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Backward Design Model and Performance Tasks for Developing Speaking Skills in A1 EFL Learners

*Modelo de Diseño Inverso y tareas de desempeño para desarrollar las habilidades
orales en estudiantes A1 de inglés como lengua extranjera*

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of the Backward Design Model (BDM) and performance-based tasks on improving speaking skills among A1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at a private school in Ambato, Ecuador. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was applied, combining pre- and post-test assessments, self-assessment surveys, and observation checklists to evaluate students' progress in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, confidence, and creativity. Performance tasks were developed using the GRASPS framework and aligned with WHERETO principles, both core components of BDM. These tools helped create structured and purposeful learning experiences that increased students' engagement and oral performance. The findings showed that applying the BDM and its main components improved students' speaking skills, revealing greater participation, more frequent use of English, and increased confidence while performing communicative tasks. Furthermore, students perceived the

video-recorded role-play activities, based on the GRASPS framework, as an enjoyable and motivating task that encouraged creativity, repeated practice, and reduced speaking anxiety. Most of the students reported improvements in their speaking abilities and expressed a stronger willingness to use English in class. This research supports the pedagogical value of the BDM as a student-centered approach that promotes both linguistic development and learner autonomy. It emphasizes the importance of designing instruction around clear objectives and integrating meaningful, emotionally supportive activities into speaking lessons. Future studies are encouraged to examine the long-term effects of BDM and its applicability to other language skills and educational contexts.

Keywords: backward design model, english as a foreign language, learning objectives, performance tasks, speaking skills

RESUMEN

Este estudio analizó el impacto del Modelo de Diseño Invertido (BDM) y de las tareas basadas en el desempeño en el desarrollo de las habilidades orales en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (nivel A1) de una institución privada en Ambato, Ecuador. Se empleó un diseño mixto secuencial explicativo que incluyó evaluaciones pre y post-test, encuestas de autoevaluación y listas de cotejo de observación para medir el progreso en fluidez, pronunciación, vocabulario, gramática, confianza y creatividad. Las tareas se diseñaron utilizando el marco GRASPS y se guiaron por los principios WHERE TO, ambos elementos esenciales del BDM, con el fin de crear experiencias de aprendizaje estructuradas y con propósito. Los resultados mostraron mejoras en las habilidades orales, con un aumento notable en la participación, el uso frecuente del inglés y la confianza al realizar actividades comunicativas. Los estudiantes describieron las dramatizaciones grabadas en video, basadas en el marco GRASPS, como actividades agradables y motivadoras que fomentaron la creatividad, la práctica repetida y la reducción de la ansiedad. La mayoría reportó mejoras en su desempeño oral y mayor disposición para hablar inglés en clase. Estos hallazgos respaldan el valor del BDM como enfoque centrado en el estudiante que promueve el desarrollo lingüístico y la autonomía. Se resalta la importancia de planificar la enseñanza con objetivos claros e integrar tareas significativas y emocionalmente favorables en las lecciones de expresión oral.

Palabras clave: habilidades orales, inglés como lengua extranjera, modelo de diseño inverso, objetivos de aprendizaje, tareas de desempeño

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate successfully in English is essential for learners in non-English-speaking countries like Ecuador, where the language plays a crucial role in academic, professional, and global contexts. According to Karfa (2019), English has become a fundamental tool for educational success and international participation. However, for EFL learners, developing speaking skills remains a major challenge due to limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, weak grammar, and a lack of authentic opportunities for language use. As Suban (2021) points out, many students avoid speaking because they fear making mistakes and often have minimal contact in English outside their classroom.

In response to these challenges, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) implemented a communicative curriculum in 2016, which emphasizes oral interaction and functional language use. Nevertheless, as noted by Rao (2019), classroom practices often were teacher-centered and grammar-based, which limited the development of real speaking skills. Additionally, as Acosta & Cajas (2018) observed, national assessments continue to prioritize accuracy over communication, creating a mismatch between learning objectives and evaluation. As a result, students become passive recipients of content, with few chances to engage in meaningful conversations.

To address this gap, it is essential to adopt instructional models that promote communicative competence, provide clear learning goals, and offer engaging, authentic tasks. One such approach is the Backward Design Model (BDM), which, according to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), involves designing instructions by first identifying desired learning goals and then aligning assessments with activities accordingly. When combined with performance-based tasks, the BDM can increase engagement, support language use in context, and scaffold speaking development, particularly for students with low proficiency levels (Ziegenfuss, 2019).

