

InterSedes

Revista Electrónica de las Sedes Regionales de la
Universidad de Costa Rica



Putting into Practice Gap Tasks in an ESP Classroom for
Medicine Personnel at Universidad de Costa Rica

Lucía Villanea – Morales

InterSedes, N° 38. Vol 18. Julio-diciembre (2017). ISSN 2215-2458

URL: <https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/intersedes>

DOI <https://dx.doi.org/10.15517/isucr.v18i38>

InterSedes Revista Electrónica de las Sedes Regionales, Universidad de Costa Rica, América Central. Correo electrónico: intersedes@gmail.com

Dr. Edgar Solano Muñoz, Director. Teléfono: (506) 2511 0654. Correo electrónico: edgar.solano@ucr.ac.cr

Editor Técnico: Bach. David Chavarría. Correo electrónico: davidalonso.chavarria@ucr.ac.cr

Montaje de texto: Licda. Margarita Alfaro Bustos. Correo electrónico: margarita.alfarobustos@gmail.com

Consejo Editorial Revista InterSedes

Dr. Edgar Solano Muñoz - Director- Universidad de Costa Rica

M.L Mainor González Calvo - Universidad de Costa Rica

M.L Neldys Ramírez Vásquez - Universidad de Costa Rica

Dr. Pedro Rafael Valencia Quintana. Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala. Facultad de Agrobiología. México.

M en C.A. Juana Sánchez Alarcón. Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala. Facultad de Agrobiología. México.

Mag. Marcelo Pérez Sánchez, Universidad de la República de Uruguay. Uruguay

Maria T. Redmon. Modern Languages & Literatures, Spanish. University of Central Florida.

Dr. Mario Alberto Nájera Espinoza. Universidad de Guadalajara. México.

Ing. Alex Roberto Cabrera Carpio, Mgr. Universidad Nacional de Loja-Ecuador.

Dr. Leonel Ruiz Miyares. Centro de Lingüística Aplicada (CLA). Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente, Santiago de Cuba. Cuba.

Magíster Bibiana Luz Clara. Profesora e Investigadora de la Universidad FASTA, Mar del Plata. Argentina.

Carlos José Salgado. Profesor del área de mercadeo. Universidad de La Sabana. Colombia.

Daniel Hiernaux-Nicolas. Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro. Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales. México.

Rodolfo Solano Gómez. Instituto Politécnico Nacional - IPN-Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigación para el Desarrollo Integral Regional Unidad Oaxaca, México.

José Miguel Guzmán Palomino. Universidad de Almería, España.

Dr. José Luis Gómez Olivares. Departamento de Ciencias de la Salud. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa. México.



Revista Electrónica de las Sedes Regionales de la Universidad de Costa Rica, todos los derechos reservados. Intersedes por intersedes.ucr.ac.cr/ojs está bajo una licencia de [Creative Commons Reconocimiento-NoComercial-SinObraDerivada 3.0 Costa Rica License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/cr/)

Putting into Practice Gap Tasks in an ESP Classroom for Medicine Personnel at Universidad de Costa Rica

Poniendo en práctica actividades que requieren de la interacción verbal para completar la información faltante en una clase de inglés con fines específicos impartida para el personal de medicina de la Universidad de Costa Rica

LUCÍA VILLANEA – MORALES¹

Recibido: 28.08.17

Aprobado: 09.02.18

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15517/isucr.v18i38.32676>

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study conducted in a group of eight students in an ESP course taught by Practicum students at the School of Medicine at the University of Costa Rica. The results indicate that the student-teachers based their lessons mostly on information gap tasks. Besides, this study revealed that the activities presented followed a common pattern avoiding variety. In addition, the study reflected that the activities used during the days of observation, did not fulfilled the requirements of a good gap task in a hundred percent since the tasks did not promote spontaneous and creative communication. The correct use of gap tasks helps students to develop speaking skills in a safe and private environment. The outcomes of these kinds of tasks will always be positive as long as they are adequate, relevant, authentic, and achievable.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching; communicative competence; English for Specific Purposes; gap tasks; adequacy; relevance; achievement; authenticity;

