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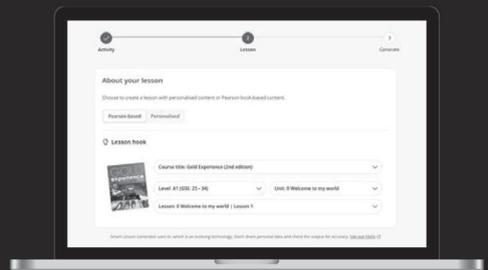
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The Role of *HOW* In Giving Visibility to English Teachers' Knowledge

El papel de *HOW* en visibilizar el conocimiento de los profesores de inglés

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Abstract

The English language teaching community in Colombia has witnessed the emergence and consolidation of academic or scientific journals edited in the country to disseminate the results of teachers' work. Although their efforts are generally valued, we do not have many studies concerning the life and implications of what is being published in those journals. This article aims to examine the role that the *HOW* journal, led by the Colombian Association of Teachers of English (ASOCOPI), has had in making visible the knowledge produced by teachers of English. Following the tenets of narrative inquiry, we present an account of the path of the journal in such an attempt. To do so, we have examined documentary evidence that is part of *HOW* editorial processes and the history of the journal, as portrayed in the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of ASOCOPI and the records of the past ten years. We identify achievements in the editing process as well as in the inclusion of different voices and agendas along the journal's trajectory. Finally, we highlight some opportunities to move forward as well as challenges we may face to ensure ASOCOPI's journal sustainability and upgrade in national and international scenarios.

Keywords: publishing teachers' work, teacher communities, *HOW* journal, teacher researcher, teacher knowledge

Resumen

La comunidad de la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia ha sido testigo del surgimiento y consolidación de revistas académicas o científicas editadas en el país, con el propósito de difundir los resultados del trabajo de los docentes. Aunque generalmente se valoran sus esfuerzos, no contamos con muchos estudios sobre la vida y las implicaciones de lo que se publica en ellas. El objetivo de este artículo es examinar el papel que ha tenido la revista *HOW*, liderada por la Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés (ASOCOPI), en la visibilización del conocimiento producido por los docentes de inglés. Con base en los principios de la investigación narrativa, presentamos un relato del camino recorrido por la revista. Para ello, hemos examinado evidencias documentales que hacen parte de los procesos editoriales de *HOW* y de la historia de la revista, tal como se reseña en la celebración del sexagésimo aniversario de ASOCOPI y en los registros de los últimos diez años. Identificamos logros en el proceso editorial, así como en la inclusión de diferentes voces y agendas durante la vida de la revista. Finalmente, destacamos algunas oportunidades para avanzar, así como los desafíos que podríamos enfrentar para garantizar la sostenibilidad de la revista de ASOCOPI y su proyección en escenarios nacionales e internacionales.

Palabras clave: publicación del trabajo de los docentes, comunidades docentes, revista *HOW*, docente investigador, conocimiento docente

Introduction

"...now that the "somehow distant future" of the past has become our present, and the humble printed bulletin is now a journal read around the world thanks to technology, one wonders at the imperishable nature of human endeavors and at how common objectives survive, intact, throughout the changing times. We are just receiving the torch from our forerunners" (Cárdenas, 2016, p. 40)

We would like to begin this article with a quote from the article that examined the academic trajectory of the HOW journal (hereafter HOW) during the Colombian Association of English Teachers' (hereafter ASOCOPI) 50th anniversary. Now that "the past has become our future," we celebrate another decade of the continuous growth of the ELT (English Language Teaching) community in Colombia by exploring HOW's role in highlighting English teachers' knowledge over the past 10 years. As we "receive the torch from our forerunners" (Cárdenas, 2016, p. 40), we advocate for the ongoing participation and active contribution of Colombian teachers in shaping an ELT field made in Colombia. We believe that scientific journals published in Colombia—both edited and published—serve as promoters of locally grounded and international research agendas, as well as ways of knowing and voicing alternative perspectives, with HOW being one such example.

For over six decades, ASOCOPI has sought to contribute to strengthening the academic community of English teachers in the country. The joint efforts of teachers, teacher-educators, pre-service teachers, and novice teacher-researchers have helped to position ASOCOPI as a valuable community for teacher education in Colombia. Since its foundation in 1965, the association has regarded the dissemination of teachers' research agendas, pedagogical innovations, and reflective practices as avenues for consolidating a local ELT community.

While we, as such a community, have a myriad of options to get acquainted with knowledge that has shaped the canons of our profession and their development, we cannot deny the preeminent role scientific or academic journals play over other kinds of publications nowadays. Journals have become sources of information for scientific and academic communities, and in Colombia, they are mainly edited by universities. This makes *HOW* unique. Without the infrastructure similar publications have, *HOW* has continued its course of action in ELT. Even in the face of difficulty or with little or no financial support, the journal is inspired by its vision:

HOW is a biannual publication led by ASOCOPI, the Colombian Association of Teachers of English. It is a journal by and for teachers of English who wish to share outcomes of educational and research experiences intended to add understanding to English language teaching practices. Therefore, the journal falls within the field of education and, specifically, the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language. (<https://www.howjournalcolombia.org/index.php/how/index>)

In the same vein, other Colombian journals have worked in shaping the field of ELT. In 2023, ASOCOPI and *HOW* welcomed Miryan Vera Peña and Edgar Lucero's initiative to create the Colombian Network of Language Journals that "looks to hold collaborative structures for continuous improvement" (Lucero & Vera Peña, 2024, p. 8). This platform emerged with the purpose of sharing good practices, joining efforts to strengthen the publication and dissemination processes, and promoting a fruitful dialogue among editors and assistants to the journals. Although individual and joined efforts are generally valued, we do not have many studies concerning the life and implications of what is being published in those journals.

Aware of the significance of ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, we decided to engage in the analysis of *HOW*'s milestones, with special attention to the past ten years, a period that has been characterized by changes in national and international policies regarding the evaluation systems of academic or scientific journals. These, in turn, have affected the journals edited in Colombia, as well as the role they play in different communities. Thus, we examine how knowledge published in our journal has become more visible for capturing a wider audience of authors and readers.

We depart from extending a comparative analysis of the results from the article by Cárdenas (2016), which explored the evolution of *HOW* from its beginnings, the authors' profile and their preferred themes and concerns throughout the journal's history. We shed light on the most recent interests and authors' perspectives during the last decade, while contributing to the historical review of the journal and its impact in fostering academic dialogue between the periphery and the center. Similarly, through a narrative lens, we explore the challenges the journal faced in 2015 in comparison with the existing reality of the journal amidst ranking pressures and the pervasiveness of metric systems. Finally, we discuss the role that *HOW* has played as a steering force to build and strengthen academic communities, the trends and future directions of the journal, the profile of the articles in this special issue in the framework of ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, and our advocacy for the strengthening of the journal from the larger audience and academic community.

What We See Now: Trends and Challenges in *HOW* from 2015 to 2025

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The emergence and consolidation of academic or scientific journals edited in the country have contributed to the dissemination of teacher knowledge. Within this panorama, *HOW* has sought to make visible the emergent research and pedagogical agendas of Colombian teachers while enriching the academic dialogue with the international milieu. In ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, we celebrate the contributions of the association to the ELT in Colombia, examine the last decade's work of *HOW*, and revisit the journal's aspirations and its responses to the emerging demands and pressures in publishing while advocating for the growing

participation of Colombian scholars in the academic dialogue concerning ELT. Table 1 depicts the salient events that have shaped its life.

Table 1. Salient Events During the 60 Years of HOW

Name of the Publication	Year	Features and Key Events
<i>HOW</i> bulletin	1965	<i>HOW</i> was created.
<i>Boletín Académico-Informativo</i>	1977 to 1979	The name was changed.
<i>HOW: English Teaching Magazine (Number 33)</i>	October-December, 1979	The bulletin was transformed into a journal.
	1984	The International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) was assigned to <i>HOW</i> .
	1986-1996	The publication was suspended.
<i>HOW: A Colombian Journal for English</i>	1997	The journal was reborn thanks to the leadership of Professor Edmundo Mora and the sponsorship of Universidad de Nariño. The name was changed to <i>HOW: A Colombian Journal for English</i> . Editorial policies were introduced to make it more scientific and ensure quality.
<i>HOW: A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English</i>	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ASOCOPI decided to take full charge of the edition and publication of the journal. - The journal maintained the series started at Universidad de Nariño, with a minor change in the title. - The <i>PROFILE</i> journal, edited at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, provided academic support, helped <i>HOW</i> to incorporate international publication policies, and accompanied it in complying with international standards for scientific journals. - The current format was adopted. - Consolidation of editorial committees and peer-review processes.
	2009	<i>HOW</i> was included for the first time in the National Bibliographical Index, Publindex, and classified in Category C.

Name of the Publication	Year	Features and Key Events
<i>HOW: A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English</i>	2010	The current three sections of the journal were defined: Research Reports, Reports on Pedagogical Experiences, and Reflections and Revision of Themes.
	2012	<i>HOW</i> was awarded a higher classification: Category B in the National Bibliographical Index, Publindex.
	2014	The journal changed its periodicity and became a biannual publication.
<i>HOW</i>	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From the first issue of 2015 (Volume 22, Number 1), the journal's title returned to its origins. - The publication has maintained its periodicity under the leadership of university scholars who have voluntarily contributed to maintaining its standards.

HOW, as well as other ELT journals edited in peripheral countries like Colombia, has faced challenges because of the adoption of national policies that govern the classification system and the prestige gained by the ones produced in the center, i.e., anglophone countries from the West and with strong economies or hegemonic territories. Additionally, the assumption that the quality of the journals depends on the citations received, the prestige of the publishing houses, or the institutions in charge of them presents a more difficult situation for a journal that depends upon the voluntary work of editors, assistants, and reviewers, and the limited budget ASOCOPI can invest in sustaining it. Despite those drawbacks, in ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, we celebrate the contributions of the association to the ELT in Colombia and examine the last decade's work of *HOW* for the growing participation of Colombian scholars in the academic dialogue concerning ELT.

We argue that Colombian edited journals such as *HOW* have played a significant role in shaping the ELT field. The prolific research production shown by Colombian journals, whose focus is on foreign language teaching and learning, has constructed Colombian ELT as a valid interlocutor in the global arena while broadening its horizons to the larger academic landscape. Journals such as *HOW* have been the hub for several local and international authors to share their research and pedagogical agendas as an opportunity to establish a

common dialogue between the center and the periphery. Publishing has also become a political act where Colombian scholars, teacher-educators, teachers, pre-service teachers, and novice teacher-researchers alike position themselves as transformative intellectuals to contest, challenge, and digress imposed instrumentalized perspectives of themselves as passive technicians (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) while decolonizing knowledge (Cárdenas, 2021). Thus, *HOW* has become a platform for teachers' voices to be heard, published, and read. This vision has been grounded in the realities of the academic community while striving for visibility, editorial quality, and national relevance.

For the past ten years, *HOW* has continued its mission to share educational and research experiences without interruption in the field of ELT from teachers, teacher-educators, pre-service teachers, and novice teacher-researchers. Throughout time, editors in the journal have invited the community to think of *HOW* as a *space of enunciation* rather than simply as a publication (Cárdenas, 2016, 2021; Lucero & Castañeda, 2021). Since then, and despite the growing external pressures to abide by ranking and metrics, the journal has served as the platform for about 270 authors to share their voices, concerning their research agendas, pedagogical innovations, and reflections on the field.

Since 2015, *HOW* has been facing different challenges for its publication in times of ranking and indexation pressures. Coupled with the lack of sponsorship and academic support from reviewers, who are often overwhelmed by workload, one of the most pressing concerns has been the pressure of academic rankings. The increasing influence of international indexation systems aligned with the largest companies for the dissemination of knowledge (e.g., Elsevier, Thomson Reuters, Web of Science) in the national policies and ranking indexes, has created a dual expectation: on the one hand, *HOW* is expected to maintain its mission to democratize and make knowledge accessible to the academic community; on the other hand, the journal must comply with standards that often prioritize and value international impact factors over local impact. The classification carried out in 2017 harmed the ranking of several publications; many of them were categorized at a lower level, and others were left out.

As described by Cárdenas (2022), after debates and tensions due to changes in the policies, in 2017 and 2018, new calls were issued by Colciencias (now Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation) to classify journals under new rules that did not pay much attention to requests from local communities. No substantial changes were made concerning what had been defined in the 2016 national journal classification model, and the results again harmed the position of university journals; *HOW* was not the exception. The number of classified journals was reduced, as shown in Table 2, and since 2000, there has not been an update in policies or in the national rank.

Table 2. Comparison of Journals Indexed in Publindex by Category, in 2014, 2017, 2018, and 2020

Category	Number of journals classified in 2014	Number of journals classified in 2017	Number of journals classified in 2018	Number of journals classified in 2020
A1	38	1	3	4
A2	137	12	10	19
B	134	110	119	120
C	263	123	143	134
Total	562	246 (out of 583 journals endorsed by publishing institutions)	275 (out of 540 journals endorsed by publishing institutions)	277 (out of 519 journals endorsed by publishing institutions)

Note: The table was done considering results in Cárdenas (2022, p. 51) and Minciencias (<https://minciencias.gov.co/la-ciencia-en-cifras/publindex/estadisticas-2017> ; <https://minciencias.gov.co/convocatorias/fortalecimiento-capacidades-para-la-generacion-conocimiento/convocatoria-para>).

We observed a decrease in the number of classified publications; also, many journals dropped in category. *HOW* fell from category B to C in 2017, although returning to category B in 2021. For most of the journals, the outlook did not change significantly in 2018. Although a considerable portion of the scientific community expressed dissatisfaction with the new methodology, others believed the main interest was to curb the economic impact that high publication rates by public university faculty members have on the budget, since these publications result in salary increases. For its part, MinCiencias argued that the survival of so many journals with few researchers and few citations could not be ensured, since, according to its policy, academic impact is determined by citations. Still now, Colombian journals wait for the criteria that will rule their evaluation and classification. In this panorama, *HOW* has maintained its presence and has not given up.

Revisiting Goals and Embracing Emerging Challenges: A Decade of Publishing Teacher Knowledge

The journal's trajectory from 2004 up to now embraces notable progress in positioning itself as a platform for teacher knowledge, research dissemination, and critical reflection. The journal has archived the evolution, questions, tensions, innovations, hopes, and critical reflections of the Colombian ELT since the early bulletins of the 1970s to today's fully

digitized issues. In 2016, Cárdenas recounted the main features of the 214 articles from 2004 to 2015, with Pedagogical Experiences and Research Reports as the central pillars of publication in the journal. In 2025, we see the journal has sustained its editorial vision while adapting to the emerging publishing challenges (See Table 3 below).

From the first issue of 2016, a total of 170 articles have been published in *HOW*, including this special issue, bringing the total number of contributions to 384 manuscripts since 2004. The journal has followed the path of continuity and resistance by sustaining a steady editorial rhythm for research dissemination. On average, *HOW* has published 16 articles per year, maintaining its biannual periodicity of eight manuscripts per issue after the decision to issue a number in each semester in 2014. In 2022, the journal published a third special issue to celebrate the journal's 25th anniversary. This issue featured reflections by Colombian scholars charting emergent research agendas of ELT in the country and underscoring the blooming of situated epistemologies rooted in the Colombian landscape (Lucero & Castañeda, 2022). *HOW* has sustained its periodicity as a form to showcase ASOCOPI and the journal's commitment and organization to giving voice to teacher-researchers in Colombia and abroad.

Since 2010 (Issue 17), the journal has retained the main sections for teachers to produce and share knowledge. The *Research Reports* section has been the most prominent, representing 66% of all manuscripts (113 out of 170 articles). This fact shows a significant increase from the previous period (2004-2015), during which only 35% of the journal's production was framed within this category. This rise may be the result of an increasing interest from ELT practitioners in engaging with action research, narrative inquiry, and classroom-based inquiry, strengthening a research culture in foreign language teaching and learning in the country. In comparison with the report in 2016, the *Reflection and Revision of Themes* section saw an increase from 8% to 25% (43 articles) in 2025. This reflects the journal's commitment to maintaining the visibility of teachers' profiling emergent themes and their critical engagement with theoretical concepts. In contrast, the section on *Pedagogical Experiences* showed a decrease from 26% to 8% (13 articles). Though fewer in number, this section continues to provide significant insights into teachers' praxis and their relatable experiences in bridging theory and practice. A lone *Book Review* article (1%) rounds the content distribution *HOW* has fostered for the past decade. This last section was no longer available since the first issue of 2016.

In terms of authorship patterns, 286 authors have been published in the journal for the past ten years. In comparison to the report in 2016, gender representation has slightly changed, with 58% of authors identifying as female and 42% as male by 2015, and 61% and 39% respectively during the last decade. These data represent an initial attempt to characterize the demographic composition of the ELT teaching profession in the country while suggesting a relatively balanced participation from female and male ELT teacher-researchers from Colombia and other global contexts. While the journal's scope remains locally grounded, it has increasingly expanded its horizons.

The international participation of different authors demonstrates *HOW*'s recognition and accessibility aligned with its policies as an open-access journal aiming to build a shared space for reflection and practice-based research. In this vein, out of the 170 articles published in the past 10 years, 118 were authored by Colombian teacher-researchers. We also noted contributions from authors in Chile (15 articles), Iran (10), Mexico (8), Argentina (2), Saudi Arabia (2), and one article each from Ethiopia, Panama, Puerto Rico, Spain, Turkey, and the United States. Similarly, out of the 170 articles published between 2016 and 2025, 81 were written by single authors, 62 by pairs, and 18 by teams of three, proving that collaborative writing is a defining characteristic of the journal and strengthening its role as a site for academic collaboration.

We believe that these quantitative data point to *HOW*'s success in fulfilling its mission while responding to the growing demands of academic publishing. Thus, the journal has positioned itself as a platform for reflective inquiry to publish work that bridges theory with classroom realities. We believe that this renewed increase signals critical reflection and political action from teacher-researchers who advocate for teachers' knowledge production *otherwise* instead of implementing top-down policies uncritically. The latter has been the result of the increase in research reports evident in the journal's contribution to sharing systematic inquiries in ELT classrooms. Thus, *HOW* has helped position teachers as producers of knowledge instead of mere passive technicians in the academic field, as it nurtures diverse genres of writing. We believe that *HOW* is not solely a platform for in-service teacher-researchers but also becomes an avenue for undergraduate and graduate programs to share their research agendas while serving as a reference for future generations. The journal's effort to maintain its open-access policies despite the challenges in funding and sponsorship mirrors the mission of ASOCOPI, as expressed in its slogan, for "*Cultivating, Supporting and Treasuring the ELT Profession in Colombia*". Therefore, the journal disseminates knowledge, becomes a platform for sharing voices, and *creates conditions* for the development of a more reflective and critical teaching force from the periphery.

Navigating the Present and Envisioning the Future: Challenges and Resilience

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Since its inception, *HOW* has had to navigate an increasingly complex and challenging academic environment. In 2016, Cárdenas warned the academic community of the challenges the journal was facing: (i) coping with the impact and ranking pressures, (ii) dealing with lack of sponsorship and support, (iii) balancing the availability of reviewers, (iv) keeping the sections alive, (v) supporting authors with the systematicity of academic writing. Today, these challenges remain.

Not surprisingly, the biggest challenge continues to be the pressure to meet indexing and metric criteria. This is related to Colombia's accession to the OECD (in Spanish: OCDE

-*Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos*) in 2020. It should be noted that the OECD fosters peer revision to enhance quality in the issuing, implementation, and monitoring of national policies in areas such as information, technology, and education (Tassara, 2016). The international connections and benefits resulting from OECD are not denied. However, the application of international norms that are not always perceived as transparent or fair has been associated with what has happened with the evaluation of academic or scientific journals and, thus, questioned.

Table 3. *HOW* a Decade Later. Comparative Report 2004-2015 & 2016-2025

2004 - 2015	2016 - 2025
From 2004 to 2015, a total of 214 articles were published.	170 articles from 2016 to 2025 have been published.
35% research reports 26 pedagogical experiences 8 reflections and themes 1% book reviews	66% Research Reports 8% Pedagogical 25% Reflections 1% Book Reviews
Up to 2010, the issue featured 9 articles; in 2010, it increased to 10 and from 2011 to 2013; 12 manuscripts were published in each issue. From 2014, the journal became biannual featuring 7 articles per number. 14 per volume.	The journal has been publishing in average a total number of 17 articles per volume. Including 15 manuscripts in 2016, 2019, 2020, 2023, and 2024. 16 in 2021. 17 in 2017, 2018, 2025. 28 in 2022.
Female 58% Male 42%	61% Female 39% Male total of 286 voices
Nationality Colombia: 215 United States: 22 Mexico: 14 United Kingdom: 3 Iran: 4 Argentina: 4 India: 3 Puerto Rico: 3 China: 1 Japan: 1 Russia: 1 Venezuela: 1 Brazil: 1 Canada: 1 Total: 274	Nationality Argentina: 2 Chile: 15 Colombia: 127 Ethiopia: 1 Iran: 10 Mexico: 8 Panama: 1 Puerto Rico: 1 Saudi Arabia: 2 Spain: 1 Turkey: 1 USA: 1 Total: 170

The need for the government to meet international criteria as an excuse to gain international visibility through the inclusion of national journals in reputable databases such as Scopus or Web of Science has exacerbated the pressure on *HOW* to meet indexation and ranking pressures. Nevertheless, *HOW* has found ways to navigate this increasingly metric-driven system that values international publishing standards, prioritizing article citations and impact factors while excluding, implicitly, recognition of research-based practice from peripheral journals, whose contributions are often under-cited. Nonetheless, the data shown above demonstrate that Colombian authors with different academic trajectories, as well as others with geographic diversity, maintain their interest in the journal. Besides, although we are missing studies measuring the impact of the contents published in *HOW* on the development of teacher education programs, citation reports from Google Scholar show that postgraduate theses and monograph papers, and, on some occasions, other publications, cite its articles.

The editorial team, hand-in-hand with ASOCOPI's Board of Directors, has instilled on acknowledging the value of the journal in the academic community by inviting teacher-researchers, pre-service teachers, teacher-educators, and scholars to continue publishing in *HOW* despite having not participated in MinCiencias' 2021 call, a situation that has been lingering until now because the Ministry has not issued a call in this respect. Although this has been an insurmountable challenge for the journal, the academic community has responded and helped sustain the journal's periodicity. As is the case with this special issue, Colombian scholars believe in the local impact of *HOW* as a driving force to disseminate locally-based research while helping ASOCOPI keep the journal alive. We believe this support has allowed the journal to remain in shaping the field of ELT. Consequently, we extend our utmost gratitude to those authors who keep believing in *HOW*, even though it does not represent points in the "puntímetro" or score system that, now, might be the incentive for some university professors to advance in their careers and get a salary raise (Gómez-Morales, 2015).

Similarly, we invite the academic community to consider that the trajectory of *HOW* cannot be separated from the history of ASOCOPI itself. Over the years, *HOW* has provided to and supported the association's mission "to contribute to the betterment of English Language Teaching in Colombia by means of promoting quality Educators" (ASOCOPI, n.d.); however, the journal has faced challenges in funding and sponsorship. The journal's publication has depended solely on the voluntary work of ASOCOPI's Board of Directors, the Editorial Team, authors, and reviewers since 1994 (Cárdenas, 2016). This fact represents a big disparity between those journals that have the support or infrastructure to sustain the editorial activity. As we celebrate 60 years of ASOCOPI, we advocate for a call to action from the ELT community to contribute through funds or more voluntary work, becoming reviewers, and continuing publishing to sustain the association and the journal.

Despite the above-mentioned tensions, *HOW* has chosen to uphold its ethos by resisting through publishing rigorous and accessible research. Instead of compromising its mission to meet external benchmarks, the journal has sought to amplify the voices of Colombian teacher-researchers. The different issues launched in the past ten years mirror the collective efforts from ASOCOPI's BoD and the Editorial Team to achieve the transforming practice of ELT through reflection, inquiry, and action. The journal's Editorial Team remains positive that through strengthening peer-review procedures, improving metadata management, and diversifying its editorial board, *HOW* will continue to reflect a vibrant publishing ecosystem for teachers' voices and situated research.

Celebrating ASOCOPI's 60th Anniversary: An Ongoing Commitment to Positioning Voices from the Periphery

HOW is proud to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Colombian Association of English Teachers through this special issue that stands as a tribute and testimony of the legacy of the association and its contribution to the evolution of the Colombian ELT field. These six decades have represented the association's uninterrupted commitment to professional advocacy and academic community building. ASOCOPI has served as a national platform for teachers' voices and as a marker in shaping an ELT that is socially, critically, and locally grounded. This issue showcases a rich variety of perspectives from local authors. The manuscripts prove a commitment to academic rigor, critical reflection, community transformation, and social justice.

The selected contributions in this special issue explore the historical, political, pedagogical, epistemological, and peripheral knowledge built from the bottom up in the country. In contrast to the dominant narratives concerning the centralization of what is considered valid knowledge in ELT, as stemming from countries from the inner circle (Kachru, 1985), this issue unfolds across territories, institutions, and timeframes. The articles are organized around different core themes. These themes reflect emerging research agendas and persistent concerns in the Colombian ELT landscape. The authors address critical pedagogies and territory-based agendas, the integration of content and language, teacher education under foreign influence and local resistance, rural and peripheral ELT, sustainability, and digital transformation.

The opening article from Bertha Ramos-Holguín, Julieth Lorena López-Acevedo, and Jhon Eduardo Mosquera-Pérez, from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, traces the emergence of socio-cultural and socio-critically oriented approaches to ELT in Colombian territories. Their work highlights the context-sensitive turn that the ELT field has taken towards the local realities in the regions. By revisiting past practices during the last few years, the authors advocate for renewed practices aiming towards social justice grounded

in situated teaching practices. Similarly, they envision future opportunities to understand Colombian ELT as both pedagogically and politically situated in local practices. In tune with the situated practices, Lourdes Rey-Paba, Kathleen A. Corrales, Angela Bailey, and Nayibe Rosado-Mendinueta, from Universidad del Norte, explore the teaching of English through content in higher teacher education. By reviewing the specialized literature on English teaching through approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the authors address the evolution of English teaching as a vehicle for disciplinary learning. These authors discuss the potential opportunities and future directions of these approaches within the diverse local realities of the Colombian landscape.

The third article, authored by Edgar Lucero, Yolanda Samacá-Bohórquez, and Jairo Enrique Castañeda-Trujillo examine the field of ELT in Colombia for the past sixty years and the emerging tensions between imported language methodologies and local pedagogical realities. Their reflections question the dominant second-language teaching methods and dominant linguistic policies to resist the hegemonic discourses permeating ELT while emphasizing the need to develop contextually responsive teacher education programs. This critique of the dominant narratives is aligned with the fourth article in the issue by Pilar Méndez-Rivera, Alexander Steffanell, and Francisco Pérez-Gómez. Through document analysis and autobiographical narrative, the authors raise awareness on building bridges between the academic center and the periphery, particularly the Caribbean region of the country. The manuscript critiques the imbalance of power in Colombian ELT concerning the presence of ASOCOPI in the Colombian Caribbean region from 1989 to 2018. These authors raise concerns about the senses of association and representation of territories in connection with ASOCOPI's role of bringing unity and belonging in Colombia.

Carlo Granados-Beltrán and Miguel Martínez-Luengas trace the historical-pedagogical trends in Colombia from 1966 to 1985. Through archival analysis of the early issues of *HOW*, the fifth article in this issue explores the shifts in foreign language education, teachers' professional development, and teaching methodologies in the ELT field. The authors portray the broader sociopolitical transformations concerning the evolution of the field amidst globalization, the digital revolution, and the incorporation of intercultural competence and intercultural education. This manuscript reaffirms *HOW*'s role in shaping ELT in Colombia through its historical record and as the space for knowledge construction and dissemination.

Addressing rural education, Yamith José Fandiño-Parra, Andrea Muñoz-Barriga, and Sandra Patricia Barbosa-Hernández, from Universidad de La Salle, chart the trajectory of English teaching in rural contexts. Through a critical examination of scholarly literature, the authors identify persistent challenges in foreign language education in rural contexts. Their historical overview of rural education concerning English advocates for plurilingualism, interculturality, and context-responsive practices as transformative frameworks for rural

ELT. In tune with the examination of Colombian rural ELT, José Adriano Barbosa-Corredor and Liceth Alejandra Bohórquez-León, from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, share findings from an ethnographic study in Boyacá. The authors address the voices from those who experience English daily in rural territories in Colombia. The manuscript centers on the voices of learners, teachers, and parents concerning the evolution, progress, and challenges of the field in rural communities. Both studies make visible the advances and ongoing gaps of ELT in territories whose access to resources and pedagogical support have somehow been sidelined by the national authorities.

The last two articles bring two broader social dimensions to the conversation. On the one hand, William Ricardo Ortiz-García and Carol Anne Ochoa Alpala explore how teachers and researchers have contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the ELT field. Through a documentary review of Colombian ELT publications, their work focuses on the areas of quality education, equity, and peace to connect classroom practice with global justice agendas. On the other hand, Juan Carlos Acosta, Marcela Díaz-Ramírez, and Cénaida Gómez-Sáenz explore the impact of distance and digital learning models in foreign language teaching and learning. The manuscript traces the evolution of distance ELT in Colombia to understand the transformations in access, pedagogy, and inclusion through technological innovation. The authors emphasize the need for a flexible ELT that adapts to diverse populations, particularly those in the periphery, through distance learning and media literacy practices.

The contributions of the nine articles, aligned with the previous sections discussed in this manuscript, demonstrate *HOW*'s historical role in shaping the field of ELT, the mission of ASOCOPI in promoting quality professional development for teachers in Colombia, and our call for action from the larger academic community to continue contributing to the production and dissemination of knowledge. We believe that this special issue continues to foster critical dialogue amongst the different socio-cultural and political actors in the ELT field in the country. Their voices, research agendas, critical reflections, and innovations reaffirm the increasingly ever-changing landscape of ELT in Colombia. In this vein, the issue offers a non-linear narrative of progress. It features a multilayered thread of narratives, polyphonic texts, and kaleidoscopic perspectives that examine our past practices, present challenges, and future possibilities. This special issue honors ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary by reminding us of our unique roots, territories, experiences, and communities, and our capacity to establish shared dialogues and collaborative writing across differences. We remain positive that ASOCOPI and *HOW* will surmount any upcoming challenges as both continue their uninterrupted efforts to place the Colombian ELT at the core of the dialogue between the center and the periphery.

