Critical Perspective and Integral Educational Quality in Secondary Education: Evidence from Educational Management

Angélica María Vega Porras[1], Rosa Margarita Murgas Canchano[2], Iris María Cantillo Velásquez[3], Angélica Margarita García Moreno[4], Karina Paola Buelvas Almanza[5], Leonar Javier Briceño Ariza[6]

[1] Universidad Metropolitana de Educación, Ciencia y Tecnología – UMECIT. Ciudad de Panamá, Panamá. angelicavega.est@umecit.edu.pa - https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7161-557X
[2] Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Valencia, España. rmurcan@upv.edu.es - https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6429-6005
[3] Corporación Unificada Nacional de Educación Superior – CUN. Santa Marta, Colombia. iris_cantillo@cun.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4322-8131
[4] Universidad Simón Bolívar. Barranquilla, Colombia. angelica.garciam@unisimon.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2474-4381
[5] Universidad de San Buenaventura Cartagena. Cartagena, Colombia. karina.buelvas@usbctg.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3522-0316
[6] Corporación Unificada Nacional de Educación Superior – CUN. Santa Marta, Colombia. leonar_briceno@cun.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0475-2870

ABSTRACT

Educational quality constitutes a fundamental element for the integral development of students and the strengthening of contemporary educational systems. In this context, the critical perspective emerges as an approach aimed at promoting reflective thinking, autonomy, and social participation, contributing to the development of integral education. The purpose of this study was to analyze the critical perspective as a guiding component of integral educational quality in secondary education, from the perspective of educational management. The research was conducted under a quantitative approach, within the positivist paradigm, using a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and field design, with a descriptive level. The population consisted of school administrators from public secondary education institutions, selected through non-probability convenience sampling. Data were collected using a structured Likert-type questionnaire, validated through expert judgment and demonstrating high reliability. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency and percentage distribution. The results show that the critical perspective is integrated into educational management processes, promoting the development of autonomous, reflective, and socially committed students. Furthermore, the incorporation of pedagogical practices aimed at fostering critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, and social transformation was identified. These findings highlight the relevance of the critical perspective in strengthening integral educational quality by promoting competencies that support students' comprehensive development. This approach is recognized as a strategic component for enhancing educational quality and fostering formative processes oriented toward equity, inclusion, and social transformation.
Keywords: *Educational Quality, Secondary Education, Educational Management, Critical Thinking.*

INTRODUCTION

Educational quality is a central theme in contemporary discussions about the development of education systems, due to its impact on the holistic development of individuals and its contribution to social development. Currently, this concept has gained significant relevance in national and international educational agendas, as it is considered a key element for responding to the challenges of the knowledge society and promoting sustainable human development. From this perspective, educational quality should not be limited exclusively to academic results, but should encompass dimensions related to

equity, inclusion, holistic development, and the formation of critical competencies that enable students to actively participate in the transformation of their social environment (Martínez-Iñiguez et al., 2020). In this context, education is conceived as a comprehensive formative process that contributes to the student's personal, social, and cultural development, fostering the construction of more equitable and democratic societies. In this sense, educational quality is associated not only with the transmission of knowledge but also with the development of critical, reflective, and social skills that enable students to face the challenges of the contemporary world and actively participate in social and community life (Rojas Lizarazo & Mejía Galvis, 2025). This conception recognizes education as a fundamental instrument for social transformation, which implies the need to promote pedagogical approaches aimed at strengthening critical thinking, autonomy, and the student's active participation in their learning process (Freire, 1990; Giroux, 1993).

However, the definition of educational quality has been subject to multiple interpretations due to its multidimensional nature and its close relationship with social, cultural, political, and institutional factors. In this sense, educational quality is not a single or static concept, but rather responds to diverse theoretical perspectives that link it to the student's holistic development, educational equity, the sociocultural context, and institutional management (Tenorio Rojas, 2017). This view recognizes that educational quality involves not only the achievement of learning outcomes, but also the implementation of pedagogical processes that foster the development of critical thinking skills and strengthen the individual's holistic development (Feria-Cuevas & Ramos de Robles, 2020).

