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## DOCTORAL THESIS ABSTRACT

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES. THE  
MONTESSORI MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH  
CENTURY

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## INTRODUCTION

Education stands as a fundamental pillar of both individual and societal development, representing a continuous process through which knowledge, values, and skills are transmitted and assimilated from one generation to the next. Over time, it has become evident that education forms the foundation of human progress, emerging from the need to preserve and share accumulated experiences. The earliest forms of schooling, developed in various parts of the world, reflect the cultural visions and philosophies surrounding learning.

This study aims to trace the evolution of education from its early organized beginnings to the modernization of the Romanian educational system in the first half of the twentieth century. It explores the profound structural and ideological transformations education underwent, shaped by the social and political context of the time. Special emphasis is placed on alternative pedagogies—modern concepts that redefined the relationship between student and teacher.

Particular attention is given to the Montessori pedagogy, which advocates for child-centered learning, the development of autonomy, and exploration within a structured educational environment. This method had a significant impact on interwar European and Romanian education, generating both enthusiasm and controversy.

Through this research, we seek to highlight how these alternative educational approaches contributed to shaping the Romanian school system, offering an innovative perspective on education and its role in the formation of both the individual and society.

### Motivation for Choosing the Topic

The research topic „The History of Education and Alternative Pedagogies. The Montessori Movement in Romania during the First Half of the Twentieth Century” reflects our interest in the intersections between educational and societal development. We believe that education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but also a reflection of a society's values and aspirations. Exploring Montessori philosophy allows us to better understand how international pedagogical ideas were perceived and adapted within a Romanian context that was both traditional and striving for reform.

By consulting historical sources, including the interwar press, we aim to offer an original contribution to the understanding of the development of alternative education in Romania. This research seeks to highlight not only the structural transformations within the education system, but also their impact on Romanian culture, identity, and mindset. Understanding these historical processes can help us formulate more effective responses to contemporary educational challenges.

### Spatial and Temporal Delimitations

This study focuses on the interwar period (1918–1945), a crucial stage in the modernization of Romanian education, during which numerous innovative pedagogical initiatives emerged. The geographical scope encompasses the entirety of Greater Romania, considering that Montessori influences were felt in various regions of the country, with a particular emphasis on urban environments and private education. The first half of the twentieth century marked the introduction and spread of the Montessori method, which began in 1907 in Rome. (In Romania, the first signs appeared in the press and through published translations) and this period also includes the time when totalitarian regimes suppressed Montessori schools. The first Montessori school opened in 1934, but it lacked continuity and was followed only by isolated private initiatives. After 1948, under the communist regime, the method was abandoned and replaced by the imposed Soviet educational model.

## The Relevance of the Topic

The chosen topic is highly relevant to understanding the current state of Romanian education. Analyzing the evolution of the educational system—including during the interwar period—sheds light on the foundational principles that have shaped education in Romania. Understanding the past enables us to better grasp both the challenges and the opportunities of the present. The interwar context was one of significant social, economic, and technological transformations that profoundly impacted the educational system.

This research addresses a relatively unexplored subject within Romanian historiography: the impact of the Montessori movement in interwar Romania. The analysis of over 180 articles from the period's press provides a fresh and well-documented perspective on the reception of Montessori pedagogy, highlighting its role in shaping alternative education. This study contributes meaningfully to the field of educational research in Romania by revealing how the interwar educational reform influenced both students and the formation of national identity.

## Objectives, Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research seeks to investigate the roots of modern education and the development of alternative pedagogies, with a particular focus on the reception of the Montessori method in Romania during the first half of the twentieth century. The general objective is to analyze how educational alternatives were shaped internationally and how they were adapted within the Romanian socio-political, economic, and cultural context.

A distinctive element of this research lies in its use of interwar periodicals as the main corpus of analysis—this being the first scholarly study to examine Montessori education as reflected in Romanian publications of the era. Thus, the dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between national pedagogical tradition and international influences, offering a historical perspective on the challenges and potential of alternative education within an evolving educational system.

The specific, descriptive, synthetic, as well as causal and correlational objectives were selected with the aim of guiding the research toward relevant conclusions regarding the overall purpose of the thesis. In Chapter 1, „EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW UNTIL THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN CONCEPTS”, our specific **objective** is to establish the theoretical framework by defining key terms and concepts related to education and alternative pedagogies, as well as to analyze the development of education and pedagogy worldwide across historical eras. This will serve to highlight the relationship between the two notions, with a particular focus on educational innovations and alternatives throughout the centuries. The **research hypothesis** is based on the premise that education is a dynamic phenomenon, shaped by the historical, social, economic, and philosophical context of each era. Thus, the evolution of education and the emergence of educational alternatives are the result of profound structural changes, reflecting the needs and ideals of society during each historical period. By analyzing the historical development of education and pedagogy, we anticipate that educational innovations and alternative pedagogies emerged as responses to the challenges of their time, directly influencing educational systems and shaping modern educational principles. The **questions** we aim to answer within the subchapters are as follows: What is the historical and theoretical meaning of education and educational alternatives? How did the philosophies of antiquity—such as those of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—influence the development of classical education, and why are they considered a foundation for educational innovation? In what ways was medieval education shaped by the Church, and how did the Renaissance bring about innovation through the emergence of alternatives? What essential contributions did Enlightenment thinkers make to education and

pedagogy, and who were the key theorists in this regard? How did the concept of adult education evolve into a new pedagogy during the modern period, and what successful models emerged?

