

Research on the Integrated Application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching in Second Language Instruction

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Received 12 June 2024; accepted 26 July 2024

Published online 26 August 2024

Abstract

With the rapid acceleration of globalization, second language teaching is encountering unprecedented opportunities and challenges. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a widely recognized and adopted methodology in the field of second language education due to its focus on practical language use and learner engagement. However, significant areas for improvement remain, particularly in terms of goal setting, instructional design, and assessment methods. This paper introduces the Backward Design model as a guiding framework for TBLT, exploring the integrated application of these two approaches in second language instruction.

Backward Design, with its focus on defining desired learning outcomes and planning instruction backward from these endpoints, aligns well with the task-centered focus of TBLT. The integration of these two approaches can lead to more coherent and effective teaching strategies. This study proposes a comprehensive teaching framework that aims to enhance instructional effectiveness by ensuring better alignment between learning objectives and tasks, providing enhanced assessment and feedback mechanisms, and fostering a more engaging learning experience.

Through practical case studies, this paper illustrates the successful implementation of this integrated approach, demonstrating that this combined strategy can significantly improve second language acquisition by fostering clearer objectives, stronger learner motivation, and more effective skill integration. The practical application of

this integrated method shows that it can address common challenges in language teaching, such as maintaining student interest, providing relevant and practical language practice, and effectively measuring language proficiency. Ultimately, this study offers practical recommendations for educators seeking to adopt a more cohesive and effective approach to second language teaching, highlighting the potential for this integrated model to contribute to overall academic and professional development of learners.

Key words: Backward design; Task-based language teaching; Second language teaching; Teaching strategies; Educational assessment; Curriculum design; Language acquisition

Wang, X. J., & Song, Y. X. (2024). Research on the Integrated Application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching in Second Language Instruction. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 29(1), 93-98. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/13526>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13526>

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the demand for learning second languages in non-native environments is rapidly expanding. As a vital tool for global communication and cultural exchange, second language acquisition has gained significant attention regarding its teaching strategies and learning methodologies. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has emerged as a prominent instructional strategy in recent years, focusing on student-centered tasks that promote active language use and practical skill development. Unlike traditional, teacher-centered methods that emphasize rote learning of linguistic knowledge, TBLT engages learners in meaningful tasks that foster communicative competence.

Despite its advantages, TBLT faces challenges in

practical application, including the need for systematic curriculum design, effective alignment between teaching objectives and tasks, and robust assessment methods. To address these challenges, integrating the Backward Design model offers a promising solution. Backward Design, introduced by Wiggins and McTighe, emphasizes starting with the end in mind, focusing on desired learning outcomes, and planning instruction backward from those outcomes.

This paper aims to explore the feasibility and benefits of integrating Backward Design with TBLT in second language instruction. By evaluating the strengths and challenges of both approaches, this study proposes a novel instructional framework that enhances teaching effectiveness and optimizes the learning process. The goal is to provide practical strategies for educators to improve learners' language proficiency and practical skills, thereby contributing to their overall academic and professional development.

2. METHOD

2.1 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT is a learner-centered instructional approach that emphasizes the use of meaningful tasks to promote language acquisition. Its theoretical foundations include Vygotsky's social constructivism, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Long's Interaction Hypothesis. TBLT involves designing tasks that mirror real-life scenarios, motivating learners to engage actively in the learning process. These tasks guide students to acquire linguistic knowledge and develop communication skills through practical application. The implementation of TBLT often follows the three-phase theory proposed by Willis, as outlined in Table 1.

In practice, TBLT designs authentic communicative tasks, providing ample opportunities for language practice and sparking students' interest in active participation. It emphasizes experience, practice, interaction, and cooperation throughout the learning process. This approach aligns with the cognitive laws of second language acquisition, moving beyond traditional grammar-

and vocabulary-focused teaching, enabling students to learn and apply language in near-real contexts, thereby enhancing their communicative language skills. However, achieving desired outcomes with TBLT requires scientific and targeted classroom design, with a strong emphasis on the guiding role of teachers and active student participation.