This study was carried out with A1-level EFL students in a private school in Ecuador and explored how BDM and structured performance tasks could support the development of speaking skills. The intervention was designed following the principles of instructional alignment and meaningful learning, incorporating the use of digital tools. According to Richards (2006), communicative language teaching focuses on interaction as both the primary method for learning a language and the goal of the learning process. In line with this, the tasks were designed using the GRASPS framework of BDM to promote purposeful language use, helping students gain confidence and express themselves more effectively.

Although various studies have analyzed BDM in higher education and teacher training contexts, limited research has focused on its application to young learners' speaking skills in Ecuador. This study aims to address that gap by offering empirical evidence of how BDM, supported by performance tasks, impacts the development of oral proficiency at the A1 level. The

findings aimed to contribute to more effective speaking instruction and inform future pedagogical decisions in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. How does implementing the Backward Design Model develop A1-level students' speaking skills?
2. How do Backward Design-based performance tasks influence A1 students' oral communication progress?
3. How do A1 students' in-class speaking behaviors (e.g., frequency of voluntary participation, use of L1 vs. English) evolve during BDM implementation?

Literature review

The Backward Design Model in EFL Instruction

The Backward Design Model (BDM) is a framework introduced by Wiggins & McTighe (1998), which emphasizes planning instruction by starting with clearly defined learning goals. In EFL contexts, this model helps teachers move away from memorization and grammar drills and focus instead on communicative and performance-based outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). According to McTighe & Willis (2019), BDM promotes purposeful instructional planning where each activity aligns with specific outcomes. In line with Hutchinson et al. (2002) this makes lessons more coherent and meaningful for learners.

Ziegenfuss (2019) supported this view by stating that backward planning helps keep instruction focused on results that can be measured, which is especially useful for skills like speaking. In the same line, Ibrahim, (2022) described BDM as a flexible and teacher-friendly model that supports lesson planning around clear, communicative goals.

Wilson (2023) also explained that BDM follows three main stages: (1) identifying desired results, (2) determining acceptable evidence, and (3) planning learning experiences. This structure helps ensure that activities and assessments stay aligned. As stated by Fox & Doherty (2012), when used effectively, BDM can improve learning flow and prevent disorganized instruction.

Previous studies like the one by Sadik and Ergulec (2023) showed that BDM works well in diverse classrooms, including settings with refugee or international students. Their research found that combining BDM with real-life tasks and digital tools helped reduce student resistance and increased active participation. This showed how BDM can support communicative teaching by making tasks more relevant and engaging, also proved in the study of Michael & Libarkin (2016).

Álvarez et al. (2024) applied BDM in teacher education programs to analyze their discernment of its use in an English Skills Development course. The results demonstrated that authentic performance tasks, especially those designed with the GRASPS model, improved creativity, fostered learner's autonomy skills and developed their critical thinking to manage real-life situations, issues that are essential in modern language classrooms. This study demonstrated

that the BDM is an innovative framework which helps teachers to improve their educational practices.

GRASPS and WHERETO: Structuring Performance Tasks

To apply the Backward Design Model (BDM) effectively in the classroom, teachers can rely on two key planning tools: GRASPS and WHERETO, both proposed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). According to Dazeley et al., (2025) these tools help structure lessons in a way that promotes real communication and supports learning outcomes.

The GRASPS framework stands for Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Product, and Standards. According to Wiggins and McTighe (2012) it helps teachers design authentic, real-world tasks where students understand what they are doing, why they are doing it, and who they are doing it for. For instance, a student might take on the role of a news reporter, create a video interview for a teenage audience, and follow certain criteria or standards for success. This structure gives purpose to speaking tasks and motivates learners to use the language in meaningful ways.

On the other hand, the WHERETO framework offers guidance for sequencing learning activities. It stands for Where and Why, Hook, Explore and Equip, Rethink and Revise, Evaluate, Tailor, and Organize. As explained by McCreary (2022), this planning model helps teachers create lessons that are engaging, focused, and adapted to students' needs. It also encourages reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement.

By combining GRASPS and WHERETO, teachers can design tasks that are goal-oriented, creative, and student-centered. According to Sadik and Ergulec (2023), when performance tasks are well-structured, students feel more motivated and less anxious. In this kind of environment, they are more willing to take risks, express ideas, and participate actively.

