

## **“ASOCOPI is You, Me, and All of Us”: Words from the President of ASOCOPI**

### **“ASOCOPI eres tú, yo, y todos nosotros”: Palabras del Presidente de ASOCOPI**

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I genuinely want to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the current National Board of Directors of the Colombian Association of English-language Teachers (ASOCOPI), our deepest gratitude to former President, Professor *Claudia María Uribe-Hoyos*. Her commitment, dedication, and most importantly, her warm and thoughtful way of uniting the English Language Teaching (ELT) community have inspired us to stay true to the values that ASOCOPI has safeguarded throughout its history.

Indeed, this is the perfect moment to recognize her leadership in hosting ASOCOPI's two most impactful events: the 58<sup>th</sup> National & 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference: “*From the Global South: Our Roots, Perspectives and Transformations*” held at Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, in 2023; and the 59<sup>th</sup> National & 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference and 4<sup>th</sup> LAALTA (Latin American Language Testing Association): “*Democracy and Language Education: Teaching and Assessing for Social Justice*” held at Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, in 2024. We also recognize that these achievements would not have been possible without the support and dedication of the former National Board of Directors. Thus, we are truly thankful to *Kaithie Ramírez Correa*, *Adriana Sánchez Beltrán*, and *Clara Lozano Espejo*, who now hold the distinction of *Honorary Associates* in recognition of their outstanding commitment, tireless work, and valuable contributions over the past years.

With this in mind, it is worth looking back at ASOCOPI's long-standing history and its impact on the ELT community in Colombia. For six decades, ASOCOPI has brought together teachers, researchers, and students who believe in the power of communities of practice and the transformative potential of language education. On October 14–16, 1965, the first seminar for university English-language teachers was held at the Universidad Industrial de Santander in Bucaramanga, Santander, bringing together 38 participants from 17 universities and 4 academic organizations. This event is recognized as the founding moment of ASOCOPI, as it reflected a collective vision of establishing a non-profit association committed to strengthening ELT in Colombia. This moment is marked as the beginning of ASOCOPI, with Professor Claire de Silva (may she rest in peace) as ASOCOPI's first president. In recognition of her legacy, the *Clare de Silva Award* was created in 1990 to honor individuals and/or institutions that have devoted themselves to the growth and enrichment of the Association. Still today, this distinction continues to symbolize excellence, service, and dedication within our community.

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Throughout these sixty years of collective effort, ASOCOPI has been guided by twenty-eight (28) presidents whose leadership has shaped its evolution and strengthened its mission: *Claire de Silva* (1966-1969), *Leland Northam* (1970-1971, 1991-1992), *Roberto Cabrera* (1972), *Ma. Auxiliadora Consuegra* (1973), *Víctor Cruz* (1974), *Hugo Acosta* (1975-1976), *Jerónimo Gil Otalora* (1977, 1985-1990), *Moisés Mendoza* (1978), *Filippo Testa* (1979), *Clotilde Duarte* (1980), *Ana Mercedes Roldán* (1981), *Mélida Blanco* (1982), *Gloria Ma. Blanco* (1983-1984), *Tina M. Castillo* (1993-1994), *Ricardo Romero-Medina* (1995, 2003-2005), *Luz Ángela Umaña* (1996),

Irene Reyes (1997-1998), JoEllen Simpson (1999), Alba Lucía Calad Coral (2000-2002), Rigoberto Castillo (2006), Melba Lúbia Cárdenas-Beltrán (2007-2010), Álvaro Hernán Quintero-Polo (2011-2012), Carmen Helena Guerrero-Nieto (2013-2016), Harold Castañeda-Peña (2017-2018), Carlo Granados Beltrán (2019-2020), Jairo Enrique Castañeda-Trujillo (2021-2022), Claudia María Uribe-Hoyos (2023-2024), and myself Jhonatan Vásquez-Guarnizo (2025-2026). As the 28<sup>th</sup> President of ASOCOPI, I must admit that I am deeply honored to be part of this legacy and fully committed to cultivating, supporting, and treasuring the ELT profession across the country.

