



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY IN IMPLEMENTING UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY IN ENGLISH TEACHING MODULES

Nanik Retnowati¹, Pham Thi Thu Hien², Maulidia Rachmawati Nur³, Linda⁴, Tsaniatul Fatiha⁵, Lutfio Indra Permana⁶

^{1,3,4,5,6}Faculty of Teacher and Training Education, Ibn Khaldun University, Bogor, Indonesia

² Ly Tu Trong College Ho Chi Minh City

Corresponding author: nanik.retnowati@uika-bogor.ac.id

APA Citation: Retnowati, N., Hien, P. T. T., Nur, M. R., Linda., Fatiha, T., & Permana, L. I. (2025). School leadership and policy in implementing understanding by design: A comparative case study in english teaching modules. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 13(1), 421-434. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v13i2.11213>

Received: 23-02-2024

Accepted: 25-04-2024

Published: 30-06-2025

Abstract: Effective teaching relies heavily on intentional instructional planning that aligns learning goals, assessments, and activities. The Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, known for its backward design approach, has been adopted within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum to promote coherence and purpose in learning. However, its implementation across schools varies significantly, often shaped by leadership practices and local policy enforcement. This study investigates how school leadership influences the implementation of UbD in English teaching modules at two public secondary schools in Bogor City. Employing qualitative content analysis, the research draws on data from curriculum documents, semi-structured teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Findings reveal that one school demonstrates effective UbD integration, driven by assertive leadership, clear policy communication, and routine monitoring. In contrast, the second school shows fragmented implementation due to limited leadership involvement and a lack of institutional reinforcement. These contrasting cases highlight that while teacher understanding is necessary, school leadership plays a pivotal role in translating national curriculum mandates into coherent instructional practice. The study underscores the importance of proactive leadership and coordinated policy support to ensure the consistent and meaningful adoption of curriculum frameworks like UbD in schools.

Keywords: school leadership; education policy; Understanding by Design; curriculum implementation; English teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding by Design (UbD) is an instructional planning framework that emphasizes backward design, which begins with the identification of desired learning outcomes before planning assessment and instructional activities (Taiyabi, 2021; Wiggins, 2005). This approach addresses two common pitfalls in traditional lesson planning: focusing solely on content coverage or emphasizing activities without clear outcomes. By aligning long-term and short-term goals, UbD fosters meaningful learning through a structured three-stage design process: identifying desired results, determining acceptable evidence, and planning learning experiences (Wiggins, 2005). The model has been applied in various educational

contexts including classroom instruction, curriculum management (Dano Ali, 2023), and structured education projects (Jensen et al., 2017). Despite its wide applicability, UbD implementation is not always optimal. For example, Joshi (2021) reported inconsistencies in applying the three UbD stages across school districts in central Minnesota. Nevertheless, research continues to support its effectiveness in aligning learning outcomes with instructional materials and strategies (Alvarez-Llerena et al., 2023; Aslam et al., 2024). It also enhances both teachers' procedural knowledge and students' English language skills (Alvarez Llerena, 2020). UbD has been found applicable at all educational levels (Utami & Bram, 2023), and effective in

improving English reading comprehension and social responsibility among Thai EFL students (Chaisa & Chinokul, 2021). Similarly, in remote Indonesian contexts, UbD supported by the Mind Walker Program improved English proficiency among elementary students (Yen, 2024). Furthermore, combining UbD with problem-based learning has been shown to enhance deep understanding and critical thinking in elementary learners (Aristanti, 2024).

In Indonesia, UbD was introduced more formally with the launch of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 (Idzni Suryana et al., 2025). This curriculum explicitly adopts UbD as a framework to ensure alignment between learning objectives, assessments, and instructional activities (Kemendikbud, 2022). Intended to address post-pandemic learning loss, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes essential content, adaptability to student progress, and relevance to real-world contexts such as environmental, health, and social issues (Satria, 2022). Several regions have reported positive outcomes using UbD, particularly in boosting student motivation and conceptual understanding (Resa, 2023). UbD has also proven effective in hybrid and online learning models, particularly in improving science comprehension (OZYURT et al., 2021; Tshering, 2022).

Preliminary interviews and observations conducted for this study at two public schools in Bogor revealed striking differences in how UbD is perceived and applied. At School A, the principal and curriculum coordinators strongly promote UbD, making it a central planning framework. As a result, teachers consistently acknowledge its importance and attempt to integrate its principles. Conversely, at School B, although teachers are aware of UbD, it is not emphasized as an institutional priority, and implementation varies considerably across classrooms. These initial findings suggest that the degree of UbD implementation may be closely linked to school leadership and policy emphasis.

School leadership and policy play a critical role in translating educational reforms into practice. Effective school leaders actively promote and reinforce curriculum frameworks, provide ongoing professional development, and offer structural support to ensure policy adoption (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2020). Without this leadership, even well-designed policies may fail to be effectively implemented (Fullan, 2021). Alignment across different levels of the education

system—both horizontal and vertical—is essential for effective reform (Hopkins & Levin, 2000). A decentralized, subsidiarity-based model, where decision-making occurs at the lowest competent level, may also enhance implementation efficiency (Coles, 2024). Consistently articulated school policies and procedures—both verbal and written—help establish a supportive environment where teachers are more likely to align their planning with institutional goals (PowerDMS, 2020). Lesson planning documents, therefore, serve not only as instructional tools but also as indicators of how leadership mediates policy enforcement (Annet, 2024; Dano Ali, 2023).