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados obtenidos de una investigación realizada con un grupo de ocho estudiantes en un curso de Inglés para Fines Específicos impartido por los estudiantes de posgrado en su práctica profesional en la Escuela de Medicina de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Los resultados indican que el enfoque primordial de los estudiantes practicantes en sus lecciones fue la utilización de las actividades llamadas "gap tasks". Además, este estudio reveló que estas actividades siguieron un patrón común donde la variedad quedó de lado. La investigación

¹ Costarricense, Profesora de Inglés. Docente de la Universidad de Costa Rica, Sede de Guanacaste. Email: lvillanea@hotmail.com

también reflejó que las actividades utilizadas no cumplieron con los requisitos de una "gap task" apropiada en un ciento por ciento puesto que las mismas no promovieron una comunicación espontánea y creativa. Las "gap tasks", si se emplean debidamente, son de gran ayuda para los estudiantes en el aula quienes pueden desarrollar sus habilidades del habla en un ambiente seguro y privado. Los alcances tras la utilización de estas actividades serán siempre positivos siempre y cuando estas tareas sean adecuadas, relevantes, auténticas y factibles.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza del Idioma Comunicativo - destreza comunicativa - Inglés para Fines Específicos - tareas con información faltante – adecuación – relevancia – logro - autenticidad

INTRODUCTION

Currently the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has become very popular in the area of teaching. It is an approach that focuses on communication and the accomplishment of students' ability to communicate. In order to reach this goal, CLT highlights the importance of helping students use the target language in a diverse array of contexts and situations. Furthermore, CLT weighs up meaningful communication rather than the achievement of perfect grammar or native-like pronunciation. Thus, the main goal of CLT is the development of communicative competence in learners. Savignon (2002) clearly supports this idea when she states that "the central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is communicative competence." Communicative competence refers to the ability of learners to communicate their language knowledge effectively. To develop competence, students have to be involved in a non-structured environment of language. To be precise, learners need the proper conditions to be creative and spontaneous.

Moreover, with the development of CLT, the role of teachers and learners has changed, as well. As Lee & Van Patten (1995) have clearly stated, "the instructor was no longer simply the drill leader but was also charged with providing students opportunities for communication; that is, using the language to interpret and express real-life situations." As a result, the students' task is no longer the repetition of structured sentences, but the generation of significant new ideas. As a result, other kinds of activities (gap-tasks) have been introduced to encourage communication. Gap refers (Lee & Van Patten, 1995) "to information that one person possesses but others do not. Gaps, therefore, create the absolute need to communicate as well as the need to cooperate."

Additionally, changes in language teaching methods, and language teaching materials and resources have occurred due to the worldwide demand for good English teaching. To this respect,

Richards (2006) says that “employers, too, insist that their employees have good English language skills, and fluency in English is a prerequisite for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today’s world.” This demand for a suitable teaching methodology has been spread out in all kinds of fields worldwide. Thus, an important part of English language teaching, explicitly English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching, flourished to fulfill this demand and the specific groups of students’ needs. In other words, ESP was born to meet the necessities of students who belong to specific fields needing English for specific purposes. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) explain that “if language varies from one situation of use to another, it should be possible to determine the features of specific situations and then make these features the basis of the learners’ course.”

Having established the relationship between CLT, communicative competence, gap-task activities, and ESP, and the importance of information gap tasks in communicative teaching, this study precisely aimed at the varied gap tasks used by the teachers during the main task cycle in an adult ESP course for medicine at UCR.

