

Celebrating legacy, envisioning the future: A report on ASOCOPI's 60th Conference

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In early October 2025, I had the opportunity to attend and present at the 60th National and 6th International Conference of the *Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés* (ASOCOPI), held at the premises of the *Universidad del Magdalena*, located in sunny Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast. The conference's central theme, *Linguistic Empowerment: Celebrating Our Legacy, Envisioning Our Future*, was selected to commemorate the organization's 60th anniversary and to highlight the importance of reflecting on its trajectory while charting future directions for English language teaching (ELT) in the country. The academic event, attended by about 500 professionals and sponsored by the YMCA and the British Council, among others, proved to be a dynamic forum for sharing research, strengthening professional networks, and exploring emerging approaches to language teaching and learning.

The role of research in ELT in Colombia was specifically addressed during the *HOW* Journal panel. *HOW: A Colombian Journal for English-language Teachers* is ASOCOPI's academic journal, which began as a newsletter in 1966—a year after the association was founded—and became a peer-reviewed publication in 1996. During the session, a special issue commemorating the association's 60th anniversary was launched. Professors Castañeda Trujillo, Martínez Luengas, and Samacá Bohórquez presented summaries of their articles, which traced the most significant topics discussed in each decade of the journal's history. Several teachers in the audience expressed their concern that the profession is at times influenced by short-lived tendencies and emphasized the need to return to its linguistic foundations and to a renewed focus on the development of the macro abilities underlying language teaching.

Key emerging trends in the field were highlighted in the plenary sessions, which set the tone of the event and framed the central themes explored throughout. Three, in particular, stood out as especially compelling and will be briefly summarized. Drawing on Walsh's (2009) concept of *critical interculturality*, professor Astrid Nuñez-Pardo (2025) presented a comprehensive account of her localized research on how teachers engage with decolonial criteria in materials development. Her findings demonstrate that, when appropriately fostered, ELT does not occur in isolation but constitutes a socially and politically grounded endeavor. In a similar vein, professor Verónico N. Tarrayo (2025) from the University of Santo Tomás in the Philippines, presented an autoethnographic exploration of teacher agency for social justice. Through a perceptive retelling of their personal experience as an asexual person navigating the structural confines of a Catholic university, Tarrayo passionately urged the audience to become genuine agents of change and to queer the English language classroom in pursuit of more equitable and inclusive environments. They expanded on this vision in a concurrent session co-authored with Colombian professors.

The plenary session by José Vicente Abad Olaya (2025) captured my full attention, providing valuable insights from the Colombian experience that may inform the somewhat unpredictable Argentine context. Drawing on his role coordinating the

activities of a *semillero de investigación*, Abad Olaya discussed the development of collaborative literacies within inquiry-based learning communities. *Semilleros de investigación* are academic spaces designed to foster a research culture among undergraduate and graduate students while providing training in research practice. In Colombia, the movement began at the University of Antioquia, in Medellín, in 1996 as an extracurricular initiative, and since 2002, Colciencias (the Colombian equivalent of CONICET) has provided financial support to *semilleros*, mainly in regions with lower levels of research capacity development. Specifically, Abad-Olaya emphasized the importance of collaborative presenting and publishing for early-career teacher-researchers, especially given the demanding constraints of typically individualistic academic cultures.

The strong focus on research in ELT was evident in several concurrent sessions led by young teachers eager to share the outcomes of their studies and classroom projects. The concurrent sessions highlighted the diversity and complexity of current concerns in the field, with most presentations addressing topics such as translanguaging, multiliteracies and critical literacies, teaching in rural areas or to students whose first language is not Spanish, teacher identity and agency, and teaching for social justice. Minor topics covered by presenters included the teaching of literature and intonation, as well as an emerging interest in Artificial Intelligence in ELT. I truly enjoyed Quintero-Peña's (2025) exploration of teachers' professional identities through critical discourse analysis and Young's (2025) exhaustive description of teaching English to Mayan Mam English language learners in Guatemala. There were also colloquia on equity in language education, linguistic citizenship and democratic participation, and cultural plurality and language empowerment—key dimensions identified by the association when defining the conference's central theme. I found the critical and insightful colloquium on English language teacher education in Latin America, focusing primarily on Brazil and Colombia (Jordao et al., 2025), especially engaging, particularly for its discussion of the challenges involved in delinking it from modernity and coloniality. All concurrent sessions were evaluated by attendees through a brief survey accessible via QR code, and feedback was sent to presenters within five days of the conference's conclusion, an innovation I believe local ELT academic meetings should emulate.

With graduate programs in Applied Linguistics firmly established across the country, the success of ASOCOPI's 60th Conference was virtually guaranteed. The conference was superbly organized, and the social events—including a vibrant celebration of the association's anniversary, with *vallenato* and other *costeño* rhythms performed by the hosting university's band—had almost everyone partying and dancing. Moreover, Jhonatan Vásquez-Guarnizo, the young and energetic president of ASOCOPI, played an outstanding role and seemed to be everywhere throughout the event. Equally lively was the sharing of the conference program and its live coverage on Instagram, though as an almost senior educator, I missed the traditional bookstands, now replaced by those of organizations primarily promoting “experiences”.

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