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Transformational Leadership inthe Managerial Practice of Public Educational Institutions in District 09D07, Guayaquil – Ecuador

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Resumen

Este trabajo expone resultados derivados de una investigación doctoral y analiza la alineación entre la alineación entre las prácticas de liderazgo ejercidas por los directivos docentes y los principios del liderazgo transformacional, tomando como referencia instituciones fiscales del Distrito 09D07 en Guayaquil. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cuantitativo, con diseño no experimental, de tipo descriptivo y transversal. Para la recolección de datos se aplicó una encuesta estructurada a 42 docentes en ejercicio, considerando las cuatro dimensiones propuestas en el modelo teórico de Bass y Avolio: influencia idealizada, motivación inspiradora, estimulación intelectual y consideración individualizada. Los hallazgos revelaron que las prácticas de liderazgo transformacional en la mayoría de los centros educativos evaluados fueron poco frecuentes o inconsistentes. Las dimensiones mejor posicionadas fueron la motivación inspiradora y la consideración individualizada; sin embargo, estas no alcanzaron niveles que permitieran consolidar un estilo de liderazgo plenamente transformador. Las respuestas obtenidas señalaron que los directivos presentan limitaciones para consolidarse como referentes éticos o movilizadores de una visión institucional compartida. Asimismo, se identificó una escasa estimulación del desarrollo profesional del cuerpo docente. En conjunto, los resultados alertan sobre la necesidad de fortalecer las competencias directivas en liderazgo transformacional como eje clave para impulsar procesos de mejora continua, innovación pedagógica y cohesión organizacional dentro de las instituciones escolares.

Palabrasclave: liderazgo transformacional, gestión directiva, educación pública, calidad educativa.

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Abstract
This work presents results derived from a doctoral research and analyzes the alignment between practices exercised by school principals and the principles of transformational leadership, focusing on public institutions within District 09D07 in Guayaquil. The research employed a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, descriptive, and cross-sectional design. Data were collected through a structured survey administered to 42 in-service teachers, based on the four dimensions proposed by Bass and Avolio's theoretical model: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized
consideration. The findings revealed that transformational leadership practices were generally infrequent or inconsistent across most of the evaluated schools. Inspirational motivation and individualized consideration emerged as the most prominent dimensions; however, they did not reach levels sufficient to consolidate a fully transformational leadership style. Responses indicated that principals face challenges in positioning themselves as ethical role models or as drivers of a shared institutional vision. Likewise, there was limited stimulation of teachers' professional development. Overall, the results underscore the need to strengthen school leaders' competencies in transformational leadership as a key strategy to foster continuous improvement, pedagogical innovation, and organizational cohesion within educational institutions.

Keywords: transformational leadership, school management, public education, educational quality

Introduction

The managerial leadership role has become consolidated as a decisive factor in shaping educational institutions capable of responding to the complex challenges of the twenty-first century. Today, it is no longer sufficient to manage resources or ensure regulatory compliance; leaders are required who can exert a transformative influence on their school communities, mobilize institutional capacities, promote collaborative cultures, and articulate visions of deep pedagogical change. This transformation of the managerial role involves a necessary shift from vertical and bureaucratic management models toward more integrative, participatory approaches committed to pedagogical development, in which leadership is conceived as an ethical, dialogical practice oriented towards continuous improvement.

Within this framework, transformational leadership emerges as a theoretical–practical proposal that responds to these demands. Since the pioneering formulations of Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), and its subsequent adaptation to the educational context by Leithwood (2006), transformational leadership has demonstrated its capacity to strengthen teacher commitment, generate resilient school environments, and foster sustained innovation processes. The dimensions of this model—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—constitute a leadership

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architecture aimed not only at organizational improvement but also at human and professional development within school institutions.

Several studies in Ibero-America have documented the positive effects of transformational leadership in contexts characterized by social vulnerability, institutional precariousness, or educational inequality. In these scenarios, the transformational school leader acts as a mediator between public policies and school reality, adapting external demands to the internal context, revaluing the voice of teachers, and promoting more relevant pedagogical practices (Sardon, 2017; Cavagnaro & Carvajal, 2020; Bolívar, 2010). However, researchers have also noted that the adoption of this model is neither automatic nor homogeneous; it depends on structural factors, the available professional capital, and the prevailing regulatory framework (Chamorro Miranda, 2021).

In the Ecuadorian case, transformational leadership has been partially incorporated into public policy instruments such as the Organic Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI) and the management standards established by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, the effective implementation of this model in public schools faces significant limitations. Recent research has revealed inconsistencies between what the regulations stipulate and the actual practices of school leaders, who continue to operate under conventional administrative logics, with limited autonomy and weak training in pedagogical management (Esquivel et al., 2018; SUMMA, 2023).

These tensions become sharper in educational districts with high levels of complexity, such as District 09D07 in Guayaquil. In this area, public institutions face structural issues such as academic underperformance, school dropout, limited resources, and frequent turnover of teaching staff. Under such conditions, school leadership should be the main driver of change, capable of reversing institutional inertia and articulating continuous improvement processes. However, a strong disconnect persists between the normative attributions of school leaders and their actual working conditions, which undermines the effectiveness of their leadership and frustrates attempts at educational transformation (Tantaléan et al., 2022; Abanto et al., 2023).