Literature review

ESP (English for Specific Purposes)

Globalization has been the main cause of the increasing demand for English in all kinds of fields. ESP includes a wide variety of vocational and professional areas such as business English (for business people), medical English (for nurses, doctors, other health care professionals), lawful English (for lawyers) and so on. Accordingly, the aim of teaching ESP is to develop both linguistic and professional competence so that learners are able to expand their knowledge. On this subject, Harding (2007) claims that “ESP has been designed to meet the specific needs of the learner.” He also says that “it makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves, and it is centered on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.” That is to say, that ESP focuses on the process of teaching English to certain groups of students who follow particular tasks, syllabus and methodology especially adapted to their necessities.

On the other hand, as mentioned previously, an ESP classroom is strongly linked to the main goal of CLT, which is the development of communicative competence. This idea can be complemented by Richards (2006) with the following assertion:

Advocates of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have also recognized that many learners need English in order to use it in specific occupational or educational settings. He claims that for them it would be more efficient to teach them the specific kinds of language and communicative skills needed for particular roles, (e.g., that of nurse, engineer, flight attendant, pilot, biologist, etc.) rather than just to concentrate on more general English.

Gap tasks in communicative classrooms

In a traditional classroom focused on grammar, the most frequent activity is for the teacher to ask a question and for a student to answer. Then, the teacher corrects or evaluates, and the cycle begins again and again. This means there is no real communication because all the answers are predictable. In this manner, gap tasks were introduced into the new scope to promote communication through interaction and negotiation of meaning. The success of gap tasks has been clearly expressed by a large number of authors who have agreed that to change the traditional classroom environment, the implementation of activities that promote natural communication has been necessary. For example, Doughty & Pica (1986) have declared that “the evidence suggests that a task with a requirement for information exchange is crucial to the generation of conversational modification of classroom interaction.” In addition, gap activities can indeed be effective in the classroom because they give every student the opportunity to speak in the target language without feeling intimidated as she or he would feel when delivering a speech in front of an entire class and being evaluated. Moreover, Richards (2006) reinforces the importance of gap tasks in the classroom by claiming that “using gap tasks more authentic communication is likely to occur in the classroom if students communicate with each other in order to obtain information to complete a task.”

Although gap tasks are classified into seven different categories, all are based on the information-gap principle which is sharing and obtaining information to achieve a task. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have noted “gaps can be applied to almost any lesson since learning demands thinking and gaps create that demand.” In addition, other researchers have agreed, including Doughty and Pica (1986) that “information gaps are one of the most fundamental in the whole area of communicative teaching because they can promote real communication and facilitate language acquisition.” The following is an example of an information-gap activity provided by Richards (2006):

Students are divided into A-B pairs. The teacher has copied two sets of pictures. One set (for A students) contains a picture of a group of people. The other set (for B students) contains a similar picture but it contains a number of slight differences from the A-picture. Students must sit back to back and ask questions to try to find out how many differences there are between the two pictures.

This gap activity surely promotes communication since information has to be shared and transferred to another source (student A or student B), and none of the students knows the answer. In other words, production of language is not automatic. Instead, it makes students negotiate meaning, analyze and generate vocabulary and language structures.

Furthermore, gap tasks are closely related to ESP and CLT since they have been widely recognized as required activities in an ESP classroom to promote communication. According to Richards (2006) “Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, *the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning*, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom.” Consequently, because classroom activities are one of the principles of CLT, the effectiveness of gap tasks in an ESP classroom is out of question because they promote communicative competence

Sequence of activities conducted in an ESP classroom

Kavaliauskienė (2005) underlines three main tasks that take place in an ESP classroom. She says, “in the pre-task stage, the topic is defined and essential vocabulary is highlighted by the teacher. In the task cycle, learners perform the task in pairs or small groups, rehearse their reports before presenting findings in front of the audience. The final stage (post task) is the language focus, during which specific language features that learners encountered in the task are examined and analyzed.” The present study was focused on the task cycle because the main tasks take place in this section of the lesson; therefore, it was more enriching to observe the development of students’ performance during the different tasks assigned and analyze each gap task used by the instructors in this specific cycle.