Recent studies reflect increasing global interest in UbD, though many focus on contexts in developed countries. For instance, (Hehakaya, 2022) observed that teachers often struggle to develop structured and meaningful plans using the UbD approach. A systematic review by Gunartha et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of embedding critical thinking into each stage of UbD. In the Indonesian context, while many teachers report a good understanding of UbD (Retnowati et al., 2025), there is limited research on how this understanding is translated into actual instructional modules. The quality of lesson plans remains a foundational element of teaching effectiveness (Antari, 2021; Huzefa, 2024; Mahkamova, 2000; Pal et al., 2022; Shahzad et al., 2024), and teacher preparedness through structured planning determines instructional success (Farhang et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2021). However, little is known about the role of school leadership in facilitating or hindering the integration of UbD into these plans.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how English teachers in two public schools in Bogor design their teaching modules using the UbD framework. It also investigates the extent to which these modules align with core UbD principles, the challenges teachers face in applying them, and the influence of school-level leadership and policy on these processes. The research is guided by the following questions: (1) How do English teachers in two public schools in Bogor design their teaching modules based on the UbD framework? (2) To what extent do these teaching modules align with the key principles of UbD? (3) What challenges do teachers face in implementing UbD during the lesson planning process? (4) How does school policy influence the design and implementation of UbD-based lesson plans?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach using content analysis to examine the implementation of Understanding by Design (UbD) in English teaching modules. Content analysis, as defined by Krippendorff (1989) is a systematic, objective, and structured research technique that enables the extraction of accurate conclusions from verbal, visual, or written data to describe and measure specific phenomena. To enhance the depth of analysis, this study also incorporated semi-structured interviews with English teachers to gain insights into their perspectives, challenges, and experiences in designing lesson plans based on UbD.

The data were obtained from two English teaching modules developed by teachers from two different public schools. These schools were purposively selected using a criterion-based sampling method, with selection criteria including the degree of policy reinforcement related to Understanding by Design (UbD). One school was identified as having strong institutional support for UbD, evidenced by formal documentation and leadership initiatives, while the other had minimal to no explicit policy endorsement. This contrast enabled a meaningful comparison of how school leadership influences the practical implementation of UbD in curriculum planning. Although both schools are public institutions, their differing UbD orientations provided a rich context for analysis, while the public school setting ensures relevance to broader educational practices.

In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two English teachers who developed the modules. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted in person. The interviews explored several key themes: (1) teachers' understanding of UbD principles, (2) the process of developing lesson plans using the UbD framework, (3) challenges encountered in applying UbD, and (4) the influence of school policy and leadership on instructional design. Sample interview questions included: (a) How do you structure your lesson plans based on the

UbD framework? (b) What challenges do you face in aligning your lesson plans with UbD principles? (c) How does school policy support or hinder the implementation of UbD in lesson planning?

Both teachers held undergraduate degrees in English Education and had over five years of teaching experience. One teacher had previously attended UbD-specific training provided by the local education authority, while the other had no formal training but had received informal guidance from school leaders.

Regarding challenges, the teacher who developed Module B explained that although there was an initial intention to apply UbD principles thoroughly, limited emphasis on UbD in school policy and the absence of systematic monitoring weakened the motivation to explore and implement the framework deeply. The teacher stated, "*Actually, I wanted to implement UbD properly in the module, but because it was not emphasized in the school policy and there was no monitoring, I did not pursue deeper understanding about UbD. I wish the school would set clearer policies, monitor, and evaluate the implementation regularly so that teachers are motivated to apply the concepts seriously.*" This highlights the critical role of institutional support and oversight in sustaining effective instructional practices.

In contrast, the teacher who designed Module A reported that while the school environment was supportive, the main challenge lay in continuously improving the skills needed to design and implement UbD-based modules effectively. The teacher reflected, "*My challenge is how to further develop my skills in designing modules and applying them in the classroom. I realize that I need to keep learning to make the lessons even better aligned with UbD.*" This suggests that even in supportive environments, ongoing professional development and self-directed learning are essential for enhancing instructional quality. To provide a clear overview of the content analysis process, a structured analytical framework was adopted, following these steps:

Tabel 1. *The steps of data analysis*

Step	Description
1. Data Collection	Gathering English teaching modules from two public schools and conducting interviews with two English teachers
2. Data Coding	Identifying key themes based on UbD principles, categorizing lesson plan elements, and coding interview transcripts.
3. Thematic Analysis	Analyzing recurring patterns in module design and teacher responses to determine the level of UbD alignment.

4. Interpretation	Comparing findings with existing literature, assessing the influence of school policy, and drawing conclusions on UbD implementation.
-------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The modules were analyzed using six key UbD components: established goals, enduring understandings, essential questions, knowledge and skills, assessment evidence, and learning activities (Wiggins, 2005). The coding framework was reviewed by multiple researchers to ensure consistency and reliability.

The research followed a multi-step content analysis approach: (1) Module Collection – selecting two modules based on different school contexts; (2) Coding and Categorization – identifying relevant sections corresponding to UbD principles; (3) Analysis – assessing alignment with UbD; and (4) Synthesis – determining the effectiveness of UbD application.

