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FOR A KNOWLEDGE BASED SOCIETY**

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COMMUNICATION AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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Appreciation

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We aim to contribute international trade field through our International Conference “Education and creativity for a knowledge based society (19th edition)”, Bucharest, Romania, November 20 - 22, 2025.

A beautiful congress with more than international Conference criteria is waiting for all of you. I wish to meet you all at these new international conferences...

PhD University Professor Titi Paraschiv

Vicerector of Titu Maiorescu University

International Conference “Education and creativity for a knowledge based society (19th edition)”, Bucharest, Romania, November 20 - 22, 2025.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND SCIENTIFIC CREATIVITY. CHALLENGES, TRENDS AND ETHICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

A field on which Artificial Intelligence has a strong impact and launches great challenges is creativity in science, research, culture and knowledge. Through the ability to process and synthesize a huge volume of information, AI can create well-documented and structured syntheses, studies, papers and even books, with a complex and valid scientific or cultural content. The use of AI in academic, scientific and cultural environments has become a reality integrated into everyday activity. An increasingly widespread approach is the transfer of conception, research and writing activities to AI from the human author to the digital author. The final work is the result of the technological capacity of AI to inform, structure and synthesize and, to varying degrees of complexity, of human intervention on the content. Sometimes the interventions are minimal and limited to eliminating the “traces” of the use of AI for anti-plagiarism software. There are cases in which human intervention is zero. The work is assumed, signed and published by the human “author”, who did not actually create it, but only, possibly, intervened on it. Many times, he had no contribution, other than formulating the topic and “ordering” the AI application. In this context, a series of questions arise regarding the nature and meaning of authorial creativity in the AI Era, originality and personal contribution, as well as fundamental aspects of academic ethics. Who owns the work? Does the author have the legal and moral right to assume it, sign it and publish it? Original work or plagiarism? Are we experiencing a redefinition of creativity? What are the limits of using AI? In the Age of Knowledge and Digital Technology, these are fundamental questions that need answers.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, creativity, originality, plagiarism, academic ethics

1. Artificial Intelligence – an Unprecedented Revolution in Humanity

Artificial Intelligence is generating an unprecedented revolution in the history and existence of humanity. AI is the most important discovery and achievement of human intelligence, from the beginning to the present, which is reshaping all areas of life and giving civilization an accelerated course of evolution.

In recent years, as a result of research that began decades ago, a new actor has appeared on the stage of human existence, a formidable one, for the first time in the history of humanity: Artificial Intelligence. Appearing publicly only a few years ago, if we refer to the most famous application, ChatGPT, so still in its technological infancy, AI is evolving at an accelerated pace, through increasingly complex applications, through spectacular developments in algorithms and processing capabilities, taking its creators and the world's technology elite by surprise. And we are still at the beginning. (Christiansen, 2023)

Referring to the history of humanity, going back into the obscure and unknown past, we can say that we are in the “Stone Age” of Artificial Intelligence, given its official age of only a few

years. We ask ourselves, rhetorically and not only, given its exponential progress in the past few years, from year to year and from month to month, where AI will end up in 20 years, in 50 years, in 100 years, in 1000 years. The questions become critical and the answers dramatic if we consider its lightning-fast progress and the capabilities developed in the few years since its appearance. How many more Industrial Revolutions, compared to the five so far, will follow and where will they lead? That is the question. And no one can, at the moment, give a plausible answer. The answers are subsumed by two general hypotheses: one optimistic and visionary, the other pessimistic, anchored in realism and mentalities. The first, in an aura of utopia, in the series of utopian projections of culture and science, projects a beneficial role of AI in the progress of humanity, on all levels, including in achieving... immortality. The second, much more reserved, entering the territory of dystopia, raises alarm signals on some gloomy perspectives brought by the development of AI and the achievement of the status of *singularity*, the moment when it will reach self-awareness, will be able to make decisions alone and control over man and civilization. (Tegmark, 2021)

For now, we remain fascinated by AI and its already fabulous capabilities, integrating it more and more into our activities, existence, reflection processes, thinking and our private and professional lives... Only a few years after its birth, still in its infancy, but a childhood of astonishing precocious maturity, AI is reshaping human existence in all its fields, knowledge and civilization. AI is today a source of information and documentation, collaborator in conception and writing, author, creator of visions, plans and projects, consultant in everything, advisor, specialist, expert in everything, programmer, teacher, confessor, friend, dialogue partner, almost everything. AI is and is becoming, more and more, a very good author, in all fields: science, technology, literature, philosophy, music, etc. And more and more people are using it, with enthusiasm, creativity, without limits... (Gavin, 2025)

2. The process of creation in the academic field, its stake and meaning. Conception, documentation, originality, contribution

The process by which digital technology influences and remodels human existence also encompasses education as a whole, as a system and process. In this framework, Artificial Intelligence has a complex and profound impact on higher education, in particular on academic education and scientific research. Artificial Intelligence launches the greatest challenges on the field of research, on the elements subsumed therein, with a special focus on the process of scientific creativity. (Aoun, 2017)

The activity of elaborating academic and scientific works presupposes, above all, knowledge of the field, a complex vision of it and other complementary fields, a comprehensive interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary coverage of the areas of knowledge. Starting from these mandatory conditions and within this broad framework, the act of conceiving and writing a scientific paper on a certain topic involves information, documentation, study, research, through which the author consults relevant sources – papers, communications, studies, research, publications, books, treatises, websites, etc. –, explores the

accumulated knowledge on the topic addressed, conducts a holistic research of the field and the subject, through which he comes to the present of his research, thus placing himself in full scientific topicality. (Ginsburg, 2024)

The purpose of the creative approach to a topic and of the elaboration of a scientific paper is to bring something new, to contribute to the progress of knowledge in its field through new information, through syntheses, restructurings and developments, through new ideas, interpretations and perspectives. In this process of personal contribution, the act of conception and elaboration must start from existing studies, from the most recent theories and interpretations, from the current level of research in the field. Otherwise, ignoring relevant research, based on ignorance, poor or insufficient knowledge or an improper perspective on knowledge, built around one's own ego, treating the theme "from scratch", assuming or arrogating a kind of scientific and authorial "primacy" over it, constitute approaches outside academic requirements, which push the author into an area of superficiality and ridicule and disqualify him on a scientific level. In such situations, in which the work is not anchored in the history and current affairs of scientific research, in which it does not start from the most relevant perspectives on the theme, proposing to further build, to carry forward the process of research and knowledge, one cannot speak of real value and a valid contribution on a scientific level. (Runco, 2020)

Another element of the creative process is *the originality* of the work. Originality is a fundamental factor of creation, without which one cannot speak of an author's "creation", assumed by him. The ideational and noetic content, the contribution made by the work must be manifested in a framework of originality and assumption. The work must be developed on a solid moral foundation, within the values specific to ethics and academic integrity. These aspects configure *the ethical dimension* of the scientific creation process.

In summary, the essential elements of the scientific creation process are: the idea, the perspective on the idea, the documentation on the field and the theme, knowledge of the level of research on the subject at the time of the approach, a knowledge in a diachronic and synchronic plan, originality, based on the values and principles of ethics and academic integrity, the original contribution as the goal of the entire endeavor. All these elements are deeply interconnected, dependent on each other, in an act of conceptual and creative synergy. Creation without documentation, outside of knowledge of relevant research, is an empirical act, not scientific, a superficial and sterile gesture, lacking foundation, consistency and horizon, a kind of simulation or simulacrum of research. Creation without originality is not creation, but taking over, mimicry or even plagiarism. At the same time, originality without the work bringing a specific contribution to the theme and field, without bringing elements of novelty in approach, interpretation, understanding and knowledge leads to nothing and makes the act of elaboration an empty exercise, without scientific stake. (Fischer, 2023)

3. Scientific Creativity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. The "Intelligent" Approach and the Ethical Perspective

Each great discovery has given an important impetus to evolution and generated progress. Inventions and discoveries have created the five Industrial Revolutions so far. And each of them initially determined reluctance, distrust, resistance, rejection, and, ultimately, to be accepted and integrated into current activities. Artificial Intelligence generates, in turn, fears, debates, theories and hypotheses, some utopian, others dystopian, but, at the same time, it has been and is being adopted and used with enthusiasm.

3.1. Human Intelligence *or* Artificial Intelligence vs. Human Intelligence *and* Artificial Intelligence

Two fundamental elements are often put in antithesis, in the relationship: Human Intelligence or Artificial Intelligence. The logical and correct relationship is not disjunctive, but copulative: Human Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence. The two must function in conjunction and synergy, in a complex and creative collaboration, under the coordination of Human Intelligence and with the unparalleled support of Artificial Intelligence. Because Artificial Intelligence is a product and a triumph of Human Intelligence, of human genius. At the speed of AI development, it tends to become, in a fairly short time, a kind of “universal brain”. Hence, from this exponential growth, fears and dystopian hypotheses also arise: the fear that AI will reach the status of “singularity”, in other words, it will reach and surpass Human Intelligence, that it will reach self-awareness and be able to make decisions on its own. In the future, say some voices, which should not be ignored, AI will think instead of humans. What kind of decisions will AI make? In favor of or against humans and civilization? The answers also depend on humans, on AI creators, on decision-makers, on institutions and organizations on a global scale. Utopia must not turn into dystopia, but remain utopia, oriented towards new horizons of progress and the good of humanity. And utopias can become, over time, realities. (Russell, 2019)

Currently, Artificial Intelligence is a formidable tool, with an exceptional capacity, unprecedented in history, for information, documentation, systematization, structuring and editing. AI constitutes a support in the entire process of study and research, of preparation and elaboration of a work. In the future, and we are talking about a future that is becoming present with every moment, by developing its technological, “cognitive” and “creative” capacities, AI will reach heights that we cannot even suspect today. Experts create evolution scenarios about what it could be. ChatGPT or other AI applications also offer us very interesting projections, that is, *AI about AI*. (Boden, 2023)

Only a few years after the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, after decades of research in the field, AI applications, the most well-known and familiar to the general public being ChatGPT, have become widely used tools in all professional environments and in private life. Educational, academic and research environments routinely use AI in specialized activities, in the teaching-learning act and in complex and laborious research processes. In the academic and scientific fields, AI is a generalized, active presence, a tool used daily for various purposes: information, documentation, structuring, writing, consultation, etc. It must be said that AI is also a very good

“advisor”, at a professional level, in academic and scientific areas, as well as at a personal level. (Miller, 2019)

3.2. Involvement of Artificial Intelligence in Academic Education and Scientific Research. The Red Line of AI Use

The involvement and use of Artificial Intelligence in academic education, scientific research, in science, culture, in all areas of knowledge is a natural phenomenon, which falls within the process of civilization evolution with the support of technology. Rejecting it would be an absurd attitude, a refusal of progress, given its extraordinary capabilities in a wide range of processes. Through its fabulous capabilities of documenting the topic addressed on wide areas, of structuring, systematizing, synthesizing and editing information, AI is an important working tool, a support that is becoming, day by day, absolutely indispensable in all fields and, obviously, in education, research, culture, knowledge. (Gavin, 2025)

By using AI, the teacher or researcher has access to a huge volume of information, to sources of documentation of great extent and diversity, available in the virtual environment. Without AI, access to these sources would be limited, some of them being difficult to consult or downright inaccessible. In addition to access, the time factor must also be taken into account. Informing, documenting, synthesizing would take a lot of time for the researcher without the support of AI, which thus becomes an invaluable assistant in the study, research and structuring of information. A complex and laborious process of documentation and elaboration, with the usual means of documentation, books, the library, the internet, would require days, weeks, months or even years. Today, with the help of AI, it is carried out in seconds or minutes, depending on the complexity of the topics and the scope of the research. (Moulaison-Sandy, 2025)

Of course, the use of AI does not exclude traditional study, the library and books, the laboratory, the efforts of documentation, processing and structuring of information, elaboration and writing made by the researcher with traditional means and with the primacy of Human Intelligence. But, as we emphasized above, AI is a powerful working tool, a formidable support, which can and must be used, in synergy with Human Intelligence.

In this context, several fundamental questions arise: what are the limits of using AI? To what extent can we involve AI in the processes of scientific creation? The questions are generated by developments in reality, by the increasingly extensive and increasingly complex use of AI not only in information, documentation, structuring of information, but also in the development and editing of scientific works. Reality shows us that *a red line* is thus crossed by the transition of AI from the middle and support of information to the quality of *author*. And here appears the perspective, based on reality, that AI tends, and in many cases even does, *to think* in place of humans. (Boddington, 2023)

3.3. An outstanding author - AI. The transfer of authorship, digital advantages and the risk of hallucinations

As an author, AI is an expanding force. It scans, browses, processes a large volume of information, synthesizes and structures it in texts, works, books. With a fabulous capacity for documentation and synthesis, based on algorithms, AI is becoming, day by day, an author that surpasses, in many cases, human capabilities. An essential problem of AI is that, for now, it does not develop new ideas and theories, but only gathers information, combines and processes it, synthesizes it and organizes it into compact, essentialized structures. But not every work must and can bring something new in terms of ideas and content. And a work that offers a synthesis, a perspective, a well-documented and structured image on a topic can be a contribution to its knowledge and bring something “new”. New and revolutionary ideas are not born every day. The novelty lies not only in the content, but also in the way the content is organized and presented from a different, innovative perspective. The novelty and contribution can consist in the well-made synthesis itself, focused on the essential, which offers a relevant image of the theme.

Regarding the process of creation with the help of AI, there are increasingly frequent situations, within a global trend, where the role of author is transferred from humans to AI. These processes and approaches are increasingly common in educational environments, in academic education and scientific research, to focus only on them. The one who gives the “command” to AI obtains the work in a very short time. From this moment, he disposes of it as he wishes: he can intervene, to a lesser or greater extent, he can restructure, reformulate, adjust, eliminate or develop, he can change or add, he can make his own contribution or not. He can use the AI work as a working support for his own work, which he develops in the data of his own vision and thinking. Or it may intervene only so that the work passes the evaluation made by the anti-plagiarism software. To pass this test, with the help of Artificial Intelligence tools, there are a series of procedures that “clean” the problematic passages, bearing the “AI mark”, which concern their reformulation or the type of English language (if they are in English) used. Finally, following the editing and revision processes, the work conceived and written in whole or in part by Artificial Intelligence is “clean” and “original”, with no traces left by the AI. In one form or another, it passes the test and becomes a new work, “original”, “written”, assumed and signed by the author. (Rimmer, 2020)

In the entire process, in addition to the ethical vulnerabilities, there are also a series of very important risks: in many situations, AI fails by giving inaccurate, erroneous or downright invented information, in terms of author names, work titles, ideas, theories, interpretations, etc. In such situations, AI in the process of "creation" resorts to hallucinations. It is a kind of digital imposture, which associates with the human one and even aggravates the latter, under the aegis of “academic fake news”. The effects are, of course, the discrediting of the author who assumes and signs works with such precarious content. (Hattenstone, 2020)

3.4. Who is the author? Essential questions, hypotheses and interpretations

Regarding the use of AI in the creative process, several questions arise again: Whose work is it? Who is the author? And, further, linking things to a section above: What is creativity? What is originality? What is the own contribution of the author who signs the work? Is the work created by AI or with the massive help of AI an original work? And if it is original, whose is it? The human author, the AI or theirs and all the authors, who remain anonymous, whose ideas were processed by AI and synthesized into a new work? This latter question raises a fundamental issue regarding the topic of copyright and the rights of use by AI of the works of others. (Floridi, 2024)

For the present discussion, *the key question* remains: *Who is the author?* The answers appear depending on the nature and scope of the use of AI. Thus, we have two major *hypotheses*. First: the situation in which AI is used to document and structure information, and the resulting material is used as support for the work to be conceived and written by the human author, who will have a consistent and essential contribution. Second: the situation in which the material is produced by AI, to a large extent or in its entirety, with certain interventions from the person who gave the order or without interventions, and is assumed and signed by him.

In the first hypothesis, things are clear. AI is used as a tool for documenting, processing and synthesizing information, and the resulting material constitutes the author's working support. Based on the information structured by AI, using other information related to his training, specialization and expertise, within his own scientific concerns and activities, the author involves his own vision, develops ideas and ideational structures, chapters and thematic sections, and participates, substantially, in the generation of content. AI remains an information tool, taking over part of the documentation process done by humans, but without excluding them, being a kind of research assistant, which simplifies their work, helping them to cover more and faster, and perhaps more efficiently, the areas of information and documentation. Such help supports the coverage of thematic spaces, the quality, complexity and the deadline for the elaboration of the work. In this situation, the author of the work is the human, the researcher who approaches and develops the theme, with the active involvement of AI. (Haber, 2025)

Things get complicated *in the second hypothesis*, when the work is carried out by AI, with formal, minimal interventions from the person who commissioned the theme or without interventions. There are already a series of AI applications specialized in text creation, in the fields of education, science, culture, technology, etc., increasingly complex and advanced. There are increasingly frequent situations in which someone orders an AI application a topic, takes over the work and, with minor involvement, more of a formal nature, or without their own contributions, signs and publishes it. Who is the author in these cases? The human who ordered the work or the AI? There are at least two opinions here. The first, based on an ethical perspective, says that the author is the AI. The second, which is taking shape more and more, claims that the author is the person who gave the topic to the AI application. The arguments in favor of a human author, even if the work is done by Artificial Intelligence, refer to the fact that the human had the topic and the idea to approach it scientifically, to create an academic or research paper, that he managed and controlled the creation process, intervened where necessary and assumed everything, including the final product. ChatGPT itself supports this

interpretation, granting the human author primacy, ownership and use rights over the work. (Samuelson, 2021)

3.5. Ethical perspective on scientific creation

At this point of interpretation, *the ethical perspective* intervenes. Moral values, principles of ethics and academic integrity tell us that the work is not and cannot be the work of the one who initiated it and launched it to AI. The simple fact that he commissioned it and that, possibly, he had minimal interventions on it, in many cases precisely to erase traces of AI, does not make him an author. (Floridi, 2024)

The quality of authorship is built on idea, vision, perspective, documentation, elaboration, writing, creativity and originality, as we have seen above. And the value of the work results from the sum of all these elements, to which is added one essential one: the contribution to the development and knowledge of the theme. The simple assumption, with the signing and publication of the work carried out by AI, constitutes the appropriation of a work that does not belong to the initiator. In essence, it constitutes an act of plagiarism. It is plagiarism in that the work was not done by the author, but was taken over by him, it being done by a technological tool. The fact that the sources from which the information was extracted, through the coverage and documentation capabilities of AI, remain unknown does not make it any less plagiarism. In terms of creativity and scientific creation, here we are talking about pseudo-creativity and pseudo-creation. (Coeckelbergh, 2020)

3.6. The use of AI and academic pragmatism. The ethical approach vs. the “authorship of AI”

Another aspect is worth bringing up. Even if the intensive use of AI in the process of scientific creation is increasingly widespread, the classical, traditional, morally grounded approach, which respects the values of ethics and academic integrity, remains valid and, we like to believe, dominant. Moreover, the two approaches – the use of AI and the moral approach – are not a priori contradictory, they should not be put in antithesis, but in synergy. As we have seen, the involvement of Artificial Intelligence in the act of scientific creation becomes a necessity for comprehensive documentation, provided that it is founded on ethical values. (Moulaison-Sandy, 2025)

But the offensive of “creation” through AI is ongoing and encompasses more and more environments and people. The problem that arises is also of an ethical nature and has implications in the area of unfair competition. A work carried out by a professor or a researcher with the means of their own thinking, without excluding, of course, the involvement of AI, requires an intense and continuous effort, spread over a period of weeks, months, years, depending on the theme and the nature of the work. A work on the same theme carried out by AI or with the massive help of AI takes much less time, at the level of minutes, hours or days, for a complex and meticulous elaboration. The development of the professional portfolio remains a long-term theme, a continuous, complex and laborious process for the autonomous researcher, who respects ethics in scientific creation. For the one who turns to AI, the academic portfolio develops at an accelerated and spectacular pace. The professional evolution of each

of the two, who represent two different categories of researchers and authors, two mentalities and two visions, is deeply linked to the way of approaching the creative process and the realization of the works: through classical means, through their own thinking and efforts or by appealing to the *omniscient author* AI. (Samuelson, 2021)

4. Conclusions. The primacy of academic and authorial ethics. Synergy of Intelligences and the progress of knowledge

The capacity and multiple skills of Artificial Intelligence make it a revolutionary tool. One area in which AI is used intensively is scientific creation in academic spaces and research environments. More and more authors are launching the theme of the work they want to produce to Artificial Intelligence, transferring to it the mission of writing it, with everything that the creation process implies.

In this context, a series of questions arise regarding the nature of scientific creation and the meaning of authorial creativity in the AI Era, originality and personal contribution, as well as fundamental aspects in the field of ethics and academic integrity. Who owns the work? Does the initiator of the process have the legal and moral right to assume it, sign it and publish it? Are we experiencing a redefinition of creativity? Original work or plagiarism? What are the limits of using AI? The use of AI in scientific creation processes generates several *types of attitudes*.

The first attitude, with deep roots in the academic tradition and mentality developed over the centuries, is the rejection of AI, with the affirmation of the absolute primacy of the authorial authority of human nature. In a broader context, such a position, which privileges the force and authority of Human Intelligence, falls within a conservative mentality, which also implies resistance to innovations, openings and advances brought by technology.

The second attitude grants primacy to Artificial Intelligence, from the perspectives of coverage area, competence, complexity and speed, transferring the creation process to AI applications. Thus, the phenomenon of *the transfer of authorship* and *the substitution of the human author with the digital one* takes place. This approach relativizes the concepts of creativity and originality, empties them of content and meaning and conflicts with the values of ethics and academic integrity. Taking over, appropriating, signing and publishing a work entirely done by AI, without the scientific contribution of the author, represents an unethical and unacademic act and, in its essence, a form of plagiarism. The first two attitudes are in deep opposition. (King, 2025)

Regarding the creation process, the issue of authorship and originality with the massive or exclusive involvement of AI, described in the second hypothesis, all these aspects must remain under the absolute authority of the principles of ethics and academic integrity, but, at the same time, must be subject to clear academic, administrative and legislative regulations. (Abbot, 2020)

The third attitude advocates the use of AI as a means of information and documentation, of organizing and structuring information, with the human author developing his ideas, vision and theses on the documentary support made with the contribution of AI. It is the correct, rational attitude, built on an ethical foundation, in which AI is involved as a high-performance documentation and technological support tool, in the effort coordinated and carried out by Human Intelligence. This represents an academic, pragmatic and moral way of involving AI in the process of creation and elaboration, under the auspices of Human Intelligence. (Haber, 2025)

Artificial Intelligence must not substitute Human Intelligence. AI is the product of the scientific, creative and innovative genius of researchers, in other words, of Human Intelligence, and must remain under its authority and control. The correct ratio between the two types of intelligence is one of *complex collaboration*, of *active synergy* in the direction of scientific research and creation. This synergy leads to *the progress of knowledge*, with an unprecedented speed and complexity.

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THE CHANGING WORLD ORDER: RECENT DYNAMICS IN WORLD POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

Over the past five years the international system has undergone significant transformation. The post-Cold War era of U.S. hegemonic leadership and liberal integration is giving way to a more contested, multipolar, and fragmented order. This article reviews the main shifts in international politics and relations—great-power competition (especially U.S.–China), war and coercion (notably the Ukraine conflict), alliance re-configuration, economic fragmentation and technology competition, the geopolitics of climate and energy, as well as democratic backsliding and normative contestation. It draws on recent survey and policy-report data, primary documents and think-tank analyses to highlight both empirical changes and theoretical implications for IR scholarship and policy. The article concludes by identifying emergent research agendas and policy priorities.

Introduction

In the early decades of the twenty-first century the world's major power configuration appeared stable in certain respects: a dominant United States, a broadly integrated global economy, expanding liberal norms and institutions, and limited risk of large-scale interstate war.¹ However, beginning with the global financial crisis of 2008, accelerating in the 2010s and accelerating further since 2020, the international order has entered a phase of rising instability and transformation. As the World Economic Forum (WEF) puts it in its *Global Risks Report 2025*: “Deepening divisions and increasing fragmentation are reshaping international relations and calling into question whether existing structures are equipped to tackle the challenges collectively confronting us.”² By the same token, more than half of survey respondents (52 %) expect an “unsettled” global outlook over the next two years, and 62 % foresee “stormy or turbulent” conditions over the next decade.³ This article examines how that broader context translates into changes in world politics and IR: how power is being redistributed, how states and alliances are adapting, how economic and technological linkages are being rewired, how new domains of conflict emerge, and what this all means for theory and policy.

1. Multipolarity and institutional contestation

One of the clearest shifts is toward a more plural and contested international order. The WEF survey reports that 64 % of respondents believe that the coming decade will see a “multipolar or fragmented order, in which middle and great powers contest, set and enforce regional rules and norms.”⁴

Simultaneously, existing Western-led institutions appear under strain. The WEF identifies a so-called “geopolitical recession” in which multilateral institutions’ role in conflict prevention and resolution is weakened: “A loss of support for and faith in the role of international organizations ... has opened the door to more unilateralist moves.”⁵ At the same time, new institutional formations and “non-Western” initiatives are gaining attention. For example, the enlargement of the BRICS grouping signals a drive among emerging economies to create alternative centres of finance, trade and diplomatic coordination.⁶ The implication is a layered order in which U.S. power remains substantial but no longer unilateral, and where multiple regional and thematic architectures vie for influence. This scenario demands refinement of classical IR frameworks (e.g., unipolarity, bipolarity, multipolarity) to account for institutional competition and normative-ideational rivalry.

The rise of digital communication has transformed the mechanisms of political mobilization. Social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube have empowered populist leaders to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and communicate directly with mass audiences. Populists excel in this environment because their rhetoric—simple, emotive, and adversarial—fits the logic of social media. Algorithms prioritize sensational content, reinforcing ideological echo chambers and deepening polarization. The digital age has also produced an epistemic crisis. The proliferation of fake news, conspiracy theories, and algorithmic manipulation has eroded trust in traditional

information sources.¹⁶ Populist leaders exploit this mistrust, dismissing unfavorable journalism as “fake news” and presenting themselves as the only reliable interpreters of reality.

This erosion of epistemic authority has profound implications for democracy. Deliberative politics depends on shared facts and reasoned debate; when these foundations collapse, populist narratives based on fear and resentment gain traction.

2. U.S.–China strategic competition and technology decoupling

The liberal international order—anchored by institutions, rules-based trade, and multilateral governance—is under strain. Many observers argue that systemic cooperation is more difficult in an era of geoeconomic rivalry and technological decoupling.¹¹ When the major powers compete, the incentives for global public-goods provision or broad multilateral problem-solving become weaker, thereby reinforcing the competitive logic.

The resurgence of great-power competition marks a critical turning point in international relations. The paradigms of the 1990s and early 2000s—characterised by U.S. primacy and liberal multilateralism—are giving way to a more contested, multipolar, and complex world. While this revival of power politics shares DNA with the Cold War era, it also differs significantly: competition today is more diffuse (multiple domains, geoeconomic tools, technological frontiers), and the stakes encompass not just territory or ideology but supply-chains, standards, and governance models. The contest between the United States and China in East Asia, Russia’s re-assertion in Europe/Eurasia, and the strategic choices of middle powers such as India illustrate that we are navigating a world of rivalry layered with cooperation, autonomy and strategic ambiguity.

Among the axes of global competition, the rivalry between the United States and the People’s Republic of China stands out. What was once primarily an economic and trade relationship is now conceptualised as long-term strategic competition. Analysts emphasise three intertwined dimensions: trade/technology, military/security, and diplomatic/global governance. In the technology domain, states increasingly treat advanced semiconductors, AI, quantum computing and certain biotechnologies as strategic assets. The WEF notes the risk of “adverse outcomes of AI technologies” making a “jump” in the ten-year risk horizon.⁷

Scholars provide empirical support. For example, a recent paper finds that export controls on semiconductor hardware and software are starting to hurt U.S. firms while accelerating Chinese innovation: “Export controls backfired ... the report shows how U.S. firms lost more than US\$33 billion in sales to Huawei between 2021 and 2024.”⁸ Another study finds that Sino-U.S. science & technology friction is already reducing cross-border knowledge flows in certain technology areas.⁹ In military and security terms, European allies recognise the changing calculus: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has indicated that Russian aggression in Ukraine places renewed premium on deterrence and European burden sharing.¹⁰ In diplomatic and governance terms, the tech-sphere is becoming a site of normative competition — standards for data governance, AI ethics, export-regimes and supply-chain resilience are now contested. For IR theory, this competition challenges distinctions between economic interdependence and security rivalry — the two are increasingly fused.

3. War, coercion and the revival of conventional conflict

The recurrence of large-scale armed conflict is another defining feature of the period. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in February 2022 remains a systemic watershed. The WEF report states: “State-based armed conflict (proxy wars, civil wars, coups, terrorism, etc.) ... climbs from #8 to #1 in the ranking of risks for 2025.”¹¹

The war has triggered a cascade of changes: NATO revitalisation, dramatic defence spending increases in Europe, renewed emphasis on territorial defence and deterrence.¹² For example, in Europe defence spending reached 1.9 % of GDP in 2024, up from 1.6 % in 2022.¹³ The persistence of the war also highlights several structural features: (1) major-power war remains possible (at least regionally), (2) conventional war still matters despite technological advances, (3) the interplay of war, economic sanctions, energy supply disruptions and food insecurity underscores global spill-over effects. Thus, the period challenges the liberal expectation of declining interstate war and emphasises the continuing relevance of realist concerns. For IR theory, it suggests the need to integrate war-procurement-economy linkages, resource vulnerabilities and institutional adaptation into our models of conflict.

Traditional military alliances (NATO, etc.) increasingly incorporate “cyber-domains” into their doctrine; cyber-defence and information warfare become formal alliance tasks. Cybersecurity shapes access, interoperability, norms among allies and partners. Moreover, domains of contestation now include cyberspace, space, supply-chains and data infrastructures in addition to land, sea, air.

As states compete for digital architecture and control, global governance faces stress. Who writes the rules for cyber conduct? How are norms enforced? What is deterrence in cyberspace? The risk logics literature argues that cybersecurity politics encompasses more than classic threat paradigms; it includes risk-uncertainty logics, systems vulnerability, and governance dilemmas.¹³

Fragmentation of digital regimes—data sovereignty, divergent standards, national firewalls—may lead to a more fractured global order. Cooperation is still possible (for example on cybersecurity frameworks), but competition is stronger. The speed and complexity of cyber-operations raise the risk of mis-calculation, accidental escalation, and unintended consequences. The “blurring” of war/peace makes conflict less predictable. The asymmetric, deniable nature of cyber-operations complicates deterrence: if you cannot attribute reliably who attacked you, how do you respond?

Cybertechnology empowers non-state actors in new ways: hacker-groups, criminal syndicates, corporate actors with vast data capabilities can shape state-level outcomes. The intertwining of public and private in digital infrastructure means political outcomes reflect hybrid governance. Traditional IR models focusing solely on states may not suffice.

The era in which international relations were predominantly defined by armies, navies, diplomacy and economic blocs has been supplemented—and in some respects transformed—by the era of technology and cybersecurity. The digital age brings new domains of contestation (cyber-domain, data-domain), new actors (non-state, tech firms), new tempos (speed, automation), and new forms of power (data-control, standards-setting). These transformations have deep implications for how states behave, how alliances are structured, how conflict and cooperation occur, and how global governance must adapt.

4. Alliance plasticity and multi-vector partnerships

While traditional alliances endure, they are being reconfigured in response to new threat environments and shifting power balances. NATO remains central, but the alliance is adapting: increasing defence spending, authorising new capability commitments, and rethinking its geographic and thematic remit.¹⁴ Simultaneously, new formats of cooperation are emerging: the AUKUS trilateral security pact (Australia–UK–US), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the “Quad” – US, Japan, India, Australia) in the Indo-Pacific, and ad hoc defence-industrial partnerships among democracies.¹⁵ Middle powers are balancing in complex ways: hedging between China and the U.S., preserving economic ties while enhancing security linkages with the West. The result is a more flexible, issue-based, networked system of partnerships rather than rigid blocs. For IR scholarship, this invites greater attention to “mini-alliances,” functional coalitions, and the grey zone between alliance and neutrality.

The control of data and digital infrastructure becomes a form of strategic competition. States increasingly compete over standards (for 5G, AI), over digital supply-chains, over control of platforms and information flows. Cybersecurity is intertwined with digital governance: who sets the rules for data flows, algorithmic transparency, digital sovereignty?⁸ The traditional knowledge that states held becomes eroded by open, networked technologies.

Cyber-operations blur the boundary between war and peace, and between domestic and international politics. Influence campaigns via social media, disinformation, are politically potent and cross borders. The line between internal politics and external interference is increasingly porous. This evolution forces a reconceptualisation of conflict and security.

One of the most salient developments is the use of cyber-operations by major powers. For example, states conduct espionage on rivals’ economic, military, technological secrets; moreover, attacks on critical infrastructure (power grids, financial systems, government networks) have become strategic. The article “Geopolitical Ramifications of Cybersecurity Threats” argues that supply-chain attacks, ransomware and advanced persistent threats (APTs) have significant political implications.

5. Economic fragmentation, supply-chain resilience and geoeconomic coercion

The previously dominant narrative of ever-closer global economic integration is yielding to new forms of economic fragmentation and geoeconomic competition. The WEF identifies “geoeconomic confrontation (sanctions, tariffs, investment screening)” as #3 for current risk, and to receive heightened attention in the near term.¹⁶ Major powers increasingly treat trade and technology flows as instruments of statecraft. Examples include: export controls on advanced chips, investment-screening regimes for foreign direct investment, efforts at “friend-shoring” or “near-shoring” supply chains. Empirical research suggests that while diversification efforts are underway, China remains deeply embedded in global value chains (GVCs) and the U.S. + 1 strategy has limitations.¹⁷ Many scholars argue that the concept of economic interdependence needs refinement: states now manage trade

dependencies strategically, not simply economically. For IR theory, this means a revival of economic statecraft literatures, a deeper focus on digital and supply-chain interdependence, and the role of resilience as a strategic asset.

6. Climate, energy transitions and geo-ecological security

Environmental and climate issues now underpin geopolitical change in unprecedented ways. The WEF long-term risk landscape is dominated by extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and critical changes to Earth systems.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the energy transition opens new lines of competition: access to critical minerals, control over battery supply chains, clean-energy infrastructure, and the risk of bottlenecks or dependencies.

States are increasingly framing climate policy as security policy. For example, energy-exporting states must adjust to declining demand for hydrocarbons; resource-rich minerals (lithium, cobalt, nickel) become strategic; climate-induced migration and disaster risk trigger security implications. These developments require IR scholarship to incorporate ecological systems as structural variables, not just peripheral concerns.

7. Domestic politics, normative competition and regime contestation

The quality of domestic governance and norms is now a major driver of foreign policy and global politics. Democratic backsliding and authoritarian resilience have become common features. Scholars now argue that “democracy vs authoritarianism” competition is not simply normative but integral to geopolitics. One recent article observes the instrumental use of constitutional and legal levers to weaken checks and balances in many countries, producing far-reaching external consequences.¹⁹

Over the past two decades, populism and nationalism have re-emerged as powerful forces in world politics, reshaping democratic systems, altering party alignments, and transforming the international order. Though both concepts have deep historical roots, their contemporary manifestations have taken on new dimensions in response to globalization, economic inequality, migration, and technological disruption. The simultaneous rise of populist and nationalist movements across diverse contexts—from Donald Trump’s “America First” doctrine in the United States to Brexit in the United Kingdom, and from Jair Bolsonaro’s Brazil to Viktor Orbán’s Hungary—signals a structural shift in global political dynamics.

The resurgence of these ideologies has prompted widespread academic debate about their causes, consequences, and interconnections. Populism, often characterized by its anti-elite, anti-establishment rhetoric, challenges liberal democratic norms and institutions. Nationalism, with its emphasis on sovereignty and cultural identity, questions the legitimacy of supranational governance and cosmopolitan values. When combined, populism and nationalism form a potent ideological synthesis that opposes globalization and liberal internationalism, framing politics as a struggle between an authentic national community and a corrupt or alien global elite.

Populism also reflects a crisis of political representation. Traditional parties—particularly those aligned with the post-war centrist consensus—have struggled to respond to the discontent generated by neoliberal globalization.⁹ Many citizens perceive mainstream politicians as detached technocrats serving corporate or supranational interests. The populist appeal lies in its promise of direct representation: leaders who claim to speak for “ordinary people” without mediation. In Latin America, this dynamic has a long history. Leaders such as Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales mobilized populist rhetoric to challenge entrenched elites and U.S. influence, emphasizing economic redistribution and national sovereignty. While ideologically distinct from right-wing populism, these movements share a rejection of global economic orthodoxy and elite rule.

Moreover, states and non-state actors compete over narratives: governance models, data policies, human rights standards, AI ethics, climate justice frameworks. The result is a more ideationally contended world — not only who has power but whose model of governance becomes influential. For IR theory, this demands an integration of constructivist insights alongside realist/liberal concerns.

8. Possible Theoretical implications

In our view, these empirical changes present several implications for International Relations theory:

- **Refinement of polarity conceptions:** The rise of institutional contestation alongside power diffusion suggests that unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar models need revision; we may now operate in a *contested multipolarity*.
- **Integration of economic-technology-security nexus:** Traditional dichotomies between security and economics are collapsing; IR theory must more directly integrate techno-economic dimensions (e.g., export controls, value chains, data flows).

- **Revival of war and coercive tools:** Despite decades of decline, interstate war and coercive competition remain central. The expectation of peace must now be reconsidered; realism retains explanatory force but must incorporate new domains (cyber, AI, supply-chain disruption).
- **Ecological and transnational systemic factors:** Climate and geo-ecological processes are shifting from background variables to systemic drivers. IR theory must incorporate ecological constraints, resource transition, and system-level risk.
- **Normative competition and domestic-foreign interplay:** Domestic authoritarianism or democratic erosion no longer affect only internal politics but have external ramifications (alliances, legitimacy, governance export). Constructivist lenses regain relevance.

9. Possible Policy implications

From a policy perspective, four priorities emerge:

- **Manage strategic competition intelligently:** Recognise that U.S.–China rivalry is structural and long-term; institutionalise risk-reduction (military-to-military channels, crisis hotlines), multi-domain arms control (cyber, AI), and resilient supply-chain strategies.
- **Strengthen alliances and partnerships:** Adapt alliances (NATO, Indo-Pacific) for flexibility and technology pooling, while enabling partner autonomy to prevent over-dependence.
- **Build resilience and diversify dependencies:** Invest in critical-technology production, supply-chain resilience, defence-industrial base, and domestic buffers to external shocks.
- **Revitalize multilateral cooperation on global risks:** Re-energise governance for climate finance, pandemic readiness, cyber norms, biodiversity — even amid competition, cooperative platforms are indispensable.

Conclusion

The international system today is not simply reverting to a Cold War-style bipolarity nor continuing the liberal-globalisation trajectory of the early 21st century. Instead, we are witnessing a more complex, contested multipolar order — where power is more diffuse, institutions are contested, economics and technology are securitised, and global risks span domains. For scholars and policymakers alike, this means rethinking dominant assumptions and models. Key research priorities include: (1) mapping the governance architectures of emerging powers and multi-polar institutional networks; (2) quantifying how technological decoupling and supply-chain re-structuring affect security and economic outcomes; (3) exploring the intersection of climate transitions, minerals policy and geopolitics; and (4) assessing how domestic regime type, digital governance and external legitimacy interact to shape global alignment. In sum, the world politics of the 2020s is defined by **uncertainty, strategic competition, technological transformation, and systemic risk**. Understanding this evolving environment demands not only new data and frameworks but also sustained engagement across disciplinary boundaries.

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EDUCATION A CULTURAL MYTH OR AN INCREASINGLY NECESSARY MINDSET

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Abstract

If we search the word Education on social networks we will discover that it has the same frequency of access, the subject is as preoccupying as those regarding: Freedom, Democracy, Peace, Truth, Faith.

Therefore, Education joins articulately and at the same time functionally, the fundamental values that are necessary-present in any social matrix that pursues sustainable development, progress, well-being. The European Union has a consistent discourse on this topic and puts the Idea of Education in a place of honor, in the European Higher Education Area.

Keywords: education, *mindset, psychology, decision, personality.*

Introduction :

Therefore, education enjoys the prestige of producing with certainty, like a recipe, personalities, role models. Personality has the connotation of a model worthy of being followed, it has the importance of offering us, exemplary, a path, and of convincing us that an obstacle can be overcome through effort, through training, intelligence and high motivation. The model of an educated man suggests to us that we should develop and bring to light our performing Self. Education and training bring us to the forefront of social and economic life, top professions... there are times when the doctor is in the first ranks, or the engineer or the IT specialist, maybe the writer, the lawyer or the teacher. From this point of view, in essence, a social status is brought into discussion which is, let's admit, in direct relation to the economic needs of the communities, in certain periods. Today we are increasingly encouraged by those who promote "systems" that will work for us...something like, how to have success and clients on "autopilot".

A certain general view, suggested by the globalization that is increasingly present in our lives, imposes concern and involves taking into consideration the contemporary mechanisms, today

different, of solving our fundamental needs. As theoretically established by A. Maslow, the 5 levels of needs are valid: physiological, security, belonging, knowledge-understanding and those of self-actualization, self-realization and valorization of one's own potential. The last need, the need for actualization, highlights those educated personalities who feel the need for performance and maximum valorization of their potential and personal qualities. They want to pass on their knowledge and experience to their peers. The QR code of the educated personality is being modified, the interpretation algorithm of the famous "Who am I" test is being refined ?!

Abraham Maslow identifies, essentializing, 16 traits of self-actualized personalities, the elites of today and tomorrow, successful people, those who have succeeded, and are identified by most of us as valuable people present in different social fields of activity. They are rational people, humanistically open to others and social progress, correctly perceive reality, manifest creativity, spontaneity and independence in thinking, are focused on solving problems, are concerned with the good of humanity. We therefore have a psychological, cognitive-emotional profile that is established as a model to follow in the general field of education.

