Critical Perspective and Comprehensive Educational Quality: Perceptions of Lower-Secondary School Administrators in Villavicencio, Colombia

Perspectiva crítica y calidad educativa integral: percepción de directivos docentes de básica secundaria en Villavicencio, Colombia

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Abstract

This study described the perceptions of school administrators from public lower-secondary institutions in Villavicencio, Colombia, regarding the critical perspective as a component of comprehensive educational quality. A quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional design was used. The population comprised 152 school administrators, and the sample included 112 principals and coordinators selected through non-probability convenience sampling according to their availability and willingness to participate. This article analyzes nine items from a 76-item Likert questionnaire corresponding to social transformation, critical curriculum, and learning to learn. The full instrument was validated by expert judgment and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.9327 in a pilot test with 15 participants; for the nine critical-perspective items, the recalculated coefficient was $\alpha = 0.813$. Each participant was treated as the unit of analysis, and each indicator was computed as the mean of its three items. Mean scores were 4.49 for social transformation, 4.41 for critical curriculum, and 4.25 for learning to learn; the overall mean was 4.38. All three

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indicators fell within the very high perceived-frequency category. The findings describe self-reported perceptions and do not constitute direct evidence of institutional practices or social transformations actually produced. In this study, the critical perspective is interpreted through the social purpose of education, critical curricular organization, and learner autonomy.

Keywords: critical perspective, comprehensive educational quality, lower-secondary education, school administrators, social transformation.

Resumen

El estudio describe la percepción de directivos docentes de instituciones públicas de básica secundaria de Villavicencio, Colombia, sobre la perspectiva crítica como componente de una educación de calidad integral. Se empleó un enfoque cuantitativo, descriptivo, con diseño no experimental y corte transversal. La población estuvo integrada por 152 directivos docentes y la muestra por 112 rectores y coordinadores, seleccionados mediante muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia, de acuerdo con su disponibilidad y voluntad de participar. El artículo analiza nueve ítems de un cuestionario Likert de 76 ítems, correspondientes a transformación social, plan de estudios crítico y aprender a aprender. El instrumento completo fue validado mediante juicio de expertos y alcanzó un alfa de Cronbach de 0,9327 en una prueba piloto de 15 participantes; para los nueve ítems de perspectiva crítica, el coeficiente recalculado fue α = 0,813. La unidad de análisis fue cada participante, y cada indicador se obtuvo como el promedio de sus tres ítems. Las medias fueron 4,49 para transformación social, 4,41 para plan de estudios crítico y 4,25 para aprender a aprender; la media global fue 4,38. Los tres indicadores se ubicaron en la categoría de frecuencia percibida muy alta. Los resultados describen percepciones declaradas y no constituyen evidencia directa de prácticas institucionales ni de transformaciones sociales efectivamente producidas. La perspectiva crítica se interpreta, en este estudio, a partir de la finalidad social de la educación, la organización curricular crítica y la autonomía del aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: perspectiva crítica, calidad educativa integral, educación básica secundaria, directivos docentes, transformación social.

Introduction

Educational quality remains a contested concept, as its evaluative criteria depend on the underlying aims assigned to education, the outcomes considered relevant, and the social, cultural, and institutional contexts shaping the educational process. Casanova (2012) connects quality to curriculum design and the ability to respond to students' specific characteristics and needs. Furthermore, through a review of educational policy trends, Azaña-Lucio et al. (2024) show that quality manifests through varying priorities, evaluation instruments, and policy frameworks. Therefore, any empirical approach must explicitly define the dimensions under observation, the stakeholders assessing them, and the interpretive framework applied.

Educational systems commonly draw on performance indicators to monitor academic achievement, retention rates, coverage, and other institutional metrics. Although such measurements yield essential data, they cannot independently captu-

re the full complexity of the educational process. In Colombia, the Ministry of National Education guidelines (2019) expand beyond student learning to integrate notions of equity, inclusion, and holistic development. In their analysis of the Synthetic Index of Educational Quality, Ramírez Angarita and Ortiz Higuera (2021) show that assessment mechanisms actively shape how quality is conceptualized in the classroom. This plurality of frameworks opens up possibilities for investigating dimensions that cannot be reduced to academic performance alone.

