

## Backward Design Implementation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Context

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**ABSTRACT:** *Backwards design (BD) starts from the desired results or standards and then moved to the evidence of learning obtained from assessment (Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). Despite the conventional trend that designing a curriculum starts by considering the input, a backward design has begun to gain attention as many researchers were interested to study it. This article aims to explore the implementation of backward design in the EFL context. This study applies a qualitative method by analyzing various documents related to the application of backward design in the context of EF with the thematic method of analysis. Several studies were reviewed and analyzed to problematize and make meaning of the implementation of BD in EFL classrooms and its impacts. The backward design can be implemented at various levels ranging from elementary up to university levels. This model can be integrated into the lesson plan, materials development, and classroom instructions and activities. In addition, BD gave a positive impact on students' motivation, teachers' professional development, and students' creative and thinking skills.*

**Keywords:** *backward design, curriculum design, EFL context*

**ABSTRAK:** Desain mundur dimulai dari hasil atau standar yang diinginkan dan kemudian pindah ke bukti pembelajaran yang diperoleh dari penilaian (Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). Terlepas dari tren konvensional; merancang kurikulum dimulai dengan mempertimbangkan input, desain mundur mulai mendapat perhatian karena banyak peneliti tertarik untuk mempelajarinya. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi desain mundur dalam konteks sebagai bahasa asing. Penelitian ini menerapkan metode kualitatif dengan menganalisis berbagai dokumen terkait penerapan desain mundur dalam konteks EFL dengan metode tematik analisis. Beberapa studi ditinjau dan dianalisis untuk mempermasalahkan dan memaknai penerapan BD di ruang kelas EFL dan dampaknya. Desain mundur dapat diterapkan di berbagai tingkatan mulai dari tingkat dasar hingga universitas. Model ini dapat diintegrasikan ke dalam RPP, pengembangan materi, dan instruksi dan kegiatan kelas. Selain itu, desain mundur juga memberikan dampak positif terhadap motivasi siswa, pengembangan profesionalisme guru, dan kemampuan kreatif dan berpikir siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** desain kurikulum, desain mundur, konteks bahasa asing

## INTRODUCTION

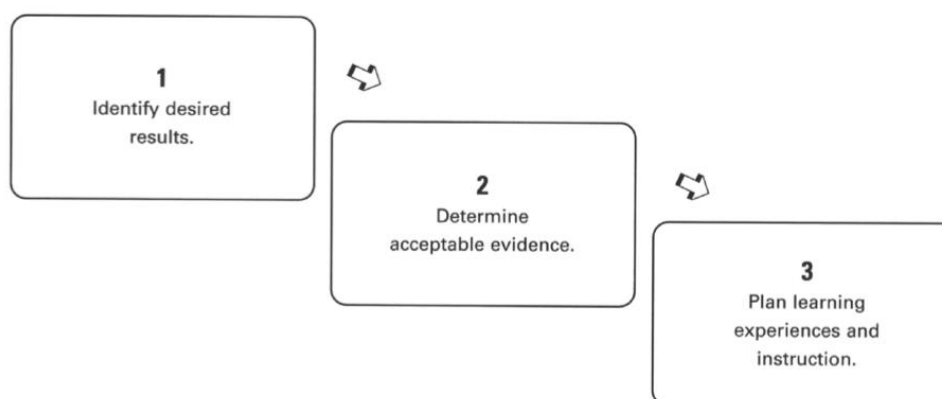
One of the most fundamental aspects of learning is the curriculum. Schools and educational institutions suggest a curriculum to improve the learning process. Curriculum development goes beyond a numbered list or a format that is required by curriculum designers or school districts (Hosseini et al., 2019). A curriculum is defined as a set of plans on how content should be delivered in the teaching and learning process to reach the desired goals (Mertz, & Neiles, 2020; Richards, 2013; Tran, 2021). The content includes the input, process, and output of the learning process.

