

# *Systems of Oppression or Emancipation? Understanding the Colombian Education System Through Critical Education*

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**Abstract:** This project examines the effect of socioeconomic status (SES) on perceptions of adults in Bogotá regarding the nation's educational curriculum (EC) and pedagogical practices (PP). Previous research looked at the relationship between EC and the elite's oppression of lower classes, as well as pedagogy's effect on the sociopolitical development of a country. This research utilizes critical education theory, hence assuming EC and PP maintain the socioeconomic privilege of higher classes in society while preventing the social mobility of lower classes by intentionally excluding the teaching of critical thinking. This project unfolds through descriptive statistics and graphic analysis of quantitative data collected from surveys. Moreover, the research triangulates data with thematically coded interviews with Colombian citizens. The research argues that the perceptions of EC and PP reflect a segregated system of education along socioeconomic lines; however, oppression is not unique to lower socioeconomic strata. The project will urge primary and secondary education institutions to rethink the present EC and PP by providing data about the perceived oppression of current educational content and teaching methods that hinder the development of equitable social, political, and economic development in the country.

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In 2016, after 54 years of bloodshed due to civil war in Colombia, "las FARC" shifted from a terrorist organization to a political party, creating a context of relative peace. However, the question remains: how is Colombia going to change the country's history of violence into a future of hope and equitable social, political, and economic growth? I argue that the formation of such a society starts with education.

This research study seeks to understand the perceptions of Colombians regarding the K-12 educational curriculum (EC) and pedagogical practices (PP) of the country. EC refers to the content of classes within schools, and PP refers to the teaching methods used by instructors to deliver class content. Critical theorists, like Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, suggest elites use the existing education systems across Latin America to oppress low socioeconomic sectors within the countries in the region. In order to explore this claim, the research uses surveys to collect primary data and understand the perceptions of Colombian adults of EC and PP. Furthermore, the project uses in-depth interviews to further explore trends identified through survey responses. Although current academic debates examine whether education is an emancipatory tool or, as Freire claims, an oppressive mechanism, the conversation usually fails to consider the perceptions

of students regarding their educational experiences. The inclusion of student opinions in debates about the Colombian educational system is crucial to address previously unseen problems and create policies driven by the people's interests and not agendas dictated by the elite.

Primarily, the research finds that perceptions of EC and PP suggest schools in Colombia act as oppressive institutions designed to preserve the socioeconomic hierarchy of the country. Schools in different socioeconomic sectors approach education with dissimilar interests; hence, the EC and PP of institutions in higher socioeconomic status (SES) communities differ from the EC and PP used in lower SES schools. In lower SES communities, schools tend to employ PP that are not conducive to critical thinking and, consequently, not conducive to building leadership skills; by contrast, schools in higher SES communities view students as future rulers of the country and therefore design their curricula to prepare students for leadership roles.

In the next section, the literature review explores the existing debates within the critical education field and primarily examines claims about how schools utilize EC and PP to either promote or stagnate democracy and social mobility. The methods section discusses data collection and analysis procedures,

including descriptive statistics, graphic analysis methodologies, and the process of triangulating survey data with interviews. The analysis section examines the relationship between the SES of students and the different degrees of oppression promoted by schools in various SES communities. For example, the analysis evidences that lower SES schools focus on skills and abilities designed to prepare students for the workforce, while schools in higher SES communities prepare students to be future business owners, diplomats, and political leaders. The discussion section explores how perceptions of school oppression have important implications for developing an equitable social system. Finally, the conclusion offers avenues for future research, namely, investigating transformative EC and PP design and implementation strategies to achieve the goal of creating and maintaining peace and equity in the Colombian educational system.