Despite the fact that the official discourse promotes standards of excellence and acknowledges the importance of pedagogical leadership, available data show deficient institutionalization of mechanisms for training, evaluating, and supporting school leaders. According to reports from the Ministry of Education (2024), less than 1% of public institutions have been trained in quality models, and more than 5,000 teachers perform leadership functions without having undergone formal selection processes or specialized training. This reveals a structural gap that compromises the education system's capacity to
promote effective, contextualized, and transformational leadership.

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In this context, the analysis of school leadership cannot be limited to a normative review or to a theoretical idealization; it becomes essential to explore, from a critical and empirical perspective, how managerial practice is configured in reality, what principles guide leaders' daily decisions, and the extent to which their actions reflect the foundations of transformational leadership. This task gains particular relevance in scenarios such as Guayaquil, where school leaders operate under high pressure, with limited technical support, and amid multiple demands from various institutional and community actors.

Accordingly, this article aims to evaluate the degree of alignment between the current leadership practices of school administrators and the principles of transformational leadership, based on a study conducted in public institutions in District 09D07, Guayaquil. Through this analysis, the intention is to provide evidence that allows for a more precise understanding of school management dynamics in urban low-income contexts, identify the factors that hinder or enhance transformational leadership, and offer useful inputs for the formulation of educational policies aimed at strengthening the managerial function within Ecuador's public education system.

The Role of the School Leader in Institutional Transformation

In contemporary school settings, the role of the school leader transcends administrative functions to become a key agent of pedagogical and institutional change. Transforming educational practices requires leadership capable of mobilizing the school community toward continuous improvement, pedagogical innovation, and the creation of organizational climates conducive to learning. In this regard, Leithwood et al. (2006) argue that school leadership has a significant effect on academic performance, particularly in contexts of vulnerability, where its influence can be decisive in generating conditions for equity. Along these lines, Bolívar (2010) states that leadership not only affects academic outcomes but also the professional culture of teachers, institutional commitment, and the quality of the school environment.

Consequently, the role of the school leader is no longer restricted to resource administration or regulatory compliance; rather, it is projected as an agent of institutional and pedagogical transformation. This perspective recognizes that school leadership directly influences teachers' professional development, organizational culture, and, therefore, student learning. Far from the bureaucratic logic that historically characterized school leadership in Latin America, today a situated, ethical, and pedagogical form of leadership capable of generating shared meaning is required (Acuña & Hernández, 2019; Aranda, 2017).

However, this redefinition of the leadership role does not always translate into concrete practices. According to Abanto et al. (2023), in educational institutions a functionalist understanding of school leadership persists, one more closely associated with ensuring regulatory compliance than with fostering the pedagogical engagement of teaching teams.

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Despite normative provisions, many school leaders continue to operate under traditional schemes centered on formal authority and control logics, revealing a tension between the leadership expected by public policy and the leadership actually exercised in schools (Carranza, 2020).

One factor explaining this disconnect is the professional preparation of school leaders. According to Riasco et al. (2021), a significant proportion of district-level leaders assume their roles without having developed specific competencies for pedagogical leadership, limiting their actions to administrative and management tasks. This reality is consistent with previous studies in the region, such as Muñoz (2019), which highlight the lack of training in educational leadership as a recurrent obstacle to transforming school practices in Latin America.

In the same context, Escanio (2023) explains that school culture in many institutions continues to reproduce hierarchical, vertical relationships centered on obedience rather than fostering collaborative work and the construction of learning communities. In this sense, school leaders cannot restrict their actions to technical–administrative management; they must assume a dynamic role that connects the institutional with the pedagogical, the normative with the ethical, and the strategic with the human. For Arce (2019), school leadership should not be conceived as a vertical, control-centered figure, but as a relational praxis that drives collaborative processes, fosters a sense of belonging, and promotes educational innovation.

This conservative institutional culture constitutes a structural barrier to the exercise of effective pedagogical leadership. According to Bolívar (2010), unless the symbolic structures of the school are transformed, innovative leadership runs the risk of being absorbed by institutional routines. Authors such as García et al. (2018) and Acuña (2019) reinforce this view by noting that successful educational leadership is based on the leader's ability to build social capital, promote professional trust, and generate collaborative cultures that sustain continuous improvement. Complementarily, Acevedo (2022) warns that educational reforms tend to fail when they do not consider the strategic role of school leaders as mediators between policy and practice, between norms and experience, and between institutional vision and classroom reality.

In Ecuador, the role of the school leader has undergone significant reforms over recent decades aimed at professionalizing the position, strengthening leadership competencies, and aligning practice with international standards. Nevertheless, important gaps persist between educational policies and institutional practice. As noted by Abanto et al. (2023), school leaders face multiple challenges derived from regulatory rigidity, administrative overload, and the absence of formative support, all of which limit their capacity to exercise effective pedagogical leadership. For their part, Cabrejos and Suarez (2019) warn that the dominant leadership model in many Ecuadorian educational institutions remains anchored in traditional

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schemes centered on hierarchical authority and formal compliance, to the detriment of more participatory and transformative approaches.

Transformational Leadership: Theoretical Foundations and Applications in School Contexts

Transformational leadership emerges as a response to traditional models centered on control and hierarchy, proposing a new way of exercising organizational influence through inspiration, the construction of shared visions, and the strengthening of trust-based relationships. Its origin dates back to the pioneering work of Downton, who defined this type of leadership as a process aimed at elevating followers' morale, motivation, and commitment. This foundation was expanded by Burns, who coined the term in 1978 and positioned it as a dynamic relationship in which leaders and followers mutually enrich one another through the mobilization of collective ideals (Amor, 2017; Enciso, 2020; Enriquez Ore, 2017).