Amidst this debate, a critical lens focuses on the interplay between education, citizenship, curriculum, power, and social transformation. Freire (1990) emphasizes the inherently political character of education, contending against the idea of neutral pedagogical practice. Ibáñez Ayuso and Ruiz-Alberdi Fernández (2025) examine citizenship education through a critical lens, analyzing how educational objectives intersect with participation, deliberation, and contextual comprehension. Within this conceptual framework, educational quality encompasses not only acquired learning, but also how institutions organize knowledge, define formative purposes, and empower students to actively and consciously participate in their own learning process.

Addressing the interplay between critical perspectives and educational quality requires steering clear of two oversimplifications: first, assuming that high academic performance is inherently synonymous with holistic education; and second, attributing unobserved social outcomes to a critical pedagogical framework. This study adopts a descriptive position, examining how frequently school principals and administrators report practices tied to the social purpose of education, a critical curriculum, and 'learning to learn' skills. It neither measures actual social transformation nor evaluates curricular implementation through direct observation, nor does it gauge student autonomy via standardized testing.

School leaders constitute a relevant population for this approach because they participate in pedagogical management decisions, curricular organization, and institutional operations. Castro Zapata et al. (2023) link holistic education, quality, equity, and school leadership, supporting the rationale for understanding how this group interprets dimensions of quality that transcend academic achievement. In public lower secondary schools, their decisions can influence the prioritization of formative goals, curricular discussions, and the coordination of pedagogical processes; nevertheless, their perceptions do not substitute for the direct observation of practices carried out by teachers and students.

Villavicencio constitutes the institutional context of the study. The aim was neither to draw territorial comparisons nor to make causal inferences, but rather to describe the responses of school leaders from public institutions offering lower secondary education in the municipality. This scope maintains alignment among the research objective, the cross-sectional design, and the nature of the data. Consequently, the results are interpreted as an approximation of the self-reported perceptions of those involved in institutional governance, within the specific conditions under which the survey was administered.

The reviewed literature offers meaningful insights into social transformation, critical curricula, educational quality, school leadership, and learning autonomy. However, a segment of these background studies originates from higher, early childhood, or primary education. Such divergence in educational stages precludes using these works as directly comparable empirical evidence for lower secondary education. Consequently, this manuscript differentiates between empirical literature strictly focused on lower secondary education and foundational works drawn upon solely for conceptual grounding or theoretical expansion.

The study aimed to describe how school leaders in public lower secondary institutions in Villavicencio perceive the critical perspective as an integral dimension of holistic educational quality, framed through three indicators: social transformation, critical curriculum, and 'learning to learn'. The

choice of these indicators reflects a conceptual articulation wherein the social aims of education, curricular design, and students' autonomous engagement are viewed as interrelated dimensions, without claiming that they represent an exhaustive definition of educational quality on their own

Literature Review

The critical perspective rests on the premise that educational decision-making is embedded within cultural, institutional, and political contexts. Selecting curricular content, defining assessment criteria, and structuring the curriculum inherently prioritize particular notions of knowledge and human formation. Freire (1990) underscores the political character of education, while Giroux (1993, 2004) frames critical pedagogy at the intersection of culture, power, and resistance. Within the Colombian context, Ortega (2014) investigates critical pedagogy in low-income public schools, highlighting the need to examine curriculum and teaching practices through the specific material realities of schooling. Together, these theoretical contributions help delineate the critical perspective without conflating a normative ideal with demonstrated institutional practice.

The social transformation dimension concerns the interplay between education and contextual awareness. In the Colombian context, Pozo Serrano and Astorga Acevedo (2018) emphasize the need for institutional, academic, and professional co-responsibility within social pedagogy and transformative processes. Furthering this discussion, Malagón Castro et al. (2025) analyze the key challenges and advancements of critical interculturality in Latin American education. While these perspectives help conceptualize contextually embedded education, they do not warrant the assertion that an institution actively transforms its environment simply because its administrators express a favorable outlook.

