

Bilingual Teaching in Geography: Effects on Students' Motivation and Academic Performance in Secondary Education

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Abstract

The growing interest in multilingual education has encouraged schools to explore new ways of combining subject teaching with foreign language learning. In this context, the present paper discusses the possible impact of bilingual teaching on students' motivation and academic achievement in secondary Geography classes. Particular attention is given to the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) approach, which allows learners to study school subjects while using a foreign language as a means of communication. The paper combines theoretical perspectives with a proposed methodological framework designed for future classroom implementation. The research focuses on how the integration of English into Geography lessons may influence students' participation, classroom interaction, motivation, and understanding of geographical concepts. The proposed methodology includes classroom observation, interactive learning activities, assessment tasks, and the use of bilingual instructional materials adapted to secondary education. In addition, digital resources such as interactive maps, visual presentations, and multimedia materials may support both language learning and geographical understanding. The anticipated findings suggest that bilingual Geography instruction may contribute to increased learner motivation, more active participation during lessons, and improved communication skills in English. At the same time, CLIL-based activities may support the development of transferable competences such as collaboration, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness. The paper also discusses possible challenges related to language proficiency, instructional planning, and

classroom implementation while emphasizing the educational value of bilingual teaching approaches in Geography education.

Keywords: CLIL, bilingual education, Geography education, student motivation, academic performance

1. Introduction

Recent educational developments have highlighted the importance of multilingual competence and interdisciplinary learning within modern school systems. As globalization continues to influence educational policies and classroom practices, schools increasingly encourage the integration of foreign language learning with subject-specific instruction. In this context, English has become an important educational tool that may support students' academic, social, and intercultural development.

Among the approaches that promote bilingual learning, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has gained considerable attention in recent years. This approach combines subject teaching with foreign language use and allows learners to develop both disciplinary knowledge and language competences at the same time. Through communication-oriented and interactive activities, CLIL may contribute to more engaging learning experiences while also supporting critical thinking and collaboration.

Geography represents a suitable subject for bilingual teaching because it combines visual resources, maps, diagrams, case studies, and contextual learning activities that facilitate comprehension and communication. Integrating English into Geography lessons may help students expand their subject-specific vocabulary, improve their understanding of geographical phenomena, and participate more actively during classroom activities. In addition, bilingual Geography instruction may support the development of transferable competences such as teamwork, problem-solving, and intercultural awareness.

Learner motivation is another important factor influencing academic achievement and classroom participation. Traditional teaching approaches may sometimes reduce students' engagement, while

interactive and student-centered instructional methods can stimulate curiosity and active involvement in the learning process. From this perspective, bilingual teaching may contribute to the creation of a more dynamic and motivating educational environment.

The present study explores the possible effects of bilingual teaching through the CLIL approach on students' motivation and academic performance in secondary Geography education. The paper also seeks to identify potential educational benefits and challenges associated with the integration of English into Geography lessons.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1.Does bilingual teaching increase students' motivation in Geography classes?
- 2.Does the CLIL approach improve students' academic performance?
- 3.How do students perceive bilingual Geography lessons?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Bilingual Education

The increasing importance of multilingual communication in contemporary society has contributed to the growing interest in bilingual education within modern school systems. Bilingual education involves the use of two languages during the teaching and learning process, enabling learners to develop both academic knowledge and language competences simultaneously. It may also contribute to the development of communication abilities, cognitive flexibility, and intercultural awareness, preparing learners for the demands of an increasingly interconnected world (Baker, 2011).

Specialists in the field of bilingual education have emphasized a variety of educational benefits associated with learning through a foreign language. Learners exposed to bilingual instruction frequently demonstrate improved problem-solving skills, greater adaptability in communication, and increased confidence in academic interaction. Cummins (2001) argues that bilingual learning environments may positively influence cognitive development and academic achievement when appropriate instructional strategies are applied.