As for the second chapter, „THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN THE ROMANIAN TERRITORY”, the specific **objective** was defined considering that the case study focuses on the reception of an innovative pedagogical movement within the Romanian context. Thus, the research continues with an analysis of the evolution of education in Romania, emphasizing the internal and external influences that shaped the national educational system. By examining historical documents, legislative regulations, and the contributions of key figures, this chapter aims to highlight the educational transformations, the attempts at innovation, as well as the work of prominent reformers such as Spiru Haret and their impact on Romanian society during the premodern and modern periods. Accordingly, the chapter also seeks to investigate key personalities, identifying and analyzing the contributions of rulers, teachers, or reformers to the development of Romanian education. The underlying **hypothesis** of this research section is that the evolution of the Romanian educational system was driven both by internal factors—such as national reforms and the contribution of key individuals—and by external cultural influences. These external inputs gradually led to the modernization of education, a process achieved with considerable difficulty and mostly sporadically, often through the efforts of enlightened scholars or rulers who contributed through cultural initiatives or by supporting education and learning institutions prior to 1859. Institutional and pedagogical modernization gained more momentum during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza and through the influence of Romanian intellectuals educated in Western Europe—philosophers, pedagogues, and others—who looked beyond Herbartianism. These developments created the premises, at the beginning of the 20th century, for the reception of educational alternatives, including Montessori pedagogy. The research **questions** addressed in this chapter are: How did the first forms of organized education emerge in the Romanian territory, and what were the main external influences on their development? What were the key educational reforms and pedagogical developments during the first half of the 19th century, and how did they shape the educational system? How did regulations and legislative provisions contribute to structuring the Romanian education system, and what impact did they have on access to education? In what ways did Spiru Haret influence the modernization of Romanian education and the development of schooling for all social categories? How did adult education initiatives develop in Romania as innovative manifestations?

In the third chapter, „MODERN PEDAGOGICAL ALTERNATIVES”, the specific **objective** is to analyze the emergence, fundamental principles, and impact of modern pedagogical methods such as Waldorf pedagogy, the Freinet method, the Dalton Plan, and the Montessori method, within both the international and Romanian historical contexts. The aim is to highlight the similarities and differences among these educational alternatives, investigate the extent to which they were received in Romania, and assess their applicability within the Romanian educational system during the first half of the 20th century. The research **hypotheses** concerning modern pedagogical alternatives suggest that they are all grounded in the principle of child-centered education, adapting the learning process to the needs, interests, and developmental pace of each individual child. Although 19th- and early 20th-century Romania was situated at the periphery of Western Europe’s innovative cultural centers, Romanian society and the national educational environment demonstrated a notable receptiveness to new pedagogical movements. The most progressive educators increasingly distanced themselves from Herbartianism, thus laying the foundation for the integration and adaptation of the Montessori method within a uniquely Romanian context. The research **questions** addressed in this chapter include: What are the core principles of Waldorf pedagogy, and how does it differ from other educational alternatives? How was the Freinet method conceived, and what was its impact on modern education? In what ways did the Dalton Plan alter the traditional structure of education, and how relevant was this method within the educational systems of its time? How were Waldorf pedagogy, the Freinet method, and the Dalton Plan received in the Romanian context? What are

the central principles of the Montessori method (regarding developmental stages, environment, and the educator's role), and how do they respond to children's developmental needs? These questions aim to facilitate a clearer understanding of the development process of alternative pedagogies and how they were perceived and adopted within Romania.

In Chapter IV, „ROMANIAN EDUCATION IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD”, the specific **objective** is to analyze and understand the evolution of educational policies and the state of the Romanian education system during the interwar years. This analysis is conducted by examining the social and political context, educational demographics, legislative developments, and the views of various political parties on educational reform. The chapter also explores the echoes of the “Copernican revolution” in education—represented by the educational alternatives gaining ground during this period—and identifies the main indigenous pedagogical currents in order to better understand the framework within which the Montessori movement was received. The **hypotheses** addressed in this chapter are as follows: the interwar Romanian education system was strongly influenced by nationalist and sociological currents, which led to the development of pedagogical theories supporting the differentiation of education between rural and urban environments. This was done by promoting a national pedagogy adapted to the Romanian ethno-psychological specificities, with the aim of preserving rural traditions and national identity—an approach that, while culturally rooted, limited the integration of international pedagogical innovations and hindered overall educational progress. A secondary hypothesis is that the reforms initiated to achieve legislative and administrative unification following the 1918 Great Union—through the adoption of essential laws for Romanian education—contributed to the creation of a unified and accessible education system for all citizens, as well as to the introduction of New Education concepts into the Romanian context. The research **questions** addressed in Chapter IV include: What were the main challenges faced by the Romanian education system in integrating the newly acquired territories after 1918? What was the impact of legislative reforms on the interwar Romanian education system, and to what extent did interwar educational legislation support the implementation of alternative pedagogies? In terms of educational demographics, what differences existed between urban and rural education during the interwar period? How did the interwar press reflect debates around educational reform, and how did political parties differ in their views on education during this time? What pedagogical currents dominated Romanian education during the interwar years, and to what extent were Romanian pedagogical theories influenced by European models (such as the “active school,” philosophical pedagogy, cultural pedagogy, personalist pedagogy, social pedagogy, and experimental pedagogy)? How was an attempt made to formulate a Romanian national pedagogy during the interwar period, and what were the consequences of this approach for the implementation of a movement such as Montessori education?