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“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 58th National & 4th International Conference: “*From the Global South: Our Roots, Perspectives and Transformations*” held at Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, in 2023; and the 59th National & 5th International Conference and 4th 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 28th 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 60th 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 60th 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 60th Annual and 6th 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 60th 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 *Miryam 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

Critical ELT Agendas from the Territories: Recalling the Past, Exploring the Present, and Envisioning the Future

Agendas Críticas de la Enseñanza del Inglés (ELT) desde el Territorio: Recordando el Pasado, Explorando el Presente, y Proyectando el Futuro

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Abstract

Colombian English Language Teacher/Teaching (ELT) Education is a steadily advancing field toward establishing a socioculturally and sociocritically oriented area of knowledge. Whereas in previous years, national ELT was primarily concerned with the development and promotion of communicative skills among English as a foreign language students derived from cognitively oriented and traditionally connected stances, since the insertion of critical pedagogies and theories into the field, its approach has changed to better cope with what is happening in immediate contexts. In other words, ELT has assumed a more context-sensitive view through which the territories and the practices inherent to them have been placed at the core of the field. Considering the current landscape, in the frame of this article, we present an analysis of how ELT has been changing over the last few years while also contemplating current practices and future venues to come. By delving into the historical development of ELT in Colombia and emphasizing what we have labeled “critical ELT agendas from the territories” through which we merge principles of social justice, critical literacy, and English as a Lingua Franca, the current article critically examines factors that shaped Colombian ELT in the past, while considering potential venues for the future. The critical reflection proposed in this paper aims to provide insights that inform more responsive and practical approaches to ELT in Colombia and abroad.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, territories, context sensitive, social justice, critical literacy, English as a Lingua Franca

Resumen

El campo de la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia (ELT) ha avanzado consistentemente hacia el establecimiento de un área de conocimiento orientada sociocultural y socio críticamente. Mientras que en años anteriores el ELT a nivel nacional se centraba en el desarrollo y fomento de las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) derivadas de posturas principalmente cognitivas y tradicionales, se observa que, desde la inserción de pedagogías y teorías críticas, el enfoque del campo ha cambiado para adaptarse mejor a lo que sucede en los contextos inmediatos donde tiene lugar la enseñanza del inglés. En otras palabras, el campo de la enseñanza del inglés ha asumido una visión más sensible al contexto, a través de la cual los territorios y sus prácticas inherentes se han incorporado. Considerando este panorama, en el marco de este artículo presentamos un análisis de cómo la enseñanza del inglés ha venido cambiando en los últimos años, al mismo tiempo que contemplamos prácticas actuales y posibles futuros escenarios. Al profundizar en el desarrollo histórico de la enseñanza del inglés en Colombia y al enfatizar en lo que hemos denominado “enseñanza crítica del inglés desde los territorios”, a través del cual fusionamos principios de justicia social, alfabetización crítica y el inglés como lengua franca, este artículo examina críticamente los factores que han moldeado la educación en inglés en el pasado de Colombia, mientras consideramos, a su vez, posibles futuros caminos. La reflexión crítica propuesta en este artículo ofrece perspectivas que puedan nutrir enfoques más sensibles y efectivos para la educación en inglés, no en Colombia, sino en el mundo.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización crítica, enseñanza del inglés, inglés como lengua franca, justicia social, sensibilidad al contexto, territorios

Introduction

As the Colombian Association of Teachers of English (ASOCOPI) is celebrating its 60th anniversary, we would like to appreciate teachers' and researchers' past, current, and future contributions within and across English language teacher/teaching (ELT). This is why we share this paper with the ELT community. We deem it essential to start this examination by highlighting that it is well known that, historically, national ELT is a field that has been heavily based on *Exonormative* models (Matsuda, 2012) for preparing English language teachers and teaching the English language. This fact partially makes sense considering the Anglo-Saxon background of the field. However, emerging dialogues, conversations, and critical stances within and across the whole "Global South" have set the floor to attempt to go beyond neoliberal practices that have affected ELT worldwide. In line with this, the notion of "Territories" in ELT has the potential to expand this movement and keep empowering all those interested in making a positive change in society through English education.

By positioning ourselves on an epistemic crack we have labeled "*ELT Agendas from the Territories*"⁴ which comprises a look at the historical and political axis of development of national ELT and ELT pedagogies, we, three English language teacher educators and researchers based in the central-eastern region of the country, analyze, through this current paper, the way our ELT field has been gradually leaving behind marketizing, businessifying, and corporatized knowledge encouraging processes which perceived numbers, statistics, and rankings as synonyms of positive results and success, and has been assuming instead more heterogeneous-context sensitive lenses which are making an effort to appreciate better the particularities of the regions where said activity takes place.

Overall, our article is divided into three major sections that contain complementary subsections. These are organized as follows: 1) Critical ELT Agendas from the Territories: An Emerging Notion that Calls for More Localized and Context-Sensitive English Education; 2) Social Justice and Education: An Overview, 2.1) Social Justice Within and Across ELT; 3) English as a Lingua Franca: Another Way to Keep Linking English Language Education with the Territory, 3.1) English as a Lingua Franca, English as an International Language, World Englishes, or Global Englishes in Colombian ELT: Where Have We Been? Where Are We Heading? and 4) Final Remarks: Envisioning the Future of ELT.

⁴ Territory is a notion based on Ramos-Holguín's (2021, 2023) epistemic contributions. Although perhaps other more standard terms such as "territory-based ELT", "local ELT perspectives", and even "context sensitive" practices, may overlap with our notion, and provide a similar understanding of what we intend to share, we have decided to attach to and employ the denomination "territory" because it encompasses our attachment, ancestry, and sense of identity of our land.

Critical ELT Agendas from the Territories: An Emerging Notion that Calls for More Localized and Context-Sensitive English Education

To start our analysis, we would like to bring to the fore the driving notion of this paper: **Territories**. From a neo-liberal perspective, territories are sections of space occupied by individuals, social groups, or institutions, most typically by the modern state (Agnew, 2000). Even though this is possibly one of the most widespread definitions of territories, from a neo-liberal perspective, territories constitute principally pieces of land that are mostly used for extractivist purposes since, under the premises of the modern nation-state, territories have been associated with land, space, power, and impersonal relations, providing their owners with statuses of power and prestige.

Even though the just presented theorization of what territories mean and imply is possibly one of the most widespread disseminated and common, Knight (1982) contends that more than a piece of land that can be exploited, territories constitute a piece of the sociocultural landscape where humans live because “it is human beliefs and actions that give territory meaning” (p. 517). From this more humanistic perspective, territories are not just pieces of land that can be used by individuals at their convenience; rather, territories are conceived as spaces that embrace socio-cultural practices, challenge misconceptions and stereotypes, and embody historical struggles, meaning that territories are spaces that transcend the material aspect of things.

While the notion of territories we propose here goes beyond market-driven practices, it seems that traditional ELT has failed to completely embrace this stance. A key reason for this disconnection is the dominance of a type of “methodological nationalism” (Baker, 2024), which has served to reinforce Anglo-Saxon-centric standards in the field. Interestingly, contributions made in the last two decades (Cárdenas, 2006a, 2006b; González, 2003; Guerrero, 2008; Hoyos-Pipicano & España-Delgado, 2025; Usma 2009; Velásquez-Hoyos & Giraldo-Martínez, 2024;) have suggested a need to develop more context-sensitive initiatives through which the territories, practices, and even indigenous languages inherent to them are more frequently put at the core of the profession, and of the preparation of prospective English language teachers, and language educators in general.

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After developing one of these analyses, and in line with Guerrero (2008, p. 35) who has already concluded that in Colombian “being bilingual means speaking English”, González (2003) suggested that not only ELT but also the professional development of many English language teachers has been linked to models where bilingualism is often connected to English, but to English spoken by either American or British people. Because of this, González (2003) stressed the need to develop professional development, or professionalization programs, from a more context sensitive perspective. Succinctly, this author stated, more than 20 years ago,

that “there is a need for new forms of teacher development programs that respond to the requirements of different teachers, teacher educators, professional development agendas, and methodologies because the ones proposed are not sensitive to our educational needs” (p. 165).

In line with these aspects, we argue that while traditional ELT has predominantly emphasized the development of the four communicative skills, something that is not necessarily negative, future ELT resources and practices should also incorporate diverse knowledge, practices, and viewpoints that have historically been overlooked. Since this aspect is essential to address persistent challenges, in the following lines, we present two dimensions that constitute some of the venues we deem to be better included in ELT. These are Social Justice and English as a Lingua Franca.

Social Justice and Education: An Overview

This section outlines the historical development of social justice and how this notion has gradually permeated education globally. After this initial analysis, we will analyze how it has permeated ELT, and will additionally provide some potential actions ELT professionals, scholars, and educators can apply to more actively engage their students with social justice-oriented education.

In general, recent years have witnessed considerable changes in education. ELT is not an exception. While in previous times there was a strong, almost sickening desire to worship native English speakers in an apparent effort to have their status, and by extension, their privileges, recent conceptualizations of ELT are intending to place human subjectivities, experiences, and voices into the field (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022). That is how social justice began to enter the ELT profession. However, social justice in ELT has not taken place at once or at a single step. It has gradually entered the field to effectively “humanize” this dimension. Before proceeding, however, it becomes necessary to look at its historical trajectory.

Throughout the years, Social Justice Education (SJE) has evolved to foster justice through approaches highlighting transformative leadership and equity as central themes. The discussions have spread to shift its comprehension from being merely a curricular strategy to being considered a comprehensive worldview, a perspective that prompts its integration into educational practices (Karaköse et al., 2023). In line with these developments, after the abolishment of slavery in 1920, important global entities like UNESCO started to make efforts to create organizations aiming at reducing global illiteracy levels. By facilitating programs and concrete actions to promote schooling despite accessibility and other structural difficulties, UNESCO saw a suitable instrument to integrate and pacify the masses in education while

also ensuring that countries would count on a professional workforce for the coming years (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2024).

The following years brought an intense debate around a two-sided situation that the government would have to deeply consider. On the one hand, bringing modernity to isolated regions and promoting education as a tool to contribute to the quest for professionalization. On the other hand, adjusting to each country's particular ideologies and contexts, many of which shared their interest in returning the focus of schooling to one aiming for simplicity, ancestral knowledge, and love of the countryside (Hofstetter & Schneuwly, 2024). The latest aligned with the Progressive Education Movement, which emphasized experiential learning, critical thinking, and democratic values, aiming to diverge from the traditional curricula, rooted in preparation for industrial university and strongly influenced by social class.

During the International Conference on Public Education in 1936 (ICPE), at the center of the discussion, Agustín Nieto Caballero, director of education and Colombian delegate, stated his nation's resolution to ruralize all schools, teaching the notions of hygiene, work, agriculture, and love towards the rural. Nieto's perspective about the responsive purpose of education would eventually set the foundations in preparation for Colbert et al.'s (1976) educative model of *Escuela Nueva*. The decade of the 1930s on the North American continent brought significant efforts to scrutinize systemic oppression simultaneously, particularly approaching social class and race inequalities. The first of these efforts was established through the labor movement, which empowered organizations to battle through strikes with certain government support provided by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was the Labor Movement that led to the creation of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 and the proposal of a Congress of Industrial Organizations (COI). Secondly, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was consistently at the forefront of national campaigns against lynching and "Jim Crow" laws affecting education, as well as fighting segregation and discrimination in schools to work toward educational equity (Haggler, 2018).

Posterior two decades enclosed the conflict of World War II and its consequences on political, social, cultural, and educational spheres. During this period, researchers began to highlight the need for equitable practices despite the persistence of privilege within academic institutions, especially in higher education. Accordingly, Dewey's advocates stressed the importance of universities in nurturing individual potential and social responsibility by supporting equitable hiring practices and providing financial aid to marginalized populations (Cunningham, 2022). Distinctively, Europe was deeply influenced by the political and social upheavals of the time. World War II and its aftermath prompted a reevaluation of social justice, with several nations trying to rebuild and redefine their societies. In such a context, the meaning of social justice was widely discussed, oscillating between two main views,

one prioritizing the equality of conditions and the other the individual rights (Šustrová, 2024). Communities experienced a shift in the educational discourse highlighted by strong expectations about the role of citizenship and government responsibility, a factor contributing to the creation of new political movements. Particularly, in Czechoslovakia, both National Socialism and later Communist regimes employed the discourse of social justice to obscure their objectives of legitimizing their authority, even though with divergent conceptual frameworks, one emphasizing racial narrative and the other prioritizing class cohesion.

Despite global enterprises attempting to discuss and integrate social justice in education, its principles were first incorporated effectively into the domain of pedagogy in the Latin American context through the scholarly contributions of Paulo Freire during the 1960s and 1970s. Freire's book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" saw its first light in 1968 as an answer to the complex sociopolitical landscape people faced on the continent, characterized by military coups and repressive regimes. While Chile experienced large unionization, countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico saw a significant rise in student movements, heavily influenced by the Freirean approach emphasizing dialogical exercises and critical pedagogy (Jones & Torres, 2010). Other movements in countries like Peru and Bolivia pursued recognition, respect, and autonomy for indigenous communities. According to Tarlau (2023), Cuba and El Salvador oriented efforts toward literacy, launching a Literacy Campaign (1961) in the first case and several literacy programs for guerrilla groups in the second. Hence, social movements increasingly recognized education as a tool for mobilization, fostering a culture of activism and awareness about social justice issues.

SJE materialized in Latin America widely as a response to socioeconomic inequalities coupled with fierce political repression. For instance, the existence of dictatorships in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil throughout the 1970s and 1980s spurred a need for educational reform designed to address equality and inclusion for all students, as those military dictatorships at the time held a hostile view of public education. Jones and Torres (2010) point out that there was a great deal of advocacy for more neoliberal policies like the privatization of public entities at the time. That most people in Latin America now have access to public education is one of the prominent accomplishments of the last three decades (Noel, 2009), and significant reforms in the policies and practices have promoted equality and inclusion (Tarlau, 2023).

Acknowledging the global trends in SJE and their specific implications in Latin America is fundamental to shed light on the historical movements, ideological frameworks, and sociocultural enterprises that served as a preceding dialogue for the development of SJE in Colombia. During the 1990s, social justice became a relevant theme in ELT as the 1980s ended with the promising consolidation of democratic governance. The socioeconomic turmoil taught teachers how critical literacy could foster inclusive methods, fundamental to addressing concerns of fairness and access in language education.

Several important elements played a role in the shift towards considering the implementation of the principles of social justice in the English classroom, we can attribute the first one to the construction of a legal framework that emphasized human rights and the recognition, for the first time, of the rich ethnic and cultural diversity in the country, which seemed consolidated when the Colombian Constitution was signed. The second one, on the other hand, arose as the processes of language teaching programs began to incorporate social justice agendas, emphasizing the need for teachers to understand and address disparities in educational outcomes related to race, socioeconomic status, and language, aligning to international proposals in the topic (Jacobs, 2006).

One of the main concerns dealing with equity registered in the literature was highlighted by Amaya de Ochoa (2002), who argued that the 1990s in Colombia were characterized by blunt inequities in educational access, specifically in higher education, which exacerbated social injustice and affected national development. The author explains how, regardless of several efforts to democratize higher education, extend its coverage, and improve equity, a vast number of students who belonged to endangered or marginalized communities could not access universities. An additional concern that such populations brought to society was the social intervention strategies that emphasized civil rights, aiming to secure their welfare (Monroy, 2005).

Social Justice within and across ELT

The new millennium established a renovated laboratory for social justice research. In the ELT field, the focus shifted towards integrating critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, fostering an environment where diverse voices could be heard and valued. Subsequently, multiple studies have contributed to shaping Colombians' perceptions regarding SJE and its implementation in formal and informal settings. An analysis of the literature about SJE in Colombia reveals diverse approaches and interdisciplinary frameworks. Such tendencies have manifested through various initiatives. Some of these have been studies revolving around gender issues (Peñaloza, 2020; Castañeda Peña, 2021; Ubaque Casallas & Castañeda-Peña, 2021), identity construction and reshaping (Castañeda-Trujillo et al. 2022; Mosquera-Pérez & Losada-Rivas 2022), critical literacy (Mora, 2014), interculturality (Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cardenas, 2023; Ramos-Holguín, 2021), decoloniality (Fandiño-Parra, 2021, Guerrero-Nieto et al., 2022), and ruralities and overall experiences held in rural settings (Hoyos-Pipicano & España-Delgado, 2025; Ortiz-García & Contreras-Pinilla, 2023).

Concerning this “territorialization of knowledge,” research reports, such as the ones carried out by Cruz Bernal and Ramos Holguín (2024), Bolaños Sáenz et al. (2018), Coronado-Rodríguez et al. (2022), Monroy Ramírez and Barros Bastidas (2023), Hurtado (2020), Ramos-Holguín et al. (2021), Nieto and Clavijo (2020), and Ramos et al. (2012).

After working with diverse territories, these scholars demonstrate that there is no template for ELT in the territories, no checklist, rubric, single model, or one “best practice. The researchers proved that teaching English with and in the territories means challenging curricular decisions, criticizing one-size-fits-all methodologies, acknowledging identities and local knowledge, providing students with emotional learning resources, and drawing on community assets. This attention to the territories has helped the ELT field to affirm each community’s characteristics and bring these conversations up in the classrooms.

From a more epistemological and ontological view, Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila (2014), Ramos-Holguín and Aguirre-Morales (2016), Cruz-Arcila (2018), Hernández Cassiani (2019), Sierra-Ospina (2020), Monroy Ramírez and Patiño-Agudelo (2022), and Monroy Ramírez and Barros Bastidas (2023) were concerned about teachers and their territories. In this sense, the authors undertook research initiatives suggesting that teachers should help instill within their students the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of the territories in which they live. Overall, the researchers pointed out that knowledge about ELT from the territories should follow a bottom-up approach in which teachers’ voices are echoed in the state policies because, directly or indirectly, schools and teachers serve the role of reproducing and perpetuating established social, cultural, political, and economic structures within territories. A particular example of efforts to undertake context-sensitive ELT pedagogies is Oviedo-Gómez and Jaramillo-Cárdenas’s (2023) case study developed at two public institutions in Medellín, Antioquia, and Florencia, Caquetá. This study serves as a model for educators seeking to integrate critical interculturality to challenge dominant power structures and promote alternative ways of knowing and being, as the researchers designed and implemented a curricular unit grounded in critical interculturality, aiming to raise students’ awareness of their realities and roles within their contexts.

As diverse as the topics broadening the dialogical exercises about SJE are, the last decade has been characterized by a shift towards interculturality, decolonization, peacebuilding, ruralities, and identities, aiming to provide novice and experienced teachers with proposals about practices, methods, and conceptual frameworks to defy power hierarchies and promote critical reflections in our nation. On this path, Mackenzie (2019) critically examines the Colombian government’s bilingualism policies, revealing the difficulties and failures in promoting equitable English learning opportunities. Mackenzie’s analysis points out that these policies often reinforce existing inequalities rather than mitigate them. For instance, the promotion of English as the main second language can marginalize indigenous languages and cultures as they experience greater struggles to access information and opportunities, leading to a form of linguistic imperialism. The author’s approach highlights the tension between national policies and the contexts’ linguistic diversity in Colombia, questioning the real scope of legal frameworks when developed to alienate the local communities and their needs.

As seen until now, social justice has increasingly become a key dimension in education, including ELT. English language teachers can therefore take several steps to actively integrate social justice into their classrooms, fostering critical awareness, inclusivity, and student empowerment. These steps include: A) adapting current curriculum and teaching methods, B) choosing resources that challenge biases and stereotypes, C) creating safe spaces for people to talk about societal issues while also setting the chance to amplify marginalized voice, D) designing culturally relevant materials, which raise awareness of discrimination while also constituting a catalysts for change, E) encouraging work with communities and local organizations, and finally, F) integrating activities which, at large, create spaces for dismantle historically imposed narratives. Two resources we find particularly beneficial for this purpose are the “Learning for Justice” site (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/>) and the “Teaching for Change” platform (<https://www.teachingforchange.org/>), which offer several free ideas, lesson plans, and other resources to help dismantle discrimination of any type.

To close this section, we would like to manifest that while social justice-linked action has been gradually emerging in ELT to challenge dominant practices, English as a Lingua Franca is also gaining relevance nationally. This form of linguistic “disobedience” to native-speaker norms, embodied in the ELF paradigm, holds the potential to reconceptualize English language teaching and consolidate alternative perspectives. This is the next level of analysis to which we will turn our attention.

English as a Lingua Franca: Another Way to Keep Linking English Language Education with the Territory

Although there are concerns about whether we should or not teach English from a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Global Englishes (GE) in contemporary times (Fu, 2024), these fields have undeniably been gaining momentum in the 21st century. Our national context is not indifferent by any means to these circumstances.

Historically speaking, English has exerted a strong influence on Colombian society due to its increasing interest in joining 21st-century interconnected communities. Although in the context of this nation English has been and continues to be referred to as a “foreign language”, recent groundbreaking conceptual (García, 2013; Macías, 2010; Mora, 2022; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022) and empirical (Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024) contributions have been discussing the need to adopt new semantic and, by extension, pedagogical notions to relate to the teaching of English nationally. Specifically, Mora (2022) argued that the very notion of “English as a **foreign** language” is problematic since etymologically, “foreign” is a synonym for other expressions such as “alien”, “strange”, and “weird”. In other words, the idea of English as a foreign language appears to continue reproducing, implicitly, standards and views that clearly delimit a differentiation between native and non-native English users

globally. As Macías and Mosquera-Pérez (2024) suggest, this situation appears to reproduce an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ position, where those who better align with Anglo-Saxon models (Núñez Pardo, 2022) and values are often regarded as better speakers of the language or are privileged over their counterparts.

Even though Mora (2022) presented an enriching and thought-provoking discussion about the need to transgress deep ingrained notions such as EFL (English as a foreign language) or ESL (English as a second language), terms that have been interchangeably (and mistakenly) used in the country despite their particular features and applicability. In this same journal, twelve years before Mora (2022), in the country’s Southeast region, Macías (2010) extended a widespread invitation to move from EFL and head towards an ELF view with the teaching of English across the educational system.

Specifically, and influenced by ELF advocates and scholars from diverse regions of the world (as Basabe, 2006; Berns, 2005; Crystal, 2003; González, 2007; Jenkins, 2000, 2003, 2006), Macías (2010) debates three aspects that should be re-signified to be able to talk about the teaching of English as a *Lingua Franca* in Colombia. The first aspect, according to the author, is linked to the relationship between native and non-native English-speaking teachers (NESTs vs. NNESTs). Following Macías’ view, the concept of the native speaker has been widely analyzed and eventually demystified in ELF/ESL literature because being a native does not necessarily mean that you are a perfect speaker. As remarked by Rampton (1990), “being born into a social group does not mean that you automatically speak its language well. Many native speakers of English can’t write or tell stories, while many non-native speakers can” (p. 98). Therefore, while it may be partially true that natives are better at certain dimensions, such as speaking or pronunciation, it does not necessarily mean they are the ideal models to follow. This view gains further relevance considering that many native English speakers are monolingual and have not firsthand experienced learning a language different from their mother tongue (Davidson, 2007).

The second fact that Macías (2010) analyzed was connected to an ELF methodology in ELT. Concerning this aspect, Macías affirmed that he had witnessed the application of several English teaching methods in Colombia, including the grammar-translation approach, audiolingual method, total physical response, and the natural approach, among others. At the same time, nevertheless, he also claimed that “initiatives to design local or national methodologies in Colombia have been kept to a minimum or have been quickly absorbed by the international ELT market established in the country” (Macías, 2010, p. 188), acknowledging therefore that “endo normativism” (Matsuda, 2012) or “*methodological nationalism*”, as Baker (2024) calls it, have been common in this country. These notions contributed to, as we like to think of, establishing the bases of the ELT field worldwide. However, as pointed out by Ayala Zárate and Álvarez (2011) and Correa and Usma Wilches (2013), it is also essential that in the current time, we design models, approaches, methodologies, policies, and overall ELT

resources that better recognize and integrate the local and global particularities of English (see also Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024). In a few words, designing resources that combine global and local ('glocal') understandings of English, comprehending the sociocultural contexts where this language takes place.

The last aspect Macías (2010) developed in his paper was related to ELT materials. Generally, this scholar remarked that although ELT materials constitute a really essential component of the English language teaching enterprise, materials available in the market have historically centered their attention on North American or British culture, or what Kachru (1992) and Mahboob (2011) regarded respectively as the Inner Circle (the U.S, the U.K, Canada) or as the NABA (North American, British, Australian). This overreliance on materials and resources at large, designed within the context of these nations, has led, according to Núñez Pardo (2020, 2022), to shaping attitudes and ideologies toward the way people from diverse backgrounds use and speak the language. Simply put, such an excessive dependence on native-centered norms has set the ground for language ideologies and other marginalizing attitudes to emerge. It is vital then, according to Macías, to create materials that integrate knowledge and epistemologies that have been shadowed in ELT.

The initial analysis shared above leads to a partial understanding that even though there is a lot to be done to finally talk about English as a Lingua Franca language teaching in Colombia, some initial steps, mostly conceptual, have been undertaken in the context of our territory. Something that we deem important to remark is that although 15 years ago Macías (2010) made a direct invitation to assume an ELF perspective in ELT, various similar yet fragmented contributions have taken place in this regard. In this section of the article, we analyze the current state of English as a Lingua Franca and similar notions in ELT and ELT-connected research, and present potential avenues for better and more effectively integrating this view in primary and secondary education, and initial English teacher education.

***English as a Lingua Franca, English as an International Language,
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National academic conversations centered around ELT in Colombia have made evident that the field has been gradually detaching from imposed and self-imposed Global North practices, and has been breaking boundaries in terms of pedagogies, methodologies, and assessment procedures to be applied in formal classroom contexts (Mosquera-Perez, 2022; Núñez-Pardo & Tellez-Tellez, 2024). This progressive epistemic rupture (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) has set the ground to expand understandings of English, English teaching and learning, and initial English teacher education as new approaches. Particularly, those linked

to sociocultural dynamics have influenced ELT and related areas. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Global Englishes (GE), English as an International Language (EIL), and World Englishes (WE) are some of the results of the expansion of these processes.

Upon reviewing empirical and conceptual materials relevant to our analysis for this special issue of the journal, we observed that an invitation to teach English and educate prospective English teachers beyond Anglo centric standards have taken various shapes in Colombia. In this sense, while some claim for an ELF model (Macías, 2010; Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022), other invite to shift EIL (García, 2013), WE (González, 2010; Macías & Mosquera-Pérez, 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2024; 2025), GE (Vargas Arévalo, 2025), and even ECL (English as a Colombia Language) and CE (Colombian English) (Mora, 2022).

Contributions addressing these concepts have emerged from various contexts within the national territory and from diverse perspectives. The theoretical analyses by Macías (2010), González (2010), García (2013), Mora (2022), and Mosquera-Pérez (2022, 2024) have encouraged the academic community to integrate ELF and EIL principles gradually into ELT, considering the potential establishment of Colombian English (CE). Conversely, empirical studies such as those by Castro-López (2018), Parra-Baez (2021), and the recent initiative by Macías and Mosquera-Pérez (2024) suggest that introducing ELF or its variants into formal classrooms and teacher preparation programs could positively impact learners. Exposure to these perspectives may eventually help solidify English as a legitimate official language in Colombia, as contemporary ELT models advocate for incorporating local perspectives in language teaching.

Building on this analysis, it is evident that while a modest, yet significant body of work has emerged in Colombia, regarding ELF and related concepts, considerable progress is needed to fully integrate English as a Lingua Franca within the national context. Nevertheless, the advances made so far indicate a promising ELT landscape. The referenced works have significantly contributed to broadening our understanding of the impact that recognizing English as a global lingua franca and its various forms can have on educational settings.

As we rejoice in celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Colombian Association for Teachers of English (ASOCOPI), we acknowledge the steady progress in Colombian ELT. However, further research and initiatives are essential to truly establish a lingua franca perspective of English in Colombia or to recognize Colombian English as a distinct variety. We advocate for the formation of research groups, seedbeds, and enhanced teacher preparation and professional development opportunities focusing on the entire ELF spectrum. Therefore, we would like to invite other scholars with similar interests to join us and contribute to the establishment of an “Observatory for the Development of English in Colombia and Latin America” (ODECL), an initiative aimed at studying the status and role of English as a lingua franca in this region of the world.

ELT practitioners and all those interested in potentially addressing ELF and Global Englishes in their classroom environments could also undertake some of these specific actions we propose: A) decenter native-speaker norms by encourage critical discussions on English ownership, B) incorporate multilingual resources to challenge linguistic discrimination, C) promote translanguaging and multilingual practices, D) use assessment practices that value diversity in terms of accents and English varieties in general, E) introduce global perspectives in ELT materials, F) Foster connections with global communities. The website of the “International Dialects for English Archive” (<https://www.dialectsarchive.com/>) and “ILF Brasil” (<https://www.elfbrasil.com/>) could be a good starting point.

To finish, it is worth highlighting to remark that although our current understanding of these fields is a dimension that is just beginning to take shape, as even in international academic scenarios there is no a consensus regarding convergent, or divergent factors among them, what is clear is that in Colombia we are already perceiving the need to transgress traditional English education models and assume instead a more integrate that views English as something fluid, and negotiated (Jenkins, 2015). Although now our colleagues have used the terms ELF, EIL, WE, and even GE, the future is promising. Perhaps in a short-term period we could talk about Multilingualism through English (MTE) as it is already occurring in some international settings where research in English is at the core. However, we agree with Mora (2022) when he claims that this is an aspect that requires more profound discussions nationally.

Final Remarks: Envisioning the Future of ELT

When examining the trajectory of the ELT profession and ELT-related research, it becomes more than evident that the field has been advancing. Colombian history has been marked by a complex socio-political landscape, which has caused considerable issues of inequity characterized by a profound feeling of unfairness and sadness. Several organizations have contributed by approaching social issues and addressing them through multidisciplinary approaches, nevertheless, challenges persist due to rooted social hierarchies and the sequels of conflict. Despite the scenario, our people still strive for recognition, equity, and integration. The last decades have provided a vast opportunity for teachers to ceaselessly research through SJE to give our communities a voice, acknowledging their territories and identities.

We believe that, even though significant efforts have been made to humanize ELT pedagogy (Ortega, 2024) and better prepare new generations of teachers for transformative practices (Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024), there is a long path to be walked. Policy makers, English teacher education programs within the national framework, and all stakeholders in the field must continue working towards this goal. Central to this endeavor is fostering collaboration

between governmental and non-governmental organizations, developing context-sensitive pedagogies, promoting research agendas linked to collaborative efforts, integrating real-world examples into classroom practices, and gradually introducing diverse English varieties. Crucially, policy construction must encourage inclusive dialogue, ensuring that stakeholders are not positioned “at different ends of the table” (Correa & Usma Wilches, 2013, p. 239).

Future ELT agendas should, in consequence, challenge simplistic, Western-centric conceptions of territory as merely a physical space occupied by individuals. Instead, ELT practices must highlight the rich diversity of cultural expressions emerging from various territories, encouraging a broader framework for understanding territory in terms of its cultural complexity. We describe this approach as engaging with “territories otherwise.”

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Asistentes al Primer Seminario de Profesores de Inglés de Colombia, realizado en la Universidad Industrial de Santander en Bucaramanga, del 14 al 16 de octubre de 1965.

Integrating Language and Content: Sixty Years of University English Language Education in Colombia

Integración de Lengua y Contenido: Sesenta Años de Educación en Lengua Inglesa a Nivel Universitario en Colombia

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Abstract

In celebration of ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, this article critically discusses how language teaching and learning in Colombia have addressed the relationship between language and content within higher education, aiming to prepare future professionals for the current interconnected world. Through the analysis of the national literature, we explore English for Specific Purposes, Content and Language Integrated Learning, and English as a Medium of Instruction in higher education in Colombia. We show the shift from learning a language for language's sake to learning a language through content and culminating in learning content through language. It includes a review of the definition, evolution, current state, challenges, and criticism of each approach. Finally, we discuss potential pathways and opportunities for language education and discipline learning focused on local needs. We argue that the future of English teaching should include all these approaches since each has a place within the Colombian language education ecosystem. Depending on the needs of specific contexts, they all can be used successfully; however, certain aspects must be considered for the selection, implementation, and evaluation of these approaches to bring about a healthy combination of language, professional skills, and content.

Keywords: CLIL, English language education, EMI, ESP, higher education

Resumen

En la celebración del 60 aniversario de ASOCOPI, este artículo analiza críticamente cómo la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas en Colombia ha abordado la relación entre lengua y contenido en la educación superior como una forma de preparar a los futuros profesionales para el mundo interconectado actual. A través del análisis de la literatura nacional, exploramos los enfoques del inglés para propósitos específicos, el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lenguas y el inglés como medio de instrucción en la educación superior en Colombia; mostramos el cambio del aprendizaje de una lengua como objeto de estudio hasta aprender un idioma a través del contenido y culminar en el aprendizaje de contenido a través de la lengua. Incluye una revisión de la definición, evolución, estado actual, desafíos y críticas de cada enfoque. Finalmente, discutimos posibles caminos y oportunidades para la formación en idiomas y el aprendizaje de las disciplinas centradas en las necesidades locales. Argumentamos que el futuro de la enseñanza del inglés debería incluir todos estos enfoques, ya que cada uno tiene un lugar dentro del ecosistema educativo de idiomas en Colombia. Dependiendo de las necesidades de contextos específicos, todos pueden utilizarse con éxito, pero es esencial considerar aspectos para seleccionar, implementar y evaluar estos enfoques y lograr una combinación saludable de idioma, habilidades profesionales y contenido.

Palabras clave: AICLE, educación en inglés, EMI, ESP, educación superior

Introduction

Changing the language of instruction not only has an effect on content and language teachers. It has an overall effect on the institution and on society as a whole.

