

TO BE OR NOT TO BE ONLINE? VIRTUAL LEARNING IN THE NEWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *This paper investigates how virtual learning during the pandemic has been depicted in the mainstream media, focusing on news headlines, as headlines frame events and attract readers, besides informing and raising awareness about specific topics. The corpus includes news headlines published by three Romanian and Italian newspapers on the topic of remote learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis adopts a mixed-methods approach, taking into account word frequency and lexical and syntactic patterns. The findings indicate that Romanian media tended to frame negatively the topics connected with the system of education in general, while the news in the Italian media adopted a more positive tone.*

Keywords: *online education; pandemic; headlines; Romanian; Italian*

1. INTRODUCTION

The fast spread of the coronavirus cases, in the spring of 2020, led many countries to take unprecedented measures, such as the closure of public and private schools and the adoption of online education. Before this moment, arguments against online teaching highlighted the costs of the technology employed, the lack of personal contact (e.g. Schmitz and Hanke, 2021:1-2), or the need for extensive teacher training. Online learning can foster greater participation by students to the courses (Dawley, 2007:2), yet it can also hinder access to education if certain technological requirements are not met (Lockee, 2021:5). Traditionally, online education was viewed as suitable to adult learners, mostly in the domain of higher education (Lockee, 2021:5). The widespread shift from face-to-face to online instruction in 2020 forced authorities, educational institutions and teachers to reconsider the role of online education and the learning opportunities it provides.

A growing corpus of research has investigated the benefits and disadvantages brought by online learning during the pandemic, with mixed results so far. For instance, a study of students' opinions revealed that they preferred instruction in the physical classroom to online instruction, however they appreciated the improvement of the teachers' skills during the pandemic years (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2021:360). Online classes can be motivating for students if they provide interactive learning and if the technological tools support task completion (Schmitz

& Hanke, 2021:6). In order for online education to be successful, both teachers and students need to trust the technological means and consider them useful (Moawad, 2020:106). Teachers need to develop a sense of self-efficacy in online teaching in order to continue to use technology in the future (Menabò *et al.*, 2021:1572). From this perspective, the experience of online teaching during the pandemic may prove useful, as a study conducted on language educators shows that they have agreed to integrate technologies in their classroom-based lessons after the pandemic (Jin *et al.*, 2021:419).

The general public opinion on online education during the pandemic may also influence the perceived usefulness of this way of teaching and even contribute to its success or failure in certain communities. Research on this topic is still at the beginning, with studies showing a favorable attitude towards online education expressed by the public on social media (e.g. Asare *et al.*, 2021). However, the users of social media are already digitally literate and therefore they may be more inclined to endorse online learning, while the opinions of other categories of the public are more difficult to investigate.

The present study aims to contribute to filling this gap, by focusing on the presentation of online education in the media during the pandemic. The analysis compares the headlines published in Romanian and Italian newspapers regarding online education in order to assess (1) the frequency of words and expression used and (2) the positive or negative framing of news about online teaching and learning.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 News headlines. According to Bednarek and Caple (2012: 100-101), news headlines should fulfill first an informative function, summarizing the content of the article. They should also attract the reader, increase the newsworthy character of the article, and express a stance towards the story presented in the article. Recent research points out that the informative function of the headlines has decreased lately, while the interpersonal function, aiming to attract the readers' attention has become widespread (e.g., Ifantidou, 2009; Janét *et al.*, 2022). In the case of online journalism, this trait can be explained through the availability of engagement metrics (Janét *et al.*, 2022:37). Research on headlines of editorials revealed that they presented the subjective attitude of the authors and tried to influence the readers' understanding (Bonyadi, Samuel, 2013:1). Although the clickbait phenomenon still needs investigation, it seems that specific linguistic traits such as short words or the inclusion of pronouns or sentimental words, increase the effectiveness of headlines (Kuiken *et al.*, 2017:1312).

