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Authors
Adriana Obando Aguirre*
*Docente de Posgrado, Corporación
Universitaria Minuto de Dios
(UNIMINUTO), Colombia
adriana1212@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1987-7235>

Correspondence to:
Adriana Obando Aguirre*
*Docente de Posgrado, Corporación
Universitaria Minuto de Dios
(UNIMINUTO), Colombia
adriana1212@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1987-7235>

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School Culture as a Setting for the Reproduction of Conflict and the Weakening of Schooling

Abstract

School culture plays a decisive role in shaping educational processes, institutional relationships, and the quality of pedagogical leadership. While teacher education emphasizes ethical commitment, democratic participation, and the protection of students' rights, the realities of school organizations often reveal tensions that challenge these foundational principles. This study analyzes how school culture may become a setting for the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of educational processes through a qualitative pedagogical systematization of leadership and administrative experiences in a public educational institution. The analysis is supported by the theoretical contributions of Hannah Arendt, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Stephen J. Ball, and Teun A. van Dijk to examine the relationships between power, institutional communication, leadership, and ethical responsibility. The findings indicate that organizational conflicts are sustained not solely by individual actors but by institutional cultures characterized by polarized communication, the normalization of uncritical practices, fragmented leadership, and power dynamics that undermine democratic dialogue and collective responsibility. The study further highlights how institutional responses centered exclusively on administrative changes, such as replacing school leaders, fail to address the structural conditions that generate and perpetuate conflict. Instead, the evidence suggests that strengthening organizational ethics, reflective leadership, transparent communication, and collaborative decision-making are essential for transforming school culture. The paper concludes that educational institutions should be understood as democratic spaces where critical reflection, plurality, and shared responsibility constitute the foundation for pedagogical leadership and the effective guarantee of students' right to a high-quality education. Recovering the ethical and political dimensions of educational practice is therefore essential for strengthening institutional trust, promoting professional responsibility, and fostering educational environments committed to human dignity, equity, and social justice.

1. Introduction

Schools are expected to serve as democratic spaces that promote human development, social justice, and the comprehensive education of future citizens. Beyond their instructional function, educational institutions are responsible for cultivating ethical values, critical thinking, coexistence, and civic responsibility, thereby enabling students to participate actively in the construction of equitable and inclusive societies. Within this framework, the role of teachers extends far beyond the transmission of academic knowledge. Rather, teaching is understood as an ethical, political, and pedagogical practice grounded in the recognition of students as rights-bearing individuals whose holistic development constitutes the primary purpose of education (Freire, 2002). Initial teacher education programs seek to prepare professionals capable of designing meaningful learning experiences while fostering dialogue, participation, diversity, and democratic coexistence. This vision assumes that educational practice is inseparable from ethical responsibility and social commitment, encouraging teachers to become reflective practitioners who contribute to the formation of autonomous, critical, and socially responsible citizens.

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Consequently, schools are conceived not merely as organizations responsible for delivering curricula but as public institutions entrusted with strengthening democracy through education.

Despite these aspirations, the everyday reality of many educational institutions reveals significant tensions between the ideals promoted during teacher education and the organizational cultures that characterize school life. Educational organizations are complex social systems in which relationships among teachers, administrators, students, families, and educational authorities are continuously shaped by power, communication, institutional norms, and competing interests. Although disagreement and conflict are inherent features of organizational life, they become problematic when institutional practices normalize mistrust, fragmented communication, personal interests, or the exercise of power detached from ethical responsibility. Under such conditions, schools risk shifting their focus away from their fundamental mission of guaranteeing every student's right to a high-quality education.

Organizational culture therefore becomes a determining factor in either strengthening or weakening educational institutions. School culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, practices, relationships, and communication patterns that influence decision-making and professional interaction within educational communities. When these cultural dynamics encourage collaboration, transparency, and shared responsibility, they create conditions that support effective pedagogical leadership and institutional learning. Conversely, when organizational cultures become characterized by polarization, informal power structures, misinformation, administrative conflicts, and the delegitimization of leadership, they contribute to institutional fragmentation and reduce the school's capacity to fulfill its educational mission.