Beyond its theoretical foundations, transformational leadership has been recognized for its potential to generate favorable organizational climates, foster innovation, and promote the comprehensive development of work teams. Rivera (2020) and Alcázar (2020) concur in noting that this approach strengthens job satisfaction and teacher commitment, essential elements for improving educational quality. González (2018), for his part, links it to the emergence of institutional cultures open to change, where active participation and continuous improvement are encouraged.

From an educational perspective, this model acquires particular relevance. Authors such as Escanio De León (2023) and Carranza (2020) highlight its usefulness in processes of institutional transformation, given that it drives more human, participatory, and adaptive management styles. Transformational leadership does not limit itself to the technical execution of administrative functions; rather, it turns the school leader into an ethical referent capable of articulating common purposes and guiding pedagogical innovation processes. This conception aligns with Mestanza's (2017) view, which emphasizes the leader's role as a facilitator of new perspectives and a builder of institutional identity.

Among the distinctive characteristics of transformational leadership are: clarity of vision and purpose (Abanto et al., 2023), the capacity to empower teams (Goleman, 2018), the drive toward organizational innovation (Salguero & García, 2024), and commitment to the holistic development of collaborators (Obuba, 2023). These dimensions enable the leader not only to mobilize resources but also to generate emotionally intelligent and sustainable learning environments. In this regard, various studies have examined the effectiveness of this model within educational institutions. For example, Rodríguez and Flores (2023) documented an increase in organizational cohesion and teacher satisfaction in contexts where it has been systematically implemented, while González (2020) and Alawi & Dhar (2021) emphasize its

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capacity to guide educational communities beyond individual interests, fostering authentic commitment to institutional goals.

The literature converges in suggesting that transformational leadership offers a concrete pathway for modernizing school management. Its articulation with emotional intelligence, as proposed by Salguero and García (2024), reinforces its potential to generate empathetic, participatory, and resilient environments. This not only contributes to administrative efficiency but also facilitates sustainable pedagogical transformations centered on collective well-being and meaningful learning.

In today's school context—characterized by demands for pedagogical innovation and organizational adaptation—transformational leadership is consolidated as an effective strategy for strengthening institutional management and teacher professional development (Cervera, 2021). Unlike traditional models centered on hierarchical control, this type of leadership prioritizes inspiration, shared vision, and the empowerment of educational actors, generating more dynamic and collaborative institutional cultures (Tantaléan et al., 2022).

Recent literature has demonstrated the positive impact of this model on variables such as teacher motivation, sense of belonging, and organizational commitment. Thus, Iza (2021), Proaño (2022), and Kartini et al. (2020) highlight that dimensions such as inspirational motivation and individualized consideration directly influence improvements in pedagogical performance and the adoption of active methodologies. Meanwhile, Delgadillo (2020) adds that this type of leadership fosters teacher participation in strategic decision-making, while Gonzales (2018) associates it with greater institutional cohesion and more agile management.

Studies such as those by Rodríguez Morales (2017) and Samaniego (2019) have shown that institutions led under this perspective exhibit more positive work climates, higher professional satisfaction, and an environment conducive to innovation. Likewise, Abanto et al. (2023) and Tantaléan et al. (2022) provide evidence of a significant correlation between transformational leadership and the strengthening of collaborative work, which enhances institutional effectiveness. However, this model cannot be considered a universal formula; its successful implementation requires contextual adaptation and rigorous evaluation. Delgado and Gahona (2022) underscore the need to develop measurement instruments that allow for assessing its effectiveness at different levels of the educational system. Finally, as noted by Insuasty and Jaime (2020), in contexts of constant change, transformational leadership becomes a key resource for fostering organizational resilience and responding appropriately to contemporary challenges.

School Leaders as Transformational Leaders

In the school context, the school leader not only fulfills an administrative function but also positions themself as a strategic agent of institutional change. According to Iza (2021), their

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role encompasses human talent management, the construction of favorable organizational climates, and the promotion of continuous improvement processes. From this perspective, transformational leadership represents a key approach that enables school leaders to transcend traditional supervision and mobilize their educational community toward shared goals (Alcaciega Pujos, 2021).

Authors such as Escanio De León (2023) emphasize that this leadership model is not limited to technical management but incorporates an inspiring vision that promotes cultures of collaborative and innovation-oriented learning. Thus, transformational leadership is configured as a leadership practice that integrates idealized influence, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—dimensions identified by Bass and Avolio and which today find concrete expression in the educational context.

The influence of the school leader as an ethical and visionary figure—foundational to idealized influence—becomes evident in their ability to project institutional values and model desirable behaviors. This legitimacy is strengthened when the leader succeeds in mobilizing the teaching team around a shared vision, generating cohesion and a sense of belonging, as noted by Rosa Cobo (2023) in her analysis of inspirational motivation in school settings. For its part, intellectual stimulation is reflected when leaders foster professional autonomy and critical thinking among teachers.