### **Literature Review**

Critical educators investigate the oppression of the marginalized majority by the privileged minority, arguing that current educational systems lack transparency in EC and PP implementation. Scholars note that there is a gap between the way elites present and promote education to the public and the actual educational curriculum and pedagogy. Michael W. Apple, in *Ideology and Curriculum* (2004), argues that the language and framework of EC and PP in schools demonstrate the elite's intent to coopt individuals into a cycle of manipulation and oppression. Using apolitical and ahistorical diction, elites promote a "hidden curriculum" designed to mask education's connection to political and economic power, in which schools are mechanisms for "anonymizing and sorting out abstract individuals into preordained social, economic, and educational slots" (Apple, 2004, p. 120). Apple's theory of social control as a product of EC and pedagogy advocates for a revolution in education, one that restructures curriculum to be transparent and accessible for all individuals in a society challenging power structures and the elite's domination of the social hierarchy. The present research aims to complement Apple's critical theory and add to the body of existing literature by surveying people from a variety of socioeconomic statuses on how they perceive EC and PP, paying particular attention to whether participants perceive

them as marginalizing or oppressive devices. If Apple's theory is correct, individuals in lower socioeconomic sectors of society will more likely be unaware of how schools perpetuate a vicious cycle that hinders social mobility.

According to critical education scholars, political elites use EC and PP as tools to indoctrinate the masses to accept, without question, a medieval notion of a hierarchy-based society, in which economically solvent individuals rule over the less economically stable. Rather than teaching individuals to analyze and question existing social structures, political elites use PP, such as teacher-to-student interactions, as mechanisms to impose knowledge. Paulo Freire (2005) insisted schools perpetuate social power pyramids by utilizing a hierarchical system within the classroom, where teachers are unquestionable authorities and students are passive receptors of information. In this way, schools can negate the agency of students by viewing students as homogenized objects without a reasoning, without a context, and without the ability to make good choices or having knowledge. As a result, schools limit students to receiving information from a teacher, a subject with authority, with the purpose of "filling" students' minds with information designed to codify students' perspectives of the world, and therefore preparing individuals to "fit" and accept the socioeconomic and political status quo (Freire, 2005, pp 76-78). If teacher-student relations reflect ruler-ruled interactions, then education is not a mechanism for the re-formation of a society but rather an instrument for the preservation of outdated, oligarchy-like sociopolitical regimes. This study seeks to explore the perceptions of individuals in a highly class-segregated society about teacher-to-student pedagogical practices, therefore evaluating the applicability of Freire's theory of oppression to the Colombian context.

Along with Freire, education scholars have argued institutions choose to use specific PP designed to ensure efficiency in test-taking, making schools institutions for content reproduction instead of knowledge production. In Europe and the Americas, the results students obtain on standardized tests usually measure an educational institution's success. Rather than measuring the individual abilities of students and human-related skills, standardized tests are designed to evaluate students' labor-related skills

like agile reading, mathematical literacy, and pattern replicability (Maehr, M. L., & Maehr, J. M., 1996). Consequently, contemporary pedagogy consists of offering precise inputs for obtaining equally precise outputs, the first provided by the teacher and the later by the students, thereby reducing the complexities of human life into a simplistic stimulus-reaction behavior (Alcaraz, 2014, p. 59). Previous research demonstrates how pedagogy reinforces inequities in society, training students to consume and replicate information and using teachers as transmission objects. When knowledge production, critical engagement, agency, and reflexivity are not encouraged in pedagogy, structures of oppression are maintained. The present research investigates the perceptions of former and current students in order to understand if standardized exams are a preference for students, and if not, recommend other pedagogies perhaps more conducive to the development of analytical skills.

## **Methods**

### *Data collection*

For primary data, I collected 358 surveys. Although the original intention was to distribute surveys in different socioeconomic spaces such as high-class country clubs, middle-class malls, and low-class marketplaces, I concluded I had more possibilities of gathering more data through disseminating the survey online. Consequently, I used the web-based statistical program Qualtrics to create and distribute a 30-question survey. To distribute the survey, I sent an anonymous link to the survey to individual friends and groups in WhatsApp, a popular messaging app, and asked my friends, family, and acquaintances to resend the link. To make the survey more accessible to lower SES communities, I travelled to Colombia between December 17th, 2018, and January 14th, 2019, and every Sunday I went to a country club in Bogota and distributed the questionnaire to the employees of the establishment, including cooks, nannies, and golf caddies. I asked hybrid questions like, "Do you think the educational curriculum prepares you to advance in the social hierarchy?" to which respondents could answer "yes," "no," or "to some extent." I asked all questions in Spanish, the official language of Colombia. The survey facilitated the gathering of quantitative data and the collection of transparent

information in a reproducible manner. The use of surveys allowed for the discovery of general trends regarding Colombians' perceptions of EC and PP.