Using these planning tools within the BDM allows educators to create a safe, dynamic space where learners can develop speaking skills while gaining confidence and autonomy.

Speaking Skills in EFL and the Need for Communicative Approaches

Speaking is one of the most complex skills to develop in a second language. It requires learners to express themselves spontaneously and effectively, often without much time to plan or translate. As Rao (2019) explained, speaking involves not only knowing vocabulary and grammar but also using them fluently in real communication. Shumway & Berrett (2004) added that the difficulty increases when students lack strong grammatical or lexical foundations.

In many EFL classrooms, instruction still focuses more on reading and writing than on oral communication. As stated by Rao (2019), this is partly due to standardized testing systems that prioritize written skills, which leads teachers to adopt traditional approaches like grammar-translation. As a result, students may perform well on paper but struggle to express themselves in spoken English.

This challenge is especially present in Ecuador, where the classroom is often the only place where students are exposed to English. In these contexts, it was crucial to design purposeful speaking activities that support both fluency and confidence. Hidayat (2023) emphasizes that incorporating speaking and listening tasks into daily lessons can help learners develop a more balanced set of language skills and improve their overall communicative competence.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as described by Richards (2006), places interaction at the center of the learning process. However, in practice, many classrooms in Ecuador still give more importance to grammar and writing than to speaking. This creates a gap between the goals of the national curriculum and what happens in the classroom. As Martínez & Vásquez (2025) pointed out, this disconnect makes it difficult for students to use English in real-life situations.

Although the 2016 Ecuadorian curriculum emphasized communicative competence (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2016), many students continued to show low oral proficiency. According to Martínez & Vásquez (2025), this was because many teachers still use teacher-centered methods and provide few opportunities for students to practice speaking. To overcome this, it is necessary to implement strategies that focus on student participation, real communication, and authentic language use.

Impact of BDM and Performance Tasks on Speaking Development

Integrating the BDM with performance tasks has shown significant potential to enhance students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. As Ziegenfuss (2020) reported, learners who engage in communicative, real-world tasks tend to show improvement in fluency, interaction, and self-confidence. In the Ecuadorian context, activities such as interviews, presentations, and video recordings allow students to use the language with a real purpose, which contributes to better oral performance (Fernández et al., 2025).

In this regard, Ibrahim, (2022) indicated that BDM supports linguistic competence and emotional readiness to communicate for developing speaking skills, as recognized by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2020). These authors highlighted the use of BDM, along with its GRASPS and WHERE TO components, helped align instructional goals with effective lesson design. This model involves choosing the right materials, strategies, and assessments that directly support students' communicative needs. In this way, students are better prepared to take part in meaningful speaking tasks. According to Jiang, X., et al. (2021) this intentional approach not only reduces anxiety but also supports the development of fluency and grammatical accuracy.

Furthermore, Sadik & Ergulec (2023) affirmed that backward planning fosters a strong alignment between learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment tools. This coherence ensured that students understood the purpose of each task and stayed focused on their communicative goals. In this kind of learning environment, students feel more confident to

participate, take risks, and express their ideas in English, especially when the tasks are designed to be relevant and engaging.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodology

The research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative data and then utilizing qualitative data to provide a deeper interpretation of the findings gathered. As Kazdin (2023) described, mixed methods approach combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative strategies to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem.

In the first phase, a structured questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data about students' perceptions of the factors influencing their speaking development in English as a foreign language. Then, in the qualitative phase, open-ended questions were used to explore students' experiences in more detail and clarify trends found in the quantitative results. This integration of both data types aligns with constructivist learning theory, which supports active learning, scaffolding, and real-world tasks that develop critical thinking skills, principles also reflected in Bloom's Taxonomy (Jumaah, 2024).

To organize the process of applying the BDM in this study, the research followed a set of clearly defined stages. Table 1 outlines each stage of the process, including the main activities carried out and the people responsible.

Table 1
Research stages for implementing Backward Design Model (BDM) in EFL speaking instruction.