From a contemporary perspective, educational quality is closely linked to educational management and the right to education, recognized as a fundamental element for guaranteeing human development, equity, and equal opportunities. Within this framework, factors such as leadership, institutional management, and pedagogical autonomy play a crucial role in consolidating quality educational processes, directly influencing institutional organization and the implementation of pedagogical practices geared toward the student's holistic development (Méndez Carpio et al., 2024). Furthermore, educational management is a strategic element for strengthening teaching and learning processes by promoting collaboration among educational stakeholders and the institutional context (Farfán Cabrera & Reyes Adan, 2017).

Similarly, educational quality should be understood as a process oriented toward the holistic development of the student, in which various educational stakeholders participate in a coordinated manner, including teachers, administrators, and the educational community. From this perspective, educational quality implies the development of cognitive, social, and critical competencies that allow students to interpret their reality, solve problems, and actively participate in the construction of knowledge (Duque & Méndez, 2024). This approach recognizes the importance of promoting pedagogical practices aimed at developing critical thinking, autonomy, and the holistic development of the student as essential elements for strengthening educational quality (Holguín Uribe et al., 2024).

In this sense, holistic approaches have gained relevance in the educational field, promoting the development of competencies that contribute to the student's comprehensive education and the strengthening of educational quality. The incorporation of holistic approaches allows for the transformation of pedagogical and curricular processes, fostering a deeper understanding of knowledge and preparing students to face the challenges of a complex and constantly evolving society (Martínez-Iñiguez et al., 2020). This approach recognizes that educational quality requires the implementation of pedagogical models oriented toward the development of critical thinking, autonomy, and active student participation (UNESCO, 2015).

From a critical perspective, education takes on a transformative character by fostering the development of individuals capable of analyzing, interpreting, and transforming their social reality. This approach recognizes that educational quality cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators but must consider the impact of education on social development, equity, and social justice (Freire, 1990; Giroux, 1993). In this sense, incorporating a critical perspective into educational processes is fundamental to

strengthening comprehensive educational quality by promoting the development of competencies oriented toward reflection, autonomy, and social participation in students.

In the context of secondary education, incorporating a critical perspective is a key element for strengthening educational processes and contributing to the student's holistic development. Developing critical, autonomous, and socially engaged students is one of the main challenges facing contemporary education systems, requiring the implementation of pedagogical practices focused on the individual's holistic development and the strengthening of educational quality.

Within this framework, the present research aims to analyze the critical perspective as a guiding component of comprehensive quality education in secondary school, in order to understand its role in strengthening educational processes and its contribution to the student's holistic development. This study provides relevant scientific evidence that contributes to strengthening the field of educational quality from a critical perspective, promoting the development of educational models oriented towards equity, inclusion, and social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted under the positivist paradigm, with a quantitative approach, oriented towards the objective measurement of the critical perspective as a component of comprehensive quality education in basic secondary education. This approach allows for the analysis of educational phenomena through the collection and analysis of quantifiable data, facilitating the attainment of objective and verifiable results (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018). Methodologically, the study was framed within the projective research modality, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and field design, which allowed for the analysis of the phenomenon in its natural context without manipulation of variables, through the direct collection of data at a specific point in time (Vega Porras, 2025).

The research was descriptive, as it aimed to characterize and analyze the critical perspective present in educational management processes, identifying its dimensions and indicators based on the perceptions of school administrators. This type of research allows for the description of the characteristics of a given phenomenon and the analysis of its behavior within a specific context (Arias, 2016).

Population and sample

The study population consisted of school administrators from public educational institutions offering secondary education in the municipality of Villavicencio, Meta Department, Colombia. These individuals were selected due to their strategic role in educational management and their participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational processes (Vega Porras, 2025).

