

Research Article

Backward design and authentic performance tasks to foster English skills: Perspectives of Hungarian teacher candidates

Carlos L. Alvarez¹, Branca Mirnic², Jardel C. Santos³, and Tatiana G. Pineda⁴

¹Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador, Ecuador (ORCID: 0000-0001-7263-2611)

²Langara College, Canada (ORCID: 0000-0003-0452-6635)

³Universidad Técnica Estatal de Quevedo, Brazil (ORCID: 0000-0002-8626-7229)

⁴Colegio de Bachillerato Machala, Ecuador (ORCID: 0000-0002-8664-9673)

This quasi-experimental research aimed to describe the syllabus design process using the *backward design model* and its features to determine the teacher candidates' perceptions of its application in the English Skills Development course. To achieve these objectives, the syllabus based on the BDM was designed before starting the course; after that, it was applied to sixteen students enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a Hungarian university in Budapest. At the end of the course, the participants developed sixteen final projects related to the main topic of the course, teaching English as a Foreign Language in Hungary and following the Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product, Standard (GRASPS) framework to conduct authentic performance tasks. This research method involves collecting data through written reflections, focus-group interviews and content analysis of the conducted performance tasks. The results show that BDM and authentic performance tasks can be used as a coherent, organized, and flexible syllabus design that supports EFL students by providing differentiated instruction to foster their English skills, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, long life and autonomous learning, and digital competencies. Furthermore, the results of the study make an essential contribution to the context of EFL by suggesting that planning the syllabus based on the BDM creates strong connections between course objectives, assessment, content, teaching strategies, and technology, thereby offering a practical framework for educators to enhance their teaching practices in the digital age.

Keywords: Backward design model; Curriculum; English language teaching; Performance tasks; Syllabus design

Article History: Submitted 23 March 2024; Revised 2 June 2024; Published online 16 July 2024

1. Introduction

Since 2020, due to the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, the educational system has transitioned to remote teaching and learning using various technological sources. Since that date, teachers and students have had many challenges, such as mental and emotional health and moving instruction from on-site to online (Hartshorn & McMurry, 2020). With this changing learning system, various research has been conducted to help teachers and students use digital media and tech tools as learning materials (Erdat et al., 2023; Fansury et al., 2020; Uzun et al., 2023). However, there still

Address of Corresponding Author

Carlos Lenin Alvarez, PhD, Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador, 24 de Mayo, Ecuador.

✉ clalvarezl@ube.edu.ec

How to cite: Alvarez, C. L., Mirnic, B., Santos, J. C., & Pineda, T. G. (2024). Backward design and authentic performance tasks to foster English skills: Perspectives of Hungarian teacher candidates. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 8(3), 98-112. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202427891>

needs to be literature highlighting teachers' changes in their syllabus design according to this current situation. Mosteanu (2022) claimed that the backward design model (BDM) could facilitate the decision on the content of the study plan according to these new environmental and digital practices. Likewise, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) stated that the BDM is a flexible approach teachers use to design an educational curriculum, courses, or units by teaching toward learning goals. Regarding performance tasks, Uluçınar and Dinç (2021) indicated that performance tasks improve student teachers' professional development by enhancing their self-efficacy, self-confidence, and communication. Thus, the BDM allows the teacher to design their syllabus, units, or courses by using three primary stages: 1) Identifying desired results, 2) Determining acceptable evidence, and 3) Planning learning experiences and instruction (Newell et al., 2024; Richards, 2013; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

When it comes to language teaching, Richards (2013) explained 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 BDM, which starts from the specification of learning outcomes and the 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).

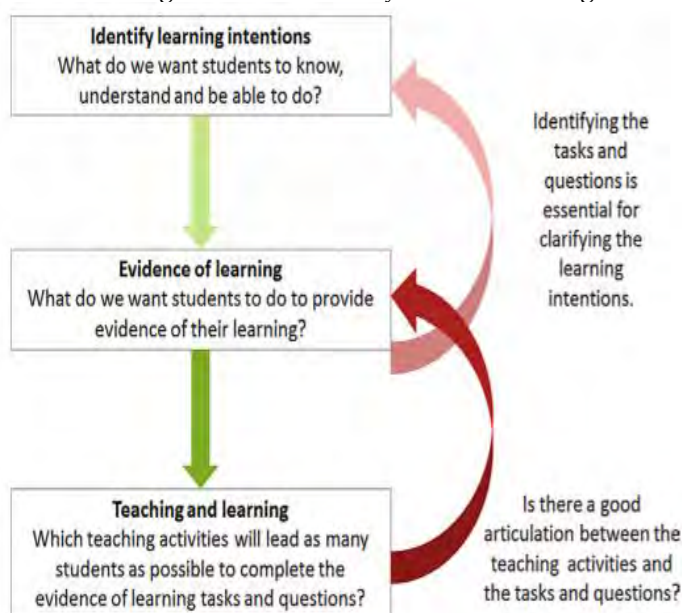
In teaching English as a Foreign Language, the BDM model benefits EFL teachers and students since teachers better understand the procedural knowledge of learning and students improve their English language skills. Thus, the application of performance tasks aids students in increasing their English writing (Hosseini et al., 2019), speaking (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016), reading (Hodaeian & Biria, 2015), and listening (El Ghany et al., 2019) skills. In the particular context studied here, first and second-year student-teachers from a Hungarian university participated in this research. This study was conducted during one semester and aimed to link the existing theory with an experimental methodology by designing a process-oriented syllabus for online teaching based on the essential principles of the BDM to obtain the participants' perceptions of this implementation in the English Skills Development course. This study directly contributes to the field of language education because it provides relevant insights to researchers and practitioners in contexts similar to the one described regarding the use of the BDM to plan online classes and provides the importance of identifying and understanding students' perceptions of the methodologies used in class.