Stage	Description	Activities	Performers
Delimitation of the Problem	Define the problem and the methodology to address it. Define speaking skill challenges and justify BDM approach.	Classroom Observation (initial); identification of speaking issues. To determine BDM suitability	Researcher
Theoretical Review	Establish framework for BDM in EFL contexts.	To review BDM literature. Analyze A1 speaking standards (CEFR) To study tech-enhanced learning.	Researcher
Instrument Design and Validation	Create and validate assessment tools.	To design pre/post- tests rubrics To develop student perception survey To refine observation checklist To validate with experts	Researcher, experts (for validation)
Intervention and Data collection	Implement BDM and gather evidence.	To administer pre-test (intro videos) To deliver 5-week BDM lessons To conduct observation(final) To administer post-test (famous person videos) To collect surveys	Researcher
Data Analysis	Evaluate BDM's Effectiveness	To compare pre/post-tests scores (quantitative) To analyze survey responses (qualitative) To triangulate with observation data	Researcher

Final Report and Conclusions	Present conclusions and recommendations.	To synthesize findings To prepare pedagogical recommendations To suggest future research directions	Researcher
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Source: Author

Participants and Settings

The research was carried out at a private educational institution in Ambato, Ecuador, involving a group of 18 seventh-grade students (10 males and 8 females) as it is showed in table 2. The participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, which, according to Rahman et al. (2022), refers to choosing individuals who are readily available and willing to participate. This method is often appropriate for classroom-based research, where access to participants is naturally limited to those enrolled in a specific class.

Table 2
Demographic information of the participants

	Students name	Gender	English Level	Age
a	Grecia	F	A1	12
b	Natalia	F	A1	11
c	Valentina	F	A1	12
d	Benjamin	M	A1	12
e	Juan David	M	A1	12
f	James	M	A1	12
g	Jhon	M	A1	12
h	Amelia	F	A1	14
i	Keily	F	A1	12
j	Daniel	M	A1	12
k	Josafat	M	A1	11
l	Brianna	F	A1	11
m	Samantha	F	A1	12
n	Juan Pablo	M	A1	12
o	Mateo	M	A1	11
p	Janice	F	A1	11
q	Martín	M	A1	11
r	Nicolás	M	A1	12

Source: Author

This intact group shared the same instructional environment and was available for the entire duration of the intervention. In this context, English is taught as a foreign language through three 40-minute lessons per week. The study took place during the regular school year and integrated seamlessly into the students' English classes, ensuring that participation did not disrupt their normal learning process.

Instruments

According to Wiggins & McTighe's framework (2012), assessment aligned directly with learning goals and authentic performance tasks. In this study, the instruments used were the following: a pre- and post-test rubric, a student perception survey, and an observation checklist. The rubric assessed speaking performance before and after the intervention, focusing on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, confidence, and creativity. In the pre-test, students recorded a short video introducing themselves and describing daily routines and hobbies, providing a baseline of their oral skills. The post-test served as a culminating performance task: students role-played as famous people in a simulated TV interview, providing personal details, describing their routines, and discussing their hobbies. This format allowed them to apply language in a real-world scenario while demonstrating progress in fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Both tasks were assessed with a rubric using four performance levels: Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, and Needs Support, ensuring comparability across stages.

The survey included six Likert-scale items and four open-ended questions to collect students' opinions about the learning experience with the activities based on the GRASPS framework. The Likert-scale section asked students to rate their perceptions of progress and engagement with the speaking performance tasks on a five-point scale, where 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree. This instrument provided valuable insights into students' confidence, fluency, vocabulary use, and enjoyment of the activities.

The observation checklist was used during classroom sessions to track changes in students' speaking behavior, focusing on voluntary participation, use of English over L1, confidence, and peer interaction, all of which were based on the WHERETO guidance. Together, these tools supported the triangulation of results with other data sources, ensuring a more reliable understanding of the impact of the intervention.

The intervention was structured around performance tasks designed with the GRASPS framework and guided by WHERETO principles. During five-week sessions, students engaged in scaffolded activities that progressively built their speaking abilities. Initial sessions focused on vocabulary activation, personal introductions, and daily routines, using interactive games, pair work, and short video practices. As students advanced, they worked on hobbies and descriptive language, integrating peer feedback and reflection on their pre-test videos to identify areas for improvement. The final sessions emphasized clarity in pronunciation and confidence on camera, culminating in the post-test role-play interview. This sequence ensured that students moved from guided practice to independent performance, strengthening both linguistic competence and communicative confidence through meaningful and enjoyable tasks.