Operationally, social transformation was not evaluated as an externally verified community outcome. Instead, the indicator aggregates survey items designed to gauge how frequently administrators acknowledge educational practices geared toward contextual understanding and the social responsibility of schooling. This distinction is vital, as a cross-sectional study grounded in self-reported data cannot demonstrate institutional impact on wider social change or establish causal links between school practices and municipal conditions.

The critical curriculum serves as the second component. Abuabara Ospino (2018) outlines a critical-social curriculum model tailored for lower and upper secondary education—a study especially aligned with the target population of this research. Critiquing market-driven metrics, Orozco Cruz et al. (2009) advocate expanding the definition of quality to embrace broader educational and social purposes. From a governance viewpoint, Vinces-Sánchez et al. (2023) characterize educational planning as an instrument to synchronize administrative decisions, resources, and pedagogical goals. In the present study, this indicator does not assess the formal design of curricular documents; rather, it records the frequency with which school leaders report implementation practices consistent with a socially and critically oriented curriculum.

Gasque (2025) examines the incorporation of formative components into basic education curricula, while Oliver-Barceló and Ferrer-Ribot (2022) analyze the relationship between arts education and social transformation in Ibero-American early childhood education curricula. The divergence in educational levels necessitates using these studies with caution. Their function in this manuscript is to broaden the discussion on curriculum, formation, and context; they are not presented as directly equivalent to a sample of lower secondary school leaders in Villavicencio.

The third component, 'learning to learn', relates to the student's conscious engagement in their educational process. García Palacios (2013) approaches this competency as the ability to recognize and manage one's own learning; Gargallo López et al. (2020) propose a model integrating cognitive, metacognitive, and self-regulatory dimen-

sions; and Vivas (2007) links it to the capacity for autonomous learning in information-intensive environments. Although some of these background studies stem from higher education or general theoretical frameworks, they provide key elements to define the construct. In this research, learning to learn was operationalized through three items related to self-assessment, the application of learning across different contexts, and the availability of tools to overcome obstacles during the learning process.

Fitriadi et al. (2024) review learning models aimed at strengthening critical thinking in primary education. Their work provides insights for discussing cognitive and pedagogical processes linked to questioning, argumentation, and active participation. However, critical thinking and learning to learn are not equivalent concepts. In this study, learning to learn remains the operational indicator defined by the instrument, whereas the work of Fitriadi et al. is used solely to contextualize approaches that promote more active student participation.

These three indicators interconnect to represent complementary dimensions of a cohesive educational approach. Social transformation establishes an overarching aim grounded in contextual awareness; the critical curriculum provides the organizational framework to integrate this aim into pedagogical practice; and 'learning to learn' encompasses student agency, conceptualized as reflective participation in their own learning process. This interrelationship is both conceptual and operational—it does not suggest that these three components are interchangeable or identical.

Furthermore, this integrated framework prevents a fragmented view of educational quality. A social purpose divorced from the curriculum can seldom foster systematic learning experiences; a curriculum designed without considering student voice risks becoming merely an external arrangement of content; and student autonomy, stripped of educational purpose and contextual grounding, risks being reduced to an isolated technical skill. By synthesizing these dimensions, the critical framework used in this study illuminates how school administrators report practices that bridge context, curriculum, and student learning.

Investigating higher education and language teaching, Özdil and Debreli (2025) examine teacher roles along the spectrum between knowledge transmission and transformation. From a comparative stance, Martínez-Usarralde (2021) examines educational inclusion, situating discussions of quality within broader governance structures. These studies are not intended to support cross-level empirical generalizations; rather, they serve a specific theoretical purpose, carefully delimited by differences in target populations, institutional settings, and research scope.

Addressing the relationship between holistic quality and critical perspectives further demands examining the role of educational leadership. Castro Zapata et al. (2023) establish explicit connections among holistic education, quality, equity, and school principals, providing a strong rationale for sampling school leaders. Within this framework, administrators' perceptions offer crucial insights into how institutional leaders conceptualize key dimensions of quality. However, this administrative standing may yield a perspective distinct from those held by teachers, students, or families—a distinction that must be factored into the interpretation of the findings.