(Wilkinson & Walsh, 2015, p. 11)

For over 200 years, foreign language learning has been an integral part of education in Colombia (M. Rodríguez Bonces, 2011). Several areas have contributed to its evolution and the shift from focusing on teaching language to combining language and content (Macías, 2010). This evolution was stimulated by Colombia's entrance into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which, in turn, demanded promoting English language learning to support citizens' potential work competitiveness, relegating traditional humanistic and social development goals of language education (Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016). Furthermore, the Colombian Ministry of National Education (MEN) instituted the national bilingual mandate in which English was appointed as the foreign language to be learned by Colombians (MEN, 2005), transforming language teaching and learning practices (Bastidas, 2017; Bonilla Carvajal & Tejada-Sánchez, 2016).

Although not without criticism, a series of laws and decrees were issued to support the national bilingual policies across all levels of the Colombian educational system. Specifically, for higher education (HE), which is the scope of this article, the government released several decrees, 1295 of 2010 and 1330 of 2019 (MEN, 2010, 2019), that overtly require every undergraduate program to determine the conditions that favor both internationalization of the curriculum and learning a foreign language. Additionally, the National Council of Higher Education (CESU) established that HE institutions should include academic courses in a foreign language in university programs (CESU, 2014).

All these government-led conditions have paved the way to the implementation of different foreign language approaches at the university level and have been supported by organizations such as “the Fulbright Commission, the American Embassy, the British Council, the ASOCOPI association, and the universities, [which have] promoted the use of up-dated methods... according to international trends” (Bastidas, 2017, p. 22). Parallel to these policies, HE professors nationwide had identified the need to integrate discipline-related content and professional skills into language teaching to prepare students for their future careers as they could no longer “just become conversant in ‘General English’, but they should study their subject in English” (Graddol, 2005, para. 2). This gave rise to the implementation of international approaches that combine language and content in HE in Colombia.

Initially, English for specific purposes (ESP) emerged as an approach to learning English based on academic, occupational, or scientific needs (Mackay & Mountford, 1978). In Colombia, the first implementations of ESP emphasized grammar, translation, and reading exercises tailored to professional fields (Hidalgo, 1997/2016) and responded to what was happening in the nation and Latin America at other educational levels (Bastidas, 2017; Fernández, 2009). Over time, with a shift towards more communicative and learner-centered methodologies, approaches such as content and language integrated learning (CLIL) started to appear in HE, emphasizing both language development and content learning. This approach is understood as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1). In Colombia, where students exit secondary education with limited English proficiency, tertiary-level CLIL became an option to help students communicate in English in their disciplines. With the growth of internationalization in HE in Colombia, English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) emerged to attract international students to national campuses while, at the same time, offering local students the opportunity to learn the discipline content in English. This approach is known for teaching academic subjects in English in countries where English is not the main language of communication (Macaro et al., 2018). Currently, all three approaches are used in Colombian universities, but this same coexistence has caused the conceptual boundaries between them to be blurred. Sometimes ESP definitions and practices are referred to as CLIL (and vice versa) while CLIL and EMI are often equated as well (Corrales & Poole, 2023).

As described earlier, while HE institutions face many challenges, they are still required to ensure their graduates are competent and competitive in their fields as well as proficient in English. However, students continue to lag behind in their English proficiency when they enter the university, adding another layer of complexity. The aforementioned policies and practices have brought a need to offer language education that blends content and language to support student development. Therefore, this article attempts to clarify the most widely used approaches that combine these elements.

In celebration of ASOCOPI's 60th anniversary, this article critically reflects upon how language teaching and learning in Colombian HE has dealt with the relationship between language and content by analyzing the national and international literature on ESP, CLIL, and EMI. It includes a review of the definition, evolution, current state, challenges, and criticism of each approach, showing how these approaches move from a focus on learning a language for professional purposes, learning a language through discipline content, to learning the discipline through language. Finally, potential pathways and opportunities for language education and discipline learning focused on local needs are discussed.

From English for Specific Purposes to English as a Medium of Instruction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Evolving from the late 1970s, the most recognized definition of ESP comes from Dudley-Evans and St. John (1988); it involves absolute and variable characteristics. The absolute features include that ESP meets specific needs, matches the discipline, and focuses on language (all aspects and genres) most appropriate for the discipline. The variable characteristics are that they: (1) may relate to the discipline, (2) do not need methods like general language teaching, (3) are usually designed for HE or professional training, and (4) are generally implemented with more advanced learners. By the late 1980s, Strevens (1988) determined that ESP should meet these needs centered on language that is appropriate to the discipline (syntax, discourses, and semantics). Within ESP, there are two common threads: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), often called English for Vocational Purposes (EVP). EAP focuses on language as it exists in academic study or scholarly events (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). EOP/EVP is for either work or vocational training (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), including any trade or professional purpose, such as medicine, law, business, among others that intertwine language elements and work functions (Lomperis, 2020). In all types of ESP, a needs analysis serves as the foundation for design and implementation. Figure 1 summarizes these aspects.

ESP in Colombia has focused on specific professional needs and has often been limited to specialized contexts such as universities (Encarnacion-Mosquera, 2022; Nausa et al., 2024) and technical institutions like SENA (Álvarez et al., 2020; Herrera Aguirre, 2022). Early discussions of ESP in Colombia date back to the 1980s. For instance, Larsen-Pusey and Pusey (1987) surveyed ESP instruction in 12 public Colombian universities, marking one of the first documented overviews of ESP needs in the country. Hidalgo (1997/2016) then published reports on ESP in the country and concluded that its use can increase student engagement and motivation toward learning English, thus demonstrating a need to implement more industry-specific language learning.

With the pressure of recognizing English as an important aspect of professional success, both public and private Colombian HE institutions have integrated ESP into various programs such as psychology, business, and engineering, over the years. Some literature focuses on the application of undergraduate-level ESP instruction to promote learner development and autonomy (Parada Moreno, 2008). Other research focuses on graduate students, faculty, and researchers' needs related to reading and writing in English to advance in their careers (Janssen et al., 2012; Nausa et al., 2024). Furthermore, Díaz Ramirez (2014) reported on how ESP contributed to improving students' learning while other educators discussed the need

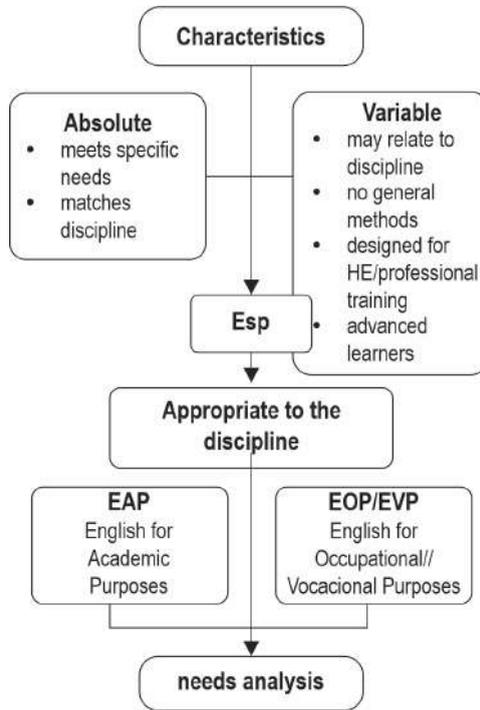


Figure 1. Definition of ESP

Note: Image created by OpenAI (2025).

to align learners' needs and expectations with assessment and teaching resources to ensure more practical and relevant activities (Sánchez Solarte et al., 2017). However, due to the arrival of other approaches, ESP seemed to have declined.

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Recently, there has been a reemergence of ESP in classroom practices, stressing the importance of tailored, relevant, and impactful courses. Recent literature highlights the importance of needs analyses that incorporate different stakeholders' perspectives and multiple sources when designing ESP courses for students at technical, undergraduate, and graduate levels (Álvarez et al., 2020; Encarnacion-Mosquera, 2022; Janssen et al., 2012; Nausa et al., 2024); and for university staff (Recuero Rodríguez et al., 2019). Additionally, some authors suggest co-teaching and co-planning strategies since teacher collaboration has been shown to improve the quality of ESP instruction, making it practical and pertinent for students (Herrera Aguirre, 2022).

Though ESP is perceived as a dynamic and versatile framework for language learning, it is not without challenges or criticism. One worldwide criticism, which can be applied to Colombian ESP, is its prescriptive nature, focusing on the transmission of existing discipline-related discursive norms instead of allowing a transformative use of language (Belcher, 2013). This tendency towards language accommodation limits learners' participation in their communities of practice by reinforcing imported linguistic practices. Secondly, addressing the diverse learning needs of students from various fields of study and levels of English proficiency remains a constant challenge as ESP programs are expected to be flexible and adaptable to cater to varied needs (Parada Moreno, 2008). Also, the historical focus of ESP on written discourse has sometimes neglected the importance of spoken interactions, which is a criticism of this approach (Belcher, 2013). Current ESP practices incorporate the integration of more skills.

At the classroom level, finding appropriate materials and resources has been a challenge since specialized teaching materials tailored to students' needs are difficult to find or create (Mosquera Pérez, 2022; Sánchez Solarte et al., 2017). This has led to the heavy reliance on foreign technologies and expertise, including methodologies, policies, and materials from the Global North, which do not align with the local Colombian context (Le Gal, 2018). In addition, planning and implementing ESP classes demand extra time for teachers and course designers, which can become a significant burden. Assessing students' progress in ESP programs also requires methods that accurately reflect their ability to use English in specific professional contexts. Therefore, traditional assessment may not always be suitable for measuring ESP outcomes (Díaz Ramírez, 2014).

At the institutional level, universities may not have designated the necessary resources to prepare and implement ESP programs comprehensively, which can impede their effectiveness and purpose of meeting students' needs (Sánchez Solarte et al., 2017). This can affect the professional development opportunities for practitioners since effective ESP instruction requires teachers to be well-versed in both English and the specific content areas relevant to their students' professional contexts (Encarnacion-Mosquera, 2022).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Emerging in Europe in the 1990s and officially coined in 1994 (Pérez-Cañado, 2012), *CLIL* is defined as “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language...there is a focus not only on content, and not only on language” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1). In practice, *CLIL* is often perceived as a continuum between content-focused approaches (e.g., hard-*CLIL*) on one end and language-focused approaches (e.g., soft-*CLIL*) on the other (Benegas et al., 2020). Regardless of its focus, *CLIL* is “context-responsive as the content element comes from the

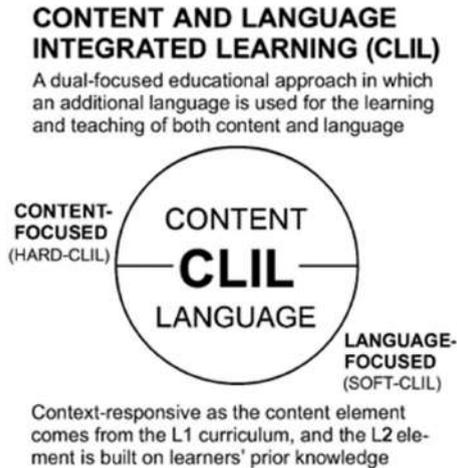


Figure 2. Definition of CLIL.
Note: Image created by OpenAI (2025).

L1 curriculum, and the L2 element is built on learners' prior knowledge" (Benegas et al., 2020, p. 2). Figure 2 summarizes the CLIL characteristics.

CLIL has spread around the world, and in South America, it has taken on its own unique flavor (Banegas, 2020). In Colombia, it is sometimes paired with project-based learning, experiential learning, or other authentic educational approaches or strategies (Garzón-Díaz, 2018; Keogh & Corrales, 2023). While it is not clear when CLIL was first implemented in Colombia, in 2009, McDougald reported on its growth nationally and predicted its importance in the future; however, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how widespread CLIL is in Colombia since very few studies quantify the number of institutions using this approach (Corrales & Poole, 2023). Nevertheless, this country is an important source of research, implementation, and innovation in CLIL (Corrales & Poole, 2023).

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Currently, CLIL can be found at every level of education in Colombia, from preschool to university, in both public and private institutions (Corrales & Poole, 2023); though much more prevalent in the private sector (Granados Beltrán, 2011; Mosquera Pérez, 2022). However, its importance in HE cannot be denied as it can be found in pre-service teacher education (Alvira & Gonzalez, 2018; Khan, 2020), graduate-level education (Curtis, 2012a, 2012b), and professional development programs (McDougald & Pissarello, 2020; Montoya & Salamanca, 2017). CLIL has also been implemented in university-specialized language programs such as Business English

(Bailey et al., 2009), English for International Relations (Keogh, 2022), Medical English (Corrales & Maloof, 2009), and the final level(s) of general English programs (Banegas et al., 2020). Furthermore, CLIL is also found in courses such as business and engineering (Wentzel, 2022), finance (Restrepo Guzmán, 2008), geography (Bryan & Habte-Gabr, 2008), intercultural studies (Spies, 2012), medicine (Cabrera Vega et al., 2021), nursing (Salamanca & Montoya, 2018), and physics to name a few (Barragán Parra & Moreno Sanguino, 2014).

Whereas CLIL has been effective for the learning of both content and language (Costa & D'Angelo, 2011; McDougald & Pissarello, 2020) and for fostering motivation in students worldwide and nationally (Banegas, 2013), several criticisms and challenges have been identified. First, CLIL implementation in Colombia is a challenge because of the need for subject teachers to have high English proficiency or English language teachers to have strong subject knowledge (J. Rodríguez Bonces, 2012). Furthermore, in successful CLIL implementation, subject teachers must also know language acquisition theory to be able to support both language and content learning (McDougald, 2009); language teachers should not give in to what Brinton and Holten (2001) have termed “content envy,” where they spend more time on content and ignore language. Furthermore, some authors suggest that students should have a certain English proficiency level to participate in CLIL classes (Rodríguez Bonces, 2012). These aspects have brought on criticism that CLIL is a type of “elitist education” since often only a select group of urban, private institutions have teachers and students able to handle this approach (Mosquera Pérez, 2022; Rodríguez Bonces, 2012). Additionally, criticism arises from the pervasive use of English as the language of CLIL, both internationally and nationally, often linking it to the language of “privilege” associated with Kachru’s (1992) “inner circle.” Some suggest that CLIL could be implemented with other foreign or indigenous languages (Mosquera Pérez, 2022).

Other challenges relate to the lack of appropriate materials for implementing CLIL (Ball, 2018; Gondová, 2015; Rodríguez Bonces, 2012), the extra planning time it requires, a general lack of knowledge about CLIL (McDougald, 2015), and not enough professional development opportunities for teachers (McDougald, 2016; Torres-Rincón & Cuesta-Medina, 2019). A further challenge is the blurry area between CLIL and ESP, creating confusion in their application. Notwithstanding all these aspects, CLIL continues to thrive in Colombia.

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)

The last approach refers to the use of English in the delivery of discipline courses without focusing on language learning (Dafouz, 2021) in areas where English is not the main language of communication (Macaro et al., 2018). In this approach, learning outcomes focus on content and not language, although incidental language development can occur (Aguilar, 2018). In sum, some characteristics of EMI include:

1. English is the language used for instructional purposes.
2. English is not itself the subject being taught.
3. Language development is not a primary intended outcome.
4. For most participants in the setting, English is a second [or foreign] language (L2) (Pecorari & Malmström, 2018, p. 499).

In the case of professors, besides having strong language skills and being experts in their field, they should also use effective pedagogy and be familiar with students' culture and language (Inbar-Lourie & Donitsa-Schmidt, 2020; Pecorari & Malmström, 2018).

EMI originated in the Netherlands at the University of Maastricht in the 1980s (Wilkinson, 2013), which became the foundation for its exponential growth in Europe. Since then, it has spread worldwide and more recently into Latin America. More particularly, EMI in Colombia has been implemented in a limited number of private universities (Archila & Truscott de Mejía, 2020; Archila et al., 2022; Bianchá Ramírez et al., 2023; Corrales et al., 2016; Cortés Medina, 2020; Miranda & Molina-Naar, 2022; Rey-Paba et al., 2024; Tejada-Sanchez & Molina-Naar, 2020).

EMI's emergence has been associated with the internationalization of HE (Dafouz, 2021). At the institutional level, it supports incoming international mobility as well as the consolidation of institutional reputation (Macaro et al., 2018). At the classroom level, it contributes to the development of competences that will help future professionals in their jobs and offers local students opportunities to experience the world without leaving their country (Aguilar, 2018). Furthermore, it has become an increasingly popular trend leading to a substantial body of research and demonstrating the role of EMI in enhancing discipline-specific learning and fostering student interaction on a global scale (Dearden, 2015).

It is linked to the role of English as the *lingua franca* of academia, as in HE, EMI is used as a language for teaching and international communication (Dafouz & Smit, 2020). This *lingua franca* status does not assume the use of standard forms of English as in English as a foreign/second language context (Macías, 2010) because in EMI, English is used to communicate in the discipline (Rey-Paba et al., 2024). EMI is usually associated with the university level, more specifically within private institutions, and this may be related to attracting international students and professors, having access to international funding, and placing higher on well-known international rankings (Dearden, 2015).

Like CLIL, this approach has not been exempted from criticism worldwide (Fang & Hu, 2022; Macaro et al., 2018), and some researchers have concluded that EMI's benefits for Colombia may be overestimated (Archila et al., 2022). A strong criticism relates to the fact that EMI has been pushed forward by institutional authorities without considering contextual and stakeholders' needs which include a lack of explicit policy, professional

development opportunities, and student support to overcome language barriers to learning content (Archila et al., 2022; Corrales et al., 2016; Miranda & Molina-Naar, 2022). This top-down process is reflected in teachers being assigned to EMI courses only because they speak English (Rey-Paba et al., 2024). Another area of discussion relates to the insufficient English proficiency of teachers and students, which may affect content learning and become a burden for professors due to the increase in preparation time and cognitive load (Corrales et al., 2016; Helm & Guarda, 2015; Henriksen et al., 2019). A final criticism addresses professors' negative feelings towards EMI. Studies have found that professors consider EMI to have negative effects on their performance, including their teaching, spontaneous use of language, and the depth of the content delivered (Richards & Pun, 2022).

In sum, the current coexistence of ESP, CLIL, and EMI in Colombian HE reflects a complex and evolving landscape of language and content integration (see Figure 3 below). The convergence of these approaches reveals both synergies and differences. In Colombia, ESP and CLIL share a focus on contextualizing language learning within specific disciplines, with ESP emphasizing professional language needs and CLIL integrating content and language learning (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1988; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). However, while ESP and CLIL explicitly aim to improve language proficiency alongside content mastery, EMI prioritizes discipline learning in English, with language acquisition as a possible side effect (Aguilar, 2018). This divergence highlights challenges related to the different objectives of each approach: ESP and CLIL must balance language and content instruction, whereas EMI requires language proficiency to ensure effective content learning (Corrales et al., 2016; Rey-Paba et al., 2024). Despite these differences, the coexistence of ESP, CLIL, and EMI in Colombian HE demonstrates a versatile and responsive educational framework that adapts to the diverse needs of students, preparing them for both local and global professional contexts.

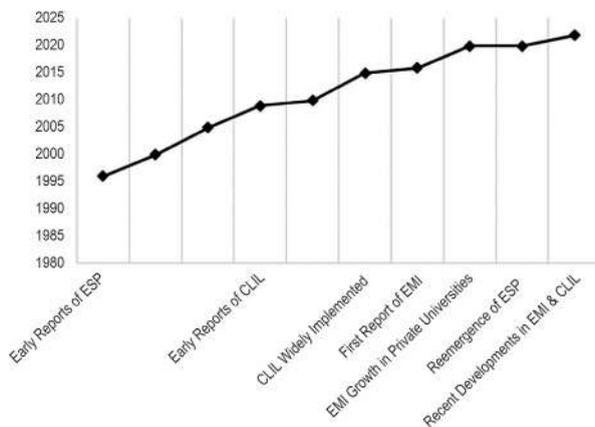


Figure 3. Development of ESP, CLIL, and EMI in Colombia

Pathways

Historically, there has been a tendency to separate language from content, positioning language as the object of study. However, with the advent of communicative approaches, the focus shifted to language in use at the social, personal, and professional levels. This gave rise to ESP, CLIL, and EMI due to the need to bridge the gap between language and content. Language competence does not exist in isolation, and disciplinary knowledge cannot be conveyed without language, as they are deeply interconnected. Thus, HE needed to integrate discipline content and discourses while developing communicative competence in the language. For this reason, our critical reflection on the literature on these approaches in Colombia has confirmed our assumption that the future of English language education should continue to embrace each approach as they have a place within the national HE ecosystem. Further advances will evolve to meet the country's emerging challenges and needs.

To consider the future of these approaches in Colombia, it is necessary to delineate the conceptual and practical boundaries between them. In national and international literature, these terms have often been used interchangeably, causing confusion to both practitioners and researchers. We propose that a first step is to establish the most basic difference among these approaches to begin the conversation to “unblur” the lines and reach a common consensus about what each entails. While there are diverse ways they can be implemented, we contend that each has a central particularity that differentiates it from the other two (see Figure 4 below). In the case of ESP, the focus is on learning to use the language in the professional settings of the discipline. CLIL, on the other hand, is in essence focused on the development of both language and the learning of content; both aspects are central to this approach. Finally, in EMI, discipline learning is the focus, and language is simply the medium of instruction. These definitions may seem simplistic and controversial, but clarification is necessary.

Once the essence of the approaches is understood, practitioners, decision-makers, and researchers could consider the following suggestions to take advantage of what the combination of language and content offers to HE. These suggestions could also help outline courses of action to ensure that ESP, CLIL, EMI, and future initiatives are effectively implemented to meet local needs.

One of the main criticisms in general about language education in Colombia is the importing of international approaches without adapting them to the national and institutional context. For ESP, CLIL, or EMI to be carried out successfully, it is essential to start at the institutional level to make informed decisions about which approach or combination to implement. To support these decisions, a comprehensive policy should be established to ensure the allocation of sufficient resources for curriculum design, teacher development, and the evaluation of program effectiveness. Once these conditions are provided, it is

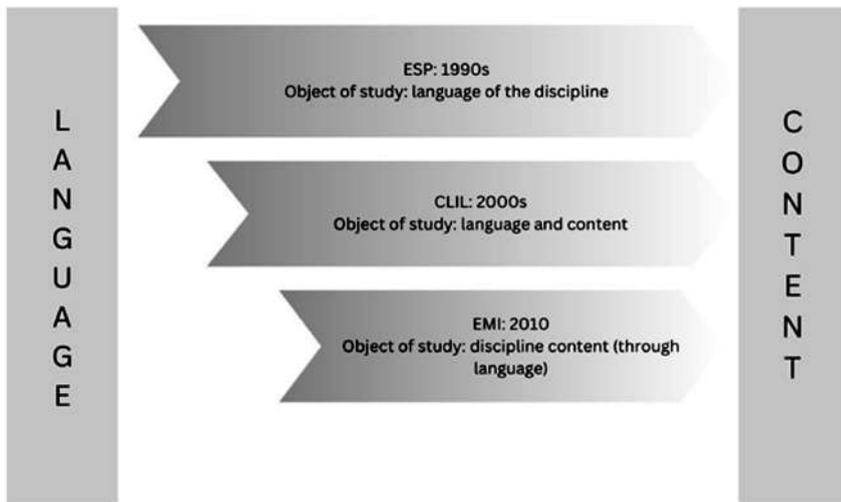


Figure 4. Coexistence of ESP, CLIL, and EMI in Colombia

necessary to adapt these approaches in a way that conserves the elements that fit into the local institution and adjusts those that do not.

For the effective implementation of ESP, CLIL, and EMI, the curriculum should be based on the results of a needs analysis. Decisions drawn from this analysis will facilitate the design of pertinent syllabi, materials, and assessments. In this process, collaboration among language and content specialists can bridge the gap between academia and professional practice, enhancing the relevance and impact of the programs and fostering interdisciplinary learning. This collaboration can not only support developing localized teaching materials, which is a worldwide issue in ESP and CLIL, but also reflect updated disciplinary learning, one of the goals of content-oriented approaches. In the case of EMI, language and discipline experts can work together to support learners' language needs when dealing with specialized knowledge and material. This joint effort can be extended to publishing houses that can facilitate the development and dissemination of high-quality, updated teaching materials. Thus, a needs analysis and collaboration will help ESP, CLIL, and EMI curricula and materials to stay relevant locally and remain connected to advances in the field.

Another aspect to consider is that in many institutions, professors are assigned to ESP, CLIL, or EMI courses without considering their qualifications, experience, and willingness to assume the task. This could affect the quality of the courses. Therefore, professional

development is pivotal. Institutions should offer development opportunities for professors so they can successfully implement these approaches in a way that facilitates student learning of both language and content. Furthermore, preservice and Master's teacher education programs should prepare their graduates for the practical applications and challenges these approaches imply. Professional associations, such as ASOCOPI, have a crucial role in opening spaces for continued development and discussion on this matter.

While we have focused principally on teaching and learning related to ESP, CLIL, and EMI, we cannot forget the importance of research to enrich the future of these approaches in Colombia. Investigating their implementation in diverse settings could provide valuable insight on the impact of these approaches to strengthen national scholarship in these areas. These studies could lay the groundwork for innovative ways to implement them or even encourage new language and content initiatives. Therefore, related research could guide policy and practice, ensuring their effectiveness over time and across various contexts.

The combination of language and content is here to stay. Therefore, it is essential to keep track of ESP, CLIL, and EMI development since they will continue to shape English language education in Colombia, considering the evolving needs of the local context. Hopefully, this critical reflection will provide greater understanding of the approaches and implications of their use as it encourages new conversations about the topic.

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Navigating English Language Teacher Education in the Colombian Context: Between Foreign Influence and Local Tensions and Transformations

Navegando la Educación de Profesores de Inglés en el Contexto Colombiano: Entre la Influencia Extranjera y las Tensiones y Transformaciones Locales

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Abstract

This article traces the evolution of English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) in Colombia over the past six decades. It critically examines how foreign-established methodologies and policies have shaped it, often ignoring local sociocultural realities. This influence incorporates diverse knowledge systems, practices, and processes of being and becoming. The article highlights how Colombian ELTE educators and student-teachers have mainly adopted and prioritized foreign methodologies over local contexts. Despite increased awareness of the complexities of ELTE in Colombia, there remains a strong need to challenge existing linguistic policies and dominant second-language teaching methods. Additionally, the article discusses the growing impact of a digitally driven educational environment, arguing that while technology provides new learning opportunities, it also intensifies ELT commodification and market-driven pedagogical shifts. By emphasizing the tensions between foreign dominance and emerging local perspectives, this article urges the Colombian ELT community to critically question foreign hegemonic structures and develop a transformative, contextually relevant pedagogy coherent with the sociocultural realities of the Colombian educational landscape.

Keywords: Colombia, contextual practices, ELTE, localized approaches, teacher education

Resumen

Este artículo delinea la evolución de la formación de docentes de inglés en Colombia durante las últimas seis décadas bajo una examinación crítica sobre cómo esta se ha configurado por metodologías foráneas y políticas que no consideran las realidades socioculturales locales. Esta influencia se incorpora en diversos sistemas de conocimiento, prácticas y proceso de ser y llegar a ser. El artículo resalta la manera en que los educadores y los docentes en formación han adoptado y priorizado metodologías de enseñanza foráneas para los contextos locales. A pesar de una creciente conciencia sobre las complejidades surgidas al respecto en Colombia, persiste la necesidad urgente de desafiar las políticas lingüísticas existentes y los enfoques dominantes en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras. Adicionalmente, el artículo discute la fuerte influencia de los ambientes digitales y debate sobre cómo estos ofrecen modalidades de aprendizaje que ratifican la comercialización de la enseñanza del inglés y los cambios pedagógicos mercantilistas. Al señalar las tensiones entre el dominio de lo extranjero y las perspectivas locales emergentes, el artículo hace un llamado a la comunidad colombiana de la enseñanza del inglés para que cuestione de manera crítica las estructuras hegemónicas extranjeras y desarrolle una pedagogía transformadora y situada que sea coherente y consistente con las realidades socioculturales del contexto educativo colombiano.

Palabras clave: Colombia, prácticas contextualizadas, formación en ELT, enfoques localizados, formación de maestros

Introduction

The article presents Colombia's English language teacher education (ELTE) path over the past six decades. We navigate the Colombian educational panorama to trace the configuration of the local ELTE. In doing so, we examine how the English language teaching and learning field is inseparably and reciprocally interconnected with teacher/teaching education integrating varied types of knowledge(s) (Castañeda-Londoño, 2019), practices, and ways of being and becoming (Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2021). Corresponding literature in Colombia has shown how educators, teachers, and student-teachers⁴ often inadvertently absorb, replicate, and prioritize foreign-established approaches and methodologies over local relevance (Gómez-Sará, 2017; González-Moncada, 2007; Guerrero-Nieto, 2018; Le Gal, 2018; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020; Truscott de Mejía, 2012). Despite an increasing awareness of ELTE complexities in our local contexts, challenging current linguistic policies and established second language teaching approaches is still needed to develop an educational praxis toward linguistics, pedagogy, and research for social justice (Cruz-Arcila, 2017; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2012, 2020; Sierra-Piedrahita, 2024). Thus, in this article, we alternatively discuss the dominant and pre-established practices entrenched in Colombian ELTE and its digitally driven world to advocate for more situated or localized approaches rooted in contextual communal practices.

The Colombian ELTE community is urged to continue problematizing foreign hegemonic and homogenizing structures embedded in such configurations. This endeavor might inquire about local visions of ELTE within the realities of our sociocultural, political, and educational contexts, teaching, and learning processes, especially those constructed around English (Samacá-Bohórquez, 2018). Thus, the Colombian ELTE community should continue to strive for more transformative situated visions and approaches that extend beyond conventional classroom boundaries and instrumentalized views of language and teaching practices.

The Path of ELTE in Colombia

Over the last 60 years, ELTE in Colombia has been shaped by foreign theories, methods, and approaches primarily derived from North American, British, and Australian (NABA henceforth) scholarship (Le Gal, 2018)⁵. In its early stages, content-based subjects such as linguistic disciplines, interculturality, second language acquisition, multiliteracies, and

⁴ We refer to educators as those teaching in bachelor's or master's programs; teachers as those teaching at the school level or language centers; student-teachers as those studying in undergraduate programs of the field.

⁵ Macías (2010) sees this phenomenon as dominated by an Anglo-centric view. Guerrero-Nieto (2018) and Núñez-Pardo (2022) see it as constructed from a Eurocentric vision. Fandiño-Parra (2021) and Mackenzie (2021) distinguish this phenomenon as epistemologically built from the Global North to the Global South.

discourse analysis, among others, were configured primarily according to NABA's research and views. Equally, the academic spaces for English learning have used teaching and assessment methods, approaches, resources, and didactic material largely informed by NABA's conceptualization of language and supported by established foreign editorial companies in the field. This focus greatly narrows the field to linguistics, technical skills, and expertise, primarily emphasizing language mastery, which is largely driven by language policies that have helped construct and maintain an instrumental vision of the language. As evident in the coming lines, initial language teacher education models and their pedagogical practicums commonly advocate applying such knowledge and didactic materials.

Considering Colombian history, English language teaching was almost uncritically installed into the country's education system. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it had largely been for the Colombian elite using or adapting foreign language teaching methods (Bastidas, 2019). Although progress in its programs and syllabi, planning remained limited to English linguistic aspects (Bastidas, 2017). Throughout the 20th century, English was gradually incorporated into the country's education system due to political and econo-cultural interests (De Mejía, 2009a; González-Moncada, 2020; Stansfield, 1972). Similarly, ELTE grew as a response to those interests (Díaz et al., 2023; Granados, 2015). The emergence of ELTE was mainly constructed by foreign knowledge postulates and scarcely considered the gained local scholarship about pedagogy, its struggles, claims, or advances (Méndez Rivera, 2017; Méndez Rivera et al., 2020).