2. Background

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) introduced the BDM as an approach to curriculum or syllabus design that starts with the end of the desired outcomes (goals or standards) – and then derives the curriculum from the evidence of learning called for by the standards and the teaching needed to equip students to perform authentic tasks. In this regard, Tung and Minh (2020) stated that the language curriculum based on the BDM begins with the specifications of desired results (evaluation/learning outcomes) and appropriate content of teaching activities (methodology) that are derived from the results of learning. Consequently, the ultimate objective of learning becomes essential in deciding the assessment, learning strategies, and materials that will be applied to reach the students' desired outcomes (Rumanti, 2019).

As seen in Figure 1, Whitehouse (2014) claimed that the BDM is divided into three stages: 1) Identifying desired intentions, 2) Evidence of learning, and 3) Developing learning activities. The author also argued that the process of the BDM "is iterative, with work on one stage feeding back into revisions and improvements of the others" (p.100).

Figure 1
The Three Stages in the Process of Backward Design



Note. Adapted from Wiggins and McTighe (2005).

To connect these three stages, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) provided a specific design template that can be applied when designing and developing the course, unit, or language program. The first stage contains the main goals, the essential questions, and the understanding students will reach at the end of the course or unit. In the second stage, it is necessary to specify the assessment plan, performance tasks, and other evidence that will be applied to evaluate students' understanding. The performance tasks are the primary assessment tool to equip learners to apply their knowledge and understandings acquired from stages 1 and 3 to real situations (Wiggings & McTighe, 2012). Therefore, authentic performance tasks require students to transfer their learning to a new and authentic situation (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) stated that performance tasks based on the BDM follow the GRASPS framework. Each letter of this framework stands for (1) a real-world goal, (2) a meaningful role for the student, (3) an authentic (or simulated) audience, (4) a contextualized situation that involves a real-world application, (5) students-generated culminating products and performances, and (6) the Success criteria by which student products and performance will be judged (McTighe & Willis, 2019). Consequently, applying performance tasks based on the BDM improves student teachers' professional development and fosters their self-confidence, self-efficacy, confidence, communication, and the use of technology (Uluçınar & Dinç, 2021). Furthermore, these tasks can help students foster 21st-century abilities, such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and communication skills to explain, interpret, apply, take a perspective, empathize, and self-regulate the acquired knowledge (Dari et al., 2024).

Finally, in the third stage, the learning activities and the resources best suited to accomplishing students' desired results are specified and developed (Misnawati, 2023). Each activity or material can be classified according to the WHERETO acronym to establish the unit or course plan at this stage. Daugherty (2006) stated that in the WHERETO acronym. W stands for Where is the unit going and what is expected; H stands for Holding students' interests; the first E stands for Explore, experience, enable, and equip; R stands for Reflect, rethink, and revise; the second E stands for Evaluate work and progress; T stands for Tailor and personalizes the work, and O stands for Organize for optimal effectiveness.

Based on the previous research studies and identification of existing research gaps, this research endeavor intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1) How do Hungarian teacher candidates perceive using the BDM in the English learning process?

RQ 2) How do Hungarian teacher candidates perceive applying authentic performance tasks based on the BDM?

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental approach to understand the students' perceptions of implementing BDM in the English Skills Development course. Maciejewski (2020) stated that this type of approach is an empirical interventional design applied to estimate the causal impact of an intervention on a target population without randomization. This research followed a three-phase design built on (1) syllabus planning based on the BDM, (2) application of the syllabus planning, and (3) the investigation of the participants' perceptions of using the BDM to increase English skills.

3.2. Participants and Research Context

Participants in this study were sixteen students, five males and eleven females, aged between nineteen and twenty-one. All the students had received at least ten years of formal education in English, and their English level was B2-C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). All the participants were enrolled in the Skills Development course. It is essential to mention that all participants attended their first or second year in different bachelor's related to English teaching education. The course lasted twenty weeks, and participants participated in the course one hour and a half a day, once a week. In concordance with the teaching objective, students were given tasks prescribed in the teaching syllabus based on the BDM to increase their English skills, cultural awareness, and appreciation of similarities and differences in teaching contexts.

