

CRITICAL READING IN COLOMBIA: EDUCATIONAL REALITIES AND CHALLENGES.

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Abstract

Critical reading is considered a necessary tool in the teaching-learning processes. This is because this type of reading not only allows humans to effectively access knowledge but also to construct it. In other words, not reading critically involves being marginalized from the knowledge society. This document presents an analysis of the problematic situation of critical reading worldwide. The work was carried out under a qualitative approach employing a bibliographic analysis provided by the statistical data from the PISA 2022 tests, the results of the Saber Test (2023), and articles from the last five years addressing this issue. This analysis resulted in the finding that the vast majority of high school students do not develop critical reading skills when reading; they appear apathetic towards reading activities, find it boring, and only engage in it to fulfill a task.

Keywords: Critical reading, levels of reading, learning, PISA, Prueba Saber

INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to analyze the problematic situation of critical reading in Colombia. This is based on the results of the PISA Tests (Programme for International Student Assessment) (2022) and the Saber Tests. The concept of critical reading is a polysemic word since it encompasses a diversity of meanings. For Cassany (2021), this is related to six terms: critical reading, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, disinformation, and post-truth. Hence, Cassany (2021) conceives that critical reading is contrary to literal reading and seeks the construction of meaning, of useful meaning for the reader. This conception implies that this type of reading is a complex activity that goes beyond the literal, of what is explicit in the text.

This type of reading is characterized by: "the ability to distinguish truth from fantasy, an opinion from empirical facts, recover inferences or implicit ones, identify the basic elements of a plot, realize the main ideas, be able to summarize a piece of writing, etc" (Cassany, 2021, p.22). This indicates that in this reading activity thinking skills such as: categorizing, discerning, inferring, summarizing and analyzing converge so that it is possible to materialize critical reading. These skills are the result of other previous processes necessary for them to materialize.

In other words, critical reading is the opposite of functional illiteracy. This term functional illiteracy goes beyond the person acquiring reading and writing skills, as it emphasizes the individual's inability to effectively implement these reading, writing, and numeracy skills efficiently (UNESCO, 2017). That is, these reading and writing skills do not allow or enable certain people to implement them in the face of the demands of daily life.

This functional illiteracy generates negative effects on various dimensions of the human being: social and economic, since by not reading critically they are excluded due to their inability to function in the world of work and technology, to mention a few. For Martínez, Trucco, and Palma (2014) cited by Pérez (2019):

The likelihood of social and economic exclusion of adults with lower literacy levels is increasing in today's world. As the tasks become more sophisticated, the skills required become more complex. Changes in the types of employment, which involve greater analysis and communication of information, and to the extent that technology permeates all aspects of daily life, increase the risk of exclusion of people with deficient reading and numeracy skills (p.8).

In this order of ideas, it is necessary to overcome this functional illiteracy so as not to be shipwrecked in the information and knowledge society. Hence, as early as 1969, at the invitation of the Italian government, UNESCO

organized a round table in Rome with various representatives of economic associations to discuss this problem. They recognized the economic and social importance of literacy as a factor in increasing production and development. (UNESCO, 1970).

Critical reading is considered a necessary tool in teaching-learning processes. This is because this type of reading allows human beings not only to effectively access knowledge, but also to construct it. In other words, not reading critically makes you a marginalized being of the knowledge society. In addition, they will not be able to act effectively in the face of the large amount of information generated today since they do not have the necessary skills to do so. For Valero, Vázquez, & Cassany (2015), to speak of critical reading is to refer to a type of reading that is more demanding and complex, due to the exhaustive degree of interpretation of the text and the skills and prior knowledge that the reader must have in order to be able to do so. Likewise, Callohuanca-Mamani (2020) conceives that: "Critical-reflective reading is a strategy, which is a skill that arises from the exercise of making complex inferences between the reader's knowledge and the knowledge proposed by the text." (p.330). Hence the importance of exercising this type of reading in academic environments to create an intertextuality between what the reader knows and what the author proposes in the text.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Critical reading

The word "criticism" has its roots in the Latin "criticus" and, previously, in the Greek "kritikós", which can be understood as the judgment, analysis or evaluation issued on a literary or artistic work (Segura, 2014, p. 158; Corominas, 1987, p.179). It is important to clarify that this definition can be broadened, beyond texts, to encompass everyday reality, which is also susceptible to being "read". This is because reading occurs in the mind and the senses function as means of communication or, more precisely, of receiving and transmitting stimuli.