In Chapter V, „THE MONTESSORI MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY”, the specific **objective** is to develop a comprehensive and analytical synthesis of the Montessori movement in Romania during the first half of the 20th century, using the relevant historical sources available, with a focus on materials from the press of the time. This chapter aims to explore how the Montessori method was received, popularized, and implemented in Romania by analyzing the contributions of key figures involved, as well as the influence of the socio-cultural and political context. The purpose is not only to highlight the adoption and adaptation of the Montessori method in Romanian educational settings but also to examine the tensions and limitations encountered, taking into account the specificities of the period and the impact of political regimes on the movement. Furthermore, the chapter seeks to frame the theory of Montessori reception in interwar Romania, as articulated by Valeriu Dumitru, to assess whether this theory holds true in light of the analyzed sources and to identify elements of continuity or divergence in relation to the international context of the movement. The final objective is to clarify the impact of the Montessori method on preschool education in Romania and its relevance within the broader framework of alternative pedagogies of the time. The

Montessori movement in Romania during the first half of the 20th century raises a series of relevant research **questions** for understanding the reception, popularization, and impact of this pedagogical method. A first central question concerns the sources of historical research: what are the main available resources that provide information about Montessori education in Romania, considering their relevance and volume? In this context, it is essential to examine press testimonies as well as other sources such as memoirs, correspondence, or archival documents to assess how this educational movement unfolded and what its main challenges and achievements were. It is equally important to identify the key individuals involved in promoting the Montessori method in Romania, without whom the movement would lack depth and substance. Who were these promoters of alternative pedagogy, what roles did they play, and how did they influence preschool education in interwar Romania? A second significant aspect concerns Valeriu Dumitru's theory on the reception of Montessori pedagogy in interwar Romania. This theory suggests three distinct types of reactions: enthusiasm in the 1920s, followed by denial and benevolence throughout the 1930s. It remains to be analyzed whether this categorization is confirmed by the available sources. To what extent does the historical reality of interwar Romania align with this theory, and what elements may be added or contested to offer a more nuanced perspective? This question allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of the reception process and the socio-political factors that influenced the evolution of the Montessori method. Finally, a third essential question concerns the impact of the historical and social context on Romanian society's receptivity to this alternative pedagogy. How was the Montessori method adopted and adapted to the educational specificities of interwar Romania? In what ways did it contribute to the development of preschool education, and what criticisms or limitations were identified in its implementation? This question invites reflection on the broader historical context and on how innovative pedagogical ideals survived or were constrained in the face of the challenges of the time. The **hypotheses** formulated within this chapter aim to guide the analysis and synthesis regarding the Montessori movement in Romania in the first half of the 20th century. Concerning the historical sources used, the hypothesis is that initiatives related to the Montessori method, mainly promoted in the private sector, did not generate a substantial volume of official archival documents. Therefore, the most relevant primary sources are found in the press of the time, memoirs, correspondences, and other autobiographical testimonies, which capture the social and educational context of the period and contribute to a detailed understanding of how this alternative pedagogy was received and implemented.

The thesis „**THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGIES. CASE STUDY: THE MONTESSORI MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY**” is rooted in the desire to explore and understand the changes and interactions in the field of education. It offers the opportunity to gain deeper knowledge of education, alternative pedagogies, and their impact on society, contributing to the development of a more comprehensive vision of the educational system and its future directions.

### ***Research Methodology***

This study follows the essential stages of a rigorous scientific undertaking: defining the topic, compiling the bibliography, formulating working hypotheses, documentation, source analysis, and the establishment of historical facts. The research plan is based on a chronological and thematic approach, correlating historical developments with pedagogical ideas and the reception of the Montessori method in interwar Romania

By analyzing *primary sources*<sup>1</sup>, where they are available, such as original historical documents, archival records, legislation, journals, letters, and photographs, I aim to reconstruct

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth D. Bailey, *Methods of Social Research*, Free Press, 1994, p. 294.

events and the diachronic evolution of education and concepts related to educational alternatives. This inquiry is complemented by the analysis of secondary sources, including historical works, articles, and studies written by other scholars who have examined the same subject.

The qualitative analysis used in this research is based on information about human behavior and attitudes, focusing on the description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study through primary sources such as observations, written documents, legislation, political activity reports, newspaper articles, and pedagogical journals from the interwar period<sup>2</sup>. Quantitative analysis, on the other hand, relies on numerical data and focuses on identifying trends and patterns in the collected data. This method is especially useful when analyzing the Romanian educational system as a whole by presenting statistical data. Both methods have their advantages and can be used in tandem to achieve a more complete and accurate understanding of the issue of educational alternatives in the history of education<sup>3</sup>. Additional sources, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, archives, and statistical records, also enhance the research's value<sup>4</sup>.

