

**Critical reading as a cross-cutting theme in basic education  
Reflections based on doctoral research in the municipality of Soledad,  
Atlántico**

***La lectura crítica como eje transversal en la educación básica  
Reflexiones a partir de una investigación doctoral en el municipio de  
Soledad, Atlántico***

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## Resumen

El artículo analiza la lectura crítica como eje transversal en la educación básica primaria en instituciones oficiales del municipio de Soledad, departamento de Atlántico. Se parte de la identificación de bajos niveles de comprensión lectora reflejados en pruebas nacionales e internacionales, que evidencian dificultades de los estudiantes para reflexionar, inferir y valorar críticamente los textos. El estudio reconoce que la problemática no se limita a factores individuales, sino que está vinculada a una falta de coherencia entre currículo, planeación y práctica docente, lo cual reproduce un modelo centrado en la memorización y la preparación para evaluaciones externas. El paradigma cualitativo hermenéutico adoptado permitió comprender cómo docentes, estudiantes y directivos conciben y practican la criticidad. La muestra incluyó cuatro instituciones, con 40 estudiantes, 16 docentes y 4 directivos, seleccionados intencionalmente. Entre los hallazgos destaca que la lectura crítica se restringe al área de Lengua Castellana, sin articularse con otras disciplinas. Asimismo, los docentes reconocen su importancia, pero carecen de recursos y formación suficientes para desarrollarla de manera efectiva. Como aporte, la investigación propone una transversalización fáctica de la lectura crítica en todos los niveles y áreas, mediante metodologías activas, proyectos interdisciplinarios y formación docente continua, con el fin de formar ciudadanos críticos capaces de interpretar y transformar su realidad.

**Palabras clave:** lectura crítica; transversalización curricular; educación básica primaria; práctica docente.

## Abstract

This article analyzes critical reading as a cross-cutting theme in primary education in public institutions in the municipality of Soledad, Atlántico. It begins by identifying low levels of

reading comprehension reflected in national and international tests, which reveal students' difficulties in reflecting, inferring, and critically assessing texts. The study recognizes that the problem is not limited to individual factors but is linked to a lack of coherence between curriculum, planning, and teaching practice, which reproduces a model focused on memorization and preparation for external assessments. The adopted qualitative hermeneutic paradigm allowed us to understand how teachers, students, and administrators conceive and practice critical reading. The sample included four institutions, with 40 students, 16 teachers, and 4 administrators, all intentionally selected. Among the findings, it is notable that critical reading is restricted to the Spanish Language area, without articulation with other disciplines. Teachers also recognize its importance but lack sufficient resources and training to develop it effectively. As a contribution, the research proposes a factual mainstreaming of critical reading at all levels and in all areas, through active methodologies, interdisciplinary projects, and ongoing teacher training, with the goal of developing critical citizens capable of interpreting and transforming their reality.

**Keywords:** critical reading; curriculum mainstreaming; primary education; teaching practice.

## Introduction

In the contemporary context of basic education, critical reading emerges as an essential skill for the comprehensive development of students. This skill, in addition to facilitating access to knowledge from a literal or comprehensive perspective, constitutes an indispensable resource for interpreting, questioning, and transforming reality. In the Colombian case, and particularly in the municipality of Soledad (department of Atlántico), a persistent concern has been identified regarding the low reading comprehension results reflected in national and international tests. This has led to a debate on the relevance of curricular designs, teacher planning, and pedagogical practices aimed at strengthening critical reading. Thus, the doctoral thesis, whose results inform this article, is based on the premise that there is a significant dissonance between the curricular conception of critical reading and its effective implementation in the classroom. This situation, in addition to limiting students' academic performance, restricts the emancipatory potential of education as a social practice.

The problem of critical reading in Colombia cannot be separated from the country's social and educational context. Reports from the World Bank (2022) and the PISA test (OECD, 2023) show that nearly 80% of Latin American students do not achieve minimum levels of reading comprehension, placing Colombia behind other countries in the region. Students are often able to identify main ideas and locate explicit information, but they struggle when reflecting on the purpose of texts, drawing inferences, or critically assessing information. In the municipality of Soledad (Atlántico), the results of the Saber tests confirm these limitations: most public educational institutions are among the lowest performing institutions, with critical reading being one of the weakest areas (ICFES, 2022).