2.2. Data collection. Three corpora have been created for the purpose of this research, two in Romanian language and one in Italian. The Romanian language corpora have been based on the headlines of the articles published in the online version of the newspapers *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Adevărul*. The Italian corpus included the headlines and intros of the articles published in the online version of the newspaper *Il Sole 24ore*. The headlines have been selected through a research in the online archives of each newspaper, using the words *school* and *online* (Rom. *școală online*; It. *scuola online*) as search terms. The resulting articles have been scanned and only the headlines of the texts connecting to the national system of education have been included in the corpus. The number of articles published on the research topic differed from a newspaper to another. The EVZ corpus included articles published between 22 April 2020 and 2 February 2022, totalizing 1,144 words. The *Adevărul* corpus was the largest one, with 3,824 words, representing the headlines of articles published 22 February 2022 and 2 January 2021. The *Il Sole* corpus totalized 2,540 words, but the articles were not listed in chronological order on the publication website. The period covered in this case was between November 2020 and 17 March 2022.

2.3. Methodology. The quantitative analysis was carried out with the use of the Sketch Engine program (<http://www.sketchengine.co.uk/>). The program allows corpora in any language as an input and can generate word sketches for the words of the targeted language (Kilgarriff *et al.*, 2004). For the current study, the Sketch Engine tool was employed in order to assess the frequency of multiword-expressions (2-gram and 3-gram analysis) and of certain lemmas, especially nouns and adjectives, based on the assumption that noun and noun phrases prevail in headlines and lead texts (Bednarek, Caple, 2012:85-86).

3. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

3.1 The *Evenimentul zilei* corpus. Since this was the smallest of the three corpora, the quantitative results showed fewer occurrences for each term in comparison to the other corpora. The 2-grams analysis showed that the most frequent combinations in the corpus were *școală online* (9 results) and *Școală online* (5 results), indicating the attention given to the new category of the school system. The combination that ranked second in the 2-grams list was *(de) ultimă oră*, suggesting that the rules regarding school instruction have changed frequently and that changes have been announced at short notice. The repetition of this combination in the corpus also indicates that the newspaper proved to keep the readers updated and to increase the impact of the headlines to attract the readers' attention.

The combination *se închid* (6 times) indicates that the closure of schools has represented a topic of interest. The education system has been presented in terms of keeping the schools open or closing them, but not in terms of efficiency of the learning process. The list of 2-grams does not show references to human actors (teachers, pupils, parents) involved in the learning process, but only to abstract notions, through terms such as *școală*, *pandemie*, *an școlar*, and *București*, with the latter term indicating a main focus of the articles on the situation of schools in the Romanian capital.

This hierarchy is also visible in the frequency of certain nouns. The most frequent noun is *școală* (34 times). If other forms of the noun such as *școală* (11 times) and *școlile* (6 times) are taken into account, the total number of occurrences is 51. The term that ranked second as a lemma is *online* (32 times). In contrast, terms referring to the human actors appeared more rarely: *elev* (23), *părinte* (11), *ministru* (10).

The lemma *elev* was accompanied by prepositions or by participial adjectives: *Anunț de ultimă oră despre elevi* (01/24/2022); *Ce îi așteaptă pe elevi în acest an* (11/08/2021); *Revine coșmarul pentru elevi* (10/07/2021); *Tot mai mulți elevi infectați cu COVID-19* (10/15/2021). When the lemma was in the subject position, the headline usually referred to obligations imposed to the pupils, for example through the verb *a trebui*: (*Elevii trebuie să meargă la școală*, 09/29/2021) or through expressions showing imposition (*Elevii, băgați cu japca în vacanță*, 10/20/2021). The lemma *familie* appears only once in the corpus, while the lemma *copil* appears 5 times. These results show that the perspective focused on the pupils, as a part of the education system, less on them as persons, as ‘children’. While the term *elev* may increase the impression of objective presentation, it reduces the children to a passive role in the teaching process, without the power to decide for themselves or to interfere with the regulations.

The lemma *profesor* appears 3 times, which indicates that the teachers received less attention than pupils and authorities in the newspaper. Other terms connected with the teaching process, such as *învățător* and *educator* do not appear in the corpus.

3.2. The *Adevărul* corpus. This corpus has been larger than the other two corpora; therefore more terms have been identified through the Sketchengine programme. Two of the first three combinations identified through 2-grams analysis referred to distance learning: *în online* (26 times) and *școală online* (18). Another expression, *la școală*, figured on the second place in the 2-gram list, with 19 occurrences, yet it did not refer to face-to-face lessons. Most of the times, it was associated with verbs in different moods and tenses, such as present conditional (*Elevii și profesorii ar putea veni la școală și sâmbăta*, 01/10/2021) or in association with another verb, indicating possibility, uncertainty, assumption (*Când preconizează ministrul că se vor întoarce elevii la școală*, 01/05/2021). The expression thus often conveyed the idea of a possible action, instead of a certain one.

