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The role of educational films in enhancing high school student motivation to learn geography

Research Article

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of educational films on high school students' motivation for learning in Geography classes, assessing students' motivation through pre-tests and post-tests through a quasi-experimental design. The research involved 84 students from the ninth and tenth grades of high school classes. The experimental group watched educational films in geography classes, while the control group did not. The questionnaire evaluated the dimensions of instructional motivation on the attention and relevance axis on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Always). The conclusion points out a significant increase in motivation to learn Geography in the attention axis in the experimental group but not in the relevance axis. Educational films enhance student engagement, but other factors affect the perception of relevance. The conclusion was that educational films effectively capture students' attention and engagement but do not significantly influence the perception of content relevance.

Keywords: *Students' motivation • Educational film • Attention • Relevance*

1. Introduction

Motivation is described as a complex set of psychological models that explain the efforts and behavior of individuals in different contexts (Watters & Ginns, 2000, p. 302). In the educational environment, motivation defines the degree of involvement of students in completing learning tasks and using their abilities (Kışoğlu, 2018) and can be generically called instructional motivation. If intrinsic, it can be associated with positive outcomes regarding greater school engagement and better academic performance (Froiland & Oros, 2014). On the one hand, if it is extrinsic, motivation is associated with maladaptive coping strategies, negative emotions, and poor academic achievement (Corpus et al., 2009).

Student motivation is the starting point in any teaching approach, defined as students' interest and desire to learn and actively participate in the educational process. Research conducted in various European countries, including Romania, and analyses from international comparative studies such as PISA and PIRLS highlighted decreased learning motivation and academic performance (Grigor, 2020).

In modern education, student motivation is essential for effective and deep learning. It has a specific role in the educational process, influencing the student's learning level in any subject, including Geography. Student attitudes and motivation can be influenced by numerous factors, including the importance of selecting appropriate pedagogical strategies and professional training to optimize students' attitudes and motivation in the learning process (Kışoğlu, 2018), specialization, or gender (Yıldırım, 2017). Adolescence is a critical period for motivational development, where a general decrease in motivation is often observed, which can negatively influence academic performance (Yeung & McInerney, 2005). This state-of-the-art determines geography teachers to use different modalities to sustain and develop students' interests in learning. Educational films could represent a valuable resource in this continuous search for effective means to stimulate high school students' instructional motivation.

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2. Literature review

In Geography teaching, visual media have become a significant focus of research and teaching due to their potential to understand and interpret geographical space innovatively and profoundly. In the literature, there have been intensive debates about the visual dimension of geography as a discipline, utilizing images such as photographs, videos, and maps. For example, the use of video documentaries in the assessment process of human geography courses encourages active and deep learning, ensuring an effective student-centered teaching approach (Mavroudi & Jöns, 2011). The visual dimension of Geography is not limited to optical perception but also includes "vision," which is both an act of imagination and perception (Freytag & Joöns, 2005). This approach reconfigures how Geography can be understood and taught, offering a broader perspective on how the perceived and the imagined intertwine in the study of geography.

Through examples of films that can be used in lessons, YouTube allows for more creative teaching of Geography, using resources that enrich students' understanding (Wattenhofer et al., 2012). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the growth of online educational resources, including YouTube, has been notable and has led to an increased availability of relevant educational videos on YouTube, such as those on the National Geographic channel (Tarisayi, 2022). In addition to YouTube, TED talks (Technology, Entertainment, Design) accessed through this platform offer a wide range of topics relevant to Geography.

Educational films help capture students' attention much more naturally than other forms of educational media due to the substantial visual and emotional impact they can generate, arouse students' curiosity, enhance memorization and comprehension of the subject matter, and support creative thinking (Kabadayi, 2012). Therefore, educational films provide a realistic and contextual framework for the information presented, making the connection between theory and practice much more accessible to students, leading to a more profound and holistic understanding (Rajpopat, 2023). The transition from simple motivational techniques to integrating educational films into specific Geography classes represents practical support for learning with the help of modern technology. Immersing students in simulated realities through educational films not only motivates them to learn but also facilitates the assimilation of geographic knowledge with a deeper understanding (Mullick & Haque, 2023).

