THE BENEFITS OF BACKWARD DESIGN IN THE ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The Backward Design Model (BDM) is a curriculum approach in language teaching, which begins with the specification of learning outcomes that are the basis for developing instructional processes and input (Richards, 2013). This study aims to display a theoretical analysis of how the integration of the BDM has impacted English as a Foreign Language class. Thus, this study provides the results of reviewing research-based articles about how the integration of the BDM has benefited EFL teachers and students. These benefits are related to the main elements of the BDM, namely, designing learning to provide enduring understandings, assessing students' performance based on acceptable evidence, and planning learning experiences and instructions based on desirable outcomes. The results indicated that the BDM indeed brought benefits to EFL teachers and students, revealing that this model's efficient application can help (a) teachers better understand the procedural knowledge of learning and (b) students improve their English language skills.

Key Words: Backward Design; EFL; English learning; curriculum design

ABSTRAK

Backward Design Model merupakan pendekatan kurikulum dalam pengajaran bahasa yang diawali dengan spesifikasi hasil belajar yang menjadi dasar untuk pegembangan proses dan masukan pembelajaran (Richards, 2013). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menampilkan analisis teoritis tentang bagaimana integrasi Backward Design Model (BDM) berdampak pada kelas bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Penelitian ini merupakan hasil dari telaah artikel berbasis penelitian tentang bagaimana integrasi BDM bermanfaat bagi para guru dan siswa EFL. Manfaat ini berkaitan dengan elemen utama BDM yaitu merancang pembelajaran untuk pemahaman yang bertahan lama, penilaian kinerja siswa berdasarkan bukti yang dapat diterima, dan merencanakan pengalaman dan instruksi pembelajaran berdasarkan hasil yang diinginkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa BDM memang membawa manfaat bagi para guru dan siswa. Hasil penelitian juga mengungkapkan bahwa penerapan model yang efisien ini membantu para guru untuk memiliki pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang pengetahuan prosedural pembelajaran dan juga membantu siswa untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris mereka.

Kata Kunci: Backward Design; EFL; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Desain Kurikulum

INTRODUCTION

During the last decades, curriculum design has been addressed as one of the fundamental pillars of language learning. Alsubaie (2016) stated that an effective curriculum design involves teaching aspects such as goals, objectives, learning experiences, instructional resources, and assessment for a specific educational program. However, language teachers have been experiencing a top-down curriculum change where teachers' and students' needs and wants are not considered when developing a new curriculum (Rahimi & Alavi, 2017).

Concerning the EFL curriculum, designing and implementing the curriculum at the school level have remained a problematic issue (Pérez, Rey, & Rosado, 2019). Due to this matter, the present study provides an alternative for English language teachers to narrow down the bridge between the language national curriculum policies and the teaching-learning process according to each school's reality.

Richards (2013) stated that forward, central, and backward design are the three curriculum models applied in language teaching. The author also explained that each curriculum model differs concerning how the input, process, and outcomes are addressed to achieve students' learning outcomes.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) introduced the Backward Design Model (BDM) as an approach to curriculum development, where the learning outcomes are the foremost aspects of planning. The researchers also stated that BDM refers to planning by thinking backward by establishing the desired results or learning outcomes before choosing the forms of assessment and instructional methodologies to be applied in the learning process.

Aiming to provide a better explanation of the principal purpose of the BDM, researchers have applied various analogies such as planning the purchase of a house or going on vacation (Clayton, 2011; Fox & Doherty, 2012). Through these analogies, the researchers linked the backward design planning with people's experiences, where, to achieve those big goals, they have to start with the big idea first before thinking about how they will accomplish those aims. Therefore, BDM advocates teachers should begin planning based on the desired results or learning outcomes they expect from their students before thinking about the activities and learning experiences they will apply in their teaching instruction.

Wiggins and McTighe (1998) established three stages when planning backward. The first stage deals with identifying the desired results or big ideas based on skills, understandings, and knowledge teachers want their students to achieve. These desired results are based on performance tasks defined as authentic tasks where students demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and skills by performing real or simulated tasks to an identified audience (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The second stage focuses on determining assessment evidence to validate and check if students have acquired enough knowledge and understandings to achieve the desired results established in stage one. This stage deals with integrating different instruments to assess students' performance during the process of learning.