Task cycle

During the task cycle it is important to evaluate what activities fulfill the requirements of a communicative ESP lesson. As it has been explored, gap tasks match this demand since they help learners develop communicative competence by engaging them in authentic and real life situations. These tasks can be done by students in pairs or groups. Thus, they have the opportunity to express themselves in the target language. The teacher walks around to monitor the students' performance. He or she helps them to achieve the task, but she or he does not interfere to correct errors. The emphasis of these activities during the task cycle is on spontaneous language production within the small group.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide seven different gap tasks:

- a. Information gap. Refers to the existence of a lack of information among participants working on a common problem. They need to exchange the information to complete a task. There are two ways of information gaps. One-way information gap task: participants decide whether or not to contribute to the solution of the problem. Two-way information gap task: both learners have the information and must share it with the other to complete the task.
- b. Media gaps. The information is presented in one medium and needs to be transferred to another medium. Therefore, the students' goal is summarize or describe the information given in the authentic material and then transfer that information to a different medium.
- c. Reasoning gaps. These tasks require students to get involved in the process of drawing some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, and practical reasoning. Ellis (2003) adds that there are clues and pieces of evidence, but the answer needs to be extrapolated.
- d. Memory gaps. The learners receive some information at one stage of the lesson. They must use their memories to reconstruct the information obtained before.
- e. Jigsaw gaps. These tasks require all participants to interact and collaborate to reach the outcome of a particular task because all the information is divided among all the

participants. Therefore, in a group of students, all the parts are there, but they need to be put together to form a complete unit.

- f. Opinion gaps. These tasks involve the exchange of opinions rather than the achievement of missing information. Students have the same information but different opinions
- g. Certainty gaps. What is definitely known? What can be presupposed? What can be predicted? What is completely unavailable? Students know different things about the world. This gap can be exploited in brainstorming and general knowledge style quizzes.

Features of appropriate gap tasks

Authenticity

Ellis (2003) expresses that authenticity concerns whether a task needs to correspond to some real-world activity, i.e. achieve situational authenticity. Long (1985) (as cited by Ellis, 2003) provides an example that indicates that for him a task must be “real world, for example, painting a fence, dressing a child, borrowing a library book, etc. are activities that occur in day-to-day living.” Sometimes, teachers make use of activities that do not really reflect aspects of real-world. However, Ellis (2003) expresses that “for example, telling a story based on a series of pictures or describing a picture so someone else can draw it are activities that manifest some sort of relationship to the real world.” Regarding an ESP classroom, authenticity plays a major role because ESP students look for the accomplishment of communicating in real situations related to their professions. In addition, Harding (2007) claims that “in an ESP classroom teachers have to make the tasks authentic as well as the texts, and get the students doing things with the material that they actually need to do in their work.”

Achievement

Ellis (2003) indicates that “tasks are used to evaluate whether the learner can successfully perform some specific real-world activity.” Since the outcome of a task is essential in an ESP and CLT classroom, it is necessary to assess if a task was successfully completed or not. Success in achieving the goals of the tasks is an incentive for students to continue their learning process of a

second language. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) reinforce this thought by claiming that “learners need to be involved both cognitively and emotionally in the lesson.”

Adequacy

There are different levels of difficulty of gap tasks. Some can be for beginners with the students using specific vocabulary and grammar to share information. Others can be for intermediate or advanced students in which students are free to make use of all the knowledge they have of English. Tasks should be at the appropriate language age level. These ideas are supported by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) with this statement:

Our aim is to enable learners to use language, but it is unfair to give learners communicative tasks and activities for which they do not have enough of the necessary language knowledge.

Relevance

An activity is relevant if it is addressed to the learners’ needs. When learners are engaged in relevant tasks, they will learn more. ESP learners should be provided with tasks that are related to their needs for them to perform their tasks successfully. For example, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) indicate, “we can call ‘necessities’ the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation; that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, a businessman or woman might need to understand business letters, to communicate effectively at sales conferences, to get the necessary information from sales catalogues and so on.”