Table 1
The three stages of Willis' Task-Based Language Teaching

Phase	Main Content
Pre-task Phase	This phase focuses on the preparation of language skills and the construction of background knowledge. Teachers need to provide relevant materials and preview guidance to stimulate students' interest in the learning content and prepare them mentally.
Task Phase	Emphasizes the implementation of student learning activities. Under the guidance of teachers, students simulate real language usage scenarios through various learning methods such as role-playing and group discussions, aiming to enhance their verbal communication skills.
Post-task Phase	Focuses on the consolidation and reflection of the course content. Teachers organize students to reflect on and summarize their learning, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of task completion, and provide improvement suggestions. Students are required to complete reflection and reporting tasks to deepen their understanding and application of the knowledge learned in class.

2.2 Backward Design Model (UbD)

Backward Design is a teaching design model proposed by American curriculum experts Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in their 1998 book "Understanding by Design" (UbD). The core philosophy of this model is "To begin with the end." (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005) Contrary to the traditional forward design approach, which follows a linear process of "setting learning objectives, organizing teaching content, and implementing teaching evaluation," Backward Design adopts an innovative "backward" pathway: it starts by clarifying the ultimate learning outcomes, then develops assessment evidence to achieve these outcomes, and finally plans teaching activities based on these outcomes and evidence. The specific design steps are illustrated in Figure 1.

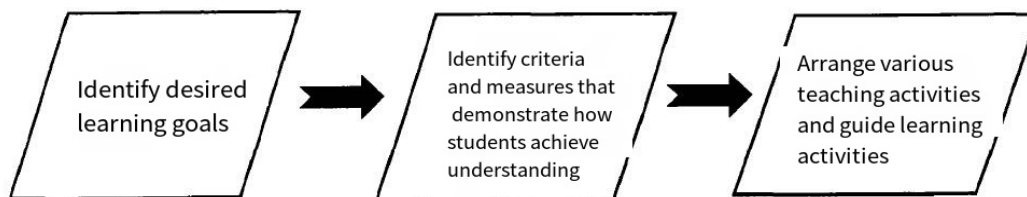


Figure 1
Three Steps of Backward Design

This model reconsiders the teaching design process, requiring educators to precisely define the learning

outcomes students should achieve before implementing the curriculum, ensuring that these learning objectives are

quantifiable and achievable. Thus, the core principles of Backward Design can be summarized as follows:

(1) Outcome-Oriented Principle: Teaching design should start and end with the specific learning outcomes students should achieve, ensuring clarity of teaching objectives and the ultimate direction of teaching activities.

(2) Assessment Priority Principle: Before planning the teaching process, teachers should establish methods and standards to assess whether students have achieved their learning outcomes, ensuring consistency between teaching activities and assessment criteria, and thus the measurability of learning outcomes.

(3) Activity Design Principle: Teaching activities should be designed around learning outcomes and assessment methods, ensuring that students can effectively achieve predetermined learning objectives during the teaching process.

In applied linguistics, the application of Backward Design principles has greatly facilitated teachers' precise targeting of teaching objectives and significantly increased their emphasis on achieving learning outcomes. By emphasizing the inherent consistency between teaching objectives, assessment methods, and teaching activities - namely, the clarity of objectives, the suitability of assessments, and the coordination of activities - this design methodology encourages teachers to carefully construct a reasonable assessment mechanism and systematically plan efficient teaching activities, ensuring that every aspect of the teaching design contributes to students achieving their learning outcomes.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Feasibility Analysis of the Integrated Application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching

Combining Backward Design with TBLT offers several advantages, including enhanced coherence between learning objectives and tasks, improved assessment and feedback mechanisms, and a more engaging learning experience. The feasibility of this integrated approach is supported by the strong internal connections between the two methodologies. Both emphasize the alignment of goals and tasks, the integration of assessment and feedback, and the synergy between teaching design and learning experience.

(1) Consistency between Goals and Tasks: Backward Design starts with clearly defined learning outcomes, ensuring that teaching activities and assessments are aligned with these objectives. Similarly, TBLT focuses on designing tasks that align with learning objectives, promoting knowledge internalization and skill development through practical application.

