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NAVIGATING CRISES: TECHNOLOGY, COMMUNICATION, AND THEIR ROLES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TEACHER STRIKES

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Abstract: This article compares the impact of technology and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher strikes. Both relied on technology for remote communication and organization. Online platforms, video conferencing, and messaging apps facilitated teaching and participation during the pandemic and helped coordination during strikes. The media played an important role in the transmission of messages and the shaping of public opinion. Differences emerged as the pandemic focused on learning continuity and health concerns, while strikes addressed payment concerns and negotiations. Effective communication and adaptability were crucial in managing these crises. The findings inform communication dynamics in complex situations that benefit the learning process and social relationships.
Key words: Communication, coordination, COVID-19 pandemic, remote, teacher strikes, technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher strikes can be considered turbulent times, have created major challenges for the educational system, and require significant changes in communication methods.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a global impact on people's health and lives, economies, and educational systems [1]. It has caused great uncertainty and disturbances in society through school closures, the transition to online learning, and severe restrictions in many countries. These changes have had a major impact on students, parents, and teachers, presenting challenges in access to education, adaptation to new teaching and learning methods, and health and well-being issues [2].

On the other hand, teacher strikes are also seen as turbulent periods. Strikes can occur for a variety of reasons, such as: unfavorable wages, unsatisfactory working conditions, or changes in educational policies. When teachers strike, this can cause major disruption of the education process, classroom interruption, and widespread dissatisfaction in the school community.

The COVID-19 pandemic and teacher strikes can cause fear and uncertainty among students, parents, and the community. They cause significant changes that affect the learning process and the stability of the educational system [3; 4; 5].

This article explores the similarities and differences between communication during the pandemic and communication during the teacher strike and analyses the role of technology, political aspects, and the impact on learning processes.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach used to analyze communication during teacher strikes was developed to investigate the dynamics of communication, the influence of technology, and the role of the media in educational crisis contexts.

This methodology was designed to provide a detailed understanding of communication during educational crises and to allow meaningful comparisons between these events. Its primary objective was to identify the ways in which technology and the media played a role in

managing the respective crises and influencing public opinion.

Our methodology aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of technology in management and promotion, as well as its impact on participants and public perception. We sought to identify specific ways in which technology was used and assess its effectiveness in the specific context of teacher strikes in Romania.

To investigate communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher strikes, we adopted a multidimensional approach that included the following methods.

- a) Data collection: Information was obtained through interviews with teachers and union representatives involved in strikes, as well as through the analysis of media content related to these events. Additionally, official documents and press releases related to strikes and pandemic events were examined. Information for this analysis was collected from multiple sources, including interviews with organizers and participants, online document analysis, posts on social media posts, and media reports related to the events.
- b) Data analysis: The collected data was analyzed using content analysis methods, which allowed the identification of communication patterns and trends. Qualitative methods were also used to understand the perspectives and perceptions of the participants about communication in these contexts. Furthermore, collected data were analyzed using content analysis methods to identify patterns and trends in technology use during the strikes. This included evaluating the types of technology used, the frequency and duration of usage, as well as its impact on strike mobilization and communication.
- c) Contextual comparison: To assess similarities and differences in communication approaches between the pandemic and teacher strikes, we used a comparative analysis method, highlighting key aspects that influenced communication in these two distinct contexts.
- d) Case studies: Multiple representative case studies were selected to illustrate how technology was used during strikes and to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving strike objectives. Detailed case studies were conducted to examine how communication evolved during the pandemic and strikes in the specific context of Romania. These studies included interviews with participants and analysis of online content.
- e) Participant perspectives: Interviews with strike participants were conducted to consider their direct perspectives on the use of technology. These interviews provided valuable information on participant experiences and how technology influenced mobilization and communication during strikes.
- f) Content analysis: The content from various sources, such as press releases, media reports, official statements, and communication materials published on online platforms, was analyzed to identify themes, tone, and key messages.
- g) Interviews and surveys: As direct participants in the strike, interviews were conducted with teachers, students, parents, and union representatives to obtain direct perspectives on their experiences regarding communication during these critical periods. Surveys were also used to collect quantitative data on their perceptions and reactions.
- h) Policy analysis and official documents: We analyze the policies and official documents issued by the government and educational authorities during the pandemic and strikes to understand the guidance and changes in communication.

This integrated approach allowed us to comprehensively assess how communication evolved and was managed in the context of the pandemic and strikes, as well as its impact on the educational community and learning processes. The results of this analysis will be presented in detail in the following chapters of this article.

3. COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS

3.1 Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic requires rapid adaptation to online education and the use of

technology to maintain communication between teachers and students [3; 6; 7; 8].

Communication channels such as video conferences, emails, and online learning platforms have been used to spread information, address queries, and maintain the seamless progression of the learning process. Educators face challenges when adapting their instructional and assessment approaches to the online setting, underscoring the importance of transparent and efficient communication for student engagement and retention [9].

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us valuable lessons about the effects of school absence. According to [10] and the United Nations reports (2020), 95% of the world’s student population was affected by school closure [11]. As seen in Figure 1, here are some key points of view.

Learning loss: Long missed school days can result in significant learning losses for students. The sudden transition to remote learning during the pandemic disrupted regular classroom instruction, reduced interaction with teachers and colleagues, and difficulties in accessing resources. These factors contribute to the gap between learning and academic progress [12].

Educational inequalities: The pandemic has exacerbated existing educational inequalities. Students with disadvantaged backgrounds may have limited access to technology, a reliable Internet or an environment conducive to learning at home and face greater challenges in maintaining their education. Digital divides and socioeconomic disparities have deepened the educational divide and widened the achievement gap between students [8, 9].

Social and emotional impacts: School closures not only undermine academic progress but also have significant social and emotional consequences. Schools provide essential social support systems for students and provide opportunities for socialization, well-being, and access to basic services such as nutrition and counseling programmes. The absence of these supports during school closures has a negative impact on mental health and overall student development [9].

The loss of routine and structure: The school provides a structured environment that helps

students develop discipline, time management skills, and a sense of routine. The sudden shift to remote learning has disrupted these routines, making it more difficult for students to maintain motivation, concentration, and organization in their studies [10].

The importance of personal education: The pandemic highlighted the value of personal education and the important role of teachers in the facilitation of effective learning. The interaction between teachers and students allows for personalized immediate feedback and personalized instruction to meet the individual needs of students. Virtual learning, although necessary during the pandemic, cannot completely replace the benefits of individual training [9, 11].

The Need for Adapted Education Systems: COVID-19 stresses the importance of building adapted educational systems that can respond effectively to crises and ensure continuity of learning [13]. Schools and policymakers are encouraged to explore innovative approaches, such as blended learning models that combine personal and online learning, to better prepare for future problems.

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the essential role of schools in the education, well-being and social development of students. It stressed the need to invest in resilient education systems, equitable access to technology and resources, and full support for students to mitigate the adverse effects of missed school days in future crises [14]. The following examples are technological innovations in the educational environment during the pandemic.

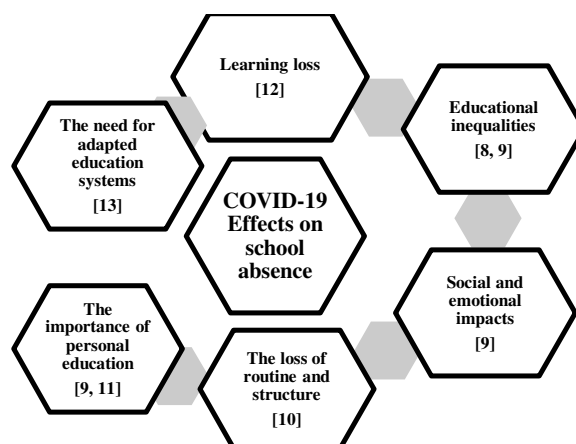


Fig. 1. COVID-19 pandemic effects of school absence

The use of online learning platforms: Educational institutions and teachers must quickly adopt an online platform to support learning. Examples of such platforms include Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, and other learning management solutions [9].

Using online communication and collaboration tools: To maintain the interaction between teachers and students, online communication and collaboration tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, or WhatsApp have been used. These have facilitated virtual meetings, group discussions, and real-time communication [9, 12, 15].

Digitization of educational materials: Teachers have had to adapt their educational materials for the online environment. This has included creating presentations, videos, online tests, or interactive educational resources.

Digital assessment and feedback: Digital tools have been used to assess students and provide feedback to students. For example, online tests, digital assignments, or tools have been used.

It is important to mention that technological innovation in the educational environment does not represent a complete solution to all challenges in the education system. There are still issues related to access to technology and internet connectivity, adequate teacher training, and adaptation of the curriculum to the online environment.

The current strikes followed the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing schools around the world to close for a long period.

