

RETHINKING EDUCATIONAL MANAGERIALISM: A CRITICAL PARADIGM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL COUNTERBALANCE IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The growing dominance of educational managerialism in contemporary education has reshaped governance practices by emphasizing efficiency, accountability, standardization, and performance measurement. While managerial approaches have contributed to administrative order and organizational control, they are increasingly criticized for narrowing the epistemological and ethical foundations of education. This study aims to examine educational managerialism as a critical epistemological paradigm and to position the critical paradigm as an epistemological counterbalance within contemporary education. Employing a qualitative critical literature review, this study analyzes peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published between 2020 and 2024 using a critical epistemological framework informed by critical social theory. The analysis focuses on uncovering the epistemological assumptions, ideological orientations, and power relations embedded in managerial knowledge and governance practices. The findings reveal that educational managerialism privileges instrumental rationality and claims of value neutrality, which function to legitimize performance-based governance while marginalizing reflective, ethical, and contextual forms of educational knowledge. In contrast, the critical paradigm offers a reflective framework that challenges these assumptions and reorients educational management toward democratic participation, social justice, and human emancipation. Rather than rejecting management outright, this study demonstrates that the critical paradigm can function as a corrective and balancing epistemological framework, enabling more humanistic and ethically grounded approaches to educational governance. This article contributes to international debates on critical educational management by advancing an epistemological synthesis that integrates critique with constructive transformation.

Keywords: Educational Managerialism; Critical Paradigm; Epistemological, Governance

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, educational governance worldwide has undergone a profound transformation marked by the growing dominance of *educational managerialism*. This paradigm emphasizes efficiency, accountability, standardization, and performance measurement as central principles of educational management. Such a shift is closely associated with the global circulation of education policies and the increasing influence of neoliberal governance, which positions educational institutions as quasi-corporate organizations required to demonstrate measurable outcomes, auditability, and competitiveness (Ball, 2021; Rizvi & Lingard, 2020). Within this framework, education is increasingly framed as a technical system to be optimized, while its pedagogical, ethical, and emancipatory dimensions are progressively marginalized.

Recent state-of-the-art literature suggests that educational managerialism has evolved beyond an administrative approach into a dominant epistemological framework shaping how education is conceptualized, governed, and evaluated. Ball (2021) argues that regimes of performativity and accountability restructure power relations in education by disciplining institutions and educators through continuous monitoring and comparison. Similarly, Truscott and Khoo (2024) demonstrate that academic managerialism operates as a normalization mechanism that prioritizes compliance with performance indicators over critical reflection and professional autonomy. Lynch (2020) further conceptualizes managerialism as an organizational expression of neoliberalism, one that obscures ideological interests behind claims of efficiency and neutrality. Together, these studies indicate that managerialism is not merely a set of

management techniques but a paradigm that redefines the meaning and purpose of education itself.

Despite its contribution to administrative order and institutional governance, educational managerialism has been widely criticized for narrowing the substantive meaning of education. The dominance of instrumental rationality privileges what can be measured, audited, and standardized, while marginalizing reflective, dialogical, and context-sensitive educational practices (Giroux, 2020; Apple, 2022). Education is increasingly reduced to the production of human capital aligned with labor-market demands, rather than understood as a social practice aimed at human development, democratic participation, and critical consciousness. This shift raises fundamental questions about the epistemological assumptions underlying managerial approaches to educational management.

A central problem of educational managerialism lies in its claim to objectivity and value neutrality. Managerial knowledge is often presented as a universal and technical solution applicable across contexts, detached from ethical, political, and cultural considerations. However, critical social theory challenges this assumption by emphasizing that knowledge is always socially situated and shaped by power relations (Habermas, 2020; Kincheloe, 2021). In practice, performance-based governance and accountability mechanisms often reproduce structural inequalities, reinforce bureaucratic control, and limit participation by educators and local communities in decision-making. Consequently, managerialism risks functioning as a depoliticizing force that conceals ideological interests under the guise of technical rationality.

The urgency of critically examining educational managerialism has intensified in contemporary education systems characterized by expanded quality assurance mechanisms, accreditation regimes, and outcome-based evaluations. Across diverse national contexts, compliance with performance indicators has become a prerequisite for institutional legitimacy and public accountability. However, relatively little attention has been paid to the epistemological and ideological implications of these developments. Without sustained critical reflection, educational management risks becoming administratively efficient but pedagogically shallow and ethically problematic. This condition underscores the need for an alternative analytical framework that interrogates the assumptions of managerial knowledge while offering a more reflective orientation to educational governance.