The most common idea in language learning is that curriculum development comes in a sequence starting from deciding the input, designing the process of learning, and reaching the output. Conventional wisdom and practice assume that input, process, and output decisions are made in order, with each one dependent on what preceded it (Richards, 2013). In practice, this theory does not always reflect how language teaching has always been implemented, (Richards, 2013). Furthermore, he distinguished curriculum designs into three; forward design, central design, and backward design (Richards, 2013). Forward design is the process of creating a curriculum by progressing from the input to process to output; starting with the process and generating input and output is what central design entails; backward design begins with the result and then moves on to process and input issues (Richards, 2013).

The trend of curriculum design in Indonesia usually starts from the input as the first consideration in designing the method and expected results. Rather than generating them from defined goals or criteria, teachers typically rely on textbooks, favourite lessons, and time-honoured activities (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). Richards defined it as a forward design where the process starts from the input, process, then moves to the output (Richards, 2013).

The concept of backwards design was first introduced by Wiggins and McTighe in 1998. Backwards design starts from the desired results or standards, then moved to the evidence of learning obtained from assessment (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). To explain the nature of backward design some researchers made analogies such as planning a trip or building a house (Clayton, 2011; Fox & Doherty, 2011). To plan a trip, ones have to decide the destination and then make the plan an itinerary. The destination is the learning goals and the itinerary is the action plan in the teaching and learning process.

According to Mc Tighe and Wiggins (1999), the process of backwards design consists of three stages as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Stages in the Backwards Design Process

The teaching and learning process is started by determining the desired results. We analyze our objectives, examine established content standards (national, state, and district), and review curriculum requirements in this first stage (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). The design of learning instruction to encourage

students' creative thinking while focusing on the desired learning outcome can aid in the effective development of the learning process and activities (Richards, 2013). Mc Tighe and Wiggins stated that in this stage teachers should select which knowledge should be delivered in the classrooms and which activities should the students do (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). Related to the selection of input and activities, Richards stated that most of the time the curriculum goals concentrate on narrower targets when usually focusing to pass a certain standardized test, hence teachers should be able to unpack these standards to make students experience more meaningful learning (Mctighe & Thomas, 2003). Furthermore, Malilla and Irwandi (2022) stated that the learning objectives can be used to gauge how well students are learning.

The next stage is determining acceptable evidence. In the second stage, the backward design approach proposes that we think about a unit or course in terms of the assessment evidence needed to document and validate that the targeted learning has been achieved rather than as a collection of learning activities to be completed (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999). Teachers or designers can explore the evidence from various documents like students' learning reports and assignments. To meet the complete range of defined learning goals, school teams must examine various sources of data, analyzing a "photo album" of assessment evidence rather than relying solely on a single test's picture (Llerena, 2020; Mctighe & Thomas, 2003). These pieces of evidence then serve as the foundation for deciding the learning experiences in the next stage. After setting clear goals and evidence of the students' needs and performances, now teachers can start to design action plans to reach the goals. To accomplish the required outcomes, a range of teaching strategies can be used, however teaching methods cannot be chosen until the desired outcomes have been specified (Richards, 2013).

Many studies have been conducted to explore the impact of the implementation of backward design in EFL classrooms. The setting and focus are considerably varied. Hence exploring each of the studies can rich the understanding of backward design. This study focuses on exploring the implementation of backward design in the EFL context by answering the following research question: How is the implementation of backward design in the EFL context? This study reviews various articles discussing Backward Design in EFL classrooms ranging from elementary up to university level.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This is a qualitative study analyzing various documents related to the implementation of a backward design in the EFL context. Qualitative research strives to comprehend social life, and its methodologies as data to be analyzed (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Hence this study focused on the document analysis collected from electronic sources. Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as the process of evaluating both printed and electronic documents to comprehend or develop empirical knowledge based on the analysis. The data collection technique used in the literature review study is reviewing journals, books, literature articles as well as other documents that are relevant to the research problem (Hidayati et

al., 2023). There were five articles reviewed in this study. They are ranging from 2016-2021. To ensure the relevance of the sources, the documents should meet three requirements as follow:

1. The article themes should be related to the implementation of BD in the EFL context.
2. The papers should have been published in indexed journals of education or linguistics.
3. The article dates should be in the range of 2016-2021.