Within this scientific approach, I employed multiple historical analysis methods: qualitative analysis, aimed at highlighting the rigor and relevance of the actions undertaken by individuals involved in the evolution of the education system; quantitative analysis, used to support the arguments formulated in the research by presenting significant statistical and numerical data; discourse analysis, focused on examining the messages conveyed by political leaders, particularly regarding their initiatives for the structure and development of education; content analysis, used to interpret the concepts presented in press articles and to correlate them with the socio-economic realities of the time; critical analysis of historical documents and educational activity reports, concentrated on an in-depth evaluation of their context and meaning. I also employed historical investigation in the research of archival documents to obtain a concise picture of the Romanian education system during the interwar period, focusing on the relevant information contained in those records. The transformations registered in the Romanian education system have long been a topic of interest for both historians and the general public.

One essential method used to gather the data and information necessary to confirm the hypotheses is the comparative method, employed to study a broad spectrum of pedagogical theories and practices across different countries. While the comparative method collects data “horizontally,” the methods specific to history collect data “vertically,” tracing the evolution of concepts and systems over time<sup>5</sup>.

The combination of these methods provides a comprehensive and balanced view of alternative education in interwar Romania. Qualitative analysis adds depth to the understanding of context and motivations, while quantitative analysis reveals dominant structures and patterns. This research draws on an interdisciplinary approach, rejecting a reductive view of the history of education as a simple succession of ideas. Instead, it emphasizes the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation, as well as the coexistence and confrontation of different pedagogical trends. Through critical analysis of sources, the study not only assesses their authenticity and objectivity but also considers the context in which they were produced and received<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, this research offers a solid and contextualized methodological perspective on the reception of Montessori pedagogy, contributing to a better understanding of the historical evolution of educational alternatives in Romania.

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<sup>2</sup> Iuliana Lazăr, *Ghid pentru analiza statistică a datelor în cercetarea educațională/A guide for statistical analysis of data in the educational research*, 2019, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald H. Fritze, Brian E. Coutts, Louis Andrew Vyhnanek, *Reference Sources in History: An Introductory Guide*, Abc-Clio, Santa Barbara, 2004, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> Dumitru Muster, (editor), Ștefan Westfried (selectator), Emil M. Brândză, *Antologie de texte pedagogice (1932-1943): Contribuții la dezvoltarea pedagogiei românești*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 1973, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

## ***Historiographical Framing***

Romanian historiography has paid limited attention to alternative pedagogies during the interwar period, with most studies focusing on general educational reforms. The only monographic work that addresses interwar Montessori education in dedicated chapters is Valeriu Dumitru's *Maria Montessori and Montessorianism in Romania* (2006). His approach, from the perspective of an expert in pedagogy, proposes valuable theories that will be critically re-evaluated in the final section of this thesis.

Accordingly, this research complements the existing body of literature by offering a detailed analysis of previously unused primary sources, including over 180 articles from the interwar press, as well as secondary sources related to Montessori pedagogy in Romania. Academic publications on interwar education, doctoral theses, and comparative studies of alternative pedagogical movements were all consulted. To support this investigation, works covering this topic from various perspectives and chronological contexts were employed. This multidimensional approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the transformation processes in educational policies.

## ***Research Sources***

The secondary works examined constituted significant sources in our research process on the development of Romanian education, alongside primary sources such as legislation, parliamentary debates, newspapers and school magazines, as well as pedagogical, didactic, and cultural publications from that period.

Primary sources for the educational alternatives discussed include works and translations by Maria Montessori, Célestin Freinet, Helen Parkhurst, John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner, and Romanian pedagogues such as C. V. Buțureanu, Izabela Sadoveanu, Ilie Șulea-Firu, among others. A crucial role in reconstructing these alternative pedagogies was played by Maria Montessori's writings, such as *The Montessori Elementary Material*<sup>7</sup> and *The Montessori Method*<sup>8</sup>, which remain foundational references in alternative pedagogy, presenting methods and learning techniques that differ from traditional ones. Montessori introduced an educational environment based on the child's freedom and autonomy, learning through exploration and manipulation of didactic materials, and development through experience and self-discovery.

Works such as *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*<sup>9</sup> and *The Roots of Education*<sup>10</sup> by Rudolf Steiner also explore the pedagogical and spiritual philosophy of Waldorf education, emphasizing the harmonious development of the child through art and culture. Steiner promoted a holistic educational approach that integrated scientific knowledge with spiritual and cultural traditions, including the development of the body, mind, and spirit. John Dewey's works, such as *Experience and Education*<sup>11</sup>, explore American educational philosophy and stress the importance of experience and democracy in learning. Dewey, frequently cited and read by Romanian interwar pedagogues, developed a philosophy that emphasized individual and social experience, learning by doing, and the cultivation of critical and reflective thinking.

As part of the study on the history and evolution of education and pedagogy in the Romanian space, we examined files from the archives of the Ministry of Public Instruction and the House of Schools, corresponding to the period before 1940, found in the holdings of the

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<sup>7</sup> Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Elementary Material*, Arthur Livingston, (traducere), Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, Anne E. George (traducere), Frederick A. Stokes Company, New York, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *The Roots of Education*, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, The Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series, New York, 1997.