Finally, the third stage emphasizes learning experiences and instruction that teachers will apply to lead students to achieve the desired results. In this stage, teachers prioritize the content to be taught and choose the learning experiences that students will do during the unit or course to develop the performance tasks.

Planning the BDM is based on designing unit plans. Yurtseven and Altun (2017) explained that unit plans are templates that cover the three main stages of the BDM. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) indicated that the first part of the unit plan focuses on the desired results based on students' knowledge in new learning and authentic situations. Moreover, concepts of knowledge, understanding, and essential questions are integrated into this stage's main aspects.

The second part of the unit plan is called evidence. In this stage, the performance task and other assessment aspects are integrated to check students' progress during learning. Finally, the third stage is called the learning plan. In this stage, the teachers decided which content, strategies, techniques, materials, and learning experiences will be applied during the learning process to assist students in achieving desired results.

These desired results deal with applying the performance task to transfer their knowledge to new contexts; thus, transferability is considered one of the main foundations of the BDM. Childre, Sands, and Pope (2009) explained that transferring knowledge into the BDM focuses on how students show their long-term understanding by using their knowledge and skills to achieve the desired results established in the unit plan.

This paper focuses on answering the following question: What benefits teachers and students obtain by applying the Backward Design Model in English as foreign language contexts? Henceforward, this study explores research carried out in the primary, secondary, and university education to connect and delineate the benefits teachers and students have acquired by integrating the backward design model in the EFL teaching-learning process.

METHOD

This study proposes a theoretical analysis of the content of empirical articles that focused on applying the BDM in EFL contexts. McCusker and Gunaydin (2014) stated that qualitative research aims to understand social life, and its methods generate words as data for analysis. Hence, this proposed study focused on a qualitative methodology based on document analysis of the gathered anticipated data.

According to Wach and Ward (2013), document analysis is a qualitative research method that analyses rigorously and systematically the content of written documents. Bowen (2009) stated that the document analysis focuses on reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents to understand or develop empirical knowledge based on this

analysis. In this study, ten articles in total, ranging from 2015 to 2020, were chosen to be analyzed. The process of examining documents followed the six steps suggested by Wach and Ward (2013) that include:

Setting inclusion criteria of documents

The requirements established for selecting articles were based on three aspects. Firstly, the chosen articles had to be related to the application of the BDM in EFL contexts. Secondly, the papers had to be part of electronic educational sources that belong to indexed journals. Thirdly, the date of the articles selected had to range from 2015 to 2020.

Collecting documents

Eleven articles that accomplished the established requirements were chosen. All of them from educational and linguistics journals specifically (1) Journal of Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, (2) International Journal of Linguistics, (3) SAGE Journals, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, (4) NECTEL Review: A Journal for K-16+ Foreign Language Educators, (5) International Journal of Instruction, (6) Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research, Journal of Education and Training Studies, (7) Journal of Education and Training Studies, (8) Journal of College

Education, (9) Perfusion Journal, (10) Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Research, and (11) New Waves Educational Research & Development.

Articulating key areas of analysis

In this step, the chosen articles were shown to articulate two main themes: integrating the BDM to assist EFL teachers' procedural knowledge of learning and improving students' English skills.

Analysis of the content

The eleven studies were coded and shared with another researcher who verified the documents' consistency. The author analyzed the data from the eleven studies through comparison and interpretation to determine themes based on the benefits of integrating the BDM model into EFL contexts. Findings from this process are presented in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents and explains the outcomes of this study that collects the benefits of integrating the BDM in EFL contexts. Findings from the electronic sources, mentioned in the methods parts, were gathered into themes, and they are detailed in the following explanation:

The Backward Design Model in EFL Education

Curriculum design is one of the fundamental pillars of education. In language teaching programs, Richards (2013) stated that curriculum design is branched into three approaches: forward, central, and backward design. The researcher also indicated that each curriculum differs from how the syllabus is addressed in connection with input and methodology to achieve students' learning outcomes:

Figure 1. The Backward Desing Process (Richards, 2013)

Whitehouse (2014) indicated that BDM in language learning provides a framework for curriculum planning that can be applied at the unit, course, or school level. In the same way, McTighe and Thomas (2003) emphasized the importance of using the BDM to help teachers develop unit plans or course designs that focused mainly on the learning outcomes that they expect from their students' learning process.