The 2-gram expression *la mie* ranked fourth, with 17 occurrences. It referred to the number of coronavirus cases per 1,000 persons in different geographic areas. The infection rate was commonly presented in the newspaper as the key factor for the shift to remote learning.

Another frequent expression was *de elevi* (17 times), usually referring to the number of infected pupils or to the pupils participating to remote or in-

person learning: *65 000 de elevi din București învață online* (10/05/2021); *Peste 30.000 de elevi din Alba merg de luni la școală* (02/07/2021). *Peste 200 de elevi din Ialomița, infectați cu SARS-CoV-2* (02/07/2022). Other expressions involving the word *elevi* also appeared in the corpus: *elevii din* (9 times), *elevi din* (7), *Elevii din* (5), *elevi și* (5). Regarding the last expression, *elevi și*, 4 out of the 5 occurrences appear in headlines about confirmed infection cases. There is only one case where *elevi și* is followed by *profesori* and refers to their desire to have in-person instead of virtual learning: *Aproape 80% dintre elevi și profesori vor ca anul acesta orele să se desfășoare fizic, la școală* (09/12/2021).

The expression *Ministrul Educației* appeared 15 times in the corpus, followed at a distance by *Ministerul Educației* (6 times), indicating that the Minister was perceived as the main communicator and as the major authority taking the decisions about remote learning. Also, the frequency in the news headlines shows that the Minister of Education had obtained large media coverage during the pandemic.

The preoccupation for remote versus in-person learning is also visible in the list of 3-grams. Here, the combination *cu prezență fizică* appears on the first place (9 times), followed closely by the combination *în sistem online* (7 times). The term *online* also appears here in the combination, *online din cauza* (5 times), which suggests that online learning was viewed as an exception from normality and that explanations for this exception had to be given in the news articles. The combination *unități de învățământ* appears 6 times in this list, yet the concordances do not refer to learning in the actual school settings. 5 out of 6 times, the combination refers to the shift to online learning, in headlines such as: *Alte patru unități de învățământ din București trec la cursuri online [...]* (10/19/2021); [...] *Care sunt cele cinci unități de învățământ care rămân exclusiv online* (02/05/2021).

The general list of lemmas identified in this corpus included on the first places the terms *online* (128 times) and *școală* (121), indicating that online learning and the closing and opening of the schools have received the widest coverage in the news about education during the pandemic. Numbers also scored very high as lemmas (117 times). The mentioning of numbers in the headlines may suggest reliability and also construct news value, as in the corpus the numbers referred to the schools closed, or to the number of pupils and teachers infected.

The frequency list of nouns sheds light on the discursive representation of the main actors

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involved in the learning process. The noun *elevi* has the highest score (75 times). Yet, in many cases, the noun is accompanied by participial adjectives, such as *infecțati* (*Peste 200 de elevi din Ialomița, infecțati cu SARS-CoV-2*, 02/07/2022; *Zeci de elevi din Dâmbovița, infecțati cu SARS-CoV-2 în ultimele zile*, 01/17/2022); *primiți* (*Elevii fără COVID-19 nu sunt primiți la cursurile online*, 10/21/2021), *confirmați* (*16.316 de elevi, confirmați cu coronavirus [...]*, 10/13/2021). In such headlines, the pupils are presented as suffering the actions of other actors or of external factors. Other terms referring to the pupils are *copil* (15 times) and *generație* (4 times). The noun *elevi* is followed at distance by *profesor* and *părinte* with the same number of occurrences (23). The noun *profesor* often refers to cases of coronavirus among teachers and rarely to their opinions and work for online education. Regarding the authorities, the lemma *câmpeanu* scored the highest (25 times), followed by *ministru* (13), *sorin* (8), *autoritate* (6) and *guvern* (3). Again, this indicates that Minister Câmpeanu was perceived as the main communicator on the topic of education during the pandemic.