Because the development perspective in the social economic space is, as we observe, as accelerated as possible, we must answer the question, whether education forms through its programs the people that the labor market, society, the world needs. If we put the problem in these terms, it means that research in the area of education, training, formation and development will have to occupy a much more advanced place, with what this means directly and not implicitly: realistic research budgets, the training of specialists and highly qualified people at expert level with a complex training, multinational research institutes that perform on this theme-project with global value and efficiency.

“The Myth of Normal”: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture , authored by renowned psychotherapist Gabor Mathé , is now available in bookstores worldwide. Hailed by Bessel van der Kolk as: “an epic journey of discovery into how our emotional well-being and our social connectivity (in short: how we live) are intimately linked to health, illness, and addiction.” “The Myth of Normality” is a groundbreaking investigation into how modern society has accepted behaviors, ways of relating, and belonging that generate illness by their very nature.

Michael Foucauld said that education tends to create clones, sublimated replicas, individual expressions, all those people who support the government. This would be one level to reach in the act of education, but the ultimate goal is another, much higher. Education lays the

foundation for the personality that makes the leap into the civic and social space and becomes a recognized leader, a valuable man of the city, indeed, with functions of support and ensuring stability, but cultivating, unprejudicedly, that context that always prepares a certain catalysis of progress.

Over four decades of clinical experience, Dr. Gabor Maté has come to recognize that the prevailing understanding of “normal” in the contemporary space is false. This fact has particular consequences in terms of promoting other models in the spaces of education, culture and health. Neglecting the roles that traumas, organizational stress and even the pressures of modern life exert on our bodies and minds, we further amplify the loss and expense of good health, we move away from that desirable, famous well being!. With all the experience in the area of education and technological refinement, Western medicine is becoming more and more analytical, conquering more and more scientific validity. Perhaps because of this, the strict approach often fails to treat the whole person, ignoring the way in which the toxicity of today's culture stresses the body, burdens the immune system and undermines emotional balance. Therefore, Education is responsible, but also dependent on how we elaborate the "Great Story", how we present the Metanarrative, the symbolic Vault under which our peers will align. Will they identify those models necessary for the act of education, training and development; will they receive from here: the idea of professional success, successful career, fair and ethical citizen, progress and well-being, of a normal and adapted man and what the state of illness and anxiety means.

Gabor Maté contributes to unraveling common myths about what makes us sick, and he offers us a more subtle interpretation that heavily involves education: he connects the dots between individual illnesses and the “loss of meaning” in life. It is a major cause of societal decline and therefore offers an educational, compassionate guide to health and healing. Written with his son Daniel, *The Myth of Normal* is Maté's most ambitious and urgent book to date. We are dealing with a great mutation: education and training, training, the development of the personality of individuals was conceived in a broken relationship with industrialization and success in the market economy, therefore with the subordination of the individual in the “net of ideas of economic surplus value” and financial success.

"Lexus and the Olive", Thomas Friedman's paradigm highlights the role of the cultural matrix that configures the "decision tree" for groups under the pressure of the organizational discourse of reference (lexus or olive) which subsequently have an educational impact even for

individuals as such. We save ourselves a little through the subjectivity of "metabolic chemistry" (through the originality of ideas) through personal behavior and the agenda that we have learned to compose with a certain program and purpose; and yet education, lifestyle, religion, national culture program us with those specific attitudes and behaviors that differentiate us.

We are "Lexus" when we approve the latest achievements in the area of high scientific research. The trinomial: Research, Development, Innovation has gained remarkable consistency and has become an operational common ground for all economic and social fields. Artificial intelligence has been validated as a technology and, at the same time, as a way of thinking and solving problems and has promoted interdisciplinary fields with an emerging role in development. By bypassing a stage of "proximal development" (Vygotsky), we focus more efficiently on innovation and place increasing emphasis on artificial intelligence. Education on this vector is already a challenge for all segments of the population: children, adolescents, young people and adults, the elderly, professional categories of the most diverse operate with enthusiasm in the area of artificial intelligence. This has a formidable impact on education, introduces a new character into the scene, stronger, analytical, highly performing who does not have to be likable or demand attention. AI is requested as such, for the confidence that it can certainly provide support, cooperation, development opportunities, and Education imperatives.

Today we have diplomas that we obtain through the psychovocational option and training but which are not "green certificates" they must express something essential.

Choose the necessary state and disposition...do not abandon yourself to them, at random. "I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become", said Carl Gustav Jung. Beethoven identifies the four musical notes that create the first deep and universal investigation into human destiny. Sue Knight, specialized in Neuro Linguistic Programming, identifies a chain, a chain that as the Greeks say is decisive for all of us: if you sow a word, you reap an act, if you sow an act you reap a habit, a habit if you sow a habit, you reap a character and if you sow a character, you reap a destiny. If we simplify and reduce determination, looking only at the ends of the chain, we are surprised to discover that if we choose a word, we reap a destiny; So, say behavioral-cognitive therapists... we are what we think! And here is how in the matrix of variables of interest for our development one of the most important factors/vectors appears,

Education as a formative vector of attitude towards others, towards the world, towards performance, towards truth, towards quality, towards progress is the fundamental value of the world. Permanently, in the morning, in the evening, before an event, problem, situation, when we make decisions "or not" (it is still a decision), our brain establishes, like an "autopilot", the mental level of neuroenergetic intensity, of approaching and solving problems, in the most diverse tasks. Nobel Prize laureate, in the theory of economic decisions, Herbert Simon, deciphered a universal law that governs our mental, psychological and implicitly energetic, in approaches, related to solving problems and called it "Bounded Rationality"?! He specified that, "by our way of being", we process a small number of items/variables of the problems, in a usually limited time and from this perspective, "we solve situations", stopping at the first solution that satisfies us, "that seems to work"! In other words, beyond our skills, independently of their development, our natural temptation to make decisions already has slightly "irrational" connotations. The optimal solution would involve more, namely that "extra effort", a kind of self-surpassing. This would mean getting out of the comfort zone, accomplishing a job well done, which implies attitude and special programming, it is about attitude, mentality, that is, education, a responsible way of facing the face of effort and solving problems. This "mental inertia", subtly self-programmed, is not easily overcome! (even academics tend to snore, they doze off easily). Stephen R. Covey offers us a recipe, with at least seven habits, through which we can all have the chance to multiply our answers, in a first phase, from which we will then choose the optimal decision! Here are the six mental habits that must be educated: to be proactive, to identify priorities, to start projects with the end in mind, to listen to our peers deeply, to be synergistic with the reference group, to approach relationships in a win-to-win register and to always review these habits on a higher level, this would be a meta-skill. This is accomplished through the "courage" to increase our space of freedom, after all, one of the real keys to happiness! Therefore, it is worth considering the education of our spirit, through the

development of imagination (psychiatrists call this process "expanded consciousness", psychologists speak, more recently, of "distributive imagination"). By intensifying willpower exercises, we will gain a certain independence from the "suggestions" of those around us. Everything will be passed through the moral filter (good-bad) to accelerate the transition to a state full of enthusiasm, energy and optimism.

Conclusions:

Our synergy with our peers is both cause and effect of optimal interrelationships, which lead to authentic and good communication! Happiness is, it seems, an emergent result of an optimal interrelationship capacity with our peers, who obviously, recognizing these qualities, offer us similar feedback. Proactive behavior, exemplarily suggested by Stephen Covey, shows us how many chances we would have, if we processed reality better and, thus, could elaborate, predominantly, rational decisions and less... emotional "preferences"! The demarcation between the two instances is very difficult to notice, and in everyday life we do not make this notable distinction, unless we take into account the fact that, most often, the context puts pressure on our mind and forces/dictates, either an emotional/"irrational" preference, or in the happy case, a rational decision, without us being, instantly, aware of what happened! It is said that we have a lot of work to do towards self-knowledge in order to make correct and responsible decisions for ourselves, for our fellow human beings, for society, in essence, direct consequences of a high education!

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THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL GAMES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ON PERSONALITY TRAITS

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Abstract

According to the American Psychological Association, personality is a concept composed of traits, emotions, and behavioral patterns that reflect each individual's unique way of adapting to objective reality and the external environment, influencing their actions and thoughts. Personality is seen as a set of characteristics whose manifestation occurs in an individual's interactions with those around them and with the external environment.

It's good to know that personality develops in stages, referring to how it evolves throughout life, influenced by environmental, psychological, and biological factors. From this perspective, several specialists have highlighted models to explain this process.

Keywords: *personality, traits, emotions, model, self-esteem*

1. THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY IN SOCIAL AND SCHOOL ADAPTATION

Specialized literature shows us that personality is an important element and influences how students adapt to the social environment, as well as to the school environment. From this perspective, a brief analysis helps us identify the following personality traits that contribute to social adaptation: extraversion (children with an extroverted temperament make friends more easily and are more active in group activities); agreeableness (students with higher levels of agreeableness show more empathy toward those around them and are better accepted by their peers). Regarding school adaptation, we identify the following personality traits that facilitate the process: conscientiousness (conscientious students possess better organizational skills, responsibility, and perseverance); openness to experience (plays an important role in establishing motivation for learning); and emotional stability.

In the same vein, personality can directly influence the social relationships people develop and even their quality. From this perspective, extraversion is associated with a high capacity to form positive interactions, given that individuals who possess this personality trait are open and have a predisposition toward communication. Agreeableness leads to the emergence and maintenance of prosocial behaviors, which facilitates harmonious relationships. Conscientiousness is an element that supports taking on social responsibilities, leading to the ability to respect the social context and the rules of a group one encounters.

Regarding social relationships, it's good to know that attachment styles can significantly influence the quality of interactions and integration into society. Attachment styles are those emotional and behavioral patterns that are formed in the relationship with attachment figures during childhood. Attachment styles influence a child's emotional and social development and the relationships they will form in adulthood.

Family is important in the process of children's personality development, having a significant impact on the values and behaviors they choose to adopt, as well as how they will interact in society. To the extent that the family environment is characterized by acceptance, love, and support, children have more opportunities to develop increased self-esteem and self-confidence, which significantly contributes to the formation of a healthy personality. Children who receive consistent emotional support are better equipped to cope with life's challenges; they are able to express their emotional experiences in a healthy way and more easily develop strong interpersonal relationships. Also, the risk of developing psychological problems is lower, precisely because adolescents who feel supported by their families exhibit a higher level of well-being. Thus, appropriate family support becomes a protective factor against psychological disorders.

The family environment is also important from the perspective of the self-identification process children go thru. If they feel accepted and appreciated by family members, it will be easier for them to develop a positive self-image, which significantly influences their behaviors and attitudes outside the family environment. We cannot overlook that the impact a family environment has on a person extends beyond childhood. The entire support a child receives and the emotional experiences they associate with their family environment influence what their adult life will look like.

It should be mentioned that there is a significant association between events that occur within the family and the risk of developing personality disorders. In other words, events that an individual experiences and perceives as traumatic can have an impact on personality development, referring to emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, neglect, the loss of a parent, separation from parents, or exposure to intense conflicts, among many others. All these experiences can affect an individual's psychological structures and mechanisms.

2. RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATIONAL GAMES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, pedagogy and psychology have become two essential fields that intertwine harmoniously in understanding and developing the child. These emphasize both cognitive and socio-emotional development. Within this framework, research conducted in this field is more than just a tool; it's a way to explore potential and also identify the most effective methods that teachers can apply in the classroom.

This paper was outlined based on the conviction that play represents more than just a way for students to have fun.

I observe that play is an important pillar in a child's development; thru play, they form their personality, develop emotional skills, and consolidate adaptive social behaviors.

The philosophy of this research is based on a humanist vision of education. It recognizes that each child is unique and that the importance of harmonious development, both intellectually and socio-emotionally, is vital. We started from the hypothesis that personality traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, or imagination can be enhanced thru games in a structured, organized, and safe environment.

This research takes a quantitative approach; the analysis of the data obtained using the instrument allowed for the formulation of objective conclusions as well as the identification of potential future directions.

What can we, the teaching staff, do to ensure the optimal development of children during their school years? First and foremost, let's show empathy toward each individual, accept their different learning paces, encourage them, and continue to improve ourselves to learn how to awaken the desire for knowledge in new generations.

This research aims to highlight the influence of educational games for personal development on personality traits and academic performance.

Overall Research Objective

The overall objective of the research is to investigate the impact of educational games for personal development on personality traits (extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, openness, imagination, benevolence) and on school performance in primary school children, aiming to identify the changes produced on an emotional, behavioral, and educational level.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Children who participate in educational games for personal development will score significantly higher on emotional stability and school performance after the intervention, compared to their initial scores.

Hypothesis 2: Participating in educational games will lead to a significant increase in children's extroversion, imagination, and conscientiousness.

Hypothesis 3: After completing the educational activities, children will demonstrate an increased level of benevolence, expressed thru empathy, a desire to help, and cooperation within the group.

To assess the impact of educational games for personal development on personality traits and school performance among children, I used a 28-item questionnaire designed to be completed by parents. The psychological instrument used in the study was inspired by the HiPIC - Hierarchical Personality Inventory for Children, but adapted to the context in which it was used and supplemented with items relevant to measuring the variables under investigation. The items cover the following dimensions:

- Extraversion (sociability, public speaking)
- Conscientiousness (organization, task completion)
- Emotional stability (managing frustration, reaction to stress)
- Agreeableness (respect for those around you, cooperation)
- Openness to experience (interest in knowledge, curiosity)
- Imagination and creativity (inventiveness, original ideas)
- Benevolence (desire to help, prosocial behaviors)
- School performance (attention, academic results, involvement)

For each item in the questionnaire, the parent was asked to choose the frequency of the described behavior on a 5-point scale, where 1 means "never" and 5 means "always." The questionnaire was completed by parents at two distinct points: before and after the educational games were applied.

The purpose was to measure any changes in the child's observable traits, specifically regarding school involvement, benevolence, and empathy.

Educational games for personal development used in the intervention:

1) I Can! - is a game that focuses on overcoming obstacles and students' fears. It is structured into difficulty levels, each level corresponding to a year of study, and is based on overcoming

limiting beliefs. Its aim is to develop self-confidence and positive thinking. At the same time, it helps children learn that failure is part of development and encourages emotional self-regulation in the face of potential difficulties. The students will draw and write what they believe they cannot do. The paper on which the drawing was written will be buried, the children will say goodbye to "I can't" and meet his brothers. I will try, I will look for solutions, I will succeed, and they will replace "I can't" with "his brothers" in their vocabulary.

2) Big Steps - the game is designed to help overcome shyness and aims to encourage emotional expression in various school settings. The exercise includes a role-playing game where students are given simple situations they are afraid to respond to, and then they are encouraged to find ways to overcome that situation, for example, by seeking help from their classmates.

One of the advantages of current personal development games involves the ability to develop alternative thinking in the face of difficulties in emotional language development, but more than that, they aim to improve active participation in class and contribute to the strengthening of emotional intelligence, empathy, and cooperation.

3) Solutions - the educational game was created for children with the aim of developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Several teams are formed, and the students face various situations that can make them feel constrained, for example, "I made a mistake on the math exercise." The team needs to collaborate to find multiple solutions, but it's important to encourage students to identify an alternative to negative thoughts like "I can't," focusing instead on solutions and plans like "I'll try again more carefully" or "I learn from mistakes." The activity takes place in the classroom, with steps leading to the resolution of a specific situation, and students benefit from the "Box of Solutions," from which they choose cards with positive ideas or encouraging messages. This exercise develops emotional and cognitive self-regulation, improves the ability to cope with challenges or situations that students perceive as difficult, and also promotes a proactive attitude and collaborative learning.

4) "Brave Emotions" - the game is aimed at students, with the objective of recognizing and expressing emotions, as well as developing self-confidence.

The following materials were used for the activity:

- A large tree drawn on a whiteboard or cardboard
- Leaves made from colored paper
- Markers or colored pencils

Each child receives two leaves; on one, they are asked to draw an image representing a fear or insecurity they have experienced at school or at home, and on the second leaf, they are asked to write or draw how they managed the emotion, what they did at that moment, and what they could do in a similar situation in the future. The tree in the game is divided into two parts: the lower part is titled "the root of fear" where leaves with images representing fear and insecurity are placed, and the upper branches represent "the leaves of courage" where students will put the leaves they wrote or drew on about how they overcame the situation.

Table 1. Normality Analysis of Variables: Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Imagination, Benevolence, and School Performance (before the games)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Extraversiune_pre	.200	40	.000	.929	40	.015
Constiinciozitate_pre	.114	40	.200 [*]	.964	40	.237
Stabilitate_emotionala_pre	.193	40	.001	.915	40	.005
Imaginatie_pre	.163	40	.009	.929	40	.015
Benevolenta_pre	.137	40	.055	.947	40	.058
Performanta_scolara_pre	.200	40	.000	.886	40	.001

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2. Normality Analysis of Variables: Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Imagination, Benevolence, and School Performance (after the games)

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Extraversiune_post	.186	40	.001	.914	40	.005
Constiinciozitate_post	.104	40	.200 [*]	.976	40	.540
Stabilitate_emotionala_post	.226	40	.000	.913	40	.005
Imaginatie_post	.201	40	.000	.906	40	.003
Benevolenta_post	.112	40	.200 [*]	.962	40	.190
Performanta_scolara_post	.200	40	.000	.886	40	.001

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The data normality analysis was performed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, considering the relatively small sample size.

The results obtained indicated that, before the intervention was applied, the variables of conscientiousness and benevolence showed a distribution compatible with the normal model, as the significance values were higher than the threshold of 0.05. In contrast, the variables of extraversion, emotional stability, imagination, and school performance did not meet the normality condition, suggesting the presence of skewed distributions.

Following the educational intervention, the distribution of the variables followed a similar pattern: conscientiousness and benevolence retained their characteristics of normality, while the remaining dimensions investigated continued to show significant deviations from normality.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the variables of extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, imagination, benevolence, and school performance (before the games)

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Extraversiune_pre	40	17	24	20.13	1.667	.491	.374	-.516	.733
Constiinciozitate_pre	40	28	37	33.38	2.157	-.272	.374	-.119	.733
Stabilitate_emotionala_pre	40	22	29	24.80	1.843	.698	.374	.314	.733
Imaginatie_pre	40	9	14	12.00	1.396	-.357	.374	-.568	.733
Benevolenta_pre	40	12	21	15.93	2.411	.012	.374	-.279	.733
Performanta_scolara_pre	40	7	11	8.77	1.310	.008	.374	-1.287	.733
Valid N (listwise)	40								

In the initial assessment, the variable means indicated moderate levels of manifestation of the investigated traits, with extraversion and school performance having the lowest values, and conscientiousness and emotional stability showing higher levels. The intervention using educational games was followed by significant increases in the averages for all measured dimensions. Extroversion showed a notable development, as did imagination, while emotional stability and conscientiousness experienced a clear improvement, supporting the idea that the proposed activities had a positive impact on both personality traits and academic performance.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the variables of extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, imagination, benevolence, and school performance (after the games)

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Extraversiune_post	40	25	30	27.13	1.418	.393	.374	-.825	.733
Constiinciozitate_post	40	40	49	44.25	2.010	.017	.374	.077	.733
Stabilitate_emotionala_post	40	28	33	30.25	1.296	.326	.374	.116	.733
Imaginatie_post	40	14	18	16.15	1.252	-.133	.374	-1.058	.733
Benevolenta_post	40	18	27	22.08	2.269	.138	.374	-.270	.733
Performanta_scolara_post	40	10	14	11.77	1.310	.008	.374	-1.287	.733
Valid N (listwise)	40								

Although the descriptive analysis indicated a relatively small dispersion of scores (standard deviations between 1.2 and 2.4), normality tests signaled some deviations from the Gaussian model, which necessitated a differentiated statistical approach between variables.

However, the consistency of the average growth suggests a clear trend of improvement in the dimensions targeted by the research following the educational intervention.

Although the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell within acceptable ranges, the results of the normality tests were decisive in the choice of analysis methodology. Thus, for variables with a normal distribution, the paired t-test was chosen, while for the other dimensions, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for paired samples was selected, which is suitable for non-parametric data.

Hypothesis 1: Children who participate in educational games for personal development will score significantly higher in emotional stability and school performance after the intervention, compared to the initial assessment (Increase in emotional stability and school performance).

For Hypothesis 1, it was found that the distribution of scores for both variables deviates significantly from normality. Therefore, for the analysis of pre- and post-intervention differences in this hypothesis, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test will be used, a non-parametric method suitable for data that do not follow a normal distribution.

Hypothesis 2: Participating in educational games will lead to a significant increase in children's extroversion, imagination, and conscientiousness (Improving Personality Traits).

Regarding Hypothesis 2, the analytical approach will be differentiated based on the behavior of each variable. Thus, since extraversion and imagination did not show a normal distribution, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test will be applied to them. Instead, for conscientiousness, which met the condition of normality both before and after the intervention, the analysis of differences will be performed using the paired samples t-test.

Hypothesis 3: After completing the educational activities, children will exhibit an increased level of benevolence, expressed thru empathy, a desire to help, and cooperation within the group (Increasing Prosocial Behaviors).

For Hypothesis 3, the data showed a normal distribution of the variable both before and after the intervention. Consequently, to test this hypothesis, the paired t-test will be used, as the necessary conditions for applying a parametric test are met.

CONCLUSIONS

Children who participate in educational personal development games will score significantly higher in emotional stability and school performance after the intervention, compared to their initial scores. The results obtained by applying the Wilcoxon test show that the hypothesis is statistically significant. Therefore, children who participated in the educational personal development games demonstrated a significant increase in emotional stability and school performance. We can explain the validation of the hypothesis by the fact that well-structured activities, starting from clearly defined objectives and focused on personal development, contribute to the improvement of emotional self-regulation.

Children have the opportunity to identify, label, and express emotions within a safe yet predictable framework, which also helps reduce anxiety levels and affective reactivity. At the same time, we can take into account that educational games facilitate the experiential learning process precisely because they allow for the learning and practice of alternative coping strategies, leading to an increased sense of internal control and also an increased sense of self-efficacy.

Another perspective thru which we can explain the statistically significant results in relation to the first hypothesis is that the presence of a positive relationship with the activity facilitator contributes to improved emotional stability, promoting secure attachment and consistent emotional validation. Furthermore, exposure to such an environment that involves communication, cooperation, and adherence to clear rules helps develop social and emotional skills, which are precisely the important elements in balanced emotional functioning.

The association between educational strategies and emotional self-regulation is confirmed.

Educational programs based on the development of social and emotional behaviors lead to better school adjustment. Additionally, it helps reduce behavioral issues.

In the same vein, educational games activate multiple cognitive processes simultaneously, such as working memory, attention, cognitive flexibility, and problem-solving. All the mentioned elements have a direct impact on academic learning skills. From this perspective, research in neuropsychology suggests that training executive functions in game contexts helps improve overall academic performance.

Participation and involvement in educational games can have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation because children feel encouraged to engage in learning tasks if they are perceived as enjoyable and relevant to their needs and desires. Educational games are designed to take into account children's cognitive level, as well as their emotional level and interests, specific to their stage of development.

Educational personal development games encourage them to explore more and more information about themselves, leading to a clearer and more positive self-image. Improving self-esteem leads to an increased level of confidence in one's abilities, which plays an important role in motivating students to actively participate in school activities, shaping the belief that they will succeed and that their effort is valuable and essential.

Furthermore, educational games for personal development can help children participate in the process of self-discovery or even discover and remember positive traits and qualities they were unaware of without contexts for personal reflection.

Educational games contribute to reshaping self-perception in a beneficial way if supported by constructive feedback. We can think that educational games lead to a feeling of usefulness and social recognition. The context favors the development of intrinsic motivation for learning, and the fear of failure or performance anxiety is replaced by openness and curiosity. These mechanisms contribute to the development of strong

emotional stability, which, over time, effectively supports adaptation to school demands and helps achieve better results.

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NEW TRENDS IN MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE. THE RISE OF KNOWLEDGE BASED SOCIAL RESILIENCE

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Abstract

Digitalization of the information environment and growing complexity of the new media ecosystems have enabled the use of new technologies for spreading fake news, malicious or partisan content and hostile narratives. At the same time, these trends, visible within media, communication and culture, have been accentuated by characteristics of the digital arena. The present paper gives a brief insight into some of the key evolutions triggered by digitalization upon contemporary societies, addressing topics such as the use of fake-news in accentuating social polarization and cultural divides, communication hijacking as well as the role of knowledge-based social resilience in maintaining democratic balance.

Keywords: mass-media, communication, culture, hybrid threats, soft power, social resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary world is strongly influenced by the presence of a set of interconnected phenomena, which tend to challenge the perception, the identities and the traditional functions of the media systems. In this context, some of the key trends which shape media, communication and culture include: deterritorialization and diasporization of social identities, fragmentation of the setting agendas and growing influence of media bubbles and digital echo chambers, decline of textual communication and rise of visual and hyper-interactive media content, commodification of news, accentuated by the growing power of social networks. The present paper explores the perspectives of evolution of contemporary media systems and media culture within the bounds of new digital arenas, the main research hypothesis referring to the presence of an essential narrative stake of mediated messages, the diversification of stakeholders that are active within information ecosystems requiring new strategies for building societal resilience.

II. THE RISE AND DOWNFALL OF NETWORK SOCIETIES

Digitalization have triggered tremendous changes within contemporary world. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the effects, the magnitude and the long-term evolution prospects of this technological and cultural revolution. The emergence of network societies was discussed by sociologist Manuel Castells in the early stages of digital transformation (Castells 2011), the main characteristic of the connected societies referring to acceleration of globalization, under auspices of virtualization of markets and rise of informational economy, fragmentation of the media systems and the end of mass audiences, due to growing potential of interactive communication chains. Published in 1996, Castells's book, *The Rise of the Network Society*, predicts the end of the Gutenberg era, new media models engaging the viewer in new interpretative and meaning creating processes. Prior, Marshall McLuhan considered that visual communication media, like television, tend to involve the public emotionally, due to the metaphorical nature of the image, the receptors being invited to fill the gaps of the message with their own intuitions and representations (McLuhan 1962: 77).

As a global communication medium, television was seen as a pervasive and powerful presence, able to shape group identities, to instill cultural landmarks and to support transnational cultural and political movements. Television was used as soft power tool within various political settings, including the Arab Springs of the 60s and 70s or the anti-Soviet propaganda of the late 80s, demonstrating the power of visual media in influencing international relations and local politics. Collective interpretation of media apparently supports collective political

action. However, the process of meaning attribution remains dependent by audiences' cultural codes, stereotypes and dormant affinities, mostly originating in historical vestiges, class culture or invented traditions. Castells also invoked Umberto Eco's perspective upon role of socio-cultural circumstances in creating a variety of codes (Deleuze and Guattari: 2018), rather than creating fixed rules of interpretation of messages.

Nevertheless, television was a cool communication medium, using the one-way communication model. In this context, the Internet revolution offered an interesting hyperbola of the image-based communication culture. However, the digital mutation enabled a set of influential and interrelated phenomena.

Digitalization not only multiplied the cultural codes and semiotic frames available for various groups and communities in interpreting the message, but also opened the possibility for continuous negotiations of social meanings and cultural landmarks. Digitalization accelerated the globalization process but determined subsidiary trends such as deterritorialization and diasporization. The global village metaphor was thus replaced by the image of rhizomic media structures, analogous to what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari described as new forms of information cities and interactive urban life. In time, digitalization of mass-media systems enabled a diversification of actors engaged in creation and circulation of news. Also, digitalization stimulated a fragmentation of setting agendas worldwide, influenced by algorithmic rules and nourishing the rise of parallel public spheres.

Nowadays we witness the advent of non-state power actors in international relations, the diversification of publics and segmentation of media systems and the emergence of a global rhetorical arena. At the same time, digitalization opened the road for empowerment of users, transforming them into receptors and creators of message, the block-chain society replacing the initial model of network society. However, decentralization, autonomy and circular memory of the new digital culture nourished unexpected consequences. In the context of digital transformation, the communication universe became gradually more divided and segregated than before. Published more than two decades after Manuel Castells' seminal book, Felix Stalder's work, *The digital condition* (Stalder 2018), highlighted some of the critical trends of the new communication culture: exponential expansion of the information sphere; growing complexity of media architectures; combination of user-centric platforms with centralized, traditional media actors; critical role played by algorithms in designing information high-ways.

The digital condition was defined in terms of referentiality, communal meaning-making, automation and algorithmizing and, mostly, in terms of information overpowering volume. Referentiality implies recovery of cultural meanings by reinterpreting and mixing existing content, such as media representations, myths, social rituals and traditions or even social mythologies and basic structures of the social imaginary. At the same time, referentiality requires the reconfiguration of the symbolic and semiotic dimensions of mass-communication, using two major techniques. First of all, referentiality creates a false memory loop, the new remixed content being perceived as already familiar, according to an imprecise and intuitive recognition, and, secondly, referentiality recovers strong cultural codes, using them as justification for promoting current political and ideological agendas. The false memory loop often generates false legitimation, resulting in building flawed majorities, social polarization and even in rediscovery of illiberal affinities. The rise of authoritarian, traditionalistic or nativist political discourses in Europe and overseas could be linked to digital referentiality effects. In this context, malign actors or opportunistic political players employ the power of invented traditions to reclaim visibility and media power. Referentiality ability to recirculate and renegotiate complex cultural codes determines subsidiary effects, such as social polarization, partisan reception and interpretation of news, as well as ingravescence of representational divides.

The multiplication of media flows slowly determined a decline of mainstream setting agenda, nourishing parallel information hierarchies. Audiences often fail to share basic information interests, individual consumption patterns determining heterogeneity and accentuating commodification and weaponization of media content. The multiplication of cultural divides became traceable in electoral distortions, civic disengagement and in the decline of common social interest. Paradoxically, communality, another effect highlighted by Stalder's work, refers to the process of permanent negotiation of social meanings (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Communality implies the collective work of publics, media and politics in creating meaning and value for community of practice, social rituals and even social order and logic. Classical concepts such as state, democracy or truth become fluid and their meaning is constantly rebuilt under pressure of this permanent dialogue. The concept of rhetorical arena was coined by Timothy Coombs in early '90 (Schwarz, Seeger and Auer 2016), but perhaps the true explicative vocation of the term is visible in the present. The polyphony of public discourses and the growing power of hyper-interactive media may question the initial prospects of the network society. The network society disclosed the image of a fragmented modernity in spite of the fact that, at the beginnings, it was seen as a space of cooperation and participation.

In many cases, digitalization determined complicated political successions, reinforcement of ethnic, religious or cultural divides or democratic inversion and relapse of post-colonial or post-communist societies. At the same time, algorithmizing, another influential feature of the new digital universe, creates new vulnerabilities within media systems. Effects such as the illusory majorities, which are based on false accounts, trolls farms and malign influence, the decline of media accountability and the distortions of news' sources, and the appropriation

of digital communications space, announced the rise of hybrid threats. Felix Stalder's book presents the effects of the complex cultural and structural transformations triggered by the end of Gutenberg era, among which mention can be made of the concentration of power and the rise of post-state political and economic forces, the widening of political participation mostly under formula of a Green Uprising (Huntington 1965) and the threat of Knowledge monopolies, enforced by new technological hegemons.

III. MEDIA, POWER AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE UNDER SIEGE OF HYBRID THREATS

Current diversification of the communication arena opened the door for a malign turnover of the user revolution, weakening the power of the traditional media Gatekeepers. In most cases, appropriation of digital space was difficult to counteract, because of malign players's ability to hijack the trends, to spin the digital agenda and to employ the new toolbox of hybrid tactics. Initially, the term of hybrid war was used in connection with unconventional warfare, employing a large variety of tactics, from political warfare, fake news and narrative operations to cyberwarfare and electoral interventions. Promoted by Frank Hoffman's work upon Israel–Hezbollah conflict which was defined by blended tactics, hybrid war gained new connotation in the context of Russia's first stage intervention in Ukraine, in 2014. At the time NATO Heads of State issued a statement that included the term in connection with Russia's grey flag operations. The concept of hybrid war has evolved since then, gaining new meanings as the use of mass-communication for propaganda, fake news dissemination, accentuation of social polarization and social divide (NATO 2024). At the same time, the new context of digital communication accentuated the changes occurred in international environment, the threats to national security becoming more fluid and more diverse (NATO 2020). Traditional boundaries amid war, peace or crisis were no longer valid, the main beneficiaries of the digitalization disruptive effects being authoritarian regimes, malign non-state and post-state actors, economic lobbies and new security challengers. These actors employed a large variety of tactics and non-traditional means, often without being detected and imitating the discursive pattern and cultural semiotics of traditional and local players. The referentiality condition mentioned by Stadler in his essay supported the recovery and recirculation of narratives and representational stereotypes. In this context, people make decisions mostly based on their cognitive biases, social experience and basic cultural conditioning. Their worldviews and meaning of events depend on the information environment, the new visual syntax of digital media and digital communication requiring new interpretative solutions.

Digitalization not only involved the rise of media bubbles and the multiplication of media agendas but also inaugurated a phase of image-oriented content. The shifting of media consumption to mobile devices shaped the patterns of digital communication, the smaller screens and the aggregating force of social media forcing the decline of the text. The post-Gutenberg tournament of communication generated interesting effects, the visual content involving new interpretative tools. First, image itself doesn't hold a unique interpretative code, its meaning being constructed in relation to the viewer. Secondly, the image-base content tends to be easier to adapt to newer contexts, avoiding the cognitive bias of the viewer. Thus, a visual media culture favored a metaphorical interpretation of advertising and news. At the same time, the interdependencies arisen amid visual oriented media and recent hybrid threats required new theoretical instruments, targeting the metaphorical nature of the new communication universe. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, established scholars in field of cognitive linguistics, highlighted the interdependencies arising amid one person's worldview and his/her perception of truth (Althus and Haiden 2018).

Under these circumstances, understanding of the situation is a priori shaped by a combination of beliefs, social conventions and political and mediatic echoes surrounding the topic. Lakoff and Johnson consider that news-bites, key words and strong images are forgotten rapidly, but individuals still hold the "edifices of shared meaning", constructed trough imagery and metaphor. These strong group representations emerge because of both referentially and communality. However, the real power of such edifices of shared knowledge lays in their ability to act as an exclusionary force. Even when the mainstream media can offer evidence-based arguments against a political offer or a social message, the public may reject these claims, because they contradict their image of the world. The exclusionary character of the edifices of shared knowledge challenges the equilibrium of participatory democracies, since their ability to perpetually reinterpret the facts is supported by the very specificity of the digital media and culture. Exclusionary communication was connected to relevant trends such as post-truth politics, ascent of populism or decrease of social resilience and democratic accountability (Olsen 2013). Post-truth definition, concept launched during Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, targeted aspects such as denoting

circumstances and promoting interpretations, case in which objective facts are less important than the political belief and the viewer's emotional engagement.

The intersection of post-truth, populism and fake-news concerns mostly the tendency to emphasize personal translation of facts and the definition of the truth above the rational and factual truth. This capacity to segregate the individual perception from the general one opens the road for a complex set of communication and media distortions that affect contemporary societies. To name only a few, the effects of exclusionary communication, combined with new characteristics of the information space could include: an international communication arena defined by uncertainty and ambiguity, an ascent of ideological thin actors, using populist and nativist discourses, a diversification of stakeholders active within information ecosystems and some evolving tactics of malign influence.

At the same time, the instrumentalization of conflicts, which are based on competing narratives, influence and hybrid informational threats, demonstrates that cyberwar and international influence operations are gradually shifting toward discrete strategies such as the creation of false social-media movements and communities, the false flag recruitment of influencers and the communication hijacking (Hautala, Luoma-aho and Brown 2025). By spinning the trends, dark strategic communication, which is employed by state and non-state actors, may affect the democratic balance of the liberal societies, may develop long-term social polarization and may undermine public trust and limit the efficiency of state, institutions and leadership.

Nowadays digital public spheres are often defined by polarization, simplified identity-narratives, use of basic group mythology and reinforcement of symbolic social cleavages. In this context, social resilience of liberal societies may become a quantifier for measuring a state's stability and international relevance within security pacts. Communication culture became critical for conserving societal consensus and democracy models, hybrid treats having the power to destabilize public arenas, affecting discourses, institutions and civic dynamic. International power actors such as NATO, define social resilience as a society's ability to resist, recover and counteract in the context of hostile actions or non-intentional crises (NATO 2022). Major shocks such as health crisis, electoral distortions or social polarization could measure both civil and societal preparedness in front of hybrid and non-conventional threats, national resilience also including civil society. Citizens' trust in institutions, democratic practices and politics define essential conditions of social resilience. However, disinformation, propaganda and hostile narratives determine more complex threats in contested territories, the proximity of the Ukrainian conflict creating subsidiary vulnerabilities at the Eastern border of NATO's security pact. The civilizational continents theory described by Huntington's influential essay in mid-90 (Huntington 1996) argued that future wars would be fought not between states and countries, but between cultures. Trends as referentiality and communality accentuated many of the cultural stereotypes and reinforced relevant group narratives, the revival of nativist, millennial and populist speech in local politics being a discrete symptom of the digital condition. Moreover, when hostile forces, proxies and long-term hegemony use cultural codes, iconography of power and media semiotics that are perceived by target societies as authentic, their effects and echoes become extremely difficult to counteract.

By spinning the trends, hijacking the meaning of news and controlling the digital discourses, malign forces could engage in long term influence operations. Moreover, the audiences are attracted in a collaborative interpretation game, the edifices of shared meaning acting as selection filters for partisan content. Perpetuation of hostile narratives often escape states and civil society reactions, rejecting facts-based arguments. Audiences' implication in the continuous adaptation of the stories contributes to the fact that they are perceived as authentic. A strong example of such effects as communality and algorithmizing is offered by pandemic's hostile narratives. Initially corresponding to the ones launched in other European countries, the Romanian fake news and partisan speech related to pandemic became specific and distinct, reflecting sometimes decades old imageries and stereotypes.

Recovering diverse semiotics from communist myths (foreign conspiracy against nation), technological dystopias and pop-culture apocalyptic scenarios, initial hostile plot was transformed into collective collaborative work, perceived as authentic and real. In recent times, the true stake of hybrid threats refers to the strategic use of social and group basic values and founding mythology. These primary narrative structures, often circulated in new media architectures, are recovered by target groups, enriched with new representational layers and transformed into authentic content. As a conclusion, the communality and referential effects of the digital condition require new solutions to develop true societal resilience. New societal resilience should be defined by strong information literacy, by the ability to build consensus, by collaboration and support within various social groups, the surpass of the digital divide being also a critical objective. Creation of strong social values, reflected in democratic engagement, rule of law, efficient institutional architectures and independent media system shape the project of knowledge based social resilience.

In the light of these considerations, efficient measures to counteract nowadays hybrid challenges should imply: rising media awareness and societal capability to counteract fake news campaign, malevolent content, deep fake, malign influence campaigns; constantly exposing and revealing the activity and channels employed by

various malign players and groups, in order to counteract their ability to seize the public discourse as legitimate and accountable social actors; adapting the media climate and media practice in order to consolidate the shift amid mass-media and pseudo-media (Palau-Sampio 2023), which promotes misleading versions of the social reality, enhancing societal gaps, cultural cleavages and developmental gaps; limiting whitewashing practices for extreme and radical messages, offers and actors, that are often naturalized in digital communication ecosystem through intervention of pseudo-media websites;

V. CONCLUSIONS

The use of new digital ecosystems to promote strong knowledge-based social resilience and to limit the hybrid potential of fake news should become a key topic of contemporary debate upon media, communication and culture.

Because of the unprecedented disruption determined by pseudo-media imitating visual forms and styles used by mainstream journalists, polarized content, conspiracy theories and clickbait patterns influence public discourse, public sphere and the politics, contributing to the decline of media accountability, democratic distortions and cultural polarization.

Effects of the “*digital condition*” as referentiality, communality and algorithmizing create new vulnerabilities for media, institutions and society. Even though geographic proximity is no longer the primary measure of risk in hybrid threat and narrative war, geography matters. Hybrid war and narrative operations are based on already present affinities. Building societal resilience in mature democracies, in societies that are undergoing changes or even in contested territories and conflict areas, depends on using shared values, reinforcing basic group narratives and exploiting the potential of shared edifices of knowledge, as nation or autonomy and freedom.

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LUCIAN BLAGA'S POETIC WORK FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (II)

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Abstract. *Artificial intelligence (AI), with astonishing outputs in various scientific, technological and theoretical projects, may be used as a preliminary, auxiliary asset as to the analysis of certain lyric works. Going further with a project initiated in 2024, I have chosen two poems of the Romanian poet Lucian Blaga to be analysed by ChatGPT.*

As expected, one of the poems, well-known when it comes to Blaga's poetry, benefited from a quite accurate analysis, although a little bit too general. As to the other one, a valuable poem however with little notoriety, the analysis offered a raised level of generality and ambiguity, introducing also erroneous information.

This leads to the conclusion that, at least for the moment, AI should be used cautiously in investigating poetry and literary works. Because of the lack of originality and creativity, it can be used as a secondary tool in such exegetic projects.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence (AI), chatbot, poetry, literature review.*

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

In the publication *Blaga Notebooks* no. 44 of 2024 I initiated an attempt at introspection in Lucian Blaga's poetic work, introspection carried out with the help of the tools currently made available by artificial intelligence (for which I will continue to use the acronym AI). Using two such tools (ChatGPT, and Microsoft Edge Copilot), I tried to get answers to questions of great generality regarding the object of my research, from the position of a novice who knows very few details about Blaga's lyrical work: *What is the most representative volume of poems of the Romanian poet Lucian Blaga? What are three reasons why the volume in question is meant to be representative? Which poems illustrate the representativeness of the mentioned volume?*

The answers, generated in a few seconds, were more or less pertinent, and in the conclusions of the article I referred to both their pluses and minuses. The general idea was that AI can deal with even difficult topics at an acceptable level (neither Lucian Blaga, nor Romanian literature, nor Romanian language are elements that benefit from great notoriety internationally), but, at least last year, the conclusion was that the temptation to give up the human element in the analysis of a literary work must still be viewed with circumspection.

The second step of the research, which has been materialized in this article, tries to deepen the approach regarding Blaga's lyrics, subjecting two poetic texts by Lucian Blaga to AI analysis.