To triangulate data, I carried out seven interviews. I travelled to Colombia during a time when many individuals were unavailable, which made arranging in-person interviews complicated. Hence, I carried out all interviews through online platforms like Skype, Zoom, and WhatsApp video and voice calls. All interviewees were Colombian citizens, and all were contacted through the information each left in the last question of the survey, which asked if they were interested in further sharing their opinions regarding EC and PP. I carried out semi-structured interviews by asking open-ended questions, such as "would you rather enroll your children in a public or private school? Why?" Before each interview, I provided a consent form for each interviewee and informed the participants of the purpose and methods of the research. Collecting the data through interviews provided an opportunity to obtain in-depth qualitative data about perceptions regarding EC and PP in the country. I used interviews to contextualize and further understand the trends obtained through surveys, ensuring the reliability of the data.

### *Data analysis*

I analyzed interviews using content analysis and thematic coding. I audio-recorded each interview and stored all materials in a password-protected external drive. After finalizing the interviews, I transcribed each interview using Intelligent Verbatim Transcription. I thematically coded responses through core concepts like "equity," "opportunities," "inequality," "worthiness," and others. After interviewing all participants in Spanish, I performed content analysis by creating categories like "hidden-curriculum," "emancipatory pedagogies," and "banking education" and proceeded to translate all transcripts, codes, and categories into English. I present operationalized data through tables. Through content analysis, I evidence patterns in participants' perceptions and unveiled any possible recommendations interviewees might have regarding the EC and PP of Colombia by exploring topics of equity, social mobility, oppression, authority in the classroom, among others. This analytic process allowed for the discovery of commonalities between

participants but also validated each interviewee's input and perceptions.

I evaluated surveys through statistical analysis. After collecting the surveys, I used Qualtrics to record, organize, and analyze the answers of the participants. First, I used descriptive statistics to analyze the data, mainly measuring frequency distribution for the answers of each question. Afterwards, I correlated demographic variables like SES with content variables like perceptions of creativity in schools or the use of standardized exams. To correlate the different variables, I created cross-tables, linking all results from one question to all results from other questions. Finally, I presented the statistical information through bar graphs, pie charts, and cross-tables. Surveying adult citizens of Colombia provided an opportunity to discover whether there is a relationship between SES and perceptions of oppression within the educational system, and if so, in what way(s). Collecting perceptions of individuals of different SES allowed for a direct comparison between social classes and facilitated an in-depth analysis of the relationship between perceptions of education and SES in Colombia.

### Analysis

Data collected through surveys reflected a disproportionate representation of some socioeconomic groups, namely the middle-high class (SES five). Although the original intention was to use stratified sampling, time constraints and security matters in some of the low SES areas called for another method of sampling. The research relies mostly on snowball sampling and purposive sampling, intentionally approaching individuals of low SES after noticing a heavy trend in responses from middle to high SES-identifying individuals. Despite the efforts to have a balanced number of participants in each SES category, most participants in the surveys claimed to belong to middle-high class (SES five) where, for every participant in SES one, there were approximately sixteen participants from SES five. Each of the three individual sectors classified as low-SES (SES one, two, and three) had some representation, and although individually SES one and SES two are low in representation, when combined with SES three under the category of low SES, they make the third largest group in the survey with 24.23% of respondents. Having disparities in

the representation of the six different SESs within the sample might lead to skewed data; hence, general trends in the study mostly reflect the observations of middle to high-class individuals. Nevertheless, as the study seeks not only to explore the perceptions of Colombians but also to correlate participant opinions about EC and PP to the individual's SES, the asymmetry in representation is not a problematic factor.