This study followed ethical consideration procedures. First, all the course students were invited to participate in this research, and they all agreed to participate. Later, informed consent was sent to each of them to explain all the information, such as goals and data collection procedures, and get their approval to participate in this study. Finally, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to keep their information safe in this research. The most essential background information of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants of this study

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Career</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>English level</i>
Petra	Female	English and Media Teaching	1 st	B2
István	Male	English and Hungarian Teaching	2 nd	B2
Balázs	Male	English and Media Teaching	1 st	B2
Réka	Female	History and English Teaching	1 st	C1
Vivien	Female	English and Italian Teaching	1 st	C1
Levente	Male	English and Hungarian Teaching	2 nd	B2
András	Male	English and Hungarian Teaching	1 st	C1
Benedek	Male	History and English teaching	2 nd	B2
Patricia	Female	English and Hungarian Teaching	1 st	B2
Kinga	Female	English and Music Teaching	2 nd	C1
Anna	Female	English and Maths Teaching	1 st	B2
Dóra	Female	English and Hungarian Teaching	2 nd	B2
Henrik	Male	English and History Teaching	2 nd	C1
Csaba	Male	English and Media Teaching	1 st	B2
Gabriella	Female	English and Hungarian Teaching	2 nd	B2
Borbála	Female	English and Hungarian Teaching	2 nd	C1

3.3. The Intervention

This research was conducted during the autumn semester at a university in Hungary in an English Skills Development course. This course, Skills Development – Teaching English in Different Countries, focused on developing students' English language skills through culture and educational awareness. The course started on September 8th and finished on February 8th; it was carried out every Tuesday for 90 minutes. The course followed a weekly theme based on the syllabus designed for the BDM. Students were expected to read articles and watch videos about cultures, living, and teaching in different parts of the world each week.

Before starting the Skills Development course, the syllabus was designed based on the BDM principles, following the unit design template and focusing on performance tasks. Yurtseven and Altun (2017) argue that unit design templates based on the BDM support teachers' design process and cover its main three stages. Therefore, the unit plan for the English Skills Development course was designed by covering the Desired Results, Assessment Evidence, and Learning Plan and the features of each stage, namely, Understandings, Essential Questions, Performance Tasks based on the GRASPS framework, Other Evidence for Assessing Students, and Learning Activities based on the WHERETO acronym.

The syllabus was planned based on the BDM principles and its connections with constructivist approaches such as scaffolding learning, Bloom's Taxonomy, and cooperative learning. Hammond and Gibbons (2005) stated that "scaffolding refers to support that is designed to assist necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would not be able to manage on their own" (p. 9). Thus, the syllabus was designed by articulating the main objectives, learning materials, and activities to enable students to extend levels of understanding and provide active participation. Similarly, Bloom's Taxonomy was used to achieve the desired results and performance tasks. Forehand (2010) explained that Bloom's Taxonomy is a systematic classification of thinking and learning processes that require prior skills or abilities before the next, more complex one. Consequently, to present the final performance task, students had to achieve the six Bloom's Taxonomy categories: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

The syllabus was also designed based on cooperative learning. Abramczyk and Jurkowski (2020) claimed that in cooperative learning, "teachers structure students' interactions and prepare them for cooperation so that students work together in small groups supporting each other's learning processes" (p.1). Therefore, students worked cooperatively in small groups to build or increase knowledge and develop the performance task at the end of the course. Students were assessed by active class- participation, assignments, regular attendance, and oral and written presentations. All the activities and materials were applied for remote teaching using tech tools such as Zoom, Padlet, Google Docs, Moodle, YouTube, Prezi, and Blogger. When the semester ended, students were asked to present their final performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework of the BDM.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

The data were collected using a qualitative approach, including students' writing reflections and two focus-group interviews. To answer the first research question: How do Hungarian teacher candidates perceive using the BDM in their English learning process? The instrument applied was reflective writing, "a key component of reflective practice, central to the notion of learning from experience" (Jasper, 2005, p. 247). Based on the students' learning experiences using the BDM, the written reflections became the primary source of information included here. It aimed to obtain information on students' critical reflection on the course by covering six statements related to the BDM and three associated with the overall course, namely, coherence between the desired results and performance tasks, the content of the course, learning, and materials provided during the course, assessment during the course, aspects that students like and dislike from the course, and

general overview of the course. The written reflections were completed through a forum on Moodle; it happened at different times, during the course and then once after the course.

By the end of the research, to answer the second research question: How do Hungarian teacher candidates perceive applying performance tasks based on the BDM? two focus group interviews, with eight participants in each interview, were used as instruments to collect data at the end of the semester. Each group was separated randomly. Anderson and Arsenault (1998) claimed that the purpose of the focus group "is to address a specific topic, in-depth, in a comfortable environment to elicit a wide range of opinions, attitudes, feelings or perceptions from a group of individuals who share some common experience relative to the dimension under study" (p.212). Consequently, the interview schedule was divided into four sections related to developing and applying the performance tasks based on the GRASPS feature from the BDM.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview, two EFL university professors from Hungary and Ecuador rated and provided written feedback. The interview schedule was modified in light of the two evaluators' comments. In addition, the interview schedule was piloted with four students from another course, which led to a few modifications and improvements to this instrument. The researchers organized and transcribed data from the students' reflections and focus-group interviews. The researchers analyzed the data collected using thematic analysis, a systematic process where raw data forms codes and codes form themes that lead to interpretations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Application of the BDM in the English Skills Development Course

The syllabus was designed for the Skills Development Course by applying the main features of the BDM and the current changing learning system based on online teaching. Thus, students' perceptions of this implementation were collected during and at the end of the course. This research had two primary goals. The first goal was to describe the process of planning the English Skills Development course syllabus. The design process started by collecting essential information from books and scientific articles related to applying BDM in the context of language teaching. The epistemological foundations of the BDM and constructivist approaches were established as the most crucial aspect when designing the syllabus. After that, the three stages of the BDM were tailored according to the Skills Development Course. Performance tasks were incorporated by following the GRASPS factor and learning experiences by applying the WHERETO factor of the BDM.