The problem described above becomes even more relevant when framed within the demands of international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations (UN), which raise the need to guarantee equitable, quality education for all, with an emphasis on the development of key competencies for the 21st century (UNESCO, 2019; United Nations, 2015). Critical reading, in this context, is conceived as a transversal axis that should permeate all areas of knowledge, so that students understand academic or literary texts and can interpret social, scientific, media, and cultural discourses that shape their daily lives. However, in many educational systems, critical reading remains limited to the Spanish language subject, obscuring its interdisciplinary potential. The reductionism in question is reproduced in municipalities like Soledad, where, despite the existence of public policy guidelines aimed at improving educational quality—for example, the Route to Improve Educational Quality (RUMECA)—the transversality of critical reading has not been consolidated as a sustained curricular practice.

Undoubtedly, the situation described cannot be reduced to a lack of student interest or individual limitations, but is related to structural factors within the educational system. One of these is the lack of coherence between the curriculum, teaching planning, and pedagogical practice. While regulatory documents and curricula recognize the importance of critical reading, in practice methodologies centered on memorization, repetition, and preparation for external tests prevail. The dissonance involved translates into an explicit curriculum that projects emancipatory ends, but a hidden curriculum that actually reproduces mechanistic and disjointed practices (Torres, 1991).

The lack of transversality constitutes another significant obstacle. Critical reading is assumed to be the exclusive responsibility of the language arts department, without articulation with natural sciences, mathematics, or social sciences, which also require complex interpretations of texts, graphics, and discourse. Cassany (2006) points out that critical reading involves reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading behind the lines, which requires interdisciplinary work. In practice, however, this concept is not realized, resulting in students lacking opportunities to apply critical reading in diverse contexts.

In this scenario, the role of the teacher is crucial. Contemporary empirical research recognizes the importance of critical reading, but also shows that teachers do not always have the pedagogical preparation or adequate teaching resources to develop it (Vargas, 2020). Thus, teachers are relegated to improvising strategies that, in many cases, end up reinforcing traditional practices. In this last regard, contextual conditions have a clear impact on the configuration of the phenomenon.

From a constructivist perspective, Vygotsky (1986) and Ausubel (1983) emphasize that learning is built through the interaction between prior knowledge and new knowledge, in a process of constant mediation. Applied to critical reading, this means that students must have meaningful experiences that allow them to relate texts to their social and cultural context.

However, in vulnerable institutions in the Soledad municipality, conditions of poverty, insecurity, and displacement limit these opportunities, reinforcing educational inequalities. Cassella (2021) warns that curriculum design in vulnerable contexts must integrate social and cultural factors, otherwise there is a risk of reproducing inequalities.

Thus, the problem of critical reading in Soledad is not only pedagogical, but also social. School dropouts, absenteeism, and lack of student motivation are related to contexts of violence and insecurity surrounding the institutions. Gadamer (1995) points out that human understanding is always mediated by the interpretation of the environment; therefore, schools cannot separate themselves from the social reality in which they operate. An education that does not consider these conditions runs the risk of becoming irrelevant to students, who fail to connect what they learn in the classroom with their life experiences.

Within this framework, the proposed doctoral research premised that critical reading problems are directly related to curriculum design and the lack of cross-curricular inclusion. The central proposition is that incorporating cross-curricular critical reading strategies into the curriculum contributes significantly to the development of individuals with higher levels of critical competence (Hernández, 2025). This statement responds to a pedagogical need and an ethical and social imperative: to develop citizens capable of critically interpreting their context and participating in the construction of a more just society.

The research proposal, therefore, is based on three dimensions. First, the theoretical dimension, which articulates contributions from hermeneutics, critical theory, emancipatory pedagogy, and constructivism, offering a robust conceptual framework for understanding critical reading as a transversal practice. Second, the pedagogical dimension, which seeks to provide teachers and students with tools to restructure the curriculum and integrate critical reading into all areas. Finally, the social dimension, which aims to develop critical citizens capable of exercising their rights and contributing to strengthening the social fabric.

In theoretical terms, this study is part of contemporary hermeneutics and Critical Theory, two approaches that place language, interpretation, and communicative action at the center of educational work. For Gadamer (1993), understanding a text always involves a fusion of horizons, where the reader interprets from their preunderstandings and continually redefines the meanings. This is, indeed, a key perspective for critical reading, as it demonstrates that students are not passive recipients of information, but rather active interpreters capable of engaging with texts. Ricoeur (1990), for his part, conceives hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, which involves understanding the author, the context, and the intentionality of the discourse. From this perspective, critical reading becomes a process that goes beyond literal interpretation, moving toward the construction of meanings in interaction with culture and society.

