

CLIL, BNCC, AND MOTIVATION: PERSPECTIVES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the current situation of additional language teaching in Brazilian public high schools, with an emphasis on the English language. The study examines current educational policies in Brazil, particularly the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) and the Curriculum Guidelines for High School Education (OCeMs), and their implications for language teaching. Based on this analysis, the article discusses the CLIL approach (Content and Language Integrated Learning) as an effective methodology for increasing students' motivation by integrating the teaching of disciplinary content with the learning of a foreign language. The effectiveness of CLIL was investigated through an experience carried out at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo (IFES), Montanha campus. Federal Institute of Espírito Santo (IFES), Montanha campus, where students participated in geography and cultural studies classes taught in English. The research conducted in this context will be discussed on the basis of the data collected. The theoretical foundations that support this study include Leffa's (2011) analyses of beliefs in additional language teaching in public schools, as well as Garcia's (2009) contributions on Bilingual Education, Dörnyei's (2001) work on motivation in language teaching, and Moita Lopes's (1996) sociocultural perspectives on language teaching, among others. These discussions reveal the positive impact of CLIL on students' motivation, aligning with the principles of the BNCC and the OCeMs.

Keywords: Additional language teaching, High school, CLIL, Motivation, BNCC.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching, especially English, in Brazil has faced significant challenges in the context of public schools. Although English language teaching has been a legal requirement since the enactment of the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB), the results regarding the development of linguistic and communicative skills remain unsatisfactory, particularly in public schools. This scenario appears to reflect pedagogical practices that still privilege traditional, grammar-centered methods, resulting in low student motivation (Brasil, 2017; IBGE, 2018).

Within this context, increasing students' motivation and searching for more effective approaches have been recurring themes in the educational literature. One promising approach is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which integrates the teaching of disciplinary content with the learning of an additional language, providing students with a more meaningful and contextualized experience. According to Dörnyei (2001), motivation is a key factor for success in foreign language learning, and CLIL has proven effective in this regard by offering more dynamic and engaging instruction.

Moreover, CLIL aligns with the guidelines of the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), which emphasizes the need to promote comprehensive and contextualized learning by connecting knowledge from different areas. According to the BNCC (Brasil, 2017), language teaching should be directed toward the development of competencies involving the use of language in real communicative contexts, and CLIL emerges as a viable path toward this goal. The integration of content such as geography and cultural studies into English teaching, for example, allows students to perceive the language not merely as an isolated object of study, but as a tool for knowledge construction, which fosters their engagement and participation.

Furthermore, CLIL is also consistent with the Curriculum Guidelines for High School Education (OCEMs), which seek to encourage student agency and promote active teaching methodologies. This is because, by enabling the use of English for the construction of knowledge in specific areas, it proposes a

form of teaching more closely connected to students' interests and needs, meeting the recommendations of the OCEMs, which highlight the importance of more contextualized and meaningful teaching for learners (Brasil, 2006).

In this sense, the present study aims to analyze the motivation of third-year high school students at a Federal Institute through the application of a questionnaire on students' perceptions of English classes that use CLIL. The objective is to investigate whether the use of this approach can be an effective strategy for increasing students' motivation and improving foreign language teaching in Brazilian public schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Additional language teaching, especially English, in Brazil faces historical challenges related to pedagogical practices primarily centered on grammar and on the teaching of vocabulary in a decontextualized manner. This traditional model often results in demotivating learning experiences and low student performance (IBGE, 2018).

Regarding this issue, Leffa (2011) states:

The traditional approach, centered on grammatical rules and the memorization of vocabulary lists, ignores the conditions of real communication and does not provide students with an experience that allows them to effectively appropriate the language. (Leffa, 2011, p. 42).

Leffa (1999) also observes that grammar teaching, when isolated from communicative practice, often results in superficial and demotivating learning, disconnected from real language use:

Foreign language teaching, reduced to grammar and formal exercises, does not create the necessary conditions for students to engage with the language in a meaningful way, thus resulting in ineffective learning. (Leffa, 1999, p. 58).

Lima (2008) also reflects on the failure of the grammar-based approach in English teaching in public schools, arguing that it does not take into account the need for contextualization in the learning process:

The grammar-based methodology, which focuses solely on teaching rules and structures without contextualized application, not only discourages students but also limits their ability to understand and use the language in real communicative situations. (Lima, 2008, p. 52).

However, more recent pedagogical approaches, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), have demonstrated potential to promote learning that is more meaningful, engaging, and integrated with disciplinary content. This theoretical framework is based on the discussion of the concept of motivation for learning, the principles of CLIL, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), and the Curriculum Guidelines for High School Education (OCeMs), in order to analyze the effectiveness of this approach in English language teaching in Brazilian public schools.

With regard to motivation, it plays a fundamental role in the success of foreign language learning. Dörnyei (2001) argues that motivation is one of the main factors influencing language acquisition, as it is directly related to the perception of relevance and to the learning context. By integrating the teaching of relevant content, such as geography or cultural studies, into the English language learning process, CLIL creates a more motivating environment, since it allows students to see the language as a useful tool for accessing knowledge in other areas.