This Special Issue of *HOW Journal* also comes at a particularly meaningful time, as it marks a historic moment: the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ASOCOPI. In this regard, I affirm that this is also a meaningful opportunity to recognize the trajectory of ASOCOPI’s Journal, which began as a newsletter in 1966, one year after ASOCOPI was founded. It stopped being published in 1986 but was relaunched as a peer-reviewed academic journal in 1996. In this sense, *HOW Journal* joins ASOCOPI’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary by marking 59 years since its first publication and 29 years since the release of Volume 1, Number 1. As such, this Special Issue is an invitation to pause, reflect on, and show the legacy, struggles, transformations, and ongoing commitments that have shaped ASOCOPI and its contributions to ELT in Colombia. In this spirit, I warmly invite you to explore the articles in this Special Issue as each one offers a unique perspective on the past, present, and future of ELT in our teaching contexts.

It is essential to recall that ASOCOPI was born not from policy but from praxis. This non-profit association emerged from the real needs of classroom educators and teachers, and their desire to improve, connect, and learn from each other. In the sixty years since its foundation, ASOCOPI has grown into the most representative and enduring professional association for English-language teachers in Colombia. Its sustained presence has been made possible by the tireless work of generations of teachers, researchers, editors, students, interns, and volunteers who have nurtured it through different political, economic, educational, and sociocultural circumstances.

Additionally, we are thrilled to share that ASOCOPI underwent a *Statutory Reform* this year, through which six areas of action were approved by the General Assembly to promote inclusive participation and equitable access to knowledges. These areas are: a) Education; b) Culture; c) Science, Technology, and Innovation; d) Social Development; e) Support for Nonprofit Organizations; and f) Support for Educational Initiatives and Entrepreneurship.

Regarding *Education*, ASOCOPI has worked tirelessly not only to host its Annual Conference every October at a different university across the country, but also to organize monthly webinars as well as seminars, workshops, and diploma courses offered throughout the year, depending on demand. All of these activities have provided ongoing opportunities for professional development, reflective dialogue, and engagement with current trends, challenges, and innovations in the field of ELT. Besides, these activities have been developed

not only to strengthen pedagogical practices but also to foster a sense of belonging among the ELT community, encourage collaborative learning, and support the continuous improvement of ELT in diverse educational contexts across Colombia.

In relation to *Science, Technology and Innovation*, ASOCOPI supports *Special Interest Groups* (SIGs), which operate at regional or national levels and collaborate to promote, implement, and evaluate academic projects in areas such as English for specific purposes, teacher education, English for young learners, technology integration, materials development, applied linguistics, translation, curriculum design, and textbook evaluation, among others. Similarly, ASOCOPI holds the *HOW Journal*, a biannual, free, open-access publication, which continues offering a platform for all voices, both national and international, in the field of ELT, including pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, educators, and researchers. This peer-reviewed academic journal has co-constructed an academic community committed to sharing the results of educational and research experiences that contribute to the understanding of ELT practices and foundations.

With respect to *Support for Enterprises*, ASOCOPI offers all active associates a free space in the exhibition area to promote and showcase their entrepreneurial initiatives during the 60<sup>th</sup> Annual and 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference, at Universidad del Magdalena in Santa Marta. This initiative not only recognizes the importance of educational entrepreneurship within the ELT community but also gives visibility to teacher-led projects, fosters networking, and promotes entrepreneurial efforts that contribute to the strengthening of ASOCOPI's mission.

As part of its ongoing efforts in the areas of *Culture, Social Development*, and *Support for Educational Initiatives and Entrepreneurship*, the current National Board of Directors actively works to strengthen these areas through concrete actions and strategic planning. We have knocked on several doors to establish alliances, seek funding, and identify opportunities that enable us to design and implement initiatives aligned with these three areas of action.

Symbolically and historically, the ASOCOPI Annual Conference has become much more than an academic event. It is a landmark in the professional calendar for the ELT community in Colombia and abroad. Year after year, it provides a democratic space where diverse voices, emerging and experienced, rural and urban, public and private, national and international, come together to share knowledges, challenge assumptions, and reimagine new futures for ELT.