The consequence is that ELTE seems to have largely remained disconnected from the evolution of local pedagogy in Colombia. ELTE was questionably introduced more distinctly as a separate entity, a "notch," within the education system during the observed six-decade period. According to Jiménez Becerra (2018, 2023), Ríos Beltrán and Echeverry Sánchez (2021), and Wasserman (2021), Colombian pedagogy has historically been characterized by a strong influence from foreign models that has created tensions with the need for local approaches. Colombian pedagogy has struggled with diverse ideas about the centrality of teacher education and the search for local theoretical foundations in socio-critical language education, critical and decolonial pedagogies, critical intercultural education(s), relational and communal pedagogies, critical literacies, place-based education(s), and gender-based education(s), among others. These have contributed to growing awareness of the importance of situated pedagogies, with Colombian teachers and intellectuals as co-constructors of educational thoughts towards social, epistemic, and pedagogical justice, local epistemologies, and transformative praxis, relevant to the national context.

The integration of ELTE into the country's local pedagogies did not occur, although it was and still is a necessity due to the close relationship between languages and contexts. Following Ramos-Holguín and Aguirre-Morales (2014), Herrera-Molina and Portilla-Quintero (2021), and Macías and Hernández-Varona (2022), Colombian varied contextual and linguistic needs

should influence the target languages' educational practices. In reciprocity, those practices should study the target language's use in society to construct dynamic, bottom-up language programs, syllabi, situated strategies, and contextualized materials that respond to those needs. With that premise in mind, local scholarship in the field of pedagogy, collaborating with the Colombian ELTE community, should co-analyze what it means to teach/learn English in Colombia and the world. Together can shed light on the reasons for, the impact of, and the manner teaching, learning, and using English can occur in the sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and political spheres. As a result, there can be mutual contributions to language pedagogical practices, the contemporaneity of language teaching, and the epistemological and ontological understandings of who a 'second'⁶ language teacher and learner can be.

This disconnection between ELTE and local pedagogies might have happened for four reasons. The first is that, as mentioned above, Colombian ELTE's foundations were broadly rooted in NABA's scholarship rather than the gained local scholarship about pedagogy (Clavijo-Olarte, 2007; De Mejía, 2005; Le Gal, 2018; Núñez-Pardo, 2022). For over a century, Global North perspectives⁷ have influenced English language teaching methods and approaches. These dominant perspectives have shaped and promoted standardized views on language, and second language pedagogy has mostly been reduced to "major trends in ELT" (as in Richards & Rodgers, 2005). A common practice in the field is the belief that English should be taught according to such perspectives, often overlooking the social, cultural, and racial dimensions of language learning in Colombian contexts (Bonilla-Medina, 2023).

In alliance with the above-mentioned perspectives, publishing houses and learning platforms such as Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Richmond, Heinle & Heinle, Palgrave MacMillan, Pearson Longman, Prentice Hall, Routledge, The University of Michigan Press, etc., have positioned their (texts) books' authors, generally American and European, as 'experts' in the field. According to Patarroyo (2016), the Colombian Ministry of National Education's (MEN as its acronym in Spanish) didactic material for English language learning has generally been an adaptation or partial reproductions of the sequences, scope, and contents of the resources these publishing houses offer, resulting in a gap between their contents and local contexts. In addition, foundational books for Colombian ELTE have also come from these publishing houses. Several educators in local ELTE undergraduate programs

⁶ Historically, English has been perceived as foreign, despite Colombians' familiarity with it and etymological explanations (Mora, 2022), and its local users have been perceived as non-native (Vélez-Rendón, 2003). Macías (2010) and Mosquera Pérez (2022a) suggest that English should be seen as a lingua franca in Colombia because of its use in the country's dynamics. Critically, Mora (2022) suggests a Colombian English by integrating principles of English as a lingua franca and as an international language gradually.

⁷ Such methodologies as Grammar-Translation, Audiolingualism, Communicative Language Teaching, and Task-based Learning were adopted. Language policies are often aligned with frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference. Teacher training and materials frequently mirror, or are taken from, these Northern models.

have adopted these (texts) books and articles published in commanding journal content platforms as primary references to teach student-teachers how to be language teachers and how to teach English to learners at different proficiency levels, ages, and contexts.

Congruent with the latter, the second reason is that Colombian language policies have based their mandates on the foundations derived from NABA's scholarship. In the 1990s, regulations started to emerge prolifically, such as the Foreign Language Curricular Guidelines and the English Syllabus in 1999. The National Program of Bilingualism was issued in 2004. Other documents accompanied it, such as the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Ayala Zárate & Álvarez, 2005; Council of Europe, 2001) and the establishment of standardized tests since 2004. Then, the Basic Competence Standards for English as a Foreign Language in 2006, the NTC-5580 in 2007, the Bilingualism Law in 2013, the Quality Guidelines for Teacher Preparation Programs in 2014, the Suggested Curriculum for English and the Basic Learning Rights in 2016, the list of valid standardized tests for language proficiency certification in 2017 and 2021, the emergence of local bilingual programs from 2016 and on, and the regulations for languages undergraduate programs between 2016 and 2022 with new and abolished regulations. No level of the Colombian educational system was exempt from regulations in terms of language teaching, learning, and evaluation/assessment/testing. The result is that not only did all these language policies confuse teachers' understanding of the purposes and performance of ELT in the country (Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023; De Mejía, 2009b; Gómez-Sará, 2017), but they also reaffirmed foundations on language visions, teaching, and evaluation/assessment/testing from NABA's scholarship and capitalist/neoliberalist principles (Guerrero-Nieto, 2009; Mora et al., 2019; Morales-Llano, 2022; Ortega, 2024; Usma-Wilches, 2009a)⁸. None of the aforementioned Colombian language policy documents incorporates principles on situated visions of language, language learning, communication, dialogical interaction, interculturality, and linguistics from local theories, methods, approaches, or sociocultural and political practices and needs. Therefore, the local has been invisibilized, sidelined, neglected, and undervalued.

The third reason is that the Colombian pedagogical community remained almost indifferent to the effects of the insertion of English into the educational system (Acosta-Padrón et al., 2018; Aldana-Gutiérrez, 2021; Maturana-Patarroyo, 2011; Torres-Martínez, 2009). This community perceived English merely as an additional subject brought into the curricular panorama based on established foreign foundations and pre-defined teaching-learning sequences. This community's belief was then perceiving learning a new language involved a mechanical, rote learning process, with reduced societal effect, limited to listening to and uttering linguistically

⁸ Examples of such foundations are the instrumentalization of language learning; standardization and marketization of language teaching and assessment; stratification of languages, teachers, and institutions; and linguistic imperialism.

correct English in interactions⁹. Thus, they were relatively unconcerned about the contributions they could make to ELTE from their gained local scholarship about language pedagogies. As a result, ELTE was nurtured based on NABA's linguistic principles without much contestation in Colombia (Méndez Rivera et al., 2020). In addition, language learning and teaching progress were seen from a deficit perspective, and language evaluation, assessment, and testing became corrective and standardized (Giraldo, 2020).

The fourth reason for ELTE's limited integration into Colombian second-language pedagogy stems from the rise of local community entitlements within the field. This is evident in the valorization of English language speakers, regardless of their sociocultural backgrounds (as in Arias-Cepeda, 2019; De Mejía, 2006) and the increasing prominence of the 'non-native' speaker label (as in Montoya & Correa, 2024). The extended social belief was, and still is, that individuals with this ability to speak English have more professional, academic, and worldwide social competencies and opportunities. They are perceived as being able to travel or 'survive' worldwide without difficulties since English is the 'universal' language of communication; they can get better jobs because they are 'bilingual.'¹⁰ Other forms of entitlement reside at the English speakers' progressive academic level. Several aspects may position them as privileged scholars. For instance, English speakers holding master's or doctoral degrees from Colombia or overseas –even more from English-speaking countries- have been granted authority to carrying out decision-making and academic duties; becoming language teachers, educators, and researchers in recognized private or state-funded schools, universities, or language centers; and having articles and chapters published about English language education locally and globally.

These entitlements may position them all higher in ELTE, allowing them to decide, define, and direct ELTE in the country at different levels of the education system,¹¹ although

⁹ For instance, Arias-Castilla and Angarita-Trujillo (2014) and Cisneros-Estupiñan and Mahecha-Bermudez (2020) explain how the English language has been perceived in the Colombian Education System in terms of levels of language proficiency for competitiveness abandoning the sociocultural and sociolinguistic impact of its incorporation or use.

¹⁰ This reflects a commodified, one-size-fits-all view of English, reinforcing its instrumental value driven by neoliberal dynamics.

¹¹ Although we specifically found no studies on this topic, other authors have mentioned certain characteristics and positioning of ELTE educators. For instance, Martín-Hernández (2013) presents a panorama in which Latin American language teachers develop sound linguistic and didactic skills valuable for their educator roles. In the same line of thought, Cely-Betancourt (2020) talks about bilingual/communicative competencies, theoretical foundations, models, and challenges in which language teachers/educators are progressively educated to teach English and future teachers. González-Moncada (2021) critically connects teachers' continuing learning to the language education policies of the country. Fandiño-Parra (2017) highlights the properties, visions, models, knowledge types, and empowerment that (English) language teachers/educators should have throughout their professional development. Thus, English language scholars likely isolated ELTE from Colombian pedagogy. This paradoxically positions them as low-status 'experts' excluded from policymaking and foreign educational corporations in their own country.

still with limited participation in the construction of national language policies. Although our point is not to dismantle or diminish such accomplishments, we advocate for a more sensible, sensitive, and empathetic exercise of those positions, while we believe, those professionals with wisdom and positioning should contribute to the ongoing development of Colombian ELTE, by recognizing the need for deeper roots in the country's diverse contexts, and for a more situated or localized language teaching and assessment (Cárdenas et al., 2010; Torres-Rocha, 2019). The dominant belief cannot continue equating speaking English with professional 'success', creating a sense of internal superiority over the non- or less proficient speakers of this language, or professionals in other fields.

ELTE Tensions, Transformations, and New Challenges in Colombia

According to recent studies, the Colombian ELTE community is unfolding how language education has evolved politically, academically, socio-culturally, and socio-linguistically. Language teachers, educators, and researchers are increasingly embarking on an overdue awakening that has recognized the inherent foreign nature embedded in ELTE pedagogical discourses and practices.

Remarkably, local scholarship has unveiled the colonial aspects that dominate ELTE; for instance, the hegemony of the English language (Guerrero, 2009; Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Ortega, 2019a), the permanence of foreign language teaching approaches and discourses (Bettney, 2022; Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2021), the standardization of English language proficiency levels in performance and assessment (Benavides, 2021; Hernández-Ocampo, 2022), the celebratory view of English-speaking cultures in textbooks (Núñez-Pardo, 2020, 2022; Oviedo-Gómez, 2024), the vision of interculturality based on widely circulated models and theories (Castro-Garcés, 2023; Flórez-Montaña et al., 2022; Ramos-Holguín, 2021), and tensions in using colonial research methods to more decolonial research approaches and methodologies (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Núñez-Pardo & Téllez-Téllez, 2024). Besides, local scholarship has revealed the marked capitalist/neoliberalist view of language policies (Camargo Cely, 2018; Vélez-Rendón, 2003; Viana-Astaiza, 2023), the instrumentalized vision of English and professional training in language curricula and local programs (Buendía & Macías, 2019; González-Moncada, 2021; Peláez et al., 2022; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020), the evident economic interest of well-known foreign and national organizations for 'educational' opportunities with the English language (Usma-Wilches, 2009a, 2009b), and the imposition of English language syllabi, methodologies, and didactic resources to schools and language centers regardless of their location (De Mejía, 2012; Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009; Guerrero-Nieto & Castañeda-Trujillo, 2024).

Besides, local scholarship has studied how English language teachers, educators, and learners shape and construct their personal and professional identities within the above-mentioned conditions (Acosta-Acosta, 2023; Barón-Pereira & Samacá-Bohórquez, 2018; Castañeda-Trujillo et al., 2022; Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Lucero-Babativa, 2023; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). Scholars have also examined the relevance of gender and positioning in teacher and student subject constitution (Castañeda-Peña, 2021; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017). Moreover, attention has been paid to the implications of classroom dynamics and practices in learning English with learners across different age groups and proficiency levels (Arteaga & Hidalgo, 2016; Benavides, 2021). Furthermore, research has addressed how the gap between private, state-funded, urban, and rural educational institutions has widened due to language policies, financial and academic support, and impositions of teaching methodologies (Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Fuentes-Vásquez, 2023; García-Botero & Reyes Galeano, 2022; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016).

As exposed in the previous section, over the last 60 years, ELTE in Colombia has been predominantly shaped by NABA's teaching principles and neoliberal language policies. While largely overlooked by the broader Colombian pedagogical community, ELTE is nowadays more actively engaged by emerging scholars in educational settings (schools, centers, universities), although its influence on national language policies remains limited. Despite this fact, Colombian ELTE has still been configured into subjects and practices containing must-do and must-be knowledge and responsibilities for teachers, educators, researchers, and student-teachers. Excluding each actor's and program's particularities, the mandatory tasks include professional training, academic reading and writing, language research, teaching performance, reflection, lesson planning, material design, and standardized assessment or testing. The profile to construct includes constant self-formation, experience, reflection, implementation, classroom management, speaking proficiency, and institutional figures.

Today, ELTE faces a growing increase in modalities to learn English that keep or combine in-person and online formats. The former taps into in-situ personal and social dimensions, factors, and variables of English language teaching and learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019), while the latter increasingly relies on teachers' choices of course design, activities and resources, creating quick access and autonomous, but solitary, emotionally disembodied, and less engaging online learning and time management (Resnik et al., 2023). Majorly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 – 2022), online resources have become one of the most preferred modalities. When the pandemic hit, teachers, educators, and students worldwide were abruptly forced to virtual education and quickly develop and adapt technical skills at the expense of physical, emotional, and mental well-being, as well as increased work/study load (Resnik et al., 2023). When institutions were opened again, blended and hybrid education, which integrates significant online activities with face-to-face learning, started to dominate the field. Multiple online programs, courses, and applications have maintained their favoritism for many who want to learn English or pursue careers as language teachers (Yajie & Jumaat, 2023).

In agreement with Castañeda-Trujillo and Jaime-Osorio (2021) and Jaime-Osorio et al. (2023), virtual, blended, and hybrid modalities have brought several benefits to the Colombian ELTE. For example, the emergence of online environments for ELT has been proven to foster learning motivation and autonomy development and maximize learning outcomes in the new generations, at least at the beginning. Besides, Prieto-Guerrero and Ramírez-Valencia (2020) and Rizo-Peñafort and Alves-Pereira (2022) state that online education facilitates broader access to knowledge while promoting literacy activities and sociocultural interchange.

However, all these authors also warn of several considerations. The soundest one refers to how online education has made the social gaps in Colombian society undeniable. Exclusion and inequality have deepened due to a lack of technology, connectivity access, quality in rural areas, and urban low-income families, as well as limited digital literacy skills. This reality underscores that the lower the social class and income, the lower the chances for quality housing and education. These disparities promote stereotyping of these populations concerning their economic, racial, and social characteristics and conditions. In the same line of thought, these authors point out how educators, teachers, and students still need more training in virtual, blended, or hybrid education as difficulties using new technology, platforms, and applications persist. Concerning issues for implementing these modalities, the authors suggest more attention to studying methods, routines, and spaces; students' self-direction and self-management; and the strategies to carry out communication and interactional principles when online participation decreases and frustration increases.

Coupled with the above-mentioned technology-driven milieu, the ELTE landscape in Colombia seems marked by deep-seated tensions shaped by colonial legacies, neoliberal agendas, and socio-political influences. The portrayed dominance of English as the so-called 'global' language reinforces hegemonic discourses and practices that usually position it as a requirement for academic and professional success. By embracing foreign and profitable models, business plans, and widespread materials and resources, this vision has transformed the local ELT into a more commodified practice, in which standardized assessments, imported foreign teaching methodologies, and market-driven educational models overshadow and marginalize localized pedagogical approaches, languages, and knowledge systems. Moreover, contrary to their expected impact, the reality shows that language policies have exacerbated social inequality by widening the gap between private and public institutions, particularly disadvantaging rural and low-income institutions and individuals with limited access to quality English education. As a result, these disparities further reinforce stereotypes linked to economic, racial, and social conditions, which deepen existing inequalities.

In response to this complex and evolving panorama, Colombian ELTE scholars have critically examined established paradigms, advocating for approaches that center local realities, languages, and epistemologies. However, as active agents in the field, we still see that resistance to dominant ELTE discourses and practices remains limited, particularly in

policymaking, where foreign-driven frameworks ignore local scholarship and continue to dominate educational agendas; this situation is amplified when online education has expanded access to English learning and fostered a greater preference. In various areas, we cannot deny that educators, teachers, and students still require substantial training in digital literacy, online pedagogies, and engagement strategies to navigate the emotional and cognitive challenges of both in-person and virtual education.

Colombian ELTE and the Digital-driven World

Under the picture presented in the previous section, redefining how language education should unfold politically, academically, and socio-culturally becomes more challenging. In concordance with Cabrera Bolaños (2020) and Díaz Guillen et al. (2021), university virtual education has substantially increased recently, driven by pedagogical and technological components such as means and mediation types, virtual environment usability and effectiveness, content banks, and teachers' and students' access, workload, and autonomy. In addition, according to MEN (2023) and Gómez-Rodríguez (2025), a decrease in tuition revenues has compelled universities to look for economically viable alternatives to survive, with virtual education offering a prompt solution. As a result, universities feel caught between a rock and a hard place, struggling between the need to remain economically afloat and to offer quality, critical education. The ELTE field has not escaped this complex dilemma. On the one hand, they prompt to keep unveiling and creating awareness of how ELTE has emerged and continues to be dominated by pre-established academic, political, and econo-cultural interests. On the other hand, the pressure of surviving economically and socially has led to paradoxical positions, where they reinforce the commodified perspective towards language. The result is that, while many in the field express the need for more researchers, educators, and student-teachers in their programs to be conscious and critical of such realities, newer generations often pursue more materialistic and rapid gains in ELT, mainly through digital or virtual platforms.

This trend is also noticeable in the marketization and commodification of English through online applications, as well as the overstimulation of digital tasks during teaching and learning this language under this modality (Correa & González, 2016; De la Hoz et al., 2019; Fandiño, 2013). For instance, the emphasis on quick and 'tangible' results in language proficiency often overshadows the value of more reflective learning experiences. As previously discussed, although beneficial in many respects (including the tendency to study online, which represents more enrolled learners and student-teachers), relying solely on online technology in language learning can foster superficial engagement with language. This type of engagement is characterized by rote memorization rather than a deep comprehension of autonomy and language as a social practice in context (Herrera Bohórquez et al., 2019; Vega-Carrero et al., 2017).

Putting such described phenomena as part of the ELTE community, we frequently observe teachers, educators, researchers, student-teachers, and learners seeking immediate gratification in the process of teaching/learning the language, compromising the development and understanding of integrated language skills and sociocultural/linguistic language use in context. Many superficial stimuli, mainly through technology and media, including language-learning apps and online resources, focused primarily on linguistic forms, contributing to creating this dynamic.

The commodification of language teaching and learning as a product and the pressure on institutions to offer market-driven courses and certifications have reinforced the idea that English can be commercialized as a key to economic and (inter) national mobility and status (De Mejía, 2012; Guerrero, 2010), but now digitally and virtually. This view strengthens the notion of language education as a consumer good, rather than promoting it as a fundamental right or as a social investment and responsibility. Consequently, ELTE repeatedly falls into a business that sets aside more aspects of access and equity, community well-being, democratic participation and cohesion, linguistic freedom and empowerment, personal-potential gains, and collective progress (Addison, 2011; Fandiño-Parra, 2021; Murray, 2020). These issues are excluded from the more marketized world, now in virtual ELTE education.

As we have already stated, the proliferation of language policies responding to marketized interests makes English learners and teachers focus even more on self-optimization and personal efficiency over a deeper process of self-improvement¹², career advancement, or as a cultural or communicative tool. Furthermore, the commodification of English has turned it into a mass media spectacle, where online platforms and YouTuber teachers are more driven by linguistic proficiency, a ‘native-like’ image, and an amiable explanation performance. This media-driven representation of language learning aims to achieve language proficiency as a symbol of personal and professional status (Adebola Lasekan & Méndez Alarcón, 2021; Chao, 2022; Ho, 2023; Wang & Chen, 2020). Consequently, we see that sociolinguistics is underrepresented; linguistic, social, and gender identity construction is reduced to English language proficiency levels; language ideologies and power are overshadowed by native-like phrases and expressions; and the richness and legitimacy of English varieties are narrowed down to an ‘accent’ or the imperative to erase non-native accents.

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The role of media in shaping the above-mentioned perceptions of ELT and learning has become significant over the past decade. Promotional and visually appealing content and materials portray English proficiency as a symbol of success and modernity (Guerrero-Nieto, 2011; Martínez, 2015; Núñez-Pardo, 2022). This situation is more prevalent and

¹² Self-optimization emphasizes measurable outcomes and performance within the existing language policy system. Self-improvement prioritizes personal growth and development; this encompasses broader skills, knowledge, and intrinsic motivation beyond mere efficiency.

particularly evident on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, where students are drawn by the promise of rapid and effortless language mastery. The constant demand for improving teaching and learning English via digital and online resources may cause cognitive and emotional exhaustion and increase frustration (Cunin Chimborazo et al., 2023; Mosquera Murillo & Yangali Vicente, 2021; Rizo Peñafort & Alves Pereira, 2022). As success is narrowly measured by quantifiable outcomes and individual achievement, rather than holistic development, teachers and students are more prone to burnout and exhaustion while being less satisfied overall.

In sum, the current digitally driven landscape likely perpetuates and reinforces Colombian ELTE into a commodity in which market-oriented, efficiency-based outcomes are prioritized at the expense of deeper and reflective teaching/learning experiences. We also see that, while the appeal for immediate language proficiency gains is tempting, educators, teachers, and learners can exert agency to foster critical engagement with English, besides other languages. This alternative empowers transformative Colombian ELTE approaches, enriches learning beyond mere proficiency, and promotes linguistic diversity. Transformative approaches for Colombian ELTE agendas should account for the overall socio-political, cultural, and ideological implications of language teaching and learning shaping language education today.

Transformative Approaches or Applications for Colombian ELTE

Overall, Colombian ELTE has created the pre-established practices described above, which are now also immersed in a digital-driven world. Despite this situation, there is a growing movement challenging the domination of the NABA's scholarly paradigms while advocating for policy definition in favor of local, contextualized knowledge for renewing ELTE. In our view, the goal of this struggle should not be to deny and reject what has thus far constituted Colombian ELTE. These structures exist, are sustained, and continue to be widely adopted. The endeavor is to examine the inherent knowledge(s) critically and deeply for language teaching and learning praxis in our territories. This knowledge and praxis still remain largely underexplored and unspoiled in terms of their roots and development.

As a community, we need to find which aspects of that foundational knowledge(s) are evolving in Colombian ELTE so that these can be reconciled with Colombia's multiple contexts, realities, needs, and practices. Achieving a balance between constitutional knowledge(s) and contextual realities is essential if we are to envision a renewed locally grounded ELTE collaboratively. Such renewal should span and consider other areas such as social justice, intercultural competence, digital literacy, translanguaging pedagogies, socio-political language dimensions, critical pedagogies, gender equity, indigenous knowledge systems, peace education, etc. Ultimately, transforming the current Colombian ELTE will

depend on the co-construction of alternative visions around the language, the recognition of pedagogical practices developed by the local, still subaltern, teachers and learners who challenge the *status quo* imposed by educational and linguistic policies, and acknowledgment of the understandings of pluriversity¹³ across our educational territories.

Over the past two decades, emerging-evolving transformative approaches and applications have created significant lines of work aimed at developing critical consciousness on the neoliberal practices instrumentalizing ELT. Such an intersection challenges the prevailing technical visions of language education through a more holistic formation process that recognizes the intercultural and contextual realities in our Colombian universities. In this vein, gradual pedagogical and research shifts rooted in our educational territories have emerged to support the co-construction of pieces of knowledge through collaborative efforts among student-teachers, teachers, teacher-educators, and researchers. These collective efforts focus on understanding and positioning our ELT field within broader socio-educational and political contexts through alternative research. For instance, critical and decolonial ELT pedagogies contest foreign dominance, advocating for locally grounded approaches (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024; Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b). A second line of inquiry involves the growing body of research on the impact of ELT policies on social inequalities, highlighting how language education has deepened economic and racial disparities, particularly in rural and state-funded schools (Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2014; Fuentes-Vásquez, 2023). A third area of transformation deals with the incorporation of interculturality and identity formation into teacher education programs (Acosta-Acosta, 2023; Ramos-Holguín, 2021), enabling student-teachers to reflect on their roles as mediators of language and culture critically while challenging the traditional narratives of English as a neutral and universal language. These transformations call for the dismantling of hegemonic structures that perpetuate inequity while advocating for more inclusive and socially responsive praxis rooted in social, cultural, political, and educational transformation in pursuing social justice.

Developing critical consciousness of the neoliberal practices instrumentalizing ELT has been a relevant transformation for undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs. These initiatives have strived to question the pre-established practices and discourses in Colombian ELTE (Fandiño-Parra, 2021; González Moncada, 2020, 2021; Lucero et al., 2024). For instance, re-dimensioning curricula and/or incorporating critical pedagogies and socio-cultural-political perspectives into courses have prompted awareness of linguistic diversity and cultural identity across the Colombian landscape (Castañeda-Londoño et al., 2024;

¹³ Pluriversity in language education involves challenging the canon imposed by the Global North and advocating for alternative ways of knowing, being, and doing. It emphasizes co-existing and understanding relationality and pluriversity within territories (Escobar 2018; Ortega, 2019b) to disrupt dominant ELT narratives. In the Colombian context, this has embraced the recognition and integration of diverse cultural and educational perspectives, particularly those of indigenous communities (Padilla, 2019).

Guerrero-Nieto & Quintero-Polo, 2009). Additionally, several programs have promoted alternative research methodologies that align with local realities, including narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and ethnographic studies (Mosquera-Pérez, 2022b; Ramos-Holguín & Aguirre-Morales, 2016).

Drawing from teachers' and teacher educators' knowledge(s), co-constructed through their lived experiences, we advocate for continuous questioning of the instrumentalized visions of languages subtly embedded within official language policies and enacted through school agendas and curricular guidelines, as discussed in the second section. Engaging in this critical inquiry embraces understanding why and what we teach or learn English for, what we can do with languages, how, when, where, and with whom. By provoking this inquiry, we can reclaim language education as a site of pedagogical thinking and contestation rather than mere compliance with external and established standards.

This understanding provokes critical reflections on language as a social, intercultural, pluricultural, and political practice (Lagnado, 1999; Portilla-Quintero & Herrera Molina, 2021; Quintero, 2023; Vanegas Garzón & Bedoya Ríos, 2023). It also contributes to redefining the sociocultural, intercultural, pluricultural, linguistic, and pedagogical dimensions of ELT in Colombia by aligning them with principles of social justice. Such redefinition challenges the deterministic frameworks that have historically shaped the field and opens possibilities for more locally grounded and context-sensitive initiatives. In this line of thought, language becomes a right and a social practice for cross-border collaboration, broader knowledge dissemination, the sharing and exploration of cultural heritage, the enactment of activism and agency, and the strengthening of social bonds through varied modalities (Gutiérrez, 2022; Torres Escobar, 2022). This vision transcends the narrow scope of pre-established classroom performance and standardized tests' language proficiency levels (Giraldo, 2018, 2021).

Gradual pedagogical and research shifts rooted in our educational territories are context-thought and intentionally planned to challenge the technical focus and domains of mainstream ELTE. This has entailed a dialogical experience within undergraduate (and graduate) programs for teacher-educators and schoolteachers to think '*outside the box*' of traditional paradigms when educating student-teachers. These programs offer foundation, knowledge(s), and practice about English and language teaching that shape prospective teachers' future practices and ultimately shape the future Colombian ELT. Student-teachers are individuals with principles, values, beliefs, feelings, concerns, expectations, and challenges about themselves and their language teaching pedagogical and research doings (Bonilla-Medina & Samacá Bohórquez, 2020; Durán-Narváez et al., 2017; Lucero & Cortés-Ibañez, 2021; Lucero et al., 2024; Suárez Flórez & Basto Basto, 2017). Therefore, everything educational programs offer contributes to shaping teachers-to-be within an acquired discourse, constructed knowledge(s), and situated teaching praxis. In simple terms, any

ELTE program operates as a teacher-shaping institution. This constitution can be more plentiful when student-teachers are placed in varied local educational contexts, encouraged to be aware of such contexts' realities, and triggered to feel, think, and act with their emerging teacher selves concerning others and the contexts they serve.

Embracing this transformative vision of language education requires a collective commitment to recognizing the Colombian ELTE community's situated, emergent, and evolving pedagogical practices. As diverse and critical voices continue to emerge within this community, co-creating communal spaces is essential where localized knowledge and practices can be shared and expanded. Whether rooted in context, community, decoloniality, local literacies, dialogical perspectives, critical pedagogies, or de-racialization, these practices hold significant value within Colombian educational territories. Acknowledging and amplifying them is crucial for reshaping the dynamics of local knowledge construction and fostering meaningful transformations in ELTE. There remains a need to keep exploring the Colombian ELTE community's powerful pedagogical decisions to teach and learn English in close relation to their contexts and needs (Bonilla-Mora & López-Urbina, 2021; Cruz-Arcila, 2018; Ubaque-Casallas, 2021).

There might be multiple ways to challenge the canonical perspectives on ELTE. For example, we can challenge the established perspectives of doing research by systematizing experiences through autobiographies (Posada-Ortiz, 2021), collaborative autoethnographies (Campos Campos et al., 2021), critical autoethnographies (Castañeda-Trujillo, 2023), testimonies (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021), and narratives (Ubaque-Casallas, 2021). These approaches can be co-constructed from particular and innovative forms embedded in our everyday language pedagogical practices (as in Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Oviedo-Gómez & Jaramillo-Cárdenas, 2024; Samacá-Bohórquez, 2020; Vanegas Garzón & Bedoya-Ríos, 2024). These ways provoke feelings, thoughts, and doings -a culture of inquiry-interrogating ELT theory and research-based literature applied to real-world practices and allow us to reflect and design context-specific methodologies, interdisciplinary work, and teaching materials (as in Aguirre Morales et al., 2022; Corrales et al., 2015; Escobar Alméciga, 2015, 2018; Guerrero-Nieto, 2022; Méndez-Rivera et al., 2020). Furthermore, by documenting and analyzing everyday pedagogical practices, the Colombian ELTE community positions itself as a co-constructor of knowledge(s) asserting its agency and actively resisting the traditional top-down flow in which foreign 'experts' often inform practice.

The growing practice of systematization of experiences has the potential to challenge the dominant discourses in ELTE and to foster a more pluralistic understanding of the field. It enables a collective reflection of challenges, supports the reshaping of teaching and research agendas, and nurtures a cycle of action, reflection, and transformation in language

education¹⁴. These lines of work, interrelated with broader fields, have provoked views and applications of social justice. Thus, besides dismantling the hegemonic structures and epistemic violence perpetuating inequity, they cultivate sensitivity and foster social, cultural, political, and educational practices. Such praxis is inclusive and transformative, recognizing ancestral pieces of knowledge and practices. This approach advocates cognitive-epistemic justice in teachers' knowledge(s) and doings, embracing differences and affirming rights in pursuing social justice.

Spaces supporting these lines of work include events and academic networks¹⁵, as critical reflection hubs, with a critical view of the above-mentioned panorama (Journal CALJ, 2020; Cárdenas, 2022; Lucero & Castañeda-Londoño, 2021). These spaces enable the Colombian ELTE community to continue reflecting deeply and critically while implementing necessary and situated changes for ELT practices and discourses. As a community, we can keep fostering interconnected academic events and networks with universities, associations, cooperative institutions, and policy-making departments. These hubs could serve as platforms to offer structured reviews, research group collaborations, and critical and decolonial-pedagogical dialogues and workshops. These initiatives can focus on promoting situated language spaces to rethink the role of English in Colombia's diverse communities and welcome other languages into our pedagogical and research praxis. Together, we can work as a community toward transforming the visions of languages by favoring a more plurilingual praxis¹⁶.