Critical Theory, in line with Habermas (1987), contributes the notion of communicative action, where language is not only an instrument of transmission, but a means to reach

rational consensus. Critical reading, in this sense, constitutes an emancipatory practice, allowing students to question dominant discourses and participate in processes of democratic deliberation. Freire (2004) complements this perspective by arguing that reading is a political act, since it involves unraveling hidden meanings, recognizing intentions, and developing critical thinking capable of transforming reality. Similarly, Giroux (2003) points out that critical pedagogy should provide students with resources and strategies to analyze the power relations present in texts and social discourses, thus contributing to the construction of autonomous and reflective subjects.

It can therefore be asserted that critical reading—as a cross-cutting theme in the primary education curriculum in the municipality of Soledad—represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in overcoming curricular fragmentation, the lack of teacher training, and the disconnect between theory and practice. The opportunity lies in building a pedagogical model that, based on transversality and critique, allows students not only to improve their academic performance but also to become citizens capable of interpreting and transforming their reality. As Freire (1991) points out, an education that does not encourage critical thinking runs the risk of producing individuals who adapt to the system but are incapable of questioning it. Therefore, it is essential to analyze critical reading as a cross-cutting theme in primary education curriculum planning in public educational institutions in Soledad, Atlántico, to understand the current state of this problem and to envision avenues for action.

### **Research methodology**

This research is framed within a qualitative hermeneutic paradigm, aimed at understanding and interpreting how curricula, instructional planning, and pedagogical practices integrate critical reading in public educational institutions in the municipality of Soledad, Atlántico. From this perspective, it is recognized that educational phenomena cannot be reduced to quantitative measurements, but must be analyzed from the meanings, discourses, and experiences of the actors involved (Gadamer, 1993; Ricoeur, 1990). The hermeneutic approach allowed for a constant dialogue between theory, practice, and context, in order to identify the coherence or dissonance between what the curricular documents establish and what happens in the classroom.

The research design adopted was descriptive and interpretive, with successive phases of diagnosis, data collection, and analysis. The study units were public educational institutions in Soledad, selected based on criteria of diversity in their academic results and geographical location. The key informants were teachers, students, and school administrators, considered key stakeholders in understanding the curricular and pedagogical dynamics surrounding critical reading.

The research sample was defined using qualitative and purposive criteria. The total reference population consisted of 49,067 students, 716 teachers, and 112 administrators belonging to

the 49 public educational institutions in the municipality of Soledad, Atlántico. However, for the purposes of the study, a purposive sample of four institutions located in different locations was selected, which together comprise 1,756 students, 77 teachers, and 11 administrators. Within this institutional sample, 40 students (10 per institution), 16 teachers (4 per institution), and four administrators (1 per institution) were selected by convenience. The students were in the third, fourth, and fifth grades of primary school: one group from third grade, two from fourth grade, and one from fifth grade, distributed across the four selected institutions. Their ages ranged from 8 to 12 years, with an equitable distribution between boys and girls, which allowed for the collection of diverse perceptions according to grade, age, and gender.

In the case of teachers, those responsible for teaching classes in areas essential for the development of critical reading were selected: Spanish Language, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Mathematics. Priority was given to working with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers, excluding first- and second-grade teachers for methodological convenience, since at these levels, critical reading does not yet feature significantly in the curriculum, as the students are just beginning the reading process. Regarding the principals, one representative from each selected institution participated, which provided additional information on institutional management, the curricular vision, and the integration of critical reading into Institutional Educational Projects (PEI).

Data collection techniques included document review (curricula, institutional educational projects, and regulations), semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, student surveys, and classroom observation. The instruments were designed based on categories derived from the theoretical framework (curriculum, transversality, and pedagogical practice) and validated through expert judgment. Data analysis was conducted through a hermeneutic approach, which involved identifying meanings, establishing relationships between categories, and developing interpretations that reflected the study's objectives (Habermas, 1987).

Finally, ethical considerations ensured the integrity of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and respect for privacy. The purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks, were explained, and participants were offered the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequences. In keeping with the principles of educational research, participants' dignity and autonomy were prioritized, and they assumed social responsibility for the knowledge generated (Resnik, 2018).