These challenges cannot be understood solely through administrative or managerial perspectives. Rather, they require an interdisciplinary analysis that considers the ethical, political, philosophical, and sociological dimensions of educational leadership. In this regard, the theoretical contributions of Hannah Arendt, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Stephen J. Ball, and Teun A. van Dijk provide complementary perspectives for interpreting the dynamics of institutional conflict within schools. Arendt's reflections on plurality, public responsibility, and the banality of evil illuminate how institutional harm may emerge not only from deliberate misconduct but also from the absence of critical reflection and ethical judgment. Freire emphasizes education as an emancipatory and political practice rooted in dialogue and humanization. Foucault's conception of power demonstrates that power is exercised through everyday relationships rather than simply possessed by individuals, while Ball examines how managerial reforms and accountability systems reshape educational leadership and professional ethics. Likewise, van Dijk's work on discourse and power explains how communication practices and the strategic control of information influence institutional relationships, legitimacy, and decision-making.

The convergence of these theoretical perspectives enables a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional conflicts are reproduced within school settings. Rather than viewing conflict exclusively as the consequence of ineffective leadership or isolated individual behavior, this perspective recognizes conflict as a product of organizational cultures that shape patterns of interaction, communication, authority, and professional responsibility. Consequently, institutional transformation requires more than administrative restructuring or changes in leadership personnel. It demands the development of democratic organizational cultures capable of fostering critical reflection, transparency, ethical commitment, and collaborative participation among all members of the educational community.

The present study emerges from the pedagogical systematization of an institutional experience developed within a Colombian public educational institution. Through critical reflection on leadership practices, organizational dynamics, and everyday school interactions, the study seeks to examine how school culture contributes to the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of pedagogical leadership. Rather than focusing on individual responsibilities, the analysis explores the structural and cultural conditions that sustain organizational tensions and influence educational practice.

Understanding these institutional dynamics is particularly relevant within contemporary educational systems, where school leaders are increasingly expected to balance administrative accountability, pedagogical leadership, community participation, and ethical governance. However, leadership cannot be reduced to the efficient administration of regulations or technical procedures. Effective educational leadership requires the capacity to promote democratic dialogue, cultivate institutional trust, and create environments in which teachers and students can participate meaningfully in collective decision-making. When organizational cultures fail to support these conditions, leadership becomes fragmented, professional relationships deteriorate, and educational institutions struggle to achieve their broader social purpose.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze how school organizational culture reproduces institutional conflict and weakens pedagogical leadership through the examination of an institutional experience interpreted from critical educational and philosophical perspectives. By integrating empirical reflection with theoretical analysis, the study seeks to contribute to current discussions on educational leadership, organizational culture, democratic governance, and public responsibility in education. Ultimately, it argues that strengthening school culture requires moving beyond technical administrative solutions toward institutional processes grounded in ethical reflection, collaborative leadership, transparency, and a shared commitment to human dignity and the fundamental right to quality education.

2. Research Objectives

2.1 General Objective

To analyze how school organizational culture contributes to the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of pedagogical leadership within a public educational institution through the critical systematization of an educational leadership experience.

2.2 Specific Objectives

1. To identify the organizational and cultural factors that contribute to the emergence and reproduction of institutional conflict in the school environment.
2. To examine how power relations, communication practices, and institutional dynamics influence pedagogical leadership, organizational trust, and democratic coexistence within the educational community.
3. To interpret the institutional experience through the theoretical perspectives of Hannah Arendt, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Stephen J. Ball, and Teun A. van Dijk, emphasizing the ethical, political, and pedagogical dimensions of educational leadership.
4. To analyze the implications of organizational culture for the protection of students' right to quality education and for the strengthening of public educational institutions.
5. To propose institutional reflections that contribute to the development of ethical leadership, democratic participation, collaborative decision-making, and organizational cultures committed to educational quality and human dignity.

2.3 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

Primary Research Question

- How does school organizational culture contribute to the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of pedagogical leadership in a public educational institution?