In this regard, Tantaléan et al. (2022) demonstrate that school leaders who promote spaces for professional development and reflection strengthen collaborative work and pedagogical innovation. This requires personalized attention to each teacher's professional development, which corresponds to individualized consideration, through strategies such as mentoring, recognition of talent, and active support (Rodríguez Morales, 2020). Likewise, transformational leadership, as stated by Proaño (2022), directly influences teacher motivation and the quality of student learning, which is why it becomes an indispensable tool
for addressing the challenges of the educational system. UNESCO (2020) also emphasizes the need for leaders with a forward-looking vision, capable of integrating new educational trends and adapting their institutions to changing demands. Nevertheless, as De la Ese (2022) warns, its implementation still faces structural obstacles such as lack of specialized training, resistance to change, and insufficient resources.

Materials and Methods

The research was conducted under a mixed-methods approach with a predominantly quantitative orientation, descriptive and correlational in nature, aimed at assessing the degree of alignment between school leaders' leadership practices and the principles of transformational leadership. The design was non-experimental and cross-sectional, given that the information was collected at a single point in time without manipulation of variables, which allowed for the analysis of the relationship between the defined constructs.

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The study population consisted of the 42 public institutions in District 09D07 of Guayaquil. For the fieldwork, three public educational institutions were selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling, as they provided access and favorable conditions for the research. From these institutions, the final sample of 42 seventh-grade teachers from General Basic Education (EGB) was obtained, considered key actors for offering a comprehensive perspective on transformational leadership and its influence on school management.

The categories of analysis were structured based on the transformational leadership model of Bass and Avolio (1999), which comprises four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These were articulated with the category of educational management, defined in terms of the administrative, pedagogical, and community practices of school leaders.

For data collection, a structured Likert-type questionnaire was administered to teachers. The instrument was subjected to expert judgment to ensure content validity and to a reliability analysis through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The procedure included coordination with district authorities and school leaders for the administration of the questionnaires. Regarding data processing and analysis, the quantitative information was tabulated and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS software (version 25).

Results

The results showed that transformational leadership in the public institutions of District 09D07 was manifested in a partial and fragmented manner. None of the four dimensions evaluated reached a consolidated level: idealized influence and inspirational motivation were perceived as weak by the majority of teachers; intellectual stimulation was expressed through isolated actions lacking continuity; and individualized consideration, although receiving relatively more favorable evaluations, was not projected as a sustained institutional practice.
The most relevant findings are presented below, organized by each dimension of the model, in order to precisely illustrate the trends observed in teachers' perceptions.

Dimension 1: Idealized Influence

According to Bass (2006), idealizedinfluence constitutes the foundation of transformational leadership, as the school leaderisperceived as a reference of values, trust, and ethical example. Under this premise, theresults obtained from the teacher survey in District 09D07 revealed a critical trend regardingtheprojection of this quality in directive practice.

Figure 1. Perception of the director'stransformational leadership.

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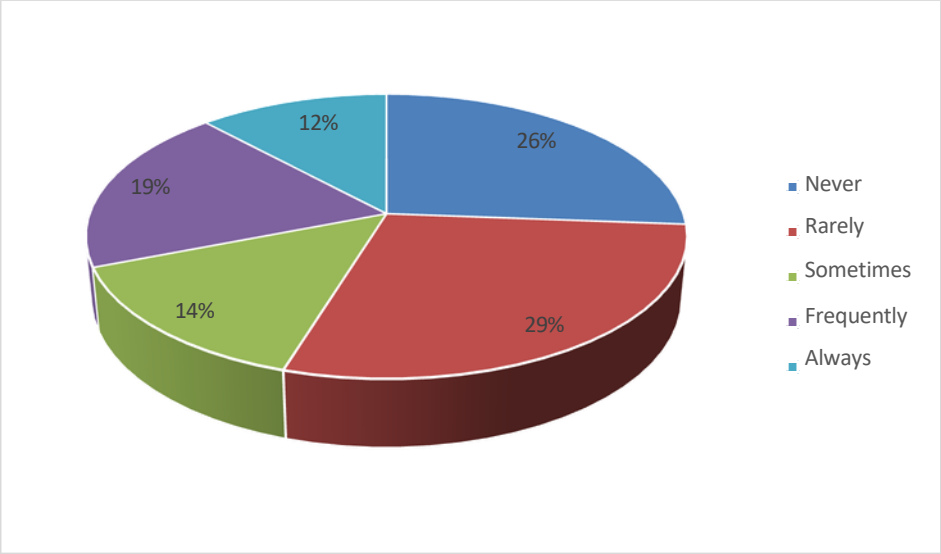

Note: Information obtained from the survey conducted by teachers.

In Figure 1, which captured teachers' perceptions of whether the director "demonstrated transformational leadership," it was observed that more than half of the respondents (55%) placed their evaluations in the lowest categories of the scale ("never" or "rarely"), while only 31% recognized the frequent or consistent presence of this trait. This pattern showed that, for most teachers, the school leader failed to establish himself as an inspiring reference or behavioral model, which weakened the recognition of idealized influence as an institutional practice.

Figure 2. Influence of the director's leadership on students' academic development.