Figure 2 highlights the expected students' desired results or learning outcomes: the primary goal of the course aimed to increase students' cultural awareness of how the EFL teaching process is conducted in different countries and the importance of culture in the learning process. The primary learning outcome aimed at creating a "Teaching & Traveling Abroad" project based on habits, customs, teaching facts, and curiosities in Hungary. Essential questions, understandings, and skills were established for this course as well.

Figure 3 focuses on the student's assessment evidence: the evaluation of this course was planned by establishing formative and summative evaluation by keeping in mind the desired results and goals of this course. Likewise, the final performance task was stated in this stage using the GRASPS factor of the BDM.

In Figure 4, examples of the instructional strategies and learning activities were specified, aligned, and reflected based on the desired results and assessment evidence from stages 1 and 2. The learning plan was determined by applying the WHERETO element from the BDM.

As a primary result, planning the syllabus for this course was a complex but worthwhile process. First, it is essential to mention that applying the BDM principles allowed the design of the Skills Development Course syllabus logically by explicitly defining the learning goals, understandings, and skills that students will achieve at the end of the course. Thus, planning

Figure 2
 Stage 1: Expected desired results or learning outcomes

<p>Teaching English in Different Countries Grade: Second-year student at Hungarian university Topic: Teaching and Traveling Abroad; Habits, Customs & Curiosities Designer: Authors</p>	<p>Subject: Skill Development Semester: Autumn 2022</p>
<p>Stage 1 - Desired Results</p>	
<p>Established Goals: At the end of this course, students will design a "Teaching & Traveling Abroad" project based on the habits, customs, teaching facts, and curiosities in Hungary.</p>	
<p>Understandings: Cultural awareness Similitudes and differences between cultures How teaching EFL is done in different countries</p>	<p>Essential Questions: Does teaching EFL can change according to where the process is done? Are there any differences between teaching EFL in your country and other countries? Which countries would you like to teach English, and why?</p>
<p>Students will know: How is EFL taught in different countries? The importance of obtaining information before starting teaching in a foreign language context. the importance of being respectful and open-minded to be part of a culture,</p>	<p>Students will be able to: Recognise that habits and customs play an important role in teaching EFL. Provide different tips for foreign teachers who want to teach in their countries. Please discuss the differences and similarities between EFL teaching in their own countries and other countries.</p>

Figure 3
 Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

<p>Stage 2 - Assessment Evidence</p>	
<p>Performance Tasks (GRASP): As EFL teacher advisors in your country, you were contracted to design and present a "Teaching and Traveling Abroad" project based on the habits, customs, and curiosities foreign teachers need to have to teach in your country. Provide enough information about accommodation, currency, budget, customs, habits, teaching process, and curiosities that foreign teachers must consider when teaching in your country.</p>	<p>Other evidence: -Regular attendance -Active class- participation -Rubric (performance task) -Oral interaction -Assignments -Final presentation based on a performance task (GRASPS framework)</p>

Figure 4
Stage 3: Learning Experience and Instruction

Stage 3 - Learning Plan (WHERE TO)	
September 8th: Introduction and guidelines of the course	
Introduction of the course; Purpose and Desired Results; Guidelines of the course	W
Agreements: Personal objectives for this course	H
Students' information:	
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dl7XMeOY3cvZut_JI1m1BDw2J9PSxpBTZClgtYMnOUE/edit?usp=sharing	E
Vocabulary words: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1AIKskUpG9yPdAkJWDM	E
Learning Language, Learning Culture: Teaching Language to the Whole Student	
September 15th: Language and culture in an EFL classroom	
Language and culture in an EFL classroom	O
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/sulaiman-jenkins/language-culture-efl-classroom	R
Forum 1: Reflection on teaching EFL classrooms in your country. https://moodle.elte.hu/mod/forum/view.php?id=192661	H
Discussion	

backwards focused more on the desired results expected from the students (learning) rather than on what activities or instruction we will apply (teaching). Moreover, students could demonstrate the learning goals by incorporating performance tasks authentically and meaningfully. Students could use the GRASPS factor for the BDM to transfer their knowledge to new real-life situations. Finally, the BDM template provided a complete and straightforward overview of my students' learning goals at the end of the course to align the activities and materials with the course's learning goals and lead students to achieve the desired results. These results are corroborated by Slavych (2020), who claimed that the BDM is an intentional course planning that can facilitate more efficient and effective learning sessions, resulting in both instructor and student satisfaction.

4.1.1. Stage One: Desired results

Following Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) principles of the BDM, the syllabus was designed by first identifying the desired result of the Skills Development Course. Thus, the course's main goal was to create a "Teaching & Traveling Abroad" project based on countries' habits, customs, and curiosities worldwide. Cultural awareness, comparison between cultures, and teaching EFL in different countries were the students' understandings at the end of the course. Students will know the importance of obtaining information before teaching in different countries, how EFL teaching is conducted, and the vital role of each culture in each country. As essential questions, three questions were established: 1) Does teaching EFL change according to where the process is done? 2) Are there any differences between teaching EFL in your country and other countries? 3) Which countries would you like to teach English, and why? Finally, at the end of the course, it was established that students could: 1) Recognize that habits and customs play an important role in teaching EFL contexts. 2) Provide different tips for foreign teachers who want to teach in their countries. 3) Talk about the differences and similarities that EFL teaching has between their own countries and other countries.