To ensure reliability, inter-rater reliability was established through multiple researchers cross-checking the coding. Additionally, a triangulation process was conducted by comparing the module analysis with teacher interviews and classroom observations. This multi-method validation strengthened the credibility of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the learning objectives design

The table below presents the analysis of the aspects of learning objectives design using the indicators from the theory of Wiggins and McTighe (Wiggins, 2005), adjusted to align with the principles of Understanding by Design (UbD):

Table 2. The analysis of the learning objectives design

Backward Design Components	Module A	UbD Alignment (Module A)	Module B	UbD Alignment (Module B)
Module Description	Focuses on teaching procedural texts with the goal of helping students understand the social function, structure, and linguistic elements of procedural texts. Aligns with curriculum standards that emphasize understanding in factual, procedural, and conceptual contexts.	This module aligns with UbD as it starts with clear learning goals and objectives, focusing on factual, procedural, and conceptual understanding. However, some competencies need revision to fully align with government-set goals and objectives.	Focuses on mastering Simple Present Tense, including writing texts and engaging in conversations. The learning objectives are relevant to the English curriculum and standards.	The learning objectives focus on content-based skills without explicitly including deeper understanding aspects such as applying the social context of language.
Enduring Understandings	The main goal is for students to apply their understanding of procedural texts in various contexts, including the ability to create, analyze, and present procedural texts creatively.	Aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum by emphasizing critical, creative, and analytical thinking skills required for creating, analyzing, and presenting procedural texts, reflecting the Pancasila student profile.	Focuses on content-based skills such as creating texts and engaging in conversations. It does not explicitly include enduring understandings, such as why the use of Simple Present Tense is important in everyday communication.	The learning objectives and activities do not apply the concept of meaningful learning.
Essential Questions	Questions guiding the exploration of main ideas, like <i>“Have you ever not known how to make or operate something?”</i> focus on exploring meaning.	The essential questions in this module align with the Merdeka Curriculum concept of reflective questions that are relevant to real-life situations. These questions encourage students to think critically and understand broader concepts.	The module includes visual prompts and motivation before the main lessons but lacks explicit essential questions as seen in the Merdeka Curriculum.	The module does not include explicit essential questions or prompts like those found in the Merdeka Curriculum.
Knowledge and Skills	Emphasizes key skills such as creating procedural texts, analyzing the structure and linguistic aspects of the texts, and using technology for presenting the results. This includes knowledge of text structure, steps, and vocabulary usage, as well as technology skills.	Knowledge and skills in Module A align with the Merdeka Curriculum principles, supporting the development of literacy, technology, text analysis, and creativity. It focuses on practical and contextual skills.	The knowledge and skills in Module B are limited to general knowledge related to using Simple Present Tense and presenting information through group presentations. It teaches only knowledge of the material and does not integrate a deeper understanding of why	This module lacks critical thinking skills integration.

The Understanding by Design (UbD) framework, developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), has gained widespread adoption in instructional design, particularly in aligning teaching practices with clearly defined learning goals and assessments. The UbD approach is underpinned by backward design, which emphasizes starting with the end goals (desired learning outcomes) and then determining the appropriate assessments and instructional strategies to achieve those goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This framework helps address common pitfalls in traditional planning, such as focusing solely on content coverage or activities, without ensuring alignment with long-term learning objectives.

In this study, we analyzed two English teaching modules in terms of their alignment with UbD principles, specifically focusing on the components of Established Goals, Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions, and Knowledge and Skills. The findings reveal important differences in how each module aligns with the UbD framework and its suitability for the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to promote more personalized and competency-based learning.

Established goals

Module A explicitly outlines its learning goals, focusing on procedural texts and aiming for students to understand the social function, structure, and language elements of such texts. It is stated as one of the learning goal in Module A: "*Students are able to present the procedural text they have created, either individually or in groups, by utilizing technology and demonstrating curiosity, perseverance, responsibility, and a friendly/communicative attitude throughout the learning process.*" This excerpt demonstrates that the learning objective has been clearly and measurably formulated, covering skill aspects (presenting procedural texts), the use of technology as a learning tool, and attitudes that support the learning process. It aligns with the UbD principle that emphasizes clear, measurable learning objectives that guide both instruction and assessment. Desired results at the outset ensures that the learning experience is focused and coherent. However, while the module is generally aligned with the UbD framework, some revisions are necessary to better match the national curriculum standards for expected competencies.

In contrast, Module B's learning goals focus on content-based skills, such as constructing texts and engaging in conversations, without explicitly integrating the broader, conceptual understanding required by UbD. It is stated as one of the learning goal in Module B: "*Engaging in conversations to express personal identity, such as family members and their occupations*". The goal "Engaging in conversations to express personal identity, such as family members and their occupations" does not fully align with the UbD concept because it lacks clear, measurable criteria for success, making it difficult to assess students' performance accurately. It is also too broad and does not specify the expected level of skill or understanding. Furthermore, it focuses only on performing a task without emphasizing deeper understanding or the ability to transfer communication skills to real-world contexts. To meet UbD principles, learning objectives should be specific, observable, and designed to promote both skill mastery and meaningful application. Based on interviews with the teacher implementing Module B, it was found that the misalignment with UbD resulted from the teacher's misunderstanding of the concept of UbD. The teacher did not have significant concerns about the application of UbD principles and therefore did not seek further information on UbD implementation in the module. However, in actual teaching practice, the teacher focused on achieving the instructional goals, ensuring students could engage in structured activities related to the content objectives.

Observations in classrooms implementing Module A showed that students were able to perform procedural texts as journalists and content creators. They effectively demonstrated linguistic features, social functions, and rhetorical steps, producing acceptable outcomes as per the project initially designed by the teacher. This result indicates that Module A successfully supports students in achieving both conceptual understanding and practical application of the target language.