Therefore, criticism can be understood as the ability or quality to deeply analyze the events of reality in their various manifestations in order to make personal judgments or make decisions based on values within that context. It is remarkable how this general definition of this term links both the conceptualization of critical reading and that of critical thinking.

By combining the concepts of reading and criticism, a deeper meaning is achieved. Critical reading involves analyzing facts to determine their characteristics and how they relate to each other. This activity must have a teleological purpose that allows people to make decisions and configure actions that affect their freedom, autonomy, individual and collective well-being.

Reading levels

Reading levels are defined as the gradualness in which the different comprehension processes involved in reading are classified, starting from the basic to the most complex. That is, they refer to how a student's reading skills evolve according to the grade in which they are and what they should be able to achieve through reading according to their age and educational level. It is important to note that the comprehension of a text implies the individual construction of meaning through active interaction with the reader, it is important to focus on the development of the three levels of comprehension: literal, inferential and critical.

The level of literal comprehension is fundamental and should be cultivated in students, as it provides the necessary foundation to advance to deeper levels of comprehension. This involves the direct identification of explicit information in the text, such as specific details, temporal and spatial context, characters, sequence of events, meaning of words and sentences, among other aspects.

On the other hand, the referential level refers to establishing relationships between parts of the text to infer information, conclusions, or aspects that are not written down (Pinzas, 2007). That is, this level goes beyond literal information and requires the reader to complement the text through their own reasoning. To teach children this level, it is important to train them in skills such as predicting outcomes, deducing implicit teachings and messages, proposing alternative titles for a text, identifying main ideas, rephrasing a text by changing elements such as facts or places, inferring the meaning of unknown words, deducing the central theme of a text, making summaries, anticipating alternative endings, identify logical sequences, interpret figurative language and use graphic organizers, among other skills.

On the other hand, the critical level is related to the elaboration of arguments to support opinions, which means that teachers promote a climate of dialogue and democracy in the classroom (Consuelo, 2007). At this level, it is important to teach students complex reading skills. Among them are: evaluating the content of a text, distinguishing between facts and opinions, grasping implicit meanings, judging the actions of the characters, analyzing the author's intention, making judgments about behaviors, evaluating the structure of a text, among others.

PISA

First, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows shortcomings in relation to the reading process in 15-year-old students in 81 countries around the world that are part of the OECD (The Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development). The program conducts a triennial study that consists of an evaluation carried out by young people belonging to this age group in various countries.

This programme provides information on how well education systems are preparing students and how they have acquired the knowledge and skills fundamental to their full participation in society. Also, how they are trained to face real-life challenges and their future success.

Saber Tests

The Saber tests are standardized external evaluations applied by the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education -ICFES-. These evaluate the performance achieved by students according to the basic competencies defined by the Ministry of National Education. These tests evaluate the performance developed by students at the end of the cycles of the educational levels of basic and secondary education. Saber 3rd and 5th grade in elementary school, Saber 9th grade at the end of basic secondary education, and Saber 11th grade at the end of secondary education.

The SABER 11th Evaluation of the Level of Secondary Education as of 2014 is aligned with the evaluations of Basic Education to provide information to the educational community in the development of the basic competencies that a student must develop during the passage through school life.