Secondary Research Questions

1. Which organizational practices and institutional dynamics contribute to the persistence of conflict within the school?
2. How do power relations and communication practices shape leadership, trust, and professional relationships among members of the educational community?
3. In what ways can Hannah Arendt's concepts of plurality, public responsibility, and the banality of evil contribute to understanding the ethical and political dimensions of school leadership?
4. How do the theoretical perspectives of Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Stephen J. Ball, and Teun A. van Dijk help explain the interaction between educational leadership, organizational culture, discourse, and institutional power?
5. What institutional strategies can strengthen democratic school culture, promote ethical educational leadership, and contribute to guaranteeing students' fundamental right to a high-quality education?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on the pedagogical systematization of educational experience. Qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of those involved in a particular context rather than through numerical measurement. Within educational research, the systematization of experiences has become a valuable methodological approach because it enables practitioners to critically reconstruct educational practice, generate situated knowledge, and transform institutional realities through reflective inquiry.

Unlike traditional case studies that primarily describe events, pedagogical systematization emphasizes the critical interpretation of lived educational experiences. It is conceived as a reflective process through which educational actors organize, reconstruct, analyze, and interpret significant experiences to identify the factors that explain institutional dynamics and generate knowledge capable of improving professional practice. Accordingly, this study does not seek to establish causal relationships or produce statistically generalizable findings. Instead, it aims to understand how organizational culture, leadership practices, communication processes, and institutional relationships contribute to the reproduction of conflict within a public educational institution.

The interpretive orientation of this research recognizes that educational organizations are complex social environments where institutional practices are continuously shaped by interactions among teachers, school leaders, administrative authorities, students, and families. Consequently, understanding institutional conflict requires analyzing not only observable events but also the cultural meanings, ethical tensions, and power relations embedded in everyday school life.

3.2 Context of the Study

The study was conducted within a Colombian public educational institution characterized by the coexistence of multiple educational, administrative, and organizational challenges. The institution experienced a prolonged period of internal conflict involving tensions between school leadership, teachers, and educational authorities. These tensions affected pedagogical processes, organizational communication, institutional trust, and collaborative decision-making.

Rather than focusing on isolated incidents or individual responsibilities, the analysis examined the organizational culture that shaped everyday institutional practices. Particular attention was given to communication dynamics, leadership practices, administrative decision-making, power relationships, and the ethical implications of institutional actions for educational quality and democratic coexistence.

The institutional context provided an opportunity to analyze how organizational cultures may normalize conflict, weaken pedagogical leadership, and influence the professional relationships that sustain educational practice.

3.3 Pedagogical Systematization Process

The methodological process followed the principles of pedagogical systematization, understood as the critical

reconstruction of educational practice through systematic reflection on lived experience. The systematization was developed through four complementary stages.

Stage 1: Reconstruction of the Experience

The first stage consisted of reconstructing the institutional experience chronologically by identifying significant events, organizational decisions, leadership processes, and conflict situations that influenced institutional functioning. This reconstruction enabled the organization of the experience into coherent analytical units while preserving the complexity of the educational context.

Stage 2: Reflective Interpretation

During the second stage, the reconstructed experience was subjected to critical reflection. Rather than describing events superficially, the analysis sought to understand the institutional conditions that produced and sustained organizational conflict. Reflection focused on identifying recurring patterns related to communication, power, organizational culture, professional responsibility, and pedagogical leadership.

Stage 3: Theoretical Interpretation

The third stage consisted of interpreting the reconstructed experience using complementary theoretical perspectives.

Hannah Arendt's concepts of plurality, public responsibility, the public sphere, and the banality of evil provided the philosophical framework for understanding ethical responsibility and institutional thoughtlessness.

Paulo Freire's conception of education as a political and emancipatory practice contributed to interpreting the ethical responsibilities of teachers and school leaders.

Michel Foucault's theory of power supported the analysis of institutional relationships and organizational control.

Stephen J. Ball's work on educational policy and performativity facilitated the interpretation of leadership and managerial practices.

Finally, Teun A. van Dijk's discourse theory enabled the examination of communication practices, institutional narratives, and the role of language in the construction of organizational legitimacy.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives allowed the institutional experience to be interpreted from philosophical, educational, sociological, and organizational viewpoints.