In a study on motivation in language teaching, Dörnyei (2001, p. 36) states that “students tend to engage more in learning activities when they perceive that what they are learning is relevant and applicable to their lives.”

This statement is corroborated by Garcia (2009), who also emphasizes that student motivation is significantly enhanced when language learning is associated with cultural or academic content of interest to them. According to the author, “language learning should not be viewed merely as an end in itself, but as a tool for understanding different cultural and academic worlds” (Garcia, 2009, p. 83).

By integrating language and content teaching, CLIL may also help overcome the traditional demotivation associated with English classes, which are frequently limited to grammar repetition activities. As Moita Lopes (1996) aptly observes, “language teaching, when disconnected from students’ reality and focused only on grammar and formal aspects, tends to become an uninteresting and disengaged process” (Lopes, 1996, p. 47).

The CLIL proposal, by combining language learning with themes from students’ everyday lives, makes teaching more dynamic and aligned with their needs and interests.

In addition, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) establishes as one of its main objectives the promotion of comprehensive education that connects different areas of knowledge and fosters students’ critical development. With regard to foreign language teaching, the BNCC emphasizes the need for teaching to be guided by communicative practices, with the use of language in real contexts of interaction. The document suggests that students should develop skills that allow them to use English in everyday situations, such as interpersonal interactions and the comprehension of multimodal texts (Brasil, 2017). In this context, CLIL offers an effective path toward such integration, as it combines the teaching of content from other areas with language learning, providing contextualized and relevant instruction.

According to the BNCC (Brasil, 2017), language teaching should “develop students’ communicative competence, aiming at effective participation in different social and cultural practices.” This principle is particularly evident in the CLIL proposal, which, by integrating English language teaching with other subjects, such as geography and science, allows students to learn the language in contextualized situations, linking language learning to relevant academic content. This promotes greater motivation, since students not only learn a language but also acquire new knowledge while practicing communication in English.

The Curriculum Guidelines for High School Education (OCeMs), in turn, also highlight the importance of active methodologies and interdisciplinarity in the learning process. According to the

OCEMs (Brasil, 2006), “it is essential for students to develop competencies and skills that prepare them to act autonomously and critically in diverse contexts, being able to apply the knowledge acquired in real-world situations.” In this sense, CLIL aligns with the objectives of the OCEMs by promoting language learning in an interdisciplinary context, encouraging students’ critical thinking and autonomy. The fact that students learn English while exploring content such as history, geography, and cultural studies makes language learning more relevant and integrated into their daily lives.

Language teaching based on interdisciplinarity also favors the construction of knowledge in a more dynamic way, as Mejía (2002) emphasizes when stating that “CLIL allows students to engage actively in language learning, since the content taught is not dissociated from real life, but contextualized in situations that make the learning process more interesting and meaningful.” This integration promotes the development of higher-order cognitive skills, as students not only learn the language but also expand their repertoire of knowledge, applying it in a context of real use.

METHODOLOGY

This article was based primarily on qualitative research involving the analysis and discussion of data collected through a semi-open and anonymous questionnaire. However, quantitative data will also be relevant and, therefore, will be considered, especially those derived from the objective questions in the questionnaire administered.

In order to collect data on the experience with CLIL in English language classes, we chose to administer a questionnaire to third-year high school students at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo, Montanha campus. These students are generally between 16 and 18 years old and come from the city of Montanha and nearby municipalities.

The choice of third-year high school students from the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo, Montanha campus, was due to a teacher’s experience in applying CLIL during the second year, involving geography and cultural studies topics, such as different celebrations around the world. The culmination of

this work was a Nations Fair, in which each group presented, in English and Portuguese, issues related to the geography, history, sociology, philosophy, arts, among other aspects, of a given country. This activity involved the collaboration and assessment of teachers from those subject areas.

The questionnaire designed contains nine questions, eight of which are multiple-choice, and four of these ask students to justify their previous response. Only one question is entirely open-ended: “What is your conception of the English language?”

This is because our theoretical framework encompasses, among other themes, the concept of representation and its implications for the language teaching/learning process, in this specific case, English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this article, we will analyze only some of the responses from the 65 (sixty-five) questionnaires administered that are related to the theme of the study.

In the third question, concerning what English classes were like in elementary school, among those who studied in public schools, the results were as follows: 10.86% classified them as terrible, 15.21% as poor, 45.6% as average, 19.56% as good, and only 6.5% as excellent. As justification, many students wrote that they had studied only the verb to be, which confirms the studies by Leffa (2011) and Lima (2008).

For the same question, among those who had studied at least some years in private schools, only 5.2% rated the classes as terrible, 21% as poor, 26.3% as average, 36.8% as good, and 10.4% as excellent, highlighting the existing differences between public and private schools in Brazil.

The fourth question, concerning the use of English in the classroom at IFES, in accordance with the BNCC guidelines, yielded 64.17% of responses rating it as “excellent,” 26.86% as “good,” and only 4.47% as “average” and “poor,” respectively.