METHODOLOGY

This work is aimed at the meta-analysis of documents on the problematic situation of critical reading in Colombia and the world. To materialize it, a descriptive methodology was implemented, with a documentary approach, provided by the statistical data of the PISA 2022 tests, the results of the Saber Test (2023-2024) and articles from the last five years that address this issue. In other words, sources available on the web, whose content is current, published in science journals, available in databases, were reviewed. These sources are as appropriate as possible to the purpose of the topic, with timely and relevant content from the scientific point of view to respond to what is discussed in this article and that serve as inspiration for other projects.

Meta-analysis carried out

The problematic situation in relation to critical reading is based on the very fact that students do not know how to read in its simplest conception since to reach that level of complexity, critical, it is necessary to start from the essential, from the basic, and increase at the different levels, starting with the literal, passing through the inferential until reaching the highest: The intertextual critic. In the words of Saavedra (2021): "students do not understand what they read and much less are they able to read a text critically." (p.2). This statement expresses how complex the panorama of students is in relation to their reading skills and invites us to reflect on the urgent need to implement pedagogical strategies that promote critical reading so that students can interact reflexively with texts. In this scenario, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows shortcomings in relation to the reading process in 15-year-old students in 81 countries around the world that are part of the OECD (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). In the reading test, three processes are evaluated: accessing and retrieving (literal): integrating and interpreting (inferential) and, finally, reflecting and evaluating (critical).

For its part, in 2022 Colombia was part of this evaluation. This test was administered to a nationally representative sample of 7,804 15-year-old students from both public and private educational institutions located in rural and urban areas. The purpose of this evaluation was to measure education systems, particularly in the context following the global crisis generated by the pandemic.

In relation to the results of Colombia PISA 2022, most of the students evaluated showed shortcomings in the reading processes. It should be noted that this test is designed to assess up to what level, six levels, young people, who are close to finishing basic and secondary education (compulsory schooling), have developed their essential knowledge and skills to fully participate in modern societies and not be a simple spectator. (OECD, 2016a).

In the reading test, the results showed a decrease in average scores between the measurements from 2018 to 2022 in all groups (OECD, Latin America and Colombia). In the OECD, the results went from an average of 487 (2018) to 476 (2022 [IGA8]). For its part, Latam obtained 407 (2018) and 399 (2022). In Colombia, this trend did not change, going from 412 (2018) to 408 (2022), showing a decrease of three points in relation to its previous score. This can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Average score per test - PISA 2018 vs. 2022

PERIODS	OECD		LATAM		COLOMBIA	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
READING	487	476	407	399	412	409

Own elaboration based on OECD country note - PISA 2022

This table shows that Colombia's results in the reading test are far from the OECD average. This has an average of 476 in 2022 compared to the Colombian average of 409 in the same year. A difference of 67 between them.

Compared to Latam's averages of 399, Colombian students are 9 points above them. This gap in reading results becomes a warning sign to implement more effective pedagogical practices in order to improve reading comprehension and reduce the difference in results with other countries.

However, as for Colombia's results by reading levels, the situation is worrying. This categorization ranges from lower reading skills (level 1) to higher competencies (level 6). This is evidenced in the following table:

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Colombia's results in the PISA 2022 Test: Reading

Level	Percentage of Students in Colombia
Average Reading in Colombia:	388 points
PISA 2022 Global Average in Reading:	472 points
Level 1b or lower	28.6%
Level 1a	30.3%
Level 2	24.7%
Level 3	12.8%
Level 4	3.1%
Level 5	0.4%
Level 6	0.1%

Elaboración propia basada OECD. (2023). PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education.

However, when analyzing the results of Colombian students by reading levels, it is evident that 58.9% are located in Level 1b or lower and Level 1a. This implies that this percentage of young people evaluated have the ability to work mainly on the explicit aspects of a text, they are not able to identify other elements such as ideology, intentions, the space-time context in which the text is born. At these levels, students are able to locate a single fragment of explicit information located in an obvious place within a simple text, and they can do so through a literal relationship or synonymy, but without the presence of conflicting information. In addition, make simple associations between nearby pieces of information. They may also recognize a simple idea that is present in the text repeatedly (probably with the help of drawings or illustrations), or they may interpret a sentence in a short text on a familiar topic. (Pisa, 2018).