Stage 4: Critical Reflection and Knowledge Construction

The final stage involved synthesizing the findings to identify broader implications for educational leadership, organizational culture, and democratic school governance. Rather than producing universal conclusions, the study generated context-sensitive knowledge intended to contribute to institutional learning and professional reflection.

3.4 Sources of Information

The analysis was based on multiple documentary and experiential sources generated throughout the

institutional process. These included records of leadership experiences, institutional documents, administrative communications, pedagogical reflections, and observations derived from everyday educational practice.

The principal source of information consisted of the systematic reflection undertaken during the pedagogical systematization process itself. Additional theoretical support was obtained from the educational and philosophical literature that informed the interpretation of institutional dynamics.

The use of multiple sources strengthened the analytical depth of the study by allowing institutional events to be interpreted from complementary perspectives rather than through isolated observations.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The analytical process involved repeated reading of the reconstructed experience to identify recurring themes, relationships, and institutional patterns relevant to the research objectives.

Initial coding generated descriptive categories associated with organizational practices and institutional experiences. Through iterative comparison, these categories were grouped into broader analytical themes representing the principal dimensions of school organizational culture.

The final thematic structure included the following analytical categories:

- Organizational culture and institutional conflict.
- Power relations and educational leadership.
- Communication, discourse, and institutional legitimacy.
- Professional ethics and pedagogical responsibility.
- Democratic participation and organizational trust.
- Public responsibility and educational governance.

These categories were subsequently interpreted through the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, enabling empirical observations to be connected with broader philosophical and educational debates concerning democratic leadership, ethical responsibility, institutional power, and educational justice.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the credibility and rigor of the analysis, the study employed continuous reflective interpretation throughout the systematization process. The triangulation of institutional experiences, documentary evidence, and theoretical perspectives strengthened the consistency of the findings and reduced the risk of interpretations based solely on isolated events.

Furthermore, the analytical process emphasized coherence between the reconstructed experience, the theoretical framework, and the conclusions drawn from the study. Rather than seeking statistical validity, the research prioritized interpretive credibility, contextual understanding, and analytical transparency, which are recognized criteria of quality in qualitative educational research.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical principles governing qualitative educational research. The analysis focused on institutional processes rather than on attributing responsibility to identifiable individuals. To preserve confidentiality and protect the privacy of participants, no names of persons or institutions are disclosed.

The purpose of the study was not to evaluate individual performance but to understand organizational dynamics that influence educational practice. All interpretations were developed with respect for human dignity, professional integrity, and the educational rights of members of the school community.

The findings are presented as a contribution to institutional learning and educational improvement, with the intention of promoting reflective leadership, democratic participation, ethical governance, and organizational cultures that strengthen the right to quality education rather than assigning blame to particular actors.

4. Results

The pedagogical systematization of the institutional experience revealed that the organizational culture of the school significantly influenced the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of pedagogical leadership. Rather than identifying isolated incidents, the analysis demonstrated recurring organizational patterns that affected interpersonal relationships, educational decision-making, and the fulfillment of the school's educational mission. Five major themes emerged from the analysis.

4.1 Organizational Culture as a Mechanism for the Reproduction of Institutional Conflict

The first finding indicates that institutional conflict was not generated by isolated disagreements but became embedded within the organizational culture of the school. Although the institution formally promoted democratic participation, collaboration, and respect for educational values, daily organizational practices frequently reflected tensions between these principles and institutional reality.

The analysis showed that administrative disagreements gradually extended into pedagogical spaces, transforming professional differences into conflicts that affected the educational environment. Rather than remaining within administrative decision-making processes, these tensions influenced interactions among teachers, school leaders, students, and other members of the educational community. As a result, institutional conflict became normalized as part of everyday school life, reducing opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and weakening collective commitment to educational objectives.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that organizational practices emphasizing confrontation rather than dialogue progressively displaced the school's primary mission of guaranteeing students' right to quality education. Institutional attention shifted from pedagogical improvement toward managing interpersonal disputes and administrative disagreements, thereby reducing the effectiveness of educational leadership.

4.2 Power Relations and the Weakening of Pedagogical Leadership

A second finding concerns the influence of power relations on institutional functioning. The experience demonstrated that leadership challenges were not exclusively associated with the performance of individual school leaders but were deeply connected to broader organizational dynamics.