Several recent studies have addressed educational managerialism from critical perspectives, though with notable limitations. Ball (2021) provides a compelling analysis of how performativity reshapes educators' subjectivities, but stops short of articulating an explicit epistemological alternative to managerial rationality. Truscott and Khoo (2024) link academic managerialism to critical theory, yet their focus remains largely on higher education practices rather than on the conceptual foundations of managerial knowledge itself. Rizvi and Lingard (2020), meanwhile, situate managerialism within the broader context of global education policy, offering valuable macro-level insights but limited engagement with the epistemological status of educational management as a field of knowledge.

Conversely, scholarship on critical paradigms in education has primarily concentrated on pedagogy and curriculum rather than on educational management. Giroux (2020) and Apple (2022) emphasize critical education as a form of resistance to neoliberalism, highlighting the role of pedagogy in fostering democratic agency and social justice. However, these analyses rarely extend to a systematic critique of managerial knowledge as an epistemological paradigm governing educational institutions. As a result, critical pedagogy and educational management are often treated as separate domains, leaving the epistemological foundations of managerialism insufficiently examined.

This review identifies a clear research gap: the lack of studies that explicitly position the critical paradigm as an *epistemological counterbalance* to educational managerialism. Existing research

tends to frame critical approaches as a total rejection or an oppositional stance toward managerial practices, rather than as a reflective and corrective framework that can engage with management without succumbing to instrumental rationality. Given that educational management cannot be eliminated from contemporary institutions, the challenge lies in rethinking its epistemological orientation rather than dismissing it altogether. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more nuanced and transformative understanding of educational governance.

The novelty of this study lies in reconceptualizing the critical paradigm not as an antithesis to managerialism, but as a reflective epistemological framework that exposes the value-laden and power-infused nature of managerial knowledge while enabling a dialogical synthesis. Through a critical literature review of recent scholarship from the past five years, this article examines educational managerialism as a social practice embedded in ideological and political contexts. This approach differs from prior studies by integrating critical theory with an explicit epistemological analysis of educational management, thereby offering a more coherent and comprehensive framework for critique.

Accordingly, this article aims to conceptually examine how the critical paradigm can function as an epistemological counterbalance to the dominance of educational managerialism in contemporary education. Specifically, it seeks to (1) interrogate the epistemological assumptions underlying managerial approaches to educational management, (2) analyze their ideological and practical implications, and (3) articulate the critical paradigm as a reflective framework that supports more humanistic, democratic, and socially just forms of educational governance. By doing so, this study contributes to international debates on critical educational management and advances a theoretical foundation for reorienting educational governance beyond efficiency alone toward ethical and emancipatory purposes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative critical literature review grounded in a critical epistemological approach. The choice of this design is informed by the study's primary objective: to examine educational managerialism not merely as a set of managerial practices, but as an epistemological paradigm embedded in specific assumptions about knowledge, rationality, and governance in education. Unlike systematic reviews that focus on aggregating empirical findings, a critical literature review is particularly suited to interrogating underlying theoretical assumptions, ideological orientations, and power relations that shape dominant paradigms (Brookfield, 2020; Kincheloe, 2021). The study is theoretically anchored in critical social theory, which views knowledge as socially constructed, value-laden, and historically situated. From this perspective, educational management is understood as a form of social practice that both reflects and reproduces broader political and economic structures. Accordingly, the methodology is designed to enable epistemological critique, rather than descriptive synthesis alone.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The data corpus for this study consists of peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published between 2020 and 2024, a timeframe selected to ensure conceptual relevance to current debates on educational governance, managerialism, and critical educational theory. Literature was retrieved from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, which are widely recognized for their comprehensive coverage of high-quality international scholarship. The search process employed keywords related to educational managerialism, performance-based governance, accountability regimes, neoliberal education,

and critical paradigms in education, enabling the identification of literature that engages with both managerial and critical perspectives.