These results reveal a limitation in the development of critical reading in the young people evaluated since their comprehension is restricted to superficial, literal levels of the text. The skills of this group are reduced to a mechanical decoding of explicit information, without the possibility of problematizing it or confronting it with other knowledge. This is generated by the inability to recognize the underlying ideology, the author's intentions, and the spatio-temporal context implies that their interaction with the text. This situation does not influence the exercise of citizenship in societies where implicit and explicit discourses abound, but also limits the ability of these students to participate in argumentative debates or to identify discursive manipulations in various scenarios, such as the media or politics.

These students are very far from the conception of a critical person. For González (2020), to be critical is to possess an accumulation of skills that allow you to understand and transform your world. In the words of this author, González (2020), they are able to: "... reading the world, formulating sustained judgments, actively participating in the social, political and economic representations of the country, in short, a commitment to participatory, critical subjects, transformers of knowledge in society, capable of building and conquering their freedom. (p.4)

In relation to "Level 2", the percentage was 24.7%. Students at this level can identify the main idea in a moderately long text and find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex, criteria. They may also reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly instructed to do so. This group of skills reflects a structural limitation in the development of critical reading. This is because young people, at this level, need explicit indications to reflect on the purpose and form of texts, which suggests a lack of autonomy in interpretative processes.

Likewise, identifying the main idea and retrieving information based on explicit criteria are basic skills, but insufficient when they do not go hand in hand with the ability to infer, intertextual analysis and argumentative evaluation. Hence, the dependence on external instructions to activate processes of critical reflection restricts the active role of the reader and his possibility of actively reflecting on the discourses to which he is exposed.

For its part, with regard to level 3, 12.8% were placed in this category. Here, students are able to: locate various pieces of information and each one can adjust the texts to different conditions; Combining fragments within a text. In addition, integrate different parts of a text to identify the main idea, understand a relationship or build the meaning of a word or phrase. They can also compare, contrast or classify taking into account different conditions. Therefore, demonstrate a detailed understanding of a text in relation to their family knowledge, or take advantage of a less everyday knowledge.

In Level 4, only 3.1% were in this range. Youth placed in Level 4 are able to locate different bits of information that are not obvious and can adjust to various conditions within an unusual context or format. In other words, these students can make inferences from explicit textual information in order to make simple abstractions. Likewise, it is possible, not given as a certainty, that they can combine verbal and graphic information to identify conflicting information. These skills are typical of the process of accessing and retrieving.

This low percentage of Colombian students who reach Level 4 demonstrates a significant gap in the development of critical reading. The ability to interpret and evaluate complex texts, integrate information from various sources, and handle abstract concepts constitutes the basis for critical and autonomous thinking, key elements in academic contexts and in informed decision-making.

Finally, in "Levels 5 and 6" only 0.5% were located in these bands. These are the categories that involve all the skills of critical reading. That is, those that effectively read texts of greater complexity and are closely related to the definition of critical reading since it involves the comprehension of texts at various levels, demanding skills, attitudes and knowledge in the activity of the subject with respect to the text. At these levels, the reader is able to identify and analyze the content, purposes, and arguments present in the texts. (Zarate, 2019). In other words, the critical reader can contextualize the author of the text culturally, spatially and temporally, recognize him from his subjectivity and positioning in front of what he writes. In addition, to place oneself in front of him, from his subjectivity, representations, evaluations, knowledge, cognitive dispositions, meanings and sociocultural context.

SABER TESTS

In relation to the results of Critical Reading in the Saber tests carried out in Colombia, worrying results are evident in relation to this competence. In the evaluation of critical reading carried out by the ICFES (Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education) it is evident that 50% do not reach level 4 of reading. This means that the students evaluated meet levels 1, 2 and 3 since this categorization is hierarchical.