During the last decade, much empirical research has been conducted

to discover how the integration of the backward design model benefits EFL teachers and students.

Benefits of applying the Backward Design Model in EFL Teaching

In EFL teaching, Wiggins and McTighe (1998) indicated that the backward design model supports teachers to establish curricular priorities and syllabus expectations. Furthermore, Siddeg (2016) manifested that BDM is a useful model that provides teachers with the opportunity to craft learning outcomes by designing a flexible and easy unit plan or course plan template.

In terms of pedagogical instruction, Brown (2004) claimed that a successful implementation of the backward design model could support teachers in enhancing their instructional activities, promoting students' understanding, and expanding the range of assessments to monitor students' achievements. Likewise, the BDM allows teachers to reflect on their pedagogical practices to be aware of which aspects of the unit plan were efficient applied, which elements need to be improved, and which ones have to be changed in futures contexts (Whitehouse, 2014; Fox & Doherty, 2012).

Backward Design Model in Foreign Language Curriculum Development

Korotchenko et al. (2015) conducted this study in a polytechnic university in Russia to students of the 3rd, 4th, and 5th years of education in 2015. This study focused on applying the backward design model and its principal characteristic stages of finding advantages and difficulties that may occur during this implementation. The results indicated that the backward design model helped foreign language teachers build massive bridges between state educational standards, students' needs, learning outcomes, and curriculum content. Besides, the research indicated that applying the backward design model was a successful experience for teachers and students because it reduced negative aspects that impede students' academic progress in foreign language acquisition.

Backward Design unit plan to enhance instructional activities

As mentioned before, designing unit plans based on the backward design model template is crucial. In 2017, Jennifer Eddy wrote an article called Unpacking the Standards for Transfer: Intercultural Competency by Design. Her study focused on describing language curriculum articulation with performance transfer

tasks based on applying the BDM. The researcher indicated that the unit plan is based on the integration of the three central aspects of the backward design model, namely (1) Identify Desired Results, (2) Determine Acceptable Evidence, and (3) Learning experiences and Instructions. Thus, the researcher stated that designing a unit plan helps teachers and instructional leaders follow and maintain articulation on the planning goals and the transfer tasks that students will develop during the learning process.

Backward Design to Develop Service-Learning in Preparation

Jozwik, Lin, and Cuenca-Carlino wrote this article in 2017. It aimed at reporting the effectiveness of the application of the BDM to develop and implement a service-learning project. Thirty-seven teachers participated in this action research that was carried out in the United States of America. This study focused on the teachers' application of the BDM principles to design a unit plan. The teachers' unit plans' principal components were: Focus on the Project: Literacy Tutoring, Goals of the Project and Desired Outcomes, Assessment of Students' Growth and Leaning, Project Activities and Implementation Plan, and Demonstration and Celebration.

Upon the completion of the service-learning project, the researchers stated three main benefits. First, designing unit plans based on the BDM allowed teachers to fulfil the established goals. Second, by applying the BDM unit plans, teachers could reflect on their teaching practices' weaknesses and strengths. Finally, with the integration of the BDM, teachers and community stakeholders reported satisfaction with the projects' goals, procedures, and outcomes.

Backward Design Model: Teachers' professional development

Yurtseven and Altun wrote Understanding by Design (UbD) in EFL Teaching in 2017. It focused on investigating the change the BDM made on teachers' professional development and students' achievements. This action research was conducted with ten teachers and 436 students from a state university in Turkey.