Several studies address the usefulness of film in teaching and learning Geography at the high school level. Kenna and Russell (2017) explore how educational films/videos can be integrated into geography teaching to stimulate student interest and active learning. Di Palma (2009) described an innovative approach for teaching geography through film, highlighting students' filmmaking as a factor that can stimulate active learning. Kenna and Waters (2017) provided practical methods and examples of relevant films to increase student engagement and critical involvement in learning Geography matters. Other authors highlight the improvement of student motivation in geography through educational films, compared to reading (Dlamini & Osodo, 2022), but also to conventional teaching (Gaudence et al., 2013).

Biber and Kubas (2017) mentioned that geography lessons supported by science fiction movies positively affect students' attitudes toward geography lessons. Also, secondary school students' attitudes toward geography are more positive if they associate their learning with films (Karademir, 2020). However, even with modern teaching aids, the results in the Geography subject can be low due to teachers' classroom practices and inefficient teaching methods (Sthembile, 2022). In this respect, Kenna (2017) offered a model for using film in geography classes to support effective learning.

In this rather little-analyzed context, the present study analyzes the impact of teaching aids, namely, educational films, on the learning motivation of high school students in Geography classes.

3. Research methodology

In recent approaches, visual media have become a significant focus in geography teaching. Through a quasi-experimental design, the study aimed to investigate the impact of educational film on the learning motivation of high school students in Geography classes. It will also highlight the benefits and effectiveness of this teaching tool in stimulating the interest and commitment of high school students in the learning process.

The study hypothesized that using educational films in Geography lessons improves high school students' motivation for learning.

The objectives of the study were to:

O1 – Investigate the opinion of high school students regarding the motivation for learning in Geography classes.

O2 – Analyze the influence of educational film in teaching Geography on high school students' motivation compared to those who did not use this learning method.

The study considered two types of variables: the independent variable, the educational film, and the dependent variable, the motivation for learning.

The experimental group used educational film viewing during geography lessons, while the control group did not. Both groups were evaluated at two different times, through a questionnaire, before the start of the experiment (pretest)

and after its completion (post-test), which allowed the measurement and comparison of the effects of motivation for learning in the Geography discipline of the two groups, observing the changes before and after the intervention.

The research participants were students from grades 9 and 10 from Timișoara High School. The questionnaire used on motivation for learning was completed both at the beginning of the module and at its completion by both samples. For this study, the experimental group comprised students from grades 9, Class A, and 10, Class D, and the control group included students from grades 9, Class D, and 10, Class A. Both groups were numerically balanced, each having 42 participants. Participation in the research was voluntary. Out of 103 students from grades 9 and 10, at the first application of the questionnaire (pretest), 84 students from the mentioned classes wanted to answer the questionnaire: 40 students from two grades 9 and 44 students from two grades 10. Thus, there was a response rate of 81.55% of the 103 students.

The sample of the study included 40 female respondents and 44 male respondents, aged between 15 and 17 years (Table 1).

Characteristics	*N*
Gender – control group	
Female	18
Male	24
Gender – experimental group	
Female	22
Male	20

Table 1. Gender of respondents (*N* = 84).
Source: Author's contribution.

The basic research methods were the pedagogical experiment and the survey method, which were used for quantitative data collection and applied to four high school classes (both at the beginning and end of the fourth school module).

A questionnaire with 16 items was applied in the research, based on the motivational model of Keller's (1987a, b; Keller & Keller, 1989) ARCS Model, which was revised and adapted to the geography discipline. The questionnaire had 16 items (Appendix) on two axes from this model (Attention and Relevance) and formulated items correlated with specific strategies suggested by this model. Attention items describe the ways in which the student relates to the content learning activity within the lesson. Relevance items describe the ways in which the student uses the concepts learned in the classroom and other contexts.