Research questions

Having established the relevance of including gap tasks in the classroom, the current study tries to answer the following research question, and sub questions.

-In what ways are gap tasks used by the teacher during the main task cycle in an adult ESP course for medicine?

- *What kinds of gap tasks are presented by the teacher?*
- *Do these tasks introduce authentic texts into the learning situation?*
- *Are the gap tasks relevant to the students’ profession?*

- *How appropriate are the gap tasks for students' language level?*
- *Are students able to solve the task successfully?*

Methodology

Subjects

The participants were 8 students. Seven of them work at the School of Medicine at UCR, and one of them was a chemist who was getting his master's degree in chemistry. Among the students, there were two secretaries, one messenger, three lab assistants and one chemist, and one student of the master's program in chemistry. All of them were true beginners whose language knowledge was basic. The course was designed for medicine personnel to provide them with useful tools to deal with topics closely related to their needs and day-to-day experiences at work.

Procedure

This research study was conducted in an ESP class taught by Practicum students at the School of Medicine at UCR. In order to gather the information required, the researcher observed the same group three times in three different weeks from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm. This study was focused merely on observing the lessons while they were taught by the instructors. Therefore, each day it was necessary for the researcher to sit discreetly in the back of the classroom, without interrupting or taking part of the class. To take notes, the researcher used an observation sheet divided into two sections. The first section was elaborated to consider the number and the types of gap tasks used in each session. First, the number of gap tasks applied in each particular session was counted. The overall number of activities is presented in Figure 1. Additionally, in the second section of the observation sheet, the researcher took into consideration some of the features a task should hold during the flow of the task cycle. First of all, each day the type of gap task employed in the classroom was written in the space provided. Next, by writing **yes** or **no** in the corresponding box, it was evaluated if the tasks were adequate enough to meet the learners' language level. Authenticity was also assessed in order to consider if the tasks introduced authentic situations of real life. The tasks were rated to be relevant to the students' needs, as well. Finally, the three different observation sheets were compared to determine if the results were similar or if there was some level of disparity among the three particular sessions regarding the application of gap tasks in the classroom. This information is shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Results and discussion

After all data were evaluated, the percentages and the distribution of a total of twelve gap tasks used by the student-teachers in an adult ESP course for medicine are shown as follows:

