivated to continue developing their English knowledge and skills beyond formal education. Lourdes stated that

> *Applying performance tasks caught my attention because I could relate the unit topics to current situations in my city.*

Similarly, Vinicio noted that

> *I felt encouraged to complete my final project when I had to perform authentic roles such as a reporter, doctor, auditor, or environmentalist. It was better than studying just to take an exam.*

Oscar added that

> *Using performance tasks provides me with lifelong learning because the first project, for example, was related to COVID-19. It promoted learning for life to apply it during this pandemic and post-pandemic because we must have the same care. So, what was reinforced through the development of the brochure is learning for life because students will use it authentically.*

Discussion

This study is part of a thesis dissertation; therefore, it focused on describing the students' perceptions of applying the BDM and performance tasks in learning English as a Foreign Language. The results are aligned with a body of literature review regarding one of the main characteristics of syllabus planning based on the BDM: performance tasks. As mentioned, the essential elements of this model use the GRASPS framework to provide students with a specific goal, role, audience, situation, performance, and standards aligned with the national curriculum and CEFR requirements. These types of tasks assist teachers in validating students' learning achievements and equip them with enough understanding and knowledge to apply in different and authentic contexts (Hulme et al., 2014; McTigue & Wiggins, 1999; Wiggins & McTighe, 2012).

According to the participants' perceptions, the BDM application allowed EFL teachers to craft learning outcomes efficiently and align assessments, teaching methodologies, materials, and activities to develop authentic performance tasks and achieve desired learning outcomes. In this way, teachers accomplished the first of the seven fundamental principles of this model, which asks them to think purposefully about curricular planning to provide a student-centered approach to achieve the desired learning outcomes efficiently (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Dari et al. (2023) corroborated these results by following the three-stage template for planning backwards. By applying this template, the teachers provide students with explicit learning expectations aligned with all the materials, assessments, activities, and teaching strategies. Furthermore, Wilson (2023) stated that applying careful and organized BDM planning allows teachers to create a diverse, inclusive, and equitable classroom environment to increase students' learning potential in different areas. Thus, students can explain, interpret, viewpoint, empathize, apply, and transfer knowledge according to their context.

Regarding performance tasks, the students found it beneficial to use the GRASPS framework for increasing their English skills, motivation, and other skills such as creativity, collaborative work, and lifelong and autonomous learning. Besides, the transferability of knowledge was the aspect most mentioned by students in the interviews. These results fulfilled the second and third fundamental principles of planning backwards, which emphasizes effectively using content knowledge and skills to transfer learning through authentic performance (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). In this regard, Celikman and Eveyik (2023) corroborated these results by indicating that applying performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework helps ELF teachers create authentic and meaningful tasks where students can apply their acquired knowledge and skills in real-life scenarios. Likewise, these tasks help students explicitly know the expected learning outcomes since the GRASPS framework defines the scope and context of the learning experience. Nagahara and Iemoto (2023) conducted a piece of research using the BDM at a university in China. As a result, they found that using this model, students worked well with the performance tasks to solve real problems that they had yet to be exposed to in traditional textbooks.

The students' perceptions of applying performance tasks based on the BDM to increase their motivation were positive. Developing the performance tasks made students feel more motivated and interested in creating the final projects to use and transfer their acquired knowledge and skills according to their contexts. The primary rationale of backward design is to provide a clear learning goal based on the transferability of knowledge to real-life scenarios. It motivates students to care about and invest time in connecting each element of the course to achieve the desired outcomes. Hence, according to the fifth principle of the BDM, to increase students' motivation to learn, teachers are coaches of understanding by ensuring that learning happens and checking for successful meaning-making and transferability of knowledge. These results are supported by Hosseini et al. (2019), who stated that applying the GRASPS elements from the BDM in EFL classrooms helps extend students' satisfaction and motivation to learn the language. Moreover, using performance tasks influences students' motivation to interact and practice their English skills to transfer their learning to the new contexts they will find inside and outside the classroom (McTighe & Willis, 2019; Yurtseven & Altun, 2016).