Another important pathway is developing a Colombian ELTE knowledge(s) ecosystem that documents, systematizes, and disseminates local ELT practices, methodologies, and research (as in Castañeda-Londoño, 2019; Correa, 2023; Lucero & Vera Peña, 2024). Published papers and books of research, teaching experiences, theoretical reviews, and reflections in Colombian and overseas' specialized journals and publishing houses constitute one of the key sources to create an evolving space where the Colombian ELTE Community not only consults but also contributes with and assimilates gained knowledge(s), context-specific methodologies, specialized research, and local sociocultural and linguistic realities.

¹⁴ In this section, we do not attempt to discuss the transformations in the digital-world-driven approaches for language education. Instead, we acknowledge Acosta López and Díaz Ramírez's article (this special issue). They broadly investigate the integration of distance learning models and ELT in Colombia through a conceptual reflection on their historical evolution and impact.

¹⁵ These lines of work, for example, can be developed through our association (ASOCOPI) and the specific events organized by teacher education programs, which are well-established and held annually.

¹⁶ A plurilingual praxis should embrace linguistic diversity in ELT; value local, indigenous, and other 'foreign' languages; foster inclusive education through translanguaging, multilingual interactions, and context-sensitive curricula; and challenge English hegemony while promoting equitable, diverse, and culturally relevant language teaching and research.

Similarly, Colombian universities' repositories (as in Asadi et al., 2019) serve as another valuable source to developing the ELTE field as they showcase students' local experiences, research culture developments, educational trends, and academic standings. By creating this localized knowledge(s)-sharing ecosystem, the Colombian ELTE community can reduce dependence on foreign models, promote a collective understanding of teaching English in Colombian contexts, and encourage the development of ELTE knowledge(s) grounded in Colombia's social, political, cultural, academic, and linguistic landscapes.

Conclusions

For the past six decades, ELTE in Colombia has been largely shaped by foreign theories, often overlooking local knowledge and needs. However, dedicated research efforts have paved the way for emerging and renewed ELT practices in the country. Despite efforts to contextualize ELTE practices, foreign influence, especially driven by NABA scholarship, continues to dominate teaching methods, materials, and policies. To advance, Colombian ELTE must prioritize local contexts, blending existing acquired pedagogical insights with more localized, sensitive, and transformative approaches.

As a community, we are living at a pivotal moment, confronting deeply ingrained foreign influences that have shaped ELT practices, discourses, and policies in Colombia. Although efforts to redefine them persist amid challenges, this shift requires equitable, context-appropriate, and inclusive pedagogical practices to fill systemic gaps in Colombian ELTE. Moving forward, addressing social disparities and enhancing teacher training in these modalities is essential. However, as a community, we undeniably face several challenges within a digital-driven world that reinforces English language commodification and marketization. Colombian ELTE undergraduate (and graduate) programs more steadily struggle to balance awareness of socio-political and economic influences with the push for rapid, marketable outcomes driven by digital modes. If we fall into the game without critical agency, the risk is reducing local ELTE to quick and profitable results, undermining reflective approaches and broader social engagement in its practices.

Therefore, transforming Colombian ELTE requires an intentional balance between historical knowledge and the evolving local contexts and current realities. As a community, we must emphasize collaborative and critical inquiry into entrenched academic practices. Emerging pedagogical and research shifts must promote more intercultural, contextualized, and socially just practices through localized teaching, innovative methodologies, and collective reflection. Creating knowledge-sharing ecosystems, collaborative networks, and more space for critical dialogue are our suggestions for a dynamic, community-driven transformation.

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ASOCOPI for the Periphery: ELT Development in the Caribbean Region from 1989 to 2018

ASOCOPI para la Periferia: Desarrollo del ELT en la Región del Caribe de 1989 a 2018

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Abstract

The history of the Colombian Association of Teachers of English (ASOCOPI) has been linked to political aspirations to build a sense of unity and belonging from the center to the country's periphery. The strategic mobility of annual congresses organized by ASOCOPI has led to partnership efforts that depict the association's struggles to improve and maintain a locus of enunciation in which all regions of Colombia can feel represented. The *licenciatura* programs in English language teaching in the Caribbean region have faced difficulties gaining quality and exposure; their advocacy and academic work in intercultural understanding and regional cultural repertoires call for greater attention and recognition. The imbalance of power between ELT communities in the Colombian capital and those in the periphery will be examined using the center-periphery metaphor. This article examines the presence of ASOCOPI in the Colombian Caribbean region from 1989 to 2018, analyzing its contribution to the advancement of the English language teaching profession and its possible impact on the region. Critical concerns about the senses of association and representation will be addressed by document analysis procedures combined with the authors' autobiographical data.

Keywords: Association, Center-periphery, Colombian Caribbean, representation

Resumen

La historia de la Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés (ASOCOPI) ha estado ligada a las aspiraciones políticas de construir un sentido de unidad y pertenencia desde el centro hacia la periferia del país. La movilidad estratégica de los congresos anuales organizados por ASOCOPI ha dado lugar a esfuerzos de cooperación que describen las luchas de la asociación por mejorar y mantener un lugar de enunciaci3n en el que todas las regiones de Colombia puedan sentirse representadas. Los programas de licenciatura en ense1anza del idioma ingl3s en la regi3n del Caribe han enfrentado dificultades para ganar calidad y exposici3n, y el trabajo de promoci3n acad3mica en el entendimiento intercultural, as3 como de los repertorios culturales regionales exige una mayor atenci3n y reconocimiento. Se examinar3 el desequilibrio de poder entre las comunidades de ELT en la capital y las de la periferia utilizando el modelo centro-periferia. Este art3culo examina la presencia de ASOCOPI en la regi3n Caribe de Colombia entre 1989 y 2018, y analiza su contribuci3n al avance de la profesi3n docente en la ense1anza del ingl3s y su posible impacto en la regi3n. Las preocupaciones cr3ticas sobre los sentidos de asociaci3n y representaci3n se abordan mediante procedimientos de an3lisis de documentos combinados con los datos autobiogr3ficos de los autores.

Palabras clave: Asociaci3n, centro-periferia, Caribe colombiano, representaci3n

Introduction

The authors of this paper are teachers from the Caribbean coast of Colombia, whose professional development has been partially or entirely dependent on the education they received in the Caribbean region. Pilar Méndez studied the *licenciatura* program⁴ at Universidad del Atlántico from 1994-1999 and was a former student of Professor Steffanell, who studied the same *licenciatura* program from 1985-1990. The third author, Francisco Pérez Gómez, received a *normalista* education⁵ in Montería, Córdoba, and finished his Bachelor of Arts in Languages in 1999. The three of us have been members of ASOCOPI in an itinerant way and have witnessed the importance of its influence in the center of the country and the periphery. The significance of this autobiographical data lies in its capacity to demonstrate that the disparities in our trajectories to become professional language educators have been influenced by the power disparity between English language teaching (ELT) communities in the capital city and those located in the periphery or distant areas.

When addressing the issue of ELT national development in research and teaching education, most studies tend to focus on the central region of the country, with only a few mentions of ELT in the Caribbean region. It seems that the concentration of specialized journals in the ELT field has helped to invigorate a sense of a unified community (Lucero & Castañeda-Londoño, 2021; Lucero & Díaz, 2016). Despite the concentration of resources and means at the center, it would be incorrect to presume that the dispersed and fragmented efforts undertaken in the Caribbean have yielded insignificant or negligible outcomes in the advancement of ELT at the national level. It would also be mistaken to ignore the contribution of ASOCOPI in promoting annual congresses in the regions. The center-periphery model illustrates how isolation from coordinated cooperation mechanisms, such as those promoted by the association, can result in political and social ostracism (Batur, 2014). The promotion of national and international cooperation must be strengthened politically.

The Presence of ASOCOPI in the Caribbean Region

Considering the chronological order of congresses, we discuss the impact of the national congresses chronologically. The levels for presenting the analysis and discussions are the following: 1) A descriptive level. This level explains the main focus of the congress, describing the nature of the presentations and various stakeholders involved in their organization. 2) A

⁴ *Licenciaturas* are undergraduate programs (Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Education) that Colombian universities offer for teaching education and professionalization in various disciplines as English teaching, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Math, and Physical Education, among others. These programs usually take four or five years to complete.

⁵ *Normalista* education refers to the teaching education received at normal schools in Colombia. These schools focus on preparing individuals to become schoolteachers.

contextualizing level. This entails, on the one hand, comprehending several socioeconomic and political circumstances that education in the Caribbean faced during the period of the event. On the other hand, it seeks to examine the prevailing focus on language and teaching in the heat of the moment. 3) A critical level. This interconnects the two previous levels with the lived experiences of authors to explain the conditions of ELT and personal and professional development in the periphery.

ASOCOPI's political commitment to connecting English language teachers has been materialized in the mobility of its annual congresses. ASOCOPI has contacted several universities in the Caribbean region to promote such congresses, which focus on different topics. In the Caribbean region, there are nine departments (San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina, La Guajira, Magdalena, Atlántico, César, Bolívar, Sucre, and Córdoba), and up to this day, the annual congress has been present in the Caribbean region in seven opportunities as can be seen in the Figure 1.



Figure 1. *ASOCOPI in the Caribbean Region*
Note. Own work

According to the SNIES (*Sistema Nacional de Información de Educación Superior*), there are more than 15 programs in foreign languages among *licenciaturas* and master's programs in the Caribbean region (see Annex 1). However, in 1989, when the 25th Congress on Teacher Training took place in Barranquilla, the number of master's programs in foreign languages was scarce in the region. Currently, most of the universities in Annex 1 have journals in education, history, and literature in which some local scholarly work by English language teachers is visible in the region. At the end of the 1980s, only a few journals existed, with limited space for English publications⁶. In fact, there are no specialized journals in ELT or applied linguistics for the teaching of foreign languages in the region, as there are in some universities in Bogotá, Medellín, Tunja, and Manizales. This absence of publications explains the dispersion of some research and reflections done in other journals.

⁶ Amata (1984) e Historia Caribe (1995) de la Universidad del Atlántico; Huellas (1980) y Memorias (2004) de la Universidad del Norte; El Taller de la Historia (2001) de la Universidad de Cartagena y Clío América (2007) de la Universidad del Magdalena.

1989_ The 25th Congress “Teacher Training in Colombia” (Barranquilla)

Situated in the late 1980s, the 25th Congress on Teacher Training was held in Barranquilla in 1989. Before the congress, extensive pre-congress activities were organized to ensure the cooperation of several professors from Universidad del Norte and Universidad del Atlántico. Local and national institutions were also involved⁷. The discussions held were oriented towards embracing a more communicative language approach to overcome some practices of the grammar-based model still dominating teacher education at the time (Bastidas, 2017). The two-day congress addressed topics such as facilitating language acquisition in the 1990s (by Leland Northam as plenary speaker), teaching practice and theory of language teaching (by José Caicedo Abadía, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas), the search and selection of texts in ESP for reading courses (by Nora Choperena Ramos, Universidad del Norte), Current Issues and Trends in Language Teaching (by Michael Klink), and the Panel: “Teacher Training in Colombia” led by universities from the center. This panel, delivered by the British Council, Universidad Nacional, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and the Centro Colombo Americano, paved the way for the Colombian Framework for English -COFE-Elto- Project. Later, in 1994, the project invited several professors from the Caribbean to be trained abroad. After receiving this training, these professors assisted in developing language labs at local universities. Various local presentations were devoted to literature and cultural manifestations, causing us three to reflect on the emphasis the event placed on language teaching and practice from a more international perspective.

Although the Caribbean was distant from the center of the country, the region certainly was not absent from historical protests developed at the national level to make visible the problems teachers and education more broadly were facing⁸. During the 1990s, the Caribbean region underwent a significant transformation in teacher training and education, as mandated by the General Law of Education (Law 115 of 1994) and Law 30 (1992) to regulate higher education at universities. One of the greatest benefits of teaching foreign languages has been the interaction between local culture and foreign culture, as *licenciatura* programs prepare teachers to teach French, English, and Spanish. Our identification as “costeños” has inspired some intellectuals in the region to explain our ties and cultural repertoires. In the book “Double History of the Coast” by Orlando Fals Borda (2002), the notion of the

⁷ Margaret Gillian Moss and Ofelia May facilitated a rich exchange of knowledge and practices. Ministry of National Education, the Departmental and District Secretary of Education, and the British Council.

⁸ The Hunger March was a social protest initiated by the teachers of Magdalena in 1966, which aimed to undertake a march from the city of Santa Marta to Bogotá to make visible and provide a solution to the social, economic, and educational problems that educators were facing throughout the country.

“ethos costeño,” in contrast to the “ethos andino,” was associated with the relationship with the territory. This, according to him, exacerbated ideological elements of the lifestyles of the amphibian culture, the physical space, and its modes of production. Nonetheless, the foundational studies conducted by Gustavo Bell⁹ (1988) and Eduardo Posada¹⁰ (1988) on the Caribbean region aimed to explicate the issues of provincial fragmentation with central power, wherein resistance to accommodate has been a component of our individualization.

2004_The 39th Annual Conference “Defining Standards in ELT” (Santa Marta)

The reliance on American and European pedagogical models, which are not aligned with Latin American contexts, has contributed to the perpetuation of what is considered a form of academic colonization. The emphasis remains on perfecting English phonetics, imitating American slang from the media, and submitting Latin American culture and context to the standards established by the United States and Europe. The papers presented at the 39th annual ASOCOPI conference were focused on the decontextualized implementation of standards that were adapted and/or adopted from overseas (Ayala Zárate & Alvarez, 2005) although some were trying to explore alternative approaches to defining standards (Jerez, 2004) or later suggesting mediating standards with L2 instruction to go beyond training (Sánchez & Obando, 2012). Although some scholars have questioned the implications of such implementation (as González, 2010; Guerrero, 2008; Usma Wilches, 2009), these critiques tend to fall short of providing practical solutions. The decolonial turn that the local ELT has recently taken acknowledges that English language instruction in Colombia continues to be colonized by influences from standardized Western ideas. However, proposals for change have not been collectively led by the association or scholars researching language policies. We think that the critical movement that has emerged must lead to action. In this sense, it must come from the scholars who have been leading this critique to go beyond individual work to lead a collective proposal.

The integration of intercultural issues within foreign language education and the effective acquisition of foreign languages remains an underexplored area in existing Western standardized frameworks. This is a vital need and one that must be further explored for the academic growth and development of foreign language acquisition across all Latin American contexts. The predominant emphasis on standardized Western language frameworks, primarily centered on North American and European English, fails to encompass the

⁹ The article “Regional Conflicts and Centralism” discusses the various factors of local division that prevented regional political unity in the face of the central government during a crucial period of development.

¹⁰ This study emphasizes the role played by business leaders in the regional alliance and highlights the complexities of the relationship between the national state and the coastal region, which ranged from fear of separatism to racist prejudice.

diverse range of English spoken globally, including dialectic intricacies, African English, and those variations from other regions. This continues to exacerbate the deficit perspective on teachers and the discourse that blames teachers for low learning scores on standardized tests, which some authors in the Caribbean found problematic (Collante & Caro, 2012). This oversight neglects the rich cultural and linguistic landscape found across Latin America and marginalizes local variations and idiosyncrasies. To address this gap, ASOCOPI congresses must persist in emphasizing the distinctive linguistic and cultural contexts of the Colombian territory to foster teachers' pride and self-assurance in their English proficiency.

Given its rich cultural context and linguistic diversity, the Colombian Caribbean is characterized by being upbeat, lively, and noisy. There is a complex blend of cultural and ethnic identities across its extensive land. The Colombian Caribbean maintains traditional practices in both culture and language, which often leads to resistance against contemporary academic norms. This region possesses a profound oral affluence that has not been adequately documented or integrated into modern academic writing and bureaucratic standards and actions of the Colombian bilingual program (Correa & Usma Wilches, 2013). The bureaucratic apparatus that organizes academia and the communicability of knowledge has granted supremacy to academic language and writing over oral and narrative language, which marginalizes participatory alternatives charged with Caribbean imagery and oral tradition.

The Colombian Caribbean's traditional and indigenous cultures and languages are regularly dismissed rather than valued as unique perspectives that could enrich linguistic and academic development. For instance, the academic elite worldwide has created a publishing environment dominated by internationally indexed journals, adhering to global standards that frequently overlook or dismiss oral traditions. It is crucial to recognize that academia, particularly from a decolonial and intercultural perspective, should not be confined to writing alone, a practice typically rooted in Western and European methodologies. Instead, the Caribbean's ancestral knowledge and empirical wisdom must also be considered valuable research contributions. The knowledge produced in the margins and periphery operates according to its standards and methodologies. Therefore, it is critical to challenge conventional academic practices and overcome the barriers of ignorance and elitism that currently define centralized scholarly perspectives. These barriers are the legacies of colonialism that inhabit our way of viewing others as inferior and lacking in their capacities. The ELT field in Colombia must look south to avoid its whitening and the neutralization of the characteristics that make us different. The marginalization and invisibility of intellectualism in the Colombian Caribbean context have been evident, particularly in the context of English language teaching (ELT). Specifically in this context, there is a noticeable deficiency in the development of foreign language education. A limited number of events and conferences highlight the ongoing need for enhanced support and financial resources to advance projects of this nature. The bureaucratic challenges associated with financial constraints have effectively isolated us intellectually. This

is why participation in meetings and reunions with colleagues is crucial for developing new pedagogical and scholarly strategies to achieve our longstanding aspirations. Addressing these challenges has proven to be a significant difficulty for individuals residing in the Caribbean and participating in their universities. The issue extends beyond mere language concerns to encompass social change, political instability, and educational shortcomings related to the inadequate governance and recognition of foreign language educators and their disciplines.

Alexander's Professional Development: From the Colombian Caribbean to the USA

In the year 2000, I relocated to the United States to pursue graduate studies in foreign languages and literature. At that moment, I became part of the Caribbean intellectual diaspora, commonly referred to as the “brain drain.” I completed both a master’s and a doctoral degree in the United States, subsequently becoming a Spanish professor and Latin American scholar based there. Despite my academic and professional accomplishments abroad, I have successfully maintained a deep connection to my beloved Colombian Caribbean roots. I continue to return to my homeland for research and to collaborate with local colleagues, and I observe that little has changed in their academic world. Colombian scholars persist in replicating practices and academic habits that mirror those of North American contexts. They often disguise these practices with superficial Colombian elements while continuing to adhere to a Eurocentric ideology, specifically in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Back in time, near the late 90s, as a teacher of high school students and college students attending ASOCOPI events, I observed a subtle yet notable bias against English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals from the Caribbean coast. This subtle disdain was evident throughout the association, frequently manifesting in a condescending attitude that implied a superiority of knowledge. The ASOCOPI council was predominantly composed of individuals from the central regions of Colombia, with minimal representation from the Caribbean, which I refer to as the periphery or margins. This centralization led to a “whitening” of the organization, where Caribbean professionals were perceived as “second-rate” and in need of guidance and coordination from their central counterparts, who were considered more knowledgeable in ELT. I hope this has changed not only in content for discussion but also in real involvement for association and representation.

Often, institutions in central locations such as Bogotá and Medellín obscure our intellectual contributions, leading to a form of mental colonization that undermines our scholarly achievements and unique perspectives. Although I live and work in the United States, my perspective remains rooted in the Colombian Caribbean context, reflecting my cultural identity, despite residing far from my homeland. As has been shown, the Colombian Caribbean government entities have recently engaged in foreign language programs, but

government support remains insufficient in promoting resources and funding to preserve and revitalize foreign languages. This lack of governmental support includes the minority languages that are not officially recognized by the Ministry of Education in Colombia, which becomes problematic for English language teachers who work with native languages in contact with Spanish.

In this context, there is still a need for a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum that recognizes and supports non-Western languages, such as Creole and indigenous languages. This inclusion would ideally foster a richer intercultural environment and support the diversity inherent in the Colombian-Caribbean context. Currently, the focus of bilingualism is often in the central areas of the country, neglecting the linguistic diversity present in the margins and peripheries. The exclusion of the more marginalized or neglected areas of Colombia is a major oversight in the country's academic development in these vital areas of linguistic development.

2010_ The 45th Congress “Seeking Alternatives in EFL Classrooms: The Need for Inclusive Curricula” (Barranquilla)

In 2010, when the 45th Annual Congress took place in Barranquilla, the issue of inclusion in education was a fertile topic of discussion for the educational academic community. Various local authors in the Caribbean region were problematizing the major challenges in implementing and effectively enforcing the large amount of national and international legislation. This includes gender equality (Morales-Ortega & Herrera-Sarmiento, 2007), functional diversity (Jaimes et al., 2009), teachers' perceptions of inclusion (Díaz-Haydar & Franco Media, 2010), LGBT inclusion (Castañeda-Castro, 2010), and teachers' actions for inclusion (Saumeth & Porto, 2010). In the context of the English language teaching field, it was imperative to consider the importance of addressing inclusion in a country like Colombia, where the disparities created by diverse socio-economic conditions make “the provision of high-quality foreign language education a significant challenge for teachers” (ASOCOPI, Newsletter, 2010).

Once again, the efforts of a group of professors from the Simón Bolívar University (another private university like Universidad del Norte) (Keiby Caro Oviedo, Jhon Carrillo Ramos, Eligio Castaño Ruíz, Carlos Castillo Marmo, Maureyra Jiménez Castro, Carmen Alicia Moreno, Viviana Parra Cera, Manuel Romero Pérez, Yessica Sánchez Mendoza, Milena Vergara Luque, and Darío Villareal Angulo) and ASOCOPI, among other institutions, made possible the activities of the congress, as well as the various preparatory workshops and conferences (ASOCOPI, newsletter, October 2010). The plenary session speakers, Dr. Ana Maria F. Barcelos (Universidade Federal de Viçosa, in Brasil) tackled the issue of language learning beliefs as keys to inclusive curricula, which emphasized the phenomenon

of believing (or giving personal meanings) to promote inclusive curricula (Barcelos, 2016; Thomas Gardner, Richmond Publishing). They talked about accent awareness as a path to cultural inclusivity to reflect upon differences and variants in English speaking. In her turn, Dr. Paula Golombek (University of Florida, USA) discussed the importance of dynamic assessment to promote inclusiveness, while the national keynote, Dr. Adriana González (Universidad de Antioquia) (invited by ASOCOPI) introduced a critical look at the national bilingual policies to assess the challenges universities face in their implementation. Other keynotes were Dr. Nora Basurto (Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico), Dr. Ismael Garrido, M.A. (State University of Puebla, Mexico, and sponsored by TESOL), and Aaron Rogers, M.A. (Pearson Longman Colombia). An image of that year's conference program can be seen below.

The national bilingualism program had already been in place for several years, which had exacerbated the significant differences between the Andean region and the Colombian Caribbean in terms of actions and investments for the inclusion of English in schools. Despite

45th ASOCOPI Annual Conference "Seeking Alternatives in EFL Classrooms: The Need for Inclusive Curricula" October 14 - 17, 2010, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Barranquilla	
Academic Program	
Thursday, October 14th	
9:00 am - 4:00 pm	Registration - ASOCOPI Table
5:00 - 5:30 pm	Opening Ceremony and Keynote Speech: Melba Libes Cárdenas, Universidad Nacional de Colombia - Bogotá, ASOCOPI President
5:30 - 6:30 pm	Plenary Session 1: Language Learning Beliefs as Keys to Inclusive Curricula Ana María F. Barcelos, Universidade Federal de Viçosa
6:30 - 7:00 pm	Opening Cocktail
Friday, October 15th	
9:40 - 10:40 am	Concurrent Session 1
10:40 - 11:00 am	Coffee Break
11:00 am - 12:00 m	Plenary Session 2: Accent Awareness: A Path to Cultural Inclusivity Thomas Gardner, Richmond Publishing
12:00 m - 2:00 pm	Lunch Break
2:00 - 3:00 pm	Concurrent Session 2
3:10 - 4:10 pm	Plenary Session 3: Using Dynamic Assessment to promote inclusiveness in second language learning and teaching Paula Golombek, University of Florida
4:10 - 4:30 pm	Coffee Break
4:30 - 6:00 pm	ASOCOPI General Assembly For ASOCOPI Affiliates only
6:00 - 7:00 pm	Cultural Activity
Saturday, October 16th	
8:30 - 9:30 am	Plenary Session 4: Motivation as a Key Factor in an Inclusive Curriculum Ismael Garrido, Puebla State University, Mexico
9:40 - 10:40 am	Concurrent Session 3
10:40 - 11:00 am	Coffee Break
11:00 am - 12:00 m	Panel 1: Seeking Alternatives in EFL Classrooms: The Need for Inclusive Curricula
12:00 m - 2:00 pm	Lunch Break
2:00 - 3:00 pm	Concurrent Session 4
3:10 - 4:10 pm	Plenary Session 5: The Three C's as a Means to an Inclusive Classroom in a Diverse Society Aaron Rogers, Pearson Education
4:10 - 4:30 pm	Coffee Break
4:30 - 5:30 pm	Cultural Activity
Sunday, October 17th	
8:30 - 9:30 am	Plenary Session 6: Trends in the Implementation of ELT Language Policies in Colombia: Are Our Universities Prepared to Face the Challenges? Adriana González, Universidad de Antioquia & ASOCOPI Secretary
9:30 - 10:30 am	Plenary Session 7: Listening to at-risk Students: Who Are They and What Can Be Done for Them? Nora Basurto, Universidad Veracruzana
10:30 - 11:00 am	Coffee Break
11:00 - 12:00 m	Panel 2: Seeking Alternatives in EFL Classrooms: The Need for Inclusive Curricula
12:00 m - 12:30 pm	Closing Ceremony

Figure 1. 45th ASOCOPI Annual Conference Academic Program

being viewed with skepticism and criticism in the center of the country, the Caribbean region embraced the program as a state policy and demanded greater participation and coverage (El Universal, 2014). Many sectors in the region thought that it was important as a driving force for the region's tourism and work economies. Since then, various strategies and programs have been promoted to increase the number of English language learners sponsored by local authorities with the cooperation of some institutions. These include the British Council, the Cultural Center Colombo Americano, and SENA, among others. In fact, local newspapers often highlight international rankings, as in the case of Barranquilla, where Education First 2023 classified Barranquilla as a city with better results than other Caribbean cities, even surpassing Bogotá (Zona Cero, 2023). However, teachers from Guajira proposed to the Ministry of National Education the creation of a program equal to or better than *Todos a Aprender* to continue teacher trainings in English, suggesting "that the selected teachers hold a degree in Modern Languages" (Administrador, 2019), which shows a care for the profession.

Among the criticisms in the region, there are several interesting papers concerning the problematization of bilingualism. The official promotion of bilingualism as English/Spanish conflicts with the presence of indigenous communities, *Raizales*, and the contact between Spanish and native languages. One of these papers examined the reasons behind myths, facts, and challenges in building consensual concepts relating to a national bilingual plan in the Archipelago of San Andrés, Old Providence, and St. Kathleen (Ardila, 2006). The author explained the complex sociolinguistic composition of the islands concerning contact with three languages: Creole, standard Caribbean English, and Spanish, and the inconveniences of a national bilingual program in the form it was developed. The paper expressed strong criticism of "the lack of knowledge of the sociolinguistic realities of the island and the favoring of a canonical and hegemonic vision of bilingualism that continues to be equated with English and not with Creole or an English-based Creole language" (p. 110).

Other studies have examined the pre-existing displacement suffered by the Wayuu community in the Lower Guajira of Colombia due to contact with Spanish (Etxebarria, 2012; Ángel-Rodríguez, 2014), whereas others have focused attention on Palenquero language to discuss varieties of Spanish (Lipski, 2012). The authors emphasize the need for language policies aimed at revitalizing and maintaining indigenous languages and the core values of endangered communities. All these studies in the region aimed at showing the characteristics of a multicultural and multilingual territory without hiding the various conflicts that have been experienced throughout history, with an emphasis on bilingualism and inequality (Trillos-Amaya, 1996, 2001, 2011).

The socio-critical turn towards reflecting on language, society, and culture meant for the Caribbean region the appropriation of a sense of belonging. In this sense, representation for a group of scholars acquired a political and differentiated treatment of language and social

policies. This made visible the abandonment of the state and the increase in discourses that homogenize identities, forms of being, and acting. In the region, Soto Molina's (2008) work began to inquire about the implications of embracing multicultural and global notions of bilingualism, without acknowledging the ideological biases behind English language teaching. When it comes to teaching English, there are aspects of culture, differences, and territories that differ from region to region, even within the same country.

2018_ The 53rd Annual Conference “Exploring Social and Cultural Diversities” (Cartagena)

The 53rd annual conference allowed participants to discuss the intricate relationships between culture and diversity in English language teaching and learning. The main plenary sessions discussed important aspects of decolonizing our practices. Some plenary sessions focused on gender blindness in ELT (Dr. Harold Castañeda-Peña, Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas) and the role of intercultural translation (Dr. Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza, Universidade de São Paulo). Others discussed the significance of translanguaging for decolonizing English language teaching (Dr. Ofelia García), the challenges of social, linguistic, and cultural diversity in higher education (Dr. Jaime Usma, Universidad de Antioquia), and the identity of rural Colombian English language teachers (Dr. Ferney Cruz-Arcila).

As evident, there was not a single Caribbean keynote, as had occurred in several previous conferences. Similarly, despite the extensive and intense program of concurrent sessions, workshops, and plenaries, it is regrettable to observe the low participation of teachers from the Caribbean region. This is a clear call for both the organizers and the host region, since a balance in participation between the center and the periphery contributes to making the country's educational developments visible¹¹. However, in the concurrent sessions among the few presenters from the Costa Atlántica, we find Sergio Meza, who on behalf of Universidad Autónoma del Caribe, presented how adjusting several instructional components make possible for language teachers to provide a differentiated instruction for all learners in the classroom; María Victoria Pardo, who represented Universidad del Norte from Barranquilla, and introduced the audience to the most common errors a group of undergraduate *costeño* students made when writing in English; Ximena Buendía Arias and Andrea André Arenas, from Universidad de Sucre, who gave a full account of how a group of eight Caribbean students constructed their teacher identity through their teaching practicum; and Jhorman Cantilla, professor to Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar, who reported on the potential correlation between the way some English language teachers at the language center from this

¹¹ This situation contrasts with what was observed at conferences in other regions, where host regions actively participate.

university assessed their students and the academic achievement of these learners within a diverse language classroom.

These observations of inadequate representation reveal why the association should ensure that at least one or two keynote speakers are scholars and professors from the host region and help members of the committee create a strategy to increase the number of participants from the Caribbean region. This structure of organizing individuals and providing space for active participation is currently under consideration to encourage more diverse dialogs as opportunities to understand what makes us a community in which the regional identities of teachers matter.

It is interesting to note that the socio-critical turn in ELT concerning national policies and programs has created opportunities for in-disciplining the field. We have observed an increase in the number of Colombian English language teachers who are confronted with education, both within and outside the discipline. Although incipient, the interest in the decolonial project has stimulated the reading of intellectuals and scholars from the South (both geographically and epistemologically), giving space to reading and consuming knowledge produced in Spanish and indigenous languages. We wonder to what extent the knowledge produced in different regions of Colombia may inform the senses we give to a national notion of community. Perhaps we should continue to create tactics of inclusion in the center, in which differences, contradictions, and self-criticism are welcome. In the same way, the Caribbean region should create a regional agenda regarding languages in contact and language teacher education (not only ELT) to invigorate a sense of togetherness and alliance and make interconnections clear.

Pilar's Professional Development: From the Caribbean to the Capital

I am a teacher from the diaspora of *costeños* who moved to Bogotá in the early 2000s to study as a fellow in a master's program in linguistics due to a lack of postgraduate academic offerings in my region. I have observed significant differences between the models of foreign language teacher education in the capital and the Caribbean, as well as cultural differences in ways of being, thinking, and acting. After a period of adaptation, I missed Caribbean cultural expressions such as music, dance, literature, and traditional festivals, not only in the learning content but also in my contact with new rhythms (*carrangas* and *bambucos*) and pleasures (cinematheque, storytelling, and the culture of coffee). At the beginning, the adaptation process was not easy: I had to learn to speak slowly, try to pronounce complete words, and laugh with candor and dissimulation. Subsequently, I was compelled to abandon prints and bold and intense hues, conceal my curves, straighten my hair, and embrace shades of gray, navy blue, and black.