In 2023, the results in the Critical Reading test of grade 11 students show higher percentages in the intermediate levels of performance: level 2 and 3. This is reflected in the fact that 45.21% of students are in Level 3 and 36.61% in Level 2. Likewise, only 5.45% are located in Level 1 and 12.72% in Level 4. It is important to note that the performance levels make a qualitative description of the skills and knowledge that the student possesses in relation to critical reading. These are intended to complement the numerical score achieved. These are characterized by being: particular since they are defined for each test; hierarchical, since they have an increasing complexity and inclusive since, in order to be placed at a level, it is necessary to have overcome the lower ones. (ICFES, 2022)

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Performance levels Saber Test 11.2023.

Critical Reading

Performance Level	Score (%) 2023	Score (%)2024
Level 1	4	4
Level 2	35	31
Level 3	48	50
Level 4	13	15
National Average	54 points out of 100	54 points out of 100

Overall Average 51 points out of 100
Critical Reading

Own elaboration based on the results of Icfes - Saber 11 Results 2023-2024 (ICFES).

For the ICFES, students located in level 1 (score from 0 to 35) are able to identify literal elements in continuous and discontinuous texts, but not to establish relationships of meaning. This means that they can only make a superficial understanding of the text, but execute and analyze the implications, inferences or generate intertextualities from what they read. In other words, students have difficulty interacting meaningfully with the text.

On the other hand, students who are located in level 2 (score 36 to 50) can perform what is stipulated in level 1 and also more complex skills such as: identifying local information in the text, its structure of continuous and discontinuous texts; basic relationships between components of the text, processes of synonymy and antonymy; the differences between proposition and paragraph; the local and global meaning of the text; explicit communicative intentions and finally basic relationships: contrast, similarity and complementarity between texts present.

At level 3 (score 51 to 65), young people possess the skills of levels 1 and 2, and are also able to: "interpret information from texts by inferring implicit content and recognize structures, discursive strategies, and value judgments" (ICFES, 2022, p.4). In this order of ideas, they can also Prioritize information; inferring implicit information in continuous and discontinuous texts; establishing intertextual relationships; relate textual markers in the interpretation of texts; Identify the communicative intention of the text, the function of literary figures, the use of language in context. Likewise, at this level, students can: analyze and synthesize the information contained in a text; syntactic structure in discontinuous texts; Establish the validity of arguments in a text.

Finally, at level 4 (score from 66 to 100), students have the skills to reflect from a text on the author's worldview (customs, beliefs, judgments, ideological-political character and ethical positions, among others). Likewise, they account for significant paratextual elements present in the text. Finally, evaluate and contrast the aforementioned elements.

In addition, they are able to propose solutions to interpretation problems that underlie a text. In other words, to handle implicit information present in the texts. Likewise, evaluate contents, discursive and argumentative strategies present in a text, create intertextualities between two or more texts or text fragments to reach a conclusion, apply concepts of literary analysis to characterize different elements in a text and recognize contexts as important elements in the evaluation of a text.

At this level, students can select local elements and construct arguments that support a thesis based on related texts. Also, to assume a critical stance in the face of the approaches of a text. Propose reading hypotheses based on the ideas present in a text.

On the other hand, when analyzing the results between the educational institutions of the official and non-official sectors, significant differences between the results are evident, especially in reading levels 2 and 4. This is reflected in the following table based on data provided by ICFES 2023-2024.

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ICFES 2023-2024 results. Comparative results between official and non-official sectors.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of School</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4</i>
2023	Official	35%	40%	20%	5%
2023	Unofficial	20%	35%	30%	15%
2024	Official	33%	42%	20%	5%
2024	Unofficial	18%	36%	32%	14%

Own elaboration based on the results of Icfes - Saber 11 Results 2023-2024 (ICFES).

These data show a persistent gap between official and non-official educational institutions in the development of critical reading. This is reflected in the greater concentration of students from official institutions at the lowest levels of performance. While in official schools more than a third of students were placed in Level 1 in both years (35% in 2023 and 33% in 2024), in non-official schools this percentage was significantly lower (20% in 2023 and

18% in 2024). This shows that students in official institutions have greater difficulties in overcoming merely superficial reading, limiting their reading skills in relation to the comprehension and interpretation of texts.