(2) Integration of Assessment and Feedback: Backward Design advocates establishing assessment plans

at the beginning of instructional design, incorporating both formative and summative evaluations. TBLT also emphasizes providing timely feedback during task execution, encouraging self-reflection and continuous improvement.

(3) Synergy between Teaching Design and Learning Experience: Backward Design supports the achievement of learning objectives through carefully planned instructional activities, including resource selection, time management, and methodological application. TBLT enriches the learning experience by designing realistic or simulated language practice situations, fostering active student participation and engagement.

Given these internal consistencies, the integrated application of Backward Design and TBLT is theoretically feasible and can address the shortcomings of each approach when used in isolation.

3.2 Implementation Framework for the Integrated Application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching

The integrated application of Backward Design and TBLT requires leveraging their respective strengths within a cohesive framework. This framework incorporates the principles and steps of Backward Design into the TBLT process. The specific design is shown in Figure 2. The framework emphasizes result orientation, assessment priority, and task alignment to ensure a systematic and effective teaching approach.

(1) Result Orientation: This involves determining learning objectives based on desired learning outcomes, ensuring that instructional planning is focused on achieving specific goals. Teachers must identify what students need to learn and be able to do by the end of the instruction period, providing a clear target for both teaching and learning activities.

(2) Assessment Priority: Designing an assessment plan before instructional activities to ensure consistency between teaching activities and assessment standards. This approach involves ongoing formative assessments and summative evaluations to monitor and measure student progress. The concept of "assessment first" should be applied throughout various implementation stages of TBLT, including task design, classroom implementation, and learning outcome assessment.

By integrating these principles, teachers can conduct process and outcome evaluations during classroom instruction, provide timely feedback on learners' progress, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. This approach enhances the quality of second language teaching and improves learners' effectiveness. The integration of backward design and task-based language teaching helps to construct a systematic, personalized, and culturally adaptive teaching model. This ensures the continuity of teaching design, implementation, and

assessment. Through mutually supportive teaching activities, assessment processes, and learning experiences, it promotes students' language ability development. This

model has the potential to enhance the pertinence and efficiency of teaching, providing a new perspective for second language teaching practices.

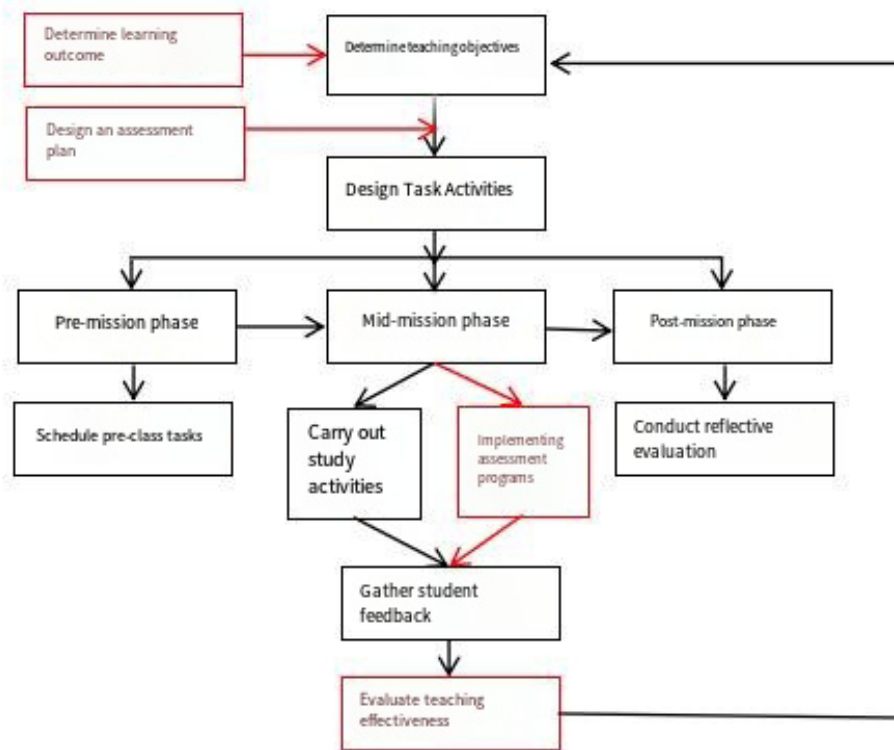


Figure 2
The teaching design framework for the integrated application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching

3.3 Analysis of the Application Effects of Teaching Cases

Taking the “restaurant ordering” scenario in cultivating beginner-level oral communication skills of Chinese learners as a teaching case, this chapter explores the differences in their effectiveness in practical teaching applications in terms of learning objectives, lesson

arrangements, and learning outcomes. Through a comparative analysis of teaching designs based on three different design philosophies: teacher-centered instruction, task-based language teaching (TBLT), and a fusion of backward design and TBLT, we explore the differences in their practical teaching applications. The specific case designs are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Teaching Cases Under Three Different Design Concepts

	Conventional Teaching-Focused Case	Task-Based Teaching Case	Backward Design and TBLT Integrated Case
Learning Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand and grasp relevant vocabulary and phrases; 2. Conduct basic dialogue for ordering food. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct simple ordering dialogue, such as inquiring and ordering dishes; 2. Improve students' oral communication skills. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Master relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns related to ordering food and apply them correctly. 2. Conduct simple ordering conversations. 3. Improve students' oral communication and practical application skills.
Lesson Preparation Stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design teaching plan (targeting teacher behavior); 2. Prepare teaching materials and aids, including menus, pictures, vocabulary, and phrases; 3. Recording equipment for students to practice dialogue and pronunciation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conventional preparations mentioned above; 2. Design tasks (targeting student behavior), such as role-playing; 3. Prepare role-playing props, including restaurant waiter and customer clothing, menus, and tableware props. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determination of Expected Outcomes: Students should be able to complete ordering tasks in a real restaurant environment using Chinese, including ordering dishes, inquiring about recommendations, expressing preferences, etc. 2. Establishment of Assessment Evidence: Students' language proficiency will be assessed through role-playing, simulated conversations, and oral tests. (Assessment criteria include accurate vocabulary usage, grammatical structure normalization, and communication fluency.) 3. Contents that need to be prepared as mentioned above.

	Conventional Teaching-Focused Case	Task-Based Teaching Case	Backward Design and TBLT Integrated Case
Pre-Task Stage		Teacher introduces relevant vocabulary and common sentence patterns for ordering food.	Advance study of relevant vocabulary and commonly used sentence patterns.
In-Class Stage	Introduction: Use pictures or videos to introduce the restaurant scene; Vocabulary learning: Such as menu, waiter, ordering, dish names, etc.; Learning common phrases: Restaurant ordering phrases; Dialogue practice: Role-playing dialogue practice; 5. Listening training: Play dialogue recordings, allowing students to understand and imitate pronunciation and intonation; 6. Extended practice: Such as writing their own restaurant dialogue or designing a restaurant menu.	1. Explanation of difficult pre-task points; 2. Task introduction: Students are divided into groups for simulated ordering activities. Each group has a “waiter” and a “customer”. The teacher provides a menu (including pictures and Chinese descriptions) and order cards; 3. Task execution: Students conduct ordering dialogues, waiters record customers’ orders and provide recommendations; 4. Role exchange: Role exchange and task execution again; 5. Summary and review: Teachers and students review and discuss the language points used in the activity, such as fixed collocations, quantifier usage, and provide feedback.	1. Explaining key vocabulary and phrase usage. 2. Introducing the task: In addition to presenting the task, task completion requirements will be provided, along with self-evaluation and peer evaluation scales (including accurate vocabulary usage, grammatical correctness, and communication fluency). 3. Task execution and peer evaluation: After completing the task, promptly record and evaluate both parties’ performances. 4. Role exchange and peer evaluation: After completing the task, record and evaluate both parties’ second-round performances. 5. Teacher observation and evaluation: The teacher observes, records, and evaluates each group. 6. Summary evaluation: Teachers and students jointly review the issues that need attention during task execution and provide evaluations and feedback. 7. Consolidation and improvement: Address problem areas through various methods of consolidation exercises, such as focused repetition, simulated conversations, and demonstration learning.
Post-Class Stage	Homework assignment: Practice writing a complete restaurant ordering dialogue and recite it.	Homework assignment: Go to a nearby Chinese restaurant and order in Chinese.	Homework assignment: Visit a nearby Chinese restaurant, order food in Chinese, and engage in brief communication with the waiter.
Lesson Evaluation	Focused on classroom learning of vocabulary and phrases, with no in-class evaluation. The learning process lacks a real-life context.	Students complete vocabulary and phrase learning beforehand. The classroom simulates real-life scenarios through role-playing for language communication training, and a summary is provided after task completion.	Organize language communication training through role-playing tasks, assess learners’ effectiveness based on task completion standards, conduct secondary consolidation exercises to address deficiencies, turn simulated exercises into field practices, and ensure the achievement of learning objectives.