The Attention axis included seven items, such as, for example, "I am excited when studying new content" and the Relevance axis included nine items, such as, "I like to apply in practice what I have learned." Also, at the end of the questionnaire, there were questions regarding the respondents' demographic data, such as age, class, profile followed, and gender of the study participants. The items in the questionnaire are multiple-choice, from which respondents chose a single answer option, these answers being represented on a Likert scale from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Always).

The questionnaires distributed to students in class were made in the Google Forms platform, generating a link through which students completed the questionnaire using their phones. Before distributing the link to the students, which contained the questionnaire, all the details were explained regarding the study completed and for what purpose the students' completion of this pre-test and post-test would help. It was also mentioned that the information they provided would be strictly confidential and processed for scientific purposes only. The time to complete the questionnaire was a maximum of 10 min. The questionnaire was applied as a pre-test at the beginning of module 4, school year 2024–2025, in the first week between March 4 and 6, 2024, and once again as a post-test at the end of module 4, between April 22 and 24, 2024.

The experiment was implemented in two different classes, one on grade 9 and the other on grade 10, for 8 weeks within Module 4. Students visioned educational films twice a week at each geography lesson. In grade 9, they were used within the learning units "Terrestrial Atmosphere" and "Earth Waters." In grade 10, the film was integrated as a teaching aid in the learning units "Natural Resources," "Agriculture," and "Industry."

The responses from the respondents who participated in the study were collected through Google Forms. The IBM SPSS Statistics program, version 23, was used to perform statistical analyses of the *t*-test for paired samples type (to compare the results obtained between the two samples – control and experimental and between each stage of each group).

4. Results

4.1 Investigating the opinion of high school students regarding motivation for learning in geography classes (O1 of the research) revealed the following aspects

The *Pre-test results* were as follows:

For the control group, *on the attention axis*, the item "I relate new content to what I already know" obtained the

highest average value, 3.74. This high value indicates that students can effectively connect new information and existing knowledge. On the same axis, the item "I like to learn content that raises problems" obtained the lowest average value, 3.05, indicating a reduced attraction of students for content that involves solving complex problems and challenges. Regarding the *relevance axis*, "I enjoy learning content that meets my personal needs" obtained the highest average, 4.24. This high value indicates that students are highly motivated to learn when the educational content directly relates to their needs and interests. On the other hand, the lowest average value was recorded, 3.02, for the item "I am actively involved in learning," which suggests that students are involved to a certain extent in the learning process. The level of active involvement is not very high.

The attention axis averages 3.44, indicating a moderate level of commitment and concentration on the part of control group students. In contrast, the relevance axis records an average of 3.65, suggesting that students perceive the content taught as relevant and useful for their needs and interests.

For the experimental group, the highest average value recorded was for the item "I relate the new content to what I already know," with an average of 3.71. This score indicates that participants in the experimental group consider integrating new information with previous knowledge important. On the other hand, the lowest value was obtained for two items: "I am excited when studying new content" and "I like to learn content that raises problems," with an average of 2.98. These results indicate that enthusiasm and interest in new or challenging content are lower, suggesting possible difficulties in maintaining attention in such contexts.

On the relevance axis, the highest value was recorded for the item "I learn to achieve my proposed objectives," with an average of 4.05. This score suggests that participants are highly motivated to learn to achieve their personal goals. On the other hand, the lowest value was obtained for the item "I like to learn with other people," with an average of 2.90. This result suggests that group learning is less preferred by participants.

The average score for the attention axis was 3.33, while for the relevance axis, it was 3.48 for the experimental group.