## Results

### *Document review: curriculum and regulatory guidelines*

The documentary review of curricula, institutional educational projects, guidelines from the Ministry of National Education, and local educational policies revealed that critical reading

is repeatedly mentioned as a cross-curricular educational focus. However, a deeper examination of the specific content of these documents revealed that critical reading is often reduced to a superficial definition linked solely to literal or inferential comprehension.

The formulation of competencies in official documents emphasizes the need to "understand, analyze, and interpret" texts, but rarely details mechanisms for achieving a level of criticality that allows students to question, connect, and redefine discourses. The conclusion, therefore, is that critical reading at the normative level functions more as an abstract ideal than as an articulated pedagogical strategy. This finding confirms the existence of a gap between political-educational discourse and concrete implementation in the curriculum, which directly impacts teaching practices and students' actual training.

### ***Mainstreaming critical reading in institutions***

The findings demonstrate that educational institutions in the municipality of Soledad have attempted to respond to the demands of external testing by implementing specific subjects such as "Critical Reading," even in primary education. However, these core subjects fail to achieve the goal of mainstreaming critical reading; instead, they become isolated spaces designed to improve the quantitative results of the Saber tests. This implicit instrumentalization leads to critical reading being viewed as a mechanical exercise aimed at answering standardized questions, without generating authentic processes of reflection or discussion around the social and cultural reality of the context.

Criticism, therefore, loses its emancipatory dimension and becomes just another resource in school training. By not conceiving it as a cross-cutting theme, critical reading is not articulated with other areas of knowledge, which limits students' ability to develop critical skills when dealing with scientific, historical, mathematical, or visual texts. This situation creates a gap in the construction of meaningful learning and a failure to utilize critical thinking as a tool for comprehensive citizenship training.

### ***Curriculum planning and pedagogical practice***

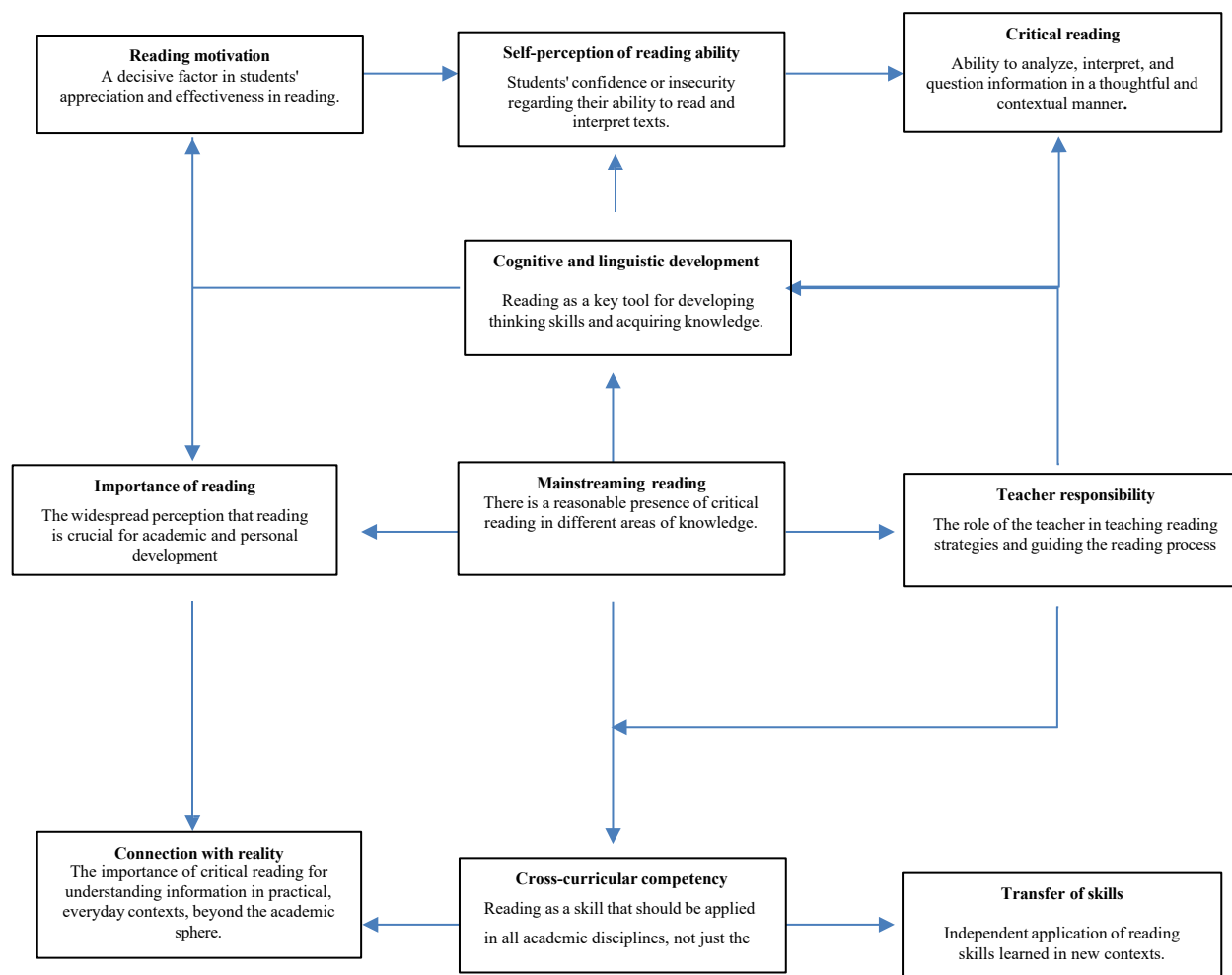
A relevant aspect that emerged from the analysis was the dissonance between the objectives stated in the curriculum and teachers' lesson plans. While most subject-area plans mention critical reading as a transversal skill, teachers' weekly or monthly plans show that the real objectives are limited to content coverage and preparing students to take external tests. Critical reading appears as an ideal that is recognized, but not translated into concrete activities.