Conversely, in classrooms applying Module B, there was no observable end product. The students engaged in learning activities focused on understanding and using the Simple Present Tense but did not produce a final project that demonstrated their application of the language in meaningful ways. The assessment in Module B was conducted through observations of the

learning process rather than through project-based outcomes, which limited the ability to measure students' deeper understanding and application of the material. The lesson plan of Module A explicitly states its ultimate goal: "*Students are able to present the procedural text they have created, either individually or in groups, by utilizing technology and demonstrating curiosity, hard work, responsibility, and a friendly/communicative attitude throughout the learning process.*" Module B focuses on a narrower goal, emphasizing basic conversational skills, as exemplified in its stated objective: "*Engaging in conversations to express personal identity, such as family members and their occupations.*"

In contrast, Module A takes a broader approach by emphasizing the practical application of knowledge and skills in real-life contexts, making learning more meaningful and applicable beyond the classroom.

Enduring understandings

Module A places significant emphasis on helping students apply their understanding of procedural texts in various contexts, including creative production, analysis, and presentation of these texts. Classroom activities are explicitly focusing on "During the learning process of determining the range, number of classes, and intervals of grouped data, the teacher observes students' attitudes, including nationalism, discipline, self-confidence, honesty, resilience in facing challenges, responsibility, curiosity, and environmental awareness". This aligns with UbD's focus on enduring understandings, which are long-lasting, transferable concepts that students should retain and apply beyond the classroom (Sharma et al., 2023). This is particularly aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on fostering critical thinking and creativity, as noted by Satria (2022).

In contrast, Module B does not emphasize enduring understandings explicitly. While the module addresses specific skills (e.g., constructing texts), it lacks a broader, conceptual focus on why these skills are important in real-world communication, which is a critical aspect of UbD. This is consistent with the critique by Rachmawati & Fatayan (2024) and Wardana (2024) that many teachers struggle to connect content knowledge with broader conceptual understandings in UbD implementation.

Essential questions

Module A effectively employs reflective questions that engage students in exploring the broader significance of procedural texts, such as "Have you ever not known how to make or operate something?" These essential questions guide students towards deeper exploration of the subject matter and foster critical thinking, as required by UbD principles. As McTighe and Wiggins (2005) emphasize, essential questions should stimulate inquiry and help students engage with content in meaningful ways. Module A aligns well with this aspect of UbD, facilitating a reflective and student-centered learning process.

Module B, however, does not include explicit essential questions, a key component of UbD's emphasis on inquiry-based learning. This absence limits the potential for students to critically engage with the material and explore its relevance in real-life contexts, a point highlighted by Hehakaya (2022), who argue that the lack of essential questions can hinder the development of deep, meaningful learning experiences.

Knowledge and skills

Both modules emphasize skills such as constructing procedural texts and using technology for presentation, which is consistent with the Merdeka Curriculum's focus on practical, contextual learning. However, Module A goes further by integrating critical thinking skills and analysis of text structures, thus fostering higher-order thinking (Kuntari et al., 2019). Learning activities such as "conducting literacy activities by searching for and reading various references to analyze information and creating a summary with creativity" stimulate critical thinking skills. In contrast, the learning activities in Module B, such as "students watching a video, discussing its content, and creating a conversation," do not effectively support the development of critical thinking skills. The skills and knowledge in Module A align with the UbD framework's goal of preparing students for real-world challenges by focusing on transferable skills and problem-solving abilities.

In contrast, Module B lacks an explicit focus on critical thinking or deeper conceptual understanding, limiting its alignment with UbD's goal of fostering comprehensive, meaningful learning. Knowledge and skills should be taught in ways that connect with students' prior experiences and broader life contexts (Hattan et al., 2024), which is underdeveloped in Module B.

In conclusion, Module A largely aligns with the UbD framework, particularly in terms of clear learning goals, enduring understandings, and essential questions. Module B, on the other hand, demonstrates significant gaps in terms of UbD alignment, particularly in the areas of enduring understandings, essential questions, and the integration of critical thinking skills. This analysis highlights the importance of implementing UbD principles in designing English teaching modules

that support deep, conceptual learning and the development of 21st-century competencies.

Assessment analysis

The table below presents the analysis of the assessment evidence design aspects using the indicators from Wiggins and McTighe (2005) theory, aligned with the principles of Understanding by Design (UbD).

Table 3. *Assessment analysis*

Indicator	Module A Description	UbD Alignment (Module A)	Module B Description	UbD Alignment (Module B)
Thinking Like an Assessor	This module begins by considering assessment evidence that aligns with learning goals, using diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Assessment occurs through tasks such as creating and presenting procedural texts.	In this aspect, the assessment evidence aligns with UbD, as the designed assessments reflect the learning goals. The assessments are structured to assess students' understanding, particularly through tasks that require students to demonstrate their skills in writing and presenting procedural texts.	The module outlines various assessment indicators: the ability to write texts and discuss routine events with correct structure. Assessments reflect students' understanding of using the Simple Present Tense in different contexts, but the focus is on the final product (writing or speaking) rather than on students' thinking processes. There is no initial or formative assessment.	The designed assessments focus on evaluating students' final outputs (texts or speaking), but they do not incorporate critical thinking or ongoing assessment. There are no preliminary or formative assessments, which limits the ability to monitor students' learning progress continuously.
Validity and Reliability	The assessments designed by the teacher can inform the extent to which students understand the material, using group project assessments.	The assessments designed in this module are valid in terms of evaluating students' understanding of the subject matter, as they are based on a group project. However, the reliability of the assessment may be limited by the collaborative nature of the project, which could mask individual student performance.	The assessments described in Module B do not provide detailed individual feedback since they focus on group projects. This limits the assessment's ability to reliably reflect individual student understanding.	The reliability of the assessments in Module B could be questioned, especially since group work is the main form of assessment. The absence of more individualized assessment methods reduces the clarity of students' individual progress and understanding.
Authentic Assessment	This module uses authentic assessment through performance tasks, such as creating a procedural text and presenting it in a video project that students must upload to YouTube. The activity reflects real-world relevance.	The assessment in this module is considered authentic because the tasks ask students to apply their knowledge and skills in creating a video. This project-based assessment allows students to demonstrate both their practical and creative abilities, making it relevant to real-world communication and technology usage.	The module focuses on speaking and writing assessments for real-world situations or simulations. It directs students to use the Simple Present Tense in everyday contexts. However, the project-based tasks or real-life scenarios could be more complex and varied to further enhance authenticity.	While the tasks are relevant to real-world contexts, the module could benefit from more complex and multifaceted project-based assessments. Real-life simulations could be developed to offer students a more comprehensive and authentic learning experience.
Variety of Assessment Formats	The assessment format in this module is primarily based on group projects, with no quizzes, self-	The assessment format used in Module A is limited as it only relies on group projects, which	The module uses a variety of assessment methods, including observation, self-	The assessments in Module B rely heavily on written tests, and although they employ