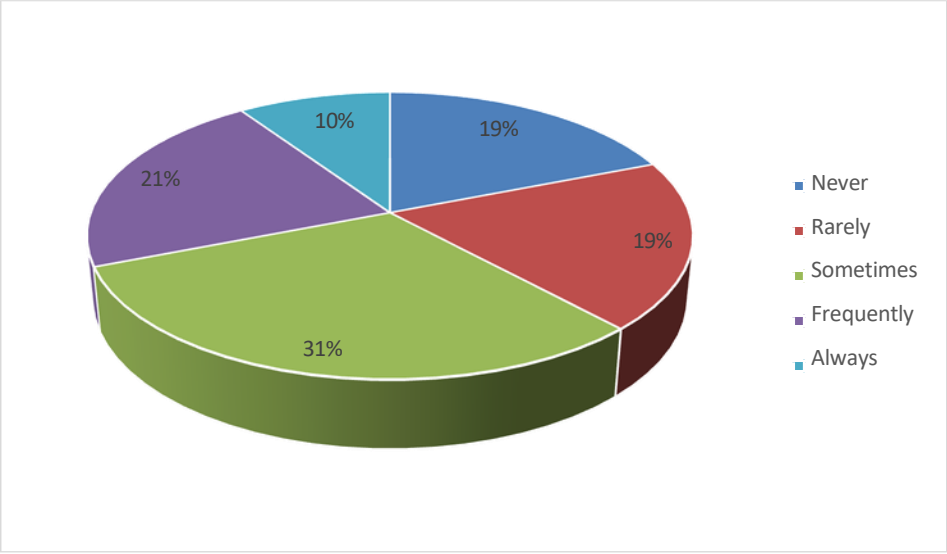

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Figure 2 presented teachers' perceptions of the influence of school leadership on institutional development, understood in terms of administrative and academic management. The results indicated that 26.2% of respondents considered such influence to be low, while the relative majority (43.4%) placed it at a moderate level. In contrast, only 26.2% recognized it as high or significant. This suggested that although teachers acknowledged some degree of impact of leadership on institutional strengthening, the director's influence did not consolidate as a decisive factor of legitimacy nor as a reference capable of comprehensively mobilizing the organizational life of the school.

Idealized influence was expressed weakly in the directive practice of District 09D07. Although some teachers recognized a certain contribution to institutional and academic management, the majority perceived the director as lacking the consistency required to become a reference of trust and professional ethics. This assessment reflected that the dimension did not consolidate as a distinctive marker of transformational leadership in the public institutions analyzed.

Dimension 2: Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation is commonly associated with the leader's ability to generate enthusiasm and project shared expectations; however, when analyzing teachers' perceptions in District 09D07, the findings suggested that this component was weakened.

A revealing aspect was the assessment of public recognition of teachers' work. As shown in Figure 3, less than half of respondents (45%) considered that such recognition occurred frequently or consistently. The remaining proportion perceived it as occasional (31%) or practically nonexistent (24%). The results indicated that symbolic gestures of motivation—fundamental for building legitimacy—appeared in isolated ways and lacked the regularity needed to consolidate collective trust.

Figure 3. Directors who publicly recognized teachers' work.

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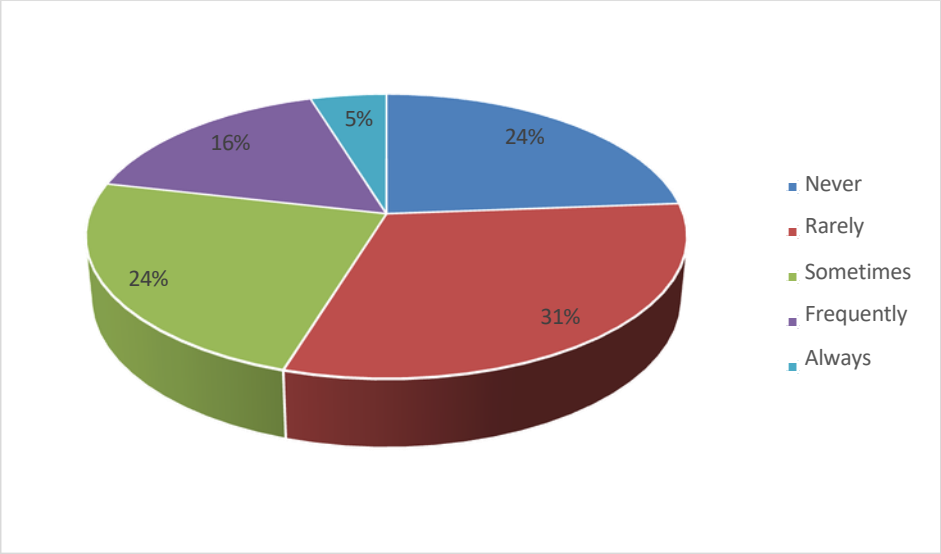
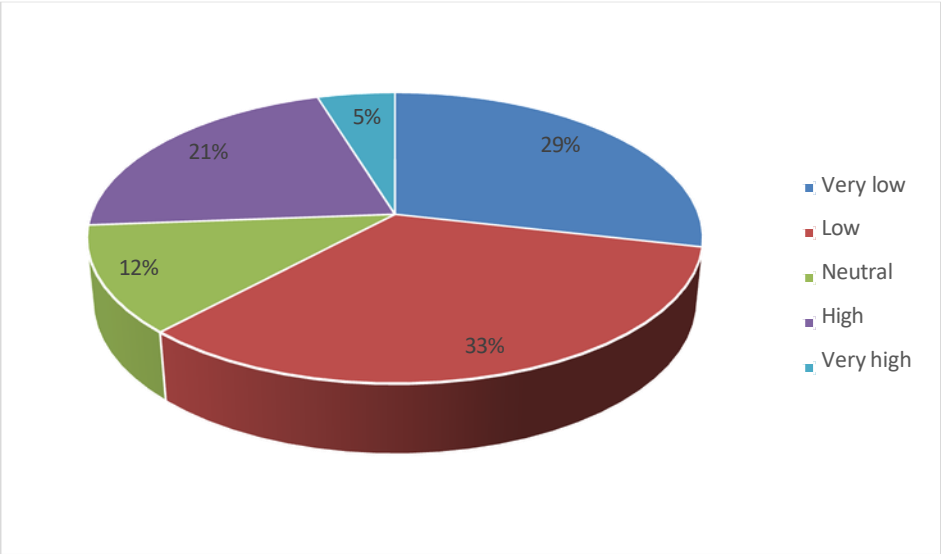


Note: Information obtained from the survey conducted by teachers.