4.1.2. Stage Two: Assessment evidence

A formative and summative evaluation was designed by considering the desired results and goals from the first stage and establishing the performance task and other instruments to assess students during the course. Therefore, a final performance task and other instruments such as assignments, oral presentations, written activities, and class participation were chosen to gather evidence of students' understanding. The following performance task was based on the GRASPS element of the BDM to allow students to transfer their acquired knowledge and skills to their context: As teacher advisor of your country, you were contracted to design and present a "Teaching and Travelling Abroad" project based on the habits, customs, culture, and curiosities that foreign teachers need to have to teach in your country. Provide enough information such as

accommodation, currency, budget, customs, habits, culture, teaching process, curiosities, and other important information foreign teachers need to consider when teaching in your country.

4.1.3. Stage Three: Plan learning experiences and instruction

In this last stage, the instructional strategies and learning activities were specified, aligned, and reflected based on the expected desired results and assessment evidence from stages 1 and 2. All the instructional strategies and activities were planned by creating engaging, collaborative lessons that led to the desired learning results. Due to the current situation, all the activities were planned to be taught synchronously and asynchronously by including various technological sources such as Zoom, Google Drive, Moodle, Google Docs, PPT, Online Blogs, YouTube, Prezi, Kahoot, Padlet, and WhatsApp. Finally, all the instruction, materials, and learning activities were based on the WHERETO element from the BDM. Therefore, all the activities and materials were planned to ensure that students know where the unit is headed and why, to provide students with the necessary knowledge, tools, and skills to tailor the performance task, reflect, revise, and evaluate the performance of students' progress.

4.2. Results from Students' Written Reflections and Focus Group Interviews

As mentioned, all the participants were students enrolled in English teacher education. Hence, this research aimed to obtain their perceptions regarding implementing this syllabus in their Skills Development course. Insights gained from their written reflections and the focus group interviews were analyzed according to the following aspects: Research Question 1: How do Hungarian students perceive using the BDM in their English learning process?

4.2.1. Overall perceptions of the skills development course based on the BDM

Results indicated that students in this study found the BDM to be an organized, coherent, and logical planning framework. They perceived that this design method caught their attention since all the activities and materials were connected to the course's main objectives. Those findings are supported by Wiggings and McTighe (2005). They claimed that BD is a model that assists teachers in aligning goals, assessments, and learning experiences to encourage students to achieve the desired results. All students emphasized the excellent rapport and good atmosphere of the course. For instance, Réka stated, "This course was helpful for our future teaching. We learned many new and unique things about different cultures, and I would like to use this syllabus planning in my school. Likewise, Patricia claimed that "The course was structured and systematically organized, and the topics and tasks were coherent and logical. Petra indicated that,

I feared this class would be similar to a Language Practice course, but I was relieved I was wrong. I felt okay making mistakes and noticed the coherent and logical connections between the readings, videos, and activities during the course. Besides, my classmates made me feel comfortable making mistakes, so the BDM design created a safe learning atmosphere.

In response to the research question of this study, the findings showed that students positively perceive the BDM application in the English learning process. Students found the BDM to be an organized, logical, and coherent syllabus plan since all the activities and materials were connected to the final performance task they had to develop at the end of the course. Rumanti (2019) corroborated the results by manifesting that, in the BDM planning, all the assessments, learning strategies, and content are planned based on the ultimate goal, which makes the learning process more systematic and organized. Besides, students agreed that developing the performance tasks based on the BDM helped them work collaboratively and autonomously to perform the final projects efficiently. These findings support previous research, which indicated that planning backwards allows students to apply cooperative learning and Bloom's Taxonomy categories to increase their knowledge and skills to effectively perform the tasks (Abramczyk & Jurkowski, 2020; Forehand, 2010).

4.2.2. Backward design model and use of technology

Students perceived that this course provided them many learning opportunities using various technological tools and authentic materials. This can be confirmed in Patricia's point of view, in which she commented, "I used various platforms in this course, such as Zoom for classes, Moodle for assignments and other files, and WhatsApp for out-of-class communication. Also, technology has offered many opportunities to work collaboratively." Ana said, "The course provided interesting tools that helped us conduct activities in and out of class. I liked working in groups collaboratively and providing feedback on our classmates' written assignments." Anna and the other participants mentioned that applying different tech tools and working in groups to develop performance tasks helped them achieve the course's learning goals.

All students perceived that the course was planned according to the remote teaching process, and all the content led to achieving learning goals. Benedek mentioned, "The course was mostly planned for remote learning and that having an organized syllabus, such as this course, is essential to avoid improvising lessons and using content that is not meaningful." According to Kantorski et al. (2019), the "backward design process provided a systematic conceptual framework for educational app design that tied the identification and implementation of learning goals and assessment goals with the design of the app itself" (p.729). Accordingly, Andras explained, "Using the BDM for syllabus planning is valuable for aligning teaching materials and strategies with technology to enhance students' English skills and motivation."