3.2 Communication during teacher strikes

In the last three years (2020-2023) in several European countries, including England and Wales [16], France [17], and Romania [18], there have been general strikes aimed at addressing the welfare of the population and attracting attention to wage problems and working conditions.

In such cases, communication plays an important role in mobilizing and coordinating teachers and their supporters. Teachers and trade unions used various channels of communication, including media, social networks, and face-to-face meetings, to communicate their messages and gain public support.

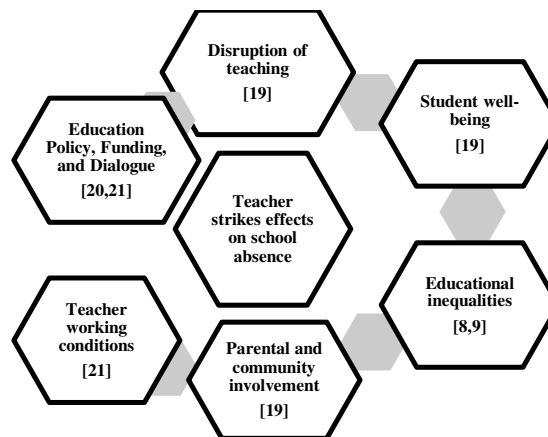


Fig. 2. Teacher strikes effects of school absence.

Like the pandemic, technology plays an important role in the organization and maintenance of connections between teachers using online platforms and discussion groups [1].

Teacher strikes have provided information on the effects of missed school days. As seen in Figure 2, here are some key lessons learnt:

- Disruption of learnt teaching: Teacher strikes result in the suspension of regular classroom teaching, leading to missed school days. As a result, student education progress and continuous learning have been disrupted. Extended strikes have a significant impact on student academic performance and overall educational experience [19].
- Student well-being: Teacher strikes can affect social and emotional well-being. The school is an important social support system for students and provides a structured and safe environment. When schools close due to strikes, students can experience routine losses, lack of access to basic services, and limited opportunities for social interaction, which can have an impact on their emotional and social development.
- Educational inequalities: Teacher strikes can exacerbate existing educational inequalities. Students with disadvantaged backgrounds may be more dependent on school resources and services, but the effect of school absences may be disproportionate. Access to food programmes, special education services, counseling, and extracurricular

activities during the strike period can deepen the educational results in disparities.

- Parental and community involvement: Teachers' strikes often require parents and community members to find alternative childcare arrangements or to support student learning at home. These strikes emphasize the importance of parents and communities in education and the critical role they play when school routines are interrupted [19].
- Teacher working conditions: Teacher strikes highlight issues related to teacher working conditions such as teacher wages, benefits, class sizes, and workloads. These strikes highlight the importance of providing fair compensation, adequate resources, and supportive working environments for teachers. Recognizing and responding to these concerns can contribute to the overall improvement of the educational system.
- Education Policy, Funding, and Dialogue: Teacher strikes can serve as catalysts for discussions about teacher and student needs and education policies. They focus on systemic challenges and create opportunities for dialogue between teachers, policymakers, and the larger community. Such discussions can lead to positive changes in the educational system and resource allocation [20].

It should be noted that the impact of teachers' strikes may vary, depending on the duration of the strike and the specific circumstances of each situation. Although strikes temporarily disrupt education, they can also be used as an opportunity for teachers to defend their rights and draw attention to important educational issues. The ultimate objective should be to find constructive solutions that prioritize both students and teachers and the educational needs of students [20; 21].

3.3. Comparing the contexts

When communication during the pandemic is compared to communication during teacher strikes, certain similarities and differences become apparent. Technology plays an essential role in both contexts, enabling remote communications and activity organization. Using messaging applications and social

networks to communicate quickly and easily, information exchanges have facilitated rapid exchange. In both cases, the media has played an important role in the transmission and influence of public opinion [16, 17].

There are also notable differences. During the pandemic, communication focused on ensuring continuity of the learning process and managing health-related concerns, while during the teacher strike, the emphasis was placed on salary issues and working conditions. In the context of teacher strikes, the political aspect is more evident because it involves negotiations and interactions with government authorities.

4. ROMANIAN TEACHER STRIKES: CASE STUDY WITH DEBATE

4.1. Romania's education system during the last 30 years

In the past 30 years, Romania's education system has experienced many changes and faces major challenges. During this time, we have witnessed the transition from rigid, centralized, and memory-based systems to more flexible systems focused on skills and student development. Many challenges remain to be overcome.

During this period, Romania was also involved in the European integration process and the education system had to adapt to the requirements and standards of the European Union. English language learning was introduced and educational programmers were implemented to prepare students for the global labor market.

