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United Arab Emirates University

**The College of Graduate Studies and the College of Humanities and Social
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PhD Dissertation Defense

Entitled

*IMPLEMENTATION OF FOCUS ON FORM IN A TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING CONTEXT IN
THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES EFL MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING*

by

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Abstract

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been researched from a number of perspectives for more than two decades. While research regarding the theoretical background of the framework and how tasks should be designed and implemented is growing worldwide, there is very little experimental research in the Gulf area and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular. This study is concerned with investigating how TBLT is implemented in intermediate English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in the UAE, focusing specifically on the way teachers focus on form (FonF) in their teaching practice in a TBLT-based educational context. The study explores the differences between four teachers when they introduced meaning-oriented tasks based on the textbook and the set of the learning outcomes proposed by The Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) - (previously known as Abu Dhabi Education Council, ADEC). The currently used textbook is task-based supported in many ways and the study looks at the role of the learning outcomes in helping learners focus on different aspects of language where they have problems with (i.e., FonF). The main objective of this dissertation is to identify the differences in the teaching practices of four teachers teaching grade seven, how the task-based textbook enhances form acquisition, and the potential gaps between theory and practice. The study also aims to explore teachers and students' views and attitudes towards the textbooks and the implementation of FonF within a TBLT framework. Adopting an experimental study approach, the data set included a total of one unit taught by four teachers on the same theme, with individual lesson plans and teaching materials. Data were collected from classroom observations, field notes, documentations of students work, as well as interviews with teachers and surveys for both, teachers and students. Results show that teachers differ in their teaching practices along four dimensions: a. the successful fulfillment of the learning outcomes, b. type of FonF employed, c. strategies used in FonF, and d. the possibility of implementing TBLT. Additionally, both teachers and students value the importance of form and the efficiency of TBLT as an integral part of the language learning process. Further, while students find the textbook a good resource for learning form and the explanation for the targeted structures are fully clear and the proposed practices are enough, the teachers did not find it a suitable resource for low-level students. These findings imply that the most important factors that contribute in enhancing language learning are not the task or the pedagogic framework the textbook is built on per se, but rather the teachers' successful understanding of the framework and their reactions to students needs in the classroom environment. It is expected that findings of the study affect the instructional practices of teachers so as to better teach form in their classrooms and help students achieve grammatical competence which is an essential part of students' language proficiency. It looks too at the potential effect of the framework on developing language learning skills of students beyond existing levels as well as raising teachers' awareness about their promising performance development. The study may help curriculum developers and material designers to amend/adapt the existing textbooks to best fit students' needs. Additionally, this study creates more research opportunities in the context of intermediate EFL school classrooms in the UAE. Finally, the study identifies the challenges and limitations of implementing TBLT in the UAE intermediate school educational setting. It is hoped that the study will tap on the benefits of implementing TBLT in EFL UAE educational settings in terms of both quantity (or amount) and quality (or depth) of learning.

Keywords: Task-based language teaching (TBLT); focus on form (FonF), English as a foreign language (EFL); the Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK); United Arab Emirates (UAE); middle school; classroom-based research.