4.2.3. Students' English Skills Development through using the BDM

Results from students' perceptions showed a positive influence of adopting the BDM for improving their English skills. Participants stated they could use the vocabulary they learned from previous lessons due to the coherent and organized syllabus. Kinga said, "The tasks throughout the course helped me develop my speaking and writing skills. I did not feel stressed most of the time during this course since all the activities and materials were connected, and the classroom environment was amicable." In the same vein, Dóra claimed, "While constantly talking, I improved my speaking skills and confidence to talk in front of my classmates and teacher. I felt comfortable presenting my ideas because I understood that making mistakes is part of the learning process."

All the participants mentioned that they improved their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills through this course. Although, the participants perceived speaking and writing as the skills they improved the most. For instance, Levente indicated, "Providing feedback, writing summaries, and writing the blog (final performance task) were the activities that helped me to improve my writing skills." Dora also explained that "Performing the activities during the course allowed me to recognize grammar mistakes and writing rules." Likewise, students indicated that aligning the materials, activities, and final performance tasks enhanced their speaking skills. Levente claimed that

Providing feedback on my classmates' presentations and making and presenting my final presentation helped me increase my speaking fluency. Besides, Patricia indicated that oral presentations, in-class discussions, and video making (final performance task) improved my speaking skills and confidence to talk in front of the class.

Apart from these four primary English skills, the students perceived that applying the BDM helped them increase their vocabulary. For example, Anna indicated, "All materials and activities were aligned with the final performance task, which provided me with enough vocabulary and useful expressions to express myself more accurately and improve my reading comprehension of contextual meanings." Moreover, Levente claimed, "Introducing vocabulary-building exercises and authentic activities related to the final project allowed me to foster my vocabulary and, therefore, to use this acquired knowledge in real-life language usage." The obtained results are supported by different authors who have applied the BDM syllabus as an alternative to improve English skills in their EFL classrooms (El Ghany et al., 2019; Hodaieian & Biria, 2015; Hosseini et al.,

2019; Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). Therefore, the results of this study corroborate the work of other studies in this area, linking the fact that applying the BDM in teaching EFL helps students increase their English skills, mainly their speaking and writing skills.

4.2.4. Performance tasks based on the GRASPS factor of the BDM

Analysis of the interviews showed that all the students' comments stated that developing and conducting the performance tasks was an exciting and motivating process. Balázs indicated that the performance task was the most creative and fun exam I have ever had. Likewise, students manifested that all the activities and materials applied during the course helped them develop performance tasks quickly. Csaba commented, "Materials and activities we performed during the course helped me develop the final performance task of this course. I felt I only had to check the notes I wrote down during the course and organize them to develop the performance task."

The participants also argued that having a real-life goal and taking roles made them feel motivated and encouraged to put their best effort into conducting the performance task. For instance, Gabriella stated that

I loved the final performance task of this course. I felt motivated to do it since I only had to check and use what I had learned during the course. I only had to set up the presentation, and presenting was easy for me since I already had many examples in each class.

Benedek added:

Having a real-life role and a specific performance task to develop was helpful in many ways. My classmates and I critically agreed on the topics covered in the performance task. Also, we learned how to use new software to record videos.

Students also claimed that performance tasks helped them increase their problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and digital literacy competencies. Anna stated, "It was interesting to create the performance task based on Teaching in Hungary. It allowed me to think deeply about how other people and cultures can see our country as a place to teach abroad." In this vein, Childre et al. (2009) argued that creating performance tasks or projects based on the BDM "challenges students to use the content in a flexible way to answer or solve problems that mirror real life." (p.9). Furthermore, as Dari et al. (2024) stated, using the GRAPS framework based on the BDM enables students to explain, interpret, empathize, have self-awareness, and apply their knowledge authentically.

4.2.5. Creativity and individual differences: Variety of performance tasks

Participants in the interview stressed focusing on creativity as one of the performance task's significant features. This thought can be evidenced in Balázs's speech: "I created the performance task and used my creativity to design a blog. Until developing the performance task, I did not know I could present a colorful and fascinating blog." So, Balázs and the other participants manifested that using different and current tech tools and connecting with the performance helped them further their creativity.

Another aspect related to creativity was the variety of performance tasks students had to conduct at the end of the course. Levente indicated, "Working in pairs, groups, or even individually allowed us different opportunities to develop the performance task according to our preferences." Besides, Gabriella added, "Having different ways to present the task in written or spoken forms was a novel teaching strategy for me. As the teachers' examples show, I felt I must be creative in presenting an excellent, perfect final project."

Finally, the students mentioned that they could present the performance task according to their likes and interests. András claimed that

When the teacher provided us with roles as teachers' advisors in our country, I knew I had to do my best to show the pros and cons of teaching in Hungary. I loved recording the video using new tech tools and my creativity with my classmates.

To support the results, Di Masi and Milani (2016) manifested that adopting the BDM is a

learner-centred model that provides students with various options to develop autonomous learning and their competencies to master the required performances. Likewise, Drake and Reid (2018) corroborated these findings by arguing that applying the DBM can create a rich learning situation that brings together creativity and 21st-century competencies.

4.2.6. *Challenges of developing performance tasks*

Finally, some students listed some challenges in developing performance tasks. One challenge was the need for more training for some students in recording and editing videos. This could have influenced their performance task. Borbála reported, "Performance task was an exciting and enjoyable way to show our skills. However, recording and editing the video was challenging since I had never edited a video. We recommend providing students with technological training before starting the intervention for future research."

