

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Title: Adapting IB-Informed Lesson Planning Practices in Secondary EFL Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Institutional Transition

Science-Metric Classification Arts & Humanities.

Main topic: Teaching innovation and curriculum adaptation.

Main practical implications: This study provides guidance for EFL teachers who wish to incorporate IB-informed lesson-planning practices, such as backwards design, clear learning outcomes, purposeful assessment, inquiry-based activities, and reflection, in non-IB classrooms. It highlights how these elements can be adapted to institutional requirements, available resources, students' needs, and time constraints. The findings may also support schools in developing teacher-training programmes and flexible planning templates that promote more coherent, student-centered, and outcome-focused instruction.

Originality/value: It contributes to the improvement of EFL teachers' lesson-planning practices through the analysis of how IB-informed principles, particularly backwards design, are adapted and applied in non-IB secondary education contexts.

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Indication of conflict of interest:

there is no conflict of interest

Source of funding

there is no source of funding

Acknowledgments

To Program Maestría en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros Mención Inglés de la Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí.

Abstract

This study explores the implementation of IB-informed lesson planning practices in secondary EFL education within a school transitioning toward a fully IB-oriented academic model. The institution currently implements inquiry-based learning, ATL skills, MYP planning elements, and backwards design in 8th, 9th, and 10th grade classrooms as part of its transition from a traditional curriculum toward exclusive IB education. The study examines how these pedagogical adaptations influence lesson planning practices among secondary EFL teachers. Specifically, the research analyzes changes in instructional alignment, inquiry integration, conceptual learning, assessment planning, and student-centered instructional design. The study is grounded in the theoretical perspectives of backwards design, constructive alignment, inquiry-based learning, and teacher agency theory. A qualitative case study design was employed to investigate the phenomenon within its authentic institutional context. Data collection included semi-structured teacher interviews, lesson plan analysis, and institutional planning documents. Current IB-informed lesson plans were compared with previous structures to identify observable changes associated with the transition. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to instructional coherence, teacher adaptation, institutional expectations, and pedagogical transformation. The findings suggest that the adaptation of IB-informed planning practices has influenced lesson planning by promoting greater alignment between objectives, assessment, and instruction, while also encouraging inquiry-based and student-centered approaches. However, teachers also reported challenges related to planning workload, time management, curriculum pacing, and adaptation to new pedagogical expectations. The study concludes that IB-informed planning practices can positively influence

lesson planning coherence when implemented flexibly and contextually during institutional transition.

Adapting IB-Informed Lesson Planning Practices in Secondary EFL Education: A Qualitative Case Study of Institutional Transition

Lesson planning is a central component of effective EFL instruction because it structures learning experiences, supports instructional coherence, and guides the relationship between objectives, classroom activities, and assessment. In recent years, educational institutions seeking to transition toward International Baccalaureate models have increasingly incorporated IB-informed pedagogical principles into lower secondary education in preparation for full Diploma Programme implementation (Kerimoğlu & Altun, 2024). These adaptations often include inquiry-based learning, ATL skills, conceptual understanding, reflection, and backwards design.

The institution examined in this study is currently undergoing a curricular transition toward an exclusively IB-oriented academic model at the baccalaureate level. As part of this transition, the school has implemented IB-informed planning practices within 8th, 9th, and 10th grade secondary classrooms. Teachers are expected to incorporate inquiry-based methodologies, ATL skills, MYP-inspired planning structures, and backwards design into their lesson planning processes despite working in levels that are not formally part of the IB Programmes.

Backwards design, developed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, emphasizes beginning instructional planning with desired learning outcomes and aligning assessment and classroom instruction accordingly (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Similarly, IB planning principles promote inquiry, conceptual learning, student agency, and reflective practices (Saxton & Hill, 2014). These pedagogical approaches aim to create more coherent and meaningful learning experiences.

However, the adaptation of these planning principles within non-IB secondary contexts may present significant challenges for teachers. Institutional expectations, administrative workload, curriculum pacing, limited training, and contextual realities may influence how

teachers interpret and implement IB-informed pedagogical practices (Dickson et al., 2018). As a result, teachers may adapt these frameworks flexibly rather than applying them systematically (Zeng, 2024).

Although existing literature discusses backwards design and IB pedagogy, limited research has explored how schools in institutional transition phases implement IB-informed planning practices in lower secondary EFL education. Furthermore, most studies in Ecuador have examined impacts of IB implementation in learning (Bittencourt, 2020, 2023; Ponce & Intriago, 2022; Resnik, 2016), instead of how these adaptations impact teachers' lesson planning practices within authentic classroom contexts.