Institutional power was exercised through formal administrative structures as well as informal relationships among members of the educational community. In several situations, the defense of personal, professional, or organizational interests prevailed over collective educational goals. These dynamics generated resistance to institutional leadership, reduced cooperation among staff members, and weakened shared responsibility for educational improvement.

The study further revealed that replacing school leaders did not substantially modify the institutional dynamics responsible for conflict. Following administrative changes in leadership, many of the same organizational practices continued to operate, including interpersonal tensions, resistance to institutional initiatives, and fragmented professional relationships. This continuity suggests that organizational culture, rather than individual leadership, constituted the principal factor sustaining institutional conflict.

4.3 Communication Practices and Institutional Distrust

Communication emerged as one of the most significant dimensions influencing organizational culture. The findings indicate that institutional communication frequently occurred through informal channels characterized by rumors, partial interpretations of events, and parallel narratives that circulated outside established institutional mechanisms.

These communication practices contributed to the construction of polarized perceptions regarding institutional decisions and educational leadership. In many cases, information was selectively interpreted or transmitted without adequate contextualization, generating misunderstandings that intensified existing conflicts.

The prevalence of informal communication also reduced opportunities for democratic dialogue. Rather than encouraging open deliberation, collaborative reflection, and collective decision-making, communication increasingly became associated with institutional pressure, misinformation, and the fragmentation of professional relationships. Consequently, trust among members of the educational community progressively deteriorated, limiting cooperation and reducing institutional cohesion.

4.4 Professional Responsibility and the Ethical Challenges of Educational Practice

The systematized experience also revealed challenges associated with the fulfillment of professional responsibilities within the educational institution. These challenges included inconsistencies in pedagogical planning, incomplete academic documentation, limited use of student monitoring

mechanisms, and insufficient implementation of institutional procedures designed to support students experiencing educational difficulties.

Although these practices represented administrative shortcomings, their consequences extended beyond organizational management. They directly affected pedagogical processes by limiting opportunities for continuous educational support and evidence-informed decision-making regarding student learning.

The findings further suggest that institutional culture may influence teachers' professional identities. In certain situations, the emphasis on compliance with contractual obligations appeared to overshadow broader ethical and pedagogical responsibilities associated with educational practice. This tendency contributed to a gradual separation between the humanistic purposes of education and the everyday realities of institutional work.

Importantly, the analysis does not imply that these practices characterize all members of the educational community. Instead, it demonstrates how institutional cultures may normalize professional behaviors that gradually weaken educational quality when opportunities for critical reflection and collective accountability are limited.

4.5 Leadership Isolation and Institutional Fragmentation

Another important finding concerns the experience of leadership isolation. The analysis indicates that school leadership extended far beyond administrative responsibilities and involved complex ethical, political, and interpersonal challenges.

School leaders frequently experienced limited opportunities for collaborative reflection regarding institutional problems. Decision-making often occurred within environments characterized by organizational polarization, fragmented communication, and limited institutional support. Consequently, leadership became increasingly associated with administrative management rather than pedagogical guidance and democratic participation.

The findings also demonstrate that organizational fragmentation reduced opportunities for shared leadership. Rather than functioning as a collaborative educational community, institutional relationships increasingly reflected individualized responsibilities and disconnected professional practices. This fragmentation limited collective problem-solving and reduced institutional capacity to respond constructively to conflict.

4.6 Implications for Institutional Transformation

The final finding indicates that sustainable institutional improvement cannot be achieved solely through administrative restructuring or changes in leadership personnel. The persistence of organizational conflict following leadership transitions demonstrates that institutional culture represents the primary context within which educational practices develop.