The sample consisted of school administrators selected through non-probability convenience sampling, based on accessibility and availability criteria. This type of sampling allows for the selection of subjects who meet the characteristics required for the study and facilitates access to the information necessary for the analysis of the phenomenon under investigation (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

Data collection technique and instrument

The survey technique was used to collect the information, allowing researchers to obtain data directly from the study participants through the application of structured instruments that facilitate the measurement of specific variables (Tamayo & Tamayo, 2012). A structured Likert-type questionnaire was used as the instrument, designed to measure the level of presence of indicators associated with critical perspective and comprehensive quality education.

The instrument underwent a validation process through expert review to assess the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the items in relation to the research objectives. This procedure ensures the content validity of the instrument and guarantees the quality of the information collected (Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez, 2008).

Furthermore, the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which allows for the evaluation of the instrument's internal consistency and ensures the stability of the results obtained. This coefficient is widely used in educational research to ensure the reliability of measurement instruments (Cronbach, 1951).

Procedure
Data collection was carried out by administering a questionnaire to selected school administrators, ensuring the voluntary participation of the subjects and compliance with the ethical principles of research. Throughout this process, the confidentiality of the information and informed consent of the participants were ensured, respecting the ethical principles that guide educational research (American Educational Research Association, 2018).

Data analysis technique
The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, employing measures of central tendency and dispersion, which allowed for the identification of the level of presence of the critical perspective in comprehensive quality education. Descriptive statistics allow for the organization, analysis, and interpretation of the data obtained, facilitating the understanding of the behavior of the variables studied (Triola, 2018).

Furthermore, an analysis of the percentage distribution of responses was conducted, which allowed for the identification of the frequency with which pedagogical practices associated with the critical perspective are manifested in educational management. This procedure facilitated the interpretation of the results and the identification of trends in the phenomenon studied, contributing to the generation of empirical evidence on comprehensive quality education in basic secondary education (Vega Porras, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The critical perspective dimension was evaluated to determine the level of integration of the critical approach as a guiding component of comprehensive quality education in lower secondary education. The results showed an overall mean of 4.384, corresponding to the very high mastery category, with a standard deviation of 0.710, indicating high consistency in the perceptions of school administrators regarding the presence of this approach in educational management. These findings reflect that the critical perspective is firmly integrated into institutional practices, which fosters the development of students capable of analyzing, interpreting, and transforming their social reality. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistical results of the indicators that comprise this dimension, showing the performance of each of its components.

Table 1. Results of the indicators of the critical perspective dimension in comprehensive quality education in basic secondary education

Dimension	Indicator	Average	Standard deviation	Category	Interpretation
Critical perspective	Social transformation	4,488	0.664	Very high mastery	Educational institutions promote the training of students as agents of social change, strengthening ethical commitment and civic participation.
Critical perspective	Critical curriculum	4,411	0.735	Very high mastery	The curriculum incorporates reflective approaches that encourage critical analysis of the social and educational context.
Critical perspective	Learning to learn	4,253	0.731	Very high mastery	The development of intellectual autonomy, self-regulation, and critical thinking in students is encouraged.

Dimension	Indicator	Average	Standard deviation	Category	Interpretation
Critical (global) perspective	Average of the dimension	4,384	0.710	Very high mastery	The critical perspective is consolidated as a structural axis of comprehensive quality education.

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Table 1, the social transformation indicator registered the highest average (4.488), demonstrating that educational institutions significantly promote the development of students with critical thinking skills and a commitment to transforming their social environment. This result confirms the recognition of education as a process oriented toward the holistic development of the student, strengthening not only cognitive learning but also social and civic development.

Furthermore, the critical curriculum indicator reached an average of 4.411, demonstrating that curricular processes incorporate pedagogical approaches oriented towards reflective analysis, problematizing knowledge, and contextualizing learning. This result shows that educational institutions promote knowledge construction from a critical perspective, fostering an understanding of social reality and the development of reflective thinking.