Other regional research on the IB has instead centered on macro-level policy outcomes; Resnik (2014), for instance, examined how the national rollout of the IB Diploma Programme into public schools reshaped the teacher labour market, highlighting tensions between bureaucratic regulation, teacher training, and the public-private divide in Ecuadorian education. While this work illuminates the systemic and labour-market consequences of IB policy, it does not address how IB-informed pedagogical principles are translated into everyday classroom planning by teachers working outside formally authorized IB programme levels. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how the implementation of IB-informed pedagogical principles influences lesson planning practices in secondary EFL education during institutional transition toward an IB-oriented model.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. How does the implementation of an IB-informed model influence the pedagogical decisions of secondary EFL teachers during an institutional transition to an IB model?

RQ2. What are the perceived benefits and challenges reported by teachers during this pedagogical transformation?

Literature Review

Lesson Planning in EFL

The literature surrounding lesson planning in EFL education emphasizes the importance of instructional coherence, alignment, scaffolding, and meaningful learner engagement (Rahayu et al., 2021). Effective lesson planning allows teachers to organize learning experiences that support language acquisition while facilitating communicative competence and student participation (Richards, 2013). Within contemporary educational approaches, planning also plays a critical role in promoting inquiry, formative assessment, and student-centered learning. Comprehensive accounts of language-teaching methodology similarly emphasize aligning objectives, activities, and assessment when designing lessons and courses (Harmer, 2001; Macalister & Nation, 2019).

Backward Design and Constructive Alignment

Backwards design has become one of the most influential instructional planning models in modern curriculum design. According to Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005), instructional planning should begin by identifying desired learning outcomes before determining assessment evidence and instructional activities. This outcome-driven approach contrasts with traditional activity-first planning models and promotes greater alignment between learning goals, instruction, and assessment.

The theory of constructive alignment proposed by Biggs (1996) further supports the importance of coherence in educational planning. Constructive alignment emphasizes that

learning objectives, classroom activities, and assessment practices should work together to support meaningful learning experiences (Wang et al., 2013). Within EFL contexts, alignment may contribute to clearer instructional organization and more purposeful language learning opportunities. This principle has since been extended to classroom teaching more broadly, where aligning intended outcomes, learning activities, and assessment is treated as central to quality learning (Biggs et al., 2022).

IB-Informed Pedagogy and the Middle Years Programme

IB-informed pedagogical practices additionally emphasize inquiry-based learning, conceptual understanding, reflection, international-mindedness, and student agency (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2014). In the Middle Years Programme, planning often integrates inquiry questions, ATL skills, interdisciplinary learning, and conceptual exploration. These approaches seek to position students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of content (Mutammimah et al., 2019).

Teacher Agency in Institutional Transition

Research on teacher agency also suggests that educational frameworks are rarely implemented uniformly across contexts. Hizli Alkan and Priestley (2019) argue that teachers function as active curriculum-makers who interpret and adapt pedagogical frameworks according to contextual realities, institutional expectations, and classroom needs. This perspective is especially relevant during institutional transitions in which teachers are expected to integrate new pedagogical approaches into previously established planning systems. Beyond individual capacity, teacher agency is shaped by beliefs, professional relationships, and the conditions of the working environment (Priestley et al., 2015), and it becomes particularly salient during periods of educational change.

Previous empirical studies indicate that implementation of inquiry-based and outcome-driven planning practices often varies according to teacher preparation, institutional support, and contextual demands (Chaudhary & Singh, 2022; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024; Kanya et al., 2021). Dieudé and Prøitz (2024), found that while all studied high schools had accommodated outcome-governed regimes, teacher autonomy still differed by context and was tied more closely to teachers' pedagogical practices than to the outcomes formally required of them.

In another hand, in a meta-analysis of 132 studies guided by the dynamic model of educational effectiveness, Chaudhary and Singh (2022) found teaching factors to be only moderately associated with learning outcomes and cautioned against imposing rigid dichotomies between teaching approaches, a caution that is pertinent where traditional and IB-informed planning coexist during a transition. Institutional conditions matter as well: surveying 385 secondary teachers, Kanya et al. (2021) reported that principal leadership, organizational culture, and teacher competence jointly accounted for 68.12% of the variation in teacher performance.

To resume, while some studies report increased instructional coherence and student-centered learning through backwards design and IB-informed practices (Heineke, 2018; Kodzi, 2019), others highlight challenges related to workload, planning complexity, and adaptation processes (Mousa, 2025). Limited research has specifically examined how IB-informed planning practices influence lesson planning in secondary EFL classrooms during institutional transition processes.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the impact of implementing IB-informed planning practices in secondary EFL education during institutional

transition toward a fully IB-oriented educational model. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand teacher experiences, planning processes, perceptions, and pedagogical adaptation within a real educational context rather than measure quantitative outcomes (Sampieri, 2018).