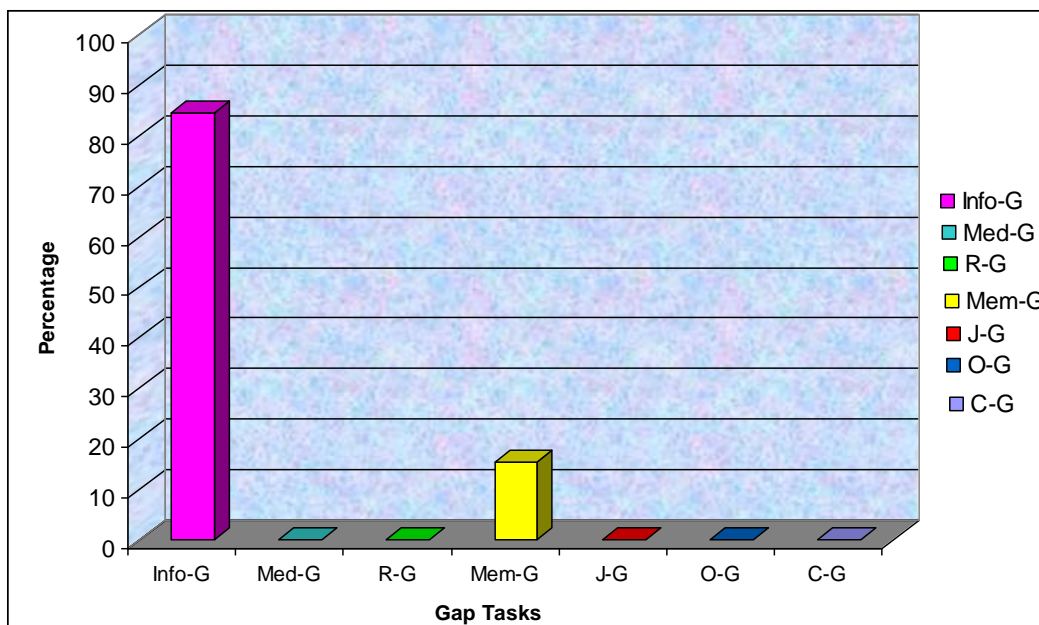


Figure 1. Overall gap tasks carried out during three different observation sessions. Info-G stands for information gap, Med-G for media gap, R-G for reasoning gap, Mem-G for memory gap, J-G for jigsaw gap, O-G for opinion gap, and C-G for certainty gap.

The results in this figure reveal that the most common type of gap task that the student-teachers applied during the three days of observation was the information gap; that is, out of 12 activities observed, 10 were information gap tasks and 2 memory gap tasks. An interesting fact here is that instructors mostly relied on gap tasks (4 gap tasks in the first session, 4 gap tasks in the second, and 4 gap tasks in the third) to promote interaction and communication among students during the task cycle of the three sessions. Thus, they followed one of the principles of CLT which is encourage students to communicate through activities that reflect real-life experiences. This might be perceived as the instructors' awareness of the significance of introducing gap tasks in their lessons. Then, as can be noted, even though the instructors were free to use any kind of task, five

extra gap tasks were not taken into account. This may reflect they were conscious of the low level of students regarding language use. For instance, in an information gap exercise, one student or the teacher must be in a position to tell another something that the second student does not know. Nevertheless, in the end, although this task promotes communication, it does not require too much effort from students to complete the task as it might be the case of reasoning, media, opinion, and certainty gap tasks where students are forced to generate more vocabulary and well-structured sentences. This statement is reinforced by Ellis (2003) when he compares information and opinion gap tasks. He says that “information gap tasks involve an exchange of information while opinion gap tasks involve learners in going beyond the information given by supplying their own ideas.” Also, sharing information in a media and reasoning gap task goes beyond the information provided.

Table 1

The features of a good gap task present in the activities carried out during the first lesson observed, day 1.

Gap task	Adequacy GTs meet learners’ language level.	Authenticity GTs introduce authentic material.	Relevance Gts are relevant to students’ needs	Achievement task successfully.
Ss solve the				
Info-gap 1	No	No	No	No
Info-gap 2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Info-gap 3	No	No	No	No
Info-gap 4	No	No	No	No

Note: GT= gap task. Info-task = information task. Ss=students.

As table 1 indicates, only info-gap 2 met learners’ language level, was relevant to the students’ needs, and was completed successfully because just this activity suited their low level of proficiency in English. However, it was not authentic. In this task students had to ask and answer questions related to some e-mails. Although students had to interact to complete the task, the questions were already given in the handouts; as a result, the task ended up being mechanical since it did not reflect a real-life situation. Regarding the rest of the activities, it is fair to say they did not meet the learners’ needs because the vocabulary they contained was not in accordance with the students’ level of English. Besides, they were neither authentic nor relevant to their needs. Again, the process to complete the tasks was not spontaneous since they have the questions written in the handouts. Consequently, students were not able to succeed in achieving the tasks. In fact, even the professor in charge and the observers found these tasks very complicated to understand what they

were about. In sum, even though the activities had the characteristics of information gap tasks, the way in which they were presented did not promote real-life communication.

Table 2
The features of a good gap task present in the activities carried out during the second lesson observed, day 2.

Gap task	Adequacy GTs meet learners' language level.	Authenticity GTs introduce authentic material.	Relevance Gts are relevant to students' needs	Achievement task successfully.
Memo-task 1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Info-task 1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Info-task 2	No	No	No	No
Info-task 3	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Note: GT= gap task. Memo-task = memory task. Info-task = information task. Ss=students.