The data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the Backward Design Model in improving students' speaking skills.

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were processed using descriptive statistics. The focus was on identifying changes in mean scores, score range, and standard deviation to determine progress in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence.

Qualitative data from the student surveys and observation checklists were analyzed thematically. Open-ended responses were reviewed to identify common perceptions, while classroom behaviors were categorized based on patterns observed during the intervention. To enhance the validity of the findings, triangulation was applied by comparing results across the three data sources. This allowed for a more accurate interpretation of how the BDM influenced students' speaking development from different perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical procedures to ensure the protection and respect of all participants, as recommended by Hasan et al. (2021). Informed consent was obtained from the students' parents, who were clearly informed about the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of their participation. Students were assured that their involvement would not affect their academic performance. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. No identifying information was included in the data analysis or reporting process. The study was approved by institutional authorities and conducted during normal class hours to avoid disruptions to the students' regular activities.

RESULTS

This study was guided by the following questions: 1. How does implementing the Backward Design Model (BDM) develop A1-level students' speaking skills? 2. How do BDM-based performance tasks influence oral communication? 3. How do students' in-class speaking behaviours evolve during BDM implementation? To present the empirical results, evidence from pre- and post-tests, observation checklists, and student self-assessments was analysed. As shown in Table 3, students' speaking performance improved after the intervention, with the pre-test mean rising from 20.28 to 22.61 in the post-test. The reduction in range, variance, and standard deviation also suggests that students' scores became more consistent, indicating more uniform progress across the group.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Speaking Scores

Criteria	Mean	Sample Maximum	Sample Minimum	Range	Variance	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	20,28	23	17	6	3,04	1,74
Post-Test	22,61	24	20	4	1,90	1,38

Note: The total number of participants was 18. The maximum possible score on each test was 24.

In addition, Table 4 displays the summarized results of the classroom observation checklist, which tracked students' speaking behaviours at the beginning and end of the intervention. The

table compared initial and final responses for five categories: voluntary participation, responses in English, preference for English over L1, confidence, and peer interaction.

Table 4

Observation Checklist on Students' Speaking Behaviors During Classroom Activities

Statement	Before the intervention	After the intervention	Observed change
1. Voluntarily participates in speaking activities	51%	71%	Significant increase in active participation
2. Responds appropriately to teacher or peer questions in English	55%	75%	Improvement in interaction quality
3. Speaks in English rather than L1 during tasks	55%	72%	Less use of L1; more target language use
4. Demonstrates confidence when speaking (e.g., eye contact, steady voice)	45%	61%	Notable improvement in speaking confidence
5. Engages in English interactions with classmates during activities	55%	87%	Strong increase in peer interaction

Source: Author

As seen in Table 4, the final average between the initial and final observation checklists indicated that students improved their speaking skills after applying the GRASP framework. The statement “engaging in English interactions with classmates during performance tasks” showed the greatest increase, with an improvement of almost 32%. The other four statements, including voluntary participation in speaking activities, responding appropriately to teacher or peer questions, speaking English rather than L1 during activities, and demonstrating confidence when role-playing, each increased by approximately 20% from the pre-test to the post-test. These results demonstrate that, at the end of the intervention, the BDM was effective in fostering more consistent progress among participants.

To describe in depth the results of the pre- and post-tests, Table 5 presents a comparison of students' speaking performance before and after the intervention. The table illustrates the mean scores for each criterion: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, confidence, and creativity, along with the differences between the two assessments and the corresponding performance trends.

Table 5

Results of the Pre and Post Tests

Criteria (mean)	Pre-test	Post-Test	Difference	Performance trend
Fluency	3,33	3,78	0,45	Improvement
Pronunciation	2,94	3,56	0.62	Significant Improvement
Use of Vocabulary	3,6	4,00	0.40	Improvement
Grammar	3,33	3,78	0.45	Improvement
Confidence	3,22	3,67	0.45	Improvement
Creativity	3,83	3,83	0	No change

Source: Author

The data revealed students' progress across specific sub-skills, highlighting areas of notable improvement and those that remained stable. As shown in Table 5, pronunciation showed the greatest improvement, increasing by 0.62 points from a pre-test mean of 2.94 to a post-test mean of 3.56. Fluency, vocabulary use, grammar, and confidence also improved, with increases ranging from 0.40 to 0.45 points. In contrast, creativity remained unchanged, with a mean of 3.83 in both the pre- and post-tests. This stability indicates that students were already highly creative at the start and consistently demonstrated originality and innovative thinking throughout the activities. Overall, the results suggest that the intervention effectively enhanced most speaking sub-skills while maintaining students' creative abilities.