Within the European educational context, bilingual education has attracted considerable attention as schools increasingly seek to integrate foreign languages into subject teaching. This

interdisciplinary approach supports the development of key competences required in the 21st century, including communication, collaboration, and intercultural understanding. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of bilingual education depends on several important factors, such as teacher training, learners' language proficiency, and the availability of suitable teaching resources.

Recent educational research highlights the growing importance of bilingual and CLIL-based instruction in contemporary school systems. Recent studies suggest that bilingual education may positively influence learner motivation, classroom participation, communication skills, and intercultural awareness, particularly in student-centered learning environments (Macaraeg, 2024; Ohki, 2024). Moreover, the integration of foreign languages into subject teaching continues to gain relevance in the context of modern multilingual education.

2.2. The CLIL Approach

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is widely recognized as one of the most important approaches used in bilingual education. Introduced by Marsh (2002), CLIL refers to the integration of subject content and foreign language learning within the same educational context. Through this approach, learners simultaneously acquire subject-specific knowledge and develop communication skills in a foreign language.

The CLIL approach is based on the 4Cs Framework proposed by Coyle (2010), which includes Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. These interconnected dimensions support both academic learning and language development while encouraging critical thinking, collaboration, and intercultural understanding.

In Geography education, CLIL represents an effective instructional strategy because the subject naturally integrates visual materials, maps, diagrams, discussions, and real-world contexts. Geography lessons may therefore provide meaningful opportunities for learners to develop communication abilities while exploring geographical concepts and phenomena.

Recent studies emphasize the growing relevance of CLIL methodologies in contemporary education, particularly in multilingual and student-centered learning environments. Current research suggests that CLIL-based instruction may improve learner motivation, communication

skills, classroom participation, and subject comprehension while supporting both language development and academic achievement (Ohki & Cross, 2024; De Benetti, 2025)

2.3. Motivation in Learning

Motivation represents an essential aspect of the educational process and plays an important role in students' academic achievement and classroom participation. Educational psychologists such as Deci and Ryan (2000) distinguish between intrinsic motivation, associated with personal interest and satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, influenced by external rewards or expectations.

According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation contributes to meaningful and long-term learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to participate more actively in classroom activities, show greater persistence in completing learning tasks, and achieve better academic results.

In foreign language learning environments, motivation becomes particularly important because learners may experience insecurity or hesitation when communicating in another language. Scheidecker and Freeman (1999) emphasize that motivating learning environments are closely related to active participation, meaningful interaction, and positive classroom experiences. Similarly, Dörnyei (2001) argues that supportive classroom environments, interactive teaching methods, and positive teacher-student relationships can significantly increase learners' motivation and involvement in the learning process.

Recent educational research continues to highlight the close connection between learner motivation, classroom engagement, and academic achievement in bilingual and CLIL-based educational settings. Contemporary studies suggest that interactive teaching strategies, collaborative learning activities, and student-centered instruction may positively influence students' motivation and participation, particularly in foreign language integrated classrooms (Macaraeg, 2024; De Benetti, 2025). In addition, the use of digital educational resources and multimedia-based activities may further increase students' interest and active involvement during lessons.

Within CLIL-based Geography education, motivation may also be supported through the use of visual materials, map analysis, interactive tasks, and communication-oriented activities. Such

approaches may encourage students to participate more confidently and actively during bilingual lessons while supporting both language development and academic achievement.

2.4. Geography Teaching through CLIL

Geography is often considered a suitable subject for the implementation of CLIL because it combines theoretical information with visual and practical learning experiences. Maps, diagrams, multimedia materials, and case studies may facilitate comprehension and support the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary in a foreign language (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

Modern Geography teaching increasingly emphasizes interactive and student-centered instructional approaches that encourage observation, interpretation, and active participation during classroom activities (Dulamă, 2017).