Table 2 reports more positive results during the second observation. Memo-task 1, info-task 1, and info-task 3 fulfilled three of the requirements of a good gap task in an ESP classroom. However, they were not authentic. For instance, in memo-task 1, the process to reconstruct the dialogue given in which students had to change some terms and add others was artificial because they did not have to think much. Second, in info-task 1, although students had to work in pairs to complete the gaps in a text related to the organization of the School of Medicine, there was no a natural exchange of ideas. Then, in info-task 3, students had to ask and answer questions about an e-mail, but the questions were already given, leaving them without the chance to be spontaneous. Finally, in this case only info-task 2 did not match any of the features studied in this research. This task about a user manual of a biological microscope included vocabulary so complex that it was impossible for the students to reach a positive outcome, which is one of the principles of CLT. This clearly indicates that info-gap 2 was not a good option to be brought to class.

Table 3

The features of a good gap task present in the activities carried out during the third lesson observed, day 3.

Gap task Ss solve the	Adequacy GTs meet learners' language level.	Authenticity GTs introduce authentic material.	Relevance Gts are relevant to students' needs	Achievement task successfully.
Memo-task 1	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Info-task 1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Info-task 2	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Info-task 3	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Note: GT= gap task. Memo-task = memory task. Info-task = information task. Ss= students.

Table 3 presents more positive results because the four activities used in this session were adequate, relevant, and more importantly, they were achieved successfully by the students who showed to be more interested and motivated. This unquestionably demonstrates that the tasks used by the instructors in the third day were good alternatives to be carried out in this kind of ESP classroom. Nonetheless, it has to be taken into account the fact that 3 of the activities did not introduce authentic material which is a significant feature to be addressed in an ESP lesson. For example, during this observation the teacher in charge started the task cycle with a memory task. The teacher used a power point presentation to practice pronunciation and at the same time their memory skills. First, all the vocabulary was presented, then some words were erased for them to fill the gaps. Then, the teacher applied an information gap in which they had to work in pairs and listen for specific information to complete a table. After that, students continued working in pairs with another information gap to practice professions. They were provided with a gap exercise to complete it with the information presented in a PPP; after they had to interact for confirmation. Finally, they practiced directions in Costa Rica by listening to their partner for specific information to complete the task. Actually, this lesson was the most productive, entertaining, and successful proving that a well-addressed planning and a good selection of gap tasks lead to victorious outcomes. Obviously, for better results, authentic material should be included, as well.

In summary, it is important to mention that although the activities used by the student-teachers did not show natural and spontaneous communication, they indeed used gap tasks adapted to the students' low level of proficiency in English. This group of students was not prepared to deal with two-way information gap tasks suitable for intermediate and advanced students. Instead, the instructors made use of one-way information gap tasks which do not require an exchange of

information. Participation was optional, and sometimes the teacher or the most proficient students controlled the task. This might be reason why the gap tasks used during the observations were not addressed according to what it is mostly presented in the literature. They included mainly handouts with spaces in blank to be completed by sharing information with a partner, but without unstructured and natural situations reflecting real-life situations. Nevertheless, in the end, they relied on gap tasks to conduct their lessons being aware of the significance of these activities in an ESP classroom that focuses on communication.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. In an ESP classroom whose central focus is communication, it is very important to introduce gap tasks since they demand thinking.
2. Gap tasks should be put into practice in an ESP classroom in the correct way. They should be introduced to activate students' minds. They should not be introduced in the lesson just to fill empty spaces but rather to suit the students' needs. They have to serve a purpose. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) strengthen this assumption A teacher's best friend can be the pair of scissors that creates the gaps which stimulate the learners' thinking processes
3. Teaching English by means of gap tasks creates the appropriate setting for students of any field.
4. There are seven different gap tasks. Teachers should be aware of this to include variety to their classes. As Hutchinson & Waters (1987) express, "variety is the spice of learning."
5. The material brought to class has to be relevant to the students' needs, authentic to reflect real-life situations, and most importantly they have to meet learners' language level to reach successful outcomes. Otherwise, there is no use in bringing gap tasks to any classroom.
6. Closely related to point 5. Tasks should not be presented in the form of handouts with spaces in blank to be filled in. There has to be other types of material to encourage communication in a more natural way.