	reflections, or enrichment activities. This format does not provide a comprehensive view of student understanding.	restricts the variety of ways to assess students' understanding. A more diverse range of assessment formats could provide a fuller picture of students' comprehension and skills.	assessment, written tests, and speaking practice. However, the use of written tests without rubrics limits the diversity and depth of the assessment formats.	various methods, they lack the variety needed to fully capture students' understanding. There is a need for a more robust integration of practical, interactive assessments.
Clear Assessment Criteria	The assessment criteria are clearly explained using detailed rubrics, covering aspects like the accuracy of text structure, social function, and language use. This ensures clarity in the assessment process.	The rubrics used in Module A align with UbD, as they are clear, detailed, and aligned with the learning goals. This transparency helps both students and teachers understand the expectations and assessment standards.	The module includes assessment criteria and rubrics, but the rubric for productive skills (writing and speaking) could be more explicit. This includes specifying what exactly is being evaluated (e.g., grammar accuracy, fluency, content relevance), which would make the assessment process more objective.	While Module B provides rubrics, they could be improved by making the assessment criteria for speaking and writing tasks more detailed. This would ensure that the assessment process is clear and objective, particularly for assessing complex skills like grammar, fluency, and content relevance.

Based on Table 3above, the researcher has analyzed the assessments of teaching modules using the Understanding by Design (UbD) principles, and several important aspects have been highlighted.

Thinking like an assessor

In this aspect, Module A adheres well to UbD principles by designing assessment evidence that aligns with the learning objectives. This module employs both formative and summative assessments, incorporating projects such as creating and presenting procedural texts, which align with UbD principles which emphasizes beginning with clear learning goals, followed by assessments designed to measure student understanding comprehensively.

Recent studies highlight the essential role of formative assessment in fostering active learning and meaningful student engagement (Muafa & Lestariningsih, 2025; Veerasamy et al., 2022; Yan, 2022). Other researches (Andrade & Heritage, n.d.; Clark, 2012; Granberg et al., 2021) underscore that formative assessments, when effectively implemented, enhance metacognition and self-regulated learning, allowing students to reflect on their progress and make adjustments accordingly. Formative test proves to have the strong contribution to students' understanding (Arrafii & Sumarni, 2018; Gloria & Sudarmin, 2018; Lumpkin, 2022) Module A aligns with these principles by integrating formative assessments that provide students with timely feedback,

fostering deeper conceptual understanding. Moreover, authentic assessment—such as project-based learning—has been shown to improve student motivation and real-world application of knowledge (Yan, 2022). By engaging students in tasks that mimic professional and real-life contexts, Module A enhances learning transferability, ensuring that students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills applicable beyond the classroom. It allows students to construct, manage, and present content in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their learning objectives.

In contrast, Module B focuses on speaking and writing skills, which reflect students' understanding in a simplified context. Module B does not include formative or diagnostic assessments, either in the assessment section or throughout the learning process. The summative assessment in Module B is presented only after the learning activity, which does not reflect the UbD principle of continuous assessment and feedback. As noted by Resa (2023), UbD design highlights the importance of continuous assessment and feedback to ensure that learning is progressing as planned. Thus, the lack of formative assessments in Module B detracts from its alignment with UbD principles.

Validity and reliability

The validity and reliability of assessments in Module A, which uses group projects, may not be

effective in assessing individual students' abilities in detail. According to Damayanti (2024), assessments should reflect individual learning progress and achievement. While group projects promote collaboration, they cannot provide a clear picture of individual student comprehension. On the other hand, Module B uses observation, written tests, and conversation to assess students, but the assessment criteria need further clarification to improve reliability. As Keeling (2020) suggests, clear and well-defined criteria are essential for ensuring the reliability of assessment results and making objective decisions.

Authentic assessment and students' outcome

In terms of authentic assessment, Module A demonstrates real-world relevance by requiring students to create a video presentation of procedural texts to be uploaded on YouTube. This aligns with UbD's focus on applying knowledge to real-world contexts, transfer, and authenticity (Domogen, 2023; Lowell & Tagare, 2023). By requiring students to engage in activities they might encounter in real-life settings (Ajjawi et al., 2024; Ukashatu et al., 2021). Module A fosters deeper understanding and practical application of skills.

Module B attempts to create real-life relevance by using images to provide context for the use of Simple Present Tense, but the assessment only measures students' knowledge and does not fully represent real-life scenarios. As Kuhn (2021) point out, authentic assessments should involve complex real-world tasks, not just measure basic knowledge, to reflect a more complete understanding. Module A employs authentic assessment through real-world tasks, such as requiring students to create and present procedural texts in a video project. The results indicate that students in this class demonstrate the ability to perform procedural text tasks as journalists and content creators, effectively utilizing linguistic features, social functions, and rhetorical steps. This suggests that the initial project design by the teacher successfully guided students toward meaningful learning and skill development. Authentic assessment in Module A positively impacts student performance, as students can apply their learning in real-world contexts, reinforcing UbD's emphasis on transferable knowledge.