The teachers interviewed recognize the importance of critical reading for citizenship education, but express feeling limited by the lack of clear guidelines, appropriate teaching resources, and training opportunities to strengthen their pedagogical strategies. This has created an ecosystem that reproduces traditional practices focused on memorization, copying information, and solving repetitive exercises. Consequently, critical reading is not

incorporated as a routine pedagogical practice, but rather as a rhetorical statement that rarely materializes in the classroom. Figure 1 presents the grid analysis of the analyzed responses.

**Figure 1.**

*Reticular analysis of teacher perceptions.*



*Note.* Source: own elaboration (2025).

### ***Student perceptions***

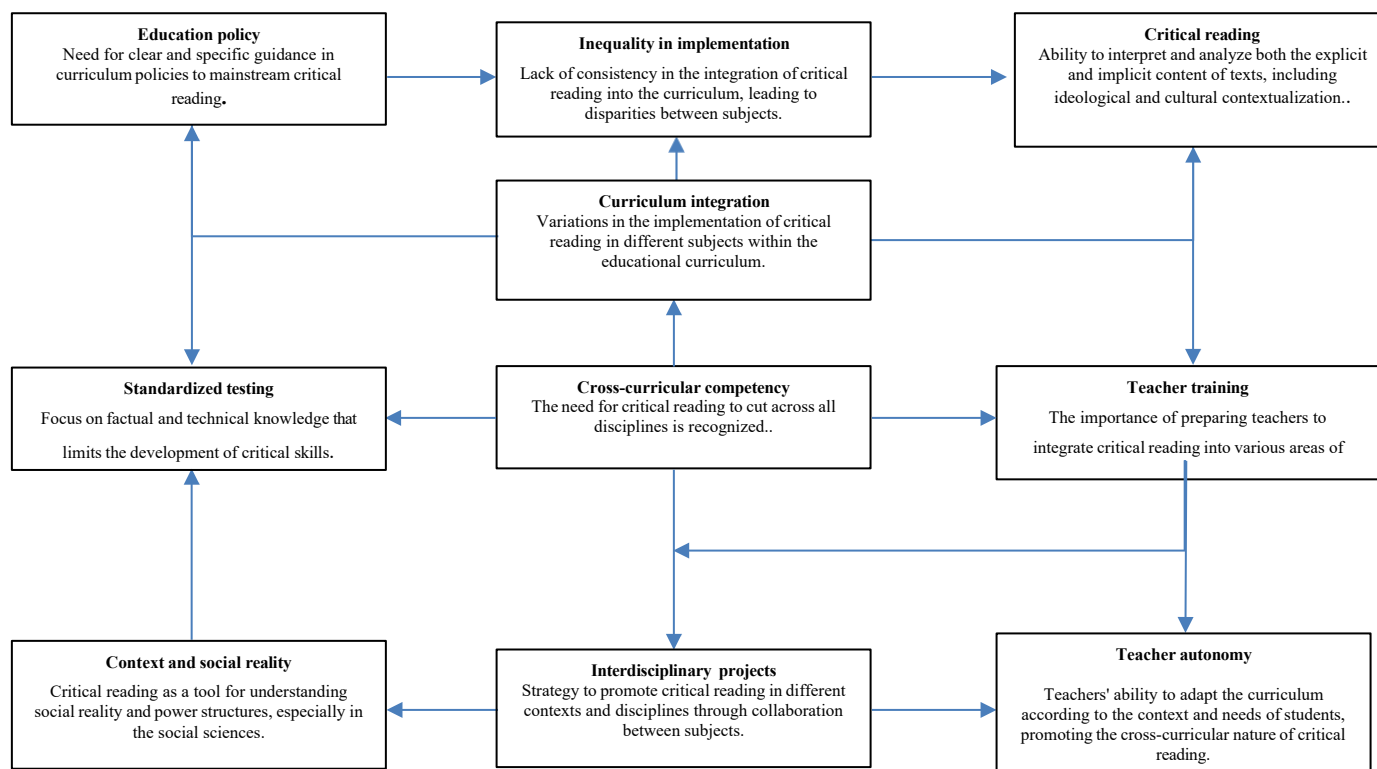
Surveys and interviews conducted with students, for their part, revealed ambivalent perceptions regarding critical reading. On the one hand, students recognize the importance of reading as a learning tool and value the ability to understand texts in order to pass assessments and meet academic requirements. However, on the other hand, they report that

