



*Research article*

## **Multimedia resources and movies in the new perspectives on teaching geography through CLIL and ICT**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the new perspectives on geographic education teaching contents through a foreign language. Covid-19 pandemic transformed teaching and learning environments and methods through the activation of distance learning in many schools around the world. In their new role of virtual classroom facilitators, teachers tried to offer an educational service through multiple multimedia resources and visual aids. The effects of the growing use of digital technologies in teaching methodologies show that these tools can be a valuable aid also for understanding the interdisciplinary nature of geography through the use of audiovisual materials and a vehicular language, that is a foreign language used as a medium of transmission of contents through CLIL approach. The research focuses on the advantages offered by the use of multimedia resources and movies to encourage interdisciplinary skills. According to many scholars, authentic materials and films in particular, boost students to acquire linguistic competences and a deeper understanding of geography.

**Keywords:** geography; CLIL; technology; movies; multimedia; teaching; learning; methodologies; interdisciplinarity; languages

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### **1. Introduction**

The relationship between human beings and the Earth is the main theme of geography. Since the post positivist period this science increasingly approaches the social ones. Between the end of

the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century geographers start to adopt an interdisciplinary approach.

*The cultural turn*, a movement beginning in the early 1970s, marks a trend that sees social and human sciences increasingly focus on culture and an orientation of human geography's interdisciplinary [1].

In *New directions in cultural geography* Cosgrove and Jackson [2] underline the new cultural perspectives and put in evidence new meanings of landscape by defining it “*a particular way of composing, structuring and giving meaning to an external world whose history has to be understood in relation to the material appropriation of land*”.

Therefore, starting from the seventies with the cultural turn and Yi-Fu Tuan's major works *Humanistic geography* [3] and *Space and place* [4], geographers expand their fields of investigation dealing with cultural issues and, in the eighties, they broaden further their perspectives with *New cultural geography* ranging from literature to art and media.

Moreover, the new direction of geography towards interdisciplinarity is well illustrated in the book *Cultural Turns/Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geograph* [5] created by thirty-one authors that belong to different intellectual and disciplinary areas. The volume is full of debates on the relationship of geography with other disciplines and focuses on the importance of space and spatiality in the social science.

Taking this on board, from the second half of the eighties, cultural geography began to study the landscape through visual narration. Researchers such as Burgess and Gold [6] examine in detail the production and consumption of the values of the environment in the media by conducting studies on the significances communicated by places, landscapes and nature, in particular in the mass media and in advertising. Cosgrove and Daniels [7] and also Pocock [8] interpret the meanings of the landscape and the sense of place produced in the literary field and in paintings depicting landscapes. Other researchers, such as Rose [9], Aitken and Zonn [10] analyze the value of place in the visual arts with particular regard to films, while others such as Kong [11] and Frith [12] highlight the importance of music in geography.

As Anderson [13] argues “field diaries, policy documents, graffiti, web-pages, campaign material, even documentaries or films can also be seen as texts that can be read to understand cultural geographies”.

With this in mind, it should be stressed that new perspectives on geographic education are oriented to adopt innovative teaching methods which require the use of new technologies and multimedia as a teaching and learning support. Contemporary geography teachers have to consider that children and young people are increasingly digital citizens. Consequentially educators must include new technologies as learning tools for the construction and sharing of geographical knowledge [14].

In Italy, geography teaching is not always effectively valued. As a matter of facts in some high schools this discipline is not even included in the curriculum. Patrizio Roversi, known as the host of the Italian of television program *Turisti per caso* (broadcast on RAI 3 until 2006 and inspired by the 1988 film *The Accidental Tourist* directed by Lawrence Kasdan), during an interview for *Focus Junior* magazine, highlighted the importance to re-evaluate teaching geography and travel literature in schools [15]. He also stressed that geography can be studied through the reading of great travel

novels and can open a window on the world by arousing anthropological curiosities and igniting imagination in children [15].

Furthermore, it is helpful to consider that geography is also indirectly taught through the study of foreign languages which also includes the achievement of cultural competence for example, through the study of tourism geography, especially with regard to places and events of tourist attraction and often comparing them with those of students' country of origin. Besides through CLIL (*Content and Language Integrated Learning*) approach it is possible to teach simultaneously geography content and language using ICT (*Information and Communications Technology*) and web tools.

In this view, digital tools and visual aids, such as pictures and movies, can help pupils and students to develop understanding of geographic concepts and increasing both linguistic and interdisciplinary skills.