Even more critical was the indicator concerning the impact of leadership on motivation to achieve personal and professional goals. Data presented in Figure 4 showed that six out of ten teachers (62%) placed this effect at low or very low levels, while only one in four (26%) recognized it as high or very high. This distribution reflected a widespread perception that school leadership failed to connect the institutional vision with individual development, thereby weakening teachers' intrinsic commitment.

Figure 4. Impact of the director's leadership on teacher motivation.



Note: Information obtained from the survey conducted by teachers.

Nexus: Multidisciplinary Research Journal (MIR)
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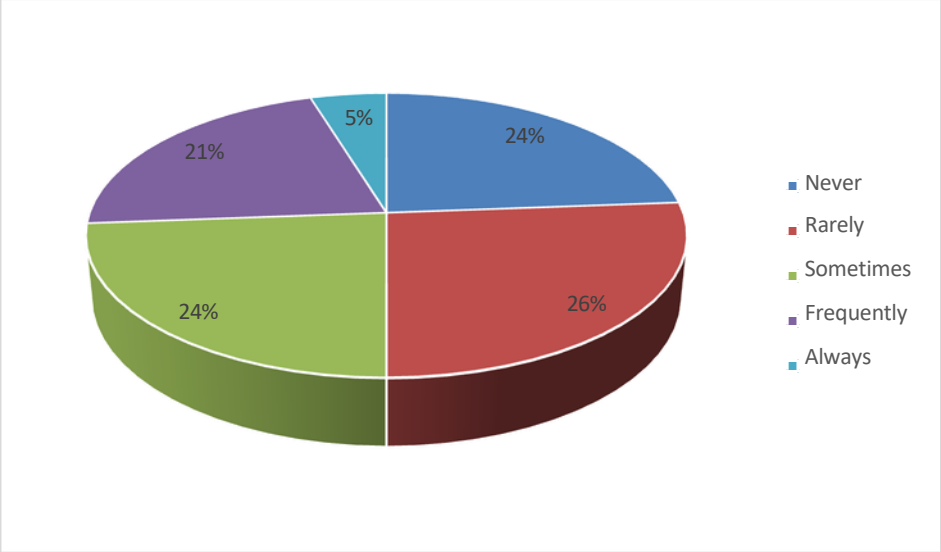
Far from functioning as a mobilizing factor, inspirational motivation emerged in the results as a discontinuous and fragmented practice—visible in certain gestures of recognition, but insufficient to generate sustained momentum toward shared goals. In the terms of Bass and Avolio (1999), this dimension did not reach the expected threshold to be considered a distinctive trait of transformational leadership, as it failed to align symbolic inspiration with the actual motivation of the teaching staff.

Dimension 3: Intellectual Stimulation

One of the most highly valued traits of transformational leadership is the leader's ability to intellectually stimulate their team by promoting innovation, critical thinking, and openness to change. For this reason, Figure 5 presents teachers' perceptions regarding the director's capacity to facilitate their professional and personal development.

Figure 5. Teachers who consider that the director facilitates their professional and personal development



Note: Information obtained from the survey conducted by teachers.

The results showed that half of the respondents (50%) believed that this action occurred "never" or "rarely," while only 26% recognized it as frequent or consistent. The remaining 24% placed themselves in an intermediate position, stating that it occurred "sometimes." This predominance of negative assessments reflected that intellectual stimulation—understood as the promotion of continuous growth and learning—was manifested in a limited way and did not manage to consolidate itself as a systematic practice within school leadership.

Consequently, the dimension of intellectual stimulation emerged as one of the weakest aspects of leadership in District 09D07; although some teachers acknowledged specific

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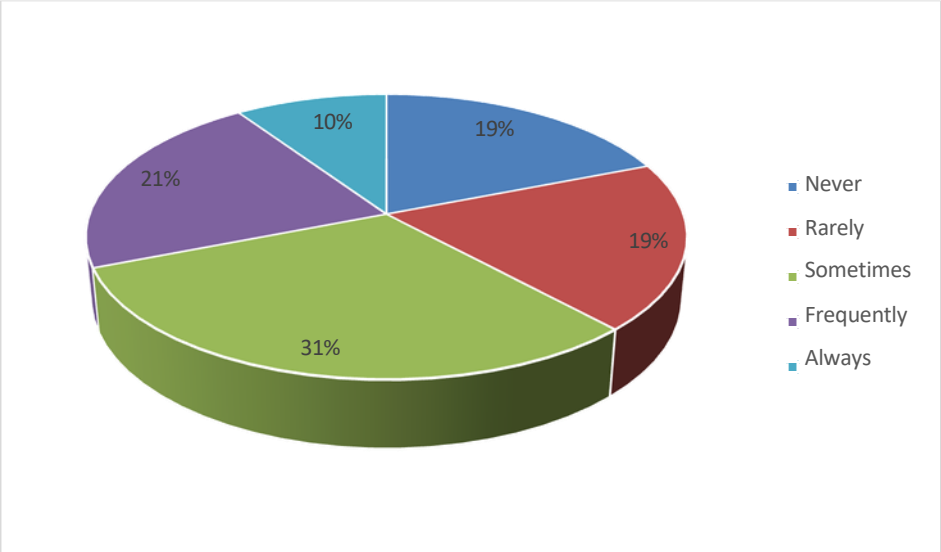
efforts aimed at their professional and personal development, most perceived these actions as sporadic or nonexistent.