In theoretical synthesis, this study does not conflate educational quality with a critical framework. Instead, the critical lens is analyzed as one constituent element contributing to a comprehensive definition of quality. Calventus Salvador (2020) demonstrates that the concept of 'quality education' embraces representations uniting learning, human rights, values, and social purposes; Casanova (2012) underscores the nexus between curriculum design and quality; and Castro Zapata et al. (2023) interrelate holistic education, equity, and administrative leadership. Accordingly, the three chosen indicators are interpreted as a target operationalization of the critical dimension, rather than a definitive measure of educational quality as a whole.

Methodology

This article reports on a specific empirical analysis of the critical perspective dimension, drawn from a larger doctoral study on comprehensive educational quality and school dropout management. The study employed a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional design. Data were gathered at a single juncture, without manipulating variables, through a survey targeting school administrators across public institutions providing lower secondary education in Villavicencio, Colombia.

The target population consisted of 152 secondary school leaders from Villavicencio's public sector. The final sample comprised 112 respondents, accounting for 73.68% of the total population. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was utilized, driven by participant availability, accessibility, and consent. Inclusion criteria encompassed principals and academic coordinators from public secondary schools who agreed to participate; non-responsive administrators and those affiliated with private schools were excluded.

Accordingly, the research design did not use stratification or proportional stratified sampling. Data collection was conducted within the broader doctoral framework between October 2025 and April 2026 using a self-administered web survey hosted on Google Forms. The survey was delivered through both in-person and online modalities, with direct researcher support to clarify item ambiguities and ensure accurate completion.

The original survey comprised 76 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Always, 4 = Frequently, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never). This article focuses on the nine items measuring the critical perspective dimension, grouped across three distinct indicators: social transformation (Items 25–27), critical curriculum (Items 28–30), and 'learning to learn' (Items 31–33), with three items per indicator. Content validity was established via expert panel evaluation; standard rubrics assessing item relevance and clarity were documented during this phase.

Instrument reliability was initially assessed through a pilot study involving 15 primary school academic coordinators, yielding an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.9327. Using the pilot dataset, internal consistency was recalculated exclusively for the nine items analyzed in this study, resulting in α = 0,813. Reporting this subscale-specific coefficient ensures methodological rigor by avoiding conflating the reliability of these nine items with that of the overall 76-item instrument.

The individual school leader served as the unit of analysis. Each participant's score per indicator was computed as the arithmetic mean across its three constituent items. Consequently, descriptive statistics were performed on 112 individual scores per indicator rather than on 336 pooled item-level responses. The 336 item-level entries (112 participantes × 3 ítems) reflect the structural layout of the item set and were not treated as independent observations, thereby correcting the unit-of-analysis issue present in the previous manuscript draft.

Initial data processing was executed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 23) and Microsoft Excel (2016). Indicator means were retained in this manuscript, given their mathematical invariance to individual-level aggregation under complete item response. Conversely, standard deviations calculated from the pooled 336 item-level responses were excluded, as those estimates violate the assumption of independent observations. Because the raw participant-level matrix needed to reconstruct composite score dispersion without post hoc assumptions was unavailable during revision, this statistic was intentionally omitted to prevent reporting methodologically flawed estimates.

Mean scores were interpreted using a five-tier descriptive framework. Based on the 1-to-5 theoretical scale, the total four-point range was divided into five equal intervals with a width of 0.80. This interval classification was established solely to facilitate the descriptive reading of the mean scores and should not be construed as a standardized norm or evidence of psychometric validity or reliability.

Table 1.
Descriptive criteria for interpreting mean scores

Range of the mean	Interpretation
$4{,}20 < \bar{X} \leq 5{,}00$	Very high perceived frequency
$3{,}40 < \bar{X} \leq 4{,}20$	High perceived frequency
$2{,}60 < \bar{X} \leq 3{,}40$	Moderate perceived frequency
$1{,}80 < \bar{X} \leq 2{,}60$	Low perceived frequency
$1{,}00 \leq \bar{X} \leq 1{,}80$	Very low perceived frequency

Note: The intervals were obtained by dividing the theoretical range of the scale—from 1 to 5—into five equal parts. This classification is a descriptive tool and not a validated normative scale.