Romanian National Archives in Bucharest. We also analyzed the press and publications issued by professional associations of teaching staff, as well as more than 100 newspaper issues, including *Opinia*, *Adevărul*, *Albina*, *Calendarul*, *Curentul*, *Cuvântul*, *Dimineața*, *Dreptatea*, *Epoca*, *Evenimentul*, *Gazeta Învățăământului*, *Neamul Românesc*, *Opinia*, *Universul*, *Țara Noastră*, *Viitorul*, *Vremea* published between August 1911 and January 1939. Employing a qualitative research method, we conducted in-depth analyses of press articles, speeches, and relevant documents for establishing educational policies, focusing on the perspectives of those directly involved and contextualizing them within the social, cultural, political, and economic environment of the time.

Romanian historiography also includes works such as *Evoluția centenară a învățăământului în România*<sup>12</sup>, which outlines the defining features and transformations of the Romanian educational system from its early stages up to 1918, through the interwar period, the 1946–1989 interval, and the changes in pre-university and higher education after 1990.

In the context of educational research in Romania, we also identified doctoral theses such as *Politicile educaționale preuniversitare în România interbelică*, written by Alexandru Mitru under the coordination of Professor Sergiu Musteață<sup>13</sup>. This work addresses crucial subjects such as the evolution of Romanian schooling after World War I and the analysis of educational policies and legislation during the interwar period. These contributions provide essential insights into the evolution of Romania's educational system during this time, offering a detailed perspective on the directions and policies adopted.

## Structure of the Thesis

This thesis undertakes a historical and developmental approach to education, from the emergence of schooling worldwide and the contributions of educational currents and innovators, to a focused examination of alternative pedagogies and the Montessori movement in Romania during the first half of the 20th century. The paper is organized into five chapters, each with a clearly defined role in constructing a detailed perspective on educational innovation throughout history. The content is structured in a logical progression, beginning with general concepts related to education and pedagogical innovation, continuing with the history of education in Romania, an exploration of alternative pedagogies, the interwar educational context, and culminating in a case study on the Montessori movement.

The first chapter, „EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL JOURNEY TO THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN CONCEPTS”, offers a perspective on the evolution of education by defining fundamental concepts of education and educational alternatives. It analyzes pedagogical ideas from Antiquity, the influence of the Church on medieval education, the pedagogical advancements of the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment’s contributions to the development of a new educational model. A distinct subchapter is dedicated to adult education, illustrating the emergence of this field as part of modern pedagogy and its relevance to the shaping of educational alternatives. This focus reflects the interest shown by interwar Romanian pedagogues and policymakers in educating the broader population.

Our research continues in the second chapter, „THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN THE ROMANIAN SPACE”, which explores the Romanian educational system from a historical perspective, including early forms of organized instruction and the key legislative frameworks that shaped its development up to the 19th century. This chapter offers an overview of major educational reforms, outlines foundational legal provisions, and evaluates the

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<sup>12</sup> Constantin Anghelache, Mădălina Gabriela Anghel, Iordan Petrescu și Emilia Gogu. *Evoluția centenară a învățăământului în România*, București, Editura Economică, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandru Mitru, *Politicile educaționale preuniversitare în România interbelică*, teză de doctorat, Universitatea „Valahia” din Târgoviște, Târgoviște, 2021.

impact of key figures such as Spiru Haret. It also emphasizes the significance of adult education and the efforts made toward modernizing the school system.

In the third chapter, „MODERN PEDAGOGICAL ALTERNATIVES”, we analyze the most important pedagogical alternatives that emerged in the 20th century, including the Montessori method, Waldorf education, the Freinet method, and the Dalton Plan. Taking a historical and philosophical perspective, this chapter focuses on alternative methods and learning techniques. We explore the work of educational innovators such as Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, and John Dewey, who had a significant impact on education and developed unique approaches that transformed the way people learn and grow. We compare and contrast the foundational principles of each method, how they spread across various educational systems, and their reception in Romania. The subchapter dedicated to the Montessori method is structured around Maria Montessori’s life and contributions, the method’s core principles, the role of the educator, and the influence of the learning environment.

Chapter IV, „ROMANIAN EDUCATION DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD”, analyzes the social and political context of the interwar years, emphasizing how these factors influenced educational reforms and the development of native pedagogical trends. The chapter examines key elements such as the demographics of the school population, the role of the press and political parties in educational debates, and the emergence of experimental pedagogies in Romania, such as the active school and personalist pedagogy, leading to the crystallization of various pedagogical currents.

Finally, the most substantial part of the analysis lies in the case study presented in Chapter V: „THE MONTESSORI MOVEMENT IN ROMANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY”. This concluding chapter is devoted to the reception of Montessori pedagogy in interwar Romania. Through the analysis of primary and secondary sources that document the existence of this movement, as well as the personalities involved in promoting the Montessori method and the educational initiatives that were developed, this section presents the first echoes of the method in the contemporary press, the contributions of various pedagogical journals, and the impact of conferences and training courses on the subject. It traces the way Montessori education was received in interwar Romania and explores the perspectives for its further development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Aiming to provide a detailed understanding of the evolution of education and alternative pedagogies, with a particular focus on the reception of the Montessori method in Romania during the first half of the 20th century, this research analyzed both the international and national context of educational alternatives, the impact of socio-political factors on the reception of the Montessori method, and its reflections in the interwar press. Throughout this investigation, we tested a series of hypotheses that guided the research process, examining whether the evolution of education reflects global trends in pedagogical innovation and to what extent these were implemented in Romania. The study assessed the impact of Montessori pedagogy on the Romanian educational system during the interwar period, emphasizing both the factors that favored its reception and the obstacles that hindered the wider implementation of this innovative method. The research was based on a rigorous analysis of historical sources, including interwar press, archival documents, and relevant literature.