To maintain analytical rigor and thematic coherence, the selection of literature was guided by explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Included sources were publications that directly address educational managerialism or related governance frameworks, such as performance management, accountability systems, and neoliberal policy orientations in education. Particular emphasis was placed on studies that engage explicitly with critical theory, epistemology, or the philosophy of education, as these perspectives are central to the study's analytical focus. Only peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books published within the last five years were considered, ensuring that the analysis reflects the most recent theoretical developments. Furthermore, selected works were required to demonstrate a clear theoretical or conceptual contribution, rather than merely reporting descriptive findings.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on technical management tools or administrative procedures without critical or theoretical reflection. Purely empirical studies lacking engagement with epistemological or conceptual questions were also omitted, as they did not align with the study's critical orientation. Publications outside the field of education were excluded to preserve disciplinary coherence. Through this selection process, approximately 30 core sources were identified and retained as the primary data corpus for in-depth critical analysis. This corpus provided a robust foundation for examining educational managerialism as an epistemological paradigm rather than a collection of isolated practices.

Analytical Framework: Critical Epistemological Analysis

To align the methodology with the study's epistemological contribution, data analysis was conducted using a critical epistemological framework informed by Habermasian critical theory and contemporary scholarship in critical education studies (Habermas, 2020; Giroux, 2020). This framework conceptualizes knowledge as socially constructed, historically situated, and inseparable from power relations. Within this perspective, managerial knowledge in education is understood not as neutral or purely technical, but as a form of social knowledge that constructs particular realities, legitimizes specific forms of authority, and shapes educational practices and governance arrangements.

The analytical process was iterative and reflexive, unfolding through four interconnected stages. First, epistemological deconstruction was employed to identify the dominant assumptions underlying educational managerialism, particularly those related to objectivity, instrumental rationality, and efficiency. This stage focused on how managerial discourse defines what counts as valid knowledge in education and marginalizes alternative forms of understanding. Second, ideological interrogation examined the alignment between managerial discourse and broader ideological formations, especially neoliberal governance frameworks that prioritize competition, performance measurement, and market-oriented rationalities. This stage sought to uncover the ideological interests embedded within ostensibly neutral managerial practices.

The third stage involved an analysis of power and governance, exploring how managerial paradigms structure power relations among policymakers, educational institutions, educators, and learners. Attention was given to how accountability mechanisms, standards, and evaluation systems function as technologies of control and regulation within educational systems. Finally, a critical reconstruction was undertaken to articulate the critical paradigm as an epistemological counterbalance to educational managerialism. Rather than rejecting management outright, this stage focused on reconstructing educational management as a reflective, democratic, and emancipatory practice oriented toward social justice and human development. Through these interconnected stages, the analytical framework enabled a systematic examination of educational managerialism while advancing a theoretically grounded alternative aligned with the study's critical epistemological aims.

Table 1. Epistemological Dimensions of Analysis

Analytical Dimension	Guiding Questions	Analytical Focus
Ontology	How is education conceptualized?	Education as a technical system vs. a social practice
Epistemology	What counts as valid knowledge?	Instrumental rationality vs. critical-reflective knowledge
Axiology	What values are prioritized?	Efficiency, control vs. justice, emancipation
Power Relations	Who governs and who complies?	Managerial control vs. participatory governance
Purpose of Education	What is education for?	Human capital production vs. human emancipation

This table operationalizes epistemological critique, making explicit the dimensions through which managerialism is analyzed and contrasted with the critical paradigm. The selected literature was analyzed using a thematic–critical coding strategy that combined thematic analysis with critical interpretation. Coding was conducted iteratively through close reading, memo-writing, and constant comparison across texts. Four core themes emerged inductively and were refined deductively through engagement with critical theory:

Table 2. Core Themes and Critical Categories

Theme	Description	Critical Lens
Instrumental Rationality	Emphasis on efficiency, metrics, and performance	Critique of means–ends logic
Neutrality Claims	Presentation of management as objective and technical	Exposure of value-laden knowledge
Managerial Power	Governance through standards and accountability	Analysis of domination and control
Emancipatory Potential	Possibilities for democratic and humanistic management	Critical reconstruction