The study was conducted within an ecuadorian private secondary institution currently transitioning toward exclusive implementation of International Baccalaureate education at the baccalaureate level. As part of this transition, teachers in 8th, 9th, and 10th grade EFL classrooms were expected to incorporate inquiry-based learning, ATL skills, MYP-inspired planning structures, and backwards design principles into their lesson planning practices.

Participants

Participants consisted of three EFL teachers working at the institution during its transition toward an IB-oriented model. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in adapting lesson planning practices during this transition.

The sample comprised three female teachers ($N = 3$) whose ages ranged from 18 to 44 years. Their teaching experience varied considerably, from three to twelve years, and all worked in private bilingual institutions. Collectively, they taught across lower secondary and high school levels, and they reported differing degrees of familiarity with the IB MYP framework and with backwards design principles, ranging from slight to high familiarity.

Teachers were included if they taught EFL at the institution, particularly at the lower secondary education courses (8th to 10th grade), and were actively engaged in adapting their lesson planning structures to IB-informed practices during the institutional transition. Teachers who were not involved in the planning transition, or who did not teach EFL, were excluded from the study.

Data Collection

Instruments and Materials

Data collection included semi-structured interviews, lesson plan analysis, and institutional planning documents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' experiences adapting IB-informed pedagogical practices, their perceptions regarding changes in lesson planning, and the challenges associated with the transition process. Interview questions focused on planning procedures, instructional alignment, inquiry integration, assessment practices, ATL skills, and institutional expectations.

Data Collection Procedures

Lesson plan analysis served as a central source of data. Current IB-informed lesson plans were analyzed alongside previous planning formats used before the institutional transition in order to identify observable changes in instructional organization and planning structure. The analysis focused on elements such as alignment between objectives and assessment, inquiry-based learning, conceptual understanding, formative assessment, student-centered instruction, reflection activities, and integration of ATL skills.

Institutional planning templates and curriculum documents were additionally analyzed to contextualize the pedagogical expectations established during the transition process. These documents provided insight into the school's implementation goals and planning requirements.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymization of participant data throughout the study.

Ethical approval procedures were followed in accordance with institutional research guidelines. Participants were fully informed of the voluntary nature of the study and of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question that caused discomfort.

Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details. No participant could be individually identified in the reporting of results.

All digital files, including transcripts, were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). Data coding focused on identifying recurring themes related to instructional coherence, teacher adaptation, institutional expectations, inquiry implementation, planning challenges, and pedagogical transformation.

Findings

The findings revealed that the implementation of IB-informed planning practices significantly influenced lesson planning processes within secondary EFL education. Teachers reported that the institutional transition encouraged greater intentionality in planning, particularly regarding alignment between objectives, instructional activities, and assessment practices.

Theme	Key Finding	Research Question
Planning intentionality and alignment	Teachers planned with greater intentionality, aligning learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment.	RQ1
Inquiry and conceptual learning	Current planning documents showed increased integration of	RQ1

	inquiry-based learning, conceptual understanding, ATL skills, and formative assessment.	
Backwards (outcome-oriented) design	Teachers defined learning outcomes and assessment before designing activities, shifting from activity-centered to outcome-oriented planning.	RQ1
Perceived benefits	Greater instructional coherence and more reflective, student-centered planning.	RQ2
Perceived challenges	Increased planning workload, limited preparation time, curriculum pacing pressures, and uncertainty about IB-informed concepts.	RQ2
Variability and teacher agency	Depth of adaptation varied with teaching style, confidence, and classroom context, reflecting teacher agency.	RQ1 and RQ2

The lesson plan analysis demonstrated increased incorporation of inquiry-based learning, conceptual understanding, ATL skills, formative assessment, and student-centered instructional strategies within current planning documents compared to previous lesson planning formats. Teachers frequently integrated inquiry questions, reflective activities, collaborative learning tasks, and opportunities for student agency into their lesson structures.

Participants also reported that backwards design encouraged more purposeful planning processes by requiring teachers to identify learning outcomes and assessment criteria before designing classroom activities. Three teachers described a shift away from activity-centered planning toward more outcome-oriented instructional organization.

Despite these positive changes, participants identified several challenges associated with the adaptation process. Teachers frequently mentioned increased planning workload (+5h/week), limited preparation time, curriculum pacing pressures, and uncertainty regarding implementation

of IB-informed pedagogical concepts. Some participants expressed difficulty balancing institutional expectations with classroom realities, particularly within large classes or tightly structured curricular schedules.

The findings additionally indicated variability in implementation among teachers. While some participants demonstrated extensive integration of inquiry and conceptual learning, others adapted IB-informed principles more selectively according to their teaching style, confidence level, and classroom context. This suggests that pedagogical adaptation during institutional transition is shaped not only by institutional expectations but also by teacher agency and contextual realities.