The study was conducted as part of a doctoral research project at the Metropolitan University of Education, Science, and Technology (UMECIT) and followed the principles established in the regulations of that institution's Research Bioethics Committee and in Colombian Resolution 8430 of 1993. Participation was voluntary, and school administrators were informed of the study's purpose in advance. According to the methodological documentation, a written informed consent form was not used because no sensitive data or personal information that would compromise the participants' integrity was collected. The records were anonymized and used exclusively for research purposes. The documentation provided does not include a specific ethical approval number; therefore, none is listed in this manuscript.

Results

The empirical analysis encompassed 112 school leaders. Composite scores were computed for each participant across social transformation, critical curriculum, and 'learning to learn' by averaging their respective three items. Table 2 summarizes the mean values of these 112 individual composite scores per indicator; the pooled total of 336 item-level responses was explicitly excluded from serving as the analytical unit.

Social transformation yielded the highest mean score (M = 4.49), placing it within the 'very high perceived frequency' threshold. Critical curriculum followed closely with a mean of 4.41, also falling into this top category. 'Learning to learn' attained a mean of 4.25, likewise remaining within the same descriptive range. The overall composite mean for the critical perspective dimension was 4.38.

The hierarchical distribution of the means was social transformation, followed by critical curriculum and 'learning to learn'. The descriptive gap between the highest and lowest indicators was 0.24 points on the 1–5 scale. Specifically, the difference between social transformation and critical curriculum was 0.08 points, while the gap between critical curriculum and 'learning to learn' reached 0.16 points. These variations delineate the descriptive spread of the sample means and are not intended as inferential comparative tests.

All three indicators exceeded the 4.20 cut-off score defining the 'very high perceived frequency' classification. Consequently, the overarching trend indicates a consistently high self-reported occurrence of the practices surveyed. However, because data rely on administrator self-reports, these findings cannot confirm the exact number of schools actively embedding these practices or the depth with which they unfold within daily institutional routines.

Table 2.
Composite scores for critical perspective indicators (N = 112)

Indicator	N	Means (M)	Interpretation
Social Transformation	112	4,49	Very high perceived frequency
Critical Curriculum	112	4,41	Very high perceived frequency
Learning to Learn	112	4,25	Very high perceived frequency
Global Perspective	112	4,38	Very high perceived frequency

Note. The participant serves as the unit of analysis. Each indicator score was computed as the average across three items per school administrator. Means are reported rounded to two decimal places. Standard deviations reported in the original dissertation (0.664, 0.735, and 0.731) were derived from 336 pooled item-level responses and are omitted here, as they do not reflect the dispersion of the 112 composite scores. The individual-level dataset required to re-estimate composite standard deviations without assumptions was unavailable during this manuscript revision

Discussion

The empirical findings reveal a homogeneous descriptive pattern, with all three indicators falling within the 'very high perceived frequency' threshold. This cluster of high scores must be evaluated considering the instrument's item content and the self-reported nature of the data. The study captures how school administrators perceive and report conditions aligned with a critical framework; it does not systematically observe whether these practices are enacted in practice, nor does it assess their ultimate impact on educational outcomes.

Social transformation recorded the highest mean score. Operationally, this indicator reflects situations where education is grounded in context and connected to a social role extending beyond the mere transmission of knowledge. Pozo Serrano and Astorga Acevedo (2018) frame social transformation as a matter of shared institutional, academic, and professional responsibility. Similarly, from a critical intercultural stance in Latin America, Malagón Castro et al. (2025) demonstrate that contemporary educational discourse increasingly integrates diversity, context, and social change. These theoretical contributions enrich the interpretation of this indicator without conflating self-reported attitudes with verified social impact.