Some students also mentioned the technical problems according to how the classes were conducted. Due to this course being conducted online, the internet connection was a problem for some students because sometimes they could not attend class or complete one activity without an internet connection. Patricia remarked that since we had classes online, sometimes I felt frustrated since the internet connection could have been better. However, despite this technical issue, everyone did their best.

5. Conclusion

In this research, the BDM was applied to design the syllabus for the Skills Development course at Hungarian University. The syllabus was designed by integrating the main features of the BDM: Desired results, learning standards, assessment evidence, performance tasks, and the WHERETO and GRASPS frameworks. Designing the course syllabus based on the BDM was a complex but worthwhile process. It efficiently allowed the alignment of remote teaching with course objectives, assessment methods, and learning experiences. Furthermore, 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.

Regarding students' perceptions of the BDM, all the study participants found this model an interesting, coherent, and organized way to connect all the content they covered during the course with its main objectives. They appreciated how the model permitted them to plan their performance tasks efficiently and flexibly according to their needs and preferences. Therefore, they found the BDM to be a student-centred and intentional approach to course design, which ensures students transfer their acquired knowledge to authentic and meaningful scenarios. Richards (2013) supported these results by indicating that the primary goal of the BDM is the ability to make meaning and transfer of learning, which starts from the specification of the expected outcomes and then establishes the decisions on methodology (process) and syllabus planning (content).

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 (El Ghany et al., 2019), Canada (Drake & Reid, 2018), and 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. Consequently, following the three main stages based on the BDM, every task and piece of instruction has 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 the tasks 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 participants claimed that applying the performance tasks allowed them to transfer their acquired knowledge and skills

to various authentic contexts. These findings are corroborated by 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. Moreover, all participants manifested that activities and materials applied during the course were associated with the course's objectives, which efficiently helped them develop performance tasks. They also argued that using the GRASPS framework made them feel motivated and encouraged to put their best effort into conducting the performance tasks.

Regarding English language skills, all the student teachers' perceived that applying the BDM in teaching EFL helped increase their four macro-skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. However, most teachers believed that writing and reading skills were the essential skills students fostered during the semester. Furthermore, the teachers perceived that by applying the BDM and performance tasks, students were more flexible in showing their creativity, working collaboratively, and learning autonomously. These findings are corroborated by Hosseini et al. (2019) and Hodaieian and Biria (2015), who showed that applying the BDM in EFL teaching helps students to increase their language skills, mainly writing and reading. The participants also claimed that performance tasks helped them improve their problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and digital literacy competencies.

The downside of planning the syllabus based on the BDM is that it could be complex and time-consuming. Furthermore, it requires teachers to understand the BDM features deeply to connect them effectively when planning their syllabus. Moreover, performance tasks can be demanding when trying to achieve authenticity. Students had to learn to use new tech tools and invest a lot of time editing and customizing videos and blogs.

During the process of conducting this research, we found some limitations. First, the generalizability of the results may not be possible due to the sample size applied in this research. In addition, we have relied on students' self-reported data, which could have been reinforced with face-to-face observational studies. In terms of improving English skills, the participants' level was high, which prevented students from noticing too many improvements in this aspect. For future research, we recommend conducting this type of study in primary and secondary education for more in-depth analyses of the effect of applying the BDM for language improvement purposes. Furthermore, it is suggested that researchers compare students' language proficiency improvements with the help of a control and experimental group to investigate the implication of the BDM in teaching EFL.

The positive results found in this study showed that the BDM and performance tasks based on the GRASPS framework are a coherent, organized, and flexible design that can be used to support EFL students by providing differentiated instruction to foster their English skills, creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, long life and autonomous learning, and digital competencies. Besides, the BDM creates strong connections between course objectives, assessment, content, teaching strategies, and technology to help students develop English language skills and motivate and encourage them to be part of the learning process by performing authentic tasks to transfer the acquired knowledge to real-life situations.

Declaration of interest: The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

Ethical statement: All subjects who participated in the study have given their consent for participation, for both collection and analysis of the data. The data was analyzed only in anonymized form. No additional ethical approval was needed.

Funding: No funding source is reported for this study.