Overall, the study found that implementation of IB-informed planning practices promoted greater instructional coherence and encouraged more reflective, inquiry-based approaches to lesson planning within secondary EFL education.

Discussion

The findings suggest that institutional implementation of IB-informed pedagogical practices can significantly influence lesson planning processes within secondary EFL education. The increased emphasis on alignment, inquiry, reflection, and conceptual understanding observed in participant lesson plans reflects the influence of backwards design and IB planning principles on instructional organization.

The findings support the theoretical perspectives of Wiggins and McTighe (2005) by demonstrating that outcome-driven planning may encourage greater coherence between learning objectives, assessment, and classroom instruction. Similarly, the findings align with Biggs's theory of constructive alignment, as teachers increasingly emphasized the importance of purposeful alignment throughout lesson planning processes.

The study also reinforces the concept of teacher agency proposed by Hizli Alkan and Priestley given that teachers did not simply replicate IB pedagogical frameworks mechanically; rather, they interpreted and adapted these principles according to contextual realities, institutional expectations, and classroom needs. This demonstrates that implementation of pedagogical frameworks during institutional transition is a negotiated and dynamic process rather than a standardized one.

The variability observed among participants additionally highlights that successful pedagogical adaptation depends on factors such as institutional support, teacher preparation, workload, and contextual flexibility. While IB-informed planning practices may promote instructional coherence and inquiry-based learning, effective implementation requires realistic expectations and sustained professional support during institutional transition processes.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the sample was small, consisting of three EFL teachers within private bilingual institutions, which limits the transferability of the results to other contexts, particularly public or non-bilingual schools. Second, the data relied largely on teachers' self-reported perceptions gathered through interviews and on the analysis of a limited set of lesson plans, which may not fully capture actual classroom practice. Third, the study was conducted during a specific phase of the institutional transition toward an IB-oriented model, so the findings reflect a particular moment rather than the long-term evolution of these planning practices. Finally, as a qualitative case study, the research prioritizes depth of understanding over statistical generalization.

Implications

The findings carry several implications for practice. For teachers, the results highlight the value of intentional, outcome-oriented planning and suggest that familiarity with backwards design and IB-informed principles supports greater coherence between objectives, activities, and assessment. For institutions undergoing a transition toward IB education, the study underscores the importance of providing sustained professional development, adequate planning time, and collaborative support, given that workload and curriculum pacing emerged as significant challenges. A further implication concerns the scope of this adaptation. The lower secondary levels examined here are not formally part of the IB programmes the institution offers, so IB-informed planning at this stage operates as a recommended preparatory practice rather than a programme requirement. Introducing these principles early can therefore be understood as a way of building the conceptual understanding and self-management skills students will need upon entering the IB programme, with the aim of strengthening their future academic outcomes. More broadly, the findings suggest that EFL lesson planning can benefit from inquiry-based and conceptually driven approaches, provided that teachers are given sufficient resources and autonomy to adapt these practices to their classroom contexts.

Further Research

Future research could address the limitations identified in this study. Larger studies involving multiple institutions, including public and non-bilingual schools, would help determine whether the patterns observed here extend to other EFL contexts. Longitudinal designs could examine how IB-informed planning practices evolve over the full course of an institutional transition rather than at a single point in time. Further studies might also incorporate classroom observation and student outcome data to complement teachers' self-reported perceptions, and

could explore how factors such as teacher experience, confidence, and institutional support shape the depth of pedagogical adaptation.

Conclusion

This study examined how the implementation of IB-informed planning practices influenced secondary EFL teachers' pedagogical decisions during institutional transition toward a fully IB-oriented academic model. The findings indicate that adaptation of inquiry-based learning, ATL skills, MYP-inspired planning structures, and backwards design reshaped the decisions teachers made when planning: they defined learning outcomes and assessment earlier, sequenced activities to serve those outcomes, and integrated conceptual and student-centered strategies more deliberately. The depth of this shift varied across participants according to their teaching experience, confidence, and familiarity with IB principles.

The study also revealed that teachers experienced both opportunities and challenges during the transition process. While many participants valued the increased coherence and intentionality associated with IB-informed planning, they also identified challenges related to workload, limited preparation time, curriculum pacing, planning complexity, and adaptation to new pedagogical expectations.

The findings demonstrate that IB-informed planning practices can positively influence lesson planning in secondary EFL education when implemented flexibly and contextually. However, successful implementation depends not only on institutional expectations but also on teacher agency, professional support, and recognition of classroom realities.

This study contributes to existing research on curriculum adaptation, institutional transition, and pedagogical implementation within EFL education. It additionally highlights the

importance of understanding educational transition processes as collaborative and context-dependent rather than strictly procedural or standardized.

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