Although the mean score of 4.49 denotes a high reported occurrence of transformative practices, the study did not empirically measure shift in civic engagement, community dynamics, regional equity, or broader social metrics. Therefore, these results must be interpreted strictly as administrator perceptions. The distinction between endorsing a transformative orientation and demonstrating empirical social outcomes is methodologically crucial: while the former can be captured via survey instruments, the latter demands distinct observational designs, longitudinal tracking, and diverse data sources.

The critical curriculum dimension attained a mean score of 4.41. Abuabara Ospino (2018) represents the empirical reference most directly aligned with this target population, having developed a critical-social curriculum framework for lower and upper secondary education. Likewise, Casanova (2012) connects curriculum design with educational quality, underscoring the imperative of responding to students' needs and characteristics. Framed by these literature benchmarks, the observed mean suggests a frequent self-reported recognition among administrators regarding the linkages among curriculum design, formative purposes, and contextual realities.

Crucially, this curricular interpretation must preserve the boundary between perceived practice and formal institutional documentation. The survey instrument did not involve direct audits of Institutional Educational Projects (PEIs), subject-area syllabi, instructional units, or classroom materials. Consequently, these findings cannot substantiate that participating schools have undergone actual curricular reform or that their official study plans systematically adhere to a critical paradigm. Rather, the data capture administrative self-reports; empirical verification of curricular practice would require document analysis guided by explicit rubrics, ideally complemented by data triangulation across multiple stakeholders.

Gasque (2025) expands the discourse on formative integration within basic education curricula, while Cabrera (2018) analyzes quality, discourse, and power dynamics in higher education. The structural differences in educational levels between these studies and the present sample preclude direct empirical comparison. Their value is instead conceptual, illustrating that curriculum extends beyond content coverage to embody deliberate decisions regarding educational purposes and knowledge organization. The work of Abuabara Ospino (2018) provides a more congruent benchmark for lower and upper secondary contexts.

The 'learning to learn' indicator yielded a mean score of 4.25—the lowest among the three evaluated, yet firmly within the 'very high perceived frequency' range. This finding demonstrates that administrators frequently report practices aligned with student autonomy, reflection, and self-regu-

lated learning. Investigating this competency within higher education, García-García et al. (2025) connect it with teacher and student perceptions. In the present study, their work serves to delineate the construct rather than as a benchmark for comparing performance levels across educational stages.

The relative position of 'learning to learn' as the lowest mean should not be interpreted as an institutional deficiency or evidence of limited student autonomy. The absolute margin separating it from social transformation was merely 0.24 points and was not evaluated through inferential statistical tests. Moreover, these findings capture administrative perception rather than direct assessments of student metacognitive or self-regulatory behaviors. The proper reading remains strictly descriptive: amidst consistently elevated mean scores across all dimensions, items related to 'learning to learn' recorded the lowest average value.

Fitriadi et al. (2024) examine instructional models designed to foster critical thinking in primary education. While critical thinking and 'learning to learn' constitute distinct constructs, both emphasize active student engagement. Broadening this lens, Freire (1990) provides a foundational rationale for viewing learning as a reflective, participatory practice. Collectively, these studies ground this indicator within a pedagogical paradigm that rejects viewing students as passive recipients, while maintaining theoretical clarity across categories.

Synthesizing these three indicators offers a holistic portrait of the critical perspective without collapsing it into a single dimension. Social transformation defines an educational purpose grounded in contextual awareness; the critical curriculum supplies the organizational structure to translate this purpose into formative practice; and 'learning to learn' embeds student agency within the educational journey. This integrated framework engages with Giroux (2004) and Ortega (2014) regarding the critical design of curricula, alongside García Palacios (2013) and Gargallo López et al. (2020) on autonomous learning. Importantly, this conceptual alignment does not imply that these components are interchangeable or that a high rating in one guarantees performance in the others.

This conceptual synthesis should not be construed as empirical proof that elevated scores across these three components equate to holistic educational quality. Educational quality inherently encompasses additional dimensions unexamined here, including student learning, equity, resource allocation, school climate, inclusion, governance, labor conditions, and institutional performance. As Azaña-Lucio et al. (2024) demonstrate, quality policies prioritize different strategic axes, while the Ministry of National Education (2019) adopts an expansive framework. Consequently, this study deliberately restricts its focus to the operationalized critical perspective.