The noun with the highest frequency in this corpus was *școală* (120 occurrences). Other terms linked to education were *curs* (35), *clasă* (29), *educație* (27), *învățământ* (17), *sistem* (11). Terms referring to elements of the education process such as *examen* (8 times), *vacanță* (9), *materie* (7), or *evalua* (6) were less frequent. The frequency list indicates that the teaching modality (online or face-to-face) chosen by the authorities represented the focus of attention. The newspaper paid attention to the official measures and to the closure and opening of schools. This finding is sustained by the list of adjectives identified in the corpus, as the most frequent adjectives are *online* (66 times), *școlar* (16), *fizic* (15), *infecțat* (8). Many adjectives which appear in the corpus have a negative meaning: *pierdut* (6 times), *depășit* (4), *suspendat* (4), *închis* (3), *obligat* (2), *blocat* (2), *impus* (2), *criticat* (1), *defavorizat* (1).

3.3. The Sole 24 corpus. In the Italian corpus no combinations of words were identified for the 2-grams and 3-grams lists. This result may be due to the small dimension of the corpus, but it also indicates that the Italian headlines did not include repetitive combinations of words.

The lemma with the highest frequency was by far *scuola* (95 times), followed by the lemma *online*, with only 17 occurrences. Other terms referring to the mode of learning were: *dad*, the abbreviation for *didattica a distanza* [remote teaching] (14 times);

distanza (4), and *presenza* (6). It appears that school in itself tended to represent the focus of attention, instead of the teaching modality. Many lemmas identified in this corpus represented temporal references, such as various months (*gennaio* – 21 times; *febbraio* – 17 times; *marzo* – 14; *novembre* – 8; *dicembre* – 8) and the word *anno* [year] (14 times). The word *anno* does not refer always to the school year, but also to the age of children and to yearly editions of projects and competitions.

The frequency lists for this corpus indicate an interesting characteristic regarding the representation of the actors involved in the teaching process during the pandemic. Each of the lemmas *istituto*, *governo* and *studente* appears 9 times in the corpus. Further, the lemmas *ministro* and *docente* are present 6 times each. This suggests that the representation of the social actors tended to be well-balanced in the Italian corpus, with the voice of the authorities being expressed in a percentage almost similar to that of students and teachers. Considerably fewer articles than in the *Adevărul* corpus referred to the children's parents, as the lemma *genitore* only had 2 occurrences in the Italian corpus. Other nouns connected to the actors involved in the education system were: *personale* (3), *prof* (3), *ministero* (3) and *presidio* [headmaster] (3). For the last term, in 2 out of the 3 cases, the term referred to the positioning of the school directors in opposition to the authorities' decisions ([...] *è scontro tra ministro e presidi*, 01/18/2022) or to the formulation of their requests (*I presidi chiedono di utilizzare questi giorni [...]*, 12/27/2021). The lemmas *prof* and *docente* do not appear in utterances where their actions are criticized, but frequently in relation to positive actions ([...] *maggiore dialogo con i prof: ecco la scuola che vorrebbero i ragazzi*, 02/24/2022; *Formazione, Treccani scuola: «In Pratica» corsi certificati per docenti. Nuova linea didattica per la formazione e l'aggiornamento dei prof*, 03/08/2022).

The findings also show that other terms besides *studenti* (9) and *alunno* (2) are used in order to refer to schoolchildren: *infanzia* (5); *ragazzo* (5); *bambino* (4), which suggests that the articles brought sometimes into discussion the pupils as children, not only in the depersonalized role of 'pupils', being subject to education.

The adjective with the highest frequency in the corpus was *nuovo* (17 times), most often accompanied by nouns such as *regole* and *misure*, showing that the change of governmental measures characterized the Italian education system. The second most frequent adjective was *scolastico* (9

times). The concordance list for this adjective shows that it was not always used in order to refer to the school year, but also in combination with terms such as *materiale*, *player*, *editoria*, *psicologia*, *dispersione* indicating that the headlines presented news about auxiliary resources for teaching and learning and also about possibilities to minimize the problems associated with online learning. Other adjectives which appeared in the Italian corpus were: *culturale* (3), *digitale* (3), *educativo* (3), *finanziario* (2), *internazionale* (2), *ecologico* indicating attempts to enrich the formative offer of schools and also to change the school system into a more modern one.

4. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

4.1. The *Evenimentul zilei* corpus. The previous results indicated that the Romanian headlines usually focused on the measures issued to contain the virus spread. The EVZ corpus comprised headlines from 75 articles, but only 2 of them focused on positive events linked to virtual learning and support to children during this process (*O nouă șansă pentru educație. Platforma care ajută elevii să învețe*, 11/11/2021, and *INEDIT. Manuale care îi inspiră pe copii să învețe singuri. Premieră la Editura Contra Mundum*, 11/08/2021). Many other titles were dysphoric, framing online learning as a wrong decision of the authorities and as a failure. The titles include such terms as *greșeală*, as an evaluation of the official measures on education: *EXCLUSIV. Școală online și după pandemie. Cum arată adevăratul învățământ digital. Mircea Miclea, fost ministru al Educației, despre greșeala majoră pe care o face România* (11/06/2021).

Online learning is presented in the *Evenimentul zilei* as unwanted by pupils, parents and teachers. For example, metaphors such as *coșmar* and *urgie* appear in the first utterance of the headline, functioning as an evaluation of the situation presented and a synthesis for the entire article: *Revine coșmarul pentru elevi. Școlile și liceele se închid rând pe rând. Ultima listă* (10/07/2021); *E urgie: fără locuri la ATI, școală online, orașe pe roșu* (09/21/2021). Other headlines include verbs with a negative meaning (*a se teme*) in regard to online learning or negative verb forms (*a nu dori*): *Începerea noului an școlar: Scenariul de care se temeau părinții s-a adevărit. Peste 2.000 de elevi fac școală online* (09/10/2021); *Scenariul pe care nu și-l dorea nimeni: Școala va putea trece în sistem online [...]* (08/31/2021). Superlatives also appear in connection to negative emotions or events: *Pandemia a schimbat comportamentul elevilor.*

Care sunt cele mai mari frici ale copiilor (02/20/2021).

The headlines in this corpus use metaphoric terms from the register of fight and war in order to refer to the closure of schools and online learning: *Război pe viață și pe moarte pentru noul an școlar! Părinții au încins Whatsapp-ul* (08/02/2020); *Școala online face prima victimă! [...]* (11/06/2020); *Tulpina Delta aruncă în aer sistemul de educație. Urmează închiderea școlilor* (09/16/2021); *Școala în pandemie, o bombă cu ceas. [...]* (10/20/2021); *«Încăierare» între Sorin Câmpeanu și DSP Ilfov. Decizia DSP l-a scos din sărite pe ministrul Educației. [...]* (10/13/2021). In this manner, both the pandemic and learning, either online or face-to-face, are presented as dangerous and framed as an 'enemy'.

The headlines do not show support or empathy to the pupils and teachers facing the challenges of remote learning, yet they construct an image of these actors as willing to cheat and thus deserving punishment: *Urmează verificări la sânge în școli. Anunț pentru elevi și profesori. Ce se întâmplă cu școala online* (10/11/2021); *Strigător la cer! Tablete pentru școala online, descoperite la case de amanet din București* (09/20/2021); *Distanțarea fizică naște monștri? Hărțuirea are loc, acum, online* (11/26/2020); *Anunțul care a băgat groaza în dascăli! Vor fi dați afară în secunda doi în caz de refuz* (10/01/2020); *Alertă pentru părinți! Cum se trișează la școala online. Ce este Photomath* (12/29/2020). Such titles show ambiguity and suggest to the reader possible erratic behaviour from the main actors involved in the education process, namely students / pupils and instructors.

Besides quotes from the announcements made by the Ministers of Education, the headlines present interventions or interviews with other public persons on the topic of remote learning. However, the speakers quoted in the headlines expressed strong disagreement with remote learning, for instance through the use of lexical items showing outright depreciation (*Maria Coman: Școala online e o porcărie! E inuman să ții ore în șir niște copii în fața unor tablete*, 12/03/2020) or through verbs indicating speech acts: *Academia Română condamnă școala online. [...]*, 07/28/2020]. In the latter case, the depreciation is enhanced by the mention of the speaker, as a prestigious cultural institution.

4.2. The *Adevărul* corpus included headlines from 225 articles. 14 of them referred to positive events or actions connected to online learning, for example the formation of teachers or the use of

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digital tools and internet to improve virtual learning (*Europa Conectată: Construim în România un sistem educațional conectat*, 01/26/2021). The rest of the headlines refer to infection cases, to the shift from classroom instruction to online instruction and to the measures adopted in order to contain the virus spread.