Limitations

This study has presented actual results; however, the small quantity of lessons observed was the main limitation. The small piece of evidence gathered during the three observations just permitted to have an overview of the whole context, and not the exact findings that could have been brought into light by conducting a deeper study. Second, the fact of being just an observer and not a participant, narrowed the conclusions because it could have been interesting to have the students' opinions to reveal what their perceptions about gap tasks had been. Last but not least, working on my own duplicated the job.

Personal reflection

First of all, based on the theory studied in class, I expected to find a course strictly addressed to medicine professionals or at least medicine students. To my surprise, the only relationship that the students had with medicine was that they worked for the school of medicine. Consequently, at first I was very confused because the types of lessons were not what I had expected. Then, I realized that the instructors had made a great effort to adapt the course to the population's needs. Hence, this is the first thing I learned after observing these lessons. I learned that I have to be prepared to face any inconvenience and adapt any course to the students' necessities mainly if I am going to encounter a group whose level of English is very low. Based on the analysis of the activities that resulted in a failure, I also discovered that in order to achieve a task successfully, the language level of the target population has to be exceptionally taken into consideration. Moreover, being engaged in this project has surely enhanced my teaching methods. From the moment I began to expand my knowledge about gap tasks, I started using them in my classes. They have become an important element of my teaching process. Actually, thanks to gap tasks I have reduced anxiety among my students since they practice communication in pairs or in groups of three. Now, they do not undergo the terrible experience of delivering a speech in front of the class. Instead of this, I monitor them, I do not correct their mistakes at the moment of speaking, and most importantly, I encourage them to produce language in a safer environment. For example, I would like to share my experience with one of my students at UCR, Liberia Campus; her major is Bilingual Primary Education. From the first moment I met her I realized her level of English was too low, so I wondered what she was doing there since the course she was taking was taught in the second semester. She was not even able to verbalize a simple sentence. However, with the implementation of gap tasks in the classroom, she has now been able to articulate some sentences.

There is still a huge way before her, but at least it is comforting to see a slight improvement. All in all, I feel I have become a better professional since I have been updating my teaching methods, and I have left behind all the “ancient” ones that teachers used to apply when I was an undergraduate student. A time when teachers were the leaders of the band who dictated the rules to be obeyed. Mostly, I have discovered that teaching is a work of heart and not a work of art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Doughty, C. and Pica. T. (1986) *Information Gap Tasks: Do They Facilitate Second Language Acquisition?* University of Pennsylvania. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/3586546? Seg=2](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3586546?Seg=2)

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford

University Press.

Harding, K. (2007). *English for Specific Purposes*. Oxford: Oxford University

Press.

Hutchinson T. & Waters A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Kavaliauskienė, G. (2005). *Task-Based Learning and Learning Outcomes in the ESP*

Classroom. ISSN 1648-2824 KALBŪ STUDIJS. 2005. 7 NR. * STUDIES ABOUT LANGUAGES. Retrieved from http://www.kalbos.lt/zurnalai/07_numeris/12.pdf

Lee, J.F. & VanPatten B. (1995) *Making communicative Language Teaching Happen*.

McGraw-Hill, Inc. University of Illinois.

Nunan, D.(1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers

Boston, Massachusetts.

Richards, J. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*: Cambridge

University Press, New Cork.. Retrieved from http://www.cambridge.org/other_files/downloads/esl/booklets/Richards-Communicative

Savignon, S.J. (2002) *Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching*. Yale: Yale

University Press. Retrieved from <http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/pdf/0300091567.pdf>