Dimension 4: Individualized Consideration

Individualized consideration constitutes the facet of transformational leadership that acknowledges the uniqueness of each team member and seeks to address their needs in a differentiated manner (Bass & Avolio, 1999). In the public institutions analyzed, the results showed that school leaders achieved certain advances in this area, although teachers' assessments revealed ambiguities and limitations.

Figure 6. School leaders demonstrate empathy toward teaching staff.



Note: Information obtained from the survey conducted by teachers.

In terms of empathy and closeness with staff (Figure 6), 31% of teachers placed the school director in the "frequent" or "always" categories, while another 31% perceived this behavior "sometimes," and an additional 38% in the lowest ranges. This finding indicated that leadership empathy was not a universally recognized attribute, but rather one experienced unevenly, depending on institutional contexts and individual leadership practices.

Regarding public recognition of teachers' work (Figure 7), the findings showed an even more critical pattern: only 21% of respondents reported that this practice occurred regularly, while 24% perceived it as occasional. The majority (55%) stated that such recognition was nonexistent or almost nonexistent. This predominance of negative responses reflected that symbolic gratification—a key component of individualized consideration according to Bass and Avolio (1999)—did not consolidate as a regular practice in school leadership, weakening its capacity to reinforce teacher motivation and cohesion.

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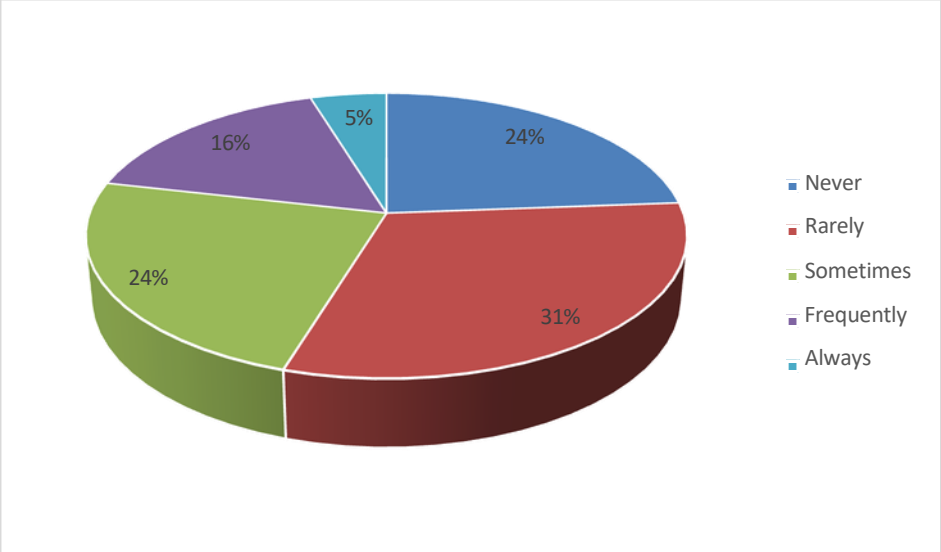
Figure 7. Directors who publicly recognized teachers' work.



Note: Information obtained from the survey administered to teachers.

Thus, the dimension of individualized consideration exhibited a fragmented pattern: although empathy and a willingness to support teachers were positively valued by a relevant proportion of respondents, actions related to public recognition showed a notable gap. In this regard, Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasize that individualized consideration cannot rely on isolated manifestations; rather, it requires a structural, continuous, and equitable commitment.

The comprehensive evaluation of the four dimensions confirmed that transformational leadership in District 09D07 has not been consolidated as a management model. Idealized influence was weakened by the absence of clear references of trust and ethics; inspirational motivation was limited to isolated gestures of recognition that failed to generate sustained enthusiasm; intellectual stimulation was expressed through intermittent initiatives without continuity; and individualized consideration, although comparatively better positioned, was perceived more as a partial effort than as an institutionalized culture.

Taken together, this panorama portrayed a hybrid leadership model that oscillated between transactional practices and transformational approaches without achieving the structural coherence of the model proposed by Bass and Avolio (1999). From a critical perspective, it may be affirmed that school leadership is situated in an incipient stage of transition: it recognizes the importance of inspiring, innovating, and supporting staff, yet still lacks the systematic mechanisms required to translate these principles into concrete and sustainable results. This limitation weakened the capacity to mobilize teachers toward continuous improvement and restricted the potential of school management as a driver of educational change in the district.

Nexus: Multidisciplinary Research Journal (MIR)
ISSN 3114-9154. https://doi.org/ 10.5281/zenodo.17674849

Discussion

The findings obtained from the administration of the instrument to teachers in District 09D07 show that transformational leadership is not yet fully consolidated as a school management model. This observation becomes particularly relevant when contrasted with the theoretical principles underpinning this approach, in which the school leader not only fulfills an administrative role but also emerges as an agent of change, an ethical reference point, and a mobilizer of the educational community (Bass & Avolio, 1999; Alcaciega Pujos, 2021). Teachers' perceptions gathered in the study suggest that this vision still manifests in a partial and fragmented way, limiting the transformative impact of leadership on institutional processes.