A characteristic of this corpus consists in the frequent mentioning of numbers in the headlines. Such titles suggest precision and an objective stance adopted by the newspaper or the discursive strategy of rationalization through the appeal to numbers as an objective data (Van Leeuwen, 2008). However, the numbers are frequently accompanied by adverbials in the corpus, which diminishes the impression of precision (Cătănescu, 2006: 28): *Peste 150 de elevi, infectați cu SARS COV-2. 18 clase din Călărași fac școală online* (02/14/2022); *Patru cadre didactice din județul Olt și alte trei din Mehedinți au murit după ce s-au infectat cu SARS CoV-2. Peste 220 de școli s-au închis în ultimele 24 de ore* (10/12/2021). Such imprecise numbers not only create ambiguity, but they also function as intensifiers (Bednarek, Caple, 2012). They suggest higher numbers than those mentioned, which increases the idea of danger and great losses, because of the pandemic.

Only a few headlines feature the pupils as Agents or as the source of enunciation: *Elevii își alege materiile și programul*, 12/09/2021 (in an article about a private school); *Aproape trei sferturi dintre elevi consideră că din punct de vedere calitativ cursurile online nu au fost la fel de eficiente [...]*, 08/20/2021. In other cases, even if the noun *elev* appears in the position of subject, the context reveals that the headline is about the restrictions imposed to the pupils: [...] *Îmi place să cred că părinții înțeleg că dacă elevii nu merg la școală, nu merg nici la mall*, 10/14/2021. The term *generație* is used as a generalization, to refer to the pupils and students, in association with a negative evaluation: *Încă o generație de sacrificiu* (11/18/2021), [...] *«Sunt o generație pierdută, asta este!»* (05/20/2021).

The teachers are also present in the news headlines first as a generic term, in connection to the coronavirus cases (e.g. *Aproape 100 de elevi și zeci de profesori infectați, în Olt*, 01/25/2022). Besides, references to teachers include news about their deviant behaviour in relation to pupils and/or parents: *Profesor către părinte: Ai mintea bolnavă* (06/02/2021); *Profesor din București, cercetat după ce a apărut în lenjerie intimă în fața elevilor, la orele online* (02/25/2021). There are very few instances when the lemma *profesor* appears linked

to a positive action. This happens, for instance, in an article about the training programme „Profesor în online”: *În mai puțin de 9 luni am reușit să formăm 20% dintre profesorii din România în competențe digitale* (02/12/2021).

The headlines include quotes from various actors, both authorities, experts, or lay people or parents. In most cases, however, the quotes reveal negative opinions about online learning. This happens, for instance, in headlines quoting the Minister of Education: *Ministrul Educației: Nu există nici acum platforme dedicate și securizate prin care să avem o evaluare corectă online. Și-au pierdut foarte mult din relevanță* (09/03/2021); *Sorin Câmpeanu: Este inacceptabilă continuarea pierderii prin sistemul de învățământ online* (08/15/2021). The mentioning of the source of authority validates the negative opinion expressed. A different opinion is presented in another headline, yet the source is not indicated here: *Ministrul Educației, contrazis: Viteza de internet din România, perfectă pentru școală online* (10/26/2021). The focus of attention is formed again by the Minister of Education which appears in the first position, although he is not the source of the utterance quoted. Online education is evaluated as inefficient and even dangerous, yet some headlines present these evaluations as facts. The impression of certainty is given through the use of verbs in the indicative mood: *Medic psihiatru, despre școala online: «Nu a adus niciun beneficiu. Va crea niște viitori tineri antisociali* (03/14/2021). Here, the idea of reliability is enhanced by the mention of the speaker's role as an expert and through the generic term *tineri* accompanied by the scientific term *antisociali*, which leads to the idea of an expert opinion. Another headline attributes a quote to an unnamed source, *dascăli: [...] «Cu astfel de subiecte, elevii sigur pică examenul»* (03/23/2021). Certainty is conveyed here through the use of the adverbial *sigur*. Such headlines contribute to the general negative framing of online education as inefficient and wrong.