After that, they were reviewed and analyzed based on different themes, and then discussed based on the existing theories.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The data were collected from previous studies discussing the implementation of Backward Design in EFL classrooms. The following are the articles reviewed in this study. The studies reviewed in this article are action research, mixed method research, research and development, and experimental research in nature. The action research investigating the effectiveness of the backward design for young learners was conducted by Sáez (2017). The mixed method research implementing the backward design in EFL class was conducted by Yurtseve and Altun in 2016 to improve students' motivation. Furthermore, two experimental studies are reviewed in this study. Both studies implemented the backward design at the high-school level in Thailand. Meanwhile, one research and development study is reviewed in this article. This study was conducted by Ambarita, Destini, and Septiawan in 2020. They developed lesson plans that integrate backward design. Those articles were reviewed to find themes. The followings are the themes found.

### **Implementing Backwards Design to Improve Students' Motivation**

A study conducted by Yurtseven and Altun (2016) revealed that the implementation of Backwards Design in the classroom can improve their motivation to learn English (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). It was a mixed method study participated by 10 teachers and 436 students. The quantitative data were obtained from pre and post-test experimental design, while the qualitative data were from action research design. The teachers had been trained in backward design or UbD (Understanding by Design) before starting the teaching and learning processes. The students were also divided into treatment and control groups.

Based on the statistical results there were significant differences in motivation levels between the treatment and control groups. The group applying backwards design in the teaching and learning process got higher scores for their motivation levels. Based on the qualitative data, students stated that the activities allowed them to deal with authentic materials which reflect the real-world context. Moreover, they also stated that the learning was more fun and enjoyable.

Overall, students had positive attitudes towards the implementation of backwards design in the classroom.

### **Backward Design on Teachers' Development and Students' Achievement**

The backward design had positive contributions to teachers' development and student achievement. Based on the result of a study conducted by Yurtseven and Altun, the teachers showed significant improvement in terms of accurately writing desired results, preparing authentic performance activities, setting assessment criteria, methodologically enriching the unit design, and resolving individual differences (Yurtseven & Altun, 2017). It was also mentioned that the design helped the teachers to address the materials more efficiently. The unit designs, on the other hand, might have done a lot better in terms of integrating some components concerning experiencing language learning, motivating students to use English actively, and transferring information to new learning circumstances.

In terms of students' achievement, among three different groups, one group showed a significant difference in the students' level of English achievement. However, from the interviews with the teachers, it was stated that backwards design affected students' behaviour positively. They became more interested and actively participated in the classroom.

Another study conducted by Chaisa and Chinokul in 2021 investigated the effect of reading instruction using a backward design framework and citizenship theme to enhance students' reading comprehension and social responsibility. It was an experimental study involving 36 tenth-grade of Thai students. Based on the statistical result, there was a significant level of improvement in students' reading comprehension and social responsibility. In detail, Backward Design and Citizenship Theme (BD & CT) ensured the learning process, fostered students' motivation and engagement in the lesson, enhanced thinking skills, and motivated them to be more mindful and active individuals (Chaisa & Chinokul, 2021; Davis, & Autin, 2020).

### **Integrating Backward Design in a Lesson Plan to Improve Elementary Students' Critical Thinking Skills**

It was a research and development study conducted by Ambarita, Destini, and Septiawan (2020). There were several principles considered when preparing the lesson plan such as individual differences, students' participation, and student-centred learning. The process of designing the lesson plan followed the steps in backward design starting by deciding the learning outcomes. The finding revealed that the use of a backward design-based lesson plan successfully increased students' learning outcomes and critical thinking skills. Overall, this lesson plan was categorized as very good based on the expert judgment result (Ambarita et al., 2020).

Sáez (2017) investigated the effectiveness of the backward design for young learners. The nature of the study was an action research study. This study was participated by fourth-grade students of a private elementary school. The nature of the study was action research by implementing the backward design in

textbook and lesson plan development as the treatment. The result indicated that backward design improved students' engagement in learning English Sáez, 2017). The students more actively participated in both writing and speaking activities.