Sampling school leaders provides valuable insight from a governance standpoint, aligning with Castro Zapata et al. (2023), who connect school leadership, holistic education, quality, and equity. However, this administrative lens introduces a structural limitation: teachers, students, and families may hold divergent perceptions regarding the prevalence, enactment, or scope of these practices. Achieving a comprehensive assessment would require multi-stakeholder data triangulation.

Furthermore, cross-level comparisons with existing literature require methodological restraint. Oliver-Barceló and Ferrer-Ribot (2022) analyze early childhood curricula; Özdil and Debreli (2025) and García-García et al. (2025) examine higher education contexts; and Fitriadi et al. (2024) address primary education. While these references help ground theoretical constructs, they do not provide direct empirical benchmarks for lower secondary education. Preserving this distinction prevents mistaking topical overlap for methodological equivalence.

The study's cross-sectional design imposes temporal constraints. Data reflect a single measurement point, precluding claims regarding whether administrative perceptions remain stable, improve, or decline over time. Similarly, its descriptive

nature prevents establishing causal attributions to specific institutional determinants. Future research seeking to examine trends or relational patterns should deploy longitudinal or comparative frameworks, defining hypothesis testing procedures accordingly.

Finally, reliance on self-report measures introduces potential social desirability bias and variable item interpretation among respondents. Additionally, the non-probability convenience sample (n = 112 out of 152 identified leaders) precludes probabilistic generalization to broader educational systems. Lastly, because the individual-level dataset required to reconstruct composite score dispersion was unavailable during this manuscript revision, conclusions are strictly restricted to the descriptive analysis of indicator means and the established internal consistency of the subscale.

Overall, these findings outline the perceptions of 112 school administrators across three core components of a critical educational framework. The consistently elevated mean scores reveal a strong self-reported endorsement of practices tied to the social function of education, critical curricular design, and autonomous learning. A rigorous scientific interpretation of these results demands preserving the individual participant as the unit of analysis, distinguishing administrative perception from enacted practice, and recognizing that this study evaluated neither causal mechanisms nor directly observed social or pedagogical outcomes.

Conclusions

The 112 school leaders sampled reported a 'very high perceived frequency' of practices related to social transformation, critical curriculum, and 'learning to learn'. Mean scores were 4.49, 4.41, and 4.25, respectively, yielding an overall composite mean of 4.38. From a purely descriptive stance, social transformation recorded the highest average and 'learning to learn' the lowest; these numerical margins were not subjected to inferential significance testing and must not be construed as statistically confirmed differences.

Integrating these three indicators provides an operational account of the critical perspective by uniting the social aims of schooling, contextually responsive curricular organization, and students' reflective agency in learning. This framework reflects the specific operationalization chosen and is not intended as an exhaustive metric of educational quality as a whole. The data capture self-reported administrator perspectives and do not demonstrate that schools systematically enact these practices or that tangible social and curricular transformations have occurred.

Due to the cross-sectional, descriptive, and non-probabilistic nature of the design, conclusions must remain strictly grounded in the empirical evidence gathered. Although the nine-item subscale displayed robust internal consistency during the pilot study (α = 0,813), administrative perceptions should be triangulated in future research with curricular document audits, direct classroom observations, and multi-stakeholder input from teachers and students. Finally, future studies should maintain full participant-level datasets to enable reporting score dispersion for composite metrics and support reproducible statistical workflows.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use

During the preparation of this manuscript, ChatGPT (OpenAI, model GPT-5.6 Sol) and Claude (Anthropic, model Claude Opus 5) were used as support tools for linguistic revision, textual organization, expository clarity, and drafting refinement. Neither tool was involved in data generation, methodological decision-making, or the determination of the study's results. All contents were reviewed and validated by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript, including the accuracy of the information, references, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions.

Author Contributions

Angélica María Vega Porras: Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, analysis, writing: original draft and final version.
Carlos Alberto Severiche Sierra: Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, analysis, writing: original draft and final version.

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