The integration of English into Geography lessons may contribute to the development of communication abilities and improve learners' understanding of geographical concepts and phenomena. Through bilingual instructional activities, students are encouraged to interpret maps, describe geographical processes, and express ideas using specialized terminology.

Furthermore, CLIL-based Geography instruction may support the development of transferable competences such as teamwork, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Learners may become more actively involved in the educational process and gain greater confidence in using English within academic contexts.

Recent educational research suggests that the integration of CLIL into Geography education may positively influence both learner motivation and academic achievement. However, the effectiveness of bilingual instruction depends on careful lesson planning, appropriate language support, and the adaptation of instructional materials to students' educational and linguistic needs (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The present research is based on a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative perspectives in order to examine the possible influence of bilingual teaching on students' motivation and academic achievement in secondary Geography education. At the current

stage, the study remains in the process of preparation, while the practical implementation is planned for the 2026–2027 academic year through CLIL-based Geography instruction.

The research aims to analyze the educational value of integrating English into Geography lessons and to explore how bilingual instructional activities may influence students' participation, classroom engagement, communication skills, and understanding of geographical concepts. The methodological design combines theoretical analysis with the development of instructional activities adapted to the educational and linguistic needs of secondary learners.

The practical component of the study will include classroom observation, student questionnaires, formative assessment tasks, and the analysis of students' participation during CLIL-based Geography activities. Observation sheets and feedback questionnaires will be used in order to monitor students' motivation, classroom engagement, communication abilities, and academic involvement throughout the instructional process.

In addition, the study aims to identify appropriate teaching strategies that may facilitate the gradual implementation of bilingual instruction in Geography education while promoting interactive and student-centered learning experiences.

3.2. Participants

The proposed research focuses on secondary students from a Romanian public school. The participants are expected to include students from grades V–VIII who study Geography within the national curriculum and learn English as a foreign language.

The selection of participants is based on students' involvement in regular Geography classes and on the possibility of implementing bilingual learning activities appropriate to their age, educational needs, and language proficiency level. The study mainly targets learners with beginner to intermediate English language skills who may benefit from the gradual integration of English into Geography instruction.

Since the practical component of the research is still in progress, the present study primarily focuses on the planning and preparation of CLIL-oriented instructional activities adapted to secondary learners.

The learners involved in the future implementation of the study are expected to participate in collaborative and communication-based classroom activities designed to encourage the use of

English within Geography lessons while supporting motivation, classroom engagement, and active participation.

3.3. Proposed CLIL Activities in Geography

The practical dimension of the research is based on the integration of bilingual teaching strategies into Geography instruction. The proposed activities aim to combine geographical content with the use of basic English language structures in order to create engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Practical and interactive learning activities play an important role in Geography education because they facilitate the understanding of geographical concepts and encourage active student involvement (Mândruț, 2023). Within CLIL-based Geography instruction, students may participate in various educational activities such as map analysis tasks, vocabulary exercises, matching activities, visual interpretation exercises, group discussions, short oral presentations, and collaborative learning tasks. These activities are designed to encourage communication, classroom participation, and the development of both geographical and linguistic competences.

Geographical terminology in English will be introduced gradually and adapted to learners' language proficiency level. Maps, images, visual organizers, and graphic materials may facilitate comprehension and reduce language-related difficulties during bilingual activities.

Digital resources and multimedia materials may also play an important role in the implementation of CLIL-based Geography instruction. Interactive maps, educational videos, online learning platforms, and visual presentations may support comprehension and increase students' engagement during bilingual lessons. The integration of technology into Geography education may contribute to both language acquisition and the understanding of geographical concepts through visually supported and meaningful learning experiences.

The proposed bilingual Geography activities may address various educational topics, including continents and oceans, climate and weather, population and settlements, natural environments, and administrative organization. These instructional activities are intended to support communication, collaborative learning, active participation, and the gradual development of both geographical knowledge and English language skills.