As a working method, I chose two poems that I submitted to ChatGPT analysis: the well-known poem *I don't crush the corolla of wonders of the world* (which opens the debut volume *Poems of Light* from 1919), but also a less familiar one to the school population, *To the readers* (which opens the volume *In the Great Passage* of 1924). In both situations, only the actual text of the poem was intentionally proposed to analysis, without specifying the title, the author, the year of publication, the volume in which it was published. I did so in order to check to what extent AI can provide those details receiving for analyse only the poem itself.

2. POEM No. 1: CHAT GPT ANALYSIS OF THE POEM *I DON'T CRUSH THE COROLLA OF WONDERS OF THE WORLD* BY LUCIAN BLAGA

ChatGPT received the text below (which I will later refer to as *Poem No. 1*), with a request to analyse it (both Romanian and English versions are available):

I don't crush the corolla of wonders of the world
and I don't kill
with my mind the mysteries, which I encounter
On my way
in flowers, in eyes, on lips or graves.
The Light of Others
strangle the spell of the hidden unfathomable
in depths of darkness,
but I,
I with my light increase the mystery of the world –
and just as with its white rays the moon not shrinking, but trembling
increase the mystery of the night even more,
The same way I enrich the dark horizon
with wide shivers of holy mystery
and everything that is incomprehensible
changes into even greater meanings
under my sight –
'cause I love
flowers and eyes and lips and graves too.

Eu nu strivesc corola de minuni a lumii
și nu ucid
cu mintea tainele, ce le-ntâlnesc
în calea mea
în flori, în ochi, pe buze ori morminte.
Lumina altora
sugrumă vraja nepătrunsului ascuns
în adâncimi de întuneric,
dar eu,
eu cu lumina mea sporesc a lumii taină
–
și-ntocmai cum cu razele ei albe luna
nu micșorează, ci tremurătoare
mărește și mai tare taina nopții,
așa îmbogățesc și eu întunecata zare
cu largi flori de sfânt mister
și tot ce-i nențeles
se schimbă-n nențelesuri și mai mari
sub ochii mei –
căci eu iubesc
și flori și ochi și buze și morminte.

I specify that I intentionally did not formulate any kind of analysis criteria, in order to detect to what extent ChatGPT can establish an interpretation grid on its own. The answer provided was as follows:

This poem, considered to be a true manifesto of Lucian Blaga's thought, opens the volume *Poems of Light* (1919) and synthesizes the essence of his philosophy about knowledge, mystery and human being's relationship with the universe.

1. Theme and meaning

The poem illustrates the opposition between two types of knowledge:

- **Rational knowledge** (symbolized by the "light of others"), which crushes mysteries through logical explanations, thus reducing the charm and depth of the world.
- **Poetic and intuitive knowledge** (represented by "my light"), which does not destroy mysteries, but amplifies and enriches them.

Blaga proposes a personal vision of knowledge: he does not want to dissect and demystify the world, but to preserve and cultivate the mystery of existence, which he considers essential.

2. Structure and style

The poem consists of a single ample stanza, with free verses, without fixed rhyme, which gives an inner rhythm specific to philosophical meditation.

- **The parallel with the moon:** "just as with its white rays the moon / does not shrink, but trembles / magnifies even more the mystery of the night". The moon, instead of destroying the mystery of the night, intensifies it. Through this metaphor, Blaga outlines his own vision of the creative act: it "illuminates" without destroying, preserving the charm of the unknown.
- **The symbolic enumeration:** "flowers, eyes, lips, graves". Symbols of beauty, love, life and death, all accepted and harmoniously integrated into the poet's vision of the world.

3. Message and impact

Blaga states that the act of knowledge should not be destructive, but creative, preserving the charm of mystery. This way of looking at the world becomes a defining mark of his work and his philosophical thought, being consistent with the "Luciferic knowledge" that he would develop in his later philosophical works.

In conclusion, *I don't crush the corolla of wonders of the world* is a manifesto-poem by Lucian Blaga, through which the poet defines his conception of knowledge and creation. The metaphorical language, the free structure and the depth of ideas make it one of the most representative texts of Romanian literature.

To verify to what extent the above statements are pertinent, I requested the clarification of the sources that ChatGPT has integrated. The answer was as follows:

The analysis I have provided is based on my accumulated knowledge of Romanian literature, especially the work of Lucian Blaga, without using external sources directly. The interpretation of the poem *I Do Not Crush the Corolla of Wonders of the World* is the result of a synthesis of the general critical perspective on Blaga's poetry, of his philosophical influence and of the analyses carried out over time by literary critics such as **Tudor Vianu**, **George Călinescu**, **Dumitru Micu** and **Nicolae Manolescu**.

If you need specific references from established critical works, I recommend:

1. Tudor Vianu – *The Art of Romanian Prose Writers* (analyses Blaga's style and expressiveness).
2. George Călinescu – *The History of Romanian Literature from the Origins to the Present* (provides a general framework on Blaga's place in Romanian literature).
3. Dumitru Micu – *Lucian Blaga. Poetry and mythical-symbolic thinking* (presents the connection between myth, symbol and poetry in Blaga's creation).
4. Nicolae Manolescu – *The Critical History of Romanian Literature* (offers a modern perspective on Blaga's work).

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3. POEM No. 2: CHAT GPT ANALYSIS OF THE POEM *TO READERS* BY LUCIAN BLAGA

ChatGPT received the text below (which I will refer to as *Poem No. 2* below), with the request to analyse it in circumstances identical to those in the case of Poem No. 1:

This is my home. Beyond the sun and the garden

Aici e casa mea. Dincolo soarele și grădina cu stupi.

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with beehives.
 You all pass by on the road, look through
 the gate bars
 and wait for me to speak. – Where do I
 start?
 Believe me, believe me,
 one can talk about anything as much as you
 want:
 about fate and about the serpent of good,
 about the archangels who ploughed the
 plow
 the gardens of man,
 about the heaven we grow towards,
 about hatred and fall, sadness and
 crucifixion
 and first of all, about the Great Passage.
 But words are the tears of those who would
 have wanted
 so much to cry and they couldn't.
 Very bitter are all the words,
 therefore – leave me
 to walk mutely among you,
 to come your way with my eyes closed.

Voi treceți pe drum, vă uitați printre
 gratii de poartă
 și așteptați să vorbesc. – De unde să-
 ncep?
 Credeți-mă, credeți-mă,
 despre orișice poți să vorbești cât
 vrei:
 despre soartă și despre șarpele
 binelui,
 despre arhanghelii cari ară cu plugul
 grădinile omului,
 despre cerul spre care creștem,
 despre ură și cădere, tristețe și
 răstigniri
 și înainte de toate despre marea
 trecere.
 Dar cuvintele sunt lacrimile celor ce
 ar fi voit
 așa de mult să plângă și n-au putut.
 Amare foarte sunt toate cuvintele,
 de-aceea – lăsați-mă
 să umblu mut printre voi,
 să vă ies în cale cu ochii închiși.

This time, the answer provided by the AI was as follows:

Analysis of the poem *The Great Passage* by Lucian Blaga [In the Great Passage, n.m.]

This poem is part of the volume *La curțile dorului* (1938), but it reflects the fundamental themes and motifs of the volume *The Great Passage* (1924) [the poem analysed, entitled *To the Readers*, opened the volume *In the Great Passage*, published in 1924, n.m.]. In this text, Blaga explores the human condition, the ephemerality of existence and the limit of knowledge, resorting to a deeply symbolic and expressionist language.

1. Theme and meaning

The poem addresses the theme of the **existential passage** and the **limits of the word** in the face of life's great questions. The title *The Great Passage* suggests human being's irreversible journey through life, an initiatory journey marked by trials, introspection and mystery.

- **The distance between the poet and the others:**
 - The first lines create a clear separation between "my house" (the inner, intimate space of poetic thought) and the outer world "you pass on the way" (symbol of those who look superficially, waiting for answers).
 - The question "Where should I start?" marks the difficulty of expressing a deep reality, difficult to translate into words.
- **The theme of knowledge and the limits of language:**
 - The enumeration of the universal elements "fate", "serpent of good", "archangels", "heaven", "hatred and fall" outlines the complete spectrum of human existence, from mythical and religious to tragic and philosophical.

- Words become insufficient: "words are the tears of those who would have wanted / so much to cry and couldn't". The poet suggests that, in the face of great truths, any attempt at expression is limited and painful.
- **Refusal to utter:**
- Finally, the poet expresses his desire for silence: "let me / walk mutely among you". This attitude is reminiscent of Blaga's conception of metaphysical silence, the idea that the mystery must be respected and not dissected by rational knowledge.

2. Artistic style and expressiveness

- **Expressionist Imagery:**
- The grandiose symbols ("the archangels ploughing / the gardens of man") suggest divine intervention in human destiny.
- Cosmic metaphors and mystical elements reflect Blagian's vision of man's relationship with the universe.

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- **Free verse:**
- The lack of rhymes and a fixed rhythm create a meditative tone, appropriate to the poetic confession.
- **The antithesis of utterance/silence:**
- Although the poem begins with an opening to dialogue, it ends with a refusal of the latter: the poet chooses silence over great truths.

3. Final Message and Interpretation

The poem *The Great Passage* is a reflection on the **limits of human knowledge** and **ephemerality**. Blaga emphasizes that profound truths cannot be spoken but only lived. The poet refuses rational explanations and chooses silence as a form of superior understanding of existence.

This idea is closely related to his philosophy of **Luciferic knowledge**, according to which man must preserve the mystery of the world, not crush it by rational explanations. In this sense, the end of the poem becomes a natural conclusion: true understanding comes not through words, but through silence and introspection.

Conclusion: *The Great Passage* is a defining poem for Blaga's thought, combining expressionist, philosophical and mystical elements to express the idea that the ultimate truths of existence cannot be spoken, but only felt.

When asked to provide the sources on which the analysis is based, the answer was as follows:

The analysis of the poem *The Great Passage* by Lucian Blaga that I have previously provided is based on my general knowledge of the poet's work and the critical interpretations available. To provide a more detailed and up-to-date perspective, we consulted the following sources:

1. "**Lucian Blaga. The Poet's Personal Myths**" – This article highlights how Blaga constructs a personal mythology in his poems, reflecting on existential and metaphysical themes.
2. "**In the Great Passage**" – **Commentary** – A detailed analysis of the poem *In the Great Passage*, emphasizing the themes of alienation and childhood longing, as well as the use of symbols and metaphors to express the break from the cosmic totality. (source: Liceunet.ro website).
3. "**The legacy that Lucian Blaga left us 'In the Great Passage'**" – The article explores the depth and contemplation of poetry, highlighting

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Blaga's concern for the passage of time and the search for immortality. (source: ZiarulPozitiv.ro website).

4. "**The Steps of Silence in Lucian Blaga's Poetry**" – The study looks at how silence and sound are used in Blaga's poetry to reflect on existential and metaphysical themes. (source: LimbaRomana.md website).

These sources contributed to deepening the understanding of the poem and to highlighting the complexity of the themes addressed by Lucian Blaga in *The Great Passage*.

Unlike the case of Poem no. 1, in this analysis the inaccuracies are flagrant, and the statements, of a greater generality, are also characterized by ambiguity: sometimes they refer to the text under analysis, other times they refer to the entire volume in which it was published, and this in the conditions in which the title of the volume is not even correctly mentioned.

4. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

As I had already anticipated in the first episode of my research, the results provided by AI still remain within the limits of a fairly high degree of generality and ambiguity. A gratifying detail is the fact that, in the case of both poems under analysis, without there being an express request in this regard, ChatGPT provided information about their philosophical support, referring to "Luciferic knowledge" and "metaphysical silence" – concepts specific to Blagian philosophy.

For Poem no. 1, the analysis was somewhat more rigorous, with references to pertinent, highly authoritative sources. It is the very result I anticipated, because this poem is practically emblematic of Blagian lyricism, being well-known to both the school population and the adult population, and not only in Romania. The result of this notoriety was a relatively broad and deep exegesis, so that AI benefited from a fairly consistent resource that could be indexed.

As for Poem no. 2, this one, less known and interpreted, has generated errors that, if not noticed, can lead the one who seeks answers regarding Lucian Blaga's poetry on the wrong path: the title of the poem is confused with the title of the volume in which it was published; confusion is also introduced regarding the volume in which the poem was published; Finally, I believe that the most flagrant error is the inaccurate mention of the title *In the Great Passage*, which is invariably mentioned in the altered form *The Great Passage*, a form that belongs to school jargon, sparing scientific rigor.

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Moreover, critical statements in the content of the analysis refer, practically, to the volume *In the Great Passage* and not to the concrete poem submitted for analysis.

Finally, in the case of Poem no. 2, the sources that ChatGPT claims to have used are entirely of modest scientific value, in the category of "popularized science" sites, used by the middle school or high school population for their homework.

A positive aspect compared to last year is that the ChatGPT user is warned about errors that may occur. At the end of the work session, even if with a lowercase font, the mention is present: *ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important information.*

5. CONCLUSIONS

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Although in other spheres the results of using AI are amazing, in areas involving originality and creativity the progress is modest. As Jessica Abbadia (2023), a lawyer working in digital marketing, notes, AI

can assist researchers in literature review and knowledge synthesis by automatically scanning and extracting relevant information from a wide range of scientific papers. This not only saves time but also helps researchers stay up-to-date on the latest advancements in their field.

AI can collate unimaginable amounts of information on a given topic, extract essential information from them and, consequently, summarize the data processed in this way to an increasingly better quality. Unfortunately, however, we are still at the stage of working with existing material, and it cannot yet be original interpretations with scientific/theoretical value.

To sum up, in the field of literary exegesis, AI is extremely useful for carrying out usual, preliminary analyses, but, at least for now, we will also need to have additional tools to verify the accuracy of the information obtained in this way. Also, we cannot rely at this moment on performances in terms of creativity, both in terms of analysis of literary productions and, extrapolating, in terms of literary creation itself.

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MAX BLECHER: PHANTASMATIC IMAGINATION AND DOUBLE IRREALITY

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Abstract

*An important interwar author whose life was cut tragically short at not quite twenty-nine, Max Blecher left us a novel of great value, *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*.*

Following the lead of the American semiotician and linguist Thomas A. Sebeok, this study traces the phantasmatic play that animates Blecher's prose and, beginning with the title itself and Sartre's definition of literature as unreality, investigates the notion of a double unreality—one that arises both from the imaginary and from the real.

Keywords: *immediate unreality; phantasmatic imagination; double unreality; Romanian interwar expressionism*

Romanian culture—and, in the present case, literature—has known two, one might say, stellar moments: the period commonly known in literary history and criticism as that of the “great classics,” and the interwar period. It is no accident that they followed, respectively, the Little Union of 1859 and the Great Union of 1918.

Despite social and political convulsions, the interwar era witnessed intense literary effervescence, to which representatives of national minorities also made a real contribution. Among them we should recall three leading Jewish writers who practiced the craft at a high level: Max Blecher, author of novels and poetry; Benjamin Fundoianu, a poet of great sensitivity; and Mihail Sebastian, a highly compelling novelist and playwright. All three suffered tragic destinies: Blecher died before the age of twenty-nine from an incurable disease; Benjamin Fundoianu was murdered by the Nazis in the Auschwitz camp; and Mihail Sebastian died in a bizarre accident, struck by a truck. Given his short life, Max Blecher wrote little: the novels *The Lit-Up Burrow*, *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, *Scarred Hearts*, and the poetry volume *Transparent Body*, his earliest publication in chronological order.

The present study focuses on *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, one of the most accomplished novels of that period. Fixating on a point on the wall—this “personal Dharana”—causes the prose protagonist to momentarily lose his identity or spatial bearings: “When I look for a long time at a fixed point on the wall, I sometimes no longer know where I am or where I find myself.” [1]

This condition does not last; otherwise, it may produce anguish. And this fleeting loss of identity ushers in other unprecedented states: “Only in this sudden disappearance of identity do I rediscover my falls into the cursed spaces of old, and only in the moments of immediate lucidity that follow the return to the surface does the world appear to me in that unusual atmosphere of futility and obsolescence that formed around me when my hallucinatory trances finished toppling me.” [2]

After calling Max Blecher “the expressionist from northern Moldavia,” Blecher being born in Botoșani, Mihai Zamfir emphasized the importance of his writing: “He is one of the few valuable and unmistakable Romanian expressionist prose writers; within our prose as a whole, the author of a single memorable work, the novel *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, he stamped the literature of the fourth decade with an unmistakable seal.” [3]

This was the moment of Romanian expressionism—as Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu also noted: “Romanian literary consciousness begins to take account of expressionism only after the First World War. The movement had appeared in Germany roughly a decade earlier, but the years 1918–1920 are when it reaches its peak and acquires a global resonance.” [4]

Returning to the text at hand, we observe that memory continually sends one back, yet bleak aspects seem to multiply: “There is no place in the world more sad and more forsaken.” [5] Walking about brings no joy; indeed, quite the opposite: “It was a roaming that, in the end, tore my heart to pieces.” [6] The room is inhospitable, as in Bacovia; it triggers all manner of crises. It is difficult to express how these crises arise, just as it remains difficult to explain what the author calls the “secret attitude” of the surrounding objects. People live isolated in their clothes, and a certain malice seems to inhere in places as well. The material world appears seized by an ambiguous vibration, an ambiguity of objects: now harmless, now terrorizing. The auctorial voice—here identical with that of the narrator—shows a certain respect for what surrounds him and thus refuses to intervene to change anything around him: “If during rain I avoided touching the stones in the coursing streams of water—that was so as not to add anything to the action of the water and not to interfere with the exercise of its elemental powers.” [7] All these are the crises of a child who seems to shed them in adolescence. Yet the feeling of futility persists,

doubled by despair.

Nicolae Manolescu offered pertinent observations on Blecher's novel: "The beginning of *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* (1936) is the most Proustian in our entire novel [...] *In Search of Lost Time* is, moreover, one of the themes of *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* ..., together with the identity crisis consumed between the cork-lined walls of the room where the protagonist, sicker than Proust, spends most of his life. It is curious that no one has remarked that *Adventures in Immediate Irreality* are *Childhood Memories* transposed into the next century and rewritten in a key no longer the general-human and realist one of Creangă, but a strictly individual, atypical, and schizoid one, mixing the real with dream and imagination." [8]

At one point, the physician prescribes quinine, believing the patient suffers from malaria. Here begins the protagonist's true "great adventure"—an exploration of consciousness and the limits of reality. The narrative proper now begins with the fragment about Eugen, the shopkeeper, and his sister, Clara. We learn that Eugen plays the violin and regards life as a kind of theater. Clara, by contrast, awakens erotic expectations in the narrator that will in the end be fulfilled! Strangely, he identifies the doctor who prescribed quinine with the mouse that witnessed the consummation of the erotic act between him and Clara. Stranger still, when the doctor commits suicide, the protagonist asks, astonished, whether there were mice in the attic of the house where the doctor "put a bullet in his temple." [9] Immediate unreality clarifies... Psychological analysis and self-analysis. Clara is an obsessive figure—the hero has known her since the age of twelve and associates her with the ideal of pure yet inaccessible femininity.

Blecher's reminiscences are clearly Proustian: "I see myself very small, in a little shirt down to my heels, crying in despair on a doorstep, in a sun-filled courtyard, a marketplace at noon, warm and sad, with dogs asleep on their bellies and people lying in the shade of the vegetable stalls." [10]

The narrative thread, however, is minimal, as Mihai Zamfir notes: "In *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* we admire precisely the instinctive classicism placed in the service of conceiving a philosophical and symbolic novel, where the plot—reduced to a minimum—exists only to preserve the very idea of the novel." [11] The same critic underscores the character's early attraction to eroticism: "The central character comes into contact with the surrounding world chiefly through eros—the axis around which all the *Adventures*... are woven." [12] Walter, the first friend, appears and proposes eating acacia blossoms! And how different all this is from Creangă's *Childhood Memories*! Walter then shows him the headquarters of the "gang," in a certain underground place where, he says, there are "dangerous men of iron." In fact, the protagonist never returns there and never again meets this Watts. Only the feather Walter mentioned remains, as an erotic instrument... The oddities continue in this vein! Even this brief passage suffices for Mihai Zamfir to observe: "The central character seems afflicted by a strange, unnameable illness, toward which he manifests not repulsion but a morbid attraction." [13]

The child-hero hallucinates; he tells a little girl he sees a statue flying in the sky... But this way of being, as Zamfir observes, is fully assumed: "The condition of ontic illness—illness of existence—is embraced by the hero almost with voluptuousness: the illness fills his life." [14] At times it is hard to distinguish the real from the unreal. "Immediate unreality" enters the scene repeatedly: "Perhaps he told me something else, and my imagination gave the words a meaning that preoccupied me in those days; I could not believe he had actually seen anything in the compact darkness of the passage." [15]

Other childhood memories are linked to literature. Ever-present is a penny dreadful, *Frida*, by a French author of no importance—Claude Adhémar André Theuriet. The melancholy of childhood disseminates into all manner of small, insignificant objects: "Wherever my thought turned, it met objects and stillnesses like walls before which I had to fall to my knees." [16] This is not Nică's childhood from Creangă, but a neurotic childhood. A double difference is at work here: temporal (a century) and spatial (village vs. city; rural vs. urban). He sees a Black man, black birds... "A flood of black," as in Bacovia. And, like Bacovia's lyric protagonist, Blecher's child performs bizarre acts, walking at night with a lantern beneath the bedsheets. The banal and the derisory appear in the neighborhood cinema, where "a gallery of pretzel sellers and rascals cracked seeds and commented loudly on the film." [17]

A space also recalled by Mihai Zamfir: "The squalid, suffocating movie theater where the novel's main character sought refuge all day explicitly represented a substitute for the erotic space, and the hidden heat of the spectators' bodies ultimately provokes a real fire in the hall." [18]

Starting from Jean-Paul Sartre's remark in response to the question "What is literature?"—that literature is, or is not, the unreal—we may say that Blecher's novel offers a double unreality: the literary unreality Sartre spoke of, and a reality rendered unreal in Blecher's prose, where the dividing line between real and unreal breaks... Immediate unreality is intensified by the presence of a madwoman.

The young Blecher seems fascinated by the freedom conferred by madness. The madwoman understands, he says, the naivety of serious people: "There was only one being in town who understood these things and for whom I felt an admiration full of respect: the town madwoman... She alone, among rigid persons stuffed to the crown of the head with prejudices and conventions; she alone had preserved the freedom to shout and dance in the street whenever she wished. She wandered the streets in rags, eaten by grime, toothless, with red hair in disarray,

holding in her arms with maternal tenderness a little box full of bread crusts and various objects gathered from garbage.” [19]

The auctorial perception mixes dread with a vague, inexplicable pleasure and a kind of *déjà vu*—the sense of a décor at once new and somehow familiar... He is strangely enthralled and perturbed by various objects: a piece of silk, a gypsy ring that he associates with a “real sexual scream.” [20] A pathological sensuality, totally different from Creangă’s innocent “Ioane, do you fancy the girls?” He is likewise impressed by imitations, sometimes with a thanatic coloring: “I am impressed by anything imitated—artificial flowers, for instance, and funeral wreaths, especially funeral wreaths forgotten and dusty in their oval glass boxes in the cemetery church, encircling with obsolete delicacy old, anonymous names, sunk into an eternity without resonance.” [21] Also by cut-out pictures and fairground statues. Or the statues of the Savior in Catholic churches—all linked to the panopticum, which he would like to see in flames... For him, the fair is exaltation and sadness.

The performance, in the protagonist’s view, has “an improvised aspect.” [22] The entire spectacle bears a strongly derisory note, which produces desolation and melancholy. At one point, to his great surprise, the hero sees his own photograph in a shop window! This scene of the fair, Zamfir believes, has a central importance in the economy of the writing: “At the heart of the novel, the fair scene (the false décor, the shabby theater), accompanied by the hero’s strained attention, explains to us the Blecherian anguish, as well as the link between the immobility of objects and their thanatic suggestion.” [23]

The specific difference, so to speak, between Creangă’s *Memories* and Blecher’s *Adventures*, a century later, is that between vivacity and asthenia—between the sthenic and the asthenic. If in Bacovia the oddities begin in the wax museum, in Blecher they begin at the fair—the fair being, nonetheless, an open space! A certain thanatic feeling is common to both... And their parks resemble one another: “The park remained behind him desolate and deserted.” [24] Metamorphoses soon occur, and the fair becomes, in its unreality, a kind of deserted island bathed in desolating halos. [25] To this impression is joined, further on, the presentation of the bizarre Weber family house—a space where equally bizarre games unfold. “The final game consists of imaginary dialogues, spoken with the utmost seriousness.” [26]

These dialogues produce a contradictory state in the narrator: “on the one hand he is overcome by a ‘slightly nauseating pleasure’; on the other, they suggest ‘a vague impression of freedom.’” [27]

Zamfir links these dialogues to a certain surrealism: “The evident surrealist signs in *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* must, however, be sought out. The narrator conducts absurd dialogues with his friend Ozy—dialogues that in fact lack a referent...” [28] Another state follows: after a time the house is abandoned, and he returns to the middle of the town: “When I went back out into the street, I had the sensation of having slept deeply. Yet the dream seemed to go on, and I looked with amazement at people speaking to one another, in all seriousness.” [29] Unreality asserts itself again—and immediately. Not by chance does the book’s title contain the phrase “immediate unreality.” Paul Weber’s portrait also falls along this same line of the implausible: “He was a red-haired boy with big hands and bristling hair. His lips were big and thick and his nose clownish...” [30] In his grandfather’s house, on an abandoned upper floor, the narrator reencounters old melancholic states. The setting becomes propitious to reverie. The walls of the hall were covered with “strange paintings, framed in thick gilded wood or in thinner red-plush frames.” [31] Attention stops at a portrait of King Carol I, yet something in the atmosphere radiates a strange sense of the uncanny: “About me, the surfaces of the world suddenly took on strange gleams and uncertain opacities like those of curtains—opacities that become transparencies and suddenly present us with the depth of a room when a light is turned on behind them.” [32]

Certain objects in this house lead him to imagine unexpected, unusual things. Seated in a kind of window niche set in the thick walls, the child conceives of a new vehicle with which he can traverse “different towns and unknown landscapes.” [33] When his father learns of this fancy, he confesses that he had imagined the very same thing. Mimesis? Quite possibly. Or desire through the other—what René Girard would call mimetic violence. The narrator’s conclusion is different and wholly personal: “There existed, then, in the world, apart from cursed places that secreted vertigo and fainting, other more benevolent spaces from whose walls pleasant and beautiful images extended.” [34]

This Blecherian protagonist’s play—his fantasizing—is not the Glass Bead Game of Hermann Hesse’s novel, yet it may be a game of phantasm, as in a book by the semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok, who speaks of the play instinct not only in humans but in certain animals.

Following Hesse’s characters, Sebeok notes a detail far from insignificant: play has a double function—expression and cognition. In conclusion, we may return to Magister Ludi and its obsessively moralizing sentence addressed to Joseph: “Play is not without dangers” [35]... Moreover, play implies possible conflict: “The Master then warns Joseph that he must be prepared for conflict.” [36]

On the play instinct, following Friedrich Schiller, we learn already on Sebeok’s first page: “In analyzing human nature, Schiller asserts that there are three fundamental impulses: *Stofftrieb*—the drive toward diversity, the continual search for change—in contrast to *Formtrieb*—the need for form, order, abstraction, independent of time and thus opposed to change (the pair corresponds to the well-known Kantian dualism); there is also a third

component that he called *Spieltrieb*—the play impulse, a serious play (*ein ernstes Spiel*), a mediating aesthetic tendency that harmoniously reconciles sensibility and reason, at both the individual (microcosmic) and social (macrocosmic) levels.” [37]

In the present case, the dangers of play are determined by the precariousness of the human being, conditioned by advanced age. The grandfather’s death brings, in the narrator’s imaginary and phantasmatic field, the disintegration of things. Thus we witness a double precariousness: of human existence and of civilization itself, expressed through the dismantling of the upper floor from which the narrator contemplated the world: “The floor decomposed piece by piece, object by object, after my grandfather’s death.” [38] Hallucinatory, too, is the image of the grandfather’s brother washing the corpse. The funeral appears unreal, as do the participants: “In the heat and languor of the air, their gestures seemed performed hundreds of years earlier, the same then as now, as always.” [39] As often in Blecher, death follows everyday life with a disturbing familiarity: immediately after the grandfather’s burial comes a wedding—that of his friend Paul Weber.

Nicolae Manolescu perceives and underscores the aesthetic stake of Blecher’s work: “Blecher does not swear by reality but by unreality, which may be oneiric, surreal, phantomatic, or mythical.” [40] Waking retains the same atmosphere of unreality and strangeness.

Blecher remains faithful to the line drawn from the very incipit of this short novel: “In a few moments the room filled immaterially with all sorts of volutes through which I had to pass to reach the door, pushing them aside and making my way through them. My head kept humming and all the caverns of the air seemed to repeat this murmur...” [41] Summer appears completely distorted in the narrator’s perception: “Summer had swollen chaotically the park, the trees, and the air, as in a madman’s drawing.” [42] His behavior proves absurd in other situations as well, the effect of despair. If we were to borrow Joyce’s phrase, a portrait of the artist as a young man, the auctorial figure prolongs the crises of existential despair.

The following fragment recalls Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*: “I was a tall, thin, pale boy, with a narrow neck sticking out from the too-wide collar of my tunic. My long hands hung beyond my jacket like freshly skinned animals.” [43] Zamfir likewise notes similar aspects: the condition of ontic illness, of being “ill with existence,” is transformed by Blecher’s hero into a painful voluptuousness: “the illness fills his life.” [44] At times the narrative brings the elemental onstage, recalling Benjamin Fundoianu’s poem “*Herța*,” another interwar writer of Jewish origin: “A pig leaned against the fence and I would stop for minutes on end to look at it.” [45] This scene appears, poetically, in *Herța*: “The road, like a sole, has cracked from so much rain. / Swine, with the soul of a puddle, pass toward the mud; / ugly swine go to sleep, stupid, in a pool, / so that chaos may again break loose upon the world.” A strange malady seems to have invaded the world, the near cosmos. The air is unhealthy; stones have abscesses. In such situations, suffering becomes habitual; rarely does one find the necessary calm. One day he reaches the theater stage when it is empty.

These wanderings are not those of a solitary dreamer in the manner of Jean-Jacques Rousseau but of one seeking a form of freedom. Here he feels well; he finds the prompter’s box and delights in quiet and solitude. After a few hours he leaves—and has the same sensation of unreality. The visits continue for several days, until something unexpected occurs: he meets two women who take him to another sick woman in the same building. Desolate, he abandons these walks... There are also moments when nature seems to relent thanks to a beneficial rain. Houses smile; interiors too. Yet what the auctorial voice calls a resigned serenity persists. Although he intensely desires what he knows he will never have—a change of condition, his own metamorphosis, the wish to be someone else—his aspiration takes on a tragic dimension: “How good I would have felt within the limits of that cheap and indifferent décor, which knew nothing of me.” [46]

A vain aspiration, for before him “the dirty street kept stretching its muddy paste forever.” [47] Despair leads him at one point to compare his condition to that of a dog. He sinks his feet into the mud; everything seems ruled by death, by a universal force pulling existence into the ground. He considers himself a missionary of the mud... His dreams are equally bizarre, saturated with strangeness. He dreams of an oriental town, walking alongside a woman in black who has no head. During the war, the woman’s husband lies dead in a cart. They reach a station, then a basement where nurses prepare to care for the wounded... The oddities multiply! He swallows a box of tablets. His stomach begins to ache and he has visions: strange images; an enormous and very beautiful head appears before him and fascinates him. Perhaps it was only a hallucination—the same imagination manifested on other occasions: “In summer, sometimes, when I looked from afar at the chestnut trees heavy with leaves, their appearance was that of enormous heads fixed on trunks, with cheeks hollowed deep, like the blades of my head.” [48] The image of the father returns—the father taking his temperature: 39 degrees.

During convalescence the world seems changed, or perhaps his perception has altered: light chased away the exactness of things, as though it had washed their old shape too much, “to rub the polish off them.” [49]

Gravity, too, seems altered: his clothes feel lighter. The city’s shop windows attract him, particularly some whose cleanliness delights him. The autumn day is superb. Still, he feels a kind of weakness, a tired body—especially when he meets a lanky fellow reading about outlaws. Nature teems with life, in total contrast to the auctorial voice. Here one senses an existentialist nuance, an approximation of Sartre’s opposition between pour-

soi and en-soi, and of what Camus would call the world's tender indifference. All this incubates within the soul-state of a sick man striving to mitigate his suffering by articulating his anguish. He feels solidarity with the tree beside him and wishes to be, in turn, just as "silent and superb."

He decides, then, to go to the house of Edda, the wife of his friend Paul Weber. He cannot bring himself to tell her he believes he is a tree. Later, Edda falls gravely ill with a kidney disease and dies. Seeing her bedridden, another phantasmatic image appears to the narrator: "Edda's face was identical in every respect with the ivory head from my feverish nights." [50] Edda's premature disappearance is experienced as his own death. At the same time, a rain begins that lasts three days; people struggle with the aggressiveness of the mud during the funeral ceremonies. A series of reflections and nightmares follows for the protagonist. What obsesses him is his very sleep, from which he wakes with a scream. Waking, however, brings no calm, but another agitation, another cry. He wants to be awakened from reality into true reality! The novel's ending is emblematic: "I struggle, I scream, I thrash. Who will wake me? Around me, exact reality pulls me ever lower, trying to drown me. Who will wake me?" "It has always been like that, always, always." [51]

An ending on which Nicolae Manolescu also dwells, with his customary, pertinent observations, noting the text's metaphysical tension and its unique character in Romanian interwar literature: "Thus ends *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, one of the great strange books of the Romanian twentieth century. Its value was immediately intuited by contemporaries not only in avant-garde circles, which claimed M. Blecher as one of their own, but also by most critics of the day, with the exception of George Călinescu." [52]

Blecher's *Adventures in Immediate Unreality* constructs, through phantasmatic play and relentless self-analysis, a poetics of double unreality in which the imaginary and the real mutually destabilize their borders. Read alongside expressionist tendencies and through lenses offered by Sartre, Schiller, Hesse, and Sebeok, the novel reveals an aesthetic that privileges unreality as a mode of truth. Ultimately, Blecher's singular voice renders the everyday uncanny and the self precarious, leaving a lasting mark on Romanian interwar prose.

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SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL - FACING A NEW TEST REGARDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving dynamics of Saudi Arabia–Israel relations within the broader context of Middle Eastern geopolitics and the U.S.-brokered normalization framework. While Saudi Arabia has not formally joined the Abraham Accords, recent diplomatic, economic, and security interactions indicate a gradual shift toward pragmatic engagement. This article explores the strategic motivations driving this rapprochement, including shared concerns over Iran, and the influence of shifting U.S. regional policies. It also analyzes domestic and regional constraints, particularly the unresolved Palestinian question and intra-Arab public opinion. Using a combination of qualitative analysis and regional policy review, the paper assesses the prospects and potential implications of formal normalization for regional stability, security architectures, and the future of Arab–Israeli relations. Ultimately, the study argues that Saudi–Israeli normalization represents both an outcome and a catalyst of a transforming Middle East order, where traditional ideological divides are increasingly subordinated to strategic and economic pragmatism.

Israel and Saudi Arabia - a short introduction of one of the most complicated and bitter relations

Or rather, the lack thereof brings to light a rather unusual reality, namely that the State of Israel and Saudi Arabia have never had formal diplomatic relations¹. This fact is particularly related to the Saudi kingdom's position on the Palestinian issue, more specifically, its support for the Palestinians, as evidenced by the actions of the Riyadh regime. For example, in 1947, Saudi Arabia was one of the countries in the region that voted against the United Nations Plan for the Partition of Palestine². Then, on two separate occasions, Saudi troops fought against Israel in two wars, namely the First Arab–Israeli War (1948) and the Yom Kippur War (1973)³.

Tensions between the two countries continued in the years that followed, maintaining the perception, in both capitals and beyond, of a lack of interest in formal diplomatic relations. Thus, the period that followed was marked by the same reluctance on the part of the Saudis to open official relations with the State of Israel, repeatedly demanding, over time, Israel's withdrawal from the areas occupied in 1967.

Then, the normalization of the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran changed things in the region. More precisely, due to the notable diplomatic successes in 2023, China came to the fore by mediating talks that culminated in Saudi Arabia and Iran agreeing in March 2023 to normalize relations between the two countries, after decades of rivalry for influence in the Middle East⁴.

This success of Beijing was followed by efforts on the part of the United States, with Washington attempting to broker one of the most significant agreements that could have been possible in 2024, should the goal of contributing to the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel have been achieved.

Thus, after March 10, 2023, and the signing in Beijing of the agreement to normalize relations between Riyadh and Tehran, the US engaged in a diplomatic effort aimed at persuading the Saudi kingdom and the State of Israel to “bury the hatchet”. Several months followed in which signals from all three international actors seemed to indicate

¹ Yoel, G., *Shifts in Saudi Arabia's Position on Normalization*, The Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), 22 May 2025,

<https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/shifts-in-saudi-arabias-position-on-normalization-209467>.

² *Palestine question at the UN (1947-1975)/CEIRPP Historical backgrounder (A/AC.183/L.3)*, The Question of Palestine, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-186560/>.

³ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Arab–Israeli wars*, Britannica, 29 September 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars>.

⁴ William Figueroa, *Iran–Saudi Normalization: A Regional Process with Chinese Characteristics*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 24 March 2023, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2023/03/iran-saudi-normalization-a-regional-process-with-chinese-characteristics/>.

the same thing: the two sides remained interested in normalizing relations, while Washington retained its privileged position between them, presenting itself as the link between the two states that had been traditional enemies for decades.

So, with the first and most important condition met, namely the desire expressed by the two states - Saudi Arabia and Israel - to open talks to reach an agreement on normalizing relations, the main concern of the US was to identify how such an opportunity could be exploited, because, beyond the good intentions expressed by the two states, the reality on the ground was clearly going to have a significant say. A reality strongly influenced by the strategic interests of the two states directly involved in this normalization effort, to which are added two other regional actors - Iran and the Palestinian Authority / Palestinians, with different agendas and a strong influence on developments in the region.

Thus, discussions on normalizing relations, which would result in the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, were conditioned at that time on the conditions signaled by the Riyadh regime, which sought advantages from the US in the form of reduced restrictions on the sale of American weapons to the Saudi kingdom, as well as assistance in developing a civilian nuclear program. Then, on the external dimension, the Saudi kingdom signaled that any agreement with Israel would require major progress on the creation of a Palestinian state⁵.

The inevitable rupture that occurred in the process of normalizing relations between the Saudis and Israelis following Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023⁶, was handled by the US in a manner that was most conducive to moving forward with the agreement. Washington playing one of the most important roles in this regard, as it represents the link between Saudi Arabia and Israel, but also the guarantee for the two states that such an agreement will not act to the detriment of the interests of the signatory states.

Even though, in certain respects, contacts between the two “traditionally” hostile states have managed to reduce the perception of major differences between Saudis and Israelis, one example of this being that between 2023 and 2024, at the initiative of the Saudi authorities, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic content was removed from Saudi school textbooks, which can be interpreted as a reduction in the radical attitude of the Riyadh regime towards Israel and Zionism, but also as recognition of the presence of Jews in the region⁷, October 2023 almost entirely nullified all these efforts: the Riyadh regime decided to abandon any initiative aimed at continuing negotiations with the Israeli state, while a survey by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, conducted between November 14 and December 6, 2023, revealed a level of hostility among the Saudi population that cannot be ignored. Specifically, 96% of Saudis who responded to the questions believed that Arab countries should immediately sever all ties with Israel, while 95% of respondents did not believe that the Palestinian Hamas killed Israeli civilians during the raid on October 7, 2023. At the same time, 40% of them expressed a favorable opinion of Hamas⁸.

The year 2024 brought some hope on this issue with the statement by Khalid bin Bandar Al Saud, the Saudi ambassador to London, who told the BBC on January 9 last year that the Saudi monarchy is interested in peace and normalizing relations with Israel after the war, but only on condition that a Palestinian state is created⁹. Then, on May 4 of the same year, a signal of support for this direction came from Washington, through the voice of US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, who said in an interview for the Financial Times that the Biden

⁵ *Possible U.S.-Saudi Agreements and Normalization with Israel: Considerations for Congress*, Congress.gov, 27 August 2024, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48162>.

⁶ *Hamas attack aimed to disrupt Saudi-Israel normalization, Biden says*, Reuters, 21 October 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-attack-aimed-disrupt-saudi-israel-normalization-biden-2023-10-20/>.

⁷ Gianluca Pacchiani, *Saudi Arabia largely removes negative portrayal of Israel from its school curriculum*, The Times of Israel, 4 June 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudi-arabia-largely-removes-negative-portrayal-of-israel-from-its-school-curriculum/>.

⁸ Catherine Cleveland, David Pollock, *New Poll Sheds Light on Saudi Views of Israel-Hamas War*, FIKRA Forum, 21 December 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/new-poll-sheds-light-saudi-views-israel-hamas-war#:~:text=When%20Saudis%20were%20asked%20in%20August%20whether,our%20relations%20with%20them%2C%E2%80%9D%20just%205%25%20agreed.>

⁹ David Gritten, *Saudi Arabia interested in Israel normalisation deal after war*, BBC News, 9 January 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67922238>.

administration would not sign a defense agreement with Saudi Arabia in the absence of an agreement to normalize relations between the Saudi kingdom and the State of Israel, explaining the situation by saying that “you can’t disentangle one piece from the others”¹⁰.

The US’s important role as a link between Saudi Arabia and Israel

In an interview given by US President Donald Trump on October 15, 2025, to Times Magazine and published on October 23, the leader in Washington “predicted” that Saudi Arabia and Israel would normalize relations by the end of this year. “I think we are very close. I think Saudi Arabia is going to lead the way”, the American leader replied when asked about the normalization of relations between the Saudi kingdom and the State of Israel. To justify his optimistic view, Trump explained that the two countries “had a Gaza problem and they had an Iran problem”, but “now they don’t have those two problems”. Then, when asked if he believed that “Saudi Arabia will join the Abraham Accords by the end of the year” he replied, “Yes, I do! I do”¹¹.