This study showed that implementing the backward design model had a positive impact on teachers' professional development. First, the researchers mentioned that designing the unit plan based on the BDM allowed teachers to improve their pedagogical instructions by having a clear idea of how the instruction will be conducted. Second, by implementing the unit plan, teachers could improve

their time management, prioritize content to be covered, and provide enriching materials and activities to help students achieve the desired results.

Benefits of applying the Backward Design Model in EFL Learning

In the English as a Foreign Language learning setting, performance tasks based on the unit plan from the BDM have been applied to efficiently integrate students' knowledge into real-life situations (Manzano, 1992). By developing performance tasks, students interact, collaborate, and create final products based on the desired results established for each unit plan (Daughtery, 2006).

Impact of BDM on improving learners' writing ability

This paper was written by Hossein Hossein, Azizeh Chalak, and Biria in 2019. This study's main focus was to determine whether the integration of the BDM significantly improves Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. One hundred students participated in this research, divided into control and experimental groups. The control group received writing instruction through the forward or traditional design during the experimental group through the integration of the BDM.

After comparing the pre- and post-task of the control and experimental groups, the researchers indicated that the BDM was pedagogically superior to the traditional model in improving Iranian EFL learners' writing ability. In terms of enhancing writing abilities, the researchers stated that the experimental group learners experienced significant improvements in their pre and post-test scores, which indicate the effectiveness of the BDM in boosting EFL learners' writing abilities.

Effect of the BDM on L2 Reading Comprehension

Maryam Hodaeian and Reza Biria conducted this study in 2015. This study determined whether the application of the BDM significantly affects intermediate EFL learners' reading comprehension. The investigation was conducted in Iran with 150 EFL students from a private institute. Control and experimental groups were assigned to this study.

The researchers indicated a significant increase between the experimental group's pre and post-test based on the comparison between the control group's pre and post-test. Thus, EFL learners from the experimental group obtained better results, which indicates that they were more successful in reading comprehension by implementing the BDM. Furthermore,

the researchers stated that the application of the BDM provided opportunities to achieve a deep understanding of texts and outcomes in real contexts. Finally, the researchers indicated that future research could be replicated with other groups in other skills such as listening and speaking in view of these benefits observed in this study.

Using Performance Tasks based on the BDM for Developing EFL Listening Skills

This study was conducted by Osama Mohamed Abd El Ghany, Salem Mahmoud, Magdy Amin, and Abdelatif El Shazly Yousif in 2019. It focused on investigating the effects of using performance tasks on developing EFL listening comprehension skills. The participants were sixty students from an Egyptian preparatory school. Thirty students were assigned to be part of the experimental group, while the other thirty belonged to the control group. The experimental group received instruction using performance tasks, whereas the control group was continued having the same learning procedures.

Results from this study showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group. The experimental group obtained better results in their listening comprehension skills. Furthermore, the researchers indicated that the performance tasks' effectiveness could be attributed to authentic materials, the integration of updated information about the topic, and monitoring their own progress in the topic. The researchers recommended that teachers should be trained to use performance tasks to provide students with more opportunities to practice listening comprehension skills in a friendly and supportive learning environment.

Students' Foreign Language Motivation and Views of Applying the BDM

Nihal Yurtseven and Sertel Altun conducted this study in 2016. It aimed to investigate students' language learning motivation and teachers' views about integrating the BDM into their lessons. Ten teachers and 436 students from Turkey participated in this action research; students were divided into treatment and control groups while teachers were trained about the BDM. Findings display some benefits of the application of the BDM in foreign language learning. First, the study indicated that BDM implementation increased students' foreign language learning motivation. Moreover, the BDM provided an opportunity for going beyond the traditional

coursebook coverage, which had a positive influence on students' motivation. Finally, the researchers stated that integrating performance tasks allowed students to develop their speaking skills.

3.5 Integrating the BDM to improve 21st Century capabilities

In 2018, Susan Drake and Johanne Reid published research that provides different integrated curriculum models and the backward design planning process to create rich learning situations where students can improve their 21st Century competencies. The researchers indicated that curriculum integration offers an effective way to teach 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creative thinking, citizenship, and communication transcend disciplines.