The analysis suggests that meaningful transformation requires strengthening democratic organizational cultures based on ethical leadership, transparent communication, collaborative decision-making,

professional responsibility, and institutional trust. Educational improvement therefore depends not only on administrative effectiveness but also on the capacity of schools to promote critical reflection, mutual recognition, and shared responsibility among all members of the educational community.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that school organizational culture plays a decisive role in shaping educational leadership, professional relationships, institutional trust, and the quality of educational processes. Consequently, institutional conflict should be understood as a cultural and organizational phenomenon requiring collective and reflective responses rather than merely administrative solutions.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that institutional conflict within educational organizations cannot be adequately explained through individual behaviors or isolated administrative decisions. Rather, the pedagogical systematization revealed that conflict is reproduced through organizational cultures that normalize fragmented communication, weaken collaborative leadership, and gradually distance educational institutions from their fundamental mission of guaranteeing the right to quality education. These findings reinforce the understanding that schools are not merely administrative organizations but complex social systems in which leadership, power, ethics, and communication continuously interact to shape institutional life.

One of the principal contributions of this study is the recognition that replacing school leaders does not necessarily transform institutional realities. The experience analyzed showed that many organizational conflicts persisted despite changes in leadership, suggesting that the underlying causes were embedded within institutional culture rather than individual leadership styles. This finding supports previous educational leadership research arguing that sustainable school improvement depends on organizational learning and collective responsibility rather than on the actions of individual administrators alone. Educational leadership, therefore, should be understood as a relational and organizational process rather than as the personal responsibility of a single actor.

The findings are particularly significant when interpreted through Hannah Arendt's conception of plurality and public responsibility. Arendt argues that human action acquires meaning only within a shared public space where individuals deliberate, interact, and assume responsibility for their decisions. The institutional experience examined in this study revealed the gradual erosion of such spaces for democratic participation. Communication increasingly occurred through informal narratives, institutional mistrust replaced collaborative dialogue, and educational decisions became influenced by polarized interests rather than collective deliberation. Under these conditions, school leadership gradually lost its political dimension and became largely administrative, reducing opportunities for meaningful participation within the educational community.

Arendt's concept of the *banality of evil* also provides an important interpretive framework for understanding the organizational dynamics identified in this study. The institutional practices that weakened pedagogical leadership were not necessarily motivated by intentional harm or deliberate misconduct. Instead, they frequently resulted from the normalization of uncritical behaviors, routine administrative practices, and the absence of ethical reflection regarding the consequences of institutional decisions. The reproduction of rumors, polarized discourse, administrative disengagement, and passive acceptance of organizational dysfunction illustrates how institutional harm may emerge through thoughtlessness rather than explicit hostility. This perspective shifts attention away from assigning individual blame and toward understanding the collective responsibility required to sustain democratic educational institutions.

The findings likewise reinforce Paulo Freire's conception of education as an ethical and political practice. Freire emphasizes that educational work is fundamentally concerned with dialogue, critical consciousness, and human emancipation rather than merely transmitting knowledge or maintaining institutional order. The institutional experience analyzed demonstrates that when communication becomes dominated by confrontation, bureaucratic interests, and fragmented relationships, educational practice risks losing its emancipatory character. Teachers and school leaders become increasingly occupied with managing conflict instead of creating conditions that promote critical thinking, democratic participation, and human development. Consequently, the ethical purpose of education becomes subordinated to organizational survival rather than educational transformation.

The analysis also supports Michel Foucault's understanding of power as something exercised through everyday social relationships rather than possessed by individuals. Throughout the institutional experience, power operated not only through formal administrative authority but also through informal communication networks, interpersonal alliances, organizational narratives, and the circulation of institutional information. These findings demonstrate that educational leadership cannot be understood solely in terms of formal hierarchical structures. Instead, power is continuously negotiated through professional interactions that shape institutional legitimacy, trust, and decision-making. Organizational conflict therefore emerges not simply from authority itself but from the ways power is exercised, interpreted, and contested within everyday educational practice.

Similarly, the communication patterns identified in this study correspond with Teun A. van Dijk's analysis of discourse and power. Institutional narratives influenced professional relationships by shaping perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and organizational identity. The circulation of partial information, rumors, and strategically constructed interpretations contributed to the fragmentation of institutional trust and reduced opportunities for democratic dialogue. These findings highlight the central role of communication in educational organizations. Transparent and ethical

communication is not merely an administrative function but a prerequisite for collaborative leadership, institutional cohesion, and democratic participation.