On the other hand, the analysis of the higher levels shows that non-official or private institutions have a better performance in advanced critical reading. In Level 4, which corresponds to students with the greatest capacity for analysis and interpretation of complex texts, they maintain a significantly higher percentage (15% in 2023 and 14% in 2024) compared to official or public institutions, which barely reach 5% in both periods of time. This 10 percentage point difference suggests that private intuitions are offering greater opportunities to develop deep interpretation, argument evaluation, and inferential reading skills.

These results of public institutions reflect a lack in the teaching of analytical reading strategies. This could be related to factors such as lack of access to enriched materials, ineffective traditional methodologies, and deficiencies in teacher training. In addition, the absence of a didactic approach focused on critical reading limits the development of inferential and argumentative skills, essential for the deep understanding of texts (Cassany, 2006). Hence, the teaching of reading should not be reduced to the decoding of the text, but should promote processes of construction of meaning that allow students to question, relate and evaluate information autonomously.

Although a slight improvement is observed in the performance of students in the intermediate levels, especially in Level 2 in both types of institutions, this progress is not enough to close the gap in the higher levels of critical reading. Public education should prioritize strengthening programs that encourage argumentation, intertextuality, and critical interpretation from early stages, preventing students from being kept in a state of literal comprehension that makes them vulnerable to misinformation and a lack of reflective thinking. In addition, educational equity policies are required that guarantee high-quality teaching resources and strategies in all school contexts, allowing students in official schools to access critical reading training in accordance with the demands of the twenty-first century.

Now, when comparing the performance between urban and rural schools in Colombia for the year 2023 in relation to the results in Critical Reading of the Saber 11° test, significant gaps are evident in performance levels 1-2 and 4. This can be seen in the following table.

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Comparative table of the results in Critical Reading of the Saber 11° test between urban and rural schools in Colombia 2023

Performance Level	Urban Schools (%)	Rural Schools (%)
Level 1	20	35
Level 2	40	45
Level 3	30	15
Level 4	10	5

Own elaboration based on the results of Icfes - Saber 11 Results 2023-2024

In the 2023 results, students in rural areas have a higher concentration at lower levels of performance and a lower representation at higher levels. This data confirms the need to implement educational policies that strengthen the quality of education in rural areas, focusing on the development of critical reading skills and providing adequate resources and teacher training.

This is in accordance with the analysis carried out by the Laboratory of Economics of Education (LEE) (2024) who consider that the gap is due to the fact that:

Rural education has structural needs that require improving its quality, coverage and accessibility by promoting the exercise of the right to education through education that meets the conditions of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability in the context of Colombian rurality. (p.1)

These shortcomings in terms of quality, coverage and accessibility significantly affect the academic results of students and meet the needs of the rural context. Hence the difference in the performance of young people in the Saber test of critical reading between the two contexts: urban and rural.

In this order of ideas, LEE (2024) considers that other factors associated with these low performances is a lack of qualified and trained teachers working in the rural context. In addition, there are budget limitations to expand or train the teaching staff. Faced with these circumstances, very few qualified teachers are willing to work in this context characterized by inadequate conditions and in areas of conflict.

On the other hand, another reason that influences the fact that critical reading is not developed in students are the activities and the type of questions proposed in secondary school academic texts. For Zárate (2019), although it is true that in school textbooks there are questions that point to critical reading skills, most of them are based on the cognitive approach, but they do not cover a wide range of critical skills such as: making judgments about the content of the text based on written sources, experiences, knowledge or values related to the reader. Likewise, in his research he reached several interesting conclusions about the problem of critical reading. To do this, he analyzed a corpus of 2,297 critical questions that were selected from 26 textbooks and 10 workbooks in

the curricular area of Communication (Peru), from first to fifth grade of secondary education. Among its conclusions are: that only about 5% of the total questions in textbooks are of critical literacy. The specific skills in this category involve more challenging tasks for the student. These seek to make the student think "more deeply" about the texts, situate them and involve them in social relationships. In addition, it allows them to find assumptions, ideologies and worldviews that underlie the texts." (Zárate, 2019, p.9).