The *Post-test results* were as follows:

The analysis of the post-test means for the control group reveals that the highest average score on attention axis, 4.07, was obtained for the item "I am attracted to what is interesting and surprising in new content." This result indicates a high level of enthusiasm and a strong attraction to the surprising and captivating elements of the educational material. On the other hand, the lowest score, 3.51, was recorded for the item "I like to learn content that raises problems," reflecting a lower attraction to content that presents difficulties or challenges.

Analyzing the average score values for the relevance axis, according to the data for the control group, it is noteworthy how the participants perceive the applicability and importance of the content learned in their personal and professional contexts. The maximum score value on this axis, 4.12, was obtained for two items: "I enjoy learning content that meets my personal needs" and "I learn to achieve my proposed objectives." These scores illustrate high motivation and commitment when learning is perceived as directly related to students' personal and professional goals. The lowest mean value, 3.27, was recorded for the item "I am actively involved in learning." This score indicates that although the contents may be perceived as relevant, the level of active involvement in the learning process may vary and require additional strategies to stimulate more active participation.

The mean scores obtained for each axis were 3.75 for the attention axis and 3.78 for the relevance axis of the control group.

In the analysis of the experimental group means at the post-test, the highest value recorded on the attention axis was for the item "I like to learn content that raises problems," with an impressive mean of 4.81. This score suggests that, after applying the film (experiment) to the classroom, participants show a particular interest in challenging content, appreciating its complexity and problem-solving opportunities. The lowest value was obtained for the item "I am attracted to what is interesting and surprising in new content," with a mean of 3.21. This lower score shows that although participants may be motivated by the challenging aspects of the content, surprising or unusual elements do not have the same attraction effect for them.

Regarding the relevance axis of the experimental group, the highest value recorded was "I enjoy learning content that will be useful to me," with an average of 4.33. This score reflects that participants particularly appreciate learning content with direct applicability and practical utility. On the other hand, the lowest value was obtained for the item "I am actively involved in learning," with an average of 3.53. This lower score suggests that although participants recognize the relevance of the learning content, their active involvement in the learning process is not as high. The average scores obtained for each axis, namely, the value of 4.09 for the attention axis and 4.01 for the relevance axis, show us that participants are not only very focused and attentive to the learning materials but also consider them relevant and valuable.

4.2 Analyzing the influence of educational film in teaching geography on high school students' motivation, compared to those who did not use this learning method (O2) revealed the following

After the post-test, the experimental group's average score on the attention axis was approximately 4.08, indicating higher attention than the control group, with an average score of approximately 3.73. This difference suggests that the intervention applied to the experimental group had a positive effect on the participants in the experimental group but not on the participants in the control group, who did not benefit from the same intervention. The average obtained on the relevance axis showed that the experimental group recorded an average score of approximately 4, suggesting an improved perception of relevance compared to the control group, which obtained an average score of approximately 3.78.

Table 2 presents the results of the paired-sample *t*-test, highlighting the differences in the mean scores between the control and experimental groups at the post-test on the attention axis. The analysis indicates that the mean score for the control group is 3.7619, while for the experimental group, it is 4.0814. Both groups have 42 participants. The significance threshold ($p = 0.021$) is lower than 0.05 ($0.021 < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant relationship between the scores of the two groups at the post-test. So, the *t*-test results are presented below, $t(41) = 2.395$. A statistically significant difference exists between the control and experimental groups on the attention axis.

Samples	*N*	*M*	*t*	df	*P*
Control group	42	37,619	2.395	41	0.021
Experimental group	42	40,814	2.395	41	0.021

Note: *N* – number of respondents, *M* – Mean value, *t* – *t* statistic value, df – degrees of freedom, *P* – *p*-value.
Table 2. Results of the paired samples *t*-test between the mean values of the control group and the experimental group on the motivational axis attention at the post-test.
Source: Author's contribution.