The fifth question, which addresses the integration of English language classes with geography and cultural studies in the second year of high school (the previous year), resulted in 63.07% rating it as excellent, 35.38% as good, and 1.5% as average. There were no responses indicating poor or terrible, which makes evident the interest in classes using the CLIL approach.

Among the justifications for these responses, we find the following:

- “It was good to learn about other cultures in English.”
- “With the Nations Fair event, our knowledge of geography and integrated English language learning expanded.”
- “Excellent, because the study gave us more background knowledge about different cultures.”
- “I really liked the classes; I learned a lot about the culture of other countries.”
- “It made us learn new terms about this subject in English, in addition to bringing English into everyday life.”
- “I thought it was excellent, because besides learning English, I learned about the culture and customs of other peoples.”
- “I found the integration with other subjects interesting, because we learned about other cultures in English and the Nations Fair was really cool to do.”
- “We combined the two subjects in the Nations Fair, and this helped us learn and study both subjects together.”
- “Because it became more enjoyable to learn; because of that, I can pay close attention.”
- “It was a challenge, but a challenge within our reach, and for that reason, it made learning dynamic.”
- “It brought us knowledge of other cultures, broadening our worldview.”
- “It was possible to write, read, and speak in English while learning both the content and the English language, with more specific subjects and words.”

The sixth question investigates whether the student felt more motivated to study the language. Only 7.69% stated that they did not, while 92.31% emphasized that they did. In this regard, it may be said that CLIL proposes an environment in which students are protagonists of the learning process and become aware of this, while at the same time encouraging the activation of their innate motivation through the understanding that they can transform the learning process into a pleasurable one once they know the reasons for their participation.

The next question concerned the experience of giving presentations in English, contributing to students' oral practice. Regarding this item, 44.26% considered it good, almost 30% considered it excellent, 22.95% considered it average, and 1.63% considered it terrible or poor.

With regard to the belief in "school English," almost 63% stated that it is possible to learn English at school. Among those who wrote that it is not, the main justification was the low number of class hours, which seems interesting in light of the common-sense belief that "school English" does not work, as explained by Leffa (2009).

The final question refers to a score indicating how students evaluate their experience with English in the second year, with the options being 0 to 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 8, and 8 to 10. Thus, 49.12% answered 6 to 8; 47.36% answered 8 to 10; and only 3.5% answered 3 to 5. Among the justifications for the score of 6 to 8, a large number of students wrote that they should have dedicated themselves more. Among some of the responses, we find:

- "Excellent approach by the teacher and very dynamic classes."
- "It was the year in which we had the greatest depth and diversity in learning."
- "Because I love English and I loved to watch the videos about cultures."
- "Despite my difficulty with English, I loved the methodology."
- "I really liked the classes and the teacher's teaching approach; I was able to learn many things, and I thought it was very good."
- "The classes were well explained by the teacher, and the method helped me a lot."

- “It was one of the best experiences in English, when I felt most comfortable trying.”
- “I learned a lot; the experience with geography was very nice.”
- “The teacher made the content more interesting with videos, seminars, and interactive activities, creating more motivation to learn.”
- “I found it very dynamic, and it made studying easier without that kind of tedious content.”
- “It was a new experience and moved away from the obvious.”

It should be noted that all these data point to a very positive understanding of the experience with the CLIL approach, involving geography and cultural studies topics in English in high school at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to analyze the motivation of third-year high school students at a federal institute in relation to English teaching through the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, applied to geography and cultural studies topics. The results obtained from the questionnaire administered clearly show that the vast majority of students felt more motivated and engaged in English classes when these involved the use of the language to learn meaningful and relevant content, such as geography and cultural studies, than in traditional classes focused solely on grammar and vocabulary.

These results corroborate the conclusions of several scholars in the field, such as Dörnyei (2001), who emphasize the importance of using approaches that integrate content of interest to students, making learning more meaningful and applicable to their reality. In addition, the study reinforces Garcia's (2009) assertions that motivation in foreign language learning is directly influenced by the relevance and applicability of the content, and that contextualized learning tends to promote greater student engagement.

By integrating the teaching of geography and cultural studies with English language learning, CLIL not only contributed to language proficiency but also made classes more dynamic, engaging, and aligned with students' interests and needs. This approach proved to be an effective alternative to the

traditional grammar-based methodology, which is often discouraging for students, as indicated by previous studies that point to low student motivation in classes centered exclusively on grammar (PNAD, 2018).

Therefore, it can be concluded that CLIL presents itself as an effective methodology for increasing students' motivation in additional language learning, especially in the Brazilian educational context, where the traditional approach often fails to meet students' expectations and interests. The use of English as a tool for learning content from other areas of knowledge proved to be a pedagogical strategy that promotes greater engagement, autonomy, and meaningfulness in students' learning.

In view of the positive results observed, it is possible to suggest that CLIL be adopted more widely in public schools and in other educational contexts in Brazil, as a methodological alternative that favors meaningful learning and increases students' motivation, making foreign language teaching more relevant and effective.

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