## 2. Teaching geography in schools using CLIL, ICT and visual aids

Today classrooms are more and more configured as a hybridization of real and virtual and therefore it is necessary to invest more to make learning environments adequately equipped [16].

Particular attention should be paid to explore the challenges facing the sudden arrival of COVID-19 pandemic that in March 2020 forced schools around the world to switch into distance learning. Before this health emergency, digital tools were barely used due to the lack of properly equipped classrooms in many schools and consequentially lots of teachers were not very familiar in using digital devices and multimedia resources.

Therefore, in the most critical periods of health emergency, the majority of educators in the world practiced a new way of teaching using digital technologies in virtual spaces. Yet today, educational platforms, such as *Google Workspace for Education* and *Microsoft Teams*, are often used as alternatives for face-to-face instruction to allow students and their teachers to communicate, create and share materials in safety.

With distance learning, images and audiovisual aids have become an indispensable support in the world of school. Likewise, playful approach has been re-evaluated through learning platforms such as *Wordwall*, *Kahoot*, *Mentimeter*, *ThinkLink*, *Socrative* and specific resources for teaching geography through foreign languages including *Google maps* and many educational platforms with engaging and interactive multimedia materials.

It is to be remarked that game is a winning educational strategy because it motivates students to learn and it promotes interactivity.

This is why gamification of today's digital generation has become a popular tactic for encouraging specific behaviors and increasing motivation and engagement. It is a strategy that applies the typical elements of the game (rules, scores, competition) in different contexts to involve users in solving problems. Widely used especially in the field of marketing, today it is also applied in the education sector where it is very effective for promoting active learning and recognizing skills, helping educators to know how to satisfy students' needs and achieve educational objectives [17].

Games are therefore an excellent resource to motivate students since they are interactive, engaging and above all enjoyable.

For the teaching of foreign languages, games can be used mainly to enrich language properties and consolidate and enhance grammar knowledge. Thanks to the variety of dynamic elements, sounds and graphics, games can make teaching a special experience that can also be repeated at home through a computer or other digital devices. The most common language games include word search, quizzes, cloze and memory games.

If we assume that English is the vehicular language to teach visual geography, we can use many amazing resources from websites accessible around the world such as National Geographic, Map your memories, *Ordnance Survey*, *World Geography Games—Seterra*.

The web is full of platforms characterized by playful and interactive activities and useful to encourage the learning of geography. For example we can suggest *Google tour creator* that allows to make a virtual journey and see three-dimensionally landscapes and cities, and *Radio Garden* which permits to select a certain geographical position and listen to the broadcast of the local radio through *Google Earth*.

These tools and resources are also very useful in face-to-face lessons because they provide a support to keep interest alive and they represent a precious stimulus to learn by doing. As a consequence of this, they can contribute to enrich critical skills and acquire interdisciplinary skills.

For these reasons, the use of new technologies and multimedia resources is particularly advantageous on teaching geography through CLIL. As a matter of facts, through the vision and analysis of an image or a film, students are more involved and motivated to increase cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary skills.

This is also confirmed by a large-scale survey [18] that suggests that students like learning languages through audio-visual material. Hence it is convenient to consider that today the study of geography and languages in schools through visual arts and music can be very stimulating for young people, especially if it is supported by the use of new technologies.

According to UNICEF [19] it is estimated that today one child in three is an internet user worldwide. Then, if we also consider that young people generally love using digital devices, with the aid of these tools it is auspicious to boost students' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, learning could be easier if teachers integrate digital technologies and audiovisual materials in their lessons. Besides using authentic material (such as documentaries, films, online videos, commercials, songs, photographs, postcards, maps) encourages students to listen to the language as it is spoken by native speakers in real life and in social and cultural contexts. As Oddone [20] states "*Teachers can use audio-visual material for different purposes: for its own sake, for comprehension of the spoken language, as a language model, to understand cultural issues, as a stimulus or input for further activities, or as a moving picture book. Videos give access to things, places, people's behaviour, and events*".

Furthermore, Scrivener [21] asserts that authentic material can even motivate students into overcoming their fears and shyness as "authentic is for communication, fluency, real-life, pleasure".

In this perspective, the use of digital materials for instructional purposes must be led by expert teachers, confident in using innovative teaching methods and strategies and effective educational resources with interdisciplinary purpose.

### 3. “Virtual travels” through movies to enhance linguistic competences and appreciate geography

Cinema and geography have a relationship based on reciprocity and interdependence since cinema proposes itself as an object of geographical reflection due to its ability to contribute to the reading of geographical space; on the other hand, geography influences cinema since cinematographic narrative draws inspiration from geography through the use of landscape as a narrative and evocative context [22].