they are rarely encouraged to question texts, discuss their meaning, or relate them to their own lives. Most students consider critical reading to be the exclusive responsibility of the language course and not an exercise present in all subjects.

Likewise, significant difficulties were identified in interpreting non-linguistic texts such as graphs, maps, tables, and audiovisual discourses, which demonstrates the absence of a multimodal approach to criticality. The findings confirm that students mostly remain at the literal and inferential levels of comprehension, with limited capacity for critical and reflective analysis. This situation, in addition to limiting their academic performance, restricts their ability to exercise informed and autonomous citizenship. Figure 2 shows the grid analysis of the responses provided by the students in the sample group.

**Figure 2.**

*Reticular analysis of student perceptions*



*Note.*Source: own elaboration (2025).

*Observation of classes and classroom dynamics*

Systematic classroom observations in various subject areas revealed that teaching critical reading remains an outstanding challenge. In language courses, activities focused on identifying main ideas, searching for explicit information, and occasionally inferring meanings were found. However, there was little space for debate, argumentation, or relating the text to its social context.

In areas such as mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences, critical reading is virtually absent. In mathematics, for example, problem solving is reduced to literal decoding, without discourse analysis or exploration of the social implications of the contexts presented. In natural sciences, the emphasis is on memorizing concepts, without discussion of their effects on daily life or the environment. In social sciences, although there is greater potential for critique, the practice is limited to the repetition of dates, data, and events, without promoting historical problematization. The panorama described demonstrates that critical reading is not mainstreamed in actual practice, which prevents students from developing skills to critically interpret the multiple languages circulating in contemporary society.

### ***Dissonance between theory, planning and practice***

Triangulation of the collected information identified a structural dissonance between curricular discourse, teaching planning, and classroom practice. In institutional and regulatory discourse, critical reading appears as a fundamental axis for the development of reflective and participatory citizens. In planning, objectives related to critical thinking are mentioned, although formulated in a general and impractical manner. Finally, in pedagogical practice, critical reading is reduced to mechanical exercises oriented toward memorization or preparation for external tests. This dissonance creates a gap between what is intended to be taught and what is actually constructed in the school experience.

Consequently, students fail to develop the critical skills promised by the curriculum, which perpetuates the low levels of reading comprehension demonstrated in national and international tests. The structural contradiction described represents one of the most relevant findings of the doctoral research addressed throughout this article, as it demonstrates that the problem is not only pedagogical but also systemic and cultural.

### ***Proposal for factual transversalization***

As part of the results, the research presents a theoretical model for mainstreaming critical reading, based on the articulation of three levels: curriculum design, teaching planning, and pedagogical practice. At the curricular level, it is proposed that critical reading be defined as an explicit transversal competence, with specific achievement indicators in all areas. At the planning level, it is suggested that teachers design integrative activities that link critical reading with content from various subjects. Finally, at the level of pedagogical practice, the incorporation of active methodologies such as project-based learning, critical discourse

analysis, argumentative debates, and scholarly research is proposed. Table 1 lists the strategies suggested within the framework of the mainstreaming proposal.