### Targeted oppression based on SES

In Colombia, social fragmentation along class lines defines school distribution in the country by placing individuals of different economic backgrounds into schools that match a person's SES. If an individual is from middle or upper class, the person is most likely to receive education in a private school, while individuals from low SES are more likely to attend a public school. The surveys revealed more than 75% of participants identified with belonging to either middle class or upper class (SES 4, 5, or 6). Furthermore, most participants indicated attendance at a private school, while less than 20% of participants studied at public primary and secondary institutions. School sectorization based on the national socioeconomic hierarchy increases the perceptions of schools as money-oriented institutions and not centers for learning. Reinforcing the stereotype of schools placing more

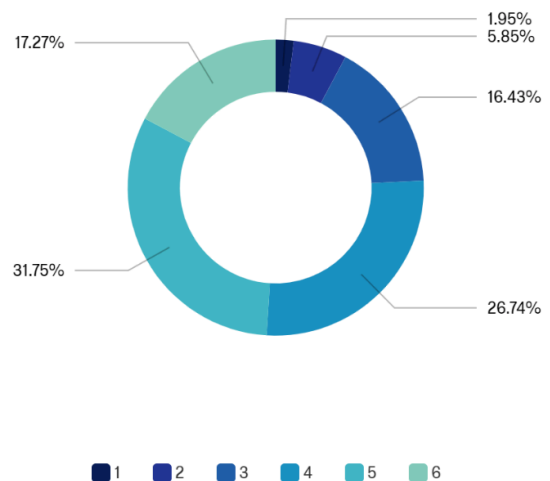


Figure 1. Demographics: SES distribution of survey participants.



value on the money a person has rather than on the talent and abilities of a student leads to a distorted perception of the differences in the academic potential of students in public and private schools.

The significance of the social divide between public or private schools stems from the perceived asymmetry in the quality of education between both types of institutions. While public education in Colombia is not synonymous with bad education, general perceptions regarding the country's EC and PP indicate private education is of better quality. Several interviewees defined "quality" as personalized education that strives to promote individual curiosity and emphasize personal talents and passions (Lina González, personal communication, March 8th, 2019; Andrés Paredes, personal communication, March 10th, 2019; Martín Serrano, personal communication, March 12th, 2019). Interviewee Andrés Paredes (personal communication, March 10th, 2019) noted that public schools tend to have more students than private schools due to the social distribution of the country, as most of the population lives in low-SES neighborhoods; furthermore, the teacher-to-student ratio is larger in public schools than in private academic institutions, making education more personalized in high-SES schools. Moreover, general opinions indicate private schools usually have more economic resources than public schools; thus, citizens perceive private institutions as more selective with the teachers they hire, choosing instructors devoted to promoting student learning rather than individuals who care only about teaching the curriculum regardless of whether the student understands the content or not (Paredes, personal communication, March 10th, 2019). Such perceptions indicate a paradigm in which private institutions provide more opportunities for students to ask questions and receive personalized teaching and thus a more meaningful learning experience within the academic space than students in public schools. Several interviewees noted "quality" in education required instructors who are dedicated to teaching students and ensuring the creation and retention of knowledge (PP) and the development of a curriculum centered on students' needs, context, interests, and abilities.

The purpose of schooling in different SES communities varies according to the epistemological conception of education. While some academic

institutions view schools as centers to prepare students for joining the workforce, others believe schools are establishments for educating future leaders. The mission of low-SES private institutions is to prepare children to be more competitive in the labor market than the students in public education through an emphasis on language skills and interpersonal communication (Ana Mora, personal communication, March 14th, 2019). In contrast, the main goal of high-SES private schools is to foster leaders as well as national and international citizens (Isabella Sasoon, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). As a result, the higher the SES of an individual, the more likely the person is going to be an entrepreneur, and correspondingly, the lower the SES of a person, the more likely it is that the person will be an employee and not an independent worker (Cross-Table 1). By preparing students to fulfill only certain roles in society corresponding to the individual's SES, schools perpetuate the hierarchical structures of society in Colombia. Schools, then, serve as organizations for the categorization of individuals in stagnant social positions, where progressive or regressive social mobility between different socioeconomic levels is unlikely.