I was delighted to hear the elegant, slow, and respectful manner of speaking in the capital. The everyday “*usted*” felt alienated and singled out to me. It took me a while to grasp that this is part of a cultural spectrum in which respect for individual and private space is defined in language. I became a target of correction and ridicule daily as a Spanish and English speaker. At the professional and occupational levels, I was targeted as a subject of study by many students who interviewed me to compare my accent and linguistic repertoire. Although the topic of the Englishes of the world can be appreciated in literature and the content of some English language textbooks, it was quite offensive to hear some students mocking teachers for their English not being native or their Spanish sounding different. It appeared that theory and practice did not align, and efforts to challenge conventional perceptions of teachers’ bodies are still in progress.

In Bogotá, there was a greater demand for English proficiency in comparison to the preceding decade, when *licenciatura* programs primarily focused on English, French, and Spanish. Although national reforms demanded that these programs adopt an emphasis on a target language, the ‘only-English’ policy was part of program leaders’ conviction to improve prospective teachers’ English proficiency. Today, this continues to be a strong tendency, and the abandonment of Spanish as a teaching content has become a great loss for new generations of teachers. As a graduate of a program situated on the Caribbean coast, I never felt disadvantaged in terms of pedagogy, linguistics, or teaching. I was fortunate to have professors who were writers, poets, storytellers, and passionate scholars of local culture (Ramón Molinares, Ariel Castillo, Edmundo Ramos, Julio Escamilla, José Arroyo (RIP), Jairo Soto, Bolaños, and Iván Campo, among others). Many of them held master’s degrees overseas, and some spoke more than one foreign language. On the contrary, I observed that professors in Bogotá were more focused on formal aspects of English language learning and effective teaching practices that gradually moved to sociopolitical concerns and critical tenets in ELT. A sense of academic professionalism is encouraged by the confluence of teachers who are active members of the ASOCOPI. Located in the center of the country, it makes it easier and more accessible to build community and involvement. Teachers are eager to participate as presenters in ASOCOPI activities and are quite enthusiastic about assessing what the rest are doing. It has been difficult for me to adjust to a more intense pace of work and competitive work environments.

My professional development has demonstrated that our identities are also shaped by work contexts and lived experiences. As a professional in education, I owe a lot of gratitude to my native land. I feel satisfied with the education I received, which is why meeting again with Professor Steffanell brought me joy and pride. Francisco and I met in Liverpool in 2006, and we instantly became friends because of our Caribbean heritage. Our colleague-friendly environment also signifies our friendship. I have had the chance to deliver various presentations at ASOCOPI congresses, which have strengthened me. I am deeply indebted

to Bogotá, where the centripetal force on teachers can trigger action and stability that is not easily achieved in the periphery, where the sense of a regional community has not been achieved, despite proximity among cities. The sense of professionalism built in ELT at the center of the country, although very competitive, has increased academic productivity.

Francisco's Professional Pathway: Moving from a Small Caribbean Town at the Periphery to a Melting Pot at the Heart of Colombia

Being educated as a *normalista* in Montería gave me a sense of community through a simple lifestyle closely aligned with the conditions of the people. As a very young student-teacher, I was exposed to rewarding teaching experiences in self-contained and multigrade classrooms. About my learning experience from this Escuela Normal, I still remember with all my affection my English schoolteacher, Ada; she was so enthusiastic and passionate about relating grammar topics and material content to local culture. She wanted me and my classmates to value our regional cultural identity and thus, make our learning situated and significant. In the late 1990s, I decided to move to Bogotá to pursue a major in teaching languages. There were *licenciatura* programs in languages in Barranquilla and Santa Martha, but my decision to go to the capital city was influenced by a major reason: I had been taught by some remarkable *costeño* secondary school teachers, who had done their undergraduate studies in Bogotá and held the view that studying a *licenciatura* at the center was far better than doing it down there in the Caribbean Region. In 1995, I was admitted into a Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish at a public, national university in Bogotá. In this program, there was a strong emphasis on the disciplinary and didactic components of the major: learning English, learning about English, and learning to teach English. Owing to this, I felt that I missed the cultural component in my learning process and that I missed the experiential and memorable activities I had been exposed to in my English classes. It was nearly at the end of my undergraduate studies when I started to value and comprehend why my English professors from the university insisted that it was paramount to be knowledgeable about how this language works, how it should be used, and how it can be taught. I developed these connections between what I had learned and what I experienced through a part-time job as an English language teacher in a secondary school.

Upon my graduation as a *licenciado*, one of my concerns was to learn how to reconcile the two views that had dominated my experience as a learner of a foreign language: the one present at the Escuela Normal, where English was a vehicle for teaching students something beyond the language *per se*, and the one underlying the Bachelor of Arts in English and Spanish at the university, where English was the end to be mastered by learners in their communicative skills, particularly in the first semesters of the major. The balance I tried to incorporate in my first jobs as a teacher showed me the importance of the metalanguage I had learned, the way I spoke and wrote in English, and how familiar I was with the prevailing

teaching methods of the time contributed to teaching quite effective lessons for the teens I was instructing at that private school.

Bearing this concern in mind, I looked for strategies to uphold in my teaching the view I had obtained at the periphery and the one I had received at the center. Since then, one of my resolutions was to attend as many academic events in ELT as possible every year. This is how, during 15 years of professional experience as a language educator, I attended ten ASOCOPI congresses and at least twenty ELT seminars or lectures organized by different institutions in Bogotá. It is undeniable that historically, ASOCOPI has tried to draw the attention of English language teachers from all around Colombia by holding a plethora of enriching lectures at the same event. Yet, on numerous occasions, some of my *costeños* colleagues, who work in the Caribbean Region, have told me that, at the ASOCOPI congress, there are alluring presentations that are impossible to attend because they are delivered simultaneously. Due to the reality that institutions do not give financial support to teachers who simply attend these presentations without delivering a lecture, pitifully, the congress became an event for a multitude of presenters and fewer attendees.

At that time, I saw myself as an “active” participant in these scholarly gatherings, scavenging for the latest, most intriguing trends in the ELT field and looking to become acquainted with the lenses of other English language teachers who taught differently. In the year 2015, I realized I had a lot to say regarding ELT, and I began to attend academic events as a lecturer. Hitherto, I have been alternately a lecturer and an attendee at ELT events in general. When congresses are held in cities distant from Bogotá, it is not always easy to acquire the resources to travel, as the congress has been allocated during holidays, making it expensive to book tickets for flights and rooms for hotels.

I should acknowledge publicly that I am immensely thankful to events such as the ELT congress organized by ASOCOPI, as they helped me gain valuable insights and experiences that would pave the road for my teaching as an English language teacher and offered me incredible resources and connections, especially when I was a novice educator. Yet, I have to confess two undesirable situations I witnessed several times at these congresses that bothered me: listening to conversations of a few colleagues from the center of the country as they judge some lecturers from the periphery on what they labelled as “strong accents” and hearing some other colleagues (even a couple of authorities in the ELT field) adamantly complain about the lack of originality and relevance of lectures given by presenters from the periphery. While my perception could be to blame, unpleasant experiences like these may deter English language teachers from attending these events and ones like them. Regarding the issue of stereotyping individuals on the periphery, we need to work in developing an understanding that even though ASOCOPI has pinpointed research topics and themes, this organization cannot rule everything; there are other prominent research agendas, or even traditional topics, ingrained in our discipline that still mobilize teachers in the country. In

the words of Batur (2014), “the center and the periphery of the world system include other centers and peripheries in their structures” (p. 212).

As an English teacher from the diaspora of *costeños* who moved to the center of the country, who loves Bogota and its culture, and who values all what this city has given me, I hold the opinion that ELT event organizers and attendees should genuinely embrace cultural diversity, not just in their intention but also in their hearts, and rethink their views about what English means for them. Establishing a sense of English’s importance to one’s individuality and professional career is of value as ELT congresses can sometimes seem to lose their roots in supporting teachers of English and giving a voice to those who teach English in unprivileged conditions; instead, these congresses can become flooded with external agendas which, while often relevant to the prevailing issues of society and the cultural contexts of the current time, are not only of the exclusive domain of the ELT. We must continue to work in a sense of community and representation that places all colleagues on the same footing to continue working in a cohesive professional atmosphere that reduces the perception of hierarchical distinctions between researchers and general attendees, which has been the framing structure of some ASOCOPI functions in the past.

Closing Remarks

The Caribbean region holds significant potential for the broader enhancement of English language teaching. Additional partnerships and strategic alliances are resolute tactics that dispersed communities and scholars in the Caribbean Region must pursue to bring their marginalization to the forefront. The contribution of ASOCOPI to the advancement of the ELT and its potential impact on this region can be strengthened if the association designates leading members in each *licenciatura* program around the country to promote the webinars, activities, and national congresses. Needless to say, the concentration of *licenciatura* programs and significant ASOCOPI members located in the center of the country have contributed to generating more encounters and collective actions for publications, leading events, and research, particularly in the Andean Region of the country, which is why representation needs to be shared and promoted to generate mutual enrichment between the center and the periphery.

ASOCOPI could intensify its initiatives to connect *licenciatura* programs for the Caribbean, organize regional events as subsidiaries of the national congress, and designate at least regional leaders who establish liaisons and cooperation. Hence, the diaspora of *costeños* working at the center needs to reconnect with their counterparts in the periphery to make visible what they are doing for the ELT field and the cultural touch they bring into it to show other ways of being an English language teacher. This might reduce our political, social, and educational ostracism. As part of self-criticism, we have noticed that teachers from the periphery prefer

to participate in local events and publish working papers and books with university publishing editorials with endogenous impact. The ELT community appears dispersed and fragmented. There is little recognition among regions of the scholarly work produced. Sadly, the majority of *costeños*, including ourselves, do research, publish, and participate in academic activities on behalf of universities or institutions based at the center, with scarce recognition of our origins and struggles for inclusion in elite community practices.

Although ASOCOPI has made enormous efforts to be present in the regions, the lack of funding makes this political commitment difficult. HOW, ASOCOPI's journal, could promote a special issue for regional scholars and teachers to elaborate on the senses of bilingualism that we experience in the Caribbean Region, where English is an option but not always the alternative for publishing. On the same token, there is a group of emergent scholars in the region advocating for interculturally situated experiences in which the role of teachers signifies local repertoire and bonding with communities. Perhaps the research topics and agendas are not aligned with those of the center, but a national sense of community and representation must be given its value.

We have also witnessed that advocacy groups for foreign languages often operate in isolation rather than uniting to form robust organizations that could coordinate language activities more effectively. This situation happens in many universities around the country, where events, although important, depict the absence of a well-rounded Latin American-based academic movement dedicated to advancing language learning pedagogies and linguistic studies. This will impact not only ASOCOPI but Latin American contexts in the global linguistic landscape.

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Annex 1.

Table of Colombian Caribbean Universities' Journals

University	Licenciatura Program	Master's or Doctoral Programs	Journals
Universidad del Atlántico	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés y Francés	Doctorado en Educación	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Historia Caribe (1995) – Amauta (1984) – Investigación Acción (2021) – Cedotic (2017)
Universidad de Cartagena	Programa Profesional Universitario en Lenguas Extranjeras	Maestría en Lenguas Extranjeras Aplicadas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Palobra (2000) – Hodos (2012)
Universidad del Magdalena	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maestría en Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas (virtual) -Doctorado en Educación, Interculturalidad y Territorio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Jangwa Pana (2001) – Praxis (2001)
Universidad del Norte	Lenguas Modernas y Cultura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maestría en la Enseñanza del Inglés -Doctorado en Educación 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Revista de Educación Superior en América Latina (2017) – Zona Próxima (2000) – Eidos (2003)
Universidad de Córdoba	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Avances en Educación y Humanidades (2015) – Assensus Revista de Investigación Educativa y Pedagogía (2016)
Universidad de Sucre	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras		
Universidad Popular del César	Licenciatura en Español e Inglés		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Humanismo y Ciencia (2014)

Universities with active programs created before 2000 (Source SNIES) with possibilities for language teachers' professional development.

**ACTA DE CONSTITUCION DE LA ASOCIACION
COLOMBIANA DE PROFESORES DE INGLES "ASOCOPI"**

En Bogotá, D. E., a 21 del mes de Mayo del año de 1966, se reunieron en uno de los salones de la Universidad de los Andes las siguientes personas: (Ver Anexo) [El anexo contiene las firmas de 70 participantes]

Por unanimidad de los asistentes se constituyeron en Asamblea de fundadores. Presidió la reunión el señor GUSTAVO TRONCOSO quien fue designado Presidente Provisional por todos los asistentes. Actuó como Secretaria Provisional Sr SOLEDAD. Acto seguido el señor Gustavo Troncoso en breves palabras expuso a los asistentes que el motivo de la reunión era fundar y organizar una Asociación que se denominará "Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés", cuya sigla es "ASOCOPI" cuyos objetivos primordiales consistían en adelantar actividades educativas, culturales y de investigación académica en el campo de la literatura y de la lengua inglesa; crear niveles profesionales para los profesores de Inglés; procurar la obtención del estatus profesional de los mismos; y patrocinar una estrecha y permanente colaboración, mediante el desarrollo de programas sociales y de beneficio común, de los profesores de inglés en los niveles secundario y universitario. Luego el Sr. Troncoso procedió a dar lectura a los estatutos que regirán la asociación, los cuales fueron aprobados artículo por artículo. Una vez aprobados los estatutos, se procedió a la elección de la Junta Directiva y para tal fin fueron nombrados los señores JOHN PETTIT y JOHN LIRANI como escrutadores, quienes aceptaron la elección y previa posesión dieron cumplimiento a su labor haciendo el escrutinio de los votos, el cual dio por resultado la elección, por unanimidad, de las siguientes personas:

DISTRITO	PRINCIPAL	SUPLENTE	
Distrito 1	Corvacho F.	Betancourt L.	<i>hans LT calles us</i>
Distrito 2	De Silva C.	Uricoechea S.	
Distrito 3	Troncoso G.	Mercado J.	
	Ehmann Ch.	Angel M.	<i>us</i>
Distrito 4	Trujillo H.	Bernoske C.	<i>us</i>
	Sr Soledad	Palacios D.	<i>us</i>
	Castilla B.	Bergmann F.	<i>us</i>
Distrito 5	Restrepo H.	Galeano L.	<i>us</i>
Sin limitación geográfica	Northam L.	Botero E.	<i>us</i> <i>7 abril 20</i>

El Presidente Provisional señor Gustavo Troncoso preguntó a la Asamblea si declaraba electa la anterior lista leída para Miembros principales y suplentes de la Junta Directiva. La Asamblea contestó afirmativamente por unanimidad. Las personas elegidas para la Junta Directiva principales y suplentes, manifes-

An Exploration of the Historical-Pedagogical Trends in Colombian ELT: Interpretative Analysis of the ASOCOPI/HOW Archive from 1966 to 1985

Una Exploración de las Tendencias Histórico-Pedagógicas en la Enseñanza de Inglés en Colombia: Análisis Interpretativo del Archivo de ASOCOPI/HOW de 1966 a 1985

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Abstract

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone significant transformations since 1966, heavily influenced by evolving sociocultural dynamics. This article explores how broader sociopolitical and cultural changes have shaped teacher education and professional development in ELT based on archival work with the very first issues of *HOW*, starting in 1966 (in total, 6 volumes; 52 issues until 1985). Key global phenomena, such as globalization, the digital revolution, and the advocacy for intercultural understanding, have redefined educational priorities and methodologies. Teacher education programs have progressively evolved from traditional grammar-translation methods to more inclusive and communicative approaches. Sociocultural changes have necessitated the incorporation of intercultural competence and intercultural education into teacher education curricula, reflecting the growing recognition of cultural diversity in the classroom. Professional development opportunities have also expanded, emphasizing the need for teachers to adapt to sociocultural shifts and technological advancements. In this regard, *HOW* serves as a valuable repository of these transformations. Given its longevity and sustained contribution to the field, the journal offers a rich archive that documents the evolution of English language teacher education in Colombia, capturing shifts in pedagogical perspectives, research priorities, and policy discussions. By analyzing its contents over time, it is possible to trace how English language teaching in the country has been influenced by these broader trends, and how educators' perceptions, practices, and professional identities have been shaped as a result. *HOW* serves as a meeting point for educators, researchers, and policymakers to foster dialogue, disseminate research, and build an academic community, ensuring ELT evolves with society.

Keywords: HOW, Colombian ELT, pedagogical trends, historical analysis, archival analysis

Resumen

El campo de la enseñanza del idioma inglés (ELT, por sus siglas en inglés) ha experimentado transformaciones significativas desde 1966, influenciadas en gran medida por la evolución de las dinámicas socioculturales. Este artículo explora cómo los cambios sociopolíticos y culturales más amplios han moldeado la formación docente y el desarrollo profesional en ELT, basado en un trabajo de archivo con los primeros números de la revista *HOW* que se remonta a 1966 (en total, 6 volúmenes; 52 números hasta 1985). Fenómenos globales clave, como la globalización, la revolución digital y la búsqueda de la comprensión intercultural, han redefinido las prioridades educativas y las metodologías. Los programas de formación docente han evolucionado progresivamente desde los métodos tradicionales de gramática-traducción hacia enfoques más inclusivos y comunicativos. Los cambios socioculturales han requerido la incorporación de la competencia y la educación intercultural en los currículos de formación docente, lo que refleja el reconocimiento creciente de la diversidad cultural en las aulas. Las oportunidades de desarrollo profesional también se han ampliado, lo que hace hincapié en la necesidad de que los docentes se adapten a los cambios socioculturales y a los avances tecnológicos. En este sentido, *HOW* sirve como un valioso repositorio de estas transformaciones. Dada su longevidad y contribución sostenida al campo, la revista ofrece un rico archivo que documenta la evolución de la formación de profesores de inglés en Colombia y captura los cambios en las perspectivas pedagógicas, las prioridades de investigación y las discusiones sobre políticas. Al analizar sus contenidos a lo largo del tiempo, podemos rastrear cómo estas tendencias más amplias han influido en la enseñanza del idioma inglés en el país, lo que da forma a las percepciones, prácticas e identidades profesionales de los educadores. *HOW* sirve como punto de encuentro para que educadores, investigadores y responsables políticos

fomenten el diálogo, difundan la investigación, construyan una comunidad académica, y aseguren que la enseñanza de inglés evolucione con la sociedad.

Palabras Clave: HOW, enseñanza de inglés en Colombia, tendencias pedagógicas, análisis histórico, análisis de archivo

Introduction

In 2025, the Colombian English Language Teaching (ELT) community is celebrating a significant milestone: the anniversary of ASOCOPI, one of the oldest English language teachers' associations in Latin America, and its academic journal, *HOW*. Founded in 1965, ASOCOPI has played a vital role in advancing ELT in Colombia. The association has built a strong academic community through annual congresses, tailored professional development workshops, and partnerships with national and international publishers. It also recognizes outstanding teachers with awards like the Clare de Silva award.

Between 1966 and 1985, Colombia was undergoing major transformations shaped by social inequality, rural-urban migration, internal conflict, and an evolving national education system. Educational reforms aimed at modernization and diversification of curricula were launched during this time, including the creation of INEM schools (Institutos Nacionales de Educación Media) and the introduction of new language policies. These sociopolitical dynamics not only impacted access to education but also influenced how English was taught, learned, and framed within the national agenda.

HOW, launched in 1966, originally was named *Bulletin of Suggestions for Teaching Foreign Languages* and aimed to provide teaching tips, as stated by its creator, Robert Ilson (see Figure 1):

However, along with the transformation of the ELT field, *HOW* has evolved into a respected academic publication whose goal is “to maintain communication among English language teachers both in Colombia and abroad by offering opportunities for the dissemination of knowledge resulting from educational and research practices that concern English language teaching-learning issues” (<http://bit.ly/3R06eji>). Therefore, the journal has become a venue for sharing research findings and insights from language educators across various levels; it has addressed important themes shaped by Colombian social and political history, including diversity and peace.

Despite the rich history of ELT in Colombia, there seems to be a lack of scholarship that systematically analyzes archival materials to trace the early pedagogical and political conversations in the field. This article aims to fill that gap by providing a historical-pedagogical analysis based on primary documents from the early issues of *HOW*, highlighting how Colombian educators and institutions have actively influenced ELT discourse and policy since the 1960s.

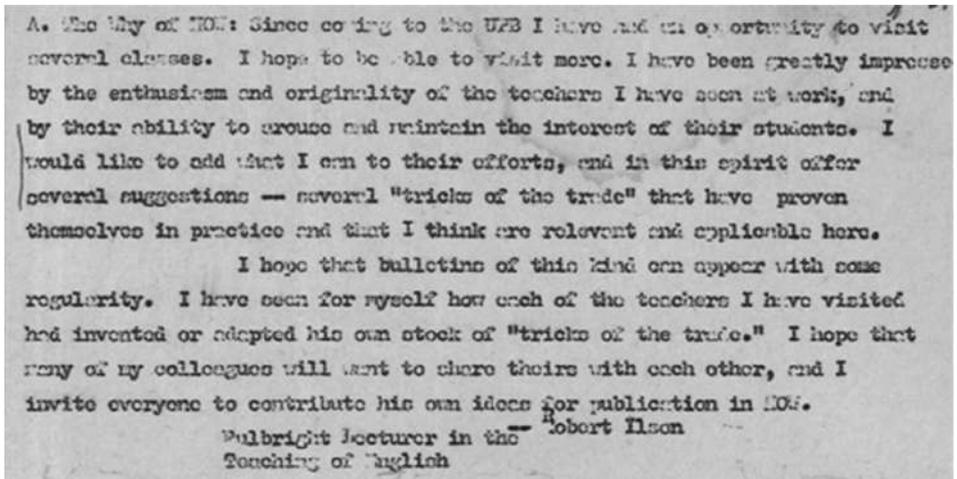


Figure 1. Aim of HOW as Stated in the First Issue by Robert Ilson

HOW serves as an invaluable resource for understanding the historical landscape of Colombian ELT, revealing the continuities, discontinuities, concerns, and interests that have shaped the field. As Giroux and Tremblay (2004) note, human activities, regardless of their antiquity, leave traces that can be analyzed to reflect our ancestors' behaviors, thoughts, and conditions. These traces can be found in various forms, including online content, audio, written documents, and even artistic and architectural works. This article explores key trends and developments in Colombian ELT by examining issues (6 volumes, 52 issues) of *HOW* from its inception in 1966 to 1985. In doing so, it pays tribute to ASOCOPI and *HOW*, the foundational spaces where many Colombian ELT scholars began their academic journeys. As educators and researchers, delving into the Colombian ELT historical and pedagogical threads is crucial.³

The Archive

The corpus for this study consists of issues of *HOW*, starting with the first one from 1966. Working with the archive posed challenges, especially since the earliest issues were

³ We must begin this article by expressing our gratitude to ASOCOPI's Board of Directors and its Administrative Manager, Miryan Cristina Vera. More than just a manager, Miryan has been the very heart and soul of ASOCOPI for many years, nurturing and driving the organization forward with unwavering dedication. As a former president of the Board, I feel truly humbled and honored that the Board and she have entrusted Miguel and me with access to the archive, allowing us to embark on this exploration of Colombian history—a history so rich that it could easily fill more than one article.

mimeographed on kraft paper (see Figure 2). The Administrative Manager preserved the issues from 1966 to 1978 in a pocket file folder, organized by number, to protect them from deterioration. However, due to their age and the poor quality of the paper, some documents were fragile and difficult to handle. To mitigate this, we digitized the documents and saved them electronically.

The second part of the corpus includes issues from 1979 to 1985, which the Administrative Manager compiled into a leather-bound book to prevent further deterioration. These issues were easier to handle as they were formatted like modern journals. These were also digitized for improved accessibility. Initially, we intended to analyze the archive up to 1990 but could not locate five missing issues from that period. Additionally, the archive contained mixed materials, including ASOCOPI newsletters and conference programs, requiring careful reading to filter out irrelevant documents. Consequently, this paper will focus on the issues from 1966 to 1985, aiming to shed light on the journal's history before it was registered in the Open Journal System, where issues from 1996 onward can be accessed (<https://bit.ly/43B58Sy>).

Methodology

As language educators and researchers engaged in teaching and learning environments, we believe tracing and exploring the historical threads of ELT in Colombia is crucial. The richness of the archive we accessed provides ample material for analysis. Initially, we considered various approaches, such as focusing on specific topics and tracking their development over time. However, we faced challenges, including potential gaps in the issues and missing numbers. Ultimately, we decided to organize our analysis by decades, examining the periods from 1966 to 1976 and 1976 to 1985, while highlighting key aspects relevant to Colombian ELT history.

We were captivated by the opportunity to work with this archive, which documents past pedagogical events in English as a Foreign Language in Colombia. We focused on the documents' significance, narratives, meanings, and contributions. Ventresca and Mohr (2005) describe archival methods as a constellation of analytic endeavors aimed at gaining insights through systematic interrogation of documents and artifacts produced by organizations. Their principles emphasize the study of relationships over objects, the shared meanings that underpin social processes, and the configurations that tie these elements into organized activities.

In our study, we focused on examining relationships and uncovering shared forms of meaning, rather than strictly following a set archival strategy. This article highlights key milestones and identifies trends in Colombian ELT as a reflective contribution to the

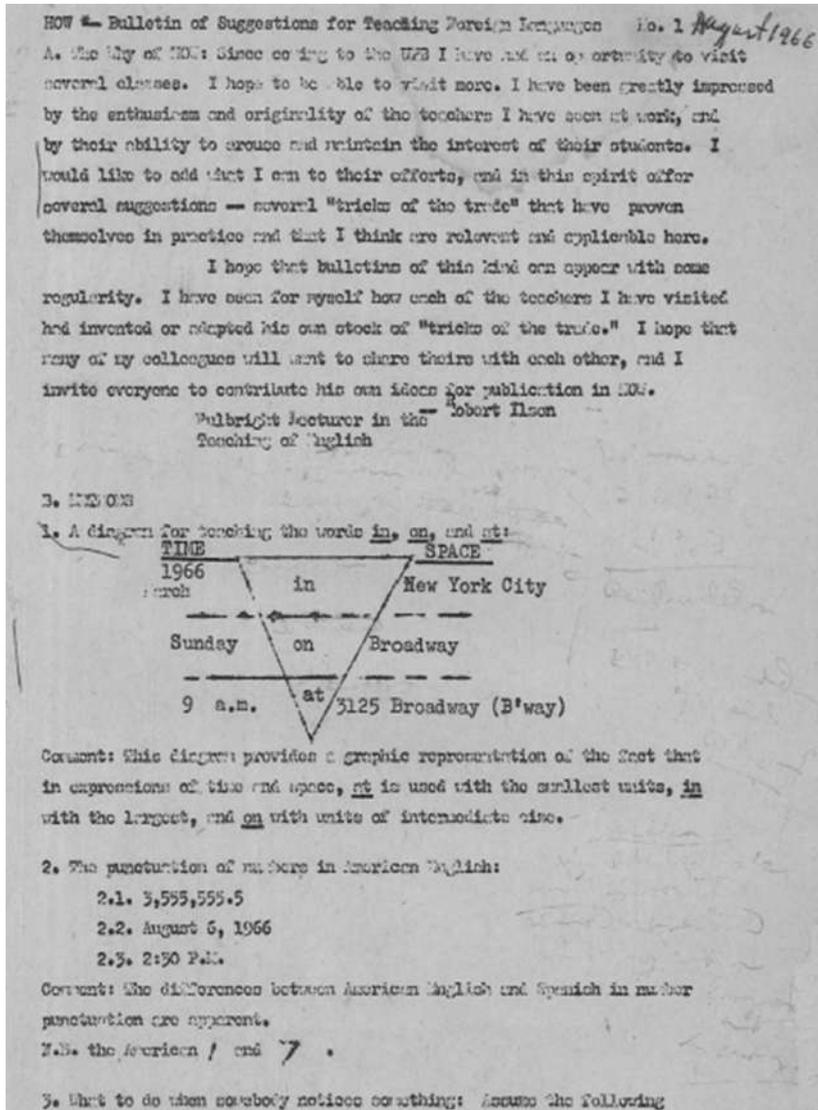


Figure 2. First Page of the First Issue of HOW Journal

Note. The first issue of HOW was produced in August 1966 by Robert Ilson, a Fulbright scholar, established at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana in Medellín. As can be seen, the journal was mimeographed on kraft paper.

field. To guide our exploration, we posed two key questions: (1) What ELT educational and pedagogical trends are present in the selected corpus? (2) What role have ASOCOPI and *HOW* played in language teacher education and professional development in Colombia? Following Giroux and Tremblay's (2004) insights, we recognized the importance of carefully selecting content elements for our analysis. Consequently, we employed a combination of descriptive and content analysis to examine the archive effectively.

Table 1. Methodological Proposal

Choosing the Collection	While we had access to texts published over a range of years, we decided to focus on the period from 1966 to 1985 as an initial framework for exploring teaching and research practices within the Colombian ELT community. Another key reason for this choice is that articles published after 1990 are available for readers in the Open Journal System. This 19-year span provides a representative scope for our analysis, which we recognize will require careful and thorough examination.
Establishing an Archive File	The files of the archive required a description and interpretation of specific aspects. Note-taking alongside the original text, preliminary ideas, and permanent commenting supported making a valuable and meaningful understanding for the community.
Processing the Archive Collection	Although the data had been organized previously, their condition made it challenging to manage, so we digitized the archive to facilitate our work. Most issues were already labelled and numbered, indicating their publication year. We divided the collections into two parts, mirroring the physical organization: One covering 1966 to 1977 and the other from 1978 to 1985. These digital files were saved in a shared drive folder to facilitate collaborative work.

Note: This table summarizes the procedure followed to work with the archival data provided by ASOCOPI. (Own elaboration).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) emphasized the theoretical foundations of collective orders and cultural analysis in archival research, while Meyer and Hannan (1979) highlighted the significance of institutional archival analysis in their studies on education and U.S. national development, employing an ecological approach. Inspired by these perspectives, we view *HOW* as more than a repository of academic articles; it is an evolving archive that reflects shifts in teacher education, linguistic policies, and pedagogical trends over time. Analyzing its contents allows us to access institutional, professional, and ideological developments that might otherwise remain unexamined, offering a historical lens into the evolution of English language teaching in Colombia.

Ecological explanations in institutional analysis emphasize the interplay between organizational, environmental, and technological constraints in shaping collective action. This perspective underscores how human populations adapt to social and institutional environments through structured responses that maximize sustainability. In this light, *HOW* functions as both a product and a reflection of these adaptive processes, capturing how the ELT community in Colombia has responded to shifting sociocultural and educational paradigms. We aimed to explore both the theoretical and pedagogical insights presented in the documents, which revealed various concerns regarding ELT in Colombia during that period.

Findings and Interpretation

This article offers a comprehensive overview of an archival inquiry into key trends and developments in Colombian ELT, as documented in *HOW* from 1966 to 1985. Four central thematic threads are identified, shedding light on the historical processes that have shaped the current state of the field. These include the construction of a community of practice; a discussion of the suitability of various ELT methods for the Colombian context; the critical voice of ASOCOPI through *HOW* in response to language policies promoted by the Colombian Ministry of National Education; and ongoing concerns about language teacher preparation to meet local needs and interests.

Development and Consolidation of an ELT Colombian Community of Practice

In discussing communities of practice, Garrido (2003) suggests that identity development and knowledge development are closely intertwined, with each influencing the other. This interaction occurs through the process of legitimate peripheral participation within the community of practice. Wenger (2001) explains that a community of practice is defined by three key dimensions: a shared enterprise that is collectively understood and continuously redefined by its members, the mutual commitment that binds them into a social group, and a shared repertoire of resources—such as routines, norms, artifacts, language, and styles—that members have built up over time.

HOW was initially founded by Robert Ilson, a Fulbright scholar at Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. However, by issue No. 6, it had evolved into an *Inter-university Bulletin of Pedagogical Linguistics*, leading to a rotating editorial responsibility, with various universities taking turns overseeing the publication. These included Universidad Industrial de Santander, Universidad de Los Andes, Universidad del Valle, Universidad del Quindío, Universidad Nacional, among others. This collaborative effort fostered meaningful interaction between foreign and local

professors, all working towards the shared goal of promoting English and advancing the education of Colombian English language teachers. *HOW* also benefited from partnerships with binational centers such as Centro Colombo Americano and the British Council, as well as from publishing houses that began advertising in the journal, such as Oxford University Press, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Longman, McGraw-Hill, Houghton Mifflin, Educar, Voluntad, and more.