This table demonstrates methodological transparency and shows how abstract epistemological claims are grounded in systematic thematic analysis.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In critical qualitative research, validity is not primarily understood in terms of replicability or statistical generalization, but rather in terms of theoretical coherence, reflexivity, and argumentative rigor (Brookfield, 2020). Consistent with this epistemological orientation, the study’s trustworthiness was enhanced through several interrelated strategies. First, theoretical triangulation was employed by engaging multiple strands of critical scholarship, including critical social theory, critical pedagogy, and critical policy studies, in order to avoid reliance on a single theoretical lens and to strengthen the depth of analysis. Second, the study adopted a reflexive analytical stance, explicitly acknowledging the normative and value-laden nature of critical inquiry. Rather than concealing this stance, reflexivity was treated as a methodological asset that enabled sustained interrogation of underlying assumptions and power relations embedded in managerial knowledge. Third, auditability was ensured through transparent documentation of data selection procedures, analytical stages, and interpretive criteria, enabling readers to follow the analysis’s logic and progression. Taken together, these strategies support the study’s credibility and trustworthiness while remaining consistent with its critical epistemological foundations. Rather than claiming neutrality, the study embraces critical reflexivity as a methodological strength that aligns with its commitment to uncovering the ideological and epistemological dimensions of educational managerialism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Educational Managerialism as an Epistemological Paradigm

The critical epistemological analysis of the selected literature reveals that educational managerialism operates not merely as a set of administrative practices but as an epistemological paradigm that shapes how educational reality is defined, governed, and evaluated. Across the reviewed sources, managerialism consistently frames education as a rational system oriented toward efficiency, predictability, and performance optimization. Knowledge within this paradigm is predominantly valued for its instrumental utility, with a focus on measurable outcomes, standardized indicators, and evidence-based management tools. This finding confirms that managerialism functions as a dominant mode of knowing in contemporary education, rather than as a neutral collection of management techniques. From an epistemological perspective, the literature demonstrates a strong reliance on instrumental rationality, in which educational processes are assessed primarily by their contribution to predefined goals. Such rationality assumes that educational value can be objectively captured through metrics and audits, marginalizing forms of knowledge that are relational, contextual, or normative. This aligns with critical scholarship arguing that managerial knowledge prioritizes control and predictability over interpretive understanding and ethical reflection. Consequently, education is increasingly rendered as a technical enterprise, rather than a complex social practice embedded in historical and cultural contexts.

Table 3. Epistemological Characteristics of Educational Managerialism

Epistemological Aspect	Dominant Managerial Assumption	Critical Interpretation
Nature of Knowledge	Objective, technical, measurable	Socially constructed and value-laden
Rationality	Instrumental, means–ends oriented	Narrow and reductionist
Evaluation	Performance indicators and metrics	Partial representation of educational value
Role of Theory	Instrument for efficiency	A tool for legitimization of control

This table translates abstract epistemological critique into explicit analytical categories, demonstrating how managerialism structures what counts as valid educational knowledge.

Ideological Alignment with Neoliberal Governance

The ideological interrogation stage of analysis indicates that educational managerialism is closely aligned with broader neoliberal governance frameworks. The literature consistently links managerial practices—such as accountability regimes, performance benchmarking, and competitive evaluation—to market-oriented logics that prioritize efficiency, competition, and individual responsibility. These practices are frequently presented as politically neutral solutions to educational improvement, yet critical analysis reveals their ideological grounding in neoliberal assumptions about governance and social organization. Within this ideological framework, educational institutions are repositioned as competitive entities, educators as performance-driven agents, and learners as units of human capital development. Such constructions obscure the political nature of educational decision-making by framing governance choices as technical necessities rather than contested social priorities. The findings corroborate critical policy analyses that view managerialism as a mechanism through which neoliberal ideology is normalized and institutionalized within education systems.

Table 4. Ideological Dimensions of Educational Managerialism

Managerial Discourse	Underlying Ideological Assumption	Critical Implication
Accountability	Individual responsibility	Shifts blame from structural conditions
Efficiency	Scarcity as given	Justifies resource reduction
Competition	Market superiority	Undermines collaboration and solidarity
Quality assurance	Universal standards	Marginalizes local contexts

This table supports ideological interrogation by making visible the political assumptions embedded within ostensibly technical managerial discourses.

Power Relations and Governance Effects

Analysis of power relations reveals that educational managerialism restructures governance through mechanisms of surveillance, standardization, and compliance. Accountability systems, evaluation frameworks, and performance audits function as governance technologies that regulate institutional behavior and professional conduct. Rather than enabling participatory decision-making, these mechanisms often centralize authority and constrain the autonomy of educators and institutions. The literature highlights how managerial power operates indirectly, shaping behavior through incentives, rankings, and reputational pressures rather than overt coercion. This form of governance produces a culture of compliance in which adherence to performance indicators becomes a prerequisite for legitimacy. From a critical epistemological standpoint, such power relations reinforce managerial knowledge as authoritative while delegitimizing alternative perspectives grounded in professional judgment, contextual knowledge, or ethical considerations.