3.4. Research Methods and Instruments

Several research methods are proposed for the future implementation of the study, including classroom observation, student questionnaires, didactic experiments, and assessment activities. These methods are intended to provide a broader perspective on the educational benefits and possible challenges associated with the implementation of the CLIL approach in secondary Geography education.

Classroom observation may be used to monitor students' participation, interaction, communication skills, and engagement during bilingual Geography lessons. Observation sheets may help identify learners' attitudes toward bilingual education as well as their level of involvement during CLIL-based instructional activities.

Student questionnaires may also contribute to the collection of information regarding learners' perceptions of bilingual instruction, their motivation toward Geography learning, and their confidence in using English during classroom activities. In addition, assessment activities and instructional worksheets may be designed in order to evaluate students' understanding of geographical concepts and the development of basic geographical vocabulary in English.

The didactic experiment proposed within the study aims to explore how bilingual instructional activities may influence classroom participation, communication, and academic engagement. Formative assessment techniques may also contribute to monitoring students' progress and participation throughout the instructional process.

The collected data are expected to be analyzed through qualitative and descriptive methods, focusing on students' classroom interaction, participation, feedback, and responses provided during questionnaires and instructional activities. The interpretation of the results may provide useful insights into the educational value of CLIL-based Geography instruction and its potential influence on learner motivation and academic involvement.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Expected Educational Benefits

Drawing on the theoretical framework and previous research on bilingual education and CLIL methodologies, the integration of bilingual teaching strategies into Geography lessons may generate a variety of educational benefits for secondary learners.

Based on classroom observation, student questionnaires, and formative assessment activities proposed within the methodological framework of the study, the research is expected to identify a possible increase in students' motivation and classroom engagement during bilingual Geography lessons. Interactive CLIL-based activities may encourage learners to participate more actively in classroom discussions and develop more positive attitudes toward the learning process.

Questionnaire responses and observation sheets may also provide information regarding students' confidence in using English during Geography classes and their willingness to communicate within bilingual educational contexts. Through map analysis, visual resources, and collaborative learning activities, learners may gradually develop communication abilities and acquire subject-specific geographical terminology in English.

In addition, the proposed instructional activities may contribute to the development of transferable competences such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and intercultural awareness. CLIL-based Geography instruction may encourage students to interpret visual information, analyze geographical processes, and communicate within meaningful educational situations while supporting active participation and collaborative learning.

The interpretation of the collected data may offer valuable insights into the educational potential of bilingual Geography teaching and its possible influence on students' motivation, participation, and academic involvement within secondary education.

4.2. Possible Challenges

Despite the educational benefits associated with the CLIL approach, several difficulties may arise during the implementation of bilingual teaching strategies in Geography education.

One important challenge is related to the different levels of English language proficiency among learners. Some students may experience insecurity or anxiety when using a foreign language during classroom activities, particularly if they are not familiar with bilingual learning environments. In such situations, excessive linguistic difficulty may reduce participation and learner confidence.

Another possible challenge concerns the preparation and adaptation of instructional materials. Teachers need to adapt geographical content to learners' language proficiency levels while maintaining the scientific accuracy of the information presented. This process may require

additional preparation time, careful instructional planning, and the use of accessible visual and interactive resources.

Based on previous research on CLIL implementation and bilingual instruction, classroom management and time limitations may also influence the effectiveness of bilingual educational activities. Observation-based activities and instructional planning may reveal that combining both content-related and language-related objectives within the same lesson can become demanding, particularly in classes characterized by different learning abilities and language proficiency levels. Consequently, the gradual implementation of CLIL strategies and differentiated instruction may represent important factors in supporting effective bilingual Geography teaching.

In addition, teacher training represents an essential factor in the successful implementation of bilingual education. Educators need both subject-specific knowledge and adequate language competences in order to design effective bilingual learning experiences and support learners throughout the instructional process.