Meanwhile, the "learning to learn" indicator obtained an average score of 4.253, confirming that educational institutions foster the development of students' intellectual autonomy, self-regulation, and reflective capacity. This finding demonstrates that students are trained as active participants in their learning process, strengthening their ability to adapt and develop within complex educational and social contexts.

To complement the descriptive analysis, the percentage distribution of responses from school administrators was examined for each of the evaluated indicators, in order to identify the frequency with which pedagogical practices associated with the critical perspective are manifested. Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of responses, allowing for a more precise understanding of the level of consolidation of this approach in educational institutions.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of responses for the indicators of the critical perspective dimension

Indicator	Always (%)	Frequently (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)	Interpretation
Social transformation	58.3	32.1	9.5	0.0	0.0	There is a high degree of consolidation of the educational approach oriented towards social transformation.
Critical curriculum	56.0	29.2	14.9	0.0	0.0	The curriculum significantly incorporates the development of critical thinking.
Learning to learn	42.6	40.2	17.3	0.0	0.0	Autonomy and self-regulation of learning are widely promoted.

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Table 2, the social transformation indicator shows the highest concentration of responses in the "always" (58.3%) and "frequently" (32.1%) categories, demonstrating that educational institutions consistently promote the training of students as agents of social change. This result confirms the role of education as a process oriented toward the development of critical awareness and social participation.
Regarding the critical curriculum indicator, 56.0% of participants indicated that this approach is always implemented, while 29.2% indicated that it is frequently developed, which shows that curriculum

planning incorporates pedagogical strategies oriented towards critical analysis, reflection and contextualization of knowledge.

For its part, the learning to learn indicator shows that 42.6% of teaching managers consider that this approach is always promoted, while 40.2% indicate that it is frequently implemented, which demonstrates that educational institutions encourage the development of intellectual autonomy and self-regulation of learning.

Overall, the absence of responses in the "rarely" and "never" categories across all three indicators assessed confirms the consolidation of the critical perspective as an essential component of comprehensive quality education in lower secondary school. These results demonstrate that educational institutions are orienting their practices toward the formation of critical, autonomous, and socially engaged individuals, strengthening the role of education as an instrument of social transformation and holistic human development.

The results obtained in the critical perspective dimension showed an overall average of 4.384, corresponding to the very high proficiency category, which confirms the consolidation of this approach as a structural component of comprehensive quality education in lower secondary education. This finding coincides with Méndez Carpio, Pesántez Calle, and Zúñiga Ruilova (2024), who maintain that educational quality constitutes a fundamental right oriented toward individual and collective empowerment, emphasizing that its effective implementation depends on educational leadership, pedagogical autonomy, and institutional commitment. The high score obtained in this research demonstrates that educational institutions have made significant progress in incorporating critical approaches that promote the holistic development of students, which supports the conception of educational quality as a process oriented toward human and social development, beyond traditional academic indicators.

Regarding the social transformation indicator, which registered the highest average (4.488), the results show that educational institutions significantly promote the training of students as agents of social change. This result confirms the arguments of Holmos-Flores et al. (2023), who point out that critical pedagogy aims to develop critical awareness and empower students, enabling them to understand their social reality and actively participate in its transformation. The high score obtained for this indicator suggests that educational institutions have incorporated pedagogical practices geared toward the development of equity, inclusion, and social justice, consolidating the role of education as a tool for social transformation. However, these results also prompt reflection on the need to strengthen the connection between critical pedagogical discourse and its practical application in the classroom, in order to guarantee its sustainability over time.

Likewise, the critical curriculum indicator obtained an average score of 4.411, demonstrating the integration of reflective approaches into curricular processes. This finding aligns with Martínez-Iñiguez et al. (2020), who maintain that educational quality, from a socio-formative perspective, involves the development of critical competencies that enable students to interpret their context and actively participate in solving social problems. From this perspective, the curriculum not only fulfills an academic function but also a formative one, contributing to the development of critical thinking, intellectual autonomy, and social participation. The high score obtained for this indicator suggests that educational institutions have made progress in implementing curricular models geared toward the holistic development of students, thus strengthening educational quality from a critical and transformative perspective.