### **Backward Design to Develop Students' Creative thinking**

Srikongchan, Kaewkuekool, and Mejaleurn (2021) integrated an instructional approach with backward design to stimulate students' creative thinking skills. It was quasi-experimental research involving 60 fifth students in a school in Thailand. The research was conducted in 12 weeks. The students were divided into two groups; field dependence cognitive style and field independence cognitive style. After the implementation of the backward instructional design-based learning activities in both groups, it was shown that both groups experienced significant improvements in their creative thinking. It is stated that LLT-CREATIVE could provide students with a meaningful learning process and help them develop creative thinking. It encouraged them to think, try, or solve problems with a fresh perspective and imagination (Srikongchan, et al., 2021).

### **Discussion**

Based on the reviewed articles, the backward design brings positive effects on various aspects of education (Rea, & Roman, 2018). Many studies have implemented this design for various purposes such as to improve teachers' development, and students' achievement, to stimulate both creative and critical thinking skills, as well as to improve students' motivations (Ambarita et al., 2020; Chaisa & Chinokul, 2021; Srikongchan et al., 2021; Yurtseven & Altun, 2017).

Regarding motivation, Yurtseven and Altun (2017) emphasized that authentic materials and real-world tasks played significant roles in students' motivation. The explanation for this is that UbD/ backward design classes provided students with opportunities to experience true and original English, which stimulated their interest in the class (Yurtseven & Altun, 2016). In addition, the design also enriched the lesson with more visual aspects and fun elements. These advantages help students to make sense of the knowledge in language learning which is important in language learning. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) stated that in foreign language study, making sense of the knowledge is crucial. The primary objective of teaching and learning should be to understand crucial concepts and seek answers to provocative questions-important inquiries that humans ask about the world and themselves on a regular basis (Mctighe & Thomas, 2003). Furthermore, Malilla and Irwandi (2022) stated that the learning objectives can be used to gauge how well students are learning.

This study also revealed that backward design improved both teachers' development and students' achievement. Backward design helped teachers to write the goals accurately and helped them provide more authentic materials and tasks. Using instructional material to improve learning while also making it more convenient is one strategy to help students overcome the challenges they face in school (Amrizal, 2022). Richards summed up the role of the teachers in backward design as the organizer of the learning experience, model of target language performance, and planner of the learning experience (Richards, 2013). It is also

found that teachers were successful about systemic issues such as time management, group work, and conformance to the UbD template (Yurtseven & Altun, 2017). During the process, they have the opportunity to review other teachers' works. Because peer reviews focus on the essence of teaching and learning, we believe that such meetings provide a strong approach to professional development (Mc Tighe & Wiggins, 1999).

The backward design also stimulates students' higher-order thinking skills like creative and critical thinking. The implementation can be integrated into the form of instructions or activities. It is also possible to integrate themes for the input. The design of learning instruction to encourage students' creative thinking while focusing on the desired learning outcome can aid in the effective development of the learning process and activities (Srikongchan et al., 2021). Backward design helps students learn more effectively by setting clearer goals, diversifying educational assessments that focus more on monitoring their progress in the learning process, and providing particular goal-centered learning activities (Zhou, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals the implementation of backward design in foreign language learning. Based on the literature reviews, it is found that backward design can be integrated into various aspects of learning. It can be implemented in the lesson plan/ curriculum, materials development, learning instructions, and classroom activities. The implementation should consider several aspects like the level of the learners, school setting, and learning goals.

The findings of several studies implementing the backward design in EFL classrooms revealed that the backward design was beneficial. It boosted students' motivation through the use of authentic materials and real-world activities. The design also allows teachers to create their own plan for the learning experience by tailoring the learning goals and the student's needs. Hence, it contributes to teachers' professional development. Moreover, the backward design also stimulated students' critical and creative thinking skills. Based on the discussion above, backward design indeed gives positive impacts in language classrooms. However, there were still some gaps in the implementation of backward design in the classroom such as the level of effectiveness for each level. It is also better to provide more explanation on the consideration of choosing activities and materials to meet the goals based on the student's levels and characteristics.

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