**Table 1.**

*Proposed strategies.*

| Subject                   | Strategies                                                                                      | Assessment                                                                            |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Spanish Language</b>   | Critical debates on texts read.                                                                 | Ability to formulate well-founded criticism.                                          |
|                           | Analysis of political, social and media discourses.                                             | Identifying underlying arguments and implications.                                    |
|                           | Interpretation of texts from different perspectives (gender, social class, historical context). | Using argumentative essays and debates as assessment tools.                           |
| <b>Social Sciences</b>    | Comparison of historical sources.                                                               | Ability to compare historical sources and identify biases.                            |
|                           | Analysis of current conflicts from different perspectives.                                      | Analysis of how the authors' perspective influences the interpretation of the facts.  |
|                           | Simulations of diplomatic negotiations.                                                         | Use of case studies and critical essays.                                              |
| <b>Math</b>               | Interpretation of graphs and statistics from various sources.                                   | Accuracy in the interpretation of data and graphs.                                    |
|                           | Problem solving applied to real life.                                                           | Identification of errors or manipulations in the presentation of data.                |
|                           | Analysis of data presentation in the media.                                                     | Evaluation through graph analysis and case studies.                                   |
| <b>Natural sciences</b>   | Evaluation of scientific research.                                                              | Ability to read and evaluate scientific research.                                     |
|                           | Debates on scientific and ethical dilemmas.                                                     | Identifying biases in scientific studies.                                             |
|                           | Analysis of case studies in public health.                                                      | Critical reflection on the ethical and social implications of scientific discoveries. |
| <b>Physical education</b> | Analysis of articles on health and wellness.                                                    | Identifying commercial interests in health and wellness products.                     |

| Subject | Strategies                                                               | Assessment                                                                         |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | Debates about beauty standards in the media.                             | Critical reflection on the influence of the media on the perception of body image. |
|         | Critical evaluation of the sports industry and its commercial interests. | Evaluation through media analysis and debates.                                     |

*Note.* Source: Own elaboration (2025).

The proposal highlights the need for ongoing teacher training to provide them with strategies and resources to effectively implement mainstreaming. It also recommends coordinating critical reading with institutional educational projects and local policies such as RUMECA, so that it becomes a comprehensive educational policy rather than an isolated practice.

## Discussion

The results of this research reveal a structural gap between normative statements, teaching planning, and actual pedagogical practices regarding critical reading in educational institutions in Soledad, Atlántico. This finding falls within what Torres (1991) calls the "hidden curriculum," insofar as the formal curriculum declares the importance of training critical and reflective students, but in practice an instrumental logic oriented toward preparing for standardized tests prevails. The detected contradiction confirms that, in contexts of vulnerability, official educational discourse tends to reproduce a teaching model centered on memorization, moving away from the emancipatory principles that underpin critical reading from the perspective of hermeneutics and critical pedagogy.

The documentary review revealed that curricula and study plans recognize critical reading as a transversal competence, but lack concrete guidelines on how to integrate it into all areas of knowledge, a finding that speaks to Cassany (2006), who argues that critical reading cannot be reduced to the area of language, but must be applied in multiple languages and discourses to be meaningful. The lack of transversality noted in the study confirms that critical reading has been instrumentalized as a resource for answering exams, and not as a comprehensive approach. This runs the risk of what Giroux (2003) calls the domestication of the curriculum: an educational practice that, instead of questioning power structures, reinforces students' adaptation to the parameters of external assessment.

The dissonance found between planning and teaching practice also reflects limitations in teacher training. While the teachers interviewed recognize the importance of critical reading, they state that they lack the necessary tools to implement it systematically. This eloquent result articulates with the approaches of Vygotsky (1986), who understands learning as a process mediated by cultural interactions and tools. Without solid teacher training, the mediation that should foster critical reading is reduced to routine repetition practices. Consequently, students do not access the "zone of proximal development" that would allow

them to move from literal to critical comprehension. This situation highlights the need to design ongoing training processes that strengthen teachers' capacity to implement critical strategies in all areas.

Classroom observations confirmed that the predominant methodologies are traditional, centered on lectures and the use of standardized guides. In light of Freire (1991), who criticizes "banking education," in which the teacher deposits knowledge in passive students, the result is valuable and relevant. In this model, students are not active subjects in the construction of meanings, but rather receptors who learn to repeat what has been established. The absence of spaces for dialogue, problematization, and argumentation limits the possibility of constructing what Habermas (1987) calls communicative action, that is, interactions based on consensus and critical reflection. In this way, the school distances itself from its democratic function and becomes an apparatus for cultural reproduction.