		What is your socioeconomic status?						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
What is your occupation?	Employee	6	14	25	33	39	17	134
	Independent	0	3	11	26	34	22	96
	Student	1	3	14	26	30	15	89
	Home	0	1	1	2	5	4	13
	Other	0	0	8	8	6	4	26
	Total	7	21	59	95	114	62	358

**Cross-Table 1.** Individual's occupation in relation to personal SES

Schools in Colombia have to follow a national curriculum; however, higher SES schools have more flexibility to incorporate additional content and different pedagogies than schools in lower SES communities. Although all seniors in high school should know trigonometry, principles of physics and chemistry, elementary English (A2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or CEFR), and literature comprehension, students in higher SESs acquire additional knowledge not measured in the Saber11°, Colombia's mandatory high school exit examination. Some private schools in SES 5 and 6 include international programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB) within the school's curriculum, providing students with a broader set of skills like cross-cultural communication

(Isabella Sason, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). Moreover, most schools in higher SES communities include the teaching of a second and sometimes third language within the academic curriculum of the school, allowing students to graduate from high school with a proficient use of at least two languages (Spanish, English, and sometimes French, Italian, and/or German) (Catalina Arias, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). As a consequence, national standardized exams fail to address the nature and magnitude of differentiation in the skills and knowledge of students in different SES groups. Using standardized exams as the main tool for measuring the disparities in education quality between institutions in different SES communities assumes all institutions utilize the same methods and teach the same content; as a result, government efforts concentrate on addressing only the gaps in the information identifiable through exam results instead of solving the underlying differences in EC and PP.

Nonetheless, individuals from lower SESs tend to perceive schools as promoting creativity more than people in higher SES communities. Creativity, promoted through classes such as arts and humanities or through pedagogies like physical activity and music appreciation, is a component of learning critical thinking and acquiring problem-solving skills. Although the assumption is that higher SES schools promote creativity more than institutions in lower SES communities, surveys reflect an opposite trend. Less than 17% of participants in SES 1 believe schools frustrated creativity while 83.4% indicated schools promoted creativity. In addition, 65% of respondents in SES 2 claimed educational institutions promoted creativity. On the contrary, most individuals in the rest of SES groups disagreed with the idea of schools promoting creativity; rather, patterns in responses showcase most individuals perceive schools as either ignoring or frustrating an individual's creativity (see Cross-Table 2). However, the disparities in perception might be explained by the different degrees of conformity students in different SES groups have. Schools teach students from high SES backgrounds to be rigorous, selective, and critical, while individuals from low SES households are taught to passively classify whatever the school offers as ideal and not to question its efficiency, purpose, or form.

	Schools approach towards creativity			
	Promoted	Ignored	Frustrated	
SES	1	83.33%	0.00%	16.67%
	2	65.00%	30.00%	5.00%
	3	43.10%	44.83%	12.07%
	4	47.37%	44.21%	8.42%
	5	44.14%	42.34%	13.51%
	6	44.83%	44.83%	10.34%

**Cross-Table 2.** Individual's Perceptions of school's approach towards creativity based on SES.

In addition, data showcased individuals in higher SESs believe schools emphasize the upbringing of leaders through specific EC and teaching methods. By using programs focused on the development of leadership skills, higher SES schools prepare students to pursue positions of leadership inside and outside the country. The inclusion of programs like "Leader in Me" teaches students to view leadership as an intrinsic aspect of an individual's life present in all the activities that a person is a part of (Catalina Arias, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). Rather than presenting a single model of what a leader is, high SES schools incentivize students to develop skills like active listening, proactivity, time management, and collaboration in order to become holistic leaders (Catalina Arias, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). In addition, the teaching of content through alternative pedagogies incentivizes students to explore multiple ways of creating knowledge, leading to the development of innovative thinking, one of the core elements of leadership (see Table 1) (Catalina Arias, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). While students from higher SES backgrounds prepare to be leaders, individuals from lower SES backgrounds do not have access to the same programs or the same pedagogical practices, thus increasing the probability of an individual from a higher SES household to fill a leadership position. Although individuals can develop leadership skills outside an academic environment, the lack of leadership guidance and tools might lead a person to believe leadership is not a trait everyone can, or should, develop.

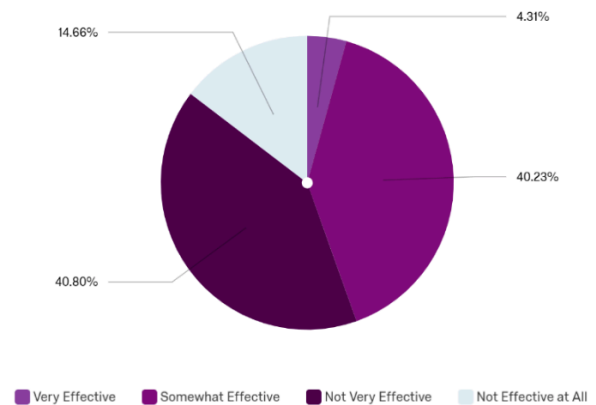
**Table 1.** Alternative pedagogical practices.