Additionally, classroom observations supported these findings, as students spoke more spontaneously and hesitated less during the performance activities guided by the GRASPS framework. At the beginning of the intervention, most learners only responded when prompted; however, by the end, many volunteered answers and engaged in short dialogues in English. For example, Student B mentioned that they began speaking faster because the materials and activities were directly related to the final video they had to record. Similarly, Student D noted that the video tasks allowed her to speak more continuously without frequent pauses. These perceptions indicate that students felt more confident and that their fluency improved through repeated, structured practice in meaningful, goal-oriented tasks.

In the *pronunciation* criterion, the students improved their scores from 2.94 to 3.56, showing significant progress. The observation checklist showed that students increasingly articulated words clearly and corrected themselves after feedback. Common vocabulary from daily routines (e.g., get up, take the bus, live) was pronounced with greater accuracy by the end of the intervention. Student A mentioned *repeating my sentences helped me pronounce better*, while Student F expressed that acting on camera made him *care more about how the words sound*. These findings confirm that pronunciation benefited from the focused rehearsal encouraged by the GRASPS designed video tasks.

In terms of *vocabulary* use, students showed a rise from 3.6 to 4.0 points. They incorporated more topic-related expressions into their speech and relied less on Spanish to convey their meaning. According to Table 5, the frequency of using English instead of L1 improved notably. Student C shared, *I learned new words and used them in the video*, while Student G highlighted that he liked acting because *I could say new things in English*. These comments reflect the impact of the GRASPS framework, as the goal-oriented, performance tasks encouraged learners to apply new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Observations confirmed that students attempted to integrate recently taught vocabulary when interacting with peers, demonstrating how WHERETO-guided planning ensured tasks were purposeful, structured, and relevant, effectively supporting lexical development.

On the other hand, *grammar accuracy* improved modestly, with scores increasing from 3.33 to 3.78. Although errors were still present, students showed better control of sentence structures. The checklist indicated that responses became more coherent and aligned with classroom instructions. For example, Student H noted, *I tried to put the verbs correctly because I knew I was recording*. Student E added that feedback from the teacher helped her *fix mistakes before the video*. The results suggest that scaffolded tasks, combined with opportunities for revision and practice, support grammatical development.

The development of *confidence* showed a marked improvement, moving from 3.22 in the pre-test to 3.67 in the post-test. Observations revealed that students made more eye contact, spoke louder, and volunteered more often during class activities. Student J explained, *I was nervous at first, but the videos helped me feel less shy*. Similarly, Student L said, *I liked to speak because I felt surer of myself*. This indicates that performance tasks created an emotionally supportive environment where students felt safe to take risks in English.

Another important factor was that *creativity* did not show a significant numerical change (remaining at 3.83 in both pre- and post-tests). However, qualitative data revealed that students used imaginative approaches in their video tasks, including role-playing different characters, creating short dialogues, and adding gestures. Student K commented, *I enjoyed acting as another person because it was fun*, while Student M shared, *I liked recording videos with my friends*. These reflections suggest that while creativity levels were already high before the intervention, BDM-based tasks maintained and supported this skill.

Together, Tables 3, 4, and 5 show that applying the Backward Design Model (BDM) enhanced students' speaking skills in multiple areas. Quantitative results confirmed improvements across five out of six criteria, while qualitative evidence from observations and self-assessments highlighted that video-recorded performance tasks encouraged participation, reduced anxiety, and fostered authentic language use. The integration of WHERETO and GRASPS principles was central in providing structured, goal-oriented activities that supported students' growth in speaking.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provided empirical evidence that the BDM can significantly enhance the speaking performance of A1-level EFL learners. The improvement observed in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence confirming the value of this framework for communicative language instruction. These results align with Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) principles of backward design, which emphasize that instruction should be structured around clear outcomes, evidence of learning, and purposeful activities.