Based on the above, we could say that Donald Trump’s “prediction” regarding the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Israel relations is more than bold, a characteristic that is not out of the ordinary for the American president. Similarly, we can say that these statements are not necessarily wishful thinking, given that the history of relations between the Saudis and the Israelis reveals a desire, at least in words, to formalize and establish diplomatic ties.

Furthermore, the current context offers the United States of America the opportunity to represent the balance between the two states and, implicitly, the actor that can influence the progress towards normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, given that both countries have an interest in maintaining the best possible relations with the US, while the US, in turn, is interested in such a development that would, at least declaratively, nullify the enmity between them, each of which is an important piece in maintaining the US position in the Middle East.

Returning to Trump’s interview for Time magazine, in which he mentioned that he would visit the Gaza Strip at some point, the White House leader said he did not see Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as the leader of the Palestinians. “They don’t have a leader right now, at least a visible leader, and they don’t really want to, because every one of those leaders has been shot and killed. It’s not a hot job”.¹²

Discussing the two issues in the same interview, namely the normalization of Saudi Arabia-Israel relations and the future of the Palestinians, is not inappropriate, given that October 7, 2023, almost nullified previous efforts on this subject and brought back to the forefront the rethinking of the conditions imposed by the Saudis on the Israelis. Riyadh has never abandoned the idea of supporting the creation of a Palestinian state, but while testing the waters for the possible normalization of relations with Israel, it has prioritized the conditions imposed on it in a different order. Now, however, after the most recent Hamas-Israel conflict, Saudi Arabia has brought the condition of creating a Palestinian state back to the forefront, which, despite the optimism displayed by US President Donald Trump, may hinder progress in this direction.

The manner in which this condition is perceived in Israel may also contribute to slowing down the normalization process, at least given that Israeli officials do not take this issue seriously. A recent example is the intervention of Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who, on October 23, 2025, said he would not agree to normalize relations with Saudi Arabia if it meant creating a Palestinian state. Moreover, he spoke disparagingly about the Saudis, saying that they could “continue to ride camels”¹³.

This stance towards Saudi Arabia and the efforts made so far to normalize relations between the two countries has been criticized by the opposition in Israel, which has accused the Israeli finance minister of ignorance and of actions that harm Israel, and for not speaking on behalf of the Israeli state, demanding that he apologize.

¹⁰ Felicia Schwartz, Steff Chávez, Andrew England, *US says defence pact with Saudi Arabia not possible without Israel deal*, Financial Times, 4 May 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/8f5b6401-6c7c-4f73-8bea-ca9e9a10e9ed>.

¹¹ Time staff, *Read the Full Transcript of Donald Trump’s Interview on the Gaza Ceasefire With TIME*, Time Magazine, 23 October 2025, <https://time.com/7327689/trump-israel-gaza-deal-interview-transcript/>.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Ariela Karmel, *Smotrich on Saudi normalization: ‘No thank you, keep riding camels’*, The Times of Israel, 23 October 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/smotrich-on-saudi-normalization-no-thank-you-keep-riding-camels/.

A few hours later, the apology came from the person in question, but it was accompanied by a warning: “My comment about Saudi Arabia was absolutely inappropriate, and I apologize for the insult it caused.”, Bezalel Smotrich added at the same time: “I expect from the Saudis not to do us harm and not to deny our heritage, our tradition and the rights of the Jewish people to its historic homelands in Judea and Samaria, and to establish true peace with us”¹⁴.

In the context of Smotrich's statements, it is important to note that they came in the context of the vote on October 22, 2025, in the Knesset, to adopt a bill in preliminary reading regarding the application of Israeli sovereignty over settlements in the West Bank¹⁵. The subject is extremely sensitive, especially given the wave of sympathy shown by countries that announced in September this year their willingness to recognize the existence of a Palestinian state, with a large part of the coalition led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling for progress on the annexation of territories in the West Bank. In September, the Israeli finance minister brought up the annexation of 82% of the West Bank, despite signals from countries in the region that such a move could spell the end of Israel's integration into the region¹⁶.

Just as such a move would be detrimental to Israel's good relations with the US, given the recent developments that have led to the mutual release of hostages and talk of the much-desired peace, Donald Trump argues that the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel is not only possible but could happen in a relatively short period of time. Donald Trump's stated intention to welcome Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the White House in November¹⁷ to discuss, among other things, the normalization of relations between the two states, increases the pressure surrounding this issue, causing the two states involved—the Saudi kingdom and the Israeli state—to weigh their decisions very carefully, especially so as not to upset the leader in Washington and, why not, to save face. In the sense that, if this normalization does not take place, the responsibility for such a failure should not be attributed to either of the two parties. In other words, neither Saudi Arabia nor Israel has any interest in remaining in the perception of the United States, more specifically Donald Trump, that they contributed to the failure of this initiative.

Based on this reality, the Israeli finance minister's change of heart regarding Saudi Arabia can be explained, just as the Saudi kingdom is pushing the idea that the American leader's interest in achieving such a success—mediating normalization between the Saudis and Israelis—will push things in the direction desired by Riyadh. In fact, each of the two sides is trying to achieve maximum gain, and this is also evident from the Saudis' position on the Knesset vote. Specifically, Saudi Arabia said that “The kingdom stresses its complete rejection of all settlements and expansionist violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities”, as stated on October 23, 2025, by the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs in an official statement. The Saudi monarchy also emphasized that “The kingdom reiterates its support for the inherent and historical right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant international resolutions”¹⁸.

Instead of conclusions

¹⁴ Ariela Karmels, *Smotrich apologizes for his 'keep riding camels in the desert' jab at Saudi Arabia*, The Times of Israel, 23 October 2025,

https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/smotrich-apologizes-for-his-keep-riding-camels-jab-at-saudi-arabia/.

¹⁵ Tim Hume, *Israel's parliament advances bill to annex occupied West Bank*, Al Jazeera, 22 October 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/22/israels-parliament-advances-bill-to-annex-occupied-west-bank>.

¹⁶ Aaron Boxerman, *Far-Right Israeli Minister Calls for West Bank to Be Annexed*, The New York Times, 3 September 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/03/world/middleeast/israel-west-bank-annexations.html>.

¹⁷ Steve Holland, *Saudi Crown Prince bin Salman will visit Trump on Nov 18*, White House official says, Reuters, 4 November 2025,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/saudi-crown-prince-bin-salman-will-visit-trump-november-18-white-house-official-2025-11-03/>.

¹⁸ *Saudi Arabia denounces Knesset's advancement of West Bank annexation bills*, The Times of Israel, 23 October 2025,

https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/saudi-arabia-slams-knessets-advancement-of-west-bank-annexation-bills/.

Returning to Trump's recent statements, it is clear that they are linked to the American leader's desire to rekindle the two states' interest in continuing efforts to normalize relations between them, now that the war in Gaza is considered, at least for the moment, to have reached a point where such an initiative can be reexamined. Moreover, it is the American leader's personal desire to contribute to such a development, which would coincide with the regional realignment in favor of peace and stability, a realignment initiated in 2020 with the Abraham Accords, while the inclusion of Saudi Arabia in them would seal his legacy in foreign policy, as well as the foundations for developments that should significantly change the Arab political order

Hamas's literal and figurative dynamiting of the region and efforts to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, following the attack in October 2023, is now being reversed by Donald Trump's renewed efforts and confidence in reviving this initiative. And the American leader's interest is all the greater given that the weight of "sealing" a normalization between the two states is also due to the fact that Saudi Arabia is not just another Arab state, but the custodian of the two most important holy sites for Islam - Mecca and Medina, a state whose economy is based on its wealth of energy resources and major influence in this field, as well as Riyadh's desire to have the capacity to politically influence the entire Arab and Islamic world. It is precisely these elements that make possible normalization with Israel so important, as it could be seen as a domino effect in all other Arab and Muslim states, while for Israel, Saudi Arabia's recognition of the Israeli state would represent the achievement of a major goal.

Then, beyond the regional effects of such a development, normalization would give the US a dominant position by strengthening the US-led bloc from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, with direct effects on limiting both Iran and China at the regional level.

But, despite the major stakes for the main actors involved in these efforts—Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US—developments in this direction remain uncertain. This is because, beyond the aforementioned aspects, several issues continue to affect this complex process. A key factor is the situation in Iran, the main regional adversary of both Saudi Arabia and Israel, with the caveat that the normalization of relations between Riyadh and Tehran has not, in reality, completely eliminated the rivalry between the two states.

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EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS ON IMPLICATURES: A WINDOW INTO THE SEMANTICS/PRAGMATICS INTERFACE WITHIN BUSINESS CONTEXTS

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Abstract

Scalar Implicatures (SIs) are linguistic phenomena where the use of weaker scalar terms implies the negation of stronger alternatives (e.g., "some" implies "not all"). While traditionally studied in linguistic and psycholinguistic contexts, this article explores the application of SIs within business communication. We investigate how SIs influence decision-making, negotiations, and strategic interactions in professional settings. Through experimental studies, we examine the explicit defeasibility, structure-dependency, and contextual constraints of SIs in business scenarios, such as contract discussions, marketing strategies, and corporate communication. Additionally, we address the debate between default and pragmatic accounts of SIs, analyzing whether SIs are generated automatically or contextually in business environments. By integrating linguistic theory with real-world business practices, this research aims to provide insights into how SIs shape communication, enhance clarity, and impact outcomes in professional contexts.

Keywords: *scalar implicature, discourse analysis, business communication, structure- dependency*

Understanding Scalar Implicatures

The Influence of Subtle Language on Business Outcomes In the complex domain of business, where the success or failure of ventures often depends on the strategic use of language and the art of negotiation, the subtleties of linguistic expressions can have significant ramifications. While conventional business analysis typically emphasizes measurable metrics and strategic models, the implicit meanings embedded in everyday language frequently remain underexplored. This article investigates the concept of Scalar Implicatures (SIs), a linguistic phenomenon wherein the nuanced application of language can profoundly affect decision-making, negotiations, and strategic interactions within professional environments. Scalar implicatures constitute a fundamental aspect of human communication. They occur when a speaker employs a less forceful term from a hierarchy of alternatives, thereby implicitly negating the stronger terms. A quintessential example is the use of "some." When a speaker asserts, "Some of our products meet the new regulations," the listener typically infers that "not all" of the products comply with the regulations. This inference, although not explicitly articulated, represents a scalar implicature. The scale in this context is often perceived as .

Comprehending scalar implicatures is essential, as misinterpretations can lead to misunderstandings, erroneous assumptions, and ultimately, undesirable outcomes.

The Relevance of Scalar Implicatures in Business Contexts

The formal investigation of scalar implicatures originated within the fields of linguistics and psycholinguistics; however, their implications extend significantly into the professional realm. Business communication is replete with opportunities for scalar implicatures to shape perceptions and outcomes. Consider the following scenarios:

Contract Negotiations: When a lawyer states, "The contract addresses some of the potential liabilities," it implicitly suggests that not all liabilities are covered, thereby prompting further examination

Marketing Strategies: An advertisement claiming, "Our product is more effective," implies that it is not the most effective. The pertinent question becomes, more effective than what, and is that relevant to the consumer?

Corporate Communication: A company statement declaring, "We are committed to improving our environmental impact," implies that their environmental impact is not yet optimal.

In each of these instances, the success of the interaction depends on the listener's ability to accurately interpret the scalar implicatures present, or at the very least, recognize their existence.

To thoroughly investigate the impact of scalar implicatures (SIs) within business environments, experimental studies are indispensable. These studies should concentrate on several critical aspects of SIs:

Explicit Defeasibility: SIs can be annulled or overridden by supplementary information. It is essential to comprehend how readily individuals accept or reject SIs across various business contexts. For instance, when one states, "Some of the documents are in order, and in fact, all of them are," the SIs negate each other.

Structure-Dependency: The interpretation of SIs may be contingent upon the grammatical structure of the sentence. The use of passive versus active voice, for example, might affect the strength of the implicature.

Another important aspect is that SIs are highly context-sensitive. The specific industry, organizational culture, and the relationship between communicators significantly influence how SIs are interpreted. Explicit versus Implicit Communication Styles: Is the communication direct, leaving no room for interpretation, or implicit? The Default versus Pragmatic Debate in Business A central debate in SI research concerns whether SIs are generated by default (automatically) or through pragmatic reasoning (contextually). In a business context, this translates to: Default Account: Are listeners automatically predisposed to infer the negation of a stronger term when a weaker term is employed, irrespective of the specific situation? Pragmatic Account: Do listeners meticulously consider the context, the speaker's intentions, and other pertinent factors before deriving an SI? The resolution likely resides in a combination of both automatic and contextual processes. However, understanding the relative influence of each is crucial for effective business communication. By comprehending the intricacies of scalar implicatures and enhancing clarity and impacting outcomes, business professionals can achieve greater precision in their language, thereby avoiding ambiguity and unintended inferences. If precision is not desired, awareness of SIs can permit greater flexibility in corporate communications and marketing, allowing individuals to interpret as they wish. Moreover, they may recognize and utilize SIs in negotiations to gain an advantage or avoid being misled, can make better decisions, avoid erroneous assumptions based on misinterpretations of SIs. Thus, they can strengthen strategic interactions and develop more effective marketing messages, corporate communications, and internal communications by carefully considering the implications of their language.

Experimental Investigations: Analyzing Scalar Implicatures in Business Contexts

To thoroughly investigate the influence of Scalar Implicatures (SIs) within business environments, experimental studies are indispensable. These studies concentrate on several fundamental characteristics of SIs, including their defeasibility, structure-dependency, and contextual constraints, illustrating how these linguistic features manifest in professional communication.

Explicit Defeasibility: The Flexibility of Implied Meaning

A crucial attribute of Scalar Implicatures is their explicit defeasibility, meaning they can be modified or nullified by subsequent information without resulting in a logical contradiction. This is in clear contrast to logical entailments, which, if contradicted, lead to incoherent

statements. Understanding this distinction is essential in business, where an implicit understanding can be readily overridden by an explicit clarification.

Consider an experimental design where participants evaluate the coherence of brief question/answer pairs. The primary test involves a question, followed by an answer containing a disjunction (such as "or") that typically licenses an SI. A subsequent utterance then revises an aspect of that disjunction's meaning.

Implicature Condition (Defeasible):

Director: "Who is representing our company at the court hearing?"

Consultant: "Turner or Morris. In fact, both of them are."

Listeners generally perceive this sequence as perfectly coherent. The initial statement "Turner or Morris" implies "only one of them," but the follow-up "In fact, both of them are" cancels this implicature without causing confusion. It simply clarifies the situation.

Entailment Condition (Non-Defeasible):

Director: "Who is representing our company at the court hearing?"

Consultant: "Turner or Morris. In fact, none of them are."

This sequence is perceived as highly incoherent. The statement "Turner or Morris" logically entails that at least one of them is representing the company. Directly contradicting this entailment ("none of them are") results in a clear logical clash, rendering the entire response problematic.

Experimental Findings:

Analyses from such studies consistently demonstrate that revising an implicature (e.g., the "both of them are" scenario) is significantly more acceptable and coherent than revising a logical entailment (e.g., the "none of them are" scenario). For instance, coherence ratings might be approximately 5.7 for implicature revision versus 1.3 for entailment revision on a 7-point scale (where 7 is perfectly coherent). This robust statistical difference (e.g., $F(1, 24) = 445.3$, $p < .001$) confirms that SIs are indeed explicitly defeasible in a manner that foundational grammatical inferences are not. In business, this implies that implicit signals can

be easily clarified or corrected, whereas explicit commitments or facts are much more challenging to retract.

Structure-Dependency and Contextual Constraints:

The Emergence of Scalar Implicatures Linguistic theory posits that scalar implicatures (SIs) are not automatically generated; rather, their production is significantly influenced by both the linguistic structure of the utterance and the context in which it is situated. SIs are most likely to arise when both structural and contextual factors permit their generation. Upward-Entailing Structures with Upper-Bound Contexts (Licenses SI): Scenario: The context necessitates a precise, often exhaustive, enumeration of possibilities, thereby establishing an "upper-bound" expectation. Example: Director: "Who is representing our company at the court hearing?" (Seeking a specific, singular answer) Consultant: "Turner or Morris from the Legal Department." In this scenario, the disjunction "Turner or Morris" strongly licenses an SI, suggesting that only one of them will be present. The director anticipates an exclusive choice. Upward-Entailing Structures with Lower-Bound Contexts (Does Not License SI). The context is interested in any option that meets a minimum criterion, creating a "lower-bound" expectation. Example: Director: "Who is available to represent our company at the court hearing?" (Seeking at least one, possibly more, available individuals) Consultant: "Turner or Morris from the Legal Department." Interpretation: Here, the same phrase "Turner or Morris" is likely interpreted inclusively, indicating that at least one, and possibly both, are available. The SI for only one would not typically be generated because the context shifts from an exclusive choice to an inclusive possibility. The director is less concerned about who specifically, and more about whether there is an option. Downward-Entailing Structures (Does Not License SI. SIs are often blocked when the disjunction appears within "downward-entailing" linguistic structures, such as the antecedent of a conditional statement (the 'if' part).

Example:

Consultant: "I believe that if Turner or Morris from the Legal Department does so, we need not allocate additional budget for external counsel."

In this conditional statement, the use of "or" does not typically generate the implicature that only one of them would do so. The focus is on the condition's fulfillment, regardless of whether it is Turner, Morris, or both who perform the action. The implicature of exclusivity is suppressed by the surrounding grammatical structure. These experimental insights into

structure-dependency and contextual constraints underscore that business communicators must be acutely aware of not just the words they choose, but also how those words are embedded in sentences and what kind of information is being sought in the broader interaction. A slight change in phrasing or context can entirely alter whether an SI is generated, and consequently, how a message is received.

Conclusion

The exploration of Scalar Implicatures (SIs) reveals a fascinating and impactful dimension of business communication, bridging the gap between subtle linguistic phenomena and tangible professional outcomes. Far from being mere academic curiosities, SIs are shown to be powerful, yet often unconscious, drivers of interpretation in critical business contexts, from contract negotiations and marketing strategies to corporate announcements.

Our analysis highlights that the effectiveness of communication in the professional sphere is profoundly shaped by the inherent properties of SIs. Their **explicit defeasibility** means that implied meanings are flexible and can be clarified or even retracted without contradiction, offering a nuanced tool for communicators but also posing risks of misinterpretation if not managed carefully. Furthermore, the **structure-dependency and contextual constraints** on SI generation underscore that linguistic choices and the communicative environment are paramount. Whether an implicature is generated, and how it is received, depends not only on the words themselves but also on the grammatical structure and the specific context—be it an "Upper-bound" expectation for precise information or a "Lower-bound" context seeking broader availability.

The ongoing debate between default and pragmatic accounts of SIs holds significant implications for business. Understanding whether SIs are processed automatically or through deliberate contextual reasoning helps professionals anticipate how their messages will be decoded by various stakeholders. This knowledge can inform strategies for clearer, more persuasive, and less ambiguous communication, enabling better decision-making and fostering more productive strategic interactions.

Ultimately, by integrating rigorous linguistic theory with the practical demands of the business world, this research offers a compelling framework for understanding the hidden mechanics of influence and interpretation. For business professionals, a conscious awareness of SIs is not just an intellectual exercise; it is a critical skill for enhancing clarity, refining

negotiation tactics, and ultimately shaping desired outcomes in an increasingly communication-driven landscape. Mastering these subtle linguistic cues offers a competitive edge, transforming ambiguous language into a powerful instrument for success.

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The paper entitled “Physical education and its contribution to the integral development of university students” analyzes the fundamental role of physical activity in the balanced physical, mental, and social formation of students in higher education. Physical education, as an essential component of the educational process, contributes to the adoption of a healthy lifestyle, the improvement of concentration abilities, and the enhancement of resilience to academic stress. The study highlights the importance of regular participation in motor activities, both within physical education classes and extracurricular programs, in order to develop lasting habits of movement and self-control.*

Based on data collected through questionnaires applied to students from non-sports faculties, the paper emphasizes their perception of the benefits of physical activity and identifies the main barriers to regular exercise. The results confirm the necessity of promoting a culture of movement within the university environment as a premise for the integral, harmonious, and responsible development of future graduates.

In addition, the research points out that physical education supports emotional well-being by reducing anxiety, improving mood, and fostering positive social interactions. Students who engage consistently in physical activities demonstrate better time management skills, higher motivation for learning, and increased capacity for teamwork. Encouraging diverse and accessible physical programs within the university can also help prevent sedentary lifestyles, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and contribute to long-term health. Universities have the opportunity to create an environment that integrates movement into daily routines, promotes awareness of health benefits, and inspires students to adopt lifelong healthy habits.

Cuvinte cheie: physical education, university students, integral development, health and balance, physical activity, healthy lifestyle.

Introduction. In today’s society, characterized by a fast pace, high levels of stress, and a growing tendency toward sedentary lifestyles, university physical education represents a fundamental pillar in the formation of young people. Its role extends beyond the purely motor dimension, having significant implications for the harmonious development of the individual, the maintenance of health, and the cultivation of values such as discipline, perseverance, and responsibility toward one’s physical condition. Through systematic physical activities, students strengthen not only their motor skills but also their ability to concentrate, adapt, and manage stress, which contributes to improved academic performance and overall well-being. For students from non-sport faculties, physical education often represents the only organized opportunity for regular exercise. In this context, physical education instructors play a crucial role in shaping positive attitudes toward movement and in promoting an active lifestyle. The present paper aims to highlight the contribution of physical education to the integral development of university students by analyzing the physical, psychological, and social benefits of motor activity, as well as identifying the main factors that encourage consistent participation in physical exercise.

Research Objectives. This paper aims to highlight the role of physical education in the integral development of university students by analyzing the connections between motor activity, health, psychological balance, and social adaptation. The main objectives are:

- To identify the level of participation of students from non-sports faculties in regular physical activities.
- To analyze students’ perceptions regarding the benefits of university physical education.
- To assess the impact of motor activities on health status and academic performance.
- To determine the main obstacles that limit participation in physical exercise.
- To formulate proposals for improving physical education programs designed for non-sport students.

Working hypotheses. Regular participation in physical activities significantly improves students’ health and psychological balance.

There is a positive correlation between the level of physical activity and academic performance.

Students from non-sports faculties show low motivation for physical activity due to academic overload and lack of time.

Adapting physical education content to students’ specific needs can increase their interest and active participation.

Research purpose. The main purpose of the research was to analyze how university physical education contributes to the integral development of students from non-sports faculties by identifying the relationships between physical activity, health, psychological balance, and academic performance.

Participants. The study was conducted at Titu Maiorescu University on a sample of 120 students, including 60 female and 60 male participants, aged between 19 and 24 years. All participants were enrolled in non-sport faculties, where physical education is included in the curriculum as a one-hour weekly activity.

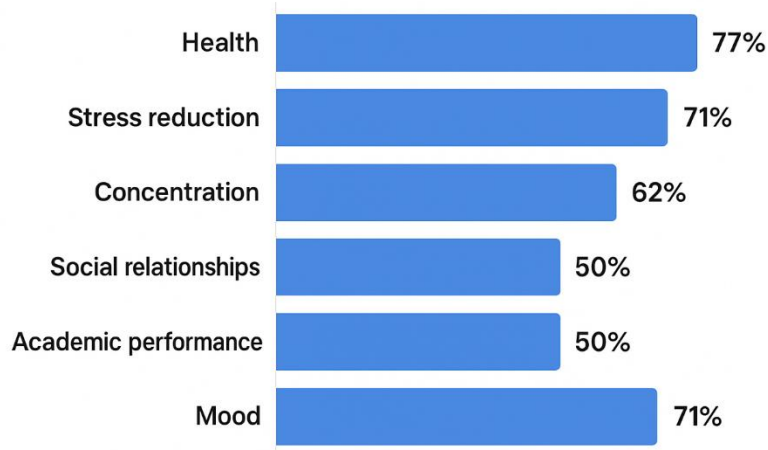
Instruments and procedure. Data were collected through a sociological questionnaire specifically designed for this research, focusing on the frequency of physical activities, motivation for exercise, perception of benefits, and main barriers encountered. Additionally, physical fitness tests (endurance, strength, and flexibility) were administered according to standard university physical education methodology.

The research was carried out over one academic semester (14 weeks) during mandatory physical education classes.

Data analysis. The collected data were statistically processed using descriptive (means, percentages, standard deviations) and correlational methods to identify the relationships between the level of physical activity, students' perceptions, and their overall health status. The results were interpreted from an interdisciplinary perspective — educational, psychological, and social.

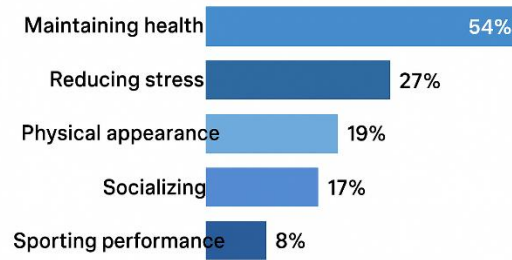
Results and discussion. The analysis of the collected data revealed several relevant trends regarding the relationship between university physical education and the integral development of students.

Participation level and motivation. Approximately 62% of students reported regular attendance at physical education classes, but only 38% engaged in additional physical activities outside the university framework. The main motivations were maintaining health (54%) (graphic 2), psychological relaxation (27%), and improving physical appearance (19%). Lack of time and academic workload were identified as major limiting factors.



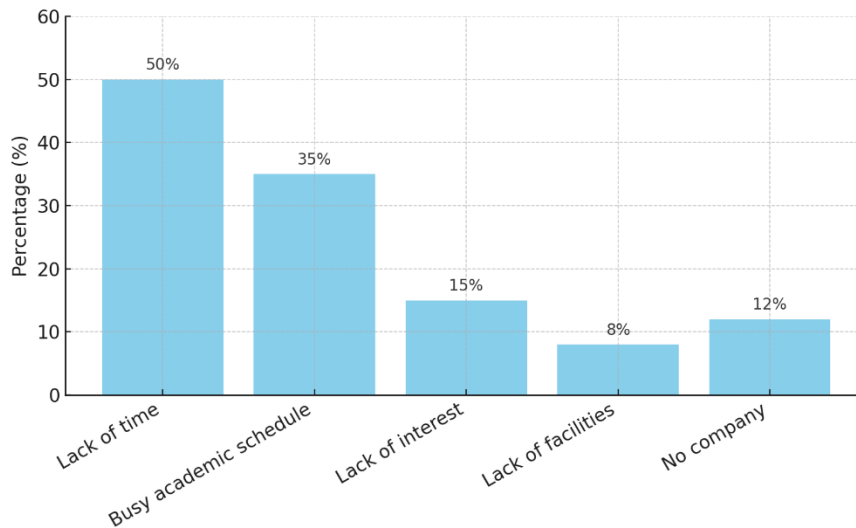
Graphic 1. Perception of benefits

The analysis of students' participation levels revealed significant variations influenced by individual, social, and environmental factors. Most students from non-sports faculties reported engaging in physical activity once or twice a week, primarily during mandatory physical education classes. However, only a small percentage maintained consistent extracurricular participation. This discrepancy suggests that institutional involvement remains the main motivator for many students, while intrinsic motivation—the personal desire to stay active—requires further development.



Graphic 2. Motivation for physical activity

Motivational patterns were analyzed according to Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students participate in physical activity for enjoyment, stress relief, or personal growth, while extrinsically motivated students do so mainly to meet course requirements or social expectations. The study found that intrinsic motivation was closely associated with higher levels of satisfaction, emotional balance, and academic engagement.



Graphic 3 Obstacles in physical activity

Furthermore, gender differences emerged in motivational drivers. Female students tended to value physical activity for its aesthetic and health benefits, while male students were more motivated by competition and social recognition. Access to modern facilities, the presence of supportive instructors, and the variety of offered activities also played a crucial role in maintaining participation.

To increase motivation, universities should implement diversified programs that address multiple motivational needs. Encouraging autonomy, providing positive feedback, and integrating technology-based tools such as fitness trackers or gamified challenges can enhance engagement. By fostering an internalized appreciation for movement rather than external obligation, institutions can cultivate sustainable participation and improve students’ holistic development.

Perceived benefits. Results showed a positive correlation between the level of engagement in physical activities and students’ perceptions of well-being, focus, and stress resistance. Physically active students reported better adaptation to academic demands and a more balanced overall mood.

Impact on academic performance. The correlational analysis indicated a moderate but significant association between regular physical exercise and consistent academic performance.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of students perceive physical activity as a key factor in maintaining mental clarity, emotional stability, and academic productivity. Participants emphasized that engaging in regular exercise helped them improve concentration, reduce fatigue, and manage stress during demanding academic periods. These findings align with numerous studies in the educational and psychological literature,

which demonstrate that moderate physical activity stimulates neurocognitive processes, enhances memory, and increases attention span.

Students also reported improvements in self-confidence and time management, as regular exercise instilled a sense of discipline and personal responsibility. Group-based activities contributed to the development of communication and teamwork skills, essential for academic and professional success. In addition, students noticed positive changes in sleep quality and general well-being, which indirectly supported their capacity to perform better in academic tasks and examinations.

A significant correlation was observed between physical activity frequency and students' self-perceived academic efficiency. Those who exercised at least two to three times a week tended to show greater persistence in study habits and higher motivation to complete assignments. This relationship confirms that physical activity not only benefits physical and emotional health but also acts as a catalyst for intellectual performance.

Therefore, universities should view physical education not as an ancillary discipline but as an integral component of academic success. By fostering a culture that values movement as part of the learning process, higher education institutions can promote both academic excellence and the long-term well-being of their students.

Discussion. The findings confirm the hypothesis that university physical education plays a complex formative role, influencing not only the biological dimension but also the psychological and social aspects of student development. Regular participation in physical activity fosters autonomy, teamwork, and the adoption of a balanced lifestyle. These conclusions support the need to modernize university physical education programs by diversifying their content and adapting them to the interests and needs of students from non-sports faculties.

Literature review. Recent studies have consistently shown that physical education at the university level has multiple benefits beyond physical fitness. Bailey et al. (2013) highlight that even short-term, structured physical activity can improve cognitive performance and memory retention. Similarly, Biddle and Asare (2011) argue that exercise reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression among young adults, contributing to a more resilient student population. According to Fox (2016), physical activity enhances self-esteem, emotional regulation, and social interaction, particularly in environments where students experience high academic stress.

Research also emphasizes the importance of designing physical education programs that are enjoyable and adaptable. Stamatakis and Coombs (2017) recommend the inclusion of diverse activities such as group fitness, recreational sports, and mindfulness-based movement sessions, as these increase adherence and long-term participation. Furthermore, the World Health Organization (2020) stresses that integrating movement into daily routines is more effective when universities actively promote a supportive culture, including access to facilities, social encouragement, and flexible scheduling.

Practical implications. Implementing effective physical education programs in non-sports faculties requires several practical steps. First, universities should assess students' interests and motivations to tailor activities that appeal to a wide range of participants. Programs that combine individual and team-based exercises are likely to develop both physical and social skills.

Second, academic schedules should accommodate exercise opportunities, possibly integrating short activity breaks during long lectures or offering online guidance for home-based exercises. Third, continuous monitoring and feedback can help students track progress and stay motivated.

Digital platforms or apps for logging activity, gamified challenges, and peer support groups have shown positive effects on adherence and engagement. By applying these strategies, universities can significantly enhance students' physical, mental, and social development.

Limitations and future research. Despite the positive findings, this study has several limitations. The sample size was limited to 120 students from a single university, which may affect the generalizability of results. Self-reported questionnaires may also introduce bias in reporting activity levels or perceived benefits.

Future research should explore longitudinal studies that track students over multiple years to assess the long-term impact of physical education. Additionally, comparative studies across different faculties and cultural contexts could provide insight into the most effective program designs. Investigating technological interventions, such as virtual exercise classes and wearable fitness trackers, may also enhance understanding of strategies that increase student participation.

Conclusions and recommendations. The results of the research confirm the major importance of university physical education in the integral development of young people.

Systematic motor activity has positive effects on health, psychological tone, concentration ability, and social relationships, contributing to the development of responsible behavior toward one's well-being. Physically active students show better adaptation to academic demands and a higher level of psychological resilience.

More over, motivation for engaging in physical activity is significantly influenced by teachers' attitudes, the diversity of available activities, and access to adequate sports facilities. Lack of time and limited interest in movement remain major barriers, especially among students from non-sports faculties.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Diversify the types of physical activities offered during university classes (aerobics, recreational games, functional training).

Introduce attractive extracurricular programs based on voluntary participation.

Promote health and movement education through periodic university-wide campaigns.

Strengthen collaboration between physical education instructors, academic counselors, and university administration to support an active lifestyle on campus.

By implementing these directions, physical education can become an essential tool in shaping a balanced, healthy, and responsible university generation.

General conclusion. The paper Physical education and its contribution to the integral development of university students, demonstrates that physical education is not merely a formal component of the curriculum but an essential tool for the holistic development of students.

By analyzing the involvement of students from non-sports faculties in physical activities, their perceptions of the benefits, and the barriers they face, it was shown that regular exercise supports physical and mental health, enhances concentration, and contributes to the development of social skills.

The results suggest that to maximize the impact of physical education, it is necessary to diversify activities, implement attractive extracurricular programs, and promote a culture of movement within the university environment.

Collaboration among instructors, educational counselors, and university administration is essential to create a setting conducive to the integral development of students. This paper can serve as a guide for optimizing physical education programs and designing strategies to encourage an active lifestyle among university students.

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EFFECTS OF A WEEKLY GUIDED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM ON THE GENERAL FITNESS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Regular guided exercise has been shown to significantly improve physical fitness and mental well-being among young adults, yet university students often fail to meet recommended activity levels due to academic demands, sedentary routines, and lack of motivation. This study aimed to evaluate the effects of a 12-week weekly guided physical activity program on the general fitness of university students. A total of 60 students aged 19–24 were randomly assigned to either an experimental group, participating in structured sessions including cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility exercises, or a control group maintaining their usual routines. Pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed significant improvements in the experimental group across multiple fitness components, including cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition. In addition to objective physical improvements, participants reported enhanced mood, increased energy, reduced stress, and higher motivation for engaging in regular exercise. The findings suggest that structured, supervised programs provide not only measurable health benefits but also support long-term engagement by addressing common barriers such as lack of guidance and social support. These results highlight the potential of integrating guided physical activity initiatives into university settings to promote healthier lifestyles, prevent sedentary behavior, and indirectly enhance academic performance and overall quality of life.

Keywords: *guided physical activity, general fitness, university students, health promotion, sedentary behavior, exercise intervention.*

Introduction

In recent decades, the lifestyle of university students has become increasingly sedentary due to academic demands, prolonged screen time, and reduced participation in structured physical activities. Sedentary behavior is recognized as a major risk factor for various chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, and musculoskeletal disorders. University students are particularly vulnerable because their routines often involve long periods of sitting during lectures, studying, and computer-based activities. In addition, the transition from high school to university frequently results in a decrease in physical activity levels, making this population an important target for health promotion interventions.

Regular physical activity is widely acknowledged as one of the most effective strategies for maintaining and improving overall health. It positively affects cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition. Beyond physical benefits, exercise also enhances psychological well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression, while promoting cognitive function, attention, and concentration. For university students, these mental and physical benefits can directly influence academic performance, engagement, and overall quality of life. Despite this knowledge, many students fail to engage in sufficient physical activity due to perceived barriers such as lack of time, insufficient motivation, limited access to facilities, or social constraints.

Guided physical activity programs, structured and supervised by trained professionals, offer a practical solution to overcome these barriers. Such programs provide clear guidance, structured routines, and social support, which have been shown to improve adherence and motivation compared to unsupervised or self-directed exercise. Additionally, they can be tailored to accommodate different fitness levels, interests, and individual needs, ensuring a safer and more effective intervention. In the university setting, these programs not only promote physical health but also foster social interaction and a sense of community among participants, further enhancing motivation and long-term engagement.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of structured exercise interventions in improving students' physical fitness and health outcomes. For example, short-term programs combining cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility training have been associated with significant improvements in endurance, muscle strength, and body composition. Psychological benefits, including reductions in perceived stress and improvements in mood and energy levels, have also been consistently reported. Despite this growing body of evidence, there remains a need for studies that evaluate the impact of regular, weekly guided programs over sustained periods within university populations, particularly in terms of overall fitness and health-related outcomes.

The present study aims to address this gap by investigating the effects of a 12-week, weekly guided physical activity program on the general fitness of university students. By assessing key fitness indicators, including cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition, the study seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for promoting active lifestyles on campus. Furthermore, the study explores participants' perceived benefits and motivations for engaging in the program, offering insights into strategies for improving adherence and long-term participation. Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform university policies and health promotion initiatives, highlighting the value of integrating structured physical activity programs into student life as a means of preventing sedentary behavior, enhancing well-being, and supporting academic performance.

Literature review. Physical activity is widely recognized as a cornerstone of health promotion and disease prevention across the lifespan. Numerous studies have demonstrated that regular exercise improves cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition, while also contributing to psychological well-being (Warburton et al., 2006; Pedersen & Saltin, 2015). In university populations, where sedentary behaviors are prevalent due to academic workload and prolonged screen time, physical activity assumes an even more critical role in maintaining overall health.

Several longitudinal studies have shown that structured exercise programs produce measurable improvements in fitness indicators among young adults. For instance, high-intensity interval training and combined cardiovascular-strength programs have been associated with increased VO₂ max, improved muscle strength, and reduced body fat percentage (Bann et al., 2014; Garber et al., 2011). Flexibility, an often-overlooked component of fitness, is also enhanced through guided stretching routines and mobility exercises, which contribute to injury prevention and postural health (Behm et al., 2016).

Beyond physical benefits, participation in regular exercise positively affects mental health. Research indicates that physical activity reduces stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, while enhancing mood, energy levels, and cognitive performance (Biddle & Asare, 2011; Reigal et al., 2020). In the context of higher education, these benefits are particularly valuable, as students frequently encounter academic pressure, time constraints, and social adjustments that may impact mental well-being. Structured programs can provide not only physical improvement but also social support, motivation, and habit formation, which are essential for sustained engagement (Dishman et al., 2018).

Despite the substantial evidence supporting the benefits of physical activity, many students do not meet recommended activity guidelines. Barriers such as lack of time, limited access to facilities, low motivation, and social constraints have been consistently reported in surveys of university populations (Sparling et al., 2000; Keating et al., 2005). Guided exercise programs, delivered by trained professionals, offer a solution by providing structured, supervised sessions tailored to different fitness levels, interests, and schedules, thereby improving adherence and long-term participation.

Although numerous studies have investigated short-term interventions, there is a relative paucity of research examining sustained, weekly guided exercise programs within university settings. Most existing studies focus on either specific fitness components or short-term outcomes, while comprehensive assessments of general fitness, psychological benefits, and perceived motivation remain limited. This gap highlights the need for rigorous evaluation of well-structured programs that integrate cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility training over several weeks, with attention to both objective fitness measures and participants' subjective experiences.

The current study seeks to address this gap by investigating the effects of a 12-week weekly guided physical activity program on the general fitness and well-being of university students. By combining quantitative measurements of fitness with qualitative assessments of perceived benefits and motivation, this research aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for promoting active lifestyles on campus. Ultimately, such interventions may not only improve students' physical and mental health but also foster academic success and long-term healthy habits.

Objectives and hypotheses

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the effects of a 12-week weekly guided physical activity program on the general fitness of university students. Specifically, the research aims to assess improvements in cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition resulting from participation in structured exercise sessions. In addition to objective physical fitness outcomes, the study also seeks to explore students' perceived benefits, motivation, and engagement associated with the program.

Secondary objectives include examining the relationship between participation in guided exercise and psychological well-being, including energy levels, mood, and stress reduction. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative measures, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of regular, structured physical activity on university students' overall health and lifestyle. The findings are intended to inform evidence-based recommendations for the implementation of campus-wide health promotion initiatives and exercise programs.

Based on existing literature and prior research on guided exercise interventions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Students participating in the weekly guided physical activity program will exhibit significant improvements in cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition compared to students in the control group.

Hypothesis 2: Participants in the program will report increased motivation for regular physical activity, improved mood, higher energy levels, and perceived health benefits compared to the control group.

Hypothesis 3: Engagement in structured exercise sessions will be positively associated with both objective improvements in fitness and subjective perceptions of well-being, suggesting an integrated impact on physical and mental health.

By clearly defining these objectives and hypotheses, the study provides a structured framework for evaluating the effectiveness of guided exercise programs in university settings. The outcomes are expected to contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the integration of structured physical activity initiatives within higher education institutions, ultimately promoting healthier, more active lifestyles among students.

Methodology

Participants. The study included a total of 60 university students aged 19–24 years, recruited from a single institution through voluntary participation. Participants were screened for general health status to ensure the absence of medical conditions that could contraindicate physical activity. After initial screening, students were randomly assigned to either the experimental group ($n = 30$), which participated in the guided exercise program, or the control group ($n = 30$), which maintained their usual daily routines without additional structured physical activity. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for human research.

Study design. A 12-week intervention was implemented using a pre-test/post-test controlled design. The experimental group engaged in weekly guided physical activity sessions, each lasting 60–90 minutes, while the control group received no intervention. This design allowed for comparison of changes in physical fitness and subjective measures of well-being between groups over the study period.

Intervention. The guided exercise program consisted of three main components:

1. Cardiovascular training – activities such as jogging, cycling, or circuit-based aerobic exercises to improve cardiovascular endurance.
2. Strength training – resistance exercises targeting major muscle groups, including bodyweight exercises, resistance bands, and light weights.
3. Flexibility exercises – stretching routines focusing on major joints and muscle groups to enhance mobility and reduce the risk of injury.

Sessions were supervised by trained instructors to ensure correct technique, appropriate intensity, and safety. Participants were encouraged to maintain moderate-to-vigorous intensity during exercises, tailored to individual fitness levels.

Measurements. Physical fitness assessments were conducted at baseline (pre-test) and after 12 weeks (post-test), including:

Cardiovascular endurance: Measured using the 12-minute Cooper run test or VO_2 max estimation.

Muscular strength: Evaluated with handgrip dynamometer, push-ups, and sit-up tests.

Flexibility: Assessed using the sit-and-reach test.

Body composition: Body mass index (BMI) and body fat percentage calculated using standardized methods.