This 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary invites us to see the Association not as a static organization, but as a living proof that our differences do not divide us, they unite us instead. ASOCOPI is not only the National Board of Directors and the Administrative Manager, but it is represented through all of us: former presidents, honorary associates, evaluators' committee, editor and assistant of *HOW Journal*, volunteers, interns, active associates, researchers, educators, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers. Thus, as the current President of ASOCOPI

(2025–2026), I am deeply honored to have the responsibility of leading ASOCOPI during this historic moment.

I understand this role not as a position of authority, but as a commitment to listening, learning, unlearning, relearning, and co-constructing with others. We are not celebrating the mere passage of time, but the ethical, intellectual, and affective labor of the many who have dedicated their time *ad honorem*. I view ASOCOPI as a space of belonging, resistance, and hope. I believe that ASOCOPI must reflect the multiple diversities of ELT in Colombia—not geographically speaking, but in terms of teaching contexts, social identities, and epistemologies. For this reason, we are also deeply committed to creating more opportunities for rural teachers, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian educators, and those working in underfunded or marginalized areas to participate actively in our events and publications. This is not just a matter of inclusion, but of epistemic justice.

I also consider it important to acknowledge *Hewlett-Packard Colombia*, *World YMCA*, and *YMCA Colombia* for generously sponsoring this Special Issue. This action certainly marks a valuable precedent as it helps expand access to the voices and reflections shared by our ELT community. Both ASOCOPI and *HOW Journal* are deeply grateful for their contribution to making the promotion of professional development more visible, fostering academic dialogue, and strengthening teacher networks across the country. We truly hope to continue working hand in hand to unite and empower the ELT community in Colombia.

I would like to finish by sincerely thanking *Harold Joban Ortigón Reyes*, who designed the cover of this *HOW Journal's* Special Issue. I am also deeply grateful to the professors from the current National Board of Directors who have accompanied me on this journey: *Andrés Felipe Micán-Castiblanco*, Vice-President; *Jonathan Delgado-Ochoa*, Secretary; and *Andrea Cardona-Márquez*, Treasurer. My thanks also go to *Miryán Cristina Vera Peña*, ASOCOPI's Administrative Manager; Professor *Edgar Lucero-Babatina*, *HOW Journal's* Editor; and *José David Largo-Rodríguez*, *HOW Journal's* Assistant to the Editor. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank Professor *Mairon Felipe Tobar-Gómez*, my boyfriend. I would not be where I am today without his unconditional support.

The first seminar for university English teachers to which all accredited Colombian universities were invited to send delegates was held at the Universidad Industrial de Santander in Bucaramanga October 14-16, 1965, with the help, support, and cooperation of Dr. Joaquin Piñeros, Dr. Thomas Case, Dr. Roy Cherrier, Dr. Vladimir Honsa, and Dr. John Pettit of the Fulbright Commission, and Dr. Robert Amerson and Dr. Howard Lusk of the American Embassy. There were 38 participants in the seminar, representing 17 universities and 4 university-connected organizations. Regrets were received from five universities who were not able to send delegates.

The purpose of the seminar was to bring together English professors and program administrators from all the Colombian universities in order to give them an opportunity to establish personal and professional relationships with their counterparts in other universities, and thus to air and exchange ideas regarding the many and varied aspects of teaching English to university students in this country. This was accomplished through a series of discussion group sessions in the seminar program and in the course of the social activities that accompanied the seminar.

Apart from establishing ties among the English departments of the different universities and defining and attempting to find solutions for the problems common to all English programs, another important outcome of this meeting was the desire expressed on the part of the participants to continue this type of activity and to form a professional association. From this aspiration came the resolution to form the Association of University Professors of English (Asociación Universitaria de Profesores de Inglés) and the election of a committee to elaborate the constitution and by-laws of the organization. A meeting was proposed for March 1966 to formally establish the organization.

The merit of this seminar as a first step towards the development and continuation of professional ties among the English professors