HOW has created valuable opportunities to share English language teachers, scholars, students, and administrators' inside and outside classroom experiences. A spirit of trust and active listening has always been central to this process. There is a clear recognition of the need to understand teaching and learning practices in the field, along with a commitment to creating spaces for participation as speakers, writers, or organizers. More than just fostering a sense of belonging, ASOCOPI and *HOW* have shown a deep commitment to collaboration within the community, providing open spaces for sharing ideas, reflecting, and offering constructive criticism. This spirit of openness and engagement has been, and continues to be, the essence of the ASOCOPI Annual Congresses and *HOW*. The following is an excerpt from the 1979 editorial, showcasing the human and organizational qualities that have long defined their work.

What of the future? Through *HOW*, an active and diligent editorial team plans to keep alive for you the spirit of unity, academic enquiry and professional debate which made Congress XV such an outstanding one. We would appreciate any suggestions or constructive criticisms you may wish to make about the current orientation, lay-out and content of *HOW*. Don't be shy about sending us articles, essays, letters or general information, which you think can be used in *HOW*. You don't have to be a Chomsky or a Widdowson to write for us! Indeed, many of those practical solutions and creative thoughts, that you have, may prove just as useful, if not more so, than a lot of the ideas of highbrow linguists. We also wish to remind members of the Editorial Board that their membership is valid only as long as they are participating actively in the planning, collation and publication of *HOW*. (Isabel de Díaz, while Marcia Dittmann is on leave of absence. Editorial *HOW*, 1979, p. 4)

This coincides with what Lamb (2012) outlines as the benefits of Language Teacher Associations (LTAs). They offer essential networking opportunities, provide a platform for educators to connect, share experiences, and collaborate. They also foster professional development through in-service training, workshops, and publication opportunities, helping teachers to refine their skills and advance their professional standing. Moreover, LTAs play a vital role in influencing language education policy. By sharing information on new policies and effective teaching practices, LTAs keep educators informed and engaged with the latest developments in the field. Additionally, they encourage cross-country collaboration, enriching professional practice and reinforcing their value to both members and policymakers.

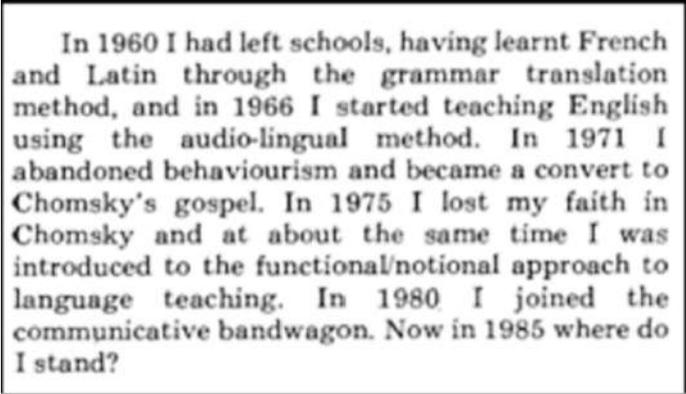
ASOCOPI has played a pivotal role in advancing ELT in Colombia through its sustained commitment to professional development, research, policy advocacy, and the integration of culture in language education. Since its founding in 1966, it has organized academic

events, published resources such as *HOW*, and collaborated with national and international institutions to support teacher training and curriculum development (Bastidas, 2017). The association has promoted teaching standards, reflective practice, and teacher inquiry by facilitating access to current research and fostering professional networks (Lucero & Díaz, 2016). More recently, it has advocated for intercultural competence, culturally responsive materials, and policy alignment with contemporary views of English as a lingua franca (Meadows, 2016), solidifying its influence across multiple dimensions of Colombian ELT.

The ELT Methods Conundrum

This section explores the way *HOW* documented and responded to the evolving landscape of ELT methods in Colombia. By tracing shifts from the audiolingual method and grammar-translation to the communicative approach and post-method perspectives, the journal reveals a community deeply engaged in negotiating the tensions between imported pedagogical models and local classroom realities. To kick off this section, we would like to introduce an excerpt from an article in issue No. 50 (July-Sept 1985) written by George Tunnell. In it, he outlines his professional journey across various countries and reflects on the trends in teaching methods, which eventually took on the status of dogma.

Before the 60s, there was a focus on the audiolingual method; however, in 1978, the Colombian Ministry of National Education published in *HOW*, the *Fundamentos del Diseño*



In 1960 I had left schools, having learnt French and Latin through the grammar translation method, and in 1966 I started teaching English using the audio-lingual method. In 1971 I abandoned behaviourism and became a convert to Chomsky's gospel. In 1975 I lost my faith in Chomsky and at about the same time I was introduced to the functional/notional approach to language teaching. In 1980 I joined the communicative bandwagon. Now in 1985 where do I stand?

Figure 3. Extract from the Article “Some Reflections on a Quarter of a Century of Learning and Teaching Languages”

Note. Tunnell was the Director of Studies at the British Council in Bogotá in 1985. In the article, he describes how his experiences teaching in different countries accounted for the evolution of ELT methods.

Curricular y su Aplicación en los INEM - ITA: Borrador del Programa de Idiomas Extranjeros, which changed the focus from audio-oral methods to reading comprehension since:

3. Los logros obtenidos con los métodos audio-orales, debido entre otras razones al elevado número de alumnos por clase, no han sido satisfactorios.

Figure 4. Extract from ‘Fundamentos del Diseño Curricular y su aplicación en los INEM – ITA’

Nota. “Los colegios INEM (Institutos Nacionales de Educación Media) desde el año 1969, han aportado de manera significativa a la educación en Colombia, a partir de su proyecto de Educación Media Diversificada”. (Taken from <https://www.inemkennedy.edu.co/>)

In 1979, in issue No. 33, George Smith from the International Program in Bogotá advocated for the Silent Way, a method developed by Caleb Gattegno (1976). Two years later, in 1981, Edmundo Mora, a local professor from Universidad de Nariño, revisited this method during the XVI National ASOCOPI Congress. A key development in the 1980s was the rise of the communicative approach. *HOW* issues from 1979 to 1985 featured articles discussing the form vs. function dichotomy, descriptions of the communicative approach, task-centered teaching, and the functional approach. By issue No. 49 (April-June 1984), the journal covered various aspects of the communicative approach, including pair work, communicative games, the use of literature, and communicative language testing. However, other methods were still being explored, such as Community Language Learning, which Professor Jesús Bastidas from Universidad de Nariño, a noted expert in the field, analyzed in comparison to Grammar Translation in a 1983 issue.

In 1994, Kumaravadivelu introduced the concept of “principled pragmatism” (p. 30) in his article on the post-method condition, emphasizing how classroom learning can be shaped by teachers through informed teaching and critical reflection. This concept is reflected in a section of *HOW* called *Language and Life*, where Okley Forbes, a professor from Universidad del Quindío, interviewed both international and national educators about various aspects of ELT. For example, in a 1982 interview, Professor Juan de la Cruz Rojas from Universidad del Valle shared his views on teaching, while in 1981, Liz Moloney, a British Council advisor for Colombia, addressed questions about the different theories influencing ELT at the time, as can be seen in the examples that follow:

The analysis of these *archives of HOW* reveals a dynamic evolution of ELT methodologies in Colombia, shaped by both global influences and local adaptations. From early discussions on the audiolingual method and reading comprehension to the rise of communicative approaches and principled pragmatism, the journal has chronicled key debates and innovations in language teaching.

language. However, each one overemphasizes some aspect of the language. Could you think of a theoretical way of putting different aspects of them into a better way to teach the language?

L. M. No, not a theory, I think in fact that good teachers have always picked from each one of them, but that's not the same as finding a theory that would include all of them. I do feel very strongly that for a teacher there is not going to be an answer or a single way of teaching because a lot depends on his personality, the class and the kind of community he is working in. I think that most teachers would accept that.

Prof. R. We believe that different theories -Structuralism, Transformationalism, Communicative Approach- do not exclude each other but they are rather different viewpoints useful to explain the language phenomenon as a whole. Every theory taken separately is only able to give us the explanation of just an aspect of language. What the G.T.G did was to show how the language works in its formal aspect. Pure Structuralism and Transformationalism tried to explain how language is. The Communicative Approach tries to explain how language functions and what it is good for. So when we have clear ideas about those notions we can say that we see language as a totality. It is not just an unconscious eclecticism, but rather a conscious, reasonable one that permits to examine the different contributions of each theory in order to have a global vision. To have this vision

Figure 5. Extract from the Interviews with Liz Moloney and Juan de la Cruz Rojas
Note. These interviews were produced by editor Okley Forbes for a section in *HOW* called Language and Life

Challenging Language Policies with a Critical Perspective

ASOCOPI and *HOW* have played a significant role in both communicating and critiquing language policies issued by the Colombian Minister of National Education. Numerous instances in their publications highlight this ongoing dialogue. One notable example occurred in 1976 when *El Espectador*, a local newspaper (Figure 5), reported on the potential elimination of English from basic education. Jerónimo Gil, then president of ASOCOPI, responded by outlining the drawbacks of such a decision and offered recommendations, including an increase in the number of hours dedicated to teaching English in secondary education.

The dialogue resurfaced in 1983, in issue No. 47, when a letter was sent to the then President of Colombia, Belisario Betancur. In this letter, ASOCOPI emphasized that further reductions in English teaching hours would hinder language learning. They also pointed out the inconsistency of governmental actions, noting that while they were training language teachers, they were simultaneously proposing to cut instructional time. Unfortunately, the response of the Ministry was disappointing; they acknowledged the recommendations but completely ignored the request regarding hourly allocation (Figure 7).

Another critical instance appeared in issue No. 33, published in 1979, which discussed Decree 1337 from the Colombian Ministry of Education. This decree mandated that

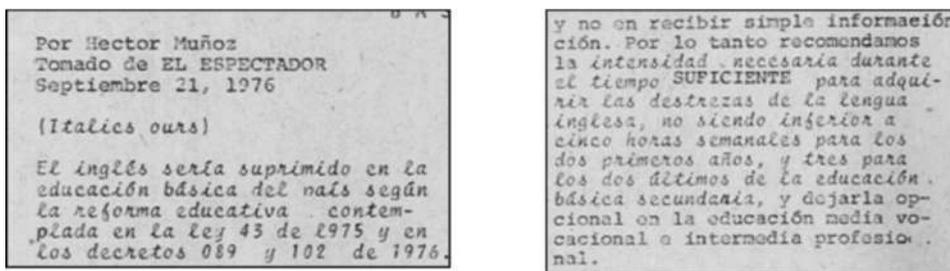


Figure 6. Extract Taken from ‘HOW Supplement on Educational Reform’ Issued in 1976
Note. ASOCOPI’s Board of Directors produced this supplement, pointing out the negative consequences of the decisions and providing recommendations for ELT in Colombia.

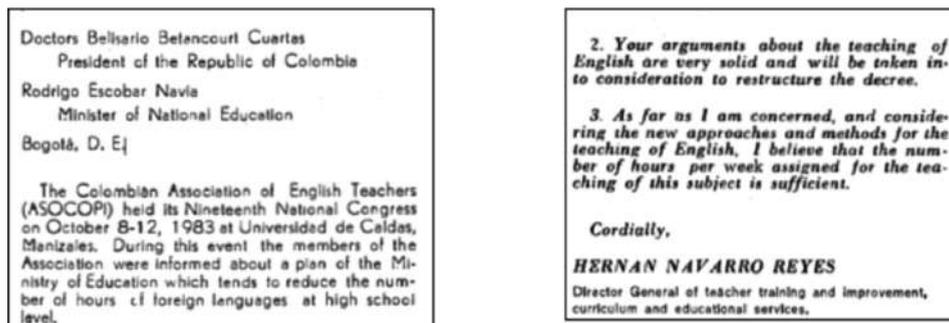


Figure 7. Extract from Letter from ASOCOPI to the President of the Republic of Colombia

Note. ASOCOPI wrote an open letter to President Belisario Betancur (1983) critiquing the language policies issued for ELT in secondary schools.

students would receive two years of English, two years of French, and two years of an optional language, beginning in February 1980 for Calendar A schools and September 1980 for Calendar B schools. ASOCOPI’s Board of Directors responded to this decree by highlighting its shortcomings, such as the disruption of English learning, the necessity of English proficiency for university admission, and concerns about the availability of qualified teachers. They also invited the Minister to engage in a dialogue about the decision, underscoring their commitment to advocating for effective language education.

One final example worth highlighting is issue No. 37, published in Christmas 1980, which outlines the official English curriculum for grades VI to XI in secondary schools.

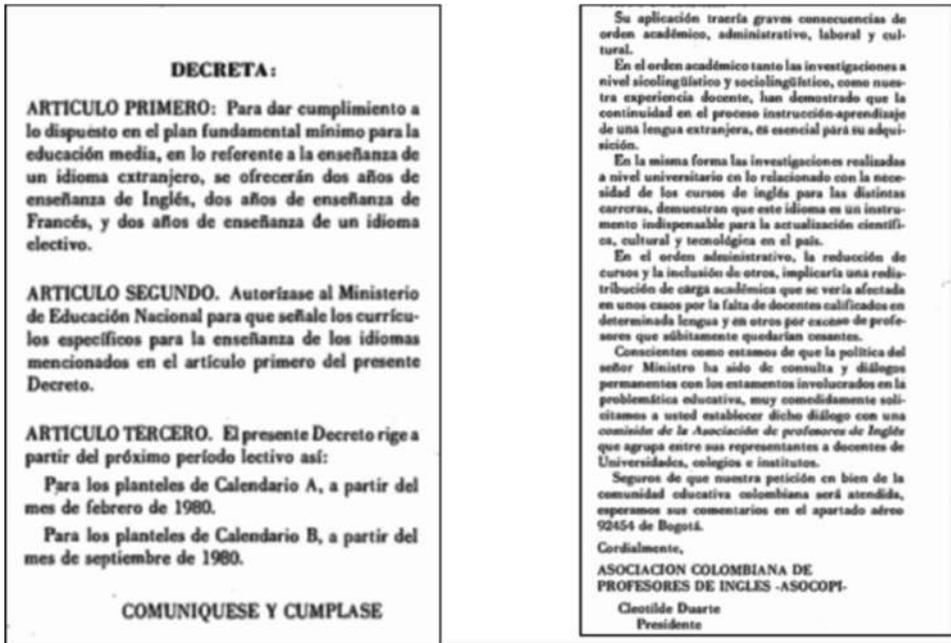


Figure 8. Extracts from Decree 1337 of 1979 and from the Open Letter to the then Minister of Education, Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo

Note. The decree regulated the teaching of English for middle school and redistributed the hours for foreign language teaching.

In this issue, the Ministry acknowledged the failure of the audio-oral method and how overly ambitious the language proficiency goals had been (Figure 9). This realization led to a shift in focus towards developing reading comprehension skills instead. This highlights that, historically, we have consistently grappled with the challenge of determining the best approach to teaching English in a community where most people are not exposed to the language or do not feel a strong need to learn it.

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Little has changed since the introduction of the National Bilingualism Plan in 2004, as foreign models continue to be followed while the national context remains largely overlooked. In this sense, Bermúdez-Jiménez et al. (2014) argue that the guidelines in the Colombian National Bilingualism Program appear to adopt international standards like the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) without public reflection on their relevance to local contexts. These guidelines overlook the diversity of local and regional contexts in the

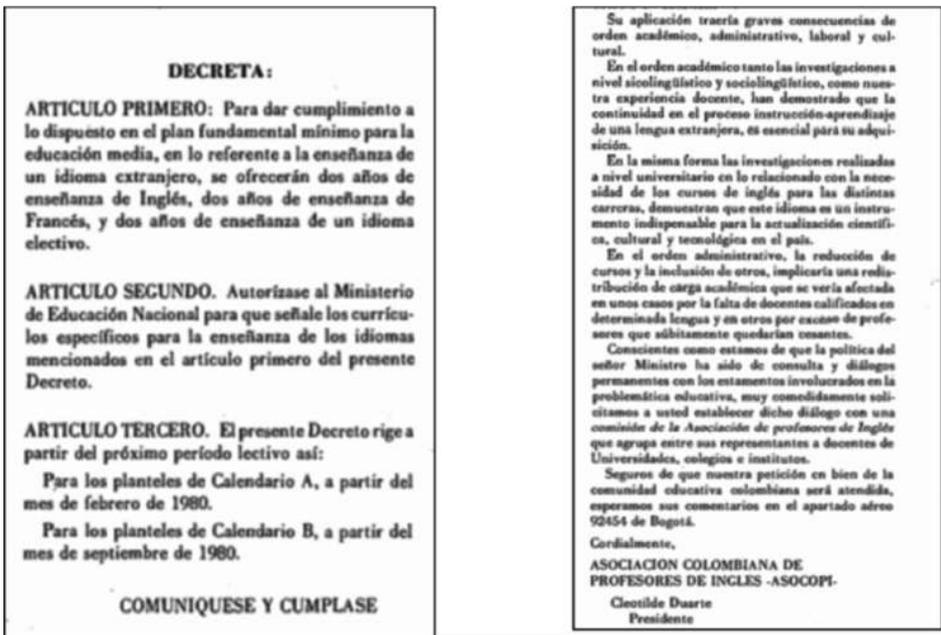


Figure 9. Extracts from the Publication English Teacher Training Presented by Alicia

Gutiérrez Zárata, Ely Cardona, Rosario Cárdenas and Sara Gómez de Ardila

Note. The authors belonged to Dirección General de Capacitación y Perfeccionamiento Docente, Currículo y Medios Educativos from Ministerio de Educación Nacional, which oversaw both language teacher training and curriculum design for secondary schools.

face of globalization. Similarly, Areiza (2008) points out that while globalization is often seen as beneficial for economic and cultural development, it tends to disregard individual regions' specific interests and cultures. Vargas et al. (2008) also criticize the basic standards proposed in the program for failing to recognize regional differences, treating the nation as a homogenous entity, and disregarding local cultures and educational contexts.

Language Teacher Preparation

A careful look at the archive shows traces of the evolution of language teacher preparation in Colombia. One of the first articles was written by Clive Taylor, the English Language Officer from the British Council in 1982. Taylor, in issue No. 41 from that year, emphasizes the importance of redesigning teacher-training programs to adapt to the dynamic nature of education and the ever-changing backgrounds and expectations of trainees and

learners. Key components for effective training include understanding the demographics of teacher trainees and the specific teaching contexts they will encounter. Programs should focus on general professional skills, specialized training in English language instruction, and continuous professional development to ensure ongoing support for newly qualified teachers. Suggestions for improvement include gathering information to tailor training, refining selection procedures, redefining language proficiency standards, aligning with current teaching practices, and adapting programs to meet local needs. This comprehensive approach aims to enhance teacher quality and effectiveness in the classroom.

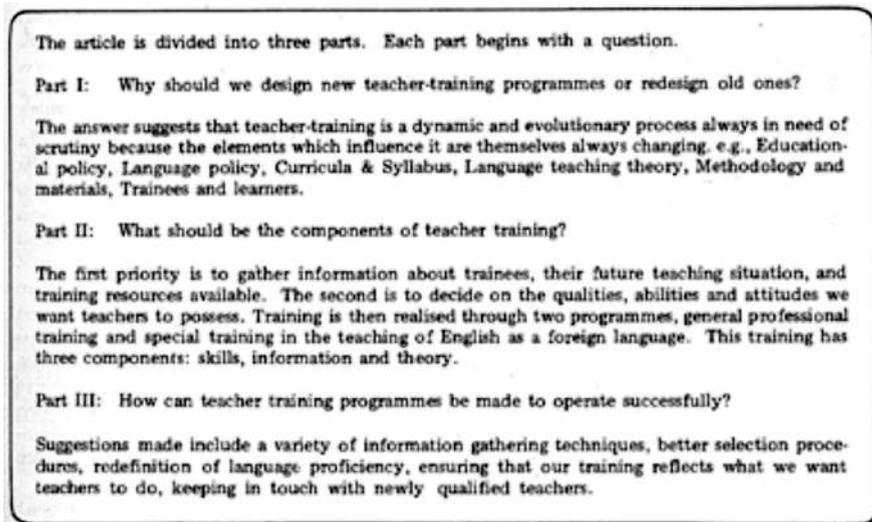


Figure 10. Extract From ‘Designing a Successful Teacher-Training Programme for English Teachers’

Note. Clive Taylor, language advisor from the British Council, summarized the main points in the article about language teacher training.

In the issue No. 41 of 1982, Silvia Valencia, Martha González, and Edelberto Arias from Universidad del Quindío present a curriculum plan for teacher training that emphasizes the integration of learning theories, a cumulative learning experience, and relevance to the realities of students. The curriculum was structured to gradually introduce increasingly complex information, enhancing the maturity and understanding of students over time. Materials were rooted in concrete experiences, starting with simple, engaging texts and progressing

to more complex subjects, which they considered crucial for maintaining motivation and ensuring meaningful learning.

By looking at issue No. 35 of 1980, we learn that the Instituto Lingüístico Colombo-Americano (ILCA) was responsible for English teacher training and material development until its dissolution in September 1976, which led to a temporary halt in English language activities from October 1976 to July 1978. In response to this gap, teacher training initiatives and the development of a secondary-level curriculum resumed in July 1978 at the Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas (IEI) in Bogotá. This reorganization was driven by decrees 088 (1976) and 1589 (1978), which placed the IEI under the Dirección General de Capacitación y Perfeccionamiento Docente, with a focus on training teachers of both foreign and indigenous languages. The primary aim of these efforts was to enhance English teacher training and improve the overall quality of English language education in Colombia.

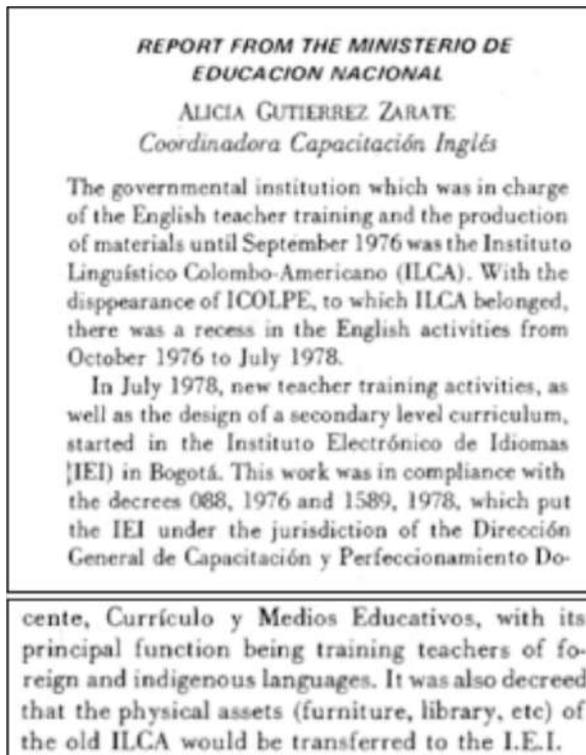


Figure 11. Extract from Academic Reports Published in Issue No. 35, April – June 1980

Note. Representatives from the Ministry explain the changes in the institutions responsible for foreign language teacher training.

This historical information was also reported by Professor Jerónimo Gil Otálora (2013) in his book *Viaje de la memoria por la Escuela de Idiomas 1960-2010*. He narrated that at the former Faculty of Philology and Languages at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia in Tunja, they transitioned from the Grammar-Translation Method to the Audio-Oral Principles Method (ILCA), developed by a team of U.S. teachers and linguists with support from UCLA and the University of Michigan. This innovative approach, created to train English speakers quickly, was used by Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s under President John F. Kennedy's program. Volunteers like Leland Northam, Carlos Maeztu, John T. Whelan, and Bruce Edwards – some of them also mentioned in issues of *HOW* and key actors in the development of ASOCOPI – were integral to the program at the university starting in 1962. The ILCA method, based on phonetics and oral language, was implemented using a set of guides from levels one to five, with teachers strictly following these materials. This method emphasized speech as the primary form of language, with teachers providing an oral model and students focusing on phonetic accuracy to mimic native pronunciation.

The I.E.I. offered various training courses for language teachers that focused on improving their English proficiency and teaching methodologies. These included Regular Courses held during the school year in cities such as Bogotá, Cali, and Manizales, scheduled to accommodate teachers' availability. Vacation Courses took place during the June-July and December-January breaks, allowing participation during their free time. The courses were designed to improve both language proficiency and teaching methodology. Each course consisted of 90 hours, including instruction, homework, and evaluations, covering topics such as classroom language and introductory teaching methods. The I.E.I. produced all course materials, including booklets for trainers and trainees, without relying on specific textbooks. A key feature of the program was integrating language improvement and teaching methodology, enabling participants to enhance their language skills while learning effective teaching strategies. The courses emphasized collaborative learning through group and pair work; their goal was to improve teachers' English language proficiency and ability to teach effectively in secondary school settings.

To close this trend, we would like to include a contribution by Okley Forbes, a Professor from Universidad del Quindío, concerning the preparation of foreign language teachers, appearing in issue No. 42 in 1982. First, he numbers the qualities a foreign language teacher should have. He claims that a good teacher is passionate about their work, finding fulfillment in guiding students and creating a positive, engaging learning environment. They are aware of their role as a foreign language teacher and take responsibility for their impact in the classroom. Strong language proficiency is essential, along with a deep understanding of the language structure and usage. Methodological knowledge is also key, as familiarity with different teaching approaches and the psychology of learning allows them to convey information effectively. A great teacher focuses on fostering both communicative and

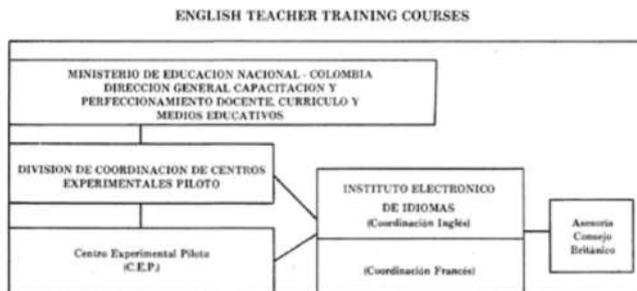


Figure 12. Organizational Structure of the Entities Offering English Teacher Training Courses

Note. The Colombian Government commissioned the Instituto Electrónico de Idiomas to develop training courses for language teachers.

linguistic competence in students, teaching grammar in a functional, context-based way. Lastly, they encourage student engagement, inspiring a sense of responsibility, discipline, creativity, and a strong desire to learn.

Besides, he describes ways to improve the teaching environment for foreign language teachers. He emphasizes the importance of creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom, where teaching is more than just a job, but a comfortable and engaging environment for both teachers and students. It also addresses the issue of teacher motivation, noting that many enter the profession without a strong commitment, which can negatively affect the learning experience. Professional development should be encouraged to improve teaching effectiveness, particularly in expanding teachers' theoretical knowledge and understanding of language and learning psychology. Additionally, students should be held accountable for their learning, with teachers setting high expectations to foster responsibility. Finally, he advocates for using varied teaching methods that prioritize meaningful communication and practical language use over purely grammatical accuracy.

Looking retrospectively at Forbes' model of language teacher education, it is evident that its core concerns—strong linguistic proficiency and a deep understanding of language teaching methodologies—remain central to Colombian linguistic policies today. However, the model also highlights key aspects of modern language teaching, such as meaningful learning, continuous professional development, and student accountability. It is particularly striking to see such a holistic approach emerging at an early stage, integrating elements like intercultural relations, psychological considerations, and learning theories into the preparation of language teachers.

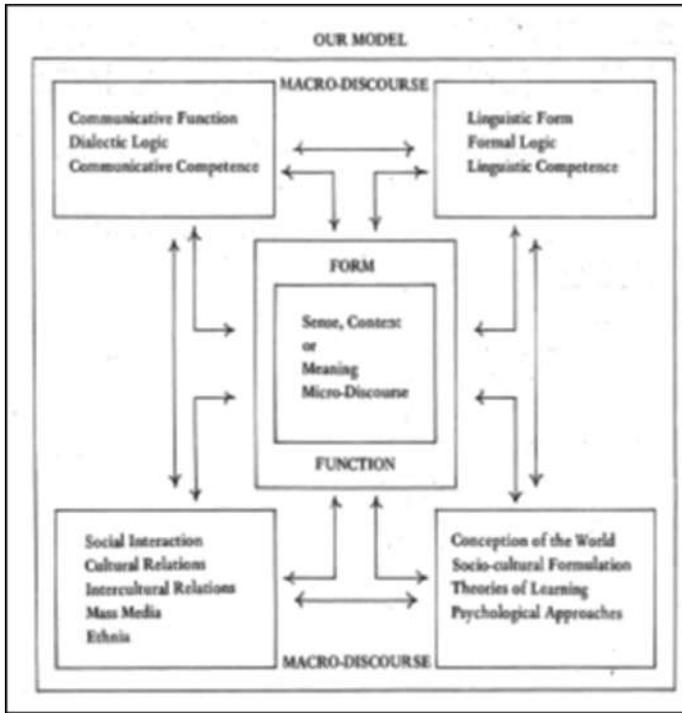


Figure 13. Language Teacher Preparation Model Proposed by Okley Forbes
Note. This model summarizes Forbes' components of a teacher preparation program, informed by the advances in applied linguistics.

While foreign advisors played an influential role in shaping early ELT policies and methods, the archive reveals the critical contributions of Colombian educators in localizing and innovating these approaches. Professors such as Jesús Bastidas, Silvia Valencia, and Edmundo Mora not only adopted international trends but also critically examined and adapted them to the Colombian social and educational context, laying the groundwork for the pedagogical practices we see today.

While many aspects of Forbes' model remain relevant, key gaps have become evident when viewed through the lens of ELT developments in Colombia since the National Bilingualism Program in 2004. Notably, the model offered little attention to sociocultural factors such as regional diversity, social inequality, and local educational needs – issues that remain critical today. It also lacked a critical perspective on language policies and their impact

on marginalized communities. Additionally, the integration of technology into ELT, now essential in the digital and AI era, was not yet part of the conversation. These omissions underscore the need for more context-aware, inclusive, and critically engaged approaches in Colombian ELT. The archive reveals that many of the challenges of today have deep historical roots, reminding us that shaping the future of ELT requires both honoring past insights and confronting present complexities.

Further Research

As previously mentioned, the archive is incredibly rich, offering numerous avenues for reconstructing the history of ELT in Colombia. One approach could involve identifying both foreign and local professionals who have contributed to the development of the field, such as professors Jesús Bastidas, Silvia Valencia, Fernando Silva, and Gilma Zúñiga. Their experiences as pioneers could provide valuable insights for shaping current bilingualism initiatives. Another potential line of inquiry involves analyzing the teaching materials, those advertised in the journal and those published by foreign and local professors between 1966 and 1985.

Exploring the connection between the linguistic policies presented in the selected corpus and those introduced after 1985, such as those related to the National Bilingualism Program, could be particularly valuable. Identifying the continuities and shifts in bilingualism goals for English and Spanish would help better understand the path that has led to the current Colombian ELT situation (in which global frameworks like the CEFR are widely adopted yet often applied without sufficient adaptation to local sociolinguistic realities, resulting in persistent regional inequalities and mismatches between policy and classroom practice). Additionally, expanding the focus to include teacher preparation and linking it to the Colombian Framework for English (COFE) project (1991–1997), as Rubiano et al. (2000) discussed, would further enrich this research.

A significant component of the archive is a series of interviews conducted by Professor Okley Forbes during his time as editor. He interviewed prominent local figures such as Beatriz Castillo de Campo, Director of Modern Languages at Universidad de Los Andes, and Gustavo Hernández García, Dean of Humanities at Universidad del Quindío; Juan de la Cruz Rojas, Director of the Languages Department at Universidad del Valle; and British Council language advisors Liz Moloney and Clive Taylor. He also spoke with international experts, including Henry Widdowson, and conducted an intriguing interview with Professor J.R. Webster, senior professor at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth, who discussed bilingualism in Wales, as well as Mr. Davies, a psycholinguistics lecturer at the same institution. These interviews provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of language education locally and globally.