Conversely, in the class implementing Module B, students did not produce an end product, as the module lacked an authentic assessment component. The assessment in Module B was

primarily conducted through observation of the learning process rather than through performance-based tasks. This absence of authentic assessment may have limited students' ability to apply their knowledge in practical, meaningful ways.

Variety of assessment formats

Module A uses group projects for summative assessments, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of student progress. According to Sujata Bharti (2024) and Domogen (2023) it is essential to use diverse assessment formats to capture a more holistic picture of student abilities. Incorporating various formats such as written tests, self-reflection, and practical assessments would provide a better understanding of student learning.

Similarly, Module B relies solely on written tests for assessment, limiting its ability to assess students' full understanding. Written tests do not fully capture practical skills or the ability to apply language in real-life situations, as Garrison (2021) and Paramole & Adeoye (2024) emphasized. Therefore, adding more varied assessment formats would better reflect students' overall understanding.

One significant gap in both modules is the lack of emphasis on formative assessment. Formative assessment is a crucial element of UbD because it provides continuous feedback, allowing teachers to make instructional adjustments based on student progress (Black & Wiliam, 2004, 2009; Paramole & Adeoye, 2024). This type of assessment fosters active learning by engaging students in self-reflection and guiding their learning processes. Without formative assessment, students may not receive timely interventions to address misunderstandings, which can hinder deeper learning and long-term retention of knowledge.

Clear assessment criteria

Module A uses clear and detailed rubrics that include key aspects such as text structure accuracy and language use. This aligns with UbD principles, as clear rubrics allow students to understand the expectations for their performance and receive more effective feedback (Olson & Krysiak, 2021; Taylor et al., 2024). By using rubrics that are detailed and measurable, Module A ensures that assessments are aligned with learning goals and objectives.

On the other hand, Module B only provides a general assessment grid, lacking clear rubrics for productive skills like speaking and writing. As (Popham, 2020) suggests, having clear and explicit

rubrics is critical for ensuring objectivity and transparency in assessments. Without detailed rubrics, assessments may lack consistency and lead to subjective evaluations

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significance of the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework in shaping effective and meaningful English instructional design. An in-depth comparison of two teaching modules from public schools in Bogor reveals a clear contrast in how UbD principles are applied. Module A demonstrates strong alignment with the UbD framework, particularly in articulating measurable learning goals, fostering enduring understandings, posing essential questions, and implementing authentic assessments. The learning activities in Module A not only promote critical thinking and real-world application but are also supported by a well-structured system of formative and summative assessments that reflect the core tenets of backward design.

On the other hand, Module B shows limited adherence to UbD principles, with goals that are less specific and assessments that lack authenticity and clear rubrics. The module's focus on content delivery and basic language tasks, without integrating broader conceptual understanding or performance-based assessment, limits its effectiveness in achieving deep, transferable learning. Teacher interviews revealed that this misalignment was largely due to a lack of understanding and training in UbD, further highlighting the importance of professional development in successful curriculum implementation.

Crucially, the study also finds that the effectiveness of UbD implementation is significantly shaped by school leadership and policy. Module A was developed in a school where leadership actively supported UbD as a strategic priority, resulting in greater teacher engagement, clearer instructional design, and more meaningful student outcomes. In contrast, Module B was created in a school where, despite national policy support for UbD, leadership did not emphasize its integration into lesson planning. This divergence illustrates that without strong, visionary leadership, even well-intentioned educational reforms may fail to translate into classroom practice. School leaders who prioritize UbD provide the necessary institutional support, training opportunities, and pedagogical guidance

that enable teachers to implement UbD effectively, ultimately leading to more impactful teaching and learning.

These findings have important implications for teacher development policy. To ensure the successful adoption of UbD and similar innovative instructional frameworks, it is critical that educational authorities not only mandate curriculum reforms but also invest in continuous, targeted professional development programs. Policies should support the establishment of structured training, ongoing mentoring, collaborative planning time, and systematic evaluation of teaching practices aligned with UbD principles. Empowering teachers through sustained professional growth initiatives will enhance their capacity to design high-quality learning experiences, thereby bridging the gap between educational policy and classroom reality.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our research team, including the dedicated faculty members of Teacher Training and Education of Ibn Khaldun University Bogor and students, whose contributions and unwavering support have been instrumental in the completion of this article.

REFERENCES

- Ajjawi, R., Tai, J., Dollinger, M., Dawson, P., Boud, D., & Bearman, M. (2024). From authentic assessment to authenticity in assessment: broadening perspectives. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 49(4), 499–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2271193>
- Alvarez Llerena, C. L. (2020). The Benefits of backward design in the English as a foreign language context. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 7(2)(2), 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v7i1.17785>
- Alvarez-Llerena, C. L., Coutinho dos Santos, J., Vélez Sacoto, D. E., & Vera Balbuca, J. M. (2023). Exploring the application of the backward design model in EFL classrooms: Teachers' perceptions and practices. *Research, Society and Development*, 12(4), e14912441102. <https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v12i4.41102>
- Andrade, H. L., & Heritage, M. (n.d.). *Using formative assessment to enhance learning, achievement, and academic self-regulation*.
- Annet, K. A. (2024). The role of government in promoting educational equity. *Research Output Journal of Education*, 4(3), 46–50. <https://doi.org/10.59298/ROJE/2024/434650>
- Antari, N. L. S. (2021). An analysis of lesson plans for learning english in the senior high school. *JLLS*, 1(1).