The first chapter, „Education: A Historical Trajectory Towards the Emergence of Modern Concepts”, examined the evolution of education up to the advent of modern pedagogical paradigms, highlighting the transformations it underwent throughout history and defining education as a dynamic phenomenon shaped by the social, economic, and philosophical contexts of each epoch. The earliest forms of education in Antiquity were analyzed, with philosophers such

as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle formulating foundational pedagogical theories. During the Middle Ages, education was heavily influenced by the Church, while the Renaissance introduced new humanistic perspectives on learning. The Enlightenment brought essential changes, advocating for accessible and rational education. In the 18th and 19th centuries, educational systems became increasingly structured, with pedagogues such as Pestalozzi and Herbart laying the groundwork for structured teaching methods. This chapter demonstrated that education evolved continuously, adapting to societal needs and paving the way for the emergence of alternative pedagogies, which would later significantly influence global education systems. The hypothesis that education is a dynamic phenomenon shaped by historical, economic, and social transformations was confirmed. The research showed that the development of education was influenced by political, religious, and economic factors, and that pedagogical alternatives emerged in response to the needs of different historical periods. For instance, in Antiquity, education was reserved for elites; the Renaissance fostered greater accessibility, while the Enlightenment promoted the idea of universal education. These historical phases created the premises for new educational models, including the adult education movement at the end of the 19th century and the emergence of the Montessori method.

The second chapter, „The Historical Evolution of Education in the Romanian Space”, explored the development of education in Romania, emphasizing the key stages through which the national educational system evolved from its early organized forms to the modern era. It was noted that, during the Middle Ages, Romanian education was also influenced by the Church, with the first schools established within monasteries, initially serving to train clergy. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, Phanariot rulers and Enlightenment-inspired reformers initiated early modernization efforts by supporting the creation of secular schools and introducing Romanian as the language of instruction. A crucial moment was represented by the "Regulamentul Organic" period and the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, during which an organized educational system was established, including the first laws on compulsory schooling. Spiru Haret's reforms at the end of the 19th century expanded access to schools, professionalized teacher training, and increased educational accessibility, especially in rural areas. The early 20th century witnessed growing modern influences. This chapter demonstrated that, although Romania experienced a continuous process of educational modernization, economic and social challenges affected the pace and scope of these changes. These developments created the foundations for the reception of alternative pedagogies, including Montessori, during the interwar period. The hypothesis that Romania's educational modernization was influenced by both internal and external factors was validated through historical source analysis and educational reforms. We found that the evolution of Romania's educational system was significantly shaped by Western influences, especially through intellectuals educated abroad, who introduced progressive ideas. However, this modernization process was fragmented, often encountering resistance from traditional structures and nationalist ideologies that promoted a rigid educational model.

The decision to analyze adult education in depth in subchapter I.5., "The Evolution of a New Pedagogy: Adult Education", and to explore its beginnings in Romania in subchapter II.5., "The Emergence of Adult Education as a New Pedagogy in Romania", is justified by the importance of this field in the modernization of educational systems and their adaptation to the new economic and social requirements of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Other major changes at the end of the 19th century included the spread of the Prussian model of education, the establishment of compulsory and free primary schooling, the expansion of teacher-training schools and kindergartens, the invention of Braille, and, notably, the emergence and dissemination of educational alternatives. Moreover, adult education remains a subject that has been relatively understudied by historians. Subchapter I.5 analyzes the international context in which adult education evolved, highlighting its development as a response to the demands of increasingly industrialized and urbanized societies. It underscores the role of initiatives such as literacy programs for workers, the extension of access to education through specialized programs for adults, and the contributions of reformers, particularly from Scandinavia, who advocated lifelong

learning. This approach allows us to better understand the innovative dynamics of adult education and its impact on the development of modern societies. Subchapter II.5 focuses on the legislative initiatives and reforms promoted in Romania from the second half of the 19th century onward, culminating in the efforts of Spiru Haret, who played a crucial role in organizing and promoting adult education. It also highlights the difficulties faced in implementing these initiatives, such as a lack of resources, resistance from certain social segments, and a fluctuating socio-political context.