The perception of students, who associate critical reading solely with the area of language and show difficulty approaching multimodal texts, reveals another dimension of the problem. As Ricoeur (1990) suggests, the act of reading involves a hermeneutic process in which the subject confronts not only the text, but also the world it projects. By restricting critical reading to a single disciplinary area, students are prevented from experiencing the multiplicity of meanings present in scientific, social, visual, and digital discourses.

The proposal for factual mainstreaming presented as a result of the research is in line with the recommendations of international organizations such as UNESCO (2019), which insist on the need for education oriented towards critical and civic competencies. The proposed model articulates curriculum, planning, and pedagogical practice, which corresponds to Habermas's (1987) systemic approach, which highlights the importance of coherence between theory and practice in communicative processes. Although the results show that mainstreaming is currently nonexistent, the proposal opens the possibility of redefining the curriculum from a comprehensive perspective, based on the recognition of critical reading as a social and political practice, in line with what Freire (2004) calls reading the world: an act of consciousness and transformation.

The research also confirms that the school culture in the municipality of Soledad reproduces external assessment logics that subordinate critical education to the achievement of quantifiable results. This finding speaks to Fullan's (2021) argument, who argues that educational systems focused exclusively on standardized testing limit pedagogical innovation and demotivate teachers and students. Overcoming this problem involves transforming not only classroom practices but also educational policies, so that quality is not measured solely in terms of results, but also in the formative impact on students' lives.

## Conclusions

The research conducted leads us to conclude that there is a structural gap between official curricular discourse and everyday pedagogical reality. While regulatory documents and institutional educational projects proclaim the need to educate critical and reflective students, school practices continue to focus on repeating content and preparing for standardized tests. This characterized dissonance generates a contradiction between the educational ideal of criticality and school dynamics, which, in practice, continue to reproduce a rote and adaptive model, closer to what Freire (1991) called "banking education" than to an emancipatory pedagogy.

In this sense, the study confirms that critical reading is in a state of pedagogical underdevelopment. Despite being declared a transversal competence, it has been reduced to an isolated subject or a set of exercises aimed at answering multiple-choice questions. By not being articulated with other areas of the curriculum, critical reading fails to permeate the different disciplines or become a common practice of reflection and analysis in the classroom. Instrumentalization, far from empowering students, trains them for an examination-based approach that limits their ability to interpret, argue, and question reality. The lack of transversality constitutes, therefore, one of the central findings of the research and represents a determining obstacle to the comprehensive education of the children of Soledad.

Another relevant finding is that teachers, although they recognize the importance of critical reading, lack sufficient training or appropriate pedagogical resources to implement it effectively. Their planning reveals general and poorly operational objectives, while classroom observations reveal the prevalence of traditional methodologies focused on lectures and the use of guides. This confirms that critical reading remains at the rhetorical level without translating into concrete actions. Consequently, students remain at levels of literal and inferential comprehension, with little opportunity for critical interpretation processes. The lack of ongoing training and institutional support is a determining factor in this limitation, highlighting the need for public policies and training programs to strengthen teachers' competencies in this area.

The triangulation of the information collected confirmed that the problems with critical reading in Soledad are not isolated phenomena of certain institutions or actors, but rather symptoms of an educational system that prioritizes quantifiable results over comprehensive training. The logic of standardized assessment shifts the emancipatory goals of education toward practices focused on repetition. Consequently, critical reading has been stripped of its political and cultural dimension, reduced to a mechanism for academic performance. In light of this, the research concludes that it is essential to redefine critical reading as a social and political practice, in line with what Freire (2004) calls the reading of the world.

Based on these findings, it is proposed that the factual mainstreaming of critical reading constitutes the main alternative to overcome current limitations. The proposed model articulates curriculum, planning, and pedagogical practice, and includes ongoing teacher training as an essential pillar. Implementing critical reading in all areas of knowledge would

allow students to approach scientific, mathematical, social, and visual texts from an analytical and reflective perspective. The interdisciplinary perspective would not only improve their academic performance but would also contribute to developing citizens capable of actively participating in democratic life and in the transformation of their communities. Mainstreaming, in this sense, is not an optional resource, but an ethical and social imperative.

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