Stephen J. Ball's work on educational governance also provides an important perspective for interpreting the findings. Contemporary educational systems increasingly emphasize accountability, managerial efficiency, and administrative performance. Although these dimensions are necessary for institutional functioning, the present study demonstrates that technical administration alone cannot resolve organizational conflict. Leadership that prioritizes procedures while neglecting ethical relationships and democratic participation risks reinforcing institutional fragmentation rather than strengthening educational quality. Consequently, effective educational leadership requires balancing administrative responsibilities with moral judgment, professional trust, and collaborative decision-making.

An important contribution of this study concerns the experience of leadership isolation. Rather than understanding isolation simply as an individual emotional condition, the findings suggest that it represents an organizational phenomenon emerging from fragmented institutional cultures. School leaders became increasingly disconnected from opportunities for collective reflection, shared decision-making, and professional dialogue. This observation resonates strongly with Arendt's distinction between loneliness and solitude. While loneliness reflects exclusion from meaningful human relationships, solitude creates the reflective space necessary for critical thinking and responsible public action. The institutional experience suggests that educational leadership requires both collaborative participation and opportunities for ethical reflection if democratic governance is to be sustained.

The findings also have significant implications for educational policy and institutional governance. Administrative responses to conflict frequently emphasize structural solutions, including leadership replacement, procedural reforms, or increased administrative supervision. However, the evidence presented in this study suggests that such measures may have limited effectiveness when organizational cultures continue to reproduce distrust, polarized communication, and fragmented professional relationships. Sustainable institutional improvement requires long-term investment in organizational learning, ethical leadership development, professional dialogue, conflict mediation, and democratic participation across all levels of the educational system. This study further contributes to current discussions concerning the ethical responsibilities of public educational institutions. Schools are entrusted not only with delivering curriculum but also with cultivating democratic citizenship, protecting human dignity, and promoting social justice. When institutional practices undermine dialogue, transparency, and mutual recognition, they compromise not only organizational effectiveness but also the broader public mission of education. Educational leadership therefore requires continuous ethical reflection regarding how administrative decisions affect relationships,

professional identities, and students' educational experiences.

Although the study is based on the pedagogical systematization of a single institutional experience, its analytical value extends beyond the immediate context. The organizational dynamics identified—including fragmented communication, leadership isolation, institutional mistrust, and ethical tensions—are common challenges reported across many contemporary educational systems. Consequently, the study contributes transferable conceptual insights that may inform future research on school organizational culture, educational leadership, democratic governance, and professional ethics.

Overall, the findings reinforce the argument that transforming educational institutions requires more than administrative reform. Sustainable change depends upon rebuilding organizational cultures founded on critical reflection, shared responsibility, ethical leadership, transparent communication, and democratic participation. Educational improvement therefore begins not with replacing individuals but with transforming the institutional conditions that shape how educational communities think, communicate, collaborate, and assume responsibility for their shared educational mission.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how school organizational culture contributes to the reproduction of institutional conflict and the weakening of pedagogical leadership through the critical systematization of an educational leadership experience within a Colombian public educational institution. The findings demonstrate that institutional conflict should not be understood merely as the result of interpersonal disagreements or ineffective leadership but as the consequence of organizational cultures that normalize fragmented communication, power struggles, institutional mistrust, and the absence of critical reflection.

The analysis revealed that organizational practices characterized by polarized discourse, informal communication, competing interests, and weakened professional collaboration gradually displaced the school's central educational mission. Rather than functioning as democratic communities committed to dialogue, ethical responsibility, and shared decision-making, institutional dynamics frequently became oriented toward administrative confrontation and organizational fragmentation. Consequently, pedagogical leadership was reduced to administrative management, while opportunities for collaborative educational improvement diminished.

The study also demonstrates that institutional transformation cannot be achieved solely through administrative measures such as replacing school leaders. Although leadership is essential for educational improvement, the findings indicate that organizational culture exerts a more significant influence on institutional functioning than individual leadership alone. Sustainable educational change therefore requires collective institutional commitment to ethical reflection, democratic participation,

transparent communication, professional responsibility, and organizational learning.