Table 5. Governance Effects of Educational Managerialism

Governance Mechanism	Mode of Power	Effect on Educational Actors
Performance audits	Surveillance	Increased compliance and self-regulation
Standardization	Normalization	Reduced contextual responsiveness
Rankings	Competitive pressure	Instrumentalization of practice
Accountability reports	Bureaucratic control	Erosion of professional autonomy

This table links epistemological assumptions to concrete governance effects, thereby strengthening the analysis's explanatory power.

Critical Reconstruction: Paradigm as Epistemological Counterbalance

The final stage of analysis—critical reconstruction—articulates the critical paradigm as an epistemological counterbalance to educational managerialism. Rather than rejecting management outright, the literature suggests reorienting educational management toward reflective, dialogical, and emancipatory purposes. Within the critical paradigm, knowledge is understood as interpretive and normative, grounded in dialogue, ethical reasoning, and contextual understanding. From this perspective, management becomes a reflective practice concerned not only with efficiency but also with justice, democracy, and human development. This reconstruction challenges the dominance of instrumental rationality by foregrounding alternative forms of reasoning that emphasize participation, reflexivity, and social responsibility. Educational management is thus reframed as a socially embedded practice that must remain accountable to educational values rather than merely to performance indicators. This finding directly supports the study's central claim that the critical paradigm functions as a corrective and balancing epistemological framework, enabling engagement with managerial practices without capitulating to their reductionist logic.

Table 6. Educational Managerialism and Critical Paradigm: An Epistemological Contrast

Dimension	Educational Managerialism	Critical Paradigm
Knowledge	Technical and instrumental	Reflective and interpretive
Rationality	Efficiency-driven	Emancipatory and ethical
Governance	Control and compliance	Participation and dialogue
Purpose of Management	Performance optimization	Human and social development

This table synthesizes the results into a coherent epistemological comparison, explicitly demonstrating the study's core contribution.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine educational managerialism not merely as a collection of management practices but as a dominant epistemological paradigm shaping how education is understood, governed, and evaluated in contemporary contexts. The findings demonstrate that managerialism operates simultaneously at epistemological, ideological, and governance levels,

reinforcing instrumental rationality as the primary mode of knowing and acting in educational management. This multidimensional operation helps explain why managerial reforms persist despite sustained criticism: they are embedded not only in policy instruments, but also in assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge, legitimate authority, and educational success.

From an epistemological standpoint, the analysis confirms that educational managerialism privileges technical, measurable, and outcome-oriented knowledge, while marginalizing interpretive, ethical, and context-sensitive forms of understanding. This finding resonates with recent scholarship arguing that contemporary education systems increasingly equate quality with what is auditable and comparable, rather than with what is educationally meaningful (Amsler, 2021; Peters & Besley, 2022). Such epistemic narrowing limits educational management's capacity to respond to complex social realities, reducing education to a problem of optimization rather than a site of moral and political deliberation.

Ideologically, the results reinforce arguments that managerialism functions as a vehicle for neoliberal governance in education. Accountability regimes, performance indicators, and quality assurance mechanisms are frequently framed as neutral tools for improvement, yet they embody assumptions aligned with market rationality, competition, and individual responsibility (Connell, 2020; Saltman, 2021). By depoliticizing governance choices and presenting them as technical necessities, managerial discourse obscures the normative judgments embedded within policy decisions. This aligns with recent critical policy analyses that identify managerialism as a key mechanism through which neoliberal ideology is normalized within educational institutions (Means, 2022; Robertson & Komljenovic, 2023).

The analysis of power relations further illustrates how managerial epistemology reshapes governance structures in subtle yet pervasive ways. Rather than relying on direct coercion, managerial power operates through standards, rankings, and evaluation frameworks that encourage self-regulation and compliance. Educators and institutions internalize performance expectations, often prioritizing measurable outcomes over pedagogical judgment or ethical reflection (Wilkins & Olmedo, 2021; Courtney & McGinity, 2022). This mode of governance not only constrains professional autonomy but also reinforces managerial knowledge as authoritative, rendering alternative perspectives less legitimate within decision-making processes.