Chapter Three, "Modern Pedagogical Alternatives", analyzed the emergence and evolution of modern educational alternatives, highlighting the main pedagogical movements that influenced educational systems in the 20th century. The chapter began by outlining the historical context in which these pedagogies developed, emphasizing the need for reform and the desire to adapt education to the individual needs of students. The most significant alternative educational models were presented: Waldorf pedagogy, the Freinet method, the Dalton Plan, and Montessori pedagogy. Each was examined in terms of its core principles, applicability to the educational process, and impact on the traditional system, as well as their reception in the Romanian context. Waldorf pedagogy, based on Rudolf Steiner's vision, promoted a holistic approach, emphasizing creativity and free thinking. The Freinet method encouraged active student participation in the learning process through innovative techniques such as printing in schools. The Dalton Plan offered students greater autonomy, allowing them to self-manage their learning pace. Special attention was devoted to Montessori pedagogy, elaborating on its essential principles, such as learning through experience, the importance of a structured educational environment, and the role of the educator as a guide. The chapter revealed the reception of these alternatives in Romania, showing that while foreign influences were present, their implementation encountered significant challenges rooted in the country's social, economic, and political context. The analysis broadly confirmed the first research hypothesis, demonstrating that modern pedagogical alternatives were grounded in the principle of child-centered education, promoting a learning process adapted to the needs and pace of each student. The study of Waldorf, Freinet, Dalton, and Montessori pedagogies revealed that these models proposed innovative methods designed to foster autonomy, creativity, and active engagement from learners. However, the second hypothesis was not fully confirmed. The reception of Western pedagogical innovations could be documented based on the sources used only in the cases of Montessori, Dalton, and Freinet; the Waldorf school, on the other hand, received minimal attention in Romania, where Rudolf Steiner was mostly known for his involvement in esoteric and occult domains. Although Romania's educational environment was initially shaped by traditional models, interwar reformers showed genuine interest in these new directions, supporting a departure from Herbartian pedagogy and creating a conducive framework for the integration of alternative methods—particularly the Montessori approach.

Chapter Four, "Romanian Education in the Interwar Period", analyzed the development of the Romanian education system between the two World Wars, highlighting the legislative, social, and cultural transformations that shaped education during this era. Following the 1918 territorial unification, there was a need to harmonize the national education system, leading to reforms intended to ensure access to education for all social categories. Educational policies of the interwar period were influenced by local nationalist ideologies, which advocated for a pedagogy tailored to the Romanian ethos but simultaneously limited the adoption of innovative international methods. Nevertheless, movements like the "active school" and the "new school" gained traction, introducing modern concepts such as experiential learning and student-centered instruction. The chapter also addressed the division between urban and rural education, where persistent issues such as resource scarcity and accessibility remained prevalent. The press and political parties played a significant role in public debates on educational reform, influencing government decisions. The findings underscored that, although the interwar period marked a time of educational modernization, resistance to certain innovations—including alternatives such as Montessori—limited their large-scale implementation. These methods were predominantly

applied in private and urban environments. The research largely confirmed the initial hypotheses, as interwar educational policy favored a centralized vision designed to reinforce national identity and standardize the education system. This orientation constrained the acceptance of alternative pedagogies, including Montessori, which were perceived by some as foreign models, potentially incompatible with the national educational ideal. At the same time, the legislative and administrative reforms introduced after the 1918 Union contributed to the unification of the national education system and the incorporation of modern concepts. However, their application was uneven, especially in rural areas, confirming this hypothesis only partially. Thus, alternative pedagogies, including the Montessori method, had a limited impact in rural settings and were primarily promoted in urban and private contexts, with minimal support from the state.

Chapter Five, "The Montessori Movement in Romania in the First Half of the 20th Century", highlighted how the Montessori method was received, popularized, and implemented within the Romanian educational context. The research was based on relevant historical sources, particularly 180 articles from the interwar press, which reflected both enthusiasm and reservations regarding this alternative pedagogy. Rooted in the development of children's autonomy, learning through experience, and adapting the educational environment to the learner's needs, the Montessori method began to be known in Romania at the beginning of the 20th century, mainly through translations and pedagogical journal publications. Figures such as Izabela Sadoveanu, Ilie Șulea-Firu, C. V. Buțureanu, and members of progressive educational circles supported the introduction of this method, viewing it as a valuable alternative to the traditional education system. The first concrete initiatives emerged in the 1920s, particularly with the organization of educator training courses (starting in 1924), and between 1930 and 1934 with the establishment of Montessori kindergartens, especially in Bucharest. Despite the interest shown by certain pedagogues and intellectuals, the application of the Montessori method was limited by several factors. Firstly, the Romanian interwar educational landscape was dominated by a strong nationalist trend. Another limiting factor was the lack of institutional and financial support for the development of a widespread Montessori system. Unlike other European countries where alternative methods received government backing, in Romania these remained isolated, privately funded initiatives. Furthermore, the rigidity of the educational system and the emphasis on standardized pedagogy hindered the official integration of the Montessori method into the national curriculum. The chapter also addressed the political transformations that impacted the Montessori movement. Especially after the rise of the communist regime, Montessori pedagogy was gradually marginalized, as education became a tool for ideological propaganda. The research demonstrated that, although the Montessori movement had a significant impact on interwar educational debates and was supported by certain intellectual circles, its large-scale implementation was hindered by ideological, economic, and political factors—remaining an educational experiment limited to private and urban settings.

The analysis of interwar press sources revealed that the Montessori method received only moderate publicity, although there was consistent interest in innovative educational alternatives. Some progressive publications emphasized the advantages of the method, while others reflected the broader society's skepticism toward innovations that did not align with the dominant vision of education. Overall, the press was not a decisive factor in spreading Montessori education, but it played an important role in stimulating educational debates. The press analysis confirmed the hypothesis that the media had an ambivalent role in promoting the Montessori method. On one hand, some pedagogical and academic journals supported educational innovation and advocated for the Montessori approach. On the other hand, mainstream newspapers had limited influence in disseminating this model, and some conservative publications raised objections regarding its compatibility with Romania's cultural and national educational ethos.