However, the Romanian education system faces serious challenges. School funding is insufficient, and teachers' salaries are low, which remains a problem. The school infrastructure is often outdated and inadequate, and teaching resources are limited. Regional and social disparities in access to education and its quality remain unresolved problems. There is concern about excessive attention to examinations and the lack of comprehensive assessments of students. In addition, aligning the curriculum with the real needs of the labor market and developing skills for the 21st century. Given all these challenges and the current economic,

financial, political, and social context with respect to education in Romania, disruptions have occurred in the form of labor movements.

As in Table 1, after 1989 and until now, Romania has faced teacher strikes.

In the current technological and communicational context and considering the latest teachers' strike that occurred three weeks from May to June 2023, the question arises regarding the relevance of the three previous teachers' strikes that took place between 1999 and 2005. The following aspects are considered significant for the answer.

Teachers' strikes from 1999 to 2005 represented significant moments in the history of the Romanian educational system and were related to issues of salary and working conditions. Consequently, these strikes influenced how teachers and their unions approached communication and mobilization in the context of subsequent strikes, including the 2023 strike.

The evolution of technology and the communication landscape over the years has influenced how teachers and their unions mobilized and communicated during strikes. We will now present some comparisons between the communication technologies and tools available during the 1999-2005 strikes and those in 2023. This will illustrate how these developments have had an impact on communication dynamics.

Communication technology in the years 1999-2005 was much more limited compared to today. Mobile phones were available, but not as ubiquitous or advanced as they are today, with text messages being the primary form of mobile communication. The Internet was growing, but the Internet penetration rates were still low and access to the Internet was generally less available in schools and less developed communities.

In the period between teacher strikes from 1999-2005 and the strike in 2023, Romania experienced significant growth in technological infrastructure and technology adoption. Mobile phones became ubiquitous and advanced, enabling fast communication and access on the go. Access to the Internet increased significantly, with high-speed connections becoming more widespread. Social media platforms and messaging apps became

fundamental for mass communication and mobilization. Streaming video and live broadcasting technologies evolved, providing new ways to transmit events in real-time.

During the 2023 strike, technology played a crucial role in organization and communication. The strike participants used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to coordinate actions and attract public attention. Live video broadcasts and online events were organized to raise awareness among the public and highlight the demands of strikers. The online media provided extensive and real-time coverage of the strike, and blogs and news websites were used to convey the perspectives of the strikers.

In essence, this comparison underscores that technology and the communication landscape have evolved significantly between the two periods of strikes. This evolution has had a significant impact on how teachers and their unions managed communication and mobilization during the 2023 strike.

The transition over these 24 years has been substantial and demonstrates how technology has been a key factor in addressing educational strikes in Romania.

For the past 30 years, the political and governmental spheres have exerted a significant influence on Romania's education system. Political decisions and government priorities have played a crucial role in the development and allocation of resources in the field of education, and throughout this period, politicians and governments have striven to promote educational system reforms aimed at improving teaching methods, assessments, and curricula.

Political objectives include increasing school autonomy, improving the quality of education, aligning curriculums with the needs of the labor market, and integrating them into international standards and values. The frequent changes in education policies, driven by changes in governments and political priorities, have led to instability and difficulties in the implementation of coherent reforms. Political objectives are sometimes influenced by political or economic interests, and education is subject to external pressure and interference.

Table 1

Romanian teacher strikes after 1989

The strike's launched	The strike period	The strike's claims	The strike's results
June 1999	1 week	4% of the gross domestic product (GDP)	Agreement by which the Executive undertook to pay the salaries
January 2000	5 weeks	Salary increase and 6% of GDP for education	Teachers' victory and 80% salary increase
November 2005	3 weeks	Doubling salaries by 2007; 6% of GDP; Additional funds for infrastructure	Agreement between the Government and unions; 12% salary increase; 4.8% of GDP; 1% projects
May 2023	3 weeks	Salary increase of 25% for all teachers and education staff	Concessions: Increasing salaries by 25%, providing annual sums of 1500 lei for teaching and auxiliary staff, and 500 lei for non-teaching staff until 2027. Granting an initial instalment of 50% from the salary grid, starting from January 1, 2024



Fig. 3. Media impact. Live broadcast. The beginning



Fig. 4. Media impact. Live broadcast. The protest

In addition, politics has had an impact on the funds and resources allocated to the education system. Public expenditure on education varies depending on political priorities and the

country's economic situation. Sometimes, underfunding of education has been felt, which has an impact on school infrastructure, access to teaching resources, and teachers' salaries.

Political involvement in the appointment and promotion of educators has also been a controversial issue. The lack of power and political favoritism often affected the educational system and hampered the selection and promotion of competencies and performance. These negative aspects led to another general strike by the largest trade unions in the Romanian education system in May 2023 [17]. It has more than 150,000 members with wages, representing more than 51.14 percent of the total number of educational employees, and is associated with 66 trade union organizations.

4.2. Technology use for organizing and support the strike

During this strike, technology played multiple roles, both in organizing and communicating among participants, as well as in gaining public attention and support.

- **Communication and organization:** Technology facilitated communication and coordination among strikers. Through the use of messaging apps, social media platforms, email or instant messaging systems, strikers transmitted quick information, updates, decisions, and instructions to members of the protest group.
- **Mobilization and Online Action:** Technology allowed strikers to voice their concerns and mobilize online support. Through social networks, blogs, websites, and online petitions, strikers informed and raised awareness among the public about their issues, encouraging participation and solidarity from others.
- **Transparency and visibility:** Technology provided the opportunity to document and transmit real-time events and actions related to the strike. Video recordings, photographs, and social media posts offered a direct perspective on the events and created public pressure to address the issues.
- **Monitoring and pressuring authorities:** Technology was used to document and report abuses, violations of rights, and other issues related to the strike. By disseminating relevant information and creating public pressure, technology helped draw attention

to the strike and enforce the strikers' demands.

It is important to mention that technology can be a powerful tool for managing and promoting a strike, but its effects and effectiveness largely depend on the specific context and how participants use it.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lessons learnt from pandemics and teacher strikes underscore the critical importance of effective communication and adaptability during times of crisis or conflict. Technology serves as a powerful means for connectivity and information dissemination, while the media assume a pivotal role in shaping public perception, particularly in tumultuous circumstances. However, variations in context and objectives have shaped the communication dynamics employed in each scenario.

These communications can be applied to other contexts such as social movements, political crises, or labor disputes. Understanding the role of the study, political aspects, and impact on communication processes can contribute to the development of effective communication dynamics in a turbulent period.

Coherent policies and political stability can create a conducive environment for the long-term implementation of reforms and the improvement of education quality. The participation of politicians in the dialogue with educational stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students, can contribute to the formulation and implementation of more effective policies. By analyzing and comparing experience analysis and teacher strikes, we can identify best practices and valuable lessons to manage communication in complex situations, contributing to improving learning processes and social relationships within and outside the education sector.

The integration of technology has had a significant impact during turbulent periods such as pandemics and teacher strikes, enabling communication and access to information while highlighting existing educational inequalities. The use of technology should be accompanied by digital inclusion strategies and a fair approach to ensure the participation of all

students and avoid social disparities. Despite challenges, the integration of technology can provide new opportunities and efficient solutions in education.

Both situations of turbulence, namely the pandemic and the teacher strike, had a significant impact on people's well-being and psychological comfort, but it is difficult to make a direct comparison between them in this regard. The pandemic caused loss of life, health concerns and global restrictions, negatively affecting the well-being and psychological comfort of many people. On the other hand, the teachers' strike generated uncertainty regarding the educational process, affecting both students and parents. Both situations had a considerable impact on mental health and psychological comfort, each in its own specific way. Future studies will consider the approaches and findings of [22 - 25] related to schools intellectual capital development and increasing safety.

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Rezonanțe ale crizelor: Tehnologia și comunicarea în pandemia COVID-19 și grevele cadrelor didactice

Acest articol compară impactul tehnologiei și al comunicării în timpul pandemiei COVID-19 cu perioada grevelor profesorilor. Ambele s-au bazat pe tehnologie pentru comunicare și organizare la distanță. Platformele online, videoconferințele și aplicațiile de mesagerie au facilitat procesul de predare și participare în timpul pandemiei și au ajutat la coordonare în timpul grevelor. Media a jucat un rol important în transmiterea mesajelor și în formarea opiniei publice. Au apărut diferențe întrucât pe perioada pandemiei procesul de învățământ s-a concentrat pe continuitatea învățării și pe aspecte legate de sănătate, în timp ce grevele au abordat probleme legate de salarizare și negocieri. Comunicarea eficientă și adaptabilitatea au fost cruciale în gestionarea acestor crize. Concluziile obținute demonstrează strategiile de comunicare în situații complexe, de care se beneficiază în procesul de învățare și în relațiile sociale.

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