4.3. Pedagogical Implications

The integration of bilingual teaching strategies into Geography education emphasizes the importance of flexible and innovative teaching approaches adapted to contemporary educational needs. The CLIL methodology encourages interdisciplinary learning and supports the simultaneous development of academic knowledge and language competences within meaningful educational contexts. Geography education may contribute to the development of analytical thinking, interpretation skills, and real-world understanding through inquiry-based and student-centered activities (Lambert & Balderstone, 2021).

The successful implementation of bilingual Geography lessons requires careful instructional planning, accessible teaching materials, and activities adapted to students' age and language proficiency level. Visual support, collaborative tasks, and interactive activities may facilitate comprehension and reduce language-related anxiety during bilingual instruction.

The use of digital technologies and multimedia resources may further improve the effectiveness of CLIL-based Geography education. Educational applications, interactive maps, online platforms, and multimedia presentations can contribute to the creation of more engaging and accessible learning environments. Technology-supported activities may also encourage collaboration,

independent learning, and active participation while supporting the development of both geographical understanding and communication abilities.

At the same time, the teacher plays a central role in creating supportive and motivating classroom environments. Teachers should gradually integrate bilingual elements into Geography lessons and encourage learners to communicate confidently without fear of making mistakes. Positive feedback, differentiated instruction, and student-centered activities may contribute significantly to increasing learner confidence and classroom participation.

The anticipated findings of the present study suggest that bilingual teaching through the CLIL approach may positively influence students' motivation, engagement, and learning experiences in Geography education. Although the practical component of the research is still ongoing, the proposed instructional framework may offer useful perspectives for future educational practices and further research in the field of bilingual and multilingual education.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

The present study includes several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the practical component of the research is still in progress, which means that the study does not yet provide final classroom-based results or detailed quantitative statistical analysis. Consequently, the current paper focuses primarily on the theoretical framework and on the proposed methodological and pedagogical approach.

Another limitation is associated with the relatively limited number of participants involved in the future implementation of the study. Since the research is intended to be conducted within secondary Geography classes, the findings may not be generalized to all educational settings or learner populations.

Furthermore, differences in students' English language proficiency levels may influence classroom participation, communication, and learning outcomes during bilingual instructional activities. Time limitations, classroom management issues, and the availability of appropriate teaching resources may also affect the implementation of CLIL-based Geography instruction.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide valuable pedagogical perspectives regarding the integration of bilingual teaching strategies into Geography education and may contribute to future research concerning CLIL methodologies and multilingual learning environments.

5. Conclusions

The present paper highlights the educational potential of bilingual teaching through the CLIL approach in secondary Geography education. In the context of contemporary educational reforms and the increasing importance of multilingual competences, the integration of English into Geography lessons may represent an effective strategy for supporting both subject learning and language development.

The theoretical perspectives discussed throughout the study suggest that bilingual instruction may positively influence students' motivation, classroom participation, and engagement in the learning process. Geography, as an interdisciplinary subject that combines visual, practical, and communicative dimensions, offers multiple opportunities for the implementation of CLIL-based activities adapted to secondary learners.

At the same time, the study underlines the importance of carefully planned teaching strategies, accessible instructional materials, and supportive classroom environments in order to facilitate successful bilingual learning experiences. The gradual introduction of English terminology, collaborative tasks, and interactive activities may contribute to the development of communication abilities, learner confidence, and transferable competences such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Although the practical component of the research is still ongoing, the proposed methodological framework outlines several possible educational benefits and pedagogical perspectives related to the future implementation of bilingual Geography instruction. Additional classroom-based studies may provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between CLIL methodologies, learner motivation, and academic achievement.

Overall, the paper supports the idea that bilingual teaching represents a valuable educational approach capable of responding to the needs of contemporary learners while promoting more interactive, student-centered, and interdisciplinary Geography education. Future research may focus on the long-term effects of CLIL-based Geography instruction on students' academic achievement, language development, and classroom engagement, as well as on the effectiveness of digital resources and bilingual assessment strategies in secondary education.

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