Meanwhile, the "learning to learn" indicator obtained an average score of 4.253, demonstrating the strengthening of students' intellectual autonomy. This result aligns with Castro-Zapata, Guateque-Londoño, and Londoño-Bonilla (2022), who emphasize that comprehensive education is based on the development of competencies that foster autonomy, critical thinking, and educational equity, recognizing the role of school leadership as a key element for consolidating quality educational processes. The high score for this indicator suggests that educational institutions are promoting training

processes aimed at developing autonomous students, capable of managing their own learning and actively participating in the construction of knowledge.

Similarly, the percentage distribution of responses showed that over 90% of participants selected the "always" and "frequently" categories for all three indicators evaluated, confirming the consolidation of a critical perspective in educational practices. This finding aligns with Rojas López (2024), who points out that the development of critical literacy strengthens students' ability to analyze, interpret, and evaluate information, fostering the development of argumentative and reflective skills. The high frequency of positive responses demonstrates that educational institutions are promoting learning environments that encourage the development of critical thinking, contributing to the strengthening of educational quality from a holistic perspective.

Furthermore, the results obtained demonstrate that a critical perspective contributes to strengthening educational environments conducive to learning, which aligns with Agüero Ynca (2026), who points out that educational quality directly influences the school climate, socio-emotional well-being, and the student's holistic development. The high rating obtained in this research suggests that implementing critical approaches contributes to strengthening the school climate, fostering the development of inclusive, equitable, and participatory educational environments.

Taken together, the results confirm that a critical perspective is an essential component of comprehensive quality education in lower secondary school, promoting the development of critical, reflective, and social skills that contribute to the student's holistic development. These results align with contemporary approaches to educational quality, which recognize that education should be geared toward the formation of critical, autonomous, and socially engaged individuals capable of actively participating in the transformation of their social environment. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that implementing a critical perspective strengthens educational quality, contributing to the development of educational institutions oriented toward equity, inclusion, and social justice.

CONCLUSION

The critical perspective is consolidated as a fundamental axis of comprehensive quality education in lower secondary school, demonstrating its integration into pedagogical practices aimed at developing students' reflective thinking, autonomy, and social commitment. This approach strengthens holistic education by promoting analytical skills, an understanding of reality, and active participation in the social environment.

The incorporation of critical curricular approaches fosters the development of skills oriented towards reflection, knowledge construction and the formation of autonomous subjects, positioning education as a process oriented towards human and social development, beyond the transmission of content.

Strengthening autonomy in learning demonstrates the promotion of student-centered educational processes, fostering their ability to manage their learning and act critically in educational and social contexts, which contributes to the development of fundamental skills for their comprehensive education.

This study provides relevant scientific evidence to the field of educational quality by recognizing the critical perspective as a structural component that strengthens educational processes and contributes to the development of educational models oriented toward equity, inclusion, and social transformation. These findings broaden the theoretical and empirical understanding of comprehensive quality education by highlighting the relevance of critical pedagogical approaches in the formation of autonomous, reflective, and socially engaged students, thus reinforcing the role of education as a fundamental pillar for the sustainable development of society.

REFERENCES
1. Agüero Ynca, ML (2026). Impact of educational quality on school climate: A systematic review. Revista InveCom, 6(2), e602114.https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17103808
2. American Educational Research Association. (2018). Ethical standards of the American Educational Research Association. AERA.