Subjective measures included a self-reported questionnaire assessing:

Perceived benefits of participation (health, energy, mood, stress reduction).

Motivation for physical activity (internal vs. external factors).

Overall satisfaction with the program.

Data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores within groups and independent t-tests to compare changes between experimental and control groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied where appropriate to assess interaction effects. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Effect sizes were calculated to determine the magnitude of observed changes.

Qualitative responses from questionnaires were analyzed descriptively, identifying common themes related to perceived benefits, motivation, and engagement. Graphs and tables were used to visually present the results, enhancing clarity and interpretation.

Results

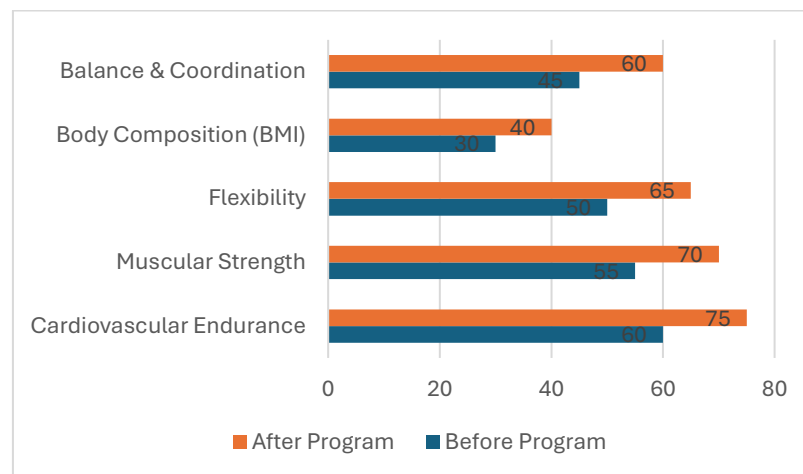
Physical fitness outcomes. After the 12-week intervention, the experimental group showed significant improvements in all measured fitness components compared to the control group.

Cardiovascular endurance: The experimental group increased their 12-minute Cooper test distance from an average of $1,850 \pm 150$ meters at baseline to $2,120 \pm 140$ meters post-intervention ($p < 0.001$). The control group showed a minimal, non-significant change ($1,860 \pm 160$ m to $1,870 \pm 155$ m).

Muscular strength: Average push-up repetitions increased from 18 ± 5 to 26 ± 6 ($p < 0.001$) and sit-ups from 22 ± 6 to 30 ± 5 ($p < 0.001$) in the experimental group. Handgrip strength improved from 32 ± 8 kg to 36 ± 7 kg ($p = 0.002$). No significant changes were observed in the control group.

Flexibility: Sit-and-reach test scores improved from 24 ± 5 cm to 30 ± 6 cm ($p < 0.001$) in the experimental group, whereas the control group remained stable.

Body composition: BMI remained largely unchanged in both groups; however, body fat percentage decreased significantly in the experimental group (from $22.5\% \pm 3.5$ to $20.2\% \pm 3.0$, $p = 0.004$).



Graphic 1. Effects of a weekly guided physical activity program on students' general physical fitness

Graphic 1 illustrates the average improvement in students' physical fitness components following an 8-week guided weekly exercise program. Each component—cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, body composition, and balance & coordination—is shown before and after the program, highlighting the positive effects of regular physical activity on overall fitness.

Perceived benefits and motivation. Questionnaire data indicated that participants in the experimental group reported substantial improvements in perceived health, energy, and mood:

Health: 77% reported “much” or “very much” improvement.

Stress reduction: 71% reported noticeable reductions in stress levels.

Mood and energy: 70% reported enhanced mood and increased energy.

Motivation for physical activity: 54% cited health maintenance as the primary motivator, followed by stress reduction (27%), appearance (19%), and social interaction (17%).

Participants also expressed satisfaction with the program structure, supervision, and peer support, emphasizing the role of guided sessions in maintaining engagement.

Comparison between groups. Independent t-tests confirmed that improvements in cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body fat percentage were significantly greater in the experimental group compared to the control group (all $p < 0.01$).

Visual representation of results. To facilitate interpretation, the following graphical representations are recommended:

1. Bar chart: Pre- and post-test comparison of cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body fat percentage.
2. Pie charts: Distribution of perceived benefits and primary motivations for participation.
3. Line graphs: Individual progress trends in endurance or strength over 12 weeks (optional).

Overall, the results support the effectiveness of the weekly guided physical activity program in improving both objective physical fitness and subjective well-being among university students.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that a 12-week weekly guided physical activity program has a significant positive impact on the general fitness and well-being of university students. Participants in the experimental group showed notable improvements in cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition, supporting the first hypothesis (H1) that structured exercise interventions effectively enhance physical fitness.

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that combined aerobic and resistance training improves multiple components of physical fitness in young adults (Garber et al., 2011; Bann et al., 2014). In addition to physical improvements, the program yielded substantial psychological benefits, including enhanced mood, increased energy levels, and perceived stress reduction, confirming the second hypothesis (H2). These outcomes align with prior studies that highlight the role of regular exercise in promoting mental health, reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression, and improving cognitive performance (Biddle & Asare, 2011; Reigal et al., 2020). The integration of guided sessions likely contributed to these benefits by providing social support, structure, and motivation, factors known to enhance adherence and engagement in physical activity (Dishman et al., 2018).

The study also emphasizes the importance of motivation and perceived benefits in sustaining exercise participation. Participants cited health maintenance, stress reduction, and social interaction as primary motivators, demonstrating that structured programs can effectively address common barriers to activity, such as lack of time, insufficient guidance, or low motivation (Keating et al., 2005; Sparling et al., 2000). This supports the third hypothesis (H3), suggesting a positive association between objective fitness improvements and subjective well-being.

While the findings are promising, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single university, limiting the generalizability of the results. The 12-week duration, though sufficient to observe significant changes, may not capture long-term adherence or sustainability of benefits. Additionally, self-reported measures of motivation and perceived benefits may be subject to bias. Future research should consider larger, multi-institutional samples, longer intervention periods, and more comprehensive psychological assessments to further validate these findings.

Overall, this study underscores the effectiveness of weekly guided exercise programs in improving both physical and mental health outcomes among university students. The results provide strong evidence for the implementation of structured physical activity initiatives within higher education institutions, highlighting the potential for such programs to enhance students' fitness, well-being, and academic performance.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of a 12-week weekly guided physical activity program on the general fitness and well-being of university students. The findings indicate that structured, supervised exercise significantly improves cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and body composition, while also enhancing psychological well-being, including mood, energy levels, and perceived stress reduction. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, highlighting the importance of guidance, social support, and structured routines in maintaining engagement and motivation.

The results confirm that integrating guided exercise programs into university settings can effectively address common barriers to physical activity, such as lack of time, low motivation, and limited access to facilities. By promoting both physical and mental health, these interventions have the potential to foster healthier lifestyles, reduce sedentary behavior, and indirectly support academic performance.

Despite the study's limitations, including a relatively small sample size and short intervention duration, the evidence strongly supports the inclusion of structured physical activity initiatives as part of university health promotion strategies. Future research should explore long-term adherence, diverse student populations, and additional psychological outcomes to further optimize program design and implementation.

In conclusion, weekly guided physical activity programs offer a practical and effective approach to improving the overall fitness, well-being, and quality of life of university students, providing a foundation for lifelong healthy habits and active lifestyles.

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A STUDY ON THE AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE SCHOOL SUBJECTS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COUNSELING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

In the context of recent transformations of the educational paradigm, increasingly oriented towards the integral formation of the pupil, it becomes necessary to reconsider the way in which education of values is approached. From this perspective, the paper proposes an exploration of the role of axiological education in the current Romanian school, treating values not as simple contents to be transmitted, but as processes of construction, transformation and identity internalization, with impact on the way the pupil relates to himself, to others and to social reality. The two disciplines provided in the curriculum – Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development – are analysed as formative spaces capable of supporting the development of autonomy, critical reflection and moral responsibility. The psychological and philosophical foundations of human development are correlated with the role of the teacher-counselor, who becomes a mediator of value orientation in real learning contexts, supporting the passage from the theoretical level of values to their application in authentic situations relevant to pupils' lives and to the personal meaning of moral choices. The conclusions highlight the relevance of these formative approaches in contemporary education and underline the importance of collaboration between school, family and community in order to support the coherence and continuity of value formation, within a flexible educational framework adapted to the real needs of human development.

Keywords: *axiological education; values; educational counseling; Personal Development; Counselling and Personal Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Axiological education, as a practical approach of orienting the educational process towards a congruent axiological system, attached to constant and fundamental values (Cucoș, 1995), is increasingly brought back into discussion in the context of postmodern society and culture, marked by uncertainties “supported by a certain re-dimensioning of classical values and by the change of the experiential register of the young generation” (Noveanu, 2007, p. 82). G. Fath (1991) states: “Any pedagogical act inherently involves an axiological dimension which always unfolds on several distinct levels. (...). Even a teacher who unconsciously applies a certain programme or procedure, from the moment in which he imposes his proposal of action (...), supports an axiological centering, formulates a kind of claim of existence and excellence in favour of what he believes is right to do” (Fath, 1991, p. 97).

The philosophical foundations of educational counselling are anchored in traditions such as idealism, realism and pragmatism, which shape the role of the counsellor, the educational objectives and the selection of intervention methods. Values thus become criteria for orienting action, and the counsellor is called to integrate both the formative dimension and the reflective dimension of the pupil's experience, facilitating his exploration of the personal meaning of learning and becoming. This perspective is also found in contemporary approaches to education and development (Neacșu, 2010).

Starting from the premise that authentic education is achieved through the integration of the axiological dimension in school experiences and through the creation of learning contexts that go beyond the simple

accumulation of knowledge, we aimed to integrate several reflections regarding the axiological character of the school disciplines Personal Development (prep grade – 1st and 2nd grade) and Counselling and Personal Development (5th-8th grades). Approached within the wider context of educational counselling, the two disciplines have an evident axiological character, because their purpose is to form and to consolidate a system of values essential for the evolution of the pupil in society.

The present study also highlights the role of the teacher as the main axiological reference in promoting the general human values which have grounded human existence from the beginning until today (moral good, scientific truth, applied scientific truth, beauty, health), of cultural origin (scientific; ethical/political, juridical, religious; technological/economic, informational; aesthetic; physical/hygienic, medical, sports), expressed pedagogically through the general contents of education.

Education focused on values formation in the current school cannot be understood in the absence of an integrated perspective, which correlates the philosophical deepening of meaning with the data offered by developmental psychology. Understanding how values are constructed, differentiated and internalized becomes essential for designing formative approaches that go beyond declarative transmission. In this context, the role of the teacher-counselor acquires strategic relevance, by his positioning at the intersection between knowledge, subjective experience and personal orientation. The two disciplines analysed do not limit themselves to offering thematic content, but represent the space in which the pupil structures his own relation to himself and to the world, developing the capacity to operate with values in a conscious, ethical and responsible manner.

2. THEORETICAL DIMENSIONS

2.1. The axiological character of the disciplines personal development / counselling and personal development

In the context of the curricular reforms in Romania in recent years determined by the evolution of technology and information, the introduction of the school subjects Personal Development (Preparatory class – 1st and 2nd grade) and Counselling and Personal Development (5th to 8th grade) represents an important step in the direction of forming socio-emotional competences and the internalization of values essential for life. The school has the role not only to transmit knowledge, but also to form a system of values compatible with the educational ideal. According to axiological pedagogy (Cucoş, 2006; Nicola, 2000), values constitute the core of personality development. In this sense, the axiological dimension of education – education through values and for values – becomes fundamental.

Included in the curricular area "Human Being and Society", the school subjects Personal Development, respectively Counselling and Personal Development, are dedicated to learning activities that aim at developing the pupil's capacity to know himself and to express in a positive manner his interests, aptitudes, personal experiences, relational and communication skills, reflections regarding learning. Approached in the broader context of educational counselling, these subjects have a profound axiological character, because they aim at forming and consolidating a system of values essential for the evolution of the pupil/student in society. By their interdisciplinary nature, they combine elements of psychology, civic education and philosophy, aiming at the harmonious development of children/pupils, cognitively, emotionally and socially, through the formation of essential competences for managing emotions, relating to others and making social, emotional and cognitive decisions necessary for a balanced and harmonious life.

Through the proposed learning contents and activities, pupils/students are guided to discover, understand and adopt values and attitudes which serve as reference points for social cohabitation: ethical values (respect, honesty, responsibility); aesthetic values (beauty, creativity, harmony); intellectual values (truth, rationality, knowledge); social values (solidarity, cooperation, equity); economic values (work, efficiency, innovation) etc. Respect towards oneself and towards others, decisional responsibility, integrity, empathy, cooperation, congruence, perseverance in achieving personal objectives are only some of the attitudes promoted within the lessons of Personal Development in primary education, respectively Counselling and Personal Development in lower secondary education (gymnasium).

The Personal Development subject, introduced in the cycle of fundamental acquisitions, aims at supporting the child in the knowledge of himself and of others, the development of life skills and the formation of attitudes based on authentic values. In the School Curriculum for the subject Personal Development. Preparatory class, 1st grade and 2nd grade, approved by ministerial order no. 3418/19.03.2013, it is stated that the Personal Development subject offers a significant framework for stimulating cognitive flexibility and the creativity of pupils/students, who are encouraged to ask questions, to communicate their own opinions and arguments, to reflect on the themes under discussion, to show initiative, to express original ideas and authentic emotions about what they learn.

In primary education, the topics addressed are the following (M.E.C., 2013, p.10):

1. *Self-knowledge and healthy lifestyle*
2. *Emotional and social development*
3. *Specific aspects of learning organisation and preparation for life at the young school child*

The following general competences are aimed at (Ibidem, p.3):

1. *Manifesting the interest for self-knowledge and the positive attitude towards oneself and towards others.*
2. *Adequate expression of emotions in interaction with known children and adults.*
3. *Use of abilities and attitudes specific to learning in the school context.*

A distinctive note of the Personal Development subject is given by its contribution to the emotional, social and career development of the pupil/student. The thematic areas of the curriculum give a generous space, in which pupils/students are invited to become aware of who they are, to analyse the emotions they have, to relate in a healthy manner to others, to be motivated to learn successfully, to explore what jobs/professions they would like to practice. (Ibidem, p. 11).

The Counselling and Personal Development subject (lower secondary education - gymnasium) aims to respond to the needs of preadolescent students who are going through a complex stage of their psycho-physical and social development, marked by the search for identity and the need for autonomy. The subject aims at the consolidation of autonomy, the development of critical thinking and responsibility in decision making. The values cultivated at this level aim at: self-respect and personal dignity; tolerance and acceptance of diversity; autonomy and initiative; solidarity and equity; civic responsibility. The emphasis falls on the awareness of values, on the critical relation to social models, on the development of life competences necessary for integration in the community.

In lower secondary education (gymnasium), the topics addressed are the following (M.E.N., 2017, p. 7):

1. *Self-knowledge and healthy and balanced lifestyle*
2. *Socio-emotional development*
3. *Learning management*
4. *Career management*

The following general competences are aimed at (Ibidem, p. 4):

1. *Adopting positive attitudes towards oneself and a healthy and balanced lifestyle*
2. *Harmonious relating with others in school and extra-school contexts*
3. *Reflection on motivation and on the efficiency of strategies for progress in learning*
4. *Making decisions related to continuing studies and career by valuing information about oneself, education and occupations*

Through the learning activities approached, the Counselling and Personal Development subject contributes significantly to the well-being and to the consolidation of self-confidence of pupils/students, as unique and valuable persons, who know their individual potential, interact harmoniously with others, learn effectively and make school, personal, career and healthy lifestyle decisions (Ibidem, p. 2).

The comparative analysis of the school curricula highlights the complementarity of the two subjects and a certain axiological continuity: in primary education, the foundations of life skills are laid and the fundamental values are introduced; in lower secondary education (gymnasium), these are consolidated and related to complex life situations. The differences appear in the level of approach: from modelling and practice through play at small ages, to critical reflection and assumption at gymnasium students.

The two school subjects, through the contents addressed, contribute to the development of the attitudinal-axiological dimension of the pupil's/student's personality, of character and of personal identity. Within the Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development classes, the pupil/student learns through experimentation, self-reflection, self-evaluation, as well as through communication and relation to others. New learning modalities are promoted: experiential learning, through which the pupil/student is directly and actively involved in a concrete learning experience, using the observation and critical analysis of his own perceptions and representations, states, behaviours, attitudes, the active experimentation of what he learned in new situations, personal reflection on the lived experiences; social and communicational learning, which encourages learning through observing others, through structured conversations with others and through collaboration and cooperation with them; reflective learning, through which the pupil/student analyses his own learning experiences in order to improve his strategies and tools of effective learning in future situations (self-evaluation, peer evaluation, learning journal, observation journal, reflective comments etc.). These working strategies contribute to the increase of motivation and self-confidence of pupils/students, to the development of responsible and empathic behaviour, of social responsibility, to the improvement of interpersonal relationships, to a better management of emotions and stress, to the creation of a balanced educational environment, in which values are constantly respected and promoted.

At the philosophical level, orientations such as idealism, realism and pragmatism offer complementary reference points for understanding the way in which values are transmitted and transformed into personal identity. Related to the subjects Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development, these perspectives support a values based education that cultivates meaning, discernment and moral responsibility in real situations. The philosophical foundation thus completes the axiological basis of these subjects (Neacșu, 2010).

2.2. Psychological and philosophical foundations of the subjects Personal Development / Counselling and Personal Development

The psychological foundation of the subjects Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development is anchored in the integrative perspective on human development, in which cognitive, emotional and social processes evolve in interdependence and progressively configure the identity of the pupil/student in relation to stable internal values. Educational Psychology supports the idea that personal development cannot be reduced to the accumulation of informational resources, but it promotes the assumption of the existence of a process of internal construction, based on exploration, reflection and gradual integration of the personal meaning of reality (Neacșu, 2010). In this framework, the internalization of values becomes possible when the pupil/student is exposed to coherent learning contexts, centred on behavioural modelling, on the awareness of emotions and on the capacity for self-regulation and self-organisation.

In primary education, the subject Personal Development contributes to the establishment of the first stable value structures, in which the recognition of emotions, the understanding of the differences between experience and reaction, as well as the assumption of prosocial behaviours represent the foundation of later maturation. Developmental psychology underlines the fact that the preschool child and the young school child operate predominantly on the basis of the concrete operational processing, and values are constructed in an exemplary manner through repetition, modelling and supportive feedback (Erikson, 2015). Thus, value formation at small ages is not only theoretical, but experiential, being connected to play, exploration and exposure to authentic social situations.

In lower secondary education (gymnasium), the subject Counselling and Personal Development supports the pupil's/student's passage towards a more advanced level of self-reflection, decisional autonomy and critical internalisation of values. Here, the pupil/student not only identifies values, but subjects them to analysis and comparison, developing the capacity to justify his/her options in relation to his/her own beliefs and to the social norms in which he/she is integrated. The emotional component acquires a significant role in this stage, because emotional self-regulation ensures the basis for coherent, responsible and conscious decisions (Goleman, 2018). In this sense, the subject contributes to the consolidation of personal identity, to the assumption of responsibility towards oneself and towards the community and to the formation of the capacity to operate with values in diverse, complex, problematic and not rarely ambiguous contexts. Thus, the value progress between school cycles reflects the natural evolution of the pupil's/student's psychological and emotional development.

The philosophical dimension supports in a complementary manner this axiological construction, because values do not represent simple social conventions, but symbolic forms of man's relation to meaning, to truth, to good and to beauty. Educational idealism highlights the transcendent character of values, placing them in the area of universal reference points which configure the becoming of the human being in an anticipatory manner. Realism places emphasis on their social functionality, by reference to norms, rules and structures of concrete action, while pedagogical pragmatism orients the formation of values towards utility, lived meaning and verifiable in real experience. In the perspective of axiological education, these three orientations do not exclude each other, but complement each other organically, ensuring the coherent integration of values in the pupil's/student's life, through the harmonization of universal human reference points with the requirements of contemporary social reality (Cucos, 2006). The two subjects are thus included in a formation paradigm which has the role of articulating moral values with the existential project of the pupil/student, avoiding both axiological relativism and rigid normativism.

In this vision, Personal Development becomes an introductory stage of value sensitization, and Counselling and Personal Development becomes the stage of refinement, differentiation, decantation and critical assumption of these values in relation to the identity in formation. The philosophical reference to the axis "meaning – value – identity" ensures the grounding of the two subjects in the modern logic of education oriented towards the formation of personal autonomy and responsibility. They do not propose only the transmission of declarative contents, but the cultivation of a moral conscience capable of operating with values in a reflexive, adaptive and contextual manner, in a society marked by rapid transformations, uncertainty and axiological diversity. Thus, the articulation of the psychological and philosophical dimensions transforms the two subjects into a formative device with major potential in the prevention of emotional vulnerabilities, in the consolidation of internal coherence and in the formation of a stable value identity.

Therefore, Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development are not limited to offering instruments of self-expression, but contribute to the configuration of a consistent axiological matrix which supports the student's progress from simple moral conducts to the capacity of critical interpretation, conscious and responsible selection of the existential direction. This integrative perspective supports the relevance of the two subjects in relation to contemporary education and grounds the role of the teacher-counselor as a strategic actor in the configuration of the student's value and emotional maturation.

In this integrative logic, the role of the teacher-counselor becomes essential, because he ensures the passage from the theoretical grounding of values to their transposition into effective formative practice, through authentic educational interaction, guidance, mediation and support in the process of the student's personal becoming.

2.3. The role of the teacher-counselor in promoting values

The teacher, in his capacity as educational counselor, is not only a transmitter of knowledge, but also a model of behaviour, a guide in the moral formation of students. The teacher has the mission to initiate a coherent programme of educational experiences that will lead to the personal, educational, professional and social development of students. The professional qualities of a good pedagogue must aim at: empathy, sensitivity towards students' problems; unconditional acceptance of the student; honesty, correctness in the relationship with students; authenticity, good faith, sincerity, seriousness and sobriety, but also joviality; positive valorisation of the student's resources; high capacity to observe and objectively analyse the specific particularities of students; verbal skills; capacity to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages; continuous training in order to increase the accuracy of students' evaluation; responsibility, seriousness and competence in relation to students' problems; self-imposing high professional standards and a correct line of ethical conduct (Moraru, 2013, p. 9).

In this sense, the role of the teacher-counselor exceeds the strictly didactic sphere, integrating psychological dimensions essential for accompanying the student in the process of his/her value becoming. From a psychological perspective, the teacher-counselor becomes a facilitator of emotional self-regulation processes and identity development, offering students a secure, non-critical and empathetic space for the exploration of their own experiences and values. His intervention has a predominantly preventive and formative character, distinct from the psychotherapeutic one, but coherently grounded in scientifically validated principles in the field of the helping relationship (Rogers, 2008; Goleman, 2018). At the same time, the teacher-counselor acknowledges the limits of his role and relates ethically to the moment in which referral towards specialized intervention is necessary. This delimitation clarifies educational responsibility and protects the student, maintaining professional coherence within the school.

The teacher-counselor, as primary school teacher, form teacher, school psychologist, support teacher etc., must be aware of his/her own system of values, of the fact that he/she cannot promote what he/she lacks, that he/she cannot impose his/her own conceptions and beliefs.

The creation of a secure, non-labelling, encouraging climate represents an important aspect, which depends mainly on the attitude of the teacher in the relationship with students (M.E.C., 2013, p. 11). The offering of positive feedback to each student ensures the framework for the optimisation of self-image and the development of self-confidence. The focusing of attention on the student's experience, on the cultivation of qualities and abilities, reflects the concern for the valorisation of the dignity and human quality of those who dedicate their life to shaping the human personality through education. The acceptance of the student as a valuable person in himself/herself, with availabilities waiting for the favourable context to be realised, constitutes the main reference point in the continuous action of educational counselling carried out in school.

Such a vision facilitates the development of an authentic teacher-students relationship, removes status-role barriers, creates the premises for open communication. It is essential to establish an empathetic relationship with the student, of mutual trust, of mutual respect. This ensures efficient participation and collaboration, the clear expression of ideas, the assertion of positive feelings, values and moral beliefs.

An individualized approach for each student is recommended, the design of activities which facilitate the critical analysis of personal and social values, the involvement of the educational community (teachers, parents, community representatives) in the process of value formation, the continuous development of the teacher's educational counselling competences, through professional training and reflection on his/her own educational practice.

Therapeutic experience shows that values are not consolidated only through intellectual transmission, but especially through the significant relationship lived in interaction, where acceptance, authenticity and empathy become facilitating conditions of personal becoming (Rogers, 2008). In agreement with Goleman (2018), the development of emotional competences supports the formation of responsible value identity. The integration of these principles in the school environment consolidates resilience, well-being and the autonomy of students.

Although educational counselling and psychological counselling have different domains, they converge towards the same objective: supporting the well-being of the person, in his/her emotional, cognitive and relational complexity. School success is closely linked to mental health, and emotional balance facilitates profound and autonomous learning. The integration of psychological principles in educational counselling intensifies the efficiency of value formation and supports the resilience of students, in agreement with Neacșu's (2010) perspective on identity development as the foundation of personal becoming.

CONCLUSIONS

The disciplines Personal Development and Counselling and Personal Development have a profound axiological character. Through a student-centered approach, these disciplines contribute to the formation of responsible, autonomous and balanced young people, capable of facing the challenges of the future, cultural diversity, axiological relativism and rapid social changes. The axiological dimension of these disciplines shows that school is not only the space for the accumulation of knowledge, but also the framework in which values, attitudes and life behaviours are formed. Value-based education is the key to a sustainable future, in which the person assumes his/her own choices and decisions. In the absence of an authentic axiological dimension, education risks becoming a process limited to purely theoretical considerations and reflections, with reduced impact on the student's psychosocial life.

In the convergence of the psychological and philosophical foundations of education through values, as well as through the role of the teacher-counsellor in translating them into the formative experience of students, axiological education is shaped as a central element of the contemporary school. The two analysed disciplines become privileged spaces for the development of personal identity, moral responsibility and the capacity of conscious orientation in relation to oneself, to others and to the world. In this framework, the partnership between school, family and community remains essential for the continuity and depth of value formation, contributing to the transformation of values from simple declarative contents into inner landmarks assumed and lived authentically.

In conclusion, we consider that it is necessary to strengthen to a greater extent the practical character of the two disciplines, to diversify the methodological resources, but also to involve the family and the community in order to ensure an authentic axiological education.

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ENHANCING EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Against the background of the increasing emphasis placed on socio-emotional competences, early emotional development becomes a central dimension of preschool education, shaping later social adaptation, self-regulation, and the quality of children's interactions. Considering the crucial role that play-based experiences hold within the affective formation process, the present research investigated the impact of structured play activities on emotional expression and emotional regulation in preschool children. The study was conducted within a middle preschool group (24 children, aged 4–5) over a six-week period, using a pretest–intervention–posttest design and the Screening of Emotional Competences (4/5 years).

The analysis of the results indicates an 8% increase in emotion regulation, a 9% increase in emotional expression, and a 9% increase in overall emotional competences, confirming the formulated hypotheses and the relevance of integrating play-based interventions in educational practice. The data support the idea that symbolic play, storytelling, bodily expressiveness, and guided emotional negotiation become privileged socio-emotional training contexts, in line with the directions set out in the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2019).

The conclusions highlight the need for a systematic valorisation of emotional education in kindergarten and open future perspectives for extending research to diverse institutional contexts, in order to strengthen the validity of the findings.

Keywords: *early emotional development; socio-emotional competences; emotion regulation; emotional expression; play-based activities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotional development in the first years of life represents the foundation upon which the child will later build inner balance, relational capacity, cognitive flexibility and social adaptation. In the preschool years, emotions are lived intensely, expressed spontaneously and still insufficiently organised, which is why adult support becomes essential. The kindergarten teacher is not solely a facilitator of play and learning, but also a mediator of affective experiences – a guide who supports the child in recognising what they feel, in verbalising what is being experienced internally, and in regulating behaviour in authentic social contexts.

Over the last decade, socio-emotional education has become a priority within international research, being associated with long-term positive outcomes: resilience, harmonious interpersonal relationships, decreased problematic behaviours, increased self-regulation and higher engagement in school-related activities. Play, as the natural mode of learning in early childhood education, offers the most suitable framework for this development to occur naturally, at an authentic pace, respecting each child's uniqueness.

The present study investigates how play-based activities can support the development of emotional expression and emotional regulation competences in preschool children, by transforming affective experiences from spontaneous reactions into formative learning experiences. Educational interventions centred on play, story, symbols and bodily expressiveness allow emotions to be translated into language, relationship and meaning,

facilitating the acquisition of self-regulation strategies in a natural and accessible way. Through the empirical findings obtained, the study demonstrates the value of systematically integrating emotional education into the daily kindergarten routine, showing that, in this context, play is not only a recreational activity, but becomes a privileged formative environment of early affective development.

In the current Romanian educational context, these directions are aligned with the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2019), which emphasises the role of socio-emotional development in shaping key competences from the preschool stage, especially through play, exploration and free expression. Recent curricular documents highlight the importance of supporting children in recognising and verbalising emotions, as well as the formation of affective autonomy. In this sense, the present research naturally follows national priorities regarding early emotional education, and through empirical data, argues for the relevance of systematically integrating play-based interventions in kindergarten educational practice.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During the preschool period, the expression of emotions and the capacity to regulate them acquire a decisive role in shaping the child's socio-affective balance. Affective experiences, initially raw and spontaneous, gradually refine as internal language emerges, as social situations become decodable and as the child begins to anticipate the consequences of their emotional reactions (Stifter, 2002). This development does not unfold in abstraction, but within real interactions – in play, conflict, negotiation and cooperation.

Sociocultural approaches emphasise that self-regulation is not an inherent capacity, but one that is constructed relationally, through dialogue, affective support and the gradual internalisation of social rules. Vygotsky (1978), together with later research (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Winsler et al., 2000), demonstrated that egocentric speech becomes an internal instrument of emotional and behavioural control. The child initially verbalises intentions aloud, and as this function matures, such discourse becomes internalised, enabling the regulation of impulses, reactions and expectations.

Contemporary literature on emotional competence integrates multiple dimensions: self-awareness, emotional control, self-motivation, empathy and social skills. Goleman (1995) argued as early as the 1990s that these dimensions are major determinants of later achievement, at least as relevant as cognitive intelligence. Saarni (1999) complements this perspective with the repertoire of eight fundamental emotional abilities, emphasising the role of social context and adult modelling.

From a practical standpoint, emotional regulation is not merely a “control skill”. It influences how the child cooperates, manages conflict, and remains engaged in tasks even in the presence of frustration or uncertainty. Garner and Hinton (2010) highlighted associations between self-regulation and efficiency in school activities, while more recent studies (Zhang, Yu & Jiang, 2020) support the same direction, indicating that these competences become predictive for the level of adaptation in learning contexts.

In this process, the educational climate holds a central role. An atmosphere of acceptance and coherent emotional rules within the classroom facilitates the internalisation of limits and behavioural self-regulation. Children find their affective place in a space where they are understood, supported and emotionally validated — which enables access to more nuanced regulation strategies, better adjusted to the situation.

Play offers the most fertile conditions for consolidating these acquisitions. Within symbolic scenarios, children experiment with roles, negotiate meanings, test their emotional competences and learn how to use emotions as instruments of interaction rather than obstacles. For this reason, Șchiopu (1975) regards play not as a merely recreational context, but as a constitutive framework of personality development.

Taken together, these theoretical reference points support the view that pedagogical interventions oriented towards play may have a direct impact on emotional self-regulation. From here, the aim of the present research follows naturally, in order to explore in an applied manner the extent to which play-based activities can strengthen emotional expression and emotional regulation in preschool children.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The transition from the theoretical dimension to the applied dimension requires a carefully constructed methodological approach, capable of capturing the real evolution of emotional competences within the natural kindergarten environment. In this regard, the research was designed to allow the direct observation of the effects that play-based activities exert on emotional expression and emotional regulation, within authentic educational interactions.

The objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which play-based activities can support the development of emotional expression and regulation in preschool children. The research was conducted in a middle preschool group consisting of 24 children aged between 4 and 5 years, over a period of six weeks. A pretest–

intervention–posttest design was used, appropriate for applied pedagogical research, as it allows the observation of real changes in emotional behaviours throughout the intervention period, without artificialising the educational context.

For the assessment of emotional competences, the Screening of Emotional Competences – Educators’ Version (4/5 years) was employed, an instrument consisting of 12 items organised along three dimensions relevant to preschool development: the recognition and understanding of emotions, the expression of emotions in social contexts, and emotional regulation. The instrument enables fine-grained observation of progress in the natural context, without distorting the child’s behaviour through artificial testing situations, and can be easily integrated into daily classroom routine. The choice of this instrument is grounded both in its formative value and in the analytical coherence it provides for monitoring the effects of play-based interventions across each of the three dimensions of emotional competence. Moreover, its concise structure allows the identification of variations in rhythm and level of emotional development, offering a nuanced perspective on the impact of the intervention at the level of each individual child.

The intervention programme included six play-based activities designed to gradually stimulate children’s familiarisation with the language of emotions, to support the transformation of affective experiences into contextually appropriate expressions, and to foster the development of self-regulation. The activities integrated symbolic play, storytelling, bodily representation and socio-emotional negotiation, in line with the developmental characteristics specific to the preschool years. Each of the six activities targeted a distinct emotional objective, starting from identification and recognition, progressing towards regulation and affective reconstruction. These were introduced gradually, following an intentional progression, allowing children sufficient time to transfer emotional strategies to new situations. In addition, the play-based framework enabled the teacher to directly observe how children internalise emotional rules without disrupting the natural continuity of play, which ensured that the intervention was both authentic and ecologically valid.

The pedagogical intervention consisted of six progressively structured play activities, designed to gradually exercise emotional recognition, expression and regulation: symbolic sharing activities (“The Emotion Web”), activities for assessing and differentiating affective intensity (“Emotion Thermometer”), exercises for nonverbal imitation and identification (“Mirror Emotions”), activities for affective anticipation within stories (“The Interrupted Story”), associating emotional meanings with symbolic objects (“The Box of Feelings”), and activities for guiding emotional reactions through colour-coded signals (“The Emotion Traffic Light”). The succession of these activities supported a passage from the concrete level of emotion identification to the abstract level of intentional control of affective expression, maintaining a coherent socio-emotional training structure and ensuring the gradual transfer towards natural situations in the educational context.

The research hypotheses were formulated as follows:

1. *It is assumed that play-based activities contribute to the improvement of emotional regulation in preschool children.*
2. *It is assumed that play-based activities contribute to the improvement of emotional expression in preschool children.*
3. *It is assumed that preschool children’s participation in play-based activities contributes to the development of overall emotional competences (understanding, expression and regulation of emotions).*

Data analysis was carried out by comparing the results obtained at the initial and final evaluations, monitoring the qualitative changes observable across the three dimensions of the instrument, without altering the authenticity of the educational context. The evolutions were reported in relation to the objectives of each activity, by examining the ratings provided by the teacher before and after the intervention and by observing the spontaneously manifested emotional behaviours during play: the way in which children named their emotions, their capacity to recover from frustration, their availability to request support, and their ability to wait for their turn. Interpretation was conducted on two complementary levels: the individual level (each child’s progress in relation to their own starting point) and the collective level (group tendencies), in order to capture the gradual transfer of emotional strategies practised in activities towards real social situations. This approach allowed the connection of the play-based intervention with the observed progress patterns, offering a coherent picture of the formative impact of the programme.

Ethical aspects were fully respected, by obtaining written informed consent from parents, by clearly informing them regarding the educational purpose of the intervention, and by conducting all activities in accordance with the principle of the child’s best interest and with the specific norms of the preschool environment.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Emotional Regulation

The results obtained for the dimension of emotional regulation indicate a significant improvement following the implementation of the play-based intervention programme. The total score obtained at pretesting was 366

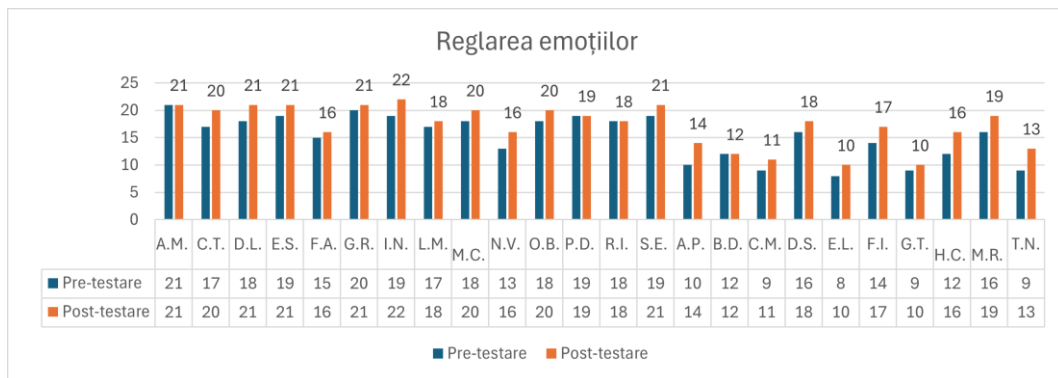
points out of a maximum of 600 (61%), while at posttesting it reached 414 points (69%), representing an 8% increase at group level.

This growth was observable in the majority of children, with individual differences ranging between +1 and +4 points per item, which suggests a consolidation of regulation strategies in situations of social interaction, frustration management and behavioural adaptation to shared group rules.

These data validate the hypothesis that structured play activities can support the development of emotional self-regulation during the preschool period, through the repeated rehearsal of symbolic scenarios and the negotiation of emotions in play-based contexts.

The results for emotional regulation show an increase in mean scores in the post-test stage compared to the pre-test stage (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Emotional regulation – pretest/posttest comparison



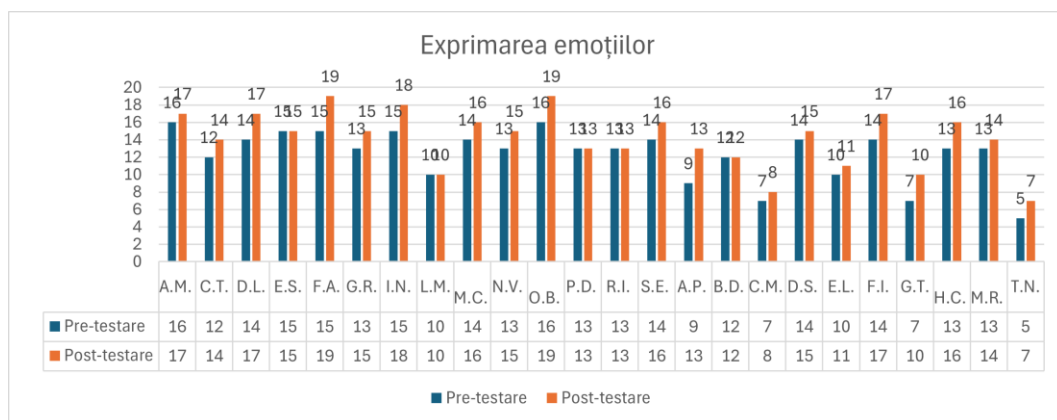
4.2. Emotional Expression

A clear evolution of group performance was observed on the dimension of emotional expression following the implementation of the intervention programme. In the pretest stage, the cumulative group score was 297 points out of a maximum of 480 (62%), while in the final evaluation the score reached 340 points (71%), indicating a 9% increase in the children’s capacity to express affective states appropriately and in a differentiated manner within real educational contexts.

Children used specific emotional vocabulary more frequently, formulated verbal behavioural alternatives in conflict situations, and transformed intense affect into more regulated expressions more rapidly, which suggests a genuine consolidation of emotional expression through structured play-based activities.

The dynamics of this progress are visible in the distribution of pretest–posttest results, presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Emotional expression – pretest/posttest comparison



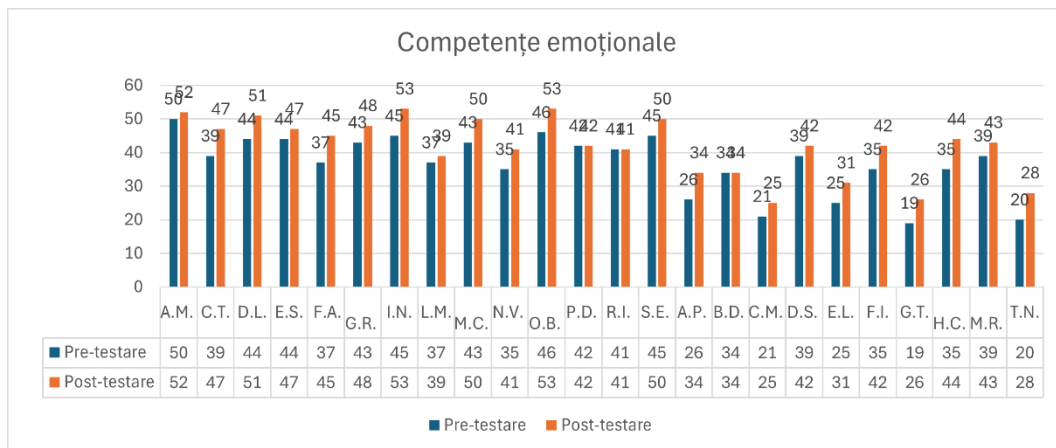
4.3. Emotional Competences

A consistent increase was observed in the global evolution of emotional competences at group level, reflected in the difference between the cumulative pretest score (884 points, representing 61% of the maximum possible score) and the posttest score (1008 points, corresponding to 70%). This 9% difference supports the positive effect of the intervention programme not only on isolated components (regulation / expression), but on the integrated emotional profile of the preschool child.

This increase indicates a simultaneous consolidation across the three evaluated dimensions, which validates the view that the development of emotional competences is a systemic process, and that play-based interventions – when designed gradually and intentionally – can generate real progress both affectively and relationally.

The ascending trend of emotional development is summarised in Figure 3, by comparing initial and final values.