The theoretical perspectives of Hannah Arendt, Paulo Freire, Michel Foucault, Stephen J. Ball, and Teun A. van Dijk provided complementary frameworks for interpreting these institutional dynamics. Together, these perspectives emphasize that educational leadership is fundamentally an ethical and political practice grounded in plurality, dialogue, public responsibility, and the recognition of human dignity. Schools cannot fulfill their democratic mission unless institutional cultures promote critical reflection, mutual trust, and collaborative participation among all members of the educational community.

Ultimately, this study argues that strengthening school culture requires moving beyond technical administrative solutions toward the development of educational organizations in which leadership is understood as a collective responsibility. Schools become genuine democratic institutions when educational actors engage in reflective dialogue, exercise ethical judgment, and work collaboratively to guarantee every student's fundamental right to a high-quality education.

7. Practical Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for educational leadership, public policy, teacher professional development, and institutional governance. First, educational authorities should recognize that institutional conflicts rarely originate exclusively from individual school leaders. Consequently, intervention strategies should prioritize organizational diagnosis, conflict mediation, and institutional learning rather than relying primarily on administrative transfers or leadership replacement.

Second, schools should strengthen organizational cultures that promote democratic participation, collaborative decision-making, and transparent communication. Creating structured opportunities for professional dialogue can reduce institutional polarization and reinforce collective responsibility for educational improvement.

Third, leadership development programs should move beyond technical administrative training by incorporating ethical leadership, conflict management, organizational communication, democratic governance, and reflective practice. School leaders require preparation not only in educational management but also in facilitating dialogue, building trust, and leading institutional change.

Fourth, teacher professional development should reinforce the ethical and political dimensions of teaching by promoting reflective pedagogical practice, collaborative professional learning communities, and shared responsibility for students' educational experiences. Strengthening teachers' professional identity contributes directly to improving organizational culture and educational quality.

Finally, municipal and departmental education authorities should develop policies that support schools through continuous institutional accompaniment rather than episodic administrative interventions. Long-term organizational development is more likely to

strengthen institutional resilience than isolated corrective measures.

8. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this research.

First, the study is based on the pedagogical systematization of a single institutional experience within one public educational institution. Consequently, the findings are context-specific and are not intended to be statistically generalizable to all educational settings.

Second, the study relies primarily on qualitative reflection and institutional analysis rather than on extensive empirical data obtained through interviews, surveys, or large-scale observational procedures. The objective was to generate an in-depth understanding of organizational dynamics rather than to establish causal relationships or measure their prevalence.

Third, the theoretical interpretation was intentionally grounded in critical educational and philosophical perspectives. Although this interdisciplinary approach enriches the analysis, alternative theoretical frameworks may offer additional explanations for organizational conflict and educational leadership.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable analytical insights into the relationships among organizational culture, institutional conflict, pedagogical leadership, and democratic educational practice. Its principal contribution lies in generating transferable conceptual understandings that may inform similar institutional contexts and future qualitative investigations.

9. Future Research

Future research should extend the present study by examining organizational culture and institutional conflict across multiple educational contexts. Comparative studies involving different schools, educational systems, and regional contexts would contribute to identifying common organizational patterns and context-specific differences in educational leadership.

Further qualitative research incorporating interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and documentary analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers, students, families, and educational authorities experience organizational conflict and institutional change.

Longitudinal studies are also needed to investigate how organizational culture evolves over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions designed to

strengthen democratic participation, ethical leadership, and collaborative institutional governance.

Additionally, future investigations may explore the relationship between school organizational culture and broader educational outcomes, including teacher well-being, professional identity, student engagement, educational quality, and institutional trust.

Finally, greater attention should be given to the ethical dimensions of educational leadership through interdisciplinary research integrating educational administration, philosophy, sociology, organizational studies, and public policy. Such work would contribute to developing more comprehensive theoretical and practical frameworks capable of supporting schools as democratic institutions committed to human dignity, social justice, and the fundamental right to education.

The findings presented in this study invite researchers, educational leaders, teachers, and policymakers to reconsider school improvement as a collective ethical endeavor. Building democratic educational institutions requires more than efficient administration; it requires cultivating organizational cultures in which critical reflection, shared responsibility, and respect for human dignity guide every educational decision.

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