A crucial part of this research was the analysis of the reception of Montessori pedagogy through the lens of Valeriu Dumitru's theory, which identifies three distinct phases in the interwar Romanian context: enthusiasm during the 1920s, followed by denial and then moderate goodwill

during the 1930s. These phases were identified through historical sources and press analysis and provide a useful framework for understanding how Montessori pedagogy was perceived and integrated into Romanian education. The analysis largely confirms the existence of these stages, though contextual nuances are essential for a more detailed understanding of the method's reception. The phase of enthusiasm (1920s to early 1930s) was characterized by growing interest in Montessori methods, particularly within reformist academic and pedagogical circles. The method was viewed as revolutionary, capable of offering a viable alternative to traditional teaching. This enthusiasm was linked to Romania's broader desire to align with Western educational trends, seeing Montessori pedagogy as a symbol of modernization. This period saw translations and discussions of international Montessori works in specialized journals, and a few private schools began adopting its principles. Contemporary press articles portrayed the method as modern and effective, capable of transforming early childhood education. Educators like Izabela Sadoveanu and Ilie Șulea-Firu championed these innovations, advocating for their integration into Romanian preschool education. During this time, conferences were organized at university level, and early experiments took place in private kindergartens in Bucharest and other major cities.

As nationalist discourse and centralized educational models gained dominance, Montessori pedagogy was increasingly viewed with suspicion—marking the phase of denial and skepticism (mid-1930s to late 1930s). Ministry reports and official pedagogical manuals favored more traditional approaches aligned with the ethno-national pedagogy advocated by thinkers like Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, based on the concept of a "philosophy native to the Romanian people." Critics such as Stanciu Stoian challenged Montessori for its lack of formal structure and unsuitability for mass implementation, particularly in rural areas with underdeveloped infrastructure. These attitudes led to a decline in official interest and the abandonment of initiatives aimed at institutional adoption.

In parallel, Montessori pedagogy continued to be studied and implemented in limited circles, without institutional backing—marking the phase of moderate goodwill (late 1930s to early 1940s). In private education, progressive educators attempted to preserve Montessori principles through limited educational experiments. Some pedagogical journals cautiously supported the method, treating it more as an experimental option rather than a revolutionary one. A handful of schools in Bucharest, Constanța, the Jiu Valley, and Transylvania incorporated Montessori elements into their curricula without official recognition. This phase represented a stagnation of Montessori in Romania—no major progress was achieved, but interest persisted in certain academic environments.

Following this analysis, it can be concluded that Valeriu Dumitru's three-phase theory is largely validated, though some nuances apply. The phase of enthusiasm was primarily confined to progressive academic and pedagogical circles and had limited influence on official policy. The phase of denial was driven mainly by shifts in educational policy toward nationalist and centralized models. The phase of moderate goodwill did not lead to a Montessori revival but maintained a latent interest in certain educational settings—allowing the method to be rediscovered and reevaluated in subsequent decades. Thus, the analysis of Montessori pedagogy's reception in interwar Romania confirms the existence of these three phases, each shaped by the socio-political dynamics and prevailing pedagogical orientations of the time.

At this stage of the research, we have synthesized the main educational ideas and policies, analyzing how they were translated into strategies and legislation. The study is based on archival documents, scholarly works, and interwar educational publications. We investigated the process of unifying the educational systems after the Great Union and correlated educational policies with the doctrinal orientations of the time. The analysis of primary sources highlighted the dominant pedagogical ideas, offering an interpretive framework for the case study on Montessorianism. The interwar period was marked by a clear focus on organizing the educational system and adapting it

to social changes and Western influences. Education was perceived as an essential solution in a context of national transformation and instability.

In conclusion, it can be observed that the evolution and consolidation of the Romanian educational system were influenced, at various times, by three major educational models. During the interwar period, the French model exerted a strong influence, emphasizing cultural values, the arts, literature, history, democracy, philosophy, and refinement. Between 1930 and 1944, the German model became dominant, with a strong focus on technical and scientific education. After World War II, the Soviet model was imposed, bringing significant contributions in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and other exact sciences. Currently, educational influences are multiple and diverse. The American and British systems place a strong emphasis on research and innovation, while educational models from Northwestern Europe, such as the Finnish one, stand out through pedagogical methods and techniques that stimulate students' autonomy and creativity.

This thesis focuses on the Montessori movement in Romania during the first half of the 20th century, without extending the analysis to its developments after 1990—a period marked by significant transformations in the Romanian educational system. This delimitation was determined by the accessibility of sources and by the main objective of the research, which aims to contextualize the reception of the Montessori method in the interwar period. However, for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Montessorianism in Romania, a future research direction could explore the revival and development of this pedagogy after the fall of the communist regime, in the context of post-1989 educational reforms. Nevertheless, addressing this timely topic in the form presented here allows us to better investigate and understand the current educational context, to identify the challenges and opportunities in the field of educational policy, and to analyze how these can contribute to the development of a more efficient, inclusive, and relevant educational system for the needs of contemporary society.

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