Figure 3. Emotional competences – total scores pretest/posttest



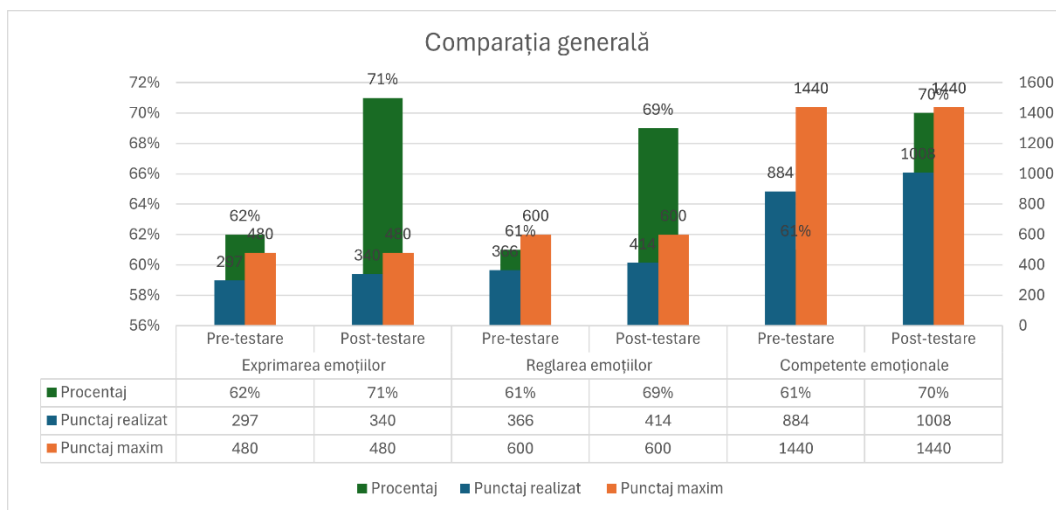
4.4. Overall comparison of post-intervention progress

The comparative analysis of the three evaluated dimensions indicates a convergent trend of growth in socio-emotional competences overall, confirming the effectiveness of the applied intervention programme. In percentage terms, the differences between pretesting and posttesting range between +8% and +9% for each of the analysed components (regulation, expression, total emotional competences), suggesting a homogeneous development of the children’s emotional profile, rather than a punctual or fragmented evolution.

This percentage convergence provides additional relevance to the dimensional interpretation of the results and supports the idea that an intervention built upon play-based mechanisms does not influence a single isolated affective skill, but fosters a coordinated maturation of the way in which children recognise, express and regulate emotions in real social situations.

The initial and final percentage distributions can be visually examined in the following figure, which provides the comparative synthesis of the results.

Figura 4. Compararea generală a procentelor pretestare / posttestare



5. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained confirm the value of systematically integrating play-based activities into preschool educational practice, as these have a positive impact on emotional expression, affective regulation and the development of overall emotional competences. The progress observed between pretesting and posttesting (+8–9%) validates the formulated hypotheses and reinforces the view that play is not merely a medium of social interaction, but a pedagogical instrument with a transformative role upon early emotional architecture, in line with current directions in the specialised literature and with the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2019).

The practical applicability is direct: thematic, recurrent play activities, with gradual structure and explicit emotional roles, can become an operational component of the daily kindergarten routine. This type of approach supports not only the reduction of impulsive behaviours, but also the improvement of interaction quality and the strengthening of affective autonomy.

The limitations of the study concern the small sample size and the implementation of the intervention within a single institutional context, aspects which require caution in the generalisation of results.

Future research directions may include extending the investigation to multi-institutional samples, integrating long-term follow-up observations (6/12 months), and correlating emotional progress with cognitive indicators and executive self-regulation.

We may therefore state that this investigation confirms that early emotional development is not simply a pedagogical objective, but a discreet architecture of human becoming—one that begins with small gestures and gradually becomes long-term structure.

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KNOWLEDGE DIPLOMACY & TALENT CORRIDORS: ROMANIA AS A REGIONAL HUB 2025–2030

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Abstract

This paper proposes a Romanian “Knowledge Diplomacy & Talent Corridors” strategy for 2025–2030 across the Black Sea–Danube–Balkans region. Rather than competing on hard power, Romania can shape outcomes through education–science–culture instruments: joint degrees and micro-credentials, dual-supervision PhDs, cross-border university alliances, and cultural platforms aligned with EU/NATO priorities. We introduce the CREDO framework—Connectivity, Reciprocity, Equivalence (of credentials), Dual-use guardrails, and Outcomes—to design scalable talent corridors that attract and circulate students, researchers, and cultural practitioners. Using theory-guided mini-cases (MD/UA accession facilitation, Danube innovation axis, cultural diplomacy nodes), we derive metrics for diplomatic impact (standard setting, network centrality, follow-on funding). The contribution is a practical playbook for Romania as a normative middle power: policy levers, partnership templates, and an education-centered signaling doctrine that strengthens resilience, integration, and soft power in a fragmenting order.

Keywords: *Education, Knowledge Diplomacy, Talent Corridor, Regional Hub.*

1. Introductory Aspects

Romania stands at a strategic crossroads in the Black Sea–Danube–Balkans region, uniquely positioned to leverage education, science, and culture as instruments of diplomacy. As an EU and NATO member sharing borders and historical ties with aspiring EU entrants like Moldova and Ukraine, Romania can deploy “knowledge diplomacy” as a form of soft power to foster regional stability and integration¹. Knowledge diplomacy refers to strengthening international relations through higher education, research, and innovation initiatives, emphasizing mutual benefit and cooperation over one-sided influence². This strategy aligns with Romania’s aim to become a regional soft-power hub by 2025–2030, using the exchange of knowledge and talent to build goodwill, encourage democratic norms, and accelerate European integration in its neighborhood.

A knowledge-centric diplomatic strategy would complement traditional statecraft by engaging universities, academies, cultural institutes, and civil society as key actors. Such multi-actor engagement is increasingly important in contemporary diplomacy, where influence is no longer wielded solely by foreign ministries. Romania’s dense networks of educational and cultural linkages in the Black Sea and Balkan region can thus serve as vectors of strategic communication and resilience, amplifying its voice as a normative middle power, a medium-sized state that punches above its weight by promoting norms and values in line with the EU/NATO liberal-democratic order. While one analysis finds that Romania, by its capabilities, could be labeled a “middle power” but has yet to fully perform as one in Europe³.

An assertive knowledge diplomacy agenda offers a pathway to fulfill that role. By investing in talent corridors, structured pathways for mobility of students, researchers, and ideas, Romania can enhance its institutional centrality in regional networks and become an indispensable hub for cooperation. This article proposes a CREDO framework (Connectivity, Reciprocity, Equivalence of credentials, Dual-use guardrails, Outcomes) to articulate Romania’s strategy and examines three theory-informed mini-case studies to illustrate how it might play out in practice. We further discuss measurable diplomatic impact indicators and practical programmatic tools (dual degrees, consortia, exchanges, etc.) to operationalize this vision.

¹ Skelton, E. *Knowledge diplomacy*, The British Council, August 2019

² Knight, J. *Knowledge Diplomacy vs. Soft Power*, NAFSA IE Magazine, October 2022

³ Angheliescu, A.M., *Is Romania a Middle Power? A Neoclassical Realist Interpretation of Post-communist Romania's Foreign Policy*. *Studia Politica*. XXI. 487-514, 2022

2. Knowledge Diplomacy as Soft-Power Strategy

Knowledge diplomacy is an emerging concept distinguishing itself from traditional cultural diplomacy or simple academic exchange by its explicit diplomatic intent. Rather than viewing international education as merely a means of attracting foreign talent or projecting cultural influence (as in classic soft power), knowledge diplomacy centers on mutuality and co-creation.

It is built on the idea that collaborative research, educational partnerships, and knowledge sharing can address global and regional challenges while simultaneously improving relations between states

This approach aligns well with Romania's interest in stabilizing and integrating its neighborhood. Whereas soft power relies on attraction and sometimes pursues national advantage, knowledge diplomacy "is based on co-creating... for mutual (but often differing) benefit"⁴ and treats partner countries as equals working toward common goals. Education thus becomes not just a projection of influence but a two-way street strengthening all parties.

Romania's universities and research institutes can be pivotal in this diplomatic turn. British Council analysts note that higher education institutions often have better links with foreign counterparts than governments do, and their autonomy and academic credibility allow them to operate beyond the confines of politics. . For example, the Pan African University and other international networks show how academic hubs can foster regional cooperation and "subtly shift relationships between countries"⁵.

In the Romanian context, leveraging university networks and scientific collaborations could serve as a source of soft power that also actively creates diplomatic goodwill. Indeed, Romania's ability to attract and educate thousands of students from neighboring Moldova, hosting four out of five Moldovan students studying in the EU⁶ has already built significant goodwill and people-to-people bonds. These ties, formed through scholarships, alumni networks, and academic cooperation, translate into long-term influence and trust. Crucially, knowledge diplomacy emphasizes reciprocity: benefits need not be identical for each side, but each partner should gain tangible value

This principle helps Romania avoid a patronizing stance; instead, partnerships with Moldova, Ukraine, or Balkan states should be framed as jointly solving problems (such as brain drain, innovation gaps, or skills shortages) in a way that advances all countries involved.

To structure Romania's strategy, we introduce the CREDO framework – a set of five pillars that ground effective knowledge diplomacy initiatives. These are Connectivity, Reciprocity, Equivalence (of credentials), Dual-use guardrails, and Outcomes. CREDO, meaning "I believe" in Latin, reflects Romania's belief in the power of knowledge ties to enhance its regional leadership. Each element is discussed below.

3. The CREDO Framework: Pillars of Romania's Knowledge Diplomacy

Connectivity: Building networks and linkages for exchange. At the heart of knowledge diplomacy is connecting people and institutions across borders. Romania must strengthen institutional connectivity – expanding consortia of universities, joint research centers, and innovation clusters in the Black Sea–Danube–Balkans region. Enhanced connectivity involves physical mobility (student and faculty exchanges, joint campus programs) and digital connectivity (virtual exchanges, collaborative online learning communities). Such networks create talent corridors – sustained pathways through which students, scholars, and professionals circulate and share ideas. The benefits of dense connectivity are well-documented: countries that internationalize their higher education more tend to see greater research collaboration and even higher economic growth. For Romania, a flagship connectivity initiative is the newly established DANUBIUS-RI research infrastructure, a pan-European network for environmental science. Headquartered in Romania's Danube Delta, DANUBIUS-ERIC brings together institutions from seven countries (including Moldova, Italy, and even the UK), making it the first European research consortium based in Romania⁷. Its coordination hub in Murighiol will link laboratories across Europe, exemplifying how Romania can serve as a coordination center for regional science collaboration

Likewise, Romania's Erasmus+ agency recently convened the DanubE+ Cooperation conference (June 2025) for rectors from six Danube region countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine) to

⁴ Skelton, E., *ibidem*

⁵ *Ibidem*

⁶ ***, *Romania leads European Union in the number of Moldovan students*, EU NEIGHBOURSEAST Online publication, February 2023

⁷ Trtíková, I., *The Czech Republic has become one of the founding countries of the newly established European research consortium DANUBIUS-ERIC*, Large Research Infrastructures, August 2025

forge new academic partnerships⁸. By actively fostering such multi-country networks, Romania increases its institutional centrality – becoming the connective node through which regional partners engage. Over time, institutional centrality in research and education networks translates into influence, as seen in other contexts where universities with high co-authorship centrality wield great field-specific clout⁹.

Reciprocity: Ensuring mutual benefit and two-way exchange. Romania's knowledge diplomacy must be founded on genuine reciprocity to gain trust in the region. This means moving beyond one-way "brain drain" flows or donor-recipient paradigms and structuring initiatives so that all sides benefit, albeit in different ways.

Reciprocity can be achieved by designing exchange programs where Romanian students and researchers also spend time in neighboring countries, not only the reverse. For instance, joint degree programs could require participants to study in both Romania and the partner country, sharing the educational experience. Co-tutelle doctoral arrangements (dual supervision of PhDs by Romanian and foreign professors) could enrich Romanian academia with new perspectives while building capacity in the partner institution. As Knight observes, in knowledge diplomacy "mutuality of benefits does not mean all actors benefit equally but that everyone benefits in some way"¹⁰.

Embracing this ethos, Romania has treated Moldovan students as de facto domestic students in many cases, offering them scholarships, housing and tuition support as fellow Romanian-speakers, while those students later contribute back by strengthening cross-border business and civic ties. A concrete example is Romania's long-running scholarship program for Moldovan youth, which by 2023 resulted in roughly 14,000+ Moldovan students studying at Romanian universities (approximately 80% of all Moldovans studying in the EU)¹¹.

These students often remain attached to Romania, creating an alumni network that bolsters inter-state relations. At the same time, they fill skill gaps in the Romanian economy or facilitate cross-border investments, a reciprocity of human capital. Romania's support for Ukraine's academic community after 2022 similarly underscored mutual aid: Romanian universities opened hundreds of spots for Ukrainian students and researchers, providing free Romanian language courses, accommodation, and even employment opportunities for displaced academics¹².

This humanitarian influx also enriched Romanian campuses with talented individuals and fostered goodwill that Romania can draw upon in future cooperation. By emphasizing fairness, respect, and co-creation in every partnership, whether establishing a joint research center or twinning universities, Romania will strengthen its image as a benevolent collaborator rather than a self-interested actor. Reciprocity also implies commitment to standardization and quality, as Romanian institutions must uphold high standards so that partnerships are truly valuable to others (e.g. issuing degrees and research output that partners recognize and appreciate).

Equivalence of Credentials: Bridging the gaps in recognition of degrees and skills. For a genuine regional knowledge space, academic and professional credentials must be portable and comparable across borders. Romania can champion frameworks of equivalence, ensuring that a diploma from Chişinău or Belgrade is understood and valued in Bucharest, and vice versa. This principle draws on the European Union's Bologna Process of harmonizing degree structures and the various recognition conventions. Indeed, joint and dual-degree programs – which award graduates degrees from multiple institutions, have been a key tool in Europe to "promote convergence of higher education systems as well as to foster... international cooperation"¹³

By expanding such programs, Romania helps align curricula and trust in qualifications between itself and partners. Moreover, Romania should actively utilize mechanisms like the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the new UNESCO Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (which entered into force in 2023) to simplify credential recognition¹⁴. These treaties promote fair and transparent procedures so that foreign qualifications can be recognized unless substantial differences are proven. Romania's National Recognition Centre (CNRED) is already a partner in the Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport

⁸ ***, *International Conference on Cooperation in Higher Education: "Danube+ Cooperation"* (25–27.06.2025, Bucharest, Romania), National Office Erasmus+ UA, June 2025

⁹ Wang, S., Yu, L., *Visual analysis of research hot topics and trends of clinical decision support system based on CiteSpace*, Langenbeck's Archives of Surgery, September 2025

¹⁰ Knight, J. (2020). *Knowledge Diplomacy: What Are the Key Characteristics?* International Higher Education.

¹¹ ***, *Romania leads European Union in the number of Moldovan students*, EU NEIGHBOURSEAST Online publication, February 2023

¹² ***, *Office for supporting the students, professors and researchers from the Ukrainian Universities*, website, accessed at 04.10.2025

¹³ Tobenkin, D., *Web Extra! The European Model for Joint and Dual Degrees*, NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008

¹⁴ ***, *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*, UNESCO, 25 November 2019

for Refugees (EQPR) initiative, which assesses refugees' qualifications even when documentation is missing¹⁵. This tool was highlighted in 2022 as facilitating Ukrainian refugees' integration into European universities and job markets. Such efforts not only serve a humanitarian purpose but also lay the groundwork for integrated regional labor markets and academic communities. Going forward, Romania could propose a "Black Sea Academic Mobility Agreement" a multilateral pact among countries in the region to expedite mutual recognition of credits, degrees, and professional certifications, potentially using EU frameworks as a reference. Equivalence of credentials, in practice, creates a credential bridge: for example, a Moldovan engineer retrained in Romania can have her license recognized in the EU, or a Romanian medical degree holder can easily serve in Ukraine's reconstruction. By smoothing these pathways, Romania helps its neighbors meet EU standards (supporting their EU accession goals) while also increasing Romanian-trained professionals' regional impact. Equivalence initiatives will be measured by outcomes like joint diploma supplements, fast-track recognition procedures, and the reduction of "brain waste" (skills going unused due to bureaucratic obstacles).

Dual-Use Guardrails: Safeguarding collaboration from security risks. In expanding knowledge exchange, Romania and its partners must remain vigilant about the dual-use dilemma, knowledge and technology that can be used for both benevolent and malevolent purposes. Academic cooperation should advance civilian and democratic development, and be shielded from exploitation by authoritarian actors or military programs contrary to NATO/EU interests. As a frontline NATO state, Romania is acutely aware of hybrid threats and malign influence in the region. Thus, a Romanian knowledge diplomacy strategy must include guardrails to prevent sensitive research or critical technologies from leaking to hostile powers, and to ensure transparency and ethics in collaboration. This doesn't mean erecting barriers to exchange, but rather implementing smart risk mitigation. Experts argue that in ambiguous dual-use domains, we need "guardrails rather than bans", for example, secure research environments and vetted partnerships instead of outright isolation¹⁶. Romania can institute policies in its international projects such as: screening of research proposals for sensitive content, cyber-security training for joint labs, and agreements on IP and data sharing that protect critical information. NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) programme provides a model, funding only civil security-related research among member and partner states with full transparency¹⁷. In Romania's context, projects under a knowledge diplomacy umbrella might focus on areas like public health, energy security, climate resilience, and cyber defense – all dual-use relevant, but approached with agreements that results will be open and not appropriated for hostile ends. For instance, a cross-border cyber incubator with Moldova could include NATO-standard protocols to ensure tools developed aren't misused. The principle of dual-use guardrails extends to educational exchanges: monitoring that foreign students in sensitive fields (e.g. nuclear engineering, AI) come from partner countries with whom Romania shares trust, or have appropriate clearances. The need for such guardrails is underscored by recent global experiences, collaborations with certain countries have led to concerns of intellectual property diversion and military application of research. By proactively setting rules (for example, Romania could develop a Code of Conduct for Responsible Research Collaboration to be signed in any bilateral science MOU), Romania will reassure its Western allies that its regional openness does not create security loopholes. It also protects the integrity of its academic system from espionage or undue influence. In essence, Romania must balance openness with sovereignty: keeping collaboration flows wide in areas of common good, while erecting "firm walls around areas that demand insulation"¹⁸ a stance that will ultimately bolster regional resilience against hybrid threats.

Outcomes: Focusing on impact and accountability. Finally, Romania's knowledge diplomacy strategy must be outcome-oriented, with clear goals and metrics to evaluate success. Diplomatic initiatives often falter when they remain at the level of meetings and MoUs without tangible change; to avoid this, CREDO calls for defining measurable diplomatic impact indicators from the outset. We propose four key indicators to gauge Romania's progress as a knowledge diplomacy hub: (1) Policy adoption, (2) Standardization influence, (3) Network centrality, and (4) Follow-on funding.

- (1) **Policy adoption:** This refers to instances where Romanian-supported initiatives lead partner governments or institutions to adopt new policies, frameworks, or reforms aligned with European standards or best practices. For example, if Moldova and Ukraine, through joint working groups with Romanian experts, adopt Romanian-influenced legislation on university quality assurance or research ethics, that counts as a diplomatic win. Already, Romania's advocacy is evident, its president has pushed for accelerated EU accession negotiations for Moldova and Ukraine, sharing

¹⁵ ***, *European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) supports Ukrainian refugees' access to job market in Europe*, Council of Europe, 20 May 2022

¹⁶ Simon, D.; Wagner, C.S., *U.S.–China Scientific Collaboration at a Crossroads: Navigating Strategic Engagement in the Era of Scientific Nationalism*, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, 4 November 2025

¹⁷ NATO, *Science for Peace and Security Programme*, 17 April 2023

¹⁸ Simon, D.; Wagner, C.S., *ibidem*

Romania's pre-accession experience to guide reforms¹⁹ We can measure policy adoption by tracking reforms in neighboring states in areas like education governance, credential recognition, or innovation policy that cite Romanian models or involvement. Each such uptake signals Romania's normative influence.

- (2) **Standardization influence:** Beyond formal policy, this indicator measures Romania's role in shaping regional standards and norms, for instance, the extent to which Romanian institutions lead the development of common curricula, joint accreditation standards, or regional qualifications frameworks. If a Danube-based university alliance agrees on standard credit transfer mechanisms under Romania's guidance, or if Romanian experts lead an initiative to standardize Black Sea marine research methods (via DANUBIUS-RI) adopted by multiple countries, it reflects normative power. Such influence can be captured by citations of Romanian-led guidelines in international documents, or the number of regional projects where Romanian institutions are the coordinators setting the quality benchmarks²⁰ Romania's involvement in drafting EU's education and research programs for the region (like the Danube Strategy Priority Areas on knowledge society) would also demonstrate standard-setting capacity.
- (3) **Institutional centrality in networks:** This is a quantitative network analysis measure – essentially how central Romanian entities are in various cooperation networks (educational, scientific, cultural). We can gauge this by the number of international consortia coordinated by Romanian universities, the frequency with which Romanian institutions are hubs connecting otherwise distant partners, or network metrics like betweenness centrality in co-publication or student mobility networks. For example, if University of Bucharest emerges as a top-five node in co-authorship network analysis in Southeastern Europe, or if the Romanian Cultural Institute leads the most cross-national projects in the Balkans Cultural Network, these point to increased centrality. A higher centrality means other countries depend on Romania as a connector, amplifying its soft power. This indicator can be tracked via project databases (Erasmus+ partnership links, Horizon Europe consortium data) and regional initiatives, the goal being to see Romania's centrality score rise over time. Notably, network power can substitute for material power: even a mid-sized country can be influential if it sits at the crossroads of many relationships²¹
- (4) **Volume of follow-on funding:** Finally, a concrete outcome of effective knowledge diplomacy is attracting increased funding from multilateral sources (EU, UNESCO, etc.) for regional initiatives centered in Romania. If Romania becomes known as a hub for successful projects, it should see a growing share of EU programs (like Horizon Europe WIDERA or Erasmus+ Capacity Building) being awarded to consortia led by Romanian entities. The EU's Widening participation scheme already encourages channeling funds to Eastern members; Romania can capitalize on this by demonstrating strong networks and readiness. We can measure this by the total € value of grants for regional education/research projects coordinated by Romania, and the number of UNESCO or Council of Europe sponsored initiatives hosted in Bucharest or Cluj. An uptick in these numbers by 2030 would indicate that donors see Romania as a credible regional leader capable of managing impactful projects. One example is the EDUREGION project under the Danube Transnational Programme, aimed at improving higher education governance in the region, in which Romania plays a key role, securing and successfully executing more such grants will both signify and reinforce Romania's hub status.

At the threshold of 2030, Romania stands at a crossroads of opportunity and responsibility. Embracing its role as a normative middle power anchored in European values, it has set a course to transform the Black Sea–Danube–Balkans region through knowledge diplomacy and talent corridors. Under the CREDO framework, emphasizing connectivity, reciprocity, equivalence of credentials, dual-use guardrails, and outcomes – Romania's soft power strategy is both visionary and pragmatic. It is visionary in that it seeks to strengthen resilience, regional integration, and democratic values by knitting together a community of scholars, innovators, and future leaders. It is pragmatic in demanding measurable outcomes: from mutual recognition of diplomas and joint research centers, to tangible increases in academic exchanges and innovation partnerships, ensuring this initiative does not devolve into symbolic policy but catalyzes real impact.

¹⁹ Diaconescu, A.M., *Exclusive: Romania's President Dan pushes for Moldova and Ukraine's EU bid, challenging Hungary*, Euronews, 2 October 2025

²⁰ EU Commission, *Widening participation and spreading excellence*, Research and Innovation website accessed 3 November 2025

²¹ Wilding, P., *The Diplomacy League: How Political Globalisation Measures a Nation's Smart Power*, League of Nations publication, 5 August 2025

Crucially, Romania's own post-Cold War journey, from transition to EU accession, lends it credibility to guide its neighbors along the path of reform and openness. By championing liberal-democratic norms and sharing its educational resources, Romania can bolster societal resilience against hybrid threats such as disinformation, while fostering a common sense of purpose with its neighbors. The long-term diplomatic and developmental returns of this education- and research-centered cooperation promise to be profound: a more stable, prosperous region aligned with European standards and inoculated against authoritarian drift. Yet there is a palpable sense of urgency – a risk of missed opportunity if Romania fails to seize the moment. In an era of intensifying soft power competition in Eastern Europe, hesitation could see less benevolent influences fill the void. The coming years thus form a narrow window for Romania to solidify its leadership as a regional hub. By decisively implementing the CREDO agenda now, with ambition tempered by accountability, Romania can ensure that its knowledge diplomacy is not just aspirational rhetoric but a transformative force securing the region's European future.

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THE WHITE PAPER FOR EUROPEAN DEFENCE AND THE REARM EUROPE – READINESS 2030 RE-ARMAMENT PLAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIA

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Abstract

The White Paper for European Defence and the “ReArm Europe – Readiness 2030” re-armament plan represent two key instruments designed to reinforce the European Union’s security and defence posture in an increasingly volatile strategic environment. While the Strategic Compass provides the overarching vision for EU security and defence, the White Paper translates this vision into capability development priorities, whereas ReArm Europe works on the operational level through industrial, financial and technological measures aimed at strengthening defence readiness by 2030.

For Romania, positioned on the EU and NATO Eastern Flank, these initiatives carry significant implications. Firstly, they offer opportunities to enhance national defence capabilities by supporting investment in critical systems and encouraging cross-border cooperation in procurement, innovation and joint development. Secondly, ReArm Europe provides a framework to stimulate the Romanian defence industry by integrating it into European supply chains and reducing dependency on external actors. Thirdly, alignment with these instruments strengthens interoperability with NATO forces, reinforces deterrence against regional threats and elevates Romania’s strategic profile within the EU.

Ultimately, an effective implementation will depend on the coherence of national planning, financial commitment and industrial modernization. For Romania, active engagement in these initiatives is not only beneficial, but necessary to consolidate its defence posture and contribute to European strategic resilience.

I. WHY IS THE WHITE DEFENCE PAPER NECESSARY?

I.1. The main security challenges mentioned by the White Paper

The White Defence Paper reveals the main security challenges that the EU states are confronting with. It was first published on 19th of March, 2025. Within the introduction of the document, it is stated that “a new international order will be created in the second half of this decade”¹. The security threats posed by the non-EU actors have strongly impacted the European political system, also having a negative approach on economic growth “as people fear the consequences of a break of the international order due to the behaviour of hostile actors.”². Hence, Europe must be prepared to face this kind of challenge and, nevertheless, to become part of this order and not just merely a witness to changes around the world.

The White Paper identifies Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China as states that threaten Europe’s security, although in the latter case the importance of commercial bonding between the People’s Republic of China and most of the European states is also emphasized. Thus, the Russian Federation will continue to scale up its war economy, being firmly supported by its close allies, such as Belarus, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Iran. Moreover, the Russian Federation has been “massively expanding its military industrial production capacity with an estimated spending in 2024 of 40% of the Russian federal budget and up to 9% of its GDP (up from 6% in 2023) on defence. In 2025, Russian Federation is expected to surpass Member States’ defence spending in purchasing power parity terms.”³. Subsequently, the Russian Federation has made it clear that, in their perception, the war with the West is present and ongoing. In the foreseeable future, the Russian Federation will continue to pose a significant threat to Europe’s security, especially in what concerns its nuclear posture and the positioning of nuclear weapons in Belarus. According to the White Paper, provided the Russian Federation is permitted to attain its objectives in Ukraine, no one should be surprised if its territorial ambition extends beyond. Why is this happening? Because it is an authoritarian regime, with historic aspirations, consistently fuelling

¹ European Commission, *JOINT WHITE PAPER for European Defence Readiness 2030*, page 1, at https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/30b50d2c-49aa-4250-9ca6-27a0347cf009_en?filename=White%20Paper.pdf, accessed on 5th of November, 2025.

² *Ibid.*, page 3.

³ *Ibid.*, page 4.

instability and tensions in its geographical proximity, which includes EU's neighbourhood (whether it is in the Western Balkans, Georgia, Moldova or Armenia).

In the meantime, the People's Republic of China is a key trading partner for the EU, hastily expanding its own capabilities, starting from the military ones, including nuclear, and going to space and cyber capabilities. In this context, it is majorly increasing its defence spending, all covered by a lack of transparency. Currently, it has "the second highest military spending in the world, surpassing all other East Asian countries combined"⁴.

In terms of EU's defence expenditure, since 2021 it has increased by appx. 31%, reaching 1.9% of the EU's combined GDP (326 billion EUR) in 2024, more precisely – 102 billion EUR. This amount is far lower than the total US defence spending or Russian Federation's or the People's Republic of China's, for that matter. Thus, the process of building a strong European defence will also require "massive and sustained investment, both public and private."⁵

The White Paper outlines various measures, which are essential for Europe's security, for addressing critical capability gaps and for building a strong defence industrial base. It proposes ways in which Member States could make substantial investments in defence, by both acquiring defence systems and enhancing the long-term readiness of the European defence industry. Therefore, Europe ought to invest on the continent's security and defence levels and continue to alleviate major threats translated in conflicts on its territory or in its proximity. In this regard, the White Paper highlights several main courses of action⁶:

- * *Addressing capability gaps, with a focus on the critical capabilities identified by Member States.*
- * *Supporting the European defence industry by aggregating demand and increasing collaborative public procurement.*
- * *Supporting Ukraine through enhanced military assistance and deeper integration between European and Ukrainian defence industries.*
- * *Deepening the EU-level defence market, including through regulatory simplification.*
- * *Accelerating defence transformation through disruptive innovation, such as AI and quantum technology.*
- * *Increasing Europe's readiness for worst-case scenarios by improving military mobility, establishing stockpiles and strengthening external borders—particularly the land border with Russian Federation and Belarus.*
- * *Strengthening partnerships with like-minded countries around the world.*

I.2. The role of EU's organisms in defence and Europe readiness

The White Paper also talks about the global technological race, which makes it even more necessary for EU's doctrine and planning process. In a world full of geopolitical interests and political turnarounds, the never-ending hybrid threats, such as cyber-attacks, electronic interference in global navigation and satellite systems, sabotage activities, manipulation and disinformation campaigns, political and industrial espionage become priorities when talking about building a safer environment. The question to be is „How will Member States be able to manage all the threats, risks and vulnerabilities and what will the measures, solutions, strategies look like?” “Cooperation, governance, resilience” are the top buzz-words all around the world, but will they suffice? These are questions that will need to be answered sooner or later by all of the EU's states and EU's officials and governing structures, as conflicts rise more frequently than not. The terms *cooperation*, *governance* and *resilience* are necessary, but not sufficient on their own. Success will depend on sustained defence investment, deeper integration in procurement and production chains, hybrid defence and cybersecurity architectures, rapid and common threat assessments, faster decision-making that is less intergovernmentally constrained and stronger EU - NATO complementarity.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ SOARE, Andreea, *White Paper on Defence: It is time for Europe to arm itself. The United States believes it is too engaged in European security and is reducing its role as Europe's security guarantor (Carta Albă a Apărării: Este momentul ca Europa să se înarmeze. SUA cred că sunt prea angajate în securitatea europeană și reduc rolul de garant al securității Europei)*, in Monitor of Defense and Security (Monitorul Apărării și Securității), 20th of March, 2025, at <https://monitorulapararii.ro/carta-alba-a-apararii-este-momentul-ca-europa-sa-se-inarmeze-sua-cred-ca-sunt-prea-angajate-in-securitatea-europeana-si-reduc-rolul-de-garant-al-1-57964>, accessed on 05.11.2025.

⁶ European Commission, Romanian Representation (Comisia Europeană, Reprezentanța în România), *Comisia prezintă Cartea albă pentru apărarea europeană și Planul de reînarmare a Europei „ReArm Europe – Readiness 2030”*, at https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/comisia-prezinta-carta-alba-pentru-apararea-europeana-si-planul-de-reinarmare-europei-rearm-europe-2025-03-19_ro, accessed on 06th of November, 2025.

The EU's four decisional institutions, as the European Parliament, the European Council, the EU's Council and the European Commission⁷ are some of the European main institutions that could manage and apply a three-pronged fork as strategic guidance, decision-making mechanisms and resource allocation. While concepts such as cooperation, governance and resilience have become recurring policy imperatives, their effectiveness will depend on the depth of implementation, the degree of Member State convergence and the readiness of political drive and resources, all of which remain rather uneven across the EU.

The European Council may very well play an important role in defining collective threat perceptions, steering agreement on investment priorities (e.g., defence capability gaps, industrial consolidation) and also strengthening alignment with NATO. The European Parliament acts through oversight, budgetary authority and political messaging. It can also push for coherent governance frameworks, demand accountability for defence expenditure, boost deeper cooperation with NATO and trusted partners / allies. The European Parliament's influence remains indirect, but growing fast, especially in budgetary matters. The Council and the European Parliament negotiators reached a provisional agreement on measures to incentivise defence-related investments in the current EU budget to implement the so-called ReArm Europe plan, an EU initiative to increase defence spending and strengthen the EU's military capabilities.⁸ The agreement includes a milestone decision in implementing the ReArm Europe plan and in the EU's progress towards increasing its defence readiness by 2030, while also associating Ukraine to the European Defence Fund, thus emphasizing the EU's enduring commitment to Ukraine's security, resilience and gradual integration into the European defence industrial base.⁹ In addition to this, the co-legislators decided to extend EU financial support within *Horizon Europe* to defence-related companies, while largely upholding the eligibility rules already present in EU instruments such as SAFE (*Security Action for Europe Instrument*) and EDIP (*European Defence Programme*).

The European Commission is also able to develop industrial consolidation instruments (ReArm Europe; EDIP), strengthen dual-use innovation ecosystems and last, but not least, enhance cybersecurity. Its biggest challenge will be transforming fragmented national markets into a genuinely integrated defence industrial base. The Council of the EU is able to spread on policy through legislative and coordination functions. Its capacity to respond will depend on integrating national defence planning processes, refining solidarity techniques in crisis management and also advancing military mobility, procurement synergies and infrastructure protection.

Other than that, the EU has established three agencies that perform technical, scientific and management tasks, with the mission of assisting the EU Member States in implementing the Common Foreign and Security Policy. These are:

- * The European Defence Agency (EDA) – involved in military cooperation among EU Member States, the development of defence capabilities and the promotion of defence-related research and technology;

- * The European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) – provides analyses on issues related to foreign, security and defence policy, contributing to debates on security strategy in Europe and globally;

- * The European Union Satellite Centre (SatCen) – supplies geospatial intelligence products through the analysis of data from Earth-observation satellites, issuing early-warning alerts to decision-makers on potential crises, to support diplomatic, economic and humanitarian action.

Conflicts are occurring more frequently and with hybrid dimensions that blur the lines between peace and war. Therefore, all the EU's organisms become of high importance when dealing with solving problematic incidents around Europe's territory, when finding mechanisms for retaliation (e.g., economic sanctions etc.) or when fighting with lack of cohesion among Member States. This requires the EU to move beyond rhetorical alignment into structural transformation. Sooner rather than later, the EU must decide whether it aims to become a strategic actor or to remain a strategic arena in which others act.

The White Paper is of so much importance due to the fact that it had identified the defence and security needs of EU Member States in order to ensure effective deterrence against a possible conflict, as follows^{10 11}:

* *air and missile defence: an integrated, multi-layered air and missile defence system that protects against the full spectrum of aerial threats (cruise missiles, ballistic and hypersonic missiles, aircraft and UAS);*

⁷ European Union, *Types of institutions and bodies*, at https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/types-institutions-and-bodies_en, accessed on 5th of November, 2025.

⁸ European Council, *EU investments in defence: Council and Parliament agree to support faster, more flexible and coordinated investments in European defence*, - updated press release on 07th of November, 2025, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/11/05/eu-investments-in-defence-council-and-parliament-agree-to-support-faster-more-flexible-and-coordinated-investments-in-european-defence/>, accessed on 07th of November, 2025.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ SOARE, Andreea, op. cit.

¹¹ European Commission, JOINT WHITE PAPER for European Defence Readiness 2030, pages 6-7, loc.cit.

- * *artillery systems: advanced combat systems, including modern artillery systems and long-range missiles, designed to conduct precise, long-distance strikes against land targets (precision strike);*
 - * *ammunition and missiles: building on the European External Action Service initiative “Ammunition Plan 2.0,” a strategic stockpile of ammunition, missiles and components, together with a sufficient level of industrial defence production capacity to ensure timely replenishment;*
 - * *drones and counter-drone systems: unmanned systems, including aerial, ground, surface and underwater vehicles that can be remotely controlled or operate autonomously using advanced software and sensors, enhancing the capabilities these technologies provide (e.g., situational awareness, surveillance etc.);*
 - * *military mobility: an EU-wide network of land corridors, airports, seaports and support elements and services that facilitate the rapid and seamless transport of troops and military equipment within the EU and to partner countries;*
 - * *AI, quantum, cyber & electronic warfare: defence applications using military AI and quantum computing; advanced EU-level electronic systems designed to protect and ensure unhindered use of the electromagnetic spectrum for land, air, space and naval forces and operations; suppress, disrupt and deny an adversary’s use of the electromagnetic spectrum; protect freedom of action in cyberspace and ensure unhindered access to cyber capabilities. Both defensive and offensive cyber capabilities are needed to ensure protection and freedom of manoeuvre in cyberspace;*
 - * *strategic enablers and protection of critical infrastructure: including, but not limited to, strategic airlift and air-to-air refuelling aircraft, intelligence and surveillance, maritime domain awareness, the use and protection of space and other secure communication assets and military fuel infrastructure.*
- The White Defence Paper states that by creating the required standards to frontload investment in defence sector, providing necessary predictability to industry and reducing red-tape, the EU will sustain Member States to attain full readiness by 2030.¹² By setting out a plan to rearm and build up Europe’s defence in order to tackle the imminent or medium-term threats, the White Paper highlights several strategies seen as priorities¹³:
- * *Member States are expected to demand the activation of the National Escape Clause, by the end of April.*
 - * *The Council is expected to assume the proposed draft Regulation on Security and Action for Europe (SAFE) as a matter of urgency.*
 - * *The co-legislators are expected to adopt the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) before summer, including its Ukraine Support Instrument (USI).*
 - * *The co-legislators are also invited to consider with priority the changes to the European Regional Development Fund that will be proposed by the end of March 2025. Following the midterm review of cohesion policies, national, regional and local authorities, they will be able to voluntarily allocate funds within their current programmes towards emerging priorities including strengthening defence and security capabilities.*
 - * *Member States are invited to swiftly step up collaborative defence procurement in line with the target of at least 40% proposed by the European Defence Industry Strategy (EDIS), including under the aegis of the SAFE instrument.*
 - * *Member States are expected to swiftly agree on an ambitious new military support initiative for Ukraine, including artillery ammunition, air defence and “train and equip”.*
 - * *The Commission will promote the integration of Ukrainian defence industry into the Single Market, support the extension of military mobility corridors into Ukraine and explore Ukraine’s access to EU space-based governmental services.*
 - * *The Commission calls on the Board of Governors of the European Investment Bank to urgently step up support to the European defence industry, notably by further narrowing the list of excluded activities and increasing the volume of available funding.*
 - * *The Commission will immediately launch a Strategic Dialogue with the defence industry, also calling on the expertise of the EDA or the EU Military Staff as appropriate.*
 - * *The Commission will present, by June 2025, a Defence Omnibus Simplification proposal.*
 - * *The EU will present a European Armament Technological Roadmap on investment into dual-use advanced technological capabilities in 2025.*
 - * *The Commission and the HR will adopt, by end of 2025, a Joint communication on Military Mobility, accompanied by the necessary legislative proposals.*

The White Defence Paper concludes by stating that a significant increase in defence spending would generate broad economic benefits, boosting competitiveness, employment and technological progress across multiple industries, starting from aeronautics and shipbuilding and going to steel, space, transport and artificial intelligence. If effectively leveraged, this momentum could considerably strengthen Europe’s resilience amid an increasingly threat-rich global environment.

¹² Ibid., page 5.

¹³ Ibid., page 21.

II. ROMANIA'S ROLE WITHIN EU'S AGENDA

In the field of security, the EU seeks to become a more capable and autonomous actor, particularly by strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Initiatives such as PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), BUS (Brussels-based Union Security) and the European Defence Fund are intended to boost defence cooperation among Member States and reduce fragmentation within the European defence market.¹⁴ Strategic autonomy does not imply a separation from NATO, but rather the strengthening of Europe's ability to act independently in its proximity or in support of the transatlantic Alliance.

For Romania, active participation in these structures represents both an opportunity to modernize its armed forces and national defence industry, as well as a political instrument for influencing decision-making processes concerning European security policies. As an active participant in PESCO projects, Romania takes part in initiatives aimed at military mobility, the development of cyber defence and military personnel training. At the same time, Romania benefits from financial support through the European Defence Fund for the modernization of its defence industry and the strengthening of its own capabilities.¹⁵

In terms of Romania's particular role within the White Defence Paper, everyone knows the fact that geography doesn't change. Its strategic location (on the Eastern flank), adjacent to the Black Sea, represents an essential hub for projecting defence and deterrence, through air/missile defence, mobility corridors and Black Sea security. Another important aspect regards aligning national capability planning with EU-wide priorities, which is actually an opportunity for a direct investment into modernisation of own armed forces, especially in the context of EU's capabilities' shortfalls.

Moreover, with the EU desire for a defence industrial base that is less fragmented and more scale-efficient, Romania's defence area possesses the opportunity to access EU financial instruments (e.g., SAFE, EDF) and join collaborative procurement efforts for military equipment. Thus, Romania could accelerate a multi-annual planning, increase equipment acquisition and participate in pan-European funding mechanisms.

One significant role that Romania might undertake is becoming a bridge between the Black Sea region and EU institutions. This would definitely strengthen Romania's strategic presence within the EU, enhancing its credibility on the decision-making / negotiation table. By having a dual presence, within the EU and NATO, Romania is able to synchronize its defence capabilities to both frameworks, which would well serve both national and European security objectives.

Nevertheless, Romania should also prioritise growing its resilience, for instance through logistical hubs, strategic stockpiles, dual-use infrastructure, thereby becoming a regional resilience node.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The White Defence Paper appears as a strategic response to the continuous deterioration of Europe's security and the rise of authoritarian powers seeking to reshape the global order. It emerges due to the necessity of finding pragmatic solutions to the intensification of hybrid threats and the widening of the geopolitical gap between Europe and other global actors.