From the comparison of this set of teaching design cases, we can see:

The conventional teacher-centered case design is led by the teacher, where students follow pre-arranged instructions in class. The classroom lacks situational design and creation, and the learning objects are knowledge-based vocabulary and phrases. There is no evaluation of students’ learning behavior and outcomes during the learning process.

The case design based on TBLT focuses on designing tasks oriented towards student activities, such as role-playing. Knowledge-based content is completed by students before class. There is sufficient time in class for students to practice applications in simulated situations. Finally, teachers and students review and provide feedback on the effectiveness and key points of task completion. Homework requires students to apply what they have learned in class in real-life situations, reflecting the continuation of classroom learning.

The fusion case of backward design and TBLT combines the strengths of the two teaching modes. Through backward design, the expected learning outcomes are determined, and an assessment plan is formulated to ensure the consistency of teaching activities, learning objectives, and assessment criteria. The application of TBLT provides an interactive and practical teaching

platform, enabling students to apply and practice language in simulated contexts. Compared to the other two design cases, the teaching design that combines backward design and TBLT demonstrates more optimized design ideas and more measurable and achievable teaching effects in terms of goal achievement detection, refinement of assessment plans, and substantial improvement of learning effectiveness. The fusion of the two significantly enhances the effectiveness of second language teaching.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on theoretical feasibility analysis and case application analysis, the integrated application of Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a comprehensive, efficient, and personalized teaching model for second language instruction. This integration demonstrates significant advantages in terms of clear objectives, enhanced learning motivation, skill integration, and timely feedback. It ensures clarity and coherence in teaching objectives, as teachers define clear end goals before the instructional process begins, aligning all teaching activities and assessments with these goals. This ensures students consistently work towards well-defined outcomes, enhancing overall focus and effectiveness. Additionally,

TBLT's emphasis on real-life, meaningful tasks makes learning more engaging and relevant, increasing student motivation and retention. The integration also facilitates comprehensive assessment and feedback mechanisms, with Backward Design emphasizing assessment from the outset and TBLT providing continuous feedback through task performance, allowing real-time reflection and improvement.

Despite these significant advantages, the integrated use of Backward Design and TBLT faces challenges. One major challenge is the need for extensive teacher training and professional development. Effective implementation requires teachers to understand both principles deeply and apply them flexibly. Another challenge is the complexity of language proficiency assessment, which requires refined tools and skills to accurately measure and interpret student progress. Addressing diverse learner backgrounds, styles, and needs also demands flexible, personalized teaching strategies. Future research should focus on enhancing teacher training, developing teaching resources, optimizing assessment tools, and exploring personalized strategies. By addressing these areas, the integration of Backward Design and TBLT can be more effectively implemented, improving teaching effectiveness and promoting language proficiency.

5. CONCLUSION

Through model construction and case analysis, this study reveals the broad prospects of integrating Backward Design and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in second language instruction. This integrated approach provides novel perspectives and methodological support, ensuring that teaching is both goal-oriented and engaging, leading to more effective learning outcomes. It addresses common challenges such as maintaining student interest, providing relevant language practice, and effectively measuring proficiency. The success of this integration depends on careful attention to teacher development and robust assessment tools. Future research should focus on validating the effectiveness of this integrated method through empirical studies and additional case analyses. By refining these strategies, educators can significantly enhance second language instruction, ultimately fostering greater language proficiency and academic success among learners. Additionally, this integration can serve as a model for other educational fields, promoting more holistic and student-centered approaches across disciplines.

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