- Aristanti, A. P., & F. A. (2024). The effect of the UbD-based problem-based learning model on the critical thinking skills of Grade IV students in IPAS subject at elementary school. *Mimbar Sekolah Dasar*, 11(2).
- Arrafii, M. A., & Sumarni, B. (2018). Teachers' understanding of formative assessment. *Lingua Cultura*, 12(1), 45. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i1.2113>
- Aslam, A., Ahamd, S., Siller, H.-S., & Nasreen, A. (2024). Impact of the understanding by design model on the science academic achievement of fifth grade students in Pakistan. *Asia-Pacific Science Education*, 10(1), 113–153. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23641177-bja10078>
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2004). The formative purpose: Assessment must first promote learning. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 103(2), 20–50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-7984.2004.tb00047.x>
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 5–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9068-5>
- Chaisa, P., & Chinokul, S. (2021). Effects of reading instruction using backward design framework and citizenship theme to enhance english reading comprehension and social responsibility of tenth-grade Thai EFL students. In *Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network* (Vol. 14, Issue 1). <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/index>
- Clark, I. (2012). Formative Assessment: Assessment Is for Self-regulated Learning. *Educational Psychology Review*, 24(2), 205–249. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-011-9191-6>
- Coles, J. (2024). *Supporting schools: How government can do a better job*. <https://unitedlearning.org.uk/Portals/0/unitedthinking/Supporting-Schools.pdf>
- Damayanti, I., & U. N. (2024). *Penilaian pembelajaran dalam pendidikan: Konsep dan implementasi*. Universitas Gadjah Mada Press.
- Dano Ali, Y. N. (2023). Application of backward design in the implementation of curriculum management. *Inovasi Kurikulum*, 20(1), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jik.v20i1.54438>
- Domogen, J. C. (2023). Authenticity in language learning: A study of language materials in public high schools. *OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 17(2), 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v17i2.8577>
- Farhang, Asst. Prof. Q., Hashemi, Asst. Prof. S. S. A., & Ghorianfar, Asst. Prof. S. M. (2023). Lesson plan and its importance in teaching process. *international journal of current science research and review*, 06(08). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V6-i8-57>
- Fullan, M. (2021). *The new meaning of educational change (5th ed.)*. Teachers College Press.
- Garrison, D. R., A. T., & A. W. (2021). *Critical thinking, collaboration, and interaction in online education: A conceptual framework*. Routledge.
- Gloria, R. Y., & Sudarmin, S. (2018). Kontribusi asesmen formatif dalam tahapan understanding by design terhadap pemahaman mahasiswa calon guru biologi. *Jurnal Bioedukatika*, 6(2), 67. <https://doi.org/10.26555/bioedukatika.v6i2.9507>
- Granberg, C., Palm, T., & Palmberg, B. (2021). A case study of a formative assessment practice and the effects on students' self-regulated learning. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 68, 100955. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100955>
- Gunartha, W., Widiastri, D. A., & Suarsa, N. (2024). *Pedalitra IV: Seminar Nasional Bahasa*. 4(1).
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 30(2), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632431003663214>
- Hattan, C., Alexander, P. A., & Lupo, S. M. (2024). Leveraging what students know to make sense of texts: what the research says about prior knowledge activation. *Review of Educational Research*, 94(1), 73–111. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543221148478>
- Hehakaya, N., & P. D. (2022). Challenges in implementing Understanding by design framework in Indonesian secondary education. *Journal of Educational Research*, 58(2), 235–250.
- Hopkins, D., & Levin, B. (2000). Government Policy and School Development. *School Leadership & Management*, 20(1), 15–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430068851>
- Huzefa. (2024, July 7). *The Importance of Effective Lesson Planning*. Cambridge.
- Idzni Suryana, S., Reizal, H., Sobari, T., & Siliwangi Indonesia, I. (2025). Integrating understanding by design (ubd) into elementary science learning: a study on teacher and student responses. *Primaryedu: Journal of Elementary Education*, 9(1). <https://e-journal.stkipsiliwangi.ac.id/index.php/primaryedu/>
- Iqbal, Md. H., Siddiqie, S. A., & Mazid, Md. A. (2021). Rethinking theories of lesson plan for effective teaching and learning. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 4(1), 100172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100172>
- Jensen, J. L., Bailey, E. G., Kummer, T. A., & Weber, K. S. (2017). Using backward design in education research: a research methods essay. *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.1128/jmbe.v18i3.1367>
- Joshi, S. P. (2021). Evaluation of the implementation of understanding by design processes in select Minnesota public schools (Culminating Projects in Education Administration and Leadership. In *Culminating Projects in Education*

Nanik Retnowati, Pham Thi Thu Hien, Maulidia Rachmawati Nur, Linda, Tsaniatul Fatiha, Lutfio Indra Permana

School leadership and policy in implementing understanding by design: A comparative case study in english teaching modules