The Paper identifies the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as primary strategic challengers, perceiving Russian Federation as an aggressive actor, having a belligerent nuclear posture and using destabilizing influence in Europe's neighbourhood. In the meantime, the People's Republic of China is seen as an ambitious actor with an increased military spending, technological advances and opaque strategic interests.

The White Defence Paper outlines a multilevel plan so to strengthen European defence through the development of the Member States' military capabilities along with the consolidation of the defence industrial base, boosting the financial and logistical sustenance for Ukraine, reinforcing military mobility and bringing innovation in disruptive technologies to the table. Moreover, it highlights key priority areas (*precision strike capabilities, drone, counter-drone, cyber and electronic systems and critical infrastructure*), which are meant to be used, but also protected through prevention or rapid reactions to hostile actions.

¹⁴ European External Action Service, The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en, accessed on 30th of April, 2025.

¹⁵ European Defence Cooperation, *Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)*, at [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(PESCO\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-(PESCO)), accessed on 29th of April, 2025.

Equally, the White Defence Paper underlines that governance reform is as important as capability acquisition, especially within the cooperation, governance and resilience context, which imply faster decision-making, optimal threat assessment and a healthy EU-NATO interoperability.

The role of the EU's institutional ecosystem (*European Council, European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament*) remains central in determining guidelines, finances, economic policy and even oversight. Complementing them are the EU's specialized agencies (EDA, EUISS, SatCen), which contribute with both technical and operational support.

For Romania, the White Defence Paper offers both responsibility and opportunity. Romania's strategic location on the Eastern flank, bordering the Black Sea, positions it both on the forehead of the risks and at the forefront of deterrence and defence. It acts not only as a bridge between the EU and the Black Sea region, enhancing its strategic relevance and influence within European institutions, but also as a key partner in developing EU capabilities in air and missile defence, mobility corridors and Black Sea situational awareness. Romania's dual membership in the EU and NATO provides a unique chance to be part of the interoperability, deterrence and also be an integrated response to crises.

Lastly, the White Defence Paper stresses that Europe stands at a decisive juncture. Attaining full readiness by 2030 requires structural conversion (*efficient strategic planning, sustainable defence investment, industrial integration and strong transatlantic bond*). Provided these efforts are pursued with determination, the EU might significantly improve its deterrence posture while protecting its neighbourhood and generate wider economic benefits.

The overarching conclusion is clear: Europe should transition from reactive adaptation to proactive strategic empowerment. The choice is binary: become a strategic actor shaping the international order or remain in the strategic arena shaped by others.

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ETHICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE FIELD OF NATIONAL SECURITY – A SOCIAL PERSEPCTIVE

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Abstract:

In the context of an increasingly intense global competition (both among private corporations and various international actors) with regard to the research and development of artificial intelligence (AI), alongside the continuous stream of recent innovations and the growing demand among end-users for such emerging technologies, a fundamental question arises: **Does the current legislative framework proposed by the European Union adequately ensure security in the research, development, and operational deployment of AI systems?**

This paper seeks to explore several issues highlighted by public discourse, including but not limited to: What are the key legislative instruments that safeguard social protection in the event of adverse effects caused by AI technologies? Why is the national security sector exempted from the obligations set out under the current EU regulatory framework, and to what extent does this exemption impact the social sphere? Are the newly introduced legislative requirements sufficiently robust, clearly defined, and readily implementable? Do these regulations hinder innovation and the competitive capacity of major companies? What risks and challenges may arise from the current and future regulatory developments in the field of AI? Within this analytical context, the primary focus of scientific inquiry will be the social domain, given that it remains the principal beneficiary of products and services built upon artificial intelligence.

The current regulation of the field of artificial intelligence at the level of the European Union

The rapid and exponential rise of technology within contemporary society is an undeniable reality. This evolution has culminated in the attainment of a superior level of capability, namely the domain of artificial intelligence. Its utility is now recognized across all sectors of society (research and development, industry, medicine, defense, education, etc.), with its primary observable effects including: reduced time in service delivery; the removal of repetitive tasks from the workload of human resources; the capacity to analyze significantly larger volumes of data in a shorter period of time while simultaneously delivering higher-quality outputs; enhanced decision-making through the testing of scenarios and hypotheses, as well as the provision of predictions and recommendations; and increased social and cybersecurity protection, among others.

Nevertheless, due to the continuous development of artificial intelligence and the growing willingness to delegate an increasing number of tasks to such systems, so that they may become capable of independent reasoning and autonomous decision-making in certain circumstances, a set of risks to which society may be exposed is increasingly emerging. Consequently, states and international organizations have begun to more rigorously regulate this field.

At European Union level, the main legal instrument is the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, which entered into force in 2024 and was subsequently updated in 2025. The Act classifies and defines AI systems into four categories based on their associated risk: “*unacceptable risk, high risk, limited risk, and minimal risk*” [1], with the first category being strictly prohibited from use. However, the national security domain is exempted from this rule, an aspect outlined in Article 2, paragraph 3: “*This Regulation shall not apply to areas outside the scope of Union law and shall not affect, in any way, the competence of Member States concerning national security, irrespective of the type of entity entrusted by Member States with tasks related to such competences*” [1]. In the same vein, it does not apply to AI systems already placed, or not yet placed, on the market and used exclusively for military, defense, or national security purposes, regardless of the entity performing the activity.

In this respect, it may be observed that the current legislative framework provides substantial flexibility to the national security sector with regard to the use of artificial intelligence systems. Consequently, the potential gap in the development and operationalization of AI compared with states governed by authoritarian regimes (a concern identified by several experts in the field) is mitigated on this strategic front.

Furthermore, one of the most significant questions that remains is what happens if certain authorities operating in the field of national security unjustly interfere with the private life of a citizen by using AI-based technologies, particularly those classified as presenting unacceptable risks, such as:

- “systems for evaluating and classifying individuals based on social behavior, known, inferred, or predicted personal characteristics, and assigning a negative social score that will subsequently affect certain aspects of their private life;
- systems for assessing the risk that a person may commit specific criminal offenses;
- the creation and expansion of databases by extracting data from facial recognition systems;
- the classification of individuals according to biometric data in order to create target groups defined by features such as race, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.” [11]

Therefore, limiting abuses in the use of AI under the pretext of national security concerns is also achieved through other legislation closely linked to the EU AI Act, but having a greater impact on the use of artificial intelligence in the field of national security, namely the legislation concerning the protection of personal data (GDPR). Within this framework, specific ethical and legal constraints are identified, which affect the need to employ AI in contexts other than armed conflict and criminal prosecution.

The guarantee of ethical and legal standards may also be achieved through an internal mechanism for certifying AI systems by the state concerned. Thus, algorithms are subject to verification by the provider, and consequently, not every AI technology will be permitted to enter the market. Additionally, as in any sensitive issue identified at the national level, training programs for different professional categories and awareness initiatives for the general public have a considerable impact on the responsible use of AI.

Another legal issue, which may be interpreted on a case-by-case basis, concerns the field of electronic communications, where the confidentiality of data imposed on service providers may be compromised. According to current legislation, the direct collection and processing of personal data by national security authorities does not fall under the scope of the GDPR; however, when such data are obtained with the assistance of third parties, the situation differs, and the European Court of Human Rights must examine each case individually.

Alongside the EU AI Act, which has internal applicability only within the Union, there is also the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, which holds the status of an international treaty and may be used by other states outside the EU as an international benchmark for addressing AI governance. It likewise becomes a standard for states aspiring to obtain EU membership. This convention draws attention to the risk that AI may “undermine human dignity and individual autonomy, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law” [2] and emphasizes several issues such as the growing social inequality, discrimination, unlawful and arbitrary surveillance, blackmail, manipulation, disinformation, etc. In this regard, the document provides a set of limitations, principles that must be respected, rights, safeguards, as well as the possibility of pursuing legal remedies by individuals who consider that AI systems have been abusively applied in relation to their person.

In the field of national security, the convention largely maintains the same guidelines as the EU AI Act, but introduces an important condition: compliance with international human rights law as a fundamental prerequisite. Specifically: “AI activities related to national security are excluded from the scope of the convention, provided that such activities are in all cases conducted in a manner consistent with applicable international human rights law and with respect for democratic institutions and processes” [2]. Although the European Convention on Human Rights also states that certain civil rights may be restricted in cases of criminal prosecution or national security concerns, it nonetheless provides a set of criteria for assessing the intervention of authorities in private life (whether a protected right was interfered with, whether the interference was lawful with a legitimate aim, and whether it was strictly necessary). Unfortunately, a general truth that applies to a greater or lesser extent depending on each state suggests that certain issues, such as for example, “the manipulation of nuclear weapons”, may be considered matters of high politics, while violations of human rights may be categorized as matters of low politics.

National security, as discussed at the level of the European Union, is closely linked to that of NATO. Consequently, it can be observed that, under the same overarching guidelines, NATO’s vision does not significantly differ from that of the EU when referring to a “responsible development of AI” (as set out in the NATO Artificial Intelligence Strategy launched in 2021 and updated in 2024) [4]. Under this imperative, new terms have emerged in

the field, such as TAI — Trustworthy AI, and XAI — Explainable AI. The European Commission places strong emphasis on these concepts and has imposed a set of criteria in this regard, often known as the seven principles of a reliable AI system:

- “the protection of fundamental human rights and interaction limited solely to the provision of assistance;
- *robustness and safety through the ability to self-correct certain errors;*
- *preservation of privacy and data security against unauthorized users;*
- *ensuring transparency of system functioning and explainability of processes and outputs;*
- *respect for diversity and fairness by understanding differences among users and avoiding discrimination;*
- *development grounded in environmental protection, sustainability, and ensuring social well-being;*
- *accountability of the AI system through the reporting of any internally identified issues and responsibility for the outcomes generated” [5].*

These principles aim to ensure that AI becomes safer and more accessible, while providing well-reasoned information, presented in an intelligible manner, enabling the user to understand aspects such as: why specific results were provided, why alternatives were not offered, when the system is unable to provide the desired output, under what circumstances it can or cannot be trusted, and when its responses are ambiguous or unreliable.

Risks and challenges in the process of regulating artificial intelligence

Given that the research and development of artificial intelligence is conducted today at an unprecedented level—amounting to a veritable “algorithmic arms race,” in which most actors invest significant resources—we are witnessing a regulatory framework for AI that attempts to keep pace with ongoing innovations in the field. Consequently, a series of risks and challenges emerge in the process of regulating artificial intelligence.

One such challenge concerns the terminology used in this domain. The main legal document itself, the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, has been criticized for being overly complex and lacking clarity [6]. Over time, various ambiguities have arisen in the definition of certain terms, concepts, components, and specific processes. Although many of these issues have been clarified, there remain several concepts that are still vague, insufficiently delimited, and not clearly regulated, such as *human vulnerability* and *artificial intelligence system*. In the case of *human vulnerability*, for instance, although the expression is widely used, it is still not precisely defined so as to encompass all aspects reflecting the full range of possible human error. Therefore, the lack of clarity surrounding some of the concepts being used may, on the one hand, create uncertainty for authorities, operators, and AI users, and, on the other hand, open small loopholes enabling the avoidance of responsibility or the use of technology for unintended purposes. This limitation, however, may be understood primarily through the lens of the pioneering stage of legislation specific to artificial intelligence.

Another issue reflects the opposite extreme of the previous one, namely *overregulation*. This challenge has been flagged by various AI-driven enterprises that claim such an approach will slow the pace of innovation (due to increasingly complex standards, the requirement to modify or adapt infrastructure, and the additional cost and time involved [9]). Up to a certain point, companies are encouraged, having prioritized, simplified, and free access to so-called *sandbox environments* that allow the testing of technologies in real-world conditions; however, in subsequent stages the process becomes more burdensome (adapting to new requirements, market authorization, provision of guarantees, etc.). At the level of EU Member States, this phenomenon translates into slower implementation of AI technologies due to rising costs and more extensive compliance obligations, while also generating inequalities among states in terms of security and social protection resulting from differing speeds of implementation [7]. This aspect must be prioritised given that states are part of international alliances and agreements, and the EU’s role as a global actor is contingent upon coordinated and unified implementation in this area. Europe’s competitiveness with other major international actors (such as the United States and China) will also be negatively affected, as the strategic advantage conferred by innovation may be neutralized by the complex and cumbersome mechanism required for its deployment. Therefore, overregulation of AI may generate vulnerabilities both in the field of security and within the social sphere.

Another aspect that may be considered a challenge in clearly delimiting the boundaries of AI research and development relates to the field of national security, specifically those military and defense technologies that are exempted from the strict rules of the EU AI Act. This category, which may include AI products classified as presenting an unacceptable level of risk, has the potential to generate real threats to societal safety if not managed under strict oversight. Consequently, a new grey area emerges, where subjective interpretations may arise when labeling issues as matters of national security, thereby justifying the use of such technologies. Moreover, abuses may

be enabled through the coordination of targeted and discriminatory actions lacking transparency, involving infringements upon private life, with the aim of exercising control, manipulation, maintaining power, influencing decisions, etc. This concern arises from the fact that most legal obligations fall on developers and providers, with fewer responsibilities applying to end users [8]. A concrete example in this regard is the AI facial recognition systems installed on the streets of major Russian cities. These systems have enabled the identification and detention of numerous protesters criticizing the Kremlin's intervention in the war in Ukraine at various locations and times of day. Another illustrative example is the social credit system implemented in China several years ago. AI systems make automated decisions regarding individuals' access to certain services (healthcare, justice, education, etc.) solely based on a profile and social score generated from the continuously monitored behavior of the respective citizen (professional performance, civic conduct, political affiliation, etc.). Thus, a wide array of basic civil rights and liberties fundamental to a democratic society are more easily and severely infringed upon through the use of such AI technologies.

From a more technical perspective on the research and development process, it must be understood that AI security risks may arise at every stage of the life cycle ("*initiation, design and development, verification and validation, deployment, operation and monitoring, reassessment, retirement*" [10]), as proposed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) under standard ISO/IEC 22989:2022:

- "*initiation: the intended objectives of AI applications may violate national laws/regulations and ethical principles;*
- *design and development: flawed AI infrastructures, technical vulnerabilities, errors in design and development;*
- *verification and validation: insufficient testing, failure to remedy previously identified risks;*
- *deployment: use of insecure or unverifiable hardware/software, unauthorized access and usage;*
- *operation and monitoring: direct attacks / backdoor attacks / model inversion / user simulation attacks, model theft, error generation through manipulated feedback, exploitation of code vulnerabilities, misuse and malicious use of the system;*
- *continuous validation: delays in updating data, inability to detect and correct errors in due time;*
- *reassessment: similar issues to those in the initial stage;*
- *retirement: incomplete destruction and disclosure of data and information*" [10].

Therefore, at any stage, hidden purposes, faulty designs, security breaches, misuse, data leaks, system hijacking, and other incidents may arise, enabling technology to be used for ends other than those initially intended. These risks, as detailed by experts in the field, implicitly highlight a set of requirements such as: the need for highly qualified and responsible personnel; strengthening the legislative framework by addressing technical aspects in detail; constant and strict monitoring of all stages; and rigorous testing of AI products that will be used by the population in order to prevent data theft and avoid misleading users through erroneous services (the system must constantly communicate its limitations to the end-users).

Ultimately, although the legislation is complex and restrictive, it must be understood that both the authorities and institutions responsible for AI regulation and the companies involved in AI research and development must find a balance between current and future legal requirements and AI-based products, ensuring that these technologies remain useful and safe for society, compliant with the legislation and norms in force, while also supporting the necessity of maintaining high levels of innovation and market competitiveness — particularly in the context of unsafe alternatives proposed by other international actors whose values and interests differ from those of the European Union.

Conclusions:

The regulation of AI by the European Union, and subsidiarily by the Member States, may represent a challenging task in the context of rapid developments in this sector, as well as due to the legislative pioneering in a relatively new field. Nevertheless, the responsible authorities and institutions must anticipate and proactively establish the legal framework for the research, development, and use of technologies based on artificial intelligence. A subsequent adaptation to such evolutions, and the time gap between the emergence of an innovation and the creation of the appropriate legal framework, may provide malicious actors with genuine vulnerabilities that could be exploited.

Furthermore, beyond the legislative framework and the deadlines set, the EU bears responsibility for providing mechanisms that facilitate the Member States' adaptation to the new requirements and their uniform implementation, so as to avoid various internal blockages and to prevent the loss of valuable time in this global strategic competition

in the field of AI. Even if we refer to a complex legislative framework, filled with new standards, requirements, and obligations, such mechanisms can reduce rigidity, latency, and even related compliance costs.

Although exceptions exist in the field of national security and defence, these must be strictly delimited through legislative instruments, physical protection measures, and continuous monitoring, as their extraction and utilisation for purposes other than those defining the present exemption may generate major negative effects on all security sectors (social, military, political, economic, and environmental).

At the same time, both the legislative framework and the companies involved in AI research and development must prioritise the provision of safe and useful products for the end-users, ensuring that no direct or indirect harm is inflicted upon democratic values and interests.

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REGIME OF MEASURES AND SANCTIONS ADOPTED BY NATO AND EU DURING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

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Abstract

The application of sanctions against states that violate international norms and the adoption of legal measures are a priority in order to prevent acts of aggression, crimes against humanity, or those that violate the principle of self-determination of peoples. In these situations, the involvement of international organizations in the peaceful resolution of crises plays a decisive role, as they contribute to the development of rules on how to act internationally and play an important role in monitoring international relations. The cooperation of member states in the peaceful resolution of disputes is a manifestation of their sovereign will to exercise their right to participate on an equal footing in the process of promoting international peace and security.

THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFLICT. CAUSES.

One of the factors that triggered the conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and ended with the annexation of Crimea, was Ukraine's intention to join NATO, as well as other states that were part of the Soviet Union, such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, but also a former ally such as Poland. To end the 2014 crisis, Ukrainian officials and pro-Russian separatists in the provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk signed two ceasefire agreements in Minsk, entitled "Minsk I" and "Minsk II," which set out the steps to be taken militarily and politically, but which remained unimplemented.

The period following the signing of the last ceasefire agreement was characterized by democratic reforms within the country, the strengthening of relations with NATO and the EU, but also by continued fighting with pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas region, who proclaimed the two republics independent through internal referendums, as well as by measures taken against Russia's continued hybrid actions in the area.

Due to Russia's occupation of Crimea and its invasion of Donbas, the Ukrainian parliament voted in 2014 to remove the neutrality clause from the Constitution and to apply for Ukraine's accession to NATO. In this context, Russian President Vladimir Putin challenged Ukraine's right to exist as an independent state and demanded that it be barred from joining NATO.

Thus, after the election of President Petro Poroshenko in May 2014, followed by that of President Volodimir Zelenski in April 2019, Ukraine's foreign policy shifted towards NATO and the EU, as follows: in 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament supported the reintroduction of NATO membership as a foreign policy objective¹. Also, in 2019, the Ukrainian Constitution was amended to introduce membership of the North Atlantic Alliance as a foreign and national security policy², and in 2020 Ukraine obtained the status of NATO's partner with extended opportunities³.

Another factor underlying the conflict is the military support Ukraine received between 2014 and 2021 from the following allied states: in 2015, the United Kingdom launched Operation Orbital to train and build the capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces in the areas of medicine, logistics, infantry, and intelligence; in 2016, at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, a package of assistance for the Ukrainian armed forces was approved⁴; and in 2017, President Trump approved the transition from selling non-lethal to lethal weapons to the Ukrainian army.

¹ *The Ukrainian Parliament has declared cooperation with NATO and accession to the Alliance as a key priority for the country*, text available at <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/28536019.html>, accessed on 07.10.2025.

² *Ukraine has enshrined in its Constitution the strategic objective of obtaining full membership of the EU and NATO*, text available at <https://romania.mfa.gov.ua/ro/news/70362-ucraina-a-nscris-n-constituie-obiectivul-strategic-de-a-obine-statutul-de-membru-cu-drepturi-depline-al-ue-i-nato>, accessed on 07.10.2025.

³ *Ukraine has obtained the status of NATO partner with expanded opportunities*, text available at <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/30668883.html>, accessed on 07.10.2025.

⁴ *NATO leaders confirm strong support for Ukraine*, text available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_133806.htm?selectedLocale=en, accessed on 07.10.2025.

Subsequently, in 2021, Russia requested guarantees from the United States that Ukraine would never join NATO and would not receive any military aid, but this request was rejected, which led to the outbreak of the current conflict in the region.⁵

The foreign policies announced by Ukraine and Georgia to join the North Atlantic Alliance, along with the measures taken at NATO level to increase military presence on Europe's eastern border, were seen as a threat to Russia's interests, which led it to decide to attack Ukraine.

On the other hand, the US wants to expand its influence in Ukraine because of the natural resources that this country offers, such as iron ore, coal, oil, natural gas, uranium, titanium, and manganese.

The disagreements between Russia and the US began in 2008, triggered by the installation of American missile defense and radar surveillance systems in countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Turkey. In addition, discontent escalated following the invitation for Ukraine to join NATO at the 2008 Bucharest Summit.⁶

At the same time, in 2022, the US decided to send American troops to Europe to be used for any additional deployment to Eastern European allies, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Although it violates the rights of self-determination and territorial integrity of a sovereign state, Russia wants to keep Ukraine within its sphere of influence, mainly to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO or deepening its relations with the EU.

NATO-EU COOPERATION IN THE CURRENT CONFLICT

The Alliance seeks to implement its security policies by ensuring a stable environment based on democracy and the peaceful resolution of disputes, as well as by cooperating with other international organizations and member states on the protection of human rights and fundamental values, including in the field of arms control and disarmament.

NATO's role is not limited to organizing military operations aimed at deterring and defending against threats on Alliance territory, but also includes the possibility of engaging in peacekeeping operations, so that it can provide support to states before, during, or after a conflict. NATO maintains that a conflict cannot be resolved by military means alone, and that a comprehensive political, civilian, and military approach is necessary for effective crisis management.⁷

To achieve security through cooperation, the Strategic Concept sets out three areas of action to ensure global security through: partnerships with other countries and international organizations, active contributions to arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament, and maintaining openness to NATO membership for all European democracies that meet Alliance standards⁸.

The Alliance has repeatedly highlighted in its strategic concepts and declarations the importance of the EU's role in maintaining security in the Euro-Atlantic area and has emphasized the need to develop the EU's security and defense dimension, as well as the importance of the two organizations supporting each other in maintaining international security.

In addition, the Strategic Concept adopted at the Madrid Summit in 2022 reaffirms the Alliance's three core objectives: deterrence and defense; crisis prevention and management; and security through cooperation, including with the EU, as demonstrated by the intention to develop strategic partnerships with states that are not members of the EU or NATO. This concept also highlights NATO's commitment to creating a nuclear-free security environment where sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights, and international law are respected.⁹

Among NATO's fundamental tasks, the defensive nature of the Alliance is emphasized, namely its role of defense and deterrence to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression, as well as the

⁵ *Russia and Ukraine: Chronicle of an undeclared war*, text available at <https://www.dw.com/ro/rusia-%C5%9Fucraina-cronica-unui-r%C4%83zboi-nedeclarat/a-60523314>, accessed on 02.02.2023.

⁶ *Bucharest Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008*, point 23, text available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm, accessed on 08.10.2025.

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⁸ *Active Engagement, Modern Defence, Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security*, point 4, text available at https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm, accessed on 08.10.2025.

⁹ *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Madrid on June 29, 2022*, text available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept.pdf, pp. 1-2, accessed on 08.10.2025.

organization's concerns regarding combating new threats that have emerged in the international security environment, namely hybrid, energy, economic, or information tactics.¹⁰

EU-NATO cooperation has been and remains essential for strengthening Euro-Atlantic security. NATO is the foundation of collective defense for its members, but at the same time, a stronger and more capable European defense is essential to complement NATO. This has expanded significantly in recent years, building on three joint declarations adopted in 2023, 2018, and 2016, as well as NATO's Strategic Concept adopted in 2022.

The EU-NATO partnership aims to maintain security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area in the face of growing challenges and threats. This partnership is based on shared values, a determination to address common challenges, and an unequivocal commitment to promoting and protecting peace, freedom, and prosperity in the Euro-Atlantic area.¹¹

The third and most recent joint declaration on EU-NATO cooperation, adopted on January 10, 2023, outlines the current challenges and how they will be addressed. The declaration sets out a shared vision of how the EU and NATO will act together against common security threats. The EU and NATO are expanding and deepening their cooperation in areas such as: growing geostrategic competition, resilience and protection of critical infrastructure, emerging and disruptive technologies, space, the security implications of climate change, foreign information manipulation and foreign interference¹².

In its content, the EU and NATO declare that they are united in condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and in supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to self-defense¹³.

Through its military assistance to Ukraine, the EU aims to strengthen the capabilities and resilience of the Ukrainian armed forces and to protect the civilian population against Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression. At the same time, the EU is committed to continuing to provide Ukraine and the Ukrainian people with increased political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military, and diplomatic support¹⁴.

In addition, NATO has decided to provide Ukraine with political and practical support by implementing extensive humanitarian aid, including assistance in the transition from Soviet-type equipment to modern equipment, achieving interoperability with NATO forces, and reforming Ukrainian defense and security institutions.

In its efforts, NATO has encouraged member states to support Ukraine with modern military equipment that meets Alliance standards, sending military advisers to train the Ukrainian armed forces in the use of this equipment and to host refugees on their territory.

Through the European Peace Facility, the EU is financing the provision of lethal and non-lethal military equipment and supplies, such as personal protective equipment, first aid kits, fuel, ammunition, and missiles.

On November 15, 2022, the Council also launched the EU Military Assistance Mission to Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), with an initial duration of two years, which it subsequently decided to extend by a further two years, until November 15, 2026. EUMAM Ukraine's main objectives are individual, collective, and specialized training for the Ukrainian armed forces, and the coordination and synchronization of the activities of the member states providing training.

In 2024, the EU and Ukraine signed joint security commitments that provide for predictable, long-term, and sustainable support for Ukraine's security and defense, including through missions under the common security and defense policy. These commitments will help Ukraine defend itself, resist destabilization efforts, and deter future acts of aggression.

Although cooperation between the two organizations has evolved significantly over the past three years, there are still certain difficulties in implementing their vision for resolving the conflict in Ukraine.

These difficulties are caused by the lack of a joint decision between NATO and the EU on the measures to be implemented to end the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but also by the existence of a divergent vision among EU member states on the position to adopt towards Russia's attacks on Ukraine.

One of these states is Hungary, which considers that Ukraine is not a sovereign, independent state and which, since the beginning of the war, has criticized Ukraine's requests to the two organizations for assistance in

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, paras. 21 and 27.

¹¹ *EU-NATO cooperation*, text available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/eu-nato-cooperation/>, accessed on 08.10.2025.

¹² *Areas of EU-NATO cooperation*, text available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/eu-nato-cooperation/>, accessed on 08.10.2025.

¹³ *Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation, January 10, 2023*, point 3, text available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023/>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

¹⁴ *EU military support to Ukraine*, text available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/military-support-ukraine/>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

ending the conflict, even expressing its opposition to sanctions against Russia within the European Union. Hungary has also repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the disruption to oil supplies caused by the conflict in Ukraine and has refused to give up energy imports from Russia, contrary to the requests of the United States, and has opposed the progress of negotiations on Ukraine's accession to the EU, as it believes that accession could draw the EU into a conflict with Russia¹⁵.

At the same time, the EU is concerned with acquiring a certain degree of strategic autonomy from NATO, in which context it seeks to consider pre-positioning as many allied forces as possible on Europe's eastern flank, thereby reducing the dependence of European NATO member states on the US, a situation that could lead to tense cooperation with the Alliance in the future.

Although there are various challenges and limitations in the cooperation between the two organisations, it has had a significant impact on Euro-Atlantic security by: strengthening Ukraine's defensive capabilities, stabilising NATO's eastern flank by increasing joint exercises, increasing political cohesion within both organisations, accelerating Ukraine's European integration and strengthening the transatlantic relationship. NATO-EU cooperation has redefined the structure of European security and generated a strategic adaptation to new geopolitical realities.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON RUSSIA BY INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has been described by most Western states as a flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations¹⁶.

Among the first measures adopted were restrictions on exports to Russia of dual-use goods and technologies, oil refining equipment, semiconductors, chemicals, and advanced technologies.

The European Union adopted an oil embargo on Russian crude oil delivered by sea, and the United States completely banned imports of oil, gas, and coal from Russia¹⁷.

During the first year of the war, the EU Council adopted ten packages of sanctions aimed at weakening Russia's economy, depriving it of technology and its most important markets, and significantly reducing its ability to wage war, including¹⁸:

- individual sanctions against Russian and Belarusian figures, presidents and former presidents, members of government, oligarchs, parliamentarians, local politicians, high-ranking military personnel, businesspeople, and key Russian propaganda figures, consisting of the freezing of private assets;
- restrictions on economic relations with the Donbas region;
- visa suspension for diplomats, officials, and businesspeople;
- closure of EU airspace and European ports;
- a ban on Russian and Belarusian land transport operators entering the EU;
- SWIFT ban for Russian and Belarusian banks, including all transactions to the National Central Bank of the Russian Federation – it is estimated that this sanction will freeze a large part of Russian bank reserves;
- suspension of broadcasting in Europe and of Russian stations' licenses;
- ban on imports and exports of European products - cutting-edge technology, transport machinery and equipment, aviation and maritime navigation products, dual-use products (drones and software for them, encryption tools), luxury goods, firearms and military equipment, construction materials, as well as some food products, tobacco and cosmetics, including energy products;
- banning the activities of certain private companies.

The sanctions have led to a significant deterioration of the Russian economy, with inflation rising and the ruble depreciating sharply.

¹⁵*New tensions between Hungary and Ukraine after accusations of Hungarian drone incursions*, text available at <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/noi-tensiuni-intre-ungaria-si-ucraina-after-accusations-of-hungarian-drone-incursions-viktor-orban-ukraine-is-not-a-sovereign-state-/33544012.html>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

¹⁶ *United Nations Charter*, Art. 2, text available at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

¹⁷ *The White House, Proclamation on the Suspension of Import of Russian Oil, Liquefied Natural Gas, and Coal*, para. 3, text available at <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/02/24/a-proclamation-on-increasing-duties-on-certain-articles-from-the-russian-federation/>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

¹⁸ *EU sanctions against Russia explained*, text available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia-explained/#sanctions>, accessed on 10.10.2025.

The technology and military industries have also suffered substantial losses as a result of technological isolation, particularly due to the lack of access to microchips and high-precision equipment. However, Russia has turned to China to cover its chip losses so that it can continue its production of drones and missiles¹⁹.

Sanctions, particularly those targeting energy and agri-food exports, have contributed to rising global energy and food prices. Temporary blockages of Ukrainian grain exports have particularly affected developing countries in the Middle East and Africa.

In the energy sector, Russia benefits from domestic energy capacity based on natural gas, nuclear power, and hydropower, resources that have enabled it to avoid an acute domestic energy crisis despite sanctions and lack of access to Western technology.

To circumvent the sanctions imposed by the EU after the embargoes on maritime exports of oil and petroleum products, Russia has redirected significant quantities to Asian markets, particularly India and China.

Certain fuels that were previously exported to the EU were redirected to China, India, and areas in the Middle East, allowing Russia to maintain a large portion of its export revenues. Russia has developed a network of alternative exports using methods such as ship-to-ship (STS) transfers and the creation of a "shadow fleet" to circumvent maritime transport restrictions and mask the origin of the oil²⁰. At the same time, domestic refining capacity has been kept active, although partially affected by the loss of access to Western technology.

Thus, faced with Western isolation, Russia has intensified economic relations with China, India, Iran, and other states considered "neutral" or "friendly." However, these relations have not fully compensated for the losses generated by the contraction of European and American markets.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the severe sanctions imposed by the European Union and its partners, Russia has managed to avoid a major economic crisis by redirecting trade flows and through strategic state interventions. However, these measures came at a cost: efficiency losses, declining net export revenues, risks related to energy infrastructure, and limitations in access to modern technologies. In the medium and long term, maintaining this fragile balance will depend on Russia's ability to innovate technologically and find new trading partners outside the Western sphere.

The diplomatic and economic sanctions imposed by the EU are an essential tool in the strategy to end the conflict, but to be effective, they must be combined with a complex package of legal, military, and political measures.

Adopting a long-term solution to end the conflict in Ukraine requires the cooperation of all international organizations, namely the UN for peacekeeping in the region, the EU for reconstruction and economic reforms, and NATO for providing security guarantees to prevent the forced cession of certain territories. In addition, initiating the process of accession to the European Economic Area would provide a framework for the financial stability of the state.

At the same time, the involvement of the International Criminal Court and the European Union is necessary to investigate war crimes and prosecute the crime of aggression against Ukraine. In this context, the EU Commission has supported the establishment in The Hague of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA), integrated into the existing joint investigation team (JIT) supported by Eurojust.

As Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, the Court has no jurisdiction to try the crime of aggression, in which case the Commission and the EU High Representative proposed the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

Therefore, in May 2025, an international coalition comprising the Commission, the High Representative, the Council of Europe, and Ukraine agreed to establish the special tribunal²¹, and in June 2025, Ukraine and the Council of Europe signed the Agreement establishing the special tribunal²².

¹⁹ Miller C., *The Impact of Semiconductor Sanctions on Russia*, text available at accessed on 10.10.2025.

²⁰ Le Monde, *Despite sanctions, Russia's "Shadow Fleet" Keeps Delivering Oil*, text available at https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/23/despite-sanctions-russia-s-shadow-fleet-keeps-delivering-oil_6743624_4.html, accessed on 10.10.2025.

²¹ *International coalition agrees on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine*, text available at https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/international-coalition-agrees-establishment-special-tribunal-crime-aggression-against-ukraine-2025-05-09_en?prefLang=en, accessed on 10.10.2025.

²² *Ukraine and the Council of Europe sign Agreement on establishing a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine*, text available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/ukraine-and-the-council-of>

The sanctions regime imposed on Russia represents the most comprehensive package of coercive measures implemented against a major power in the modern era. Although the effectiveness of these sanctions may be debatable in the short term, they have had a significant impact on Russia's economic and technological capacity. At the same time, they send a clear signal about the international consequences of aggression and violations of international law. However, the measures adopted by the EU to date have not resulted in the cessation of aggression in Ukraine, their effectiveness being limited by Russia's refusal to accept the conditions imposed by Western states.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE REDEFINED NATO MISSION IN THE CURRENT STRATEGIC CONTEXT

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Abstract

The article examines the major evolutions of the global security environment and the way they shape NATO's redefined mission within the current strategic context. After three decades of a liberal international order based on multilateral cooperation, the world is undergoing a transition towards multipolarity, strategic competition, and systemic instability. Events such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine, China's rise, energy and technological crises, and the proliferation of hybrid threats have reshaped the global security architecture. The analysis highlights that NATO has returned to its core mission of collective defense while expanding its scope to societal resilience, cyber security, critical infrastructure protection, and counter-disinformation. At the same time, the Alliance integrates climate security, global cooperation, and Indo-Pacific partnerships, evolving from a regional military alliance into a global strategic actor. The paper also emphasizes Romania's relevance as a member state on NATO's Eastern flank, playing a vital role in the security of the Black Sea region. Through doctrinal adaptation, defense investments, and strengthened resilience, Romania can actively contribute to NATO's strategic objectives.

Keywords: *NATO, global security, strategic competition, resilience, Romania, collective defense.*

The international security system is undergoing a profound structural transition in which the balance of power, governance rules, and instruments of competition are simultaneously transforming. Emerging multipolarity does not represent a stable balance but rather a systemic competition between divergent political and economic models. The strategic confrontation between Western democracies and authoritarian regimes is redefining globalization, while the space between peace and war is increasingly dominated by hybrid actions and grey-zone tactics.¹

¹ *Global Security and Technological Competition Report*, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution (2023), available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/reports/global-security-and-technological-competition/>

Russia and China represent the main centres of revisionist power, each acting through military, economic, informational, and technological means to expand its regional and global influence. In this context, NATO finds itself in a process of deep structural adaptation, aimed at maintaining relevance amid instability marked by hybrid warfare, energy pressure, and attacks on critical infrastructure.

China has become a major factor in recent geopolitical developments. Since the beginning of the 21st century, it has increasingly asserted itself as a global actor with a clear and ambitious geopolitical agenda. China's economic expansion—driven by rapid GDP growth and openness to external markets—has been accompanied by a spectacular modernisation of its military capabilities. Among the most remarkable aspects of this evolution is the rapid growth of China's naval and space power, which has transformed it into a significant competitor on the global stage.

China, through its control over strategic trade routes and its massive investments in global infrastructure via the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), promotes a geopolitical vision that challenges Western dominance. The BRI—a vast project involving the construction of infrastructure such as ports, roads, and energy networks across Africa, Asia, and Europe—constitutes a form of economic competition and global influence that exerts pressure on the existing financial and political system. This initiative not only secures China a dominant position in key areas of the world but also imposes an alternative model of development, one based on political authoritarianism and state control over the economy.

Moreover, China's ambitions extend beyond the economic and infrastructural dimension to include the development of military and strategic capabilities that align perfectly with its geopolitical interests. Its expansion in the South China Sea—both through the construction of artificial islands and their militarisation—represents an attempt to alter the status quo in this crucial maritime region, which is essential for global transport routes and for the energy security of many Asian states. At the same time, China is making massive investments in technology and the development of cyber capabilities, which can be used not only for power projection but also for hybrid interventions in the geopolitical and security spheres.²

² *The Military Balance 2025*, London, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance>

In this context, NATO has found itself compelled to broaden its strategic analysis to encompass regions and scenarios within the Indo-Pacific area, where China is increasingly reaffirming its authority and promoting its strategic interests. The strategic competition between China and the West is therefore a global one, transcending traditional spheres of influence and requiring a more complex and diversified approach to foreign policy and international security.

On the other hand, the Russian Federation's aggression in eastern Ukraine continues this trend of reviving power politics and expansionism. In parallel, Moscow's active involvement in the conflicts in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova represents further evidence of its intent to project power into key regions and to destabilise regional orders that do not serve its interests. These actions have seriously tested NATO's cohesion, as the Alliance has been confronted with dilemmas regarding how to respond effectively to Russia's provocations. At the same time, these conflicts have demonstrated Russia's efficiency and speed in mobilising and employing its armed forces in a regional context—an ability that has had a significant impact on the balance of power in Europe.

The culmination of this process of strategic competition was the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022. This conflict has had implications not only for regional stability but also for the entire international order. It has become the most serious conflict in Europe since 1945, underlining both the gravity and the dangers of a major escalation. Moreover, the war in Ukraine has revealed the West's inability to respond rapidly and decisively to an act of aggression of such magnitude, as well as Europe's vulnerability in the face of an increasingly revisionist and aggressive Russia.

The Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine has reintroduced high-intensity conventional warfare in Europe, combining the use of artillery, drones, electronic warfare, and information operations. In response, NATO has launched its most comprehensive adaptation since the end of the Cold War, culminating in the decisions adopted at the

Washington Summit in July 2024, which expanded regional planning and multi-domain defence capabilities.³

Sweden's accession in March 2024 profoundly altered the Alliance's strategic architecture in Northern Europe, transforming the Baltic Sea into a fully integrated operational space. At the same time, the increase in defence budgets has become a generalised phenomenon, surpassing the 2% of GDP threshold in most member states, with a strong emphasis on investments in munitions, air defence, logistical infrastructure, and cyber capabilities.

Recent events have demonstrated that hybrid aggression, cyberattacks, and sabotage operations targeting submarine infrastructure can produce strategic effects without formally triggering a state of war. The incident in the Baltic Sea in November 2024 highlighted the vulnerability of undersea cable and pipeline networks—critical for communications and energy supplies. NATO responded by strengthening cooperation among member states, the private sector, and European Union partners, establishing mechanisms for early warning, maritime surveillance, and information sharing. This reaction model confirms the Alliance's tendency to evolve from a purely military organisation into a multidimensional system of protection and resilience.⁴

NATO's mission today has been redefined along three converging directions: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. The *Strategic Concept* adopted in Madrid in 2022 enshrined these pillars, complementing them with new objectives—societal resilience, the protection of critical infrastructure, and technological innovation. The document reflects the recognition that the wars of the future will not be purely military but will also be informational, economic, and cognitive in nature. Thus, the three decades in which the global security environment appeared to embody a normality of peace have abruptly deteriorated, and “the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace.” This inaugural

³ *NATO's July 2024 Washington Summit: In Brief*, Washington D.C., available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12217>

⁴ *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries – Updates*, Bruxelles, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_225291.htm

formulation of the 2022 Madrid *Strategic Concept* marks a clear discontinuity from the 2010 version and reflects the systemic nature of current threats.⁵

The same section emphasizes that an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Allies cannot be ruled out, while the Russian Federation is identified as “the most significant and direct threat” to Allied security.⁶ Beyond the Russian vector, the 2022 *Strategic Concept* outlines a landscape of strategic competition, pervasive instability, and recurrent shocks, characterized by interconnected global threats.⁷

In parallel, China’s rise as a global actor and the growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific are prompting the Alliance to adopt a comprehensive vision based on the “360-degree” principle, encompassing all geographical directions and domains of confrontation—land, maritime, air, cyber, and space.⁸ Subsequent documents developed by Allied Command Transformation (ACT) specify that future multi-domain operations will integrate conventional, technological, and informational means, timing to generate convergent effects.⁹

Technology has become a central factor in security. NATO regards the digital, cyber, and space domains as essential front lines of strategic competition, promoting initiatives such as the *Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA)* and the *NATO Innovation Fund*, both designed to preserve the Alliance’s technological edge.¹⁰ Richard

⁵ NATO. *Strategic Concept 2022*, available online at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-factsheet-strategic-concept-en.pdf

⁶ NATO. *Strategic Concept 2022*, available online at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-factsheet-strategic-concept-en.pdf

⁷ NATO. *Strategic Concept 2022*, available online at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-factsheet-strategic-concept-en.pdf

⁸ Allied Command Transformation, *Future Warfare Development Report*, Norfolk, 2023, p. 12.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Fontaine and Kara Frederick define this new stage as the “age of techno-realpolitik,” in which geopolitical power is measured by the control of digital infrastructures and dates.¹¹

Climate change is introduced, for the first time, as “the defining challenge of our time” in NATO’s *Strategic Concept*, being regarded as a threat multiplier that affects energy security, supply chains, and societal stability.¹² The OECD *Climate and Defense Readiness Report 2024* complete this perspective, showing that the adaptation of armed forces to the effects of climate change is becoming an integral part of modern strategic planning.¹³

The human dimension of security, addressed in the *UNDP Human Security Report 2024*, underlines that the protection of populations, psychological resilience, and security education are essential components of collective defense. In the same spirit, the *EUISS Report 2023* highlights the growing NATO–EU cooperation in crisis management, military mobility, and the protection of critical infrastructure.¹⁴

For Romania, the redefinition of NATO’s mission carries direct strategic implications. The Eastern Flank is becoming a pivot of deterrence, while the Black Sea represents a key arena of geopolitical competition. The *Vilnius Summit Communiqué 2023*¹⁵ reiterates the importance of the region and confirms the Alliance’s commitment to strengthening its forward defence posture.