References

- Abramczyk, A., & Jurkowski, S. (2020). Cooperative learning as an evidence-based teaching strategy: What teachers know, believe, and how they use it. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 46(3), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1733402>
- Anderson, G., & Arsenault, N. (1998). *Fundamentals of educational research*. Psychology Press.
- Castleberry, A., & Nolen, A. (2018). Thematic analysis of qualitative research data: Is it as easy as it sounds? *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(6), 807–815. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2018.03.019>
- Childre, A., Sands, J. R., & Pope, S. T. (2009). Backward design: Targeting depth of understanding for all learners. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41(5), 6–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990904100501>
- Dari, W., Hidayat, S., & Wulandari, E. (2024). The understanding by design strategy in 21st-century Education. *Biosfer: Jurnal Tadris Biologi*, 14(2), 169–179. <https://doi.org/10.24042/biosfer.v14i2.15818>
- Daugherty, K. K. (2006). Backward course design: Making the end the beginning. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(6). <http://doi.org/10.5688/aj7006135>
- Di Masi, D., & Milani, P. (2016). Backward design in-service training blended curriculum to practitioners in social work as coach in the P.I.P.P.I. program. *Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society*, 12(3), 31–40. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/173472/>
- Drake, S. M., & Reid, J. L. (2018). Integrated curriculum as an effective way to teach 21st-century capabilities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Research*, 11, 31–50. <https://doi.org/10.30777/apjer.2018.1.1.03>
- El Ghany, M. A. O., Salem, M. Z. M., Amin, M., & Yousif, A. (2019). Using performance assessment tasks for developing EFL listening comprehension skills among preparatory stage pupils. *Journal of College Education*, 30(118), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.12816/JFEB.2019.61557>
- Erdar, Y., Ceren, R. E. S., Ozdemir, L., Uslu-Sahan, F., & Bilgin, A. (2023). Influence of technical, cognitive and socio-emotional factors on digital literacy in nursing students assessed using structural equation modeling. *Nurse Education Today*, 130, 105937. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2023.105937>
- Fansury, A. H., Januarty, R., & Rahman, S. (2020). Digital content for millennial generations: Teaching the English foreign language learner on COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University*, 55(3), 1–10. 10.35741/issn.0258-2724.55.3.40
- Forehand, M. (2010). Bloom's taxonomy. *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*, 41(4), 47–56.
- Hammond, J., & Gibbons, P. (2005). What is scaffolding? *Teachers' voices*, 8(5), 8–16.
- Hartshorn, K. J., & McMurry, B. L. (2020). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on ESL learners and TESOL practitioners in the United States. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 2(2), 140–157. <https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.09.11>
- Hodaeian, M., & Biria, R. (2015). The effect of backward design on intermediate EFL learners' L2 reading comprehension: Focusing on learners' attitudes. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2(7), 80–93.
- Hosseini, H., Chalak, A., & Biria, R. (2019). Impact of backward design on improving Iranian advanced learners' writing ability: Teachers' practices and beliefs. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(2), 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2019.1223a>
- Jasper, M. A. (2005). Using reflective writing within research. *Journal of research in nursing*, 10(3), 247–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/174498710501000303>
- Kantorski, B., Sanford-Dolly, C. W., Commisso, D. R., & Pollock, J. A. (2019). Backward design as a mobile application development strategy. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 67(3), 711–731. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-019-09662-7>
- Maciejewski, M. L. (2020). Quasi-experimental design. *Biostatistics & Epidemiology*, 4(1), 38–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24709360.2018.1477468>
- McTighe, J., & Willis, J. (2019). *Upgrade your teaching: Understanding by design meets neuroscience*. ASCD.
- Misnawati, M. (2023). Instructional strategy for comprehensible meaning-focused input: Backward learning instruction. *Utamax: Journal of Ultimate Research and Trends in Education*, 5(1), 32–44. <https://doi.org/10.31849/utamax.v5i1.11416>
- Mosteanu, N. R. (2022). Improving the quality of online teaching finance and business management using artificial intelligence and backward design. *Quality-Access to Success*, 23(187), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.47750/QAS/23.187.01>
- Newell, A. D., Folds, C. A., Haddock, A. J., Ismail, N., & Moreno, N. P. (2024). Twelve tips for using the Understanding by Design curriculum planning framework. *Medical Teacher*, 46(1), 34–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2023.2224498>

- Richards, J. C. (2013). Curriculum approaches in language teaching: Forward, central, and backward design. *RELC Journal*, 44(1), 5–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212473293>
- Rumanti, E. D. (2019). A transformation of a backwards design model to designing a curriculum. *Diligentia: Journal of Theology and Christian Education*, 2(2), 51–67. <https://doi.org/10.19166/dil.v2i2.2059>
- Slavych, B. K. (2020). Designing courses in communication sciences and disorders using backward design. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, 5(6), 1530–1541. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_PERSP-20-00053
- Tomlinson, C. A., & McTighe, J. (2006). *Integrating differentiated instruction & understanding by design: Connecting content and kids*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tung, N., & Minh, H. (2020). A case study of curriculum development: Backward or forward/central design? *Journal of Social Sciences*, 10(1), 18–28. 10.46223/hcmcoujs.soci.en.10.1.546.2020
- Uluçınar, U., & Dinç, E. (2021). Effectiveness of authentic performance tasks: The case of a special education course. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 5(2), 152–171. <https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2021270069>
- Uzun, S., Meydan, A., Devrılmaz, E., & Uzun, A. (2023). The relationship between teachers' attitudes towards distance education and their digital literacy levels. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 7(5), 111–121.
- Whitehouse, M. (2014). Using a Backward Design approach to embed assessment in teaching. *Perspectives in the Science Curriculum*, 95(352), 99–104. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ej1032466>
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2011). *The Understanding by Design guide to creating high quality units*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2012). *The Understanding by Design guide to advanced concepts in creating and reviewing units*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Yurtseven, N., & Altun, S. (2016). Understanding by Design (UbD) in EFL teaching: The investigation of students' foreign language learning motivation and views. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(3), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i3.1204>
- Yurtseven, N., & Altun, S. (2017). Understanding by Design (UbD) in EFL teaching: Teachers' professional development and students' achievement. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 17(2), 437–461. <https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2017.2.0226>