Table 3 presents the results of the paired-sample *t*-test, highlighting the variations between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at the post-test on the relevance axis. According to the analysis, the mean score for the control group is 3.7721, and for the experimental group, it is 3.9919. The significance threshold value ($p = 0.129$) is greater than 0.05 ($0.129 > 0.05$), and the *t*-test results are $t(41) = 1.550$, indicating no statistically significant difference in the relevance axis between the control and experimental groups.

Samples	*N*	*M*	*T*	df	*P*
Control group	42	37,721	1.550	41	0.129
Experimental group	42	39,919	1.550	41	0.129

Note: *N* – number of respondents, *M* – Mean value, *t* – *t* statistic value, df – degrees of freedom, *P* – *p*-value.
Table 3. Results of the paired samples *t*-test between the mean values of the control group and the experimental group on the motivational relevance axis at post-test.
Source: Author's contribution.

For a more accurate analysis, the *t*-test for paired samples was used to compare the mean scores obtained at the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group on each motivational axis and the attention and relevance axes, respectively.

Table 4 presents the results of the *t*-test for pairs on the attention axis between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group. The results indicate that the mean scores on the pre-test are 3.3336 and on the post-test are 4.0814, with 42 participants in each sample. The significance threshold ($p = 0.000$) is lower than 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), which indicates a statistically significant relationship. Regarding the results of the *t*-test, $t(41) = 5.261$. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group on the attention axis.

Samples	*N*	*M*	*t*	df	*P*
Pre-test	42	33,336	5.261	41	0.000
Post-test	42	40,814	5.261	41	0.000

Note: *N* – number of respondents, *M* – Mean value, *t* – *t* statistic value, df – degrees of freedom, *P* – *p*-value.
Table 4. Results of the paired samples *t*-test on the mean scores obtained by the experimental group at pre-test and post-test on the attention axis.
Source: Author's contribution.

Table 5 presents the results of the *t*-test for pairs on the relevance axis between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group. The analysis indicates that the mean of the pre-test scores is 3.4788, and the post-test is 3.9919, with 42 participants in each sample. The

Samples	*N*	*M*	*t*	df	*P*
Pre-test	42	34,788	3,592	41	0.001
Post-test	42	39,919	3,592	41	0.001

Note: *N* – number of respondents, *M* – Mean value, *t* – *t* statistic value, df – degrees of freedom, *P* – *p*-value.
Table 5. Results of the paired samples *t*-test on the mean scores obtained by the experimental group at pre-test and post-test on the relevance axis
Source: Author's contribution.

significance threshold (p = 0.001) was lower than 0.05 (0.001 < 0.05) and $t(41)$ = 3.592, which indicates a statistically significant relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group on the relevance axis.

5. Discussion

The present research, using a quasi-experimental design, aimed to investigate the impact of educational film on the learning motivation of high school students in Geography classes. It was observed that educational film significantly impacted students' motivation by increasing enthusiasm and interest in new content, improving the perception of the relevance of teaching materials, and stimulating active involvement in the learning process. So, the use of educational film in teaching geography significantly impacts high school students' motivation in Geography classes. This finding is based on a study conducted by Bravo et al. (2011), Gaudence et al. (2013), and Kabadayi (2012). The growth of student motivation through films' captivating and interactive nature is more effective than traditional teaching methods. Also, Sthembile's (2022) research argued that using technology in teaching increases student motivation and engagement. The students become more interested in Geography lessons, enthusiastic, and motivated to learn if teachers use media (such as slides and films) in the teaching process (Supriyati, 2024). The increase in motivation may be because educational films transform theoretical information into concrete visual experiences, thus facilitating active learning. The effectiveness of educational films in developing student motivation, confirmed by a significant increase in attention scores in the experimental group, could be attributed to the issues addressed by the films.