Thus, NATO’s redefined mission reflects a transition from a regional military alliance to a global strategic organisation. It integrates non-military dimensions—societal resilience, technology, climate, and human security—into the paradigm of collective

¹¹ Richard Fontaine; Kara Frederick, *The Age of Techno-Realpolitik*, CNAS, Washington, 2021, p. 15.

¹² NATO. *Strategic Concept 2022*, available online at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-factsheet-strategic-concept-en.pdf

¹³ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Accelerating Climate Adaptation*. Paris, 2024, available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/12/accelerating-climate-adaptation_b375907c/8afaueb8-en.pdf

¹⁴ European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). *European Security after Ukraine: Strategic Autonomy and NATO Cooperation*. Brussels, 2023, p. 17, available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default>

¹⁵ NATO. *Vilnius Summit Communiqué 2023*. Vilnius, 2023, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

defence. This evolution transforms the Alliance into an indispensable actor in maintaining international stability and represents, for Romania, an opportunity to assert itself as a key state on the Eastern Flank.

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE DIDACTICS IN 20TH-CENTURY ROMANIA: FROM THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD TO THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution of didactic paradigms used in foreign language teaching in Romania throughout the 20th century, focusing on the transition from the grammar-translation method to the communicative approach. The study outlines the main theoretical and institutional milestones, highlighting European influences and the specific adaptations to the Romanian educational context. These methodological transformations are viewed as expressions of a shift in linguistic perspective—from language as a system of norms to language as a tool for social action and interaction.

This process was supported by the development of new learning theories and by the emergence of learner-centered pedagogical models that redefined the relationship between teaching, training, and communication. The analysis offers an integrated view of the linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural framework that shaped this complex transition.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of foreign language didactics in the 20th century was marked by a major transition: from a model centered on linguistic norm and translation to one based on communication and competence. In Romania, this transformation reflected both the synchronization with European trends and the adaptation to the country's own social, cultural, and educational realities.

Throughout the century, several paradigms succeeded one another: the grammar-translation method, the direct method, the structural and audio-visual methods, and finally, the communicative approach. Each stage proposed a specific view of language and of the roles of the teacher and learner within the educational process.

Methodological changes were accompanied by a redefinition of the status of modern languages in education: they evolved from ornamental and elitist subjects to instrumental and functional ones. At the same time, the advancement of linguistic theory provided a solid scientific foundation for studying the teaching–learning process, contributing to the professionalization of the field.

Language teaching methods have always mirrored broader epistemological shifts within educational sciences, reflecting how societies conceptualize learning itself. The twentieth century thus represents a laboratory of methodological experimentation in which ideas about the learner, the teacher, and language use were constantly redefined. The growing dialogue between linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy fostered an interdisciplinary framework that still underpins foreign language didactics today.

Language pedagogy evolved alongside major intellectual movements such as humanism, structuralism, and constructivism, each leaving distinct traces on teaching philosophy. The search for effective language instruction mirrored broader societal concerns with rationality, efficiency, and human expression. The growing diversification of learner profiles and learning contexts challenged teachers to move beyond prescriptive norms toward flexible and adaptive models. Ultimately, twentieth-century language didactics became a reflection of the dialogue between theory and classroom practice.

2. The Historical and Educational Context of Foreign Language Teaching in 20th-Century Romania

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Romanian educational system followed, to a large extent, the continental European model, in which the study of foreign languages was considered an exercise in intellectual and moral formation. French, in particular, held a central place due to its cultural and diplomatic prestige (Alexandrescu 1997: 84).

After 1948, the communist reform of education introduced a new vision of schooling, ideologically driven and centrally planned. Foreign languages continued to be taught, yet within a rigid framework marked by uniform

programs, memorization, and strict knowledge control. Nevertheless, foreign language instruction remained an area of prestige, associated with openness to other cultures and with maintaining a high intellectual standard (Mavrodin 2001: 17).

This evolution was also influenced by the cultural policies of the time, which oscillated between openness to Western Europe and the protection of national values. In the latter part of the century, the establishment of institutions specialized in training language teachers contributed to the consolidation of didactic professionalism and to the emergence of a distinct Romanian methodological tradition.

After 1989, the liberalization of education and Romania's integration into the Council of Europe led to a rapid reconfiguration of linguistic policies. Documents such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001) became key references in the design of new curricula and in the orientation of language teaching toward the development of communicative and action-oriented competences.

Foreign language instruction was closely connected to the evolution of national identity and cultural diplomacy, acting as a bridge between Romania and Europe's intellectual currents. The introduction of standardized curricula gradually unified language education, but it also limited teachers' methodological freedom. From the 1960s onward, foreign language learning increasingly reflected the state's aspiration to modernize education through scientific rationality and international collaboration.

Throughout the century, linguistic education oscillated between elitist cultivation and mass accessibility, depending on political and economic realities. Foreign languages were often used as instruments of cultural legitimacy, shaping the intellectual formation of successive generations. Institutional reforms redefined the teacher's professional role, shifting from erudite authority to facilitator of linguistic competence. The tension between ideology and openness to European trends remained a defining feature of the Romanian educational landscape.

The teaching of foreign languages was shaped not only by academic developments but also by geopolitical transformations, including wars, regime changes, and shifting alliances. Each political era redefined the symbolic hierarchy of languages, influencing curricular priorities and institutional investment. The postwar decades emphasized multilingualism as both a diplomatic tool and a mark of cultural sophistication. Teachers thus became mediators of intercultural understanding, even in politically constrained contexts. The gradual expansion of access to foreign languages after the 1960s marked a crucial step toward the democratization of education and knowledge.

3. THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD: BETWEEN TRADITION AND NORM

Until the mid-20th century, the grammar-translation method represented the foundation of foreign language learning in Romanian schools. It relied on the morphosyntactic analysis of sentences, the translation of literary texts, and the memorization of grammatical rules. Emphasis was placed on precision, rigor, and the cultivation of written expression.

The teacher played a central, authoritative role, while the learner was viewed as a passive recipient of knowledge. Authentic communication in the target language was rarely present; the main objective was mastering grammatical code and developing translation skills (Puren 1988: 45).

This method fostered a strong link between linguistics and pedagogy, turning the language teacher into a classical philologist. At the same time, it instilled a culture of discipline and intellectual effort, developing essential analytical skills for language study.

Although later criticized for its formalism and lack of communicative focus, the grammar-translation method was a necessary stage in the formation of linguistic culture and the transmission of grammatical norm. It helped consolidate a reflective attitude toward language, grounded in analysis and respect for accuracy.

This method exemplified the humanistic belief that language study cultivates logic, memory, and aesthetic sensibility. It promoted linguistic accuracy and deep familiarity with literary models, often elevating grammatical mastery above communicative utility. Its endurance demonstrates the strong attachment of traditional education to textual authority and formal reasoning.

Its pedagogical coherence stemmed from a clear hierarchical conception of knowledge transmission. The emphasis on literary translation allowed students to engage with canonical texts while developing analytical discipline. Grammar was not merely a structural system but a gateway to moral and intellectual refinement. Despite its rigidity, the method contributed to the emergence of comparative and contrastive approaches in later language pedagogy.

Its emphasis on written comprehension reinforced the idea that intellectual mastery precedes practical performance. Learning through translation cultivated a contrastive awareness that anticipated the analytical rigor of modern linguistics. The teacher's authority rested on philological erudition, linking education to classical ideals of discipline and control. Despite its distance from communicative realities, the method fostered a deep

metalinguistic awareness among learners. Its persistence well into the twentieth century reveals the enduring prestige of grammatical order and rational instruction.

4. THE DIRECT METHOD: IMMEDIATE CONTACT WITH THE TARGET LANGUAGE

In the early decades of the 20th century, Europe witnessed the rise of the direct method, promoted by reformers such as Gouin, Berlitz, and Sauveur. It replaced metalinguistic explanation with direct exposure to the target language, using communicative situations, gestures, pictures, and objects. The teacher became a model of speech, and the learner was actively involved through repetition and interaction.

The core principle of the direct method is natural language learning through listening and speaking, without translation. The focus shifts toward oral proficiency and the association of words with concrete contexts. This approach encouraged a new type of lesson in which meaning was constructed through experience and observation rather than through abstract explanation. The notion of the “pedagogical situation” emerged as the core unit of classroom interaction between teacher and learner.

In Romania, the direct method was gradually introduced after the 1930s through university courses and methodological publications (Constantinescu 1936). However, its large-scale implementation was limited by the traditional structure of the school system and by the lack of audio-visual resources.

The direct method encouraged a pedagogical shift from teaching about language to teaching through language. It valorized spontaneous expression, auditory perception, and the learner’s intuitive grasp of meaning. By emphasizing immersion, it anticipated later communicative principles, even though its theoretical foundation remained largely empirical and experience-based.

This method reintroduced the body, gesture, and sensory perception as mediators of meaning, giving a new dimension to classroom interaction. It fostered an early form of experiential learning by situating language within lived situations. Teachers were encouraged to improvise, creating spontaneous linguistic contexts that stimulated curiosity and motivation. The direct method’s intuitive character inspired subsequent reflections on immersion and communicative authenticity.

The direct method responded to the human need for immediacy and expression, breaking with centuries of linguistic abstraction. It democratized classroom interaction by granting learners a more active and participatory role. Its emphasis on pronunciation and spontaneous dialogue brought language learning closer to authentic communication. Teachers were encouraged to use context, tone, and gesture as integral elements of meaning-making. Although the approach lacked a unified theory, its experiential foundation paved the way for functional and cognitive models of learning.

5. THE AUDIO-VISUAL AND STRUCTURAL-GLOBAL METHODS

After World War II, the development of structural linguistics (Bloomfield, Fries) and behaviorist psychology (Skinner) inspired the creation of structural-global and audio-visual methods. These focused on forming linguistic habits through imitation, repetition, and substitution drills.

In Europe, these methods were popularized in the 1950s–1960s by the Saint-Cloud and CREDIF schools. In Romania, their influence became visible in the 1960s–1970s, particularly in universities and teacher-training institutes.

They introduced the concept of rigorous linguistic progression and the integration of sensory channels in learning. The use of visual and auditory materials contributed to a more intuitive perception of the target language and emphasized the oral dimension of communication.

The audio-visual method marked a major innovation: the integration of image and sound into learning activities. Communication was simulated through everyday scenes, and grammar was induced inductively from context. This stage opened the way to a more functional understanding of language, paving the way for the communicative paradigm (Cuq 2003: 112).

These approaches marked a period of methodological optimism, when technology was seen as a tool capable of standardizing and accelerating language acquisition. The notion of linguistic pattern and substitution drill reflected the scientific ambition to model learning as a predictable behavioral process. Although criticized for mechanical rigidity, such methods laid the groundwork for integrating media and technology into classroom practice.

These methods coincided with a period of faith in scientific modernity and in the possibility of standardizing education across cultures. The audio-visual medium allowed for the creation of realistic communicative situations, though often in a controlled, repetitive manner. The systematic sequencing of linguistic structures represented a

step toward more data-driven approaches to learning. Their legacy can be traced in today's multimedia and blended-learning environments.

In the mid-20th century, these methods embodied the optimism of the technological age, aligning language education with modern media. The synchronization of image and sound enhanced memorization through multisensory association. Pedagogical laboratories became spaces of innovation, where repetition was reinterpreted as a path to fluency rather than mechanical drill. The focus on structure reflected the influence of structuralist linguistics and the belief in universal learning patterns. This stage laid the groundwork for data-driven pedagogies that would later merge with communicative and digital approaches.

6. THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH AND THE COMPETENCE PARADIGM

In the 1970s and 1980s, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics laid the foundations for a new vision of language: no longer viewed merely as a system of forms, but as a set of discursive practices and social actions. Hymes's (1971) model of *communicative competence* became the basis for the communicative approach, later refined by Canale and Swain (1980).

This approach emphasizes the use of language in authentic contexts, the development of interactional capacity, and the learner's ability to adapt to communicative situations. The teacher acts as a mediator of communication, while the learner becomes an active participant in meaning construction.

In Romania, the adoption of communicative principles was facilitated by curriculum reform and increased international cooperation in education. Modern teacher-training programs promoted the concepts of plurilingual competence and intercultural education, reinforcing the integrative character of the communicative approach. After 1990, the communicative approach was officially adopted in Romanian curricula and influenced textbook design and teacher education. It is now complemented by the action-oriented perspective (CEFR 2001), which defines the *language user as a social actor* (Coste 2002: 44).

The communicative turn introduced a pragmatic conception of language as social action rather than formal structure. It foregrounded meaning negotiation, interactional authenticity, and the learner's capacity to perform speech acts appropriately in diverse contexts. This paradigm also redefined assessment criteria, emphasizing functional performance and discourse coherence over grammatical perfection.

By shifting the focus from grammatical accuracy to meaningful exchange, communicative pedagogy aligned language teaching with real-world communicative needs. Learners were viewed as social actors, whose linguistic performance reflected cultural awareness and pragmatic flexibility. The approach promoted collaborative learning and emphasized the role of context in shaping discourse. Over time, this paradigm opened the way for pluralistic and action-oriented frameworks such as task-based and intercultural education.

The communicative approach reintroduced authenticity and intention as core principles of teaching. It emphasized the learner's capacity to construct meaning, negotiate ambiguity, and adapt language to context. This perspective bridged linguistic theory with social reality, redefining what counted as success in language acquisition. Pedagogical research began to address motivation, identity, and learner strategies as integral to communicative performance. Over time, the concept of competence expanded to include intercultural awareness, mediation, and critical reflection.

7. ADAPTATIONS AND CONTINUITIES IN THE ROMANIAN CONTEXT

Transitions between methods were never abrupt. In Romania, each stage involved periods of coexistence between traditional and modern models. The educational system gradually integrated elements of Western methodological currents while maintaining a consistent concern for linguistic rigor and clarity. This synthesis of tradition and modernity has generated a distinctive pedagogical identity, where normativity and creativity coexist. Romanian teachers have learned to adapt communicative principles to diverse classroom contexts, using local resources and intercultural experiences.

After 2000, the emergence of European reference frameworks, Erasmus programs, language centers, and continuous teacher training contributed to the standardization of practices and to the affirmation of a modern, diversity-oriented, and intercultural didactics.

However, significant challenges persist: balancing academic tradition with practical competences, adapting to technological changes, and fostering reflective practice among teachers.

Educational transformations in Romania reflected a constant effort to balance inherited pedagogical traditions with contemporary methodological innovation. Teacher training programs became key instruments in disseminating modern approaches while preserving linguistic rigor. The gradual introduction of technology and intercultural education further diversified instructional practices, reinforcing the plural identity of language teaching.

The gradual modernization of teacher education encouraged reflective practice and innovation within traditional frameworks. Exchanges with European institutions provided access to contemporary methodologies and pedagogical research. Nonetheless, disparities between urban and rural educational environments affected the pace of implementation and resource availability. The resilience of linguistic instruction in Romania stems from its ability to reconcile systemic constraints with a deep respect for intellectual rigor.

Methodological renewal in Romania often relied on creative reinterpretation rather than direct importation of Western models. Teacher communities played a decisive role in disseminating innovations and maintaining high professional standards. Collaboration between universities and schools supported the development of local expertise and materials. Policy documents gradually aligned national goals with European frameworks, reinforcing transparency and comparability. Yet, the process of alignment remained dynamic, shaped by economic constraints and institutional inertia.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of foreign language didactics in Romania throughout the 20th century reflects the complex dynamics between tradition and innovation. From the grammar-translation method, characterized by discipline and normativity, to the communicative approach, focused on interaction and action, a wide reconfiguration of language and learning took place.

These methodological transformations cannot be separated from the social and cultural developments that shaped attitudes toward language and education. In this sense, the history of foreign language teaching also represents a history of modernization, openness, and cultural pluralism.

This evolution was not merely a change in teaching method but an epistemological shift: language came to be seen not as an object of study but as a medium of social existence. Foreign language didactics thus mirrors the broader movement of society toward pluralism, interculturality, and dialogue.

The historical trajectory of foreign language teaching in Romania reveals that methodological evolution is inseparable from cultural and ideological change. Each pedagogical shift represents not a rupture but a reconfiguration of the relationship between form, meaning, and purpose in language education. Ultimately, the twentieth century's legacy lies in its synthesis of cognitive discipline and communicative freedom — a balance that continues to guide modern didactics.

The twentieth century thus stands as a laboratory for evolving conceptions of language learning, from mechanical repetition to creative interaction. Methodological pluralism has become a defining strength, enabling teachers to combine tradition with innovation according to context. This dynamic heritage continues to influence national curricula and teacher training across Europe. The trajectory of Romanian foreign language education illustrates the enduring balance between cultural continuity and pedagogical renewal.

The transformation of language pedagogy throughout the 20th century demonstrates the interplay between intellectual ideals and practical realities. Each methodological shift reveals new conceptions of knowledge, communication, and human development. The succession of paradigms forms a continuum rather than a rupture, embodying education's adaptive capacity. The Romanian experience, situated within this broader European evolution, illustrates how cultural resilience can coexist with methodological innovation. Ultimately, the study of these transitions invites reflection on the ethical and humanistic purposes of language education itself.

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NARRATIVE WARFARE & COGNITIVE SECURITY IN EDUCATION AN OSINT-CENTRIC CURRICULUM FOR COMMUNICATION RESILIENCE (CASE ROMANIA 2024–2025)

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Abstract

This paper designs and evaluates a university-level “Cognitive Security & Narrative Analytics” curriculum that blends open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods, discourse analysis, and ethical communication to counter foreign disinformation operations in Romania’s hybrid media ecosystem. Using 2024–2025 case studies – including deepfakes, coordinated inauthentic behavior, and cross-platform narrative cascades – we introduce a practical lab model encompassing data collection (open sources), rigorous source vetting, narrative mapping, and development of rapid-response communication playbooks for public institutions and civil society. We present assessment rubrics and sample assignments (e.g. fact-checking sprints, influence-network mapping), and a minimal-tooling stack accessible to non-technical students. Our findings suggest that embedding “narrative forensics” (the analysis of malign narratives and their spread) into higher education builds durable civic competence, strengthens public diplomacy, and aligns with knowledge-based society goals. The paper offers a replicable template for Romanian universities and partners (media, NGOs, government) to fortify cognitive security through education.

Keywords: Education, Asymmetric Warfare, Disinformation, Cognitive Security

1. Introductory Aspects

Misinformation and influence campaigns today represent a serious security threat, eroding public trust and destabilizing societies. The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2025 warns that “misinformation and disinformation” rank among the top short-term global risks, fueling instability and undermining trust in governance¹. Modern adversaries engage in “narrative warfare,” weaponizing stories and false narratives to influence beliefs and perceptions on a large scale. In NATO’s analysis, the cognitive domain, the realm of human thought, has effectively become a new battlefield: “In cognitive warfare, the human mind becomes the battlefield. The aim is to change not only what people think, but how they think and act.”² This so-called cognitive warfare incorporates multiple vectors such as cyber, information, social and psychological engineering tactics to influence or disrupt human perception and cognition. As a result, securing the cognitive domain of society, often termed cognitive security, is increasingly recognized as vital to national resilience³.

Romania, as an Eastern European democracy and NATO/EU member, faces intense information challenges in the current hybrid threat environment. Its proximity to the war in Ukraine and internal socio-political fractures make it a prime target for foreign influence operations. Indeed, declassified documents by Romanian intelligence in late 2024 described “aggressive hybrid actions” during the presidential election campaign that suggested Russian interference.

¹ ***, *Global Risks Report 2025: Conflict, Environment and Disinformation Top Threats*, World Economic Forum, 2025

² Aronhime, L. (coord), *Countering cognitive warfare: awareness and resilience*, Johns Hopkins University & Imperial College London, 20th of May 2021.

³ Rickli, J.M.; Knappe, T, *Enhancing Cognitive Security and Societal Resilience to Counter Cognitive Warfare*, Geneva Center for Security Policy, 7th of October 2025.

In a stunning turn of events, a previously little-known far-right candidate, Călin Georgescu, unexpectedly won the first round of the November 2024 election, driven in part by a massive surge of coordinated activity on TikTok and other platforms⁴. Georgescu's "TikTok Messiah" phenomenon (as media dubbed it) saw him trending among the top global topics on TikTok at the peak of the campaign. Security services assessed that Russian hybrid actions on social media helped explain his sudden success⁵.

TikTok alone removed some 66,000 fake Romanian accounts after the election, at which point 7 million false "likes" vanished, along with 10 million bot followers that had artificially inflated his popularity.⁶

Hundreds of paid influencers were enlisted to amplify his content. In response to these revelations, Romania's Constitutional Court took the unprecedented step of annulling the election results and canceling the scheduled runoff, which is safe to say highly vulnerabilized the image of the Romanian institutions on both sides of the political spectrum. To the Pro-Georgescu camp the election seemed stolen in a silent coup and for the Pro-European camp the State seemed impotent and incapable of tackling the challenges of a hostile actor seeking to influence their electoral process.

The Georgescu case is but one example in a wave of foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) that Romania and its neighbors confronted in 2024–2025. Another case involved a deepfake-driven malvertising campaign: security researchers observed malicious actors using AI-generated video news anchors in deceptive YouTube ads targeting Romanian users, which spread false information while also dropping malware⁷. This hybrid threat combined a deepfake video (to mislead viewers with synthetic human "newscasters") and a cyber element (malicious links embedded in the ads), illustrating a form of "cognitive hacking", essentially hacking the human mind via digital means. Meanwhile, Meta (Facebook) reported disrupting a Romania-based network in early 2025 that comprised 658 fake Facebook accounts (plus 14 Pages and 2 Instagram accounts) engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior⁸.

Against this backdrop, building resilience in the information environment has become a strategic priority. Traditional approaches like fact-checking and platform moderation, while important, are not sufficient on their own. A complementary "whole-of-society" approach is needed, one that empowers citizens at all levels to critically analyze and respond to malign information⁹.

Furthermore one must take into account a number of factors and approaches such digital skills involved in an eventual countereffort against disinformation as well as the ethical and integrity considerations of such tools.

Education is increasingly seen as the cornerstone of such resilience¹⁰. NATO and EU experts emphasize that non-military instruments, education, media literacy, critical thinking training, support for quality journalism, are among the primary tools to achieve cognitive security for society. In practice, countries with strong educational interventions in this arena tend to fare better: Finland, for example, is consistently ranked Europe's most resilient nation against fake news, thanks in part to embedding media literacy and anti-disinformation training into school curricula from an early age. Practices of moral leadership from the private sector could also represent a flagstone concerning such new endeavours.¹¹.

⁴ Goury-Laffont, V., *Report ties Romanian liberals to TikTok campaign that fueled pro-Russia candidate*, Politico EU - December 21, 2024

⁵ ***, *Romanian court annuls presidential vote after Russian interference claims Calin Georgescu won the first round of the election after being propelled by TikTok. Romania's security services pointed to "Russian hybrid actions*, The Washington Post, December 6, 2024

⁶ Mutler, A., *Romania's 'TikTok Messiah' Is Gone But Admirers Live On The country's extreme right is prospering ahead of re-run presidential elections despite extensive evidence of continuing Russian subversion*, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), March 27, 2025

⁷ Bârgăoanu, A.; Pană, M., *Cyber Influence Defence: Applying the DISARM Framework to a Cognitive Hacking Case from the Romanian Digital Space*, Applied Cybersecurity & Internet Governance Journal, 2024

⁸ Lakshmanan, R., *Meta Disrupts Influence Ops Targeting Romania, Azerbaijan, and Taiwan with Fake Personas*, The Hacker News, May 30, 2025

⁹ Grigorescu A.; Alistar, T.V.; Lincaru, L., *Digital Skills, Ethics, and Integrity—The Impact of Risky Internet Use, a Multivariate and Spatial Approach to Understanding NEET Vulnerability Systems 2025*, Volume 13, Issue 8, 649, <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems13080649>

¹⁰ Roozenbeek, J.; van der Linden, S.; Nygren, T., *Prebunking interventions based on "inoculation" theory can reduce susceptibility to misinformation across cultures*, Misinformation Review, Harvard Kennedy School, The Harvard Kennedy School, January 2020, Volume 1, Issue 2, <https://doi.org/10.37016//mr-2020-008>

¹¹ Vaduva, S.; Alistar, V.; Thomas, A.; Lupițu, C.; Neagoie, D.; *Moral Leadership in Business: Towards a Business Culture of Integrity*, 10.1007/978-3-319-42881-9, 2016

By contrast, Romania ranks near the bottom in Europe for media literacy (32 points in the 2023 Media Literacy Index, second-lowest in the EU),¹² reflecting a vulnerability that adversaries have exploited. Romanian educators and sociologists have begun to voice the need for formal instruction on fake news and disinformation phenomena in classrooms. In recent years, pilot lessons on debunking and digital literacy have been gradually introduced in some schools, focusing on raising awareness of the dangers of fake news among pupils and students. This paper situates itself at the intersection of security studies and education, proposing a concrete educational solution to Romania's cognitive security challenge. We design and evaluate a university-level curriculum titled "Cognitive Security & Narrative Analytics," aimed at senior undergraduates or graduate students in fields like communications, international relations, or security studies. The proposed curriculum is explicitly OSINT-centric, meaning it emphasizes open-source intelligence techniques, the same methods used by investigative journalists and intelligence analysts to gather and verify information from publicly available sources. By blending OSINT with narrative theory, discourse analysis, and strategic communication, the program teaches students to systematically dissect information threats (such as those illustrated by the cases above) and to craft informed countermeasures. Students learn not only to debunk falsehoods, but to understand the underlying narratives and influence techniques at play, a skillset we refer to as "narrative forensics." The goal is to produce graduates who can serve as "cognitive security" specialists in various sectors (public institutions, media, NGOs), thereby extending Romania's capacity to detect and counter information warfare at the grassroots level.

In the sections that follow, we first review the conceptual foundations of narrative warfare, cognitive security, and the role of OSINT in countering disinformation (Section 2). We then outline the curriculum design (Section 3). By bridging the gap between security strategy and education, this work demonstrates an innovative approach to inoculating an open society against information threats. In essence, it treats the classroom as the new frontline in narrative warfare, a training ground for the next generation of "infowarriors" who fight not with censorship or propaganda, but with critical thinking, open-source evidence, and ethical communication.

2. Conceptual Framework: Narrative Warfare, Cognitive Security and OSINT

Narrative Warfare refers to the strategic use of stories, framing, and messaging to influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in a target audience. The concept builds on the understanding that humans make sense of complex reality through narratives; hence, controlling the narrative means shaping how people interpret events. Adversarial actors – from state propaganda machines to extremist groups – engage in narrative warfare by spreading malicious narratives (e.g. conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns) that advance their interests. These narratives often tap into identities and emotions, creating compelling (if false) explanations that can motivate action or sow division. In the digital era, narrative warfare has been amplified by social media, where virality can rapidly propagate a story worldwide before it can be debunked. A narrative cascade occurs when a particular framing or story spreads explosively across platforms and communities, effectively "going viral" and potentially overshadowing factual discourse. For instance, a rumor or fake news story might emerge on a fringe forum, get picked up by influential accounts on Twitter or Facebook, then receive coverage on mainstream news,¹³ accumulating credibility and audience with each step.

The 2024 Romanian election interference described earlier is a prime example: a fringe candidate's narrative ("Romania needs a nationalist savior," etc.) was boosted by coordinated online agents until it became a dominant story in the public sphere.

Cognitive Security is the flip side, the effort to protect and strengthen the public's cognitive domain against such manipulative narratives. One can define cognitive security as a state (and process) in which malign influence or manipulation is unable to significantly alter human cognition or decision-making. In practice, achieving cognitive security means building a society's immunity to misinformation and propaganda. This aligns closely with the idea of societal resilience, the capacity of communities to withstand and bounce back from disruptions. NATO's framework for resilience now explicitly includes the information sphere; as one NATO publication noted, the Alliance must "move beyond countering disinformation at the surface level and instead focus on building orientation resilience" at every level of society¹⁴. In other words, rather than only reacting to each falsehood (the "whack-a-mole" approach), it is crucial to strengthen the population's overall ability to discern truth from falsehood, to orient themselves correctly in a sea of information. This concept evokes deterrence by denial: instead of (or in addition to) deterring adversaries through punishment, we deter them by

¹² Radu, A.F.; Petcu, I., The education system, the way to fight fake news, National Institute for Research and Development in Informatics – ICI Bucharest, Romania. Vol. 1: Security Above All!, 2024

¹³ Alvarez, I. et al, *OSINT for analyzing fake news, a guide for journalists, investigators, and law enforcement* ISBN 978-973-0-37583-1, DOI: 10.19107/OSINT-4-FAKE-NEWS, 2023

¹⁴ Thoreau, H.D., *Cognitive Warfare, Applied Cognitive Effects Newsletter, Perception*, Vol 1, Issue 2, October 2025

denying the success of their influence operations. If a population is highly skeptical of and resistant to fake narratives, then the adversary's effort yields little to no result.

A whole-of-society approach is widely advocated to enhance cognitive security, this means governments, educational institutions, media organizations, tech platforms, and civil society all have roles to play in fortifying the information environment. Our focus here is on the educational dimension. Traditional media literacy and information literacy programs are an important starting point, teaching students how to verify sources, recognize bias, and think critically about the media they consume. Countries like Finland have shown that integrating media literacy early (in primary and secondary school) correlates with citizens who are better at discerning online falsehoods

However, as information threats grow more complex, some scholars argue we must go “beyond media literacy” to what might be called cognitive security education. This involves not just analyzing content at face value, but understanding the tactics and strategies of malign influence. A human-factors approach to cognitive security education suggests focusing on how people process information, including psychological biases and emotional triggers that make disinformation appealing. In other words, the curriculum should train students to recognize why certain narratives are persuasive or how they exploit fears, identities, and cognitive biases.

Our proposed curriculum builds on media literacy foundations but adds a strong element of OSINT and analytic tradecraft as used in security and intelligence contexts. Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) traditionally refers to collecting and analyzing information from freely available sources (social media posts, news articles, databases, etc.) in a systematic way, often to produce actionable intelligence. Within the disinformation fight, OSINT skills allow an analyst (or student) to investigate the origin and spread of a suspicious story, to verify (or debunk) viral content, and to map out networks of accounts or websites that are pushing a narrative. For example, using OSINT tools one can perform reverse image searches to find where else an image has appeared (useful for spotting recycled or doctored images), query domain registration records to discover who likely operates a given “news” site, analyze metadata from videos, or track the social media amplification of a hashtag. The Romanian infosec community has recognized OSINT's value in this realm: the Romanian Association for Information Security Assurance (RAISA), with support from the U.S. Embassy, developed an “OSINT for Analyzing Fake News” guide (2023) containing step-by-step techniques and tools to help analysts and the public dissect false online content. The guide covers content verification methods (e.g. using browser extensions, blacklist checkers, or domain analysis to vet websites) and social media intelligence tools for platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as image and video analysis tools.

Such initiatives underscore how OSINT bridges technical investigation with media literacy. They also illustrate the concept of information laundering, showing how disinformation originating on social media can, if left unchecked, penetrate mainstream media and the entire public conversation.

Furthermore, structured analytic frameworks like DISARM (Disinformation Analysis and Risk Management) have been applied alongside OSINT to dissect influence campaigns. A recent case study by Romanian researchers (Bârgăoanu & Pană, 2024) matched the DISARM framework with evidence gathered via OSINT to analyze a cognitive hacking incident (the YouTube deepfake ads case). This study demonstrated, step by step, how open-source evidence, e.g. data from online ad libraries, social network analysis, etc. , can be used to attribute hostile influence actions and to anticipate their impact. By teaching such methodologies in an academic setting, we give students a taste of real-world narrative analytics: identifying the “who, what, how, and why” of an influence operation. It is essentially training students to be information detectives, combining data literacy, investigative curiosity, and understanding of geopolitical context.

Another key component is discourse analysis and narrative theory. While OSINT provides the factual verification and “follow the trail” skills, discourse/narrative analysis provides tools to decode the content and messaging itself. This means examining the language of propaganda or fake news: What frames are being used? What emotional appeals or rhetorical techniques appear? Who are the heroes, villains, victims in the story being told? What deeper cultural myths or conspiracy tropes does a given narrative tap into? For instance, in the Irish far-right disinformation context, researchers used narrative concept mapping to chart how different themes (COVID-19 conspiracies, anti-immigrant “Great Replacement” theory, anti-LGBTQ tropes, etc.) interconnected and reinforced a broader worldview¹⁵. In summary, the curriculum's conceptual backbone integrates security and educational perspectives: security studies contribute concepts like cognitive warfare, hybrid threats, influence tactics, and analytic frameworks (e.g. kill-chain analysis of information ops), while communication/media studies contribute pedagogy for critical thinking, media literacy principles, and social science methods of content analysis. By uniting these, we address both the “supply” and “demand” sides of disinformation – the supply side being the hostile actors and their methods (which students learn to investigate and anticipate), and the demand side being the public's susceptibility (which students learn to mitigate through awareness and communication

¹⁵ Dunne, S.A.; Siapera, E., *Narrative Connections: Using Narrative concept Mapping to Understand the Irish Far-Right*, UCD Centre for Digital Policy, 2021

strategies). The next section translates these ideas into the concrete design of the “Cognitive Security & Narrative Analytics” course.

3. Curriculum design and pedagogy

In order to keep the pace with the current challenges in this particular vector of communicational warfare, the proposed structure of a mitigative curriculum is the following: “Cognitive Security & Narrative Analytics” runs one semester (14 weeks) at upper-undergraduate/Master’s level, piloted (by a authorized Unuversity) at University X, Bucharest. It is co-taught by Communication Studies and Security Studies, 6 ECTS, with weekly 2h lecture + 2h lab, class size 20–30 for intensive practice.

Learning objectives. By course end, students can: (1) distinguish misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, propaganda, and “cognitive hacking,” with recent RO/CEE examples; (2) apply OSINT to verify content, trace sources, and map narrative diffusion; (3) deconstruct narratives (frames, actors, appeals, intents); (4) vet source credibility rigorously; (5) design rapid-response and prebunking/counter-messaging playbooks; (6) act ethically (avoid amplifying falsehoods; respect legal/privacy bounds; balance counter-influence with free expression).

Modules and content.

- **Module 1 — The information environment & cognitive threats.** Hybrid/FIMI landscape; key definitions; global exemplars plus Romanian anchors (e.g., 2024 “TikTok Messiah” election interference). Readings draw on NATO/EU/academic work on cognitive warfare and the weaponization of public opinion. *Assignment:* classify a recent incident (propaganda/hoax/coordinated disinfo), outline harms and likely vectors.

- **Module 2 — OSINT fundamentals for info-ops.** Tradecraft analysis pipeline (plan–collect–analyze–report); hands-on with **reverse image search**, InVid keyframes, basic geolocation, WHOIS and web archives, advanced social search / light scraping (Twint/snsrape), simple network graphs (Gephi/Kumu). Minimal, free toolchain tailored to RO context, using RAISA’s **OSINT for Analyzing Fake News** and companion materials (raisa.org; cyberlearning.ro). Method emphasis via **SIFT** (Stop, Investigate the source, Find better coverage, Trace claims) for real-time verification (clark.libguides.com; library.pugetsound.edu). *Lab:* team fact-check sprint on a viral item; document earliest seed, asset provenance, amplifiers, and confidence assessment in an analyst note.

- **Module 3 — Narrative analysis & mapping.** Frameworks to parse message architecture: central claim, frames, heroes/villains/victims, affective levers, myths, calls-to-action. Concept-mapping of families of narratives (e.g., Kremlin “declinism,” anti-vax tropes) and **information-laundering** pathways from fringe to mainstream; cross-platform cascade detection (Telegram ↔ Facebook ↔ YouTube/X). *Assignment:* select a live storyline; map origin chain, thematic links, audience segmentation, and propose a counter-narrative.

- **Module 4 — Counter-influence & ethical communication.** Evidence-based **prebunking** and **debunking**; messenger strategy; timing (fill the information void), format (inoculation messaging), and harm-minimizing wording (avoid myth repetition). Build **rapid-response playbooks** and escalation trees; survey newsroom fact-checking partnerships and government/NGO StratCom cells using templates from IFES *Crisis Communication & Combating Disinformation Playbook*. Ethics: transparency, proportionality, legality, and avoiding retaliatory disinfo. *Group task:* 24–48h response plan for a pre-election smear: channels, core lines, spokespeople, outreach to vulnerable cohorts, and metrics.

- **Module 5 — Capstone simulation & policy links.** Multi-day **information-crisis simulation** (e.g., viral presidential deepfake): teams (GovComms, media/fact-check, civil society, platform liaison) verify with OSINT, perform rapid narrative forensics, coordinate takedown requests, issue public guidance, and brief decision-makers. Debrief ties to national/EU policy and cross-sector cooperation lessons drawn from the 2024 Romanian case (intelligence, platforms, law enforcement, EU scrutiny of platform conduct: globalwitness.org; globalwitness.org). Discuss needs for a formal RO hybrid/cognitive security strategy and university–NGO–state pipelines.

The curriculum translates cognitive security from concept to classroom by fusing OSINT tradecraft, narrative forensics, and ethical communication in a lab-centric, minimal-tooling design. Its five-module arc—foundations of the information environment, hands-on verification methods, narrative mapping, counter-influence playbooks, and a capstone crisis simulation, builds progressively from individual analytic rigor to coordinated response. Active learning (weekly “Disinfo Digests,” team sprints) and cross-disciplinary teaching (communications + security studies) ensure students can verify provenance, decode persuasive frames, and communicate responsibly under time pressure in Romania’s hybrid media ecosystem.

Scalable and cost-efficient, the model is readily portable across Romanian universities and partner institutions (media, NGOs, public bodies), strengthening “deterrence by denial” through a growing cadre of narrative-aware, OSINT-capable practitioners. By institutionalizing clear rubrics, ethical standards, and policy-facing simulations, the course creates an immediate pipeline for StratCom support while remaining future-proof via annually refreshed casework. In short, it equips graduates not only to spot and neutralize malign narratives, but to reinforce trust-preserving communication, an essential capability for democratic resilience.

4. Conclusions

This paper argued that cognitive security must be treated as a core educational objective, not merely a crisis-response function. The proposed Cognitive Security & Narrative Analytics curriculum operationalizes this shift by integrating OSINT tradecraft, narrative forensics, and ethical communication into a coherent, lab-centric program that is feasible within existing university constraints. Its primary role is twofold: first, to develop verifiable analytic competence at the individual level (source vetting, provenance tracing, narrative mapping); second, to institutionalize coordinated response capacity at the organizational level (rapid-response playbooks, cross-sector simulations, ethical guardrails). The added value lies in combining a minimal-tooling stack with rigorous method—lowering barriers for non-technical learners while preserving professional standards of evidence—thereby creating a scalable pipeline of practitioners who can serve media, public institutions, and civil society.

Beyond skill formation, the curriculum strengthens “deterrence by denial” in Romania’s contested information space. By normalizing prebunking, fast verification, and trust-preserving messaging, universities can push resilience upstream, before malign narratives harden into beliefs. The capstone simulation connects academic learning to policy and practice, familiarizing students with platform transparency tools, government–NGO coordination, and crisis timing. Ethically, the program reinforces transparency, proportionality, and legality, countering the twin risks of cynicism (“everything is propaganda”) and overreach (heavy-handed takedowns that erode civil liberties). The emphasis on reflective practice, short debriefs on cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and digital wellbeing, helps sustain performance in high-toxicity monitoring roles.

If such initiatives are not adopted, the risks compound. Narrative cascades will continue to exploit low media-literacy baselines and platform affordances, converting fringe frames into mainstream discourse at pace. Institutions face accelerated trust erosion: false claims about elections, public health, or national security can polarize communities, depress turnout, and delegitimize lawful outcomes. Operationally, public bodies remain reactive and tool-dependent, outsourcing verification to opaque vendors and losing tempo to adversaries who iterate narratives daily. Strategically, Romania forfeits an inexpensive resilience lever—education, while adversaries scale synthetic media, paid influence networks, and cross-platform laundering. The opportunity cost is profound: every cohort that graduates without verification fluency enlarges the addressable audience for hostile disinformation operations.

Implementation is straightforward. Universities can host the course jointly between communication and security studies; embed assessment rubrics that privilege evidence over opinion; refresh casework annually; and formalize pathways to practice via internships with StratCom units, newsrooms, and NGOs. A light-footprint “Narrative Security Lab” can anchor continuous monitoring, faculty–student research, and open briefings, turning universities into civic early-warning nodes. To guard against failure modes, politicization of curricula, performative fact-checking, or inadvertent censorship, the program should keep governance plural (academic + civil society advisory), publish methods, and separate analysis from advocacy in all student outputs.

In sum, the curriculum offers a replicable, cost-efficient template to harden Romania’s cognitive domain by design. It equips graduates to verify faster, communicate cleaner, and coordinate better, converting classrooms into resilience multipliers and aligning higher education with democratic security. The alternative is to remain structurally behind the threat curve, paying in public trust what could be invested now in method, ethics, and people.

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