They also stated that the BDM is a design process that helps teachers and curriculum designers make this curricular integration easier by focusing on big ideas or desired results that students must achieve at the end of the unit or course. Findings from this study indicated that the BDM, specifically the use of performance tasks, allows students to increase their 21st Century competencies by working collaboratively to develop real-life projects to apply their creativity,

problem-solving skills, and metacognition abilities.

Discussion

This study's main objective was to analyze the benefits of applying the BDM in teaching English as a foreign language. The central purpose was to prove that the integration of the BDM can assist EFL teachers and students in improving their teaching instruction and English language skills, respectively.

In terms of EFL teachers' planning, the backward design model is a simple and flexible model that allows teachers to establish curricular priorities of the national curriculum and educational standards based on the desired results they want to achieve from their students at the end of the unit or course. As stated by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), the BDM refers to planning backward in three essential stages: first, based on the desired results teachers want to achieve at the end of the unit or course; second in evidencing students' improvements; and third, in instructional activities teachers will apply to fulfill students' outcomes to avoid using content and instructional activities without any specific purpose. The researchers also emphasized that using a unit plan supports teachers' staying focused on connecting these three stages of the

backward design model. These unit plans help teachers guide and continuously evaluate the content and learning outcomes to be achieved during each unit (Yurtseven & Altun, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that integrating the BDM positively impacts English as a Foreign Language teachers and students (Drake & Reid, 2018; Yurtseven & Altun, 2017). By focusing on teachers' professional development, the backward design assisted teachers in three essential aspects. First, by applying the BDM, teachers can have a clear idea and a better understanding of how the unit or course should be developed. Second, by focusing on the teaching strategies to be applied to achieve desired results based on performance tasks. Third, by enhancing their teaching and assessment practices based on authentic materials and activities.

Concerning EFL students, findings from the studies analyzed indicate that the BDM provides various positive effects on improving students' English language skills. The analyzed studies showed that students could improve their English skills by developing performance tasks. The primary English skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking; as well as students'

motivation improve through the application of the BDM in EFL contexts (Hodaeian & Biria, 2015; El Ghany et al., 2019; Hossein, Chalak, & Biria, 2019; Yurtseven & Altun, 2017).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study confirmed that integrating the BDM in EFL instructions provides a number of different benefits for teachers and students. Regarding EFL teachers, the BDM helps teachers have a structured and systematic unit plan whose main purpose is to achieve students' learning outcomes by connecting the formative assessment and using authentic materials and activities based on real-life situations. Thus, teachers avoid textbook coverage or activity-oriented teaching with no precise purpose.

Furthermore, the BDM helps teachers to become instructional designers of the process of learning. Through planning the entire course or unit designs and developing authentic materials and activities based on the BDM, teachers can have the opportunity to improve their pedagogical practices, self-efficacy skills and to promote and motivate students to improve their English learning. Teachers may become facilitators for developing students' knowledge by creating authentic

opportunities to transfer their knowledge and skills into real contexts.

Regarding EFL students, the integration of performance tasks based on the BDM provides them with different English language benefits. Performance tasks based on BDM encourage students to work collaboratively to solve problems based on real situations. Moreover, it motivates students to improve their creativity, problem-solving skills, and metacognition skills. Finally, BDM helps EFL learners improve their writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills.

Despite the described BDM benefits described in this study, the implication of this study turns to the application of the BDM in different educational levels. All the articles analyzed were based on empirical studies conducted at secondary and university levels, leaving apart primary level education.

In light of the findings and the result of the study, the following suggestions can be made for future studies:

1. It is necessary to provide a better explanation of how the BDM is linked to the national curriculum, schools' policies, and EFL teachers' practices.

2. Designing unit plans and creating performance tasks can be explained better in future studies to enlighten teachers through the effective integration of the BDM in their EFL classes.

3. Future studies can focus more on the integration of the BDM at the primary education level.

Future studies can carry out in-depth interviews with teachers and students to better understand the integration of the BDM in EFL classrooms.

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