Against this backdrop, the critical reconstruction advanced in this study positions the critical paradigm as an epistemological counterbalance to educational managerialism. Importantly, the findings challenge binary framings that oppose critical approaches to management altogether. Instead, they suggest that critical theory offers conceptual resources for reorienting educational management toward reflective, dialogical, and emancipatory purposes. Recent studies on democratic educational leadership and critical management support this view, emphasizing that management can function as a facilitative rather than controlling practice when grounded in ethical reasoning and participatory governance (Gunter, 2020; Torrance & Forde, 2021).

By framing the critical paradigm as a counterbalance rather than a rejection, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the future of educational governance. It aligns with emerging scholarship advocating for "critical professionalism" and "ethical accountability," which seek to reconcile organizational coordination with democratic values and social justice commitments (Noordegraaf, 2021; Eacott & Salter, 2022). In this sense, the study extends existing critiques of managerialism by offering an epistemological lens that integrates critique with the possibility of constructive transformation.

Despite its conceptual contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a critical literature review, the analysis is necessarily interpretive and theoretical. While this approach is appropriate for epistemological inquiry, it does not provide empirical evidence on how educational actors experience or resist managerialism in specific

institutional contexts. Consequently, the findings should be understood as analytically generative rather than empirically generalizable. Second, the literature corpus, although carefully selected, is shaped by the availability and visibility of English-language publications indexed in major academic databases. This may limit the inclusion of critical perspectives emerging from non-Anglophone contexts, where educational managerialism may take different forms or be contested through alternative intellectual traditions (Stein & Andreotti, 2022). Future studies could expand the scope to include multilingual and regionally grounded scholarship to enrich the analysis. Third, the study primarily focuses on the epistemological dimensions of managerialism at the conceptual level. While this focus is deliberate, it necessarily limits engagement with micro-level practices of leadership, administration, and classroom governance. A more comprehensive understanding of managerialism would benefit from connecting epistemological critique with detailed empirical accounts of educational practice.

Building on these limitations, future research could empirically examine how critical epistemological perspectives are enacted, negotiated, or resisted within educational institutions. Qualitative studies involving school leaders, teachers, and policymakers could explore how managerial rationalities shape everyday decision-making and how alternative forms of knowledge are mobilized in practice (Thomson, 2020; O'Flynn & Petersen, 2023). Research would help bridge the gap between epistemological critique and lived educational realities.

Further studies might also investigate the potential of critical paradigms to inform concrete models of educational leadership and governance. Comparative research across national contexts could illuminate how critical approaches interact with different policy regimes and institutional cultures, thereby refining the applicability of epistemological counterbalancing in diverse settings (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2021). From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that educational leaders and policymakers should cultivate reflexive capacities within management practices. Rather than uncritically adopting performance metrics and accountability tools, decision-makers should engage in ongoing ethical and epistemological reflection on how such instruments shape educational purposes and power relations. Professional development programs that foreground critical reflection, democratic participation, and contextual judgment could serve as practical entry points for translating critical epistemological insights into governance practice (Keddie, 2023; Blackmore, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that educational managerialism should be understood not merely as a set of administrative techniques but as a dominant epistemological paradigm that shapes how education is conceptualized, governed, and evaluated in contemporary contexts. Through a critical epistemological literature review, the analysis reveals that managerialism is grounded in instrumental rationality and claims of value neutrality that privilege efficiency, performance measurement, and standardization. These assumptions function to legitimize specific forms of governance and power relations, often marginalizing ethical deliberation, contextual knowledge, and democratic participation in educational decision-making. The findings confirm that the uncritical dominance of managerial epistemology risks narrowing the purposes of education and reducing its transformative potential.

By positioning the critical paradigm as an epistemological counterbalance rather than a wholesale rejection of educational management, this study offers a nuanced theoretical contribution to debates on educational governance. The critical paradigm enables a reflective reorientation of management practices toward humanistic, democratic, and socially oriented aims, while acknowledging the organizational realities of contemporary education systems. This reconceptualization advances critical scholarship by bridging the divide between management and critical theory, and it provides a foundation for future research and practice that aligns educational governance with ethical responsibility and emancipatory educational purposes.

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