However, the difference in relevance scores between the experimental and the control groups was not statistically significant, despite the significative growth of students' motivation on this axis between the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group. Educational film usage does not significantly correlate with students' perception of the relevance of the content learned. The lack of a significant correlation in this study can be attributed to the fact that the perception of relevance was influenced by personal aspects of the students, such as utility, meaning the direct applicability of the material to their daily lives. It is really important that teachers continue to stimulate the students to watch films in an active way and not passively (Journell & Buchanan, 2013). Teachers should use any technological opportunities to provide the most appropriate modality to learn and improve the motivation of the students to learn geography (Aydın & Coşkun, 2011). Using educational films according to students' media-rich lives could be an opportunity to offer them context in which they become critical viewers of geography content (Kenna & Stevenson, 2024).

The study's limitations are essential aspects that need to be assessed to understand the context and potential limitations of the results obtained. The study was exclusively conducted using questionnaires for data collection, so the students' perceptions and moods may influence a subjective analysis at completion. The responses may not always reflect the students' real motivations and attitudes. Also, the experiment was conducted during a single school module (Module 4), which may not be sufficient to analyze the long-term effects of educational films on developing students' motivation for learning. Another limitation of the study could be the small number of study participants. It would be helpful to diversify the data collection methods to overcome the study's limitations. In addition to questionnaires, other methods like individual or group interviews can provide a more objective and detailed perspective on students' motivation. Conducting a study over a whole school year or several school modules would allow for assessing the long-term effects of using educational films on motivation for learning, thus providing more robust and representative results. Increasing the number of participants would contribute to obtaining more representative results and allow for more rigorous generalization of the conclusion.

6. Conclusion

The present study investigated the impact of using educational films on high school students' motivation in Geography classes. The results indicate a significant increase in motivation, especially in terms of attention and involvement, of students in the experimental group who benefited from watching educational films compared to the control group. The results demonstrated that learning with educational film information determined more enthusiasm and involvement of high school students, facilitating active and engaging learning.

Educational films support students' attention, offering an effective alternative to traditional teaching methods. Thus, although objective two was partially achieved by demonstrating an impact on attention, the results suggest that the perception of relevance is influenced by personal and contextual factors that were not sufficiently addressed through the educational film. However, the results did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups on the relevance axis.

The study results suggest that schools can capitalize on using educational films to improve students' motivation in Geography classes. However, the identified problem of the lack of a significant impact between educational films and the perception of content relevance can be addressed by taking some measures. One could use personal and real context in educational films; adapting the content to include concrete examples and situations from students' daily lives is necessary. Collaborating with students to better understand their interests and include topics that are familiar and meaningful to them is essential for geography classes.

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Author contributions

Carmen Maria Țîru: Conceptualization, Coordinating of Formal Analysis, Investigation and Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Roxana Mădălina Țăran: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Writing – original draft.

Conflict of interest statement

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Inventory on students' instructional motivation

(adapted from Țîru & Lungu, 2023)

The questionnaire refers to how you relate to the learning activities specific to the Geography discipline. Please provide a score from 1 to 5 (1 = Not at all; 2 = Very little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always) that characterizes you for each item. The questionnaire is anonymous, and the data are used only for statistical purposes.

Attention axis

1. I feel enthusiastic when I study new content in Geography classes.
2. I focus on the Geography content I am learning.
3. I find it interesting to acquire new content in Geography.
4. I connect new Geography content with what I already know.
5. I'm curious to learn as much new information in Geography as possible.
6. I'm attracted to what is interesting and surprising in the new Geography content.
7. I enjoy learning Geography content that presents challenges.

Relevance Axis

8. I enjoy learning Geography content that will be useful to me.
9. I like applying in practice what I have learned in Geography.
10. I actively engage in the Geography learning process.
11. I enjoy learning Geography content that meets my personal needs.
12. I determine my level of knowledge in any Geography subject.
13. I choose to learn Geography content that is slightly above my level of knowledge.
14. I enjoy learning together with other people.
15. I study to achieve the goals I have set for myself.
16. I want to benefit from the knowledge gained in Geography classes in other contexts.

Demographic data

Age:

Grade:

Your academic profile:

Gender: