



ORIGINAL PAPER

Media coverage of Croatian education during the World War II

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Abstract:

A historical review of Croatian education and schooling during the Second World War indicates the dynamics of the educational system under the influence of political and wartime difficulties. Education played a key role in society, but was sensitive to changes depending on political trends. The subject of research is education during the Second World War in Croatia. The research covers the observed period from 1943 to 1945 using the example of the Croatian daily, *Slobodna Dalmacija*. The unit of analysis is newspaper articles about education and schooling. The paper uses a descriptive method and a quantitative and qualitative method of content analysis. The goals of the paper are to analyze newspaper articles, headlines and photos about education in *Slobodna Dalmacija* from 1943 to 1945 through a quantitative content analysis, and to analyze newspaper articles about illiteracy as the main topic through a qualitative content analysis of the articles. The sample included the front pages of the mentioned newspapers, and 118 articles were analyzed in the observed period. Criteria that are important for the objectives of the research were singled out: journalistic genres, authors of articles, pages where articles are positioned, size of articles, graphic design of articles and topics of articles related to education and schooling. The results of the research showed that despite the various disasters and hardships that befell the citizens of Croatia at that time, education and schooling developed. Teachers, teachers and professors are shown as advocates of the progress of the education system.

Key words: *education, illiteracy, politics, local newspaper, World War II, Croatia.*

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Introduction

The research, which is based on the analysis of articles, looks at how newsrooms and journalists covered educational subjects based on the political climate and how this coverage affected how society saw the value of education. Even though politics had a significant impact on the educational system, the media helped to shape public opinion and either support or undermine particular educational ideals and concepts.

This analysis sheds crucial light on how the media shapes public perceptions of education and demonstrates how newspapers, as major media communication players, shaped public perceptions of educational concerns at a time of political upheaval and conflict.

The paper focuses on the years from 1943 to 1945 and examines schooling in Croatia during World War II. The way the media represented the educational policies of the time is examined through an analysis of articles about education and schooling that were published in the newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija*. The paper discusses Croatia's sociopolitical changes in addition to newspaper coverage, focusing on the role of national liberation organizations like State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia and National Liberation Committee and their impact on politics and the educational system. Examining how political shifts affected schooling and how the media covered them is the goal.

In the era of media communication, conventional media were crucial in educating the public, influencing public opinion, and influencing societal views. Newspapers were the primary medium for disseminating information, but they also played a role in establishing social conventions and promoting political beliefs. In this paper, the examination of articles that appeared in newspapers like *Slobodna Dalmacija* between 1943 and 1945 sheds light on how newspapers influenced attitudes about education and more general societal change during that era.

Theoretical background

The political and social changes of the time were strongly linked to the many difficulties Croatian education suffered during World War II.

The period following World War II saw significant influence of the prevailing ideology on both the theory and practice of pedagogy in Croatia. (Radeka, Batinić, 2015:59)

Curricula were frequently modified in response to political pressures and regime leaders, and education inside the Independent State of Croatia became a tool for the dissemination of Ustasha ideology. Depending on who controlled a given region, teaching could alter. For instance, in regions ruled by Germany or Italy, the occupation policies had an impact on the educational system, leading to many disputes about educational access. (Žalac, 1988:62)

Schools were forced to close, educational institutions were destroyed, and the educational process was severely disrupted as a result of the conflict. Many children and young people experienced a high rate of illiteracy as a result of this circumstance, and their access to school was severely limited. (Munjiza, 2009:86)

The conflict also had long-term effects on Croatia's educational system because it severely undermined it by using educational resources for military objectives. These educational reforms had a lasting impact on Croatia's overall social structure since they

defined the post-war educational approach and worldview of the generations that grew up at that time.

The educational landscape of the Independent State of Croatia was shaped by three predominant influences: the Ustasha in inner Croatia, the Italian presence in Dalmatia, and the fascist ideology, alongside the Partisan movement's efforts in Dalmatia and Slavonia. It was based on building awareness of belonging to the Croatian people, but within a totalitarian political framework. Through the creation of the Ustasha Youth, an effort was made to educate young men for military needs and girls for the roles of mothers and educators, who would transmit Ustasha values to new generations. The authorities considered education to be crucial for social development. (Smiljanić, 2020:37)

The second educational culture was in the area of Dalmatia, under the influence of the Italian, or fascist, authorities. The school on the island of Molat, where "national educational content" was taught and the professors were imported from Italy, was the most extreme example of Italianization. The main center of opposition to the Italianization of education was Split. Because secondary school students were active in partisan movements and were able to gather without interference from the government, the Italian authorities permitted senior schools to operate while elementary schools remained open. (Smiljanić, 2020:38)

When the Partisans took control of the areas, they had previously occupied in 1943, partisan educational culture took over. They were the first to conduct a census of devoted educators, in which competency in reading, writing, and instructing the illiterate was sufficient and higher education was not valued. Instead of concentrating on the core principles of education, the Partisan authorities prioritized the propagation of communist, and later political, concepts. As a result, they disregarded education. More focus was placed on teacher training, which included several-month seminars that emphasized communist ideology and accurate assessment of World War II. (Smiljanić, 2020:39)

The interaction between professors and students has evolved over time, becoming more open and collaborative. This shift parallels larger trends in education and psychology. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of teachers in developing culture and society. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how teachers' roles have expanded beyond the classroom.

School life as seen through the lens of the interaction between teachers and pupils (i.e., their mutual perspectives), emerges as an intriguing educational and psychological topic. The advancement of psychology and the reform-oriented pedagogical initiatives of that century surely contributed to a greater interest in one another: teachers in their students and students in their teachers. Despite complaints about "unruly" youth and the impenetrable authority of the "gentleman professor," this was the visible beginning of the democratization of that relationship. (Batinić, Miljković 2011:517)

The responsibility of teachers extends beyond the classroom. They are frequently overlooked as major drivers of cultural evolution and socioeconomic improvement. Their duty extends beyond only giving education. Now is the time for teachers to embrace their role as national educators. (Morović, 1945:3)

Unexpectedly, the number of schools increased quickly after the freedom. Local officials opened schools and promoted literacy even during the war. Despite the war, several communities made an effort to educate their citizens, and devoted educators received recognition for their work. Even if some teachers didn't meet expectations, overall development was greater than these problems. (Kursar, 1945:2)

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The conclusion of World War II signified a crucial juncture in Croatia's political and social framework, paving the way for substantial institutional transformations, particularly in education.

Croatia was completely liberated in May 1945. The People's Parliament of Croatia began operations in September 1945, succeeding the State Anti-Fascist Council for Croatian National Liberation. Among the newly formed ministries was the Ministry of Education. This ministry was in charge of monitoring auxiliary school-related tasks as well as organizing educational matters throughout Croatia. (Ogrizović, 1981: 266)

After World War II, as Croatia and the rest of Yugoslavia began to recover, education became a crucial aspect of the rebuilding process. One of the most difficult issues was combating illiteracy, which had been a problem both before and after the conflict.

Following the liberation of Croatia and Yugoslavia, adult education and public enlightenment continued. Illiteracy suppression was a crucial job both during and after the National Liberation War. Courses for the illiterate were established, with a considerable number of instructors, lecturers, and young people serving as course leaders. (Ogrizović, 1981: 284)

In 1945, the government made significant efforts to establish a solid educational system. It was an important aspect of rebuilding the country and planning for the future, especially as they considered the five-year plan and the goals of establishing a new socialist society.

If we summarize the national government's efforts in organizing education and training in 1945, we can conclude that it was a year of great commitment to lay a solid foundation for the further development of this area in the era of reconstruction and building a socialist community, as well as to make thorough preparations for the five-year plan for the country's upliftment, the development of education and training in Croatia. (Ogrizović, 1981: 287)

Methodology

The theoretical part of this thesis applies the descriptive method to present the socio-political context of Croatia during the Second World War. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the historical conditions that shaped educational policies and practices during the period. The research component employs the content analysis method, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The analysis focuses on newspaper articles concerning education published in *Slobodna Dalmacija* between 1943 and 1945.

The aim is to identify recurring themes and messages that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. The central subject of this thesis is education in Croatia during the Second World War, with a particular focus on the years 1943 to 1945. Through the example of the Croatian daily newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija*, the paper analyzes articles related to education and schooling. It also explores the broader state of education during the war and its transformations, emphasizing the role of the national liberation bodies ZAVNOH (State Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia) and NOO (People's Liberation Committees).

The research is guided by two primary objectives. First, through quantitative

content analysis, the paper examines the frequency and distribution of articles, headlines, and photographs related to education. Second, using qualitative content analysis, it explores newspaper articles that address illiteracy as a central theme.

Based on these objectives, the following research questions have been identified: what is the proportion of articles on education within the overall research corpus; what proportion of these articles addresses the issue of citizen illiteracy; what proportion of articles establishes a link between politics and education; which journalistic genre is most prevalent in the overall corpus? These questions aim to determine the presence and prominence of educational topics in the wartime press, quantify the media's attention to the issue of illiteracy, and explore the intersection of political and educational discourse. Additionally, the research seeks to identify the dominant journalistic genre to better understand the prevailing reporting style and approach to educational themes during this historical period.

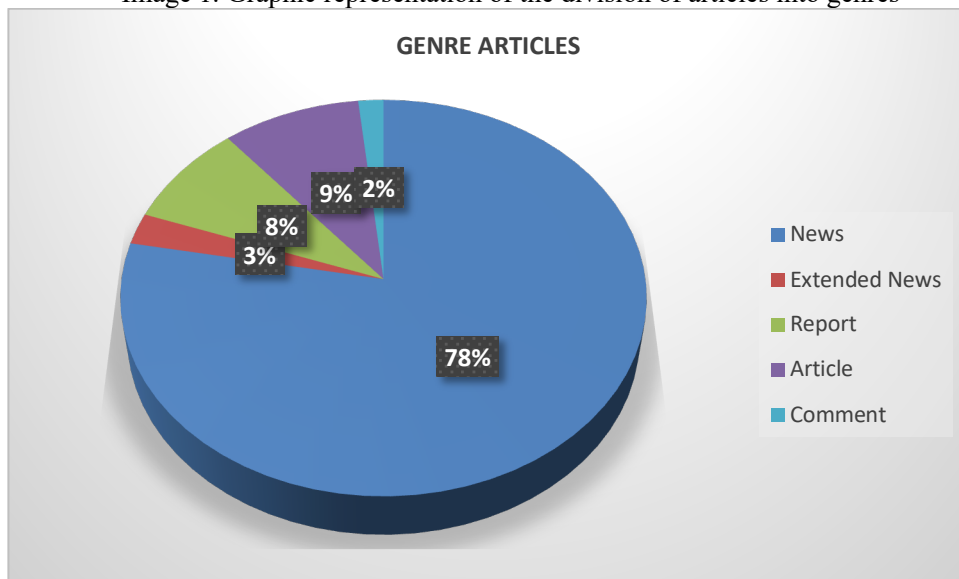
Result of research

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative method was used to examine 118 articles in total. The distribution by year makes it evident that the number of publications has increased with time: just one text was released in 1943, 18 in 1944, and 99 in 1945. This suggests that interest in educational themes increased in the years following World War II.

News is the most common journalistic genre in the texts under analysis. These are typically brief educational articles that cover useful subjects like the start of the school year, student enrollment, or other crucial information for parents and children. This demonstrates the useful purpose of newspapers at the time, which was to give the public essential and fundamental information, particularly during the post-war period of societal rehabilitation.

Image 1. Graphic representation of the division of articles into genres

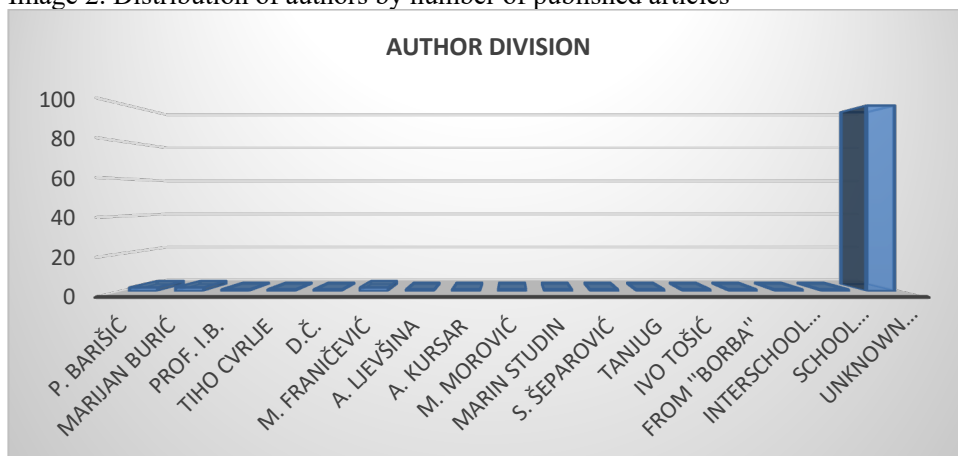


Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

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Only 16 articles had authorship listed, and up to 102 items were left unsigned. This fact illustrates how, at the time, journalistic contributions were frequently not personalized, which was consistent with the collective approach to publication and the informational conventions of the day.

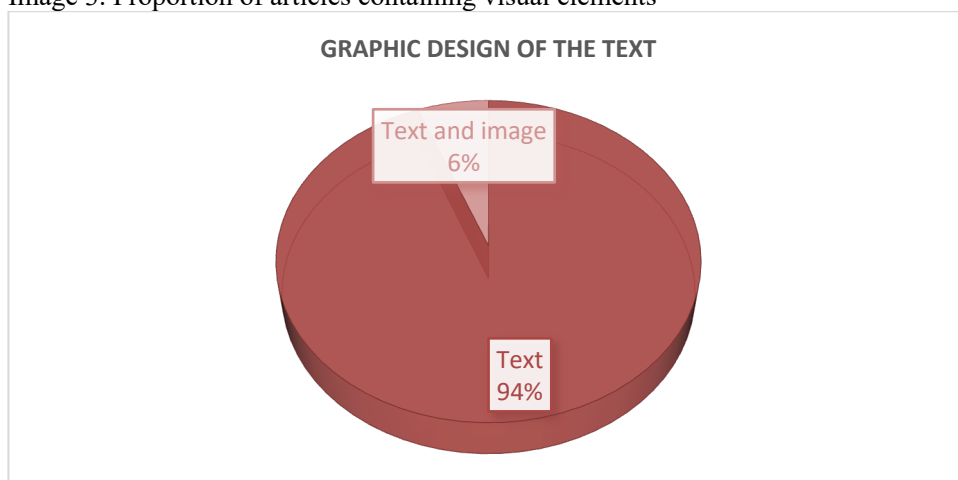
Image 2. Distribution of authors by number of published articles



Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

Regarding visual aids, it is evident that only seven publications—or a very small portion of the entire sample—have photographic accompaniment. All of the photos had titles and were in black and white, indicating a minimal but current degree of graphic processing.

Image 3. Proportion of articles containing visual elements

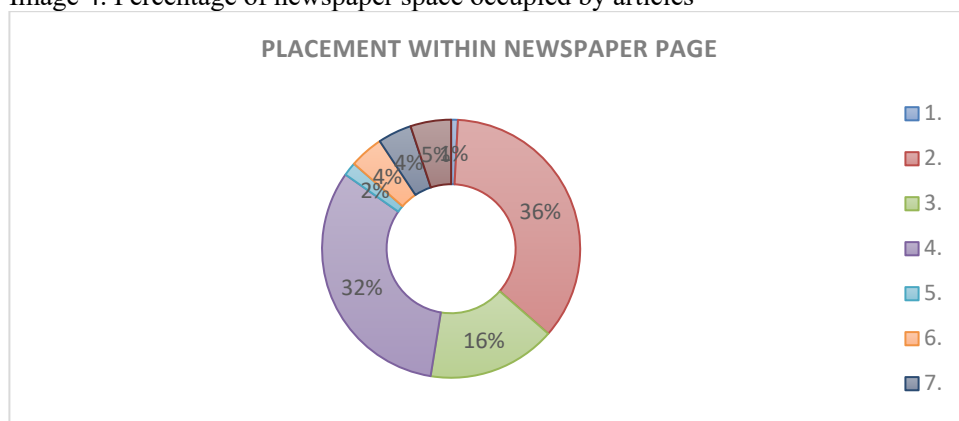


Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

In the later and extended editions of the newspaper, the articles were more frequently found on the eighth page, but they were most frequently found on the second, third, and fourth pages. The size of printed editions has clearly increased from the original

two pages to four and finally eight pages, which is evidence of the growth of the media and the increased accessibility of content.

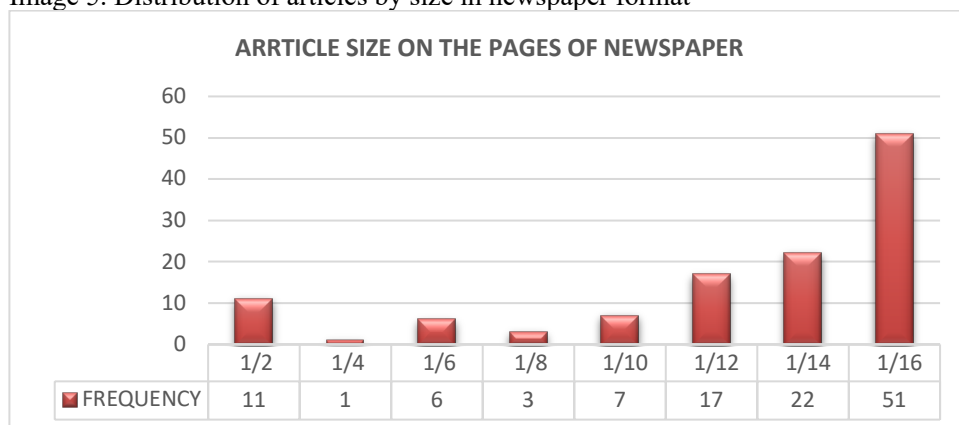
Image 4. Percentage of newspaper space occupied by articles



Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

Records that take up 1/16 of a page are the most common in terms of article size, which is usual for notices and brief news. These abbreviations were most frequently found on newspaper back pages, particularly those that contained advertisements. It's noteworthy to note that 11 of the articles were lengthy enough to fill half of the page, but none of them took up the entire front page. This suggests that educational issues are not as well-represented in the newspaper's main body.

Image 5. Distribution of articles by size in newspaper format

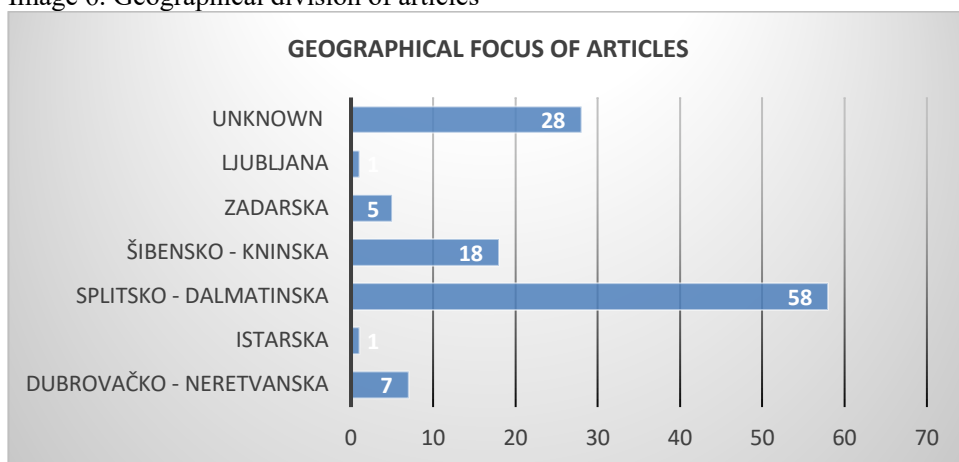


Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

The paper also examined the geographical distribution of articles. The majority of publications focus on Split-Dalmatia County, whereas Istria County receives the least attention. In 28 articles, it was not obvious which area was being referred to, such as cities, counties, or comparable locations. After Split-Dalmatia, Šibenik-Knin County is most frequently cited. In addition to Croatian areas, *Slobodna Dalmacija* provides articles about Ljubljana, Slovenia, with a focus on the country's educational progress.

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Image 6. Geographical division of articles

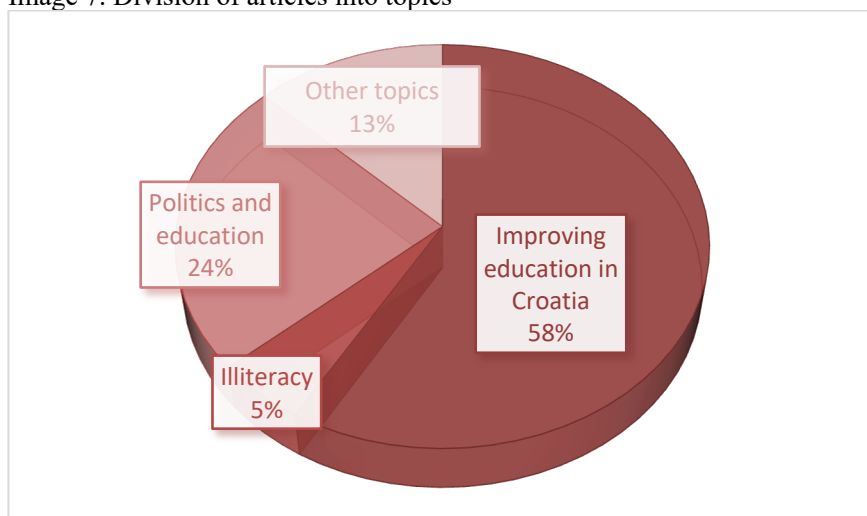


Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

According to thematic analysis, the majority of the articles (58 total) addressed ways to improve education, including through reforms, investments in infrastructure, and system organization. Articles that link politics and education come next (24%), suggesting that the educational narrative contains social objectives and ideological statements. While the theme of illiteracy, despite its social significance, barely makes up 5% of the examined articles, 13% of the articles document the accomplishments of students and activities in liberated areas and courses.

The findings demonstrate that, during the investigated period, education was mostly covered by the press in the form of brief, educational news stories that lacked in-depth analysis or importance in the newspaper space. Nonetheless, there are discernible changes in the breadth and format of reporting, along with the growth of interest in post-war educational issues.

Image 7. Division of articles into topics



Source: According to: Čemeljić 2023

Qualitative analysis

The first 1943 article, *literacy course*, addresses the issue of illiteracy and attempts to address it through educational initiatives. The People's Liberation Committee of Split has announced that it will establish a literacy course for all people above the age of twelve. They encourage those who are interested to apply, particularly women, to allow their housekeeper to join. The course aims to address illiteracy. The topic was chosen because it demonstrates how citizens wanted solutions to the problem of illiteracy, which was prevalent in 1943, and how the People's Liberation Committee provided a real response by organizing a course. This opens the door to education for anyone who want it, albeit many may be unable to take advantage of it because of wartime conditions. The article is written in a formal language, emphasizing the Split National Liberation Committee's efforts to reduce illiteracy. It also acknowledges the potential barriers that citizens may have in receiving education. This decision is most likely motivated by a larger social need or practical considerations. The content is also a plea to the community to get involved and actively contribute to the resolution of an important social issue. It symbolizes the People's Liberation Committee's responsibility for promoting education as a method of good social transformation. The text's historical context stresses the urgency and importance of combating illiteracy. It combines information and social engagement to promote the Split National Liberation Committee as an organization that acts in the best interests of its residents. This article falls under the category of news. It is located on the second page of the issue, in the lower right corner, and takes up only about 1/16 of the page. The entire newspaper issue is barely two pages long, and the examined piece is not visibly identified or attributed to a specific author.

Article *About Our Education* emphasizes the link between education and the beliefs of the national liberation movement, emphasizing that every settlement should have its own school and that education is a requirement for all inhabitants. The text emphasizes State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia decisions, which shaped the new school system. According to the report, some schools were closed during the wartime, while others in freed areas remained open. This definitely reveals a desire to organize the educational system in conformity with current political and ideological principles. Plans to rebuild wrecked school buildings and add new classrooms are also stated, indicating a desire to restore educational infrastructure and improve teaching material. The introduction of Russian and English as instruction languages, rather than German and Italian, may reflect a shift in political rules during this period. The text falls under the category of journalistic news. It was published in the 75th issue of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, which included eight pages. The article is on the third page and takes up a fifth of the area. Article is unsigned and does not include any visual elements such as images or illustrations.

The unknown author of the article *A People's University opened in Split* discusses the purpose and relevance of the newly established cultural and educational institution. The establishment of the university is a significant step forward in the process of extending education and boosting the cultural level of the population. The institution's inauguration was marked with a lecture given by a Unified National Liberation Front official, during which the assembled citizens learned more about the history of the People's Liberation Movement, the organization of the people's government, and contemporary political issues. Drago Gizdić, then-secretary of the Unified National Liberation Front of Croatia, gave the inaugural presentation on the People's Liberation Front. The article is written in news format and published in a four-page edition. The text is on the second page, taking

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about a quarter of the page. The author is not identified, and the article is not visually supported with images or illustrations. It was chosen for analysis because the establishment of the People's University represents an endeavor to extend education and raise citizens' political consciousness. The talk that opened the opening played an important role in bringing the political situation of the moment to the residents of Split.

Article *Schools and reading rooms are opening in Dalmatia* reports a large growth in the number of schools in the Vodice area, indicating a definite emphasis on extending educational options. Despite the severe conditions caused by war-damaged buildings, a solution is found in the usage of private residences, demonstrating a realistic and resourceful approach to issue solving. This demonstrates the willingness to continue education even in challenging conditions. Particular focus is placed on the work put into creating courses for illiterate elderly people. This indicated a desire to tailor education to all age groups and community requirements. The execution of special programs for literate and semi-literate persons, as well as initiatives to collect furniture and school supplies for devastated facilities, demonstrates a holistic approach to educational rebuilding and reinforcement. The article outlines conferences held in Supetar and Metković that provided organizational and advising support to instructors. The Dubrovnik gathering stresses professional development for teachers and aligning education with national liberation movement objectives. Article was published on the third page of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, occupies a fourth of the page, is not visually accompanied by an image, and lacks a signed author.

Article *Fighting Illiteracy* portrays illiteracy as a significant opponent that requires a collaborative effort from all Croatian citizens. It underlines the importance of national unity in fighting this prevalent problem. The use of the term "enemy" implies a shared responsibility for defeating it. Article employs statistical data to demonstrate the prevalence of illiteracy in cities such as Slunj, Karlovac, and the Kordun area, emphasizing the gravity of the situation. To address the issue, the Department of Public Education organizes a competition among various administrative units, ranging from districts to villages. This paradigm provides a structured and competitive platform for engaging local communities and institutions in problem solving. The article's conclusion urges all social institutions and organizations to focus on working together to combat illiteracy, not just for immediate benefits, but also to assure a better and happier existence after the conflict. This hopeful outlook for the future is consistent with the notion of societal progress through education. The piece, unlike the other texts, occupies a quarter of a page and is accompanied with a photograph of two girls writing at a school desk, with the description *Dalmatian girls learn to write* above the image.

Article *Teachers Pioneers of Rural Improvement* underlines the need of connecting villages and cities during post-liberation reconstruction. Although there were significant distinctions between rural and urban areas, they are steadily diminishing, and cooperation is becoming increasingly important. Teachers are seen as vital drivers of advancement, not just as pedagogues, but also as public educators participating in social development. They are meant to educate peasants about the economy, agriculture, animal husbandry, and other related topics. Practical teaching has been implemented in all teacher training schools, representing a novel approach not seen under prior authorities. Teachers' broader roles are highlighted, including caring for pupils, cooperating with families, and contributing to community growth. Morović emphasizes the importance of actively molding modern society and adapting to new difficulties. The article is a news item that

appears on the third page of a four-page issue of *Slobodna Dalmacija*, takes up one-eighth of a page, and does not include an image.

Article *In the fight against illiteracy* highlights the significance of combating illiteracy, presenting it as one of the most significant barriers to national education and economic progress. Illiteracy is compared to a poison that contaminates the social fabric, emphasizing its destructive potency. The slogan "Death to Illiteracy" is a well-known anti-fascist expression, implying that this is a fight of extreme importance and urgency. The author expresses his personal perspective on the issue, emphasizing that he sees assisting the illiterate as part of his professional and civic responsibilities within the context of public education. This strengthens the assumption that educational workers have an important role in addressing fundamental socioeconomic issues. The paper makes real ideas to speed the process of reducing illiteracy, ranging from reorganizing existing programs to creating new courses. Special consideration is also given to those who are economically disadvantaged, with the purchase of school materials and textbooks scheduled to allow them to access education without budgetary constraints. The text's message highlights that reading is within everyone's reach with minimal work and will, supporting inclusivity and individual empowerment. This strategy demonstrates how education may be used to promote social equality and progress.

Article *An elementary school for the Italian minority has opened in Zadar* describes the opening of a primary school for the Italian minority in Zadar, which coincides with the founding of a Croatian school in the same city. The presence of government representatives and parents of Italian students illustrates community-state collaboration and the national government's commitment to carrying out organization decisions. This also replies to, as previously noted, the deception spread by Italian reactionaries about minority persecution. The text validates the legitimacy of the government's education policies by emphasizing inclusiveness and equality. The concluding remark concerning the opening of a Croatian school on the same day highlights the importance of balance in educational policies. The item was published on the top page of newspaper, takes up 1/16 of the page, and is not accompanied by a photo.

Article *Elementary schools in Dalmatia in the first year of operation after liberation* by instructor A. Kursar, published on the second page of the newspaper issue, is a journalistic news item with no accompanying photograph, taking up 1/8 of the page. The article examines the improvement in educational success following Croatia's liberation, highlighting that practically all towns and villages had successfully eliminated illiteracy and established schools by the end of the war. The author begins the essay by recounting a tough wartime history characterized by hunger, poverty, and limited educational chances. Following the liberation, education experienced remarkable growth, demonstrating how much the new administration valued education and social advancement. Kursar recognizes teachers who have demonstrated great dedication and selflessness, portraying them as major drivers of advancement. An important theme in the text is the fraternity and solidarity of Croats and Serbs in Dalmatia, which was demonstrated via collaborative efforts on educational goals. Such cooperation represents a social shift toward regeneration and unity.

Conclusion

This paper provides a valuable insight into the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of education during World War II, using Croatia as a case study. Through a combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis, it has been established that the

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media, despite the limitations imposed by wartime conditions, actively participated in shaping social values and promoting education as a foundational factor for national development and postwar recovery.

The results of the quantitative content analysis revealed an increasing number of education-related articles toward the end of the war, indicating that education was gaining heightened social and political significance in the postwar period. Although most of the articles were unsigned and written in brief journalistic forms, their frequency and content demonstrate the media's commitment to informing the public, promoting literacy, and supporting efforts to rebuild the educational system. The most prominent themes were educational reforms, school organization, and infrastructural investments, while illiteracy—although a highly relevant social issue—was marginally represented within the overall corpus.

The qualitative analysis emphasized the strategic role of education in fulfilling political and ideological objectives during the researched period. Illiteracy was framed as a major barrier to national progress, requiring collective action for its eradication. Teachers were depicted as key agents of change, especially in their role in combating illiteracy. The analysis also highlighted the broader political context, including the activities of anti-fascist organizations such as ZAVNOH (State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia) and NOO (People's Liberation Committees), which considered education a crucial element in the construction of a new socialist society.

The research confirms that media discourse on education served an important informational function during wartime. By analyzing educational topics within their historical context, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the complex interplay between media, politics, and education. It confirms that, although limited in space and content, wartime media discourse on education fulfilled key functions during a time of crisis—informational, mobilizational, and symbolic.

Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of examining the historical dimensions of media coverage as a means of understanding broader social processes and emphasizes the lasting impact of media on educational discourse and public consciousness.

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