3. Arias, FG (2016). The research project: Introduction to scientific methodology (7th ed.). Episteme.

4. Castro-Zapata, EI, Guateque-Londoño, JF, & Londoño-Bonilla, P. (2022). Importance and relationship between comprehensive education, quality and educational equity, and the teaching director. Electronic Journal in Education and Pedagogy, 6(11), 262–280.https://doi.org/10.15658/rev.electron.educ.pedagog22.110611

5. Chacón Díaz, LF (2019). Educational quality: A look at the school and the teacher in Colombia. Education and City, 36, 35–49.https://doi.org/10.36737/01230425.v1.n36.2019.2120

6. Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. Psychometrika, 16(3), 297–334.https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02310555

7. Duque, H., & Méndez, J. (2024). Construction of the concept of educational quality: A grounded theory study in teachers from the public sector. Latin American Journal of Educational Studies, 19(2), 51–77.https://doi.org/10.17151/rlee.2023.19.2.3

8. Escobar-Pérez, J., & Cuervo-Martínez, Á. (2008). Content validity and expert judgment: An approach to its use. Advances in Measurement, 6, 27–36.

9. Farfán Cabrera, MT, & Reyes Adan, IA (2017). Strategic educational management and school management of the teaching-learning process: A conceptual approach. REencuentro. Analysis of University Problems, 28(73), 45–61.

10. Feria-Cuevas, Y., & Ramos de Robles, SL (2020). Elements of educational quality from the perspective of students in biology, orientation in environmental sciences. Scientific Journal of FAREM-Estelí, 35, 31–49.https://doi.org/10.5377/farem.v0i35.10275

11. Freire, P. (1990). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Siglo XXI Editores.

12. Giroux, HA (1993). The school and the struggle for citizenship. Siglo XXI Editores.

13. Hernández-Sampieri, R., & Mendoza, C. (2018). Research methodology: The quantitative, qualitative and mixed routes. McGraw-Hill.

14. Holguín Uribe, Y., López Gómez, YT, & Chávez Galvis, J. (2024). Comprehensive approach to improve educational quality through complex thinking: A literature review. Revista Temario Científico, 4(2), e24412.https://doi.org/10.47212/rtcAlinin.2.224.4

15. Holmos-Flores, E., Buendía-Aparcana, RR, Castilla-Anchante, PE, & Martínez-Muñoz, GG (2023). Critical pedagogy and social justice as an educational approach to address inequalities. Koinonía Interdisciplinary Peer-Reviewed Journal, 8(16), 97–112.https://doi.org/10.35381/rkv8i16.2526

16. Martínez-Iñiguez, JE, Tobón, S., López-Ramírez, E., & Manzanilla-Granados, HM (2020). Educational quality: A documentary study from a socio-formative perspective. Latin American Journal of Educational Studies, 16(1), 233–258.https://doi.org/10.48102/rlee.2020.16.1.233

17. Méndez Carpio, CR, Pesántez Calle, JF, & Zúñiga Ruilova, JG (2024). Educational quality management: An approach from the right to education. Scientific Journal, 9(32), 407–426.https://doi.org/10.29394/scientific.issn.2542-2987.2024.9.32.19.407-426

18. Otzen, T., & Manterola, C. (2017). Sampling techniques on a study population. International Journal of Morphology, 35(1), 227–232.

19. Rojas Lizarazo, ZY, & Mejía Galvis, NE (2025). Educational quality as a foundation for the development of competencies in students. Scientific Journal, 229–246.

20. Rojas López, RA (2024). Critical literacy and school debate. Language, 52(2), e20613548.https://doi.org/10.25100/lenguaje.v52i2.13548

21. Tamayo, M., & Tamayo, M. (2012). The process of scientific research. Limusa.

22. Tenorio Rojas, D. (2017). Quality in education taking into consideration the historical and current perspectives of humanitarianism in the educational field. Revista Gestión de la Educación, 7(2), 166–191.

23. Tobón, S. (2013). Comprehensive training and competencies: Complex thinking, curriculum, didactics and evaluation. ECOE Ediciones.

24. Triola, MF (2018). Statistics. Pearson.

25. UNESCO. (2015). Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4. UNESCO.

26. Vega Porras, AM (2025). Comprehensive quality education in basic secondary education from the educational management in the municipality of Villavicencio, Meta [Doctoral thesis, Metropolitan University of Education, Science and Technology].