The performance tasks designed with the GRASPS framework were essential in supporting authentic and meaningful communication. As Wiggins and McTighe (2012) argued, GRASPS

situates learning within real-world contexts, motivating learners to take on roles, address audiences, and produce tangible outcomes. In this study, role-play and video recording activities encouraged students to act creatively, and refine pronunciation, which directly supported their oral performance. Similarly, the sequencing of lessons under the WHERETO framework provided structured opportunities for rehearsal, revision, and evaluation, echoing McCreary's (2022) assertion that WHERETO fosters engagement and promotes reflection. The combination of these two planning tools, like the study of Fazekas et al. (2020) created a low-anxiety environment where students were able to practice and demonstrate growth in their speaking abilities.

Another important contribution of this study is the confirmation of the motivational value of performance-based tasks. Students reported that video-recorded activities reduced speaking anxiety and encouraged greater participation, findings that resonate with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. In addition, self-assessment surveys highlighted that student perceived gains in fluency, vocabulary, and confidence, supporting Sadik & Ergulec's (2023) claim that backward planning fosters alignment between learning outcomes and assessments, increasing student engagement.

The results also emphasized the broader importance of EFL learning. English is recognized as a key skill that opens opportunities for education, employment, and international collaboration (Karfa, 2019). As Rao (2019) pointed out, speaking is particularly critical because it enables learners to communicate effectively in academic and professional contexts. By enhancing oral skills, the BDM approach directly contributes to learners' ability to access global opportunities and adapt to diverse communicative situations.

While BDM has been extensively studied in contexts such as higher education, teacher training, or international classrooms (Sadik & Ergulec, 2023; Álvarez et al., 2024), its application in Latin American schools has been limited. Most empirical research on BDM has been conducted abroad, leaving a gap in understanding how the model functions in local EFL contexts. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating how BDM, supported by GRASPS and WHERETO, can be effectively adapted for A1-level learners in Ecuador. These findings contribute to the regional discussion on innovative pedagogical models and highlight the need for further research across Latin America.

In summary, the results of this study confirmed the pedagogical value of the BDM as a framework that fosters both linguistic and affective development in EFL learners. By aligning instruction with clearly defined outcomes and embedding performance tasks that are engaging, authentic, and student-centered, teachers can help students overcome communicative barriers, reduce anxiety, and develop the oral skills necessary to thrive in academic and professional domains.

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrated that the BDM is an effective and structured framework for enhancing the speaking skills of A1-level EFL learners. By designing lessons around clear communicative goals and using performance-based tasks supported by the GRASPS framework and WHERETO principles, students showed notable improvement in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence. Performance tasks created with the GRASPS framework provided meaningful contexts for students to practice speaking and promoting active participation. At the same time, the WHERETO framework ensured that lessons were carefully planned, varied, and aligned with learning objectives, which increased motivation and helped students see the relevance of each activity.

Quantitative results revealed significant gains in pre- and post-test scores, particularly in pronunciation. Creativity remained stable throughout the intervention, reflecting that students were already highly creative and consistently demonstrated originality in the performance tasks. Classroom observations supported these findings, showing that learners spoke more spontaneously, hesitated less, and volunteered answers more frequently. Students engaged consistently in English interactions and interacted more with their peers, which highlighted the effectiveness of structured, goal-oriented activities in supporting oral development.

Students' perceptions also confirmed the positive impact of the intervention. Many of them reported feeling more confident and motivated during performance tasks, that allowed them to practice speaking in a creative environment. Learners indicated that these tasks helped them speak more continuously and connect the activities to the outcome, fostering fluency and self-assurance. These results illustrated that combining goal-oriented instruction, scaffolded practice, and authentic speaking activities is an effective strategy for developing oral skills in early language learners.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that EFL teachers and curriculum designers incorporate the BDM to ensure alignment between goals, assessments, and learning activities. Performance tasks, particularly those involving video-based role plays, should be used to make speaking practice meaningful, engaging, and student-centered. A low-stress environment should be promoted, allowing students to express themselves creatively. Regular opportunities for speaking should be provided, emphasizing fluency and communication over grammar. Teachers should also adopt reflective practices, adjusting lessons according to students' responses and observed behaviours. Future studies in Ecuador could explore the long-term effects of BDM on speaking fluency and examine its impact on other language skills or contexts. Limitations of this study include the focus on a specific group of A1-level students, which may restrict the generalizability of the results, suggesting the need for broader investigations with diverse proficiency levels.

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