This means that the percentage of questions that promote the criticality present in school textbooks is minimal. In other words, there are few questions whose purpose is to question the text; Develop alternative and contextualized interpretations. Questions that allow you to differentiate your personal opinion from the author's opinions. For Zárate (2019), these critical literacy skills invite reflection from various points of view, such as social and cultural, to mention a few, and to analyze the relationships between language, power, and social practice. Another factor related to the lack of criticality of students is that textbooks avoid working on political issues or those related to current social problems. (Zárate, 2019). In these types of texts, questions are not posed that question "the truth or neutrality of the text"; on the contrary, the texts pass with an apparent neutrality between their lines, leaving aside to inquire about the present ideologies.

In order to strengthen comparative analysis and respond to the challenges identified around critical reading, it is pertinent to establish a more direct connection with the Colombian context, particularly with regard to school textbooks used in official institutions. In Colombia, although the Ministry of National Education has promoted curricular guidelines and language competencies that include critical reading as a transversal axis, a gap persists between these guidelines and the actual content of the textbooks that circulate in the classrooms. Many of these texts continue to focus their activities on basic literal or inferential comprehension, with little presence of questions that encourage critical interpretation, the evaluation of arguments or the taking of a position in front of the text. This situation reflects the urgent need to review editorial policies and criteria for the selection of school materials, in order to ensure that these resources effectively contribute to the development of critical skills, in coherence with the formative purposes of the Colombian education system.

CONCLUSIONS

Critical reading is an essential skill in the educational field, as it goes beyond the simple decoding of words. This type of reading involves in-depth analysis, careful evaluation, and a thorough understanding of the texts. It focuses on the ability to reflect on and question the information that is presented, which is crucial in today's knowledge-based society.

This critical reading problem arises from the fact that students lack critical reading skills. To reach this advanced level of reading, it is essential to start with the basics and gradually progress through the different levels of comprehension, from the literal, through the inferential, to the most complex level: the critical and intertextual. Colombia has significant challenges in relation to reading competence. A significant percentage of students are located in the lowest levels of achievement (Levels 1 and 2). This result reflects that many have not yet developed the basic reading comprehension skills necessary to interpret, analyze and evaluate texts effectively. This situation limits their ability to participate fully in an increasingly literate society.

Likewise, to achieve a critical reading it is essential to be attentive to the various connotations of words or statements, to question any statement, principle or theory, and to analyze and challenge the inaccuracies or opposing points of view that are presented in the text.

The results of the PISA 2022 test and the Saber Tests indicate that many young Colombians continue to have difficulties in reading comprehension, which makes it necessary to train teachers in effective strategies to teach and strengthen critical reading. To materialize this objective, a process of continuous training in didactic methods that foster skills of analysis and critical evaluation of texts must be implemented, ensuring that they can guide students beyond literal comprehension and towards a deeper and more reflective interpretation.

In addition, the differences between official and non-official schools are notable, especially at the extremes (Levels 1 and 4). The official sector concentrates a higher percentage of students at the lowest levels of reading competence, which reveals a significant gap in terms of reading communication skills, particularly with regard to critical reading.

Finally, in view of the panorama evidenced, it is imperative to formulate pedagogical action routes that guide the pedagogical practices of teachers in the teaching of critical reading. In this sense, the design and implementation of intentional didactic sequences is proposed, which promote the progressive development of inferential, evaluative and argumentative skills in students. These must respond to the different levels of reading comprehension, start from real and significant contexts, and be articulated with current curricular approaches. A viable alternative to enhance this process is the incorporation of active methodologies such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), work with interdisciplinary projects or the approach to ethical dilemmas related to the social and cultural environment of students.

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