EC	PP
Cold War	Songs
Spanish Civil War	Visual Art & Literature
Chemistry	Periodic Table Bingo
Physics	Goldberg Machine

Individuals from different SES backgrounds develop different patterns of thinking about society and their position within the established social hierarchy. In a country where socioeconomic segregation permeates education, an individual's social surrounding can condition individuals from different SES backgrounds to think differently about personal roles within a society. Individuals from higher SES backgrounds used the words "entrepreneurship," "leadership," and "global awareness" to refer to the overarching elements people learned in school (Catalina Arias, personal communication, March 17th, 2019; Isabella Sasoon, personal communication, March 17th, 2019). Individuals from middle-class and lower SES backgrounds mentioned schools teach students to "follow orders," "learn how life works," "respect authority," and "get a job" (Sara Rojas, personal communication, March 22nd, 2019; Ana Mora, personal communication, March 17th, 2019; Lina Gonzalez, personal communication, March 8th, 2019; Martin Serrano, personal communication, March 12th, 2019; Andres Paredes, personal communication, March 10th, 2019). Schools teach students to follow certain codes of behaviors and patterns that match the social hierarchy in Colombia. Accordingly, education, rather than providing equal opportunity for individuals to freely move in the socioeconomic pyramid of the country, reinforces social stagnation and preserves social inequality by indoctrinating individuals into following the oligarchy-based system.

### Generalized Trends

Some trends in survey responses indicate individuals in different SESs experience similar frustrations within the education system in Colombia. Participants' opinions demonstrate extensive negative attitudes towards the effectiveness of exam standardization in education. Nonetheless, some believe standardized examination is an adequate mechanism to measure an individual's knowledge. Eighteen percent of people participating in the surveys indicated standardized examination is at least somewhat effective in measuring knowledge (see Figure 2). However, the majority of individuals deemed standardized exams as mostly or completely ineffective in evaluating a person's knowledge. Some individuals even claimed the Saber11°, the



**Figure 2.** Perceptions of degree of effectiveness of standardized examination.

most prominent national standardized exam, is a tool for schools to measure an institution's "success" and not to measure or validate a person's abilities or knowledge (Andrés Paredes, personal communication, March 10th, 2019; Martín Serrano, personal communication, March 12th, 2019). By encouraging standardized examinations, schools, alongside the government, are indicating to students that personal talents are not as important or necessary as the ability to repeat information in order to take a test. Then, the primary interest of schools seems to be training students to reproduce preestablished information necessary to pass a standardized exam rather than developing students' abilities to create knowledge.

As the perceived purpose of schooling is to deliver standardized knowledge and prepare students to replicate information, students' objective in schools is to reproduce information given during class in exams. As a result, students do not see learning as a priority. Most interviewees agreed schools should be places to gain knowledge, learn new skills, and learn how to socialize (Ana Mora, personal communication, March 14th, 2019; Andrés Paredes, personal communication, March 10th, 2019; Lina González, personal communication, March 12th, 2019; Martín Serrano, personal communication, March 12th, 2019). However, less than a third of the participants in the surveys indicated being primarily interested in learning while in school (see Figure 3). Rather, most individuals place obtaining good grades

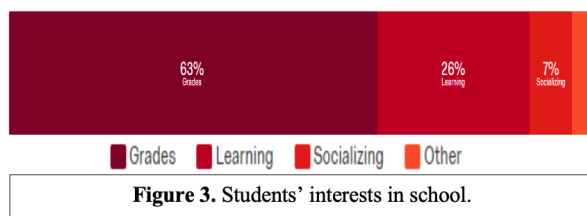


Figure 3. Students' interests in school.

at the center of their academic experience. Although the existing paradigm in education indicates that learning should lead to good grades, the perceptions of interviewed individuals indicate that good grades are not dependent on learning. Considering the emphasis that schools place on standardized exams, learning seems to be completely unrelated to good scores on exams and, by extension, to schooling. The high level of importance students place on obtaining good results on exams leads them to emphasize short-term memorization rather than long-term knowledge.