4.3. The *Il Sole* corpus. The Italian corpus includes 80 articles, out of which 30 headlines refer to positive events connected to schools, universities and the teaching process. Here, the shift to remote learning is presented in a positive light, for example in an article about the results of a survey: *Scuola, sondaggio targato Swg: il 46% degli italiani è favorevole alla Dad* (01/18/2022), where 46% of the respondents preferred remote learning, compared to only 39% respondents who were in favour of classroom-based instruction. The reference to the

survey and the percentage suggest precision. Other headlines presented various events, projects and initiatives aiming to enrich the course offer of schools and highschools, frequently thorough verbless clauses: *Programmi allargati alla scuola: scambi di docenti e studenti* (03/17/2022); *Internet, un milione di scuole mappate grazie a «Giga» di Unicef e Iti* (10/28/2021); *Piccole scuole, accordo con i piccoli musei per poter ampliare l'offerta educativa* (03/17/2022). Negative opinions are less present than in the Romanian corpora and they are presented in a hedged form. For example, an adjective that acquires negative connotations is *complicato*: *Dalla dad alla scuola che verrà. Un anno complicato per il mondo della scuola* (02/01/2022).

In comparison to the Romanian corpora, the voice of the Minister of Instruction is less present in the corpus. The headlines show that the Ministry does not represent the only source of decisions and that other administrative layers also play an important role in the adoption of measures for online instruction. For example, the term *Regioni* appears as an Agent: *Scuola, Bianchi: «Si torna in presenza», se ci saranno focolai decideranno le Regioni* (12/17/2021). Moreover, the actions linked to sources of authority are not only about the imposition of specific rules, but also about the courses offering: *Scuola, in Trentino chi non frequenta l'ora religione studierà etica. Ugo Rossi, consigliere di Azione in Provincia di Trento: «La giunta si è impegnata ad offrire alternative didattiche importanti»* (01/24/2022).

Besides the voice of the authorities, the voices of the students and teachers' unions are presented in the headlines. Disagreement between groups of social actors is not framed as a conflict, but as a dialogue: *Associazioni studentesche a Bianchi: «Ascolto non basta, vogliamo risposte concrete»* (03/02/2022); *Scuola, i sindacati proclamano lo sciopero per il 10 dicembre* (11/24/2021); *I sindacati della scuola proclamano lo stato di agitazione: pronti allo sciopero* (11/16/2021).

The voices of the students are heard even on other topics than school life, for example in a survey about the presidential elections in Italy: *Quirinale, per I giovane su 4 il nome è Draghi. Ma a scuola non se ne parla* (01/21/2022). The Italian headlines thus appear less focused on the teaching modality and more on the opinions, attitudes, and needs of the actors involved in the process of education.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results show that the measures adopted due to the virus spread have represented a key topic in the online editions of all the newspapers. In the Romanian media, the shift from face-to-face to online instruction was considered to be newsworthy not only at the beginning of the pandemic, but also during the various waves. Online teaching was viewed as an exception from the normality and it was depicted as a failure of the authorities and of the actors involved, teachers and pupils. The pupils appeared in the headlines mostly through strategies of passivization, in the reports of infection cases. The teachers appeared rarely in headlines about their positive accomplishments. They were often mentioned as cases of infection and death, or as manifesting inappropriate behaviour. Many sources quoted by the Romanian media expressed negative stances towards online education and such opinions were presented as certainties.

The Italian headlines also referred to shifts between classroom-based and online instruction. However, more articles in *Il Sole* than in the Romanian publications addressed other topics linked to education as well: the courses offered by schools, their utility for the pupils, the relevance of school instruction for the future job of the young adults, or the methods and tools used by the teachers during the pandemic years. The findings confirmed those previously obtained by Cătănescu (2006), showing that the Romanian media has maintained an inclination towards negative stance, framing events as conflictual. The most dysphoric titles were found in the *Evenimentul zilei* corpus, suggesting a tendency towards tabloidization, for instance through the use of terms related to war in order to present the shift to remote learning. *Adevărul* tended to present news about infection cases more objectively, while headlines of editorials revealed negative opinions about the authorities' decisions and online instruction. The lack of editorials showing a favourable stance towards online education suggests that the depiction of this measure during the pandemic was still unbalanced.

The most positive coverage of the chosen topic was identified in the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 ore*. Here, negative opinions about online education tended to be presented by means of lexical, morphological, or syntactic hedges, which reduced the idea of certainty. In concordance to the findings made by Asare *et al.* (2021), the subtopic of learning support during the pandemic appeared to be given special attention. Such support was seldom visible in the Romanian headlines, where the

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framing of online education tended to be viewed in a simplistic way, as the closure of schools, without details about the opportunities offered by online education. In sum, the Romanian headlines aimed to gain the readers' attention and to persuade them to adopt a certain stance on the topic, while the informative function was prevalent in the Italian headlines, which indicated the topic of the articles and focused less on shocking the reader.

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