Conclusions

Reflecting on the invaluable archive of teaching and learning processes, methods, strategies, and EFL teaching skills over the years in Colombia is crucial for the field. Both ASOCOPI and *HOW* have played a pivotal role in strengthening these areas, while also maintaining connections within the broader ELT community at regional and national levels. What emerges is a dynamic interplay between classroom practices and the broader growth of a community that has significantly enriched English language education in Colombia.

Another significant aspect is the adaptation of teaching methods and techniques to meet students' needs, shaped by their specific contexts. Understanding this allows teachers to plan more effectively, integrating social and institutional interests. The archive analysis emphasizes the importance of lesson planning, activity organization, and addressing students' learning challenges. By assessing these needs, teachers can better manage the classroom and improve the overall learning experience for themselves and their students.

Finally, the archive underscores the importance of amplifying the voices of the community in shaping language programs and challenging or supporting government language policies. The voices of teachers and students in the ELT field have resonated across Colombia, contributing to a collective dialogue that impacts the entire community. *HOW* and ASOCOPI have been instrumental in fostering this dialogue, creating a platform for listening, exchanging ideas, and advocating for change. Their work has inspired political, social, educational, and cultural advancements in the ELT field, demonstrating their lasting influence from 1966 to 1985, and of course, up to now. These historical reflections shed light on recurring tensions in Colombian ELT, such as the adoption of foreign frameworks without sufficient contextual adaptation. The concerns raised in the 1980s about unrealistic proficiency goals, lack of qualified teachers, and exclusion of regional diversity still resonate today, particularly in critiques of the National Bilingualism Program. Understanding these long-standing debates can inform more context-sensitive and equitable language education policies moving forward. *HOW* and ASOCOPI continue to unite the ELT community, reinforcing a shared commitment to co-constructing and exchanging knowledge for the benefit of all.

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"The Present Status of English Teaching in Colombia"

A graduate of Georgetown University, Prof. Leland Northam has also done additional work at the Universidad de Madrid and Texas Western College. From 1962 to 1964 he served in the Peace Corps, teaching at the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Tunja. He has also taught at Maxwell Air Force Base in his native state, Alabama. Professor of English at the Universidad de los Andes since 1965, he is presently making a study of the methodology of teaching English to Latin American students.

To state his views in a nutshell, Prof. Northam asserted that the English teaching situation in Colombia is bad. Students do not learn the language while they are in school, but years later they often feel that they must be able to use it. It would help if one could say why English is not being taught well or explain exactly what occurs at the schools. However, no one really knows the answer to these questions. How many teachers have university degrees? How many have degrees in language study? How many classes are taught using the audio-lingual method? No one knows.

Some things seemed certain, nonetheless: all Colombian students are required to take six years of English in the bachillerato program; almost all university students must take English. Yet the majority of these courses begin on an elementary level. This fact shows, more than anything else, that few colegio teachers have received training in linguistic methodology, many of them don't know English, and high school materials aren't structured scientifically.

Most of the high school materials used in Colombia, especially PRACTICE YOUR ENGLISH, follow traditional methods--memorizing grammar rules and vocabulary lists. If this book is used at all, Northam suggested, it should be employed as a review, never as a beginning text.

Because of more scientific materials and better prepared teachers, the situation in the university English program is

Review of English Teaching in Rural Areas in Colombia: Challenges, Setbacks, and Lessons Learned

Revisión de la Enseñanza del Inglés en Zonas Rurales de Colombia: Retos, Retrocesos y Lecciones Aprendidas

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Abstract

This article explores the evolution of English teaching in rural areas in Colombia. Drawing on insights gleaned from scholarly literature, it will critically examine the transformative journey of English teaching and learning in these regions. The initial discussion will delve into a historical overview of rural education and the teaching of English in rural areas. The discussion seeks to identify how educational policies and classroom practices have evolved concerning working with foreign languages in Colombian rural areas. This will, then, be followed by an analysis of the current challenges and opportunities of English teaching in educational institutions based on a review of recent academic studies. This review aims to provide a set of theoretical and methodological findings learned by Colombian foreign language teachers when investigating educational policies and language programs in rural areas. Finally, the paper proposes plurilingualism, interculturality, and situated teaching and learning based on service to the community as frameworks to transform and improve the teaching of English in rural schools.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, rural education, language instruction, language policy

Resumen

Este artículo explora la evolución de la enseñanza del inglés en zonas rurales de Colombia. Basándose en los conocimientos obtenidos de la literatura académica, examinará críticamente el viaje transformador de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés en estas zonas. La discusión inicial profundizará en una reseña histórica de la educación rural y la enseñanza del inglés en áreas rurales. En este apartado se busca identificar cómo han evolucionado las políticas educativas y las prácticas de aula en relación con el trabajo con lenguas extranjeras en las zonas rurales colombianas. A continuación, se analizarán los retos y oportunidades actuales de la enseñanza del inglés en esas instituciones educativas, a partir de una revisión de estudios académicos recientes. Esta revisión busca proporcionar un conjunto de hallazgos teóricos y metodológicos aprendidos por los profesores colombianos de inglés como lengua extranjera al investigar las políticas educativas y los programas de lenguas en las zonas rurales. Finalmente, el artículo propone el plurilingüismo, la interculturalidad, la enseñanza situada y el aprendizaje basado en el servicio a la comunidad como marcos para transformar y mejorar la enseñanza del inglés en las escuelas rurales.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua extranjera, educación rural, enseñanza de idiomas, política lingüística

Introduction

On the international scene, the field of English teaching has evolved significantly, adopting pedagogical approaches that, among other things, emphasize new literacies and multimodality to recognize the diversity of forms of communication in the digital age (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). In this context, international organizations such as the Council of Europe and the British Council have promoted teaching practices with a shift towards more interactive and student-centered teaching methods, which aligned themselves with Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theories, Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, and Kumaravadivelu's (2006) postmethod condition.

In terms of methodological advances, tools such as mobile applications, online platforms, and augmented reality resources have been increasingly used, allowing for more personalized and autonomous learning. These technological innovations are combined with methodological approaches such as Task-Based Language Learning (TBLL), which focuses on using language to perform meaningful and relevant tasks for learners (Ellis, 2003); Problem-Based Language Learning (PBL), which “incorporates social, cognitive and professional development of a learner through the projects, collaboration, motivation, and learner autonomy” (Mouni, 2022, p. 92), and Content Integrated Language Learning (CLIL), which is assumed as a dual-focused educational approach in which two languages are used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle et al., 2010).

In the Colombian context, language policies have influenced discourses and practices of English as a foreign language (EFL). These policies have strived to improve the English proficiency of Colombian students to align with the demands of the global market (Ministerio de Educación Nacional - MEN, 2014). However, their implementation has faced significant challenges, especially in remote and low-income regions, where access to resources and teacher education is limited.

In terms of education programs, Colombia has seen an increase in the undergraduate and graduate offerings. These programs have proposed guidelines and documents to enable teachers to face the challenges of growingly diverse classrooms, promoting strategies that favor meaningful learning and critical thinking (Cisneros-Estupiñán & Mahecha, 2020; Fandiño & Bermúdez, 2016). In addition, the influence of decolonial theories (Mignolo, 2000), critical theories (Norton & Toohey, 2004), and post-structuralism (Norton & Morgan, 2013) have also begun to impact the mission and vision of English language programs in Colombia, particularly in the schools of education of public universities.

Now, despite the apparent advances in ELT and EFL, this paper argues that English teaching in rural areas of Colombia is an issue that requires academic attention. Concretely, this paper delves into discussing the challenges, setbacks, and lessons learned in English teaching in Colombian rural areas because of the profound contextual inequalities and cultural particularities that characterize our country. These inequalities and particularities make it imperative for the Colombian ELT academia to go beyond implementing curricular guidelines and following study plans aligned with international frameworks. Instead, this academia should commit to modifying and transforming guidelines and plans, so they are more apt for the local realities, situated practices, and sociocultural dynamics of rural schools and communities. The next section, aligned with the HOW's special issue's aim on the evolution of Colombian ELT over the past 60 years, offers a historical review of rural education and the TEFL in Colombia to comprehensively document its transformation.

Evolution of Rural Education and TEFL in Rural Areas in Colombia

Studying the evolution of rural education and TEFL in Colombia is essential to understanding the historical and sociocultural challenges facing the country in the field of language education. Rural education, often neglected in national policies, has been a battleground for reducing the educational gap between urban and rural areas, which still faces significant challenges in terms of coverage, quality, and inclusion (ColombiaAprende, 2022). In this context, the TEFL becomes relevant, as it is a key competence in a globalized world that promotes social mobility and access to employment and academic opportunities (de Mejía, 2004).

Rural Education in Colombia

Rural education in Colombia refers to the teaching and learning processes that take place in the country's rural areas, which are characterized by low population density, geographical dispersion, and the predominance of primary economic activities. In other words, rural education in Colombia deals with the educational processes that take place in areas where agricultural, livestock, and forestry activities predominate. Carrero and González (2016) argues that rural education has historically sought to adapt to the characteristics and needs of these communities, which differ significantly from urban communities in terms of geography, access to services, and cultural and economic dynamics.

During the colonial period, education was virtually nonexistent in rural Colombia. The Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church concentrated their educational efforts in the major cities and the formation of local elites. As Helg (1987) points out, rural education during the colonial period was limited to basic religious instruction given by doctrinal priests during their sporadic visits to indigenous and peasant communities. Accordingly, rural areas received little attention, and their education was limited to evangelization and the teaching of basic trades (Castro-Gómez, 2010).

With the independence and the establishment of the republic, the first attempts to create a national education system began. The Organic Decree of Public Instruction of 1870 marked a milestone in the attempt to formalize education in Colombia by establishing rural schools, although many lacked resources and qualified personnel (Vélez, 1988). Despite this attempt at formalization, rural education was restricted as educational policies were scarce and unsuccessful. According to Jaramillo Uribe (1980), during much of the nineteenth century, rural education was characterized by its precariousness and the lack of a coherent policy on the part of the state. For their part, Ramírez and Téllez (2006) argue that the educational

reforms implemented during the nineteenth century produced only marginal effects in rural contexts, largely because of scarce resources and opposition from conservative groups.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century that specific projects aimed at improving the coverage and quality of education in rural areas began to be implemented. Thus, the twentieth century brought the first significant steps for the implementation of rural education in Colombia. For example, Decree 1522 of 1958 sought to strengthen rural education through the creation of specific programs by promoting technical and agricultural education (MEN, 1994). For Correa Pérez and Pereira Burgos (2023), the creation of the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform and programs such as the Basic Rural Education were attempts to adapt the curriculum to rural realities, but the lack of political continuity and funding hindered these efforts.

The introduction of the Escuela Nueva model in 1975 was an important advance in rural education. According to Colbert (2006), Escuela Nueva was developed as a pedagogical approach to address long-standing challenges in Colombia's rural education system, including high rates of absenteeism and school dropout, as well as consistently low levels of educational quality. This model aims to improve the quality and relevance of education in rural areas so that it can be adapted to the needs of children and their communities (Colbert & Mogollón, 2003). Among other features, Escuela Nueva is characterized by (a) multigrades, in which a single teacher attends several classes simultaneously, particularly useful in rural schools with few students; (b) adaptive curriculum, in which learning guides and activities are designed to allow students to progress at their own pace according to local characteristics; and (c) active learning, which encourages students to learn by doing, investigating and collaborating, with the participation of their communities.

For its part, Law 115 of 1994 (General Education Law) marks a turning point in the educational system as well as in Colombia's rural education policy. Perfetti (2003) explains that Law 115 marked a significant shift by formally acknowledging the particular conditions of rural education and by requiring that curricular designs be adjusted to respond to the social, cultural, and educational realities of rural contexts. Among other things, the law points to (a) the recognition of the specificity of rural education, since Article 64 establishes that a rural educational service should be promoted, subject to the respective development plans; (b) teacher education that prepares professionals capable of diagnosing, analyzing, evaluating, and innovating practices and processes under the realities of rural areas; and (c) curricular flexibility that allows for the adaptation of content and activities concerning the needs and interests of the rural environment.

Since the end of the 20th century and especially in the 21st century, there have been significant advances in the implementation of rural education. One of these advances was the National Rural Education Policy of the Ministry of National Education, which sought

to improve rural education’s coverage, quality, and relevance (MEN, 2002). In 2009, the MEN launched the Rural Education Program (PER, by its Spanish acronym) with the purpose of increasing educational coverage and strengthening the quality of preschool, primary, and secondary education in rural and geographically isolated contexts (MEN, 2012). A special plan for rural education was developed within the framework of the 2016 Peace Agreement. According to MEN (2018b), this plan seeks to bridge the rural-urban divide and promote inclusive rural development and peacebuilding.

In terms of challenges, Millán-Torres and Montoya-Jiménez (2020) claim that rural education in Colombia faces multiple difficulties, including a lack of adequate infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, limited access to technological resources, and problems adapting the curriculum to local needs (Mismatch between national standards and local realities, sociolinguistic and cultural barriers, and limited resources and teacher education). Geographic dispersion and armed conflict have exacerbated these challenges and hindered equitable access to education (Galvis, 2021). Table 1 summarizes these challenges from the voices of Colombian authors.

Table 1. Challenges of Rural Education in Colombia

Challenges	Authors
Infrastructure	The Ministry of National Education (2018b) acknowledges that insufficient and unstable educational infrastructure in numerous rural regions remains a significant barrier to the effective realization of the right to education.
Teacher Education	According to Ávila (2017), the absence of teacher training programs specifically designed for rural contexts negatively affects the quality of education in these areas
Digital Divide	Rodríguez et al. (2007) argue that limited access to information and communication technologies in rural contexts contributes to the widening of educational disparities between rural and urban areas
Lack of Curricular Adaptation	Perea and Mora-Delgado (2023) contend that the inflexibility of curricula in Colombian rural education goes beyond limiting students’ learning opportunities, as it also undermines the value of rural cultures and encourages migration to urban areas. From this perspective, a curriculum that is responsive to rural contexts is positioned as a key strategy for fostering rural development and sustaining local identities.

Source: Own work.

Regarding opportunities, there are also significant possibilities for developing rural education. Decentralization and educational autonomy policies make it possible to adapt educational strategies to the specificities of each region. According to Ramos Holguín et al. (2012), effective implementation of policies hinges on local endorsement. To achieve this, communities must be thoroughly informed about the English programs, fostering widespread support. Teachers are critical agents in ensuring these policies are effectively adapted to the needs within the community. In addition, the incorporation of digital technologies and the promotion of teacher education programs for rural areas open new opportunities to improve the quality of education (MEN, 2018a). Initiatives such as “Luces para Aprender” and digital literacy programs have shown promising progress in the last decade (Organization of Ibero-American States -Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos -OEI, 2021). Table 2 presents several opportunities suggested by Colombian authors.

Table 2. Opportunities of Rural Education in Colombia

Opportunities	Authors
Articulation with Rural Development	Perfetti (2003) argues that rural education has the potential to foster local development when it is meaningfully aligned with the productive capacities and cultural resources of each region.
Peacebuilding	The Ministry of National Education (2018a) emphasizes that rural education is essential for fostering peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in territories that have been most affected by the armed conflict.
Pedagogical Innovation	Colbert (2006) maintains that adaptable educational approaches, such as Escuela Nueva, reveal how pedagogical innovation can emerge in response to the particular demands of rural educational settings.
Incorporation and Dissemination of ICT	According to Hernández et al. (2014), the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in rural education in Colombia can help address geographical isolation by broadening access to educational resources and contributing to improvements in teaching quality. In this sense, ICTs create opportunities such as access to digital materials, interaction with experts and other educational institutions, greater flexibility in educational provision, and the development of distance-based teacher training initiatives.

Source: Own work.

TEFL in Rural Areas in Colombia

The TEFL in Colombia has undergone a complex and heterogeneous evolution, especially in rural areas, where educational and linguistic policies and curricular programs

have been influenced by the historical and socio-political dynamics of each period. During the colonial period, education focused on basic skills, and the learning of foreign languages was not considered. In this context, English teaching in Colombia was practically nonexistent. In fact, foreign languages, especially English, were perceived as a threat to the hegemony of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. In this regard, Ordóñez (2011) explains that during the colonial period education in New Granada was largely controlled by religious orders and oriented toward evangelization, with instruction centered on Spanish for Indigenous populations; consequently, foreign languages such as English were absent from the curriculum, particularly in rural contexts. For her part, García Sánchez (2005) maintains that during the colonial period, education was characterized by elitist and restrictive practices that hindered the inclusion of languages beyond Spanish and Latin.

The period of independence marked the beginning of significant changes in Colombia's educational policy, although these changes were slow to reach rural areas. There was an incipient opening to the teaching of foreign languages, driven by the interest in establishing diplomatic and commercial relations with English-speaking countries. However, rural areas continued to lag in terms of access to education. According to Safford (2014), the period following independence was marked by a renewed interest in foreign languages—particularly English and French—because they were seen as gateways to scientific knowledge and Enlightenment thought; however, this interest was largely limited to urban elites.

The consolidation of the Republic brought with it greater concern for educational modernization. During this period, reforms were implemented to strengthen public education. The emphasis was on strengthening Spanish as the national language, with little attention paid to the teaching of other languages in rural areas. As a result, access to foreign language instruction remained limited to the cities and the elite. As stated by Pérez (2019), education in rural areas during the nineteenth century was marked by limited resources and a shortage of qualified teachers, conditions that largely prevented the inclusion of foreign language instruction in these contexts. Subsequently, during the Republic and the nineteenth century, the TEFL in rural areas was reduced to a few private schools or foreign missions.

During the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a growing interest in teaching English, largely because of globalization policies and the influence of international organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In rural areas, however, progress has been restricted. The National Bilingualism Program attempted to promote the teaching of English throughout the country, but the disparities between urban and rural areas remained significant. As Cárdenas and Miranda (2014) point out, while the National Bilingualism Program has marked progress in encouraging the teaching of English, its execution in public as well as in rural contexts has been constrained by limited resources, a shortage of qualified teachers, and challenges related to accessibility.

In 1994, the General Education Law made English compulsory in primary and secondary education, but practice in rural areas has lagged in urban areas. This means that official primary and secondary curricula include English as part of the curriculum, but in rural areas, the effective implementation of these programs has been limited by the lack of infrastructure and teacher education. Usma Wilches (2009) argues that the General Education Law enacted in 1994 represented a turning point in Colombian education by mandating the teaching of a foreign language from basic education onward and, together with later initiatives such as the National Bilingualism Program, sought to extend English language instruction across the entire national territory, including rural areas. For their part, Gallego-Tavera et al. (2020) argue that the implementation of the English curriculum in rural contexts is constrained by structural conditions, particularly insufficient infrastructure and the limited availability of teachers with specialized training.

The National English Program 2015-2025 has attempted to address structural factors, with mixed results. In this respect, Bonilla and Cruz-Arcila (2014) contend that, notwithstanding the implementation of national language policies, English teaching in rural areas remains constrained by persistent challenges, including shortages of qualified teachers, limited educational resources, and minimal exposure to English beyond the classroom context. For their part, Roldán and Peláez (2017) argue that, despite some advances, there remains a considerable disparity between urban and rural contexts regarding both the quality of English instruction and access to it.

To conclude this section, we highlight that a historical overview of the evolution of rural education and TEFL in Colombia emphasizes the significant challenges faced by rural areas, including a lack of infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and curricular adaptation, which are particularly exacerbated by geographical and socioeconomic barriers. Amid these challenges, the Escuela Nueva model, General Education Law, and the National Bilingualism Program have been attempting to improve education quality in rural areas. However, disparities between urban and rural education persist. English teaching, though prioritized in recent policies, still encounters difficulties in rural areas due to resource shortages and a lack of trained teachers. Nevertheless, opportunities such as virtual learning and cultural preservation through English offer potential for improvement. The next section of this paper discusses the current state of TEFL in rural areas in Colombia.

Current State and Criticism of TEFL in Rural Areas in Colombia

In 2024, Duran Estupiñán provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of English language teaching in Colombia from a historical, theoretical, and practical perspective. The author analyzes the ways in which educational policies and curricular reforms have

shaped the teaching of English over time, arguing that in Colombia this field has largely been guided by an instrumental orientation aligned with political and economic objectives. For Duran Estupiñán, this approach has led to the adoption of methodologies that prioritize memorization and mechanical learning, often to the detriment of the development of authentic communicative competencies.

In terms of practical implications, Duran Estupiñán (2024) explores how contemporary learning theories have begun to influence English teaching in the country, particularly in the context of public education. She underscores the need for a more critical and reflective orientation to English language teaching, arguing that meaningful learning depends on the integration of intercultural perspectives and the contextualization of curricular content in relation to local realities. In addition, she discusses examples of innovative practices implemented in some rural areas of Colombia, such as the integration of community projects and the use of digital resources.

Similarly, Murcia-Yalí (2024) explores the challenges facing English teaching in rural schools in Colombia. The author identifies several key obstacles, including a shortage of trained teachers, a lack of educational resources, and adverse socioeconomic conditions that limit access to quality education. According to Murcia-Yalí, continuous teacher training is essential to ensure that teaching methodologies respond appropriately to the specific conditions of rural contexts. In addition, he stresses the importance of adapting national curricula to make them more inclusive and relevant to rural realities, suggesting that these should incorporate local cultural elements and native languages.

For their part, García and Reyes (2022) present a complex and challenging picture of English teaching in rural Colombian schools. The authors highlight the disparity in educational quality between urban and rural areas, evidencing a series of obstacles that limit access to quality language education in rural contexts. Among these obstacles are the shortage of trained teachers, insufficient or inadequate teaching resources, and deficient educational infrastructure. However, García and Reyes (2022) emphasize that, although recent progress, it seems that insufficient specialized teacher training constitutes one of the main obstacles to the effective implementation of pedagogical practices in rural schools. This lack of specialized teachers translates into difficulties in designing and implementing activities and materials that promote the development of communicative competence tailored to the needs and interests of rural communities.

Despite this adverse scenario, García and Reyes (2022) also point out the existence of significant opportunities for improving English teaching in these regions. These include using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), implementing active methodologies, and collaboration with educational institutions and local communities. Besides, they claim

that, with adequate investment in teacher education and the development of contextualized teaching materials, it is possible to transform the reality of English teaching in rural Colombia.

Likewise, Monroy-Ramírez and Patiño-Agudelo (2022) offer a critical analysis of the implementation of public policies and methodologies for English teaching in rural Colombian education. Among other things, the authors point out that the effectiveness of language education policies in rural contexts is limited by insufficient infrastructure and the limited availability of didactic resources specifically designed for English teaching. In addition, they discuss the methodological adaptations that various teachers have made to address these challenges, such as the use of community activities and the integration of local culture into English lessons. Monroy-Ramírez and Patiño-Agudelo conclude by indicating that the success of English teaching in rural areas depends largely on teachers' ability to adapt educational policies and innovate their teaching practices to their local realities.

In opposition to the previous authors, Alonso et al. (2022) present a critical analysis of the implementation of English teaching in Colombian rural schools. They mention the case of teachers who do not have the necessary training to teach a foreign language and are forced to improvise activities. They also call attention to the lack of adequate teaching materials and students' difficulties accessing technological resources to facilitate English learning.

More specifically, Alonso et al. (2022) question the relevance of prioritizing a foreign language in contexts where students' basic needs, such as access to teaching materials, adequate infrastructure, and trained teachers, are not met. They argue that, in many cases, English teaching becomes a symbolic project that does not respond to the realities and needs of rural communities. Concretely, they point out that the enforcement of a standardized, English-focused curriculum overlooks local knowledge and contextual specificities, leading to a gap between school practices and students' everyday lived experiences.

In a similar vein, Sánchez Vargas (2022) examines the specific conditions and challenges faced by teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning English in rural areas. She argues that limited access to material and technological resources, together with inadequate specialized teacher training, significantly influences the quality of English language teaching in these regions. In addition, she highlights the disparity between educational policies designed at the national level and local realities, resulting in ineffective implementation of English programs in rural schools. She, then, maintains that the lack of access to technologies and libraries limits the opportunities for rural students to practice and improve their English skills.

In 2017, Roldán and Peláez analyze the relevance of English teaching policies in a rural area of Colombia to unveil the tensions between national educational policies and local needs. They maintain that English language teaching policies are largely shaped by urban-centered assumptions and therefore tend to overlook the cultural, economic, and

geographical particularities of rural contexts. In many cases, rural teachers lack the training and resources necessary to implement these policies effectively, leading to English language instruction that is perceived as irrelevant to students. For example, the authors mention the lack of contextualized teaching materials and the inadequacy of curricular content for the rural setting.

As stated above, rural areas in Colombia face numerous difficulties in English teaching, including a lack of access to technology, a lack of trained teachers, and distance from urban centers, which hinders ongoing teacher training. In addition, English teaching in rural areas is often limited by socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and limited access to educational resources (Ortíz García & Contreras Pinilla). More specifically, it is possible to state that the main difficulties are:

1. Lack of qualified teachers in rural areas.
2. Limited infrastructure and technological resources.
3. Low exposure to English outside the school context.
4. Mismatch between standardized curricula and rural realities.
5. Lack of continuity in educational policies.

That said, it is important to note that, in terms of opportunities, there has been an increase in virtual and distance learning initiatives in recent years, which opens the possibility of bringing resources and training to rural areas. In addition, the resilience and desire to excel of rural students are aspects that can be leveraged to promote English language learning. National and local programs have begun to implement strategies to improve access and quality of English language instruction in rural areas (Velasquez, 2020). The main opportunities of TEFL in Colombian rural areas are:

6. Strengthening cultural identity through linguistic contrast.
7. Possibility of preserving and promoting local cultures through English.
8. Implementation of innovative methods adapted to the rural context.
9. Access to global education and employment opportunities.
10. Potential for the development of rural tourism and ecotourism.

As a conclusion of this section, we can affirm that a critical overview of the current state of English teaching in rural areas of Colombia highlights several challenges, including a lack of qualified teachers, inadequate educational resources, and the disconnect between national curricula and local rural realities. Colombian authors have critiqued the instrumental approach to English teaching, which often prioritizes political and economic goals over

authentic communicative skills. To overcome such approach, some have proposed adapting methodologies to include intercultural and community-based elements, integrating local cultures and languages into the curriculum. Colombian authors have also discussed opportunities for improvement, such as the use of ICTs and innovative, contextualized teaching practices. Nonetheless, for these opportunities to become a reality, there is a need for more focused public policies and teacher education programs that respond to the specific needs of rural areas to reduce the gap between urban and rural education. The next section develops these claims.

Pathways to Improvement for TEFL in Rural Areas in Colombia

As discussed above, teaching English in rural areas of Colombia has historically been challenging due to structural inequalities in resources, infrastructure, and teacher training. However, there are opportunities for improvement if more targeted public policies are implemented and teacher education programs are designed to address the specific needs of these regions. In this context, we suggest that education policies promote plurilingualism and interculturality, while teacher education programs focus on situated teaching and community-based service learning.

Plurilingualism and interculturality are fundamental pillars for meaningful English teaching in rural areas of Colombia. The former term is defined by Byram et al. (2013) as “the capacity to successively acquire and use different competences in different languages, at different levels of proficiency, and for different functions” (p. 3), whereas the latter is understood by Duque Salazar et al. (2024) as “a cornerstone in creating a pluralistic environment that promotes understanding, knowledge exchange, empathy, and integration among individuals” (p. 200). Based on this, public policies must move away from homogeneous approaches, focused exclusively on English, and promote the coexistence and valorization of local languages with English. From this perspective, Velásquez (2020) argues that the imposition of a standardized, English-centered curriculum overlooks local knowledge and contextual particularities, resulting in a disconnection between schooling processes and students’ everyday lives. To address this disconnection, public policies must allow for the adaptation of curricula to the plurilingual realities of rural areas, recognizing and strengthening indigenous and local languages, while teaching English as a tool for global access.

In addition, interculturality must be a central axis in educational policies since it promotes respect and integration of the cultural knowledge of rural communities in the educational process. According to Durán Estupiñán (2024), meaningful learning depends on incorporating intercultural perspectives and adapting educational content to learners’ local contexts. Including the cultural heritage of rural communities in English teaching facilitates

language acquisition and promotes a sense of identity and belonging in students. In this way, education policies must be designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing rural schools to incorporate intercultural and plurilingual approaches that respond to local needs and realities.

In this way, public policies aimed at improving the teaching of English in rural areas must recognize and value Colombia's plurilingual and intercultural contexts. de Mejía (2004) argues that plurilingualism in the Colombian context should be understood not merely as an existing condition, but as a key requirement for fostering social equity and recognizing linguistic and cultural diversity. In this regard, language policies should promote an approach that integrates the teaching of English with respect for and promotion of indigenous languages and regional linguistic varieties. An example of a focused policy is the ECO: A strategy for the formation of English teachers in rural areas proposed by MEN (2014b), which sought to implement strategies that are culturally sensitive and that promote intercultural dialogue. This type of initiative recognizes that English teaching should not be a process of cultural imposition, but an opportunity to enrich rural communities' linguistic and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, a critical aspect to improve English teaching in rural areas is the formation of teachers capable of contextualizing their pedagogical practice. Situated teaching, which considers the specific context in which it is taught, is key to achieving this. As Monroy-Ramírez and Patiño-Agudelo (2022) point out, the effectiveness of English language teaching in rural contexts is largely shaped by teachers' capacity to reinterpret educational policies and transform their pedagogical practices in response to the specific conditions of their local environments. An effective teacher education program should provide teachers with tools to analyze and adapt their teaching methodologies to rural communities' socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic conditions.

Teacher education programs must therefore adopt a situated teaching approach that recognizes the particularities of the rural context. As Díaz Barriga (2022) argues, situated teaching is "a multidimensional process of cultural appropriation, as it is an experience that involves thought, emotion, and action... and it is recognized that school learning is above all a process of enculturation through which students gradually integrate into a community or culture of social practices" (p. 19). In the context of English teaching, this could translate into creating teaching materials that reflect rural realities and use examples and situations relevant to students in these areas. A concrete example of this approach can be found in the English for Rural Colombia program developed by Quindío University (2023), which focuses on preparing teachers to design didactic units that connect English language teaching with locally relevant areas such as agriculture, ecotourism, and traditional craft.

Additionally, community-based service learning represents a promising approach to connecting English teaching with local needs. This approach allows students to learn English while participating in community projects, strengthening language learning and social

engagement. García and Reyes (2022) contend that establishing collaborative relationships between educational institutions and local communities plays a key role in strengthening the quality of English language teaching in rural contexts. In this way, teachers not only teach the language, but also facilitate learning experiences that are deeply linked to the values and needs of the community. Teacher education programs must therefore include service-based learning strategies that enable teachers to integrate English into projects that directly benefit rural communities.

Community-based service learning thus offers a valuable opportunity to contextualize English teaching in rural areas. This approach, as defined by Tapia (2020), is “a teaching methodology whereby students gain a better understanding of academic content by applying skills and knowledge for the benefit of society” (p. 14). In the context of English teaching, teacher education programs could include projects where teachers and students use their language skills to benefit the community. For example, the rural education implemented by the MEN in The Altiplano Cundiboyacense (Ortíz-García & Contreras-Pinilla, 2023) has identified positive results such as “teacher trainees adapt an experiential teaching methodology in EFL because they argue that they have to use the sources they have to allow their students to learn in that way, experiencing their own environment” (p. 19).

As mentioned above, we emphasize the need for English teaching in rural Colombia that values the systematic and strategic interplay among plurilingualism, interculturality, situated teaching, and community-based service learning. Educational policies should therefore promote the coexistence of English with local languages, and teacher education should integrate pedagogical contextualization. Such promotion and integration can not only strengthen English language learning but also contribute to the cultural and social development of rural communities, ensuring a more equitable and relevant education.

Conclusion

The study of the history and present of rural education and English teaching in rural areas represents an invaluable area of research for the academic community of English language teachers in Colombia. This approach allows understanding the contextual particularities that have shaped pedagogical practices