It should be also emphasized that cinematographic stories almost always come from a landscape and often return to places not only to show where events and actions take place but also to tell us about the relationship between the man and the environment.

Traditionally, films portray the external environment starting from the initial scene through what is technically called “extreme long shot”, that is a very wide shot or a very wide angle shot “often used as an establishing shot at the beginning of a motion picture or at the start of a new sequence within a motion picture” [23]. It shows where events take place—“urban, suburban, rural, mountains, desert, ocean, etc.” [23].

The master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock, following the conventions of classic cinema, often used wide-angle shots on his films: The British Museum, the Statue of Liberty, the Jefferson Memorial, the Royal Albert Hall, the Golden Gate Bridge, the United Nations Headquarters and Mount Rushmore are eternally connected to films such as *Blackmail* (1929), *Saboteur* (1942), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), and *North by Northwest* (1959) respectively. In line with the conventions of classical cinema, Hitchcock often included tourist attractions in his establishing shots as a kind of visual synecdoche. In these establishing shots as well as in some montage sequences, famous buildings and sites identify not only themselves but also act as a convenient shorthand for the entire cities that encompass them [24].

Many of Hitchcock’s films seem a sort of collection of moving postcards and thus they encourage tourists to visit the beautiful locations in which they are filmed [24]. Therefore, they can be considered as an effective authentic material to empower not only language but also cultural competences.

We can find some example in locations used for his movie *Vertigo* (1958), set in the Spanish mission in San Juan Bautista, San Benito County, California and in some enchanting places in the city of San Francisco, such as the Golden Gate Bridge and the Legion of Honor Museum of art.

It is also important to underline that locations were chosen with the specific aim of arousing different emotions and sensation that derive from the relationship with places. We can say for example that we can feel charm and inquisitiveness for the museum scenes; delight but also a sense of mystery and distress for those filmed near the Golden Gate Bridge; anxiety and fear watching the protagonists in the dreary bell tower of San Juan Bautista.

Therefore, the visual journey offered by a film can become an effective educational tool to deal with interdisciplinary topics and to practice a multisensory experience. Thanks to the suggestion given by the vision of images and the sounds reproduced, movies create the illusion to experience a sort of “virtual journey” through processes of identification in the proposed situations and through the projection in the landscapes represented.

The virtual mobility allowed by the filmic narrative gives us the illusion of approaching distant places as we don’t move, but we look at a landscape that moves [25].

Today the imaginary journey given by a film can be experienced everywhere: in a movie theater, at home or through the screen of a digital device which makes possible even watching movies while travelling. As a result, the new generation of mobile learning can learn anytime and everywhere. This means that students can hear and watch authentic materials and acquire linguistic competences easily through an immersive language-learning experience.

Thus, as Anderson states [26], movies can be considered as an important aid to learning and enhancing creativity. Besides Katchen [27] argues that video provides authentic language input. Scrivener [28] adds that videos should not be used only to study the language, but also to undertake communication, write activities or introduce a topic for discussion.

For all these reasons movies and audiovisual material, as well as multimedia resources, can be considered effective supports for teaching geography through a foreign language.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Travelling and reading have always constituted important sources of knowledge for geography education. Besides images and movies have always had an enormous communicative value and today they represent a great resource to help facilitate learning and knowledge acquisition of all students including those with special needs [29].

Nowadays the Covid-19 pandemic has increased new insight and creative learning approaches underlining the importance of e-learning in educational institutions and giving more relevance to new sources of knowledge that can be found surfing on the internet.

It is convenient to consider that teenagers love using technological devices and today, as we have already underlined, at least one child in three is an internet user worldwide. This suggests to use digital tools as teaching supports also during face-to face lessons to boost pupils' intrinsic motivation and provide them with innovative learning opportunities. Along these lines, digital resources and audiovisual materials can be added as new sources of knowledge for a deeper comprehension of geography and the acquisition of linguistic-cultural and transversal skills.

Films especially can become a valuable teaching tool if they are carefully chosen by teachers for specific aims. They can constitute a particularly valuable support for the comprehension of geography and the study of foreign languages, because they allow to bring the language and culture into the classroom in an authentic way with their linguistic and extra-linguistic components.

Therefore, today the teaching of geography through the CLIL approach sees a renewal in the methodologies that are increasingly supported by multimedia aids in order to enrich students' specific and interdisciplinary competences.

#### **Conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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