- Administration and Leadership*, No. 82. St. Cloud State University.
- Keeling, R. (2020). *Assessment and learning: A practical guide for educators*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kemendikbud. (2022). *Kurikulum Merdeka sebagai strategi pemulihan pembelajaran*.
- Krippendorff, K. (1989). *Content Analysis*. http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers
- Kuhn, D. , P. M. , & O. S. (2021). *Critical thinking and the role of authentic learning: Bridging the gap*. Oxford University Press.
- Kuntari, F. R., Rondonuwu, F. S., & Sudjito, D. N. (2019). Understanding by Design (UbD) for the physics learning about parabolic motion. *Jurnal Penelitian Fisika Dan Aplikasinya (JPFA)*, 9(1), 32. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jpfa.v9n1.p32-43>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Lowell, V. L., & Tagare, D. (2023). Authentic learning and fidelity in virtual reality learning experiences for self-efficacy and transfer. *Computers & Education: X Reality*, 2, 100017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cexr.2023.100017>
- Lumpkin, A. (2022). Checking for understanding strategies using formative assessments for student learning. *Global Research in Higher Education*, 5(1), p50. <https://doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v5n1p50>
- Mahkamova, D. (2000). The importance of lesson planning in teaching. *European Journal of Research Development and Sustainability*. <https://www.scholarzest.com>
- Muafa, A., & Lestariningsih, W. (2025). Formative assessment strategies to increase student participation and motivation. *Science and Education*, 4, 195–199.
- Olson, J. M., & Krysiak, R. (2021). *Rubrics as tools for effective assessment of student learning and program quality* (pp. 173–200). <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7653-3.ch010>
- Ozyurt, M., Kan, H., & Kiyikci, A. (2021). The effectiveness of understanding by design model in science teaching: a quasi-experimental study. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 21(94). <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2021.94.1>
- Pal, D., Taywade, M., & Alekhya, G. (2022). Designing a comprehensive lesson plan. *Current Medical Issues*, 20(1), 48–51. https://doi.org/10.4103/cmi.cmi_83_21
- Paramole, O. C., & Adeoye, M. A. (2024). Reassessing standardized tests: Evaluating their effectiveness in school performance measurement. *Curricula: Journal of Curriculum Development*, 3(2), 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.17509/curricula.v3i2.74535>
- Popham, W. J. (2020). *Classroom assessment: What teachers need to know*. Pearson.
- PowerDMS. (2020). *Importance of clear policies and procedures in schools*.
- Rahmawaty, A. T., & Fatayan, A. (2024). *Implementasi merdeka belajar dalam pengembangan kurikulum berbasis understanding by design di sekolah dasar*. 5(5). <https://doi.org/10.38035/jmpis>
- Resa, A. (2023). Implementasi kurikulum merdeka berdasarkan pendekatan understanding by design. *Jurnal Primary*, 4(1), 1–8.
- Retnowati, N., Rahmawati, M., Hidayat, N. S., Paradigma, M., & Paulina, M. (2025). Teachers' perspectives on the use of understanding by design (UBD) in secondary school lesson planning. *Educate*, 10(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.32832/educate.v10i1.18802>
- Satria, M. , W. S. , & H. S. (2022). The impact of Merdeka curriculum on student engagement and learning motivation. *Journal of Curriculum Development and Instruction*, 28(4), 230–245.
- Shahzad, M. F., Xu, S., Lim, W. M., Yang, X., & Khan, Q. R. (2024). Artificial intelligence and social media on academic performance and mental well-being: Student perceptions of positive impact in the age of smart learning. *Heliyon*, 10(8). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29523>
- Sharma, A., Thakur, K., Kapoor, D. S., & Singh, K. J. (2023). *Promoting deeper, meaningful learning in the contemporary educational landscape* (pp. 112–152). <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-8208-7.ch005>
- Sujata Bharti. (2024). Assessment of students by using tools to assess the holistic performance of students at primary level of students. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Arts, Science and Technology*, 2(5), 10–18. <https://doi.org/10.61778/ijmrast.v2i5.57>
- Taiyabi, A. (2021). Understanding by design: A backward approach to effective instruction. *Journal of Educational Design*, 36(2), 85–98.
- Taylor, B., Kisby, F., & Reedy, A. (2024). Rubrics in higher education: an exploration of undergraduate students' understanding and perspectives. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 49(6), 799–809. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2023.2299330>
- Tshering, S. (2022). The impact of using understanding by design (UbD) model on class 10 student's achievement in chemistry. *IJCER (International Journal of Chemistry Education Research)*, 29–33. <https://doi.org/10.20885/ijcer.vol6.iss1.art4>
- Ukashatu, A., Suleiman, M. M., & Mahmoud, M. (2021). 73 | *JISAE (Journal of Indonesian Student Assessment and Evaluation)* | Volume 7 Number 2 *Emerging Issues In Educational Measurement: Authentic Assessment*. 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.21009/JISAE>

- Utami, A. A., & Bram, B. (2023). Backward design implementation in english as a foreign language (EFL) context. *JET: Journal of Education and Teaching*, 4(1), 12–23. <https://doi.org/10.51454/jet.v4i1.211>
- Veerasamy, A. K., Laakso, M. J., & D'Souza, D. (2022). Formative assessment tasks as indicators of student engagement for predicting at-risk students in programming courses. *Informatics in Education*, 21(2), 375–393. <https://doi.org/10.15388/infedu.2022.15>
- Wardana, I. K. (2024). Teaching english through UbD: Challenges of Indonesian pre-service teachers. *Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP*, 11(2), 170. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v11i2.13285>
- Wiggins, G. , & M. J. (2005). *Understanding by design*.
- Yan, Z. (2022). *Student self-assessment as a process for learning*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003162605>
- Yen, A. C. (2024). Enhancing english comprehension: a UbD mind walker intervention for remote upper-grade elementary students. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-024-00267-z>

Nanik Retnowati, Pham Thi Thu Hien, Maulidia Rachmawati Nur, Linda, Tsaniatul Fatiha, Lutfio Indra Permana

School leadership and policy in implementing understanding by design: A comparative case study in english teaching modules