In particular, the weak projection of idealized influence reveals that many school leaders have not managed to position themselves as inspiring role models. This contradicts the views of Abanto et al. (2023), who argue that effective leadership is grounded in personal coherence and ethical example—essential foundations for earning legitimacy before the teaching staff. In this regard, Zapata Zenteno (2021) states that the influence of a school leader on institutional dynamics depends on their capacity to generate trust, which cannot be achieved solely through formal authority but through sustained practice of values and commitment. In the present study, the low perception of this dimension demonstrates a disconnect between the transformational ideal and teachers' everyday experience.

Likewise, the results show a marked weakness in inspirational motivation, a component that, according to Cavagnaro and Carvajal (2021), is essential for aligning institutional vision with the individual development of organizational members. This deficiency reinforces what Abad Reyes (2018) asserts: without visionary communication and consistent recognition, continuous improvement processes tend to dissipate. The absence of systematic practices that promote teacher enthusiasm—such as public recognition or the establishment of shared goals—prevents the consolidation of a culture of deep commitment. As Aguilera Ruiz (2017) points out, inspiration cannot be reduced to isolated actions; it must be sustained as a deliberate strategy of pedagogical leadership.

Intellectual stimulation also appears blurred in the study context, which is problematic in settings where innovation and continuous professional development are essential to addressing contemporary educational challenges. As González (2020) and Acuña & Hernández (2019) indicate, transformational leadership becomes meaningful when it actively promotes critical reflection and teacher professionalization. The limited perception of support for professional development observed in this study contrasts with statements by Bass and Riggio (2006), who emphasize that one of the drivers of institutional change is the creation of learning environments for teaching teams. Consequently, the lack of regular initiatives

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aimed at this purpose reveals that intellectual stimulation has not been internalized as a structural responsibility of school leadership.

In contrast, individualized consideration is the dimension that shows the greatest progress, although still with an inconsistent and personality-dependent character. According to Díaz and Rojas (2024), this dimension is essential for fostering healthy work relationships, as it allows leaders to address the individual differences of teachers, generating ties based on empathy and respect. Although some teachers acknowledge supportive gestures, the absence of a formal recognition culture or clear policies that promote differentiated professional growth suggests that this dimension has not yet been organically integrated into institutional management. In Bolívar's terms (2010), without systematizing transformational practices, they tend to fade into the daily routine of schools, reducing leadership effectiveness.

Taken together, the analysis of the results allows us to affirm that the predominant leadership model in District 09D07 is situated in an intermediate zone, where transformational elements coexist with traditional or transactional practices. This aligns with the view of Díaz Martínez et al. (2018), who argue that many Latin American educational systems adopt "hybrid leadership," in which change intentions coexist with rigid bureaucratic structures. The lack of structural coherence among the dimensions of Bass and Avolio's (1999) model prevents leadership from becoming a unifying force for institutional development. Thus, from a practical standpoint, the results call for rethinking leadership training and support programs, focusing on strengthening transformational competencies with an emphasis on inspiration, recognition, critical thinking, and human connection. As Acevedo (2022) and Cabrejos & Suárez (2019) point out, occupying a leadership position is not enough; it is necessary to build leadership capable of generating meaning, cohesion, and continuous improvement.

Conclusions

The findings of this research allowed for a critical reflection on the degree of alignment between current leadership practices and the foundations of transformational leadership in public schools in District 09D07, Guayaquil. Although partial presence of some dimensions of this model was observed, its implementation does not manifest consistently or structurally within institutional practice. Far from positioning themselves as inspiring leaders, school directors in the study appear to adopt a leadership style more focused on operational
administration than on pedagogical transformation. This limits the mobilization of teaching talent, the consolidation of positive organizational climates, and the generation of a shared vision for educational improvement.

From the theoretical perspective proposed by Bass and Avolio, transformational leadership implies not only exercising formal authority but also inspiring trust, stimulating creativity, recognizing individual potential, and promoting a culture of high expectations and commitment. However, the results obtained show that this form of leadership has not been

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internalized as a dominant practice in the public school contexts studied. The limited intellectual stimulation, the weak orientation toward professional development, and the absence of systematic mechanisms of symbolic or motivational recognition reveal a gap between the theory of transformational leadership and the practical reality of local school management.

Empirically, this disconnect is reflected in ambivalent perceptions among the teaching staff, who acknowledge certain isolated efforts of positive leadership but also express a sense of distance, limited influence on their professional growth, and weak identification with leadership figures. This situation not only erodes leadership legitimacy within the educational community but also weakens the ability of schools to generate sustained improvement processes.

In this sense, transformational leadership among school directors in District 09D07 is not yet consolidated as a dominant institutional practice. Its incipient and fragmented development limits its impact on strengthening school culture. Nevertheless, the indicators identified suggest that minimum conditions exist for its promotion, provided that policies and intervention strategies are established that recognize leadership not as a static function but as apedagogical process in continuous construction—centered on people, ethics, and social transformation from within the school.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that may have influenced the development of this research. The study was fully self-funded and did not receive any external sponsorship. Likewise, it is guaranteed that all information collected was handled with strict confidentiality and obtained through the informed consent of participants, in compliance with the ethical principles governing educational research.

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