### Discussion

The perceptions of EC and PP among survey respondents showcase a collective understanding of the national structures of power as part of a zero-sum game where winners win because losers lose. The previously established relationship between the national economic distribution, best described as an inflexible social hierarchy, and Colombians' perceptions of education validates claims from critical educators that political elites use schools to maintain the hegemonic political, social, and economic power of high SES communities. As Paulo Freire (2005) claims, the individuals responsible for the design and implementation of EC and PP indoctrinate students, especially low SES individuals, to believe in and preserve the class-segregated social structure of the country (pp. 43-48). Moreover, as Apple (2004) highlights, educational institutions promote a "hidden curriculum," a set of norms and morals schools impose on students to homogenize the behavior of the student body and, therefore, homogenize the citizenry (p. 27). The perceptions of interviewees confirm the theoretical statements of both authors by showcasing the viewpoints of individuals from low SES backgrounds on the homogenizing intentions of EC and PP designers. Participants believe education segregates individuals based on long-standing social hierarchies, as

schools are part of the elite's monopoly of political power. Results support the claims of academics in critical education and, through demonstrating the perceptions of individuals from many different SESs, legitimize the assumptions of CET about oppression implicit in EC and PP.

The negative perceptions of standardized exams support claims by critical educators that governments utilize schools as centers for memorizing, not learning. By standardizing content, schools expose individuals coming from different backgrounds, experiencing dissimilar contexts, and having different interests to the same information. Through the promotion of memorization, constituted by repetition and reproduction of information, schools encourage replication of knowledge rather than the development of skills like critical analysis (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 1981; Maehr, M. L., & Maehr, J. M., 1996). Schools teach students that learning is a mechanized process in which individuals repeat content for no other purpose than getting a good grade on an exam instead of actively engaging with content to actually learn (Figure 3). Placing standardized tests at the core of EC and PP casts students as passive receptors of information rather than knowledge producers (Freire, 2005). Understanding standardization within the Colombian education system through CET highlights a relationship between EC design and implementation and oppression, as schools teach individuals to accept content without questioning or analyzing information. Critical education scholars transcend the critique of standardized exams as inadequate tools to measure knowledge by highlighting the elite's use of a homogenized curriculum as a mechanism of social control.

Etymologically, education means to "bring up;" consequently, the purpose of schools should be to help students from low SES communities climb the hierarchical social structures in Colombia. However, imposing knowledge on students through EC and PP preserves cycles of poverty and social inequality. To combat oppression in education, participants, as well as academics like Freire and Apple, suggest making creativity the core of EC by teaching students critical thinking, contextual and textual analysis, and social justice. In addition, schools should restructure PP and, instead of continuing the imposition of knowledge from teacher to student, promote discussion between students and allow



individuals to have an active role in choosing the content and methods used to guide their education. Additionally, schools should grade students based on the measurement of knowledge-production and learning progress rather than on memorized information and results in standardized tests. If the national Ministry of Education and the schools in the Colombian territory fail to pay attention to the policies recommended, the cycle of segregation and oppression will continue. If schools and the government ignore the perceptions of some students and continue to give preference to voices in higher SESs, the social and institutional purpose of creating an equitable nation will remain unattained.

By teaching individuals from different SES backgrounds different content, through different pedagogies, the elite ensures future leaders of the country come from higher SES households and consequently preserve the current social hierarchy. While individuals from higher SES backgrounds become rulers, entrepreneurs, and social leaders, individuals from lower SES backgrounds remain trapped in a cycle of limited opportunities of socioeconomic growth. Segregating the school system based on the SES of an individual leads to an education system centered around money and not learning or knowledge. Schools are not meant to be factories of homogenous citizens, obedient subjects, and malleable workers; rather, schools should create equitable societies where all individuals, regardless of SES, should have equal opportunities of socioeconomic advancement. However, if schools and the government continue to oppress citizens by impeding equitable development of critical abilities, social emancipation and the nation's advancement towards a peaceful and socioeconomically prosperous society with no social gap will not occur.

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