The main objective of learning a language is to communicate in the target language in different situations (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Regarding students' English skills, the

analysis of relevant variables of this study confirms that applying performance tasks helped students enhance their English skills. The students' perceptions indicated that applying the BDM features and performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework helped them increase their four primary English skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. The participants considered that performance tasks allowed them to have an authentic way to use and demonstrate their English knowledge and skills in practical situations. Likewise, they perceived that performance tasks approximate real-world applications and provided more engaging and meaningful activities to use their English skills beyond academic scenarios. Thus, these results corroborated the fourth fundamental principle of the BDM, which focuses on avoiding the common problems of treating the textbook as the curriculum rather than a resource in which no explicit purposes are apparent (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). These results are in line with previous studies (Hossein et al., 2019; Mills et al., 2019; Hodaeian & Biria, 2015), which found that backward design teaching was pedagogically and significantly superior to traditional design to increase EFL learners' writing and reading skills. Similarly, Yurtseven and Altun (2016) stated that applying performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework allowed students to expand their horizons and develop their English-speaking skills. Finally, in terms of listening skills, Abd et al. (2019) conducted a study where they found that using performance tasks had a positive influence on increasing students' EFL listening comprehension skills due to the instructional and comprehensible materials that allowed students to monitor their progress.

The participants of this study agreed that using performance tasks also helped them foster their creativity, autonomy, and lifelong learning. These results are aligned with the third fundamental principle of the BDM, which emphasizes the autonomous sense and transfer of learning through authentic performance (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). By following the three stages of the BDM, students can make learning meaningful by creating final projects flexibly according to their contexts, needs, and interests. Applying the GRASPS framework was essential in increasing students' creativity because it provided more options for developing the performance tasks according to their interests and contexts. The result of a study conducted by Drake and Reid (2018) supported these results by indicating that the BDM planning process facilitates students' development of creativity when applying and transferring acquired knowledge and understanding to different real-life contexts. Likewise, Akbas and Basaran (2023) found that applying the GRASPS framework in teaching EFL is an efficient process to foster students' creativity because it demands students to perform the final projects according to their own interests and learning styles, making this process more engaging and challenging than traditional final projects.

In autonomous learning, this study found that performance tasks allowed students to decide and control which learning strategies and materials they will use to achieve the desired outcomes established in Stage 1 of the BDM planning. Likewise, they had more opportunities to make sense of learning autonomously by applying and choosing the resources to develop the performance tasks. Considering these results, Utami and Bram (2023) stated that implementing the BDM benefits EFL students since it fosters students' motivation to learn autonomously due to the authentic and real-world activities developed according to their needs and learning goals. Similarly, McTighe (2010) claimed that planning backwards motivates students to learn autonomously since teachers provide engaging and meaningful activities that make them

appreciate the value of the content and see good reasons for doing so. Therefore, the BDM requests teachers to plan their instruction by applying different social and collaborative activities where students foster autonomous learning by customizing their projects (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) emphasized that enduring understanding is essential to the BDM. They articulate what students should know and understand to use their knowledge over their lifetimes, making lifelong learning happen. The authors also stated that these tasks permit learners to transfer their new knowledge in authentic scenarios, providing more learning opportunities for life by generating meaningful educational experiences. In agreement with these previous studies, the results of this investigation indicated that performance tasks encouraged students to oversee their own learning by having the power or right to monitor their learning and as a meaningful tool for retaining information and transferring the acquired knowledge into different contexts and periods. Although only a few pieces of research have investigated the benefits of applying the GRASPS framework for increasing EFL students' English skills (Betchoo, 2023; Celikman & Everyk, 2023; Martínez, 2023; Utami & Brand, 2023), this study supports these previous studies by illustrating the benefits of applying the BDM and GRASPS framework to allow EFL students create and customize their final performance tasks in a flexible way to enhance their English skills, creativity, autonomous and lifelong learning.

Conclusion

This study took students' perceptions as its underlying theoretical framework of the Backward Design Model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to explore the efficacy of applying performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework in learning English as a Foreign Language. This turned out to be the case in which students perceived applying performance tasks as more beneficial and efficient in improving their English skills than traditional projects or exams. Furthermore, performance tasks based on the GRASPS element allowed students to show their creativity, increase their motivation to learn English and improve their autonomous and lifelong learning. This research includes implications for research and practice in education and language teaching. For language teachers, the BDM provides performance tasks based on the GRASPS element that significantly increases students' English skills, learning autonomy, creativity, and collaborative skills. Furthermore, considering students' positive perceptions towards integrating performance tasks in their English lessons, it could be used as a novel aspect to motivate students to learn English authentically and promote lifelong learning. This study faced certain limitations. The main limitation was how the research was conducted. It was carried out 100% online; therefore, some activities were not conducted efficiently due to the lack of the internet or slow connection. Likewise, the research was conducted in two of the four regions of Ecuador, and the remaining population may affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research may be able to investigate these relationships further, trying out the BDM for more extended periods in other schools from the Coast Region and the Galápagos Islands to compare the results of this study. Furthermore, to obtain quantitative results, the researchers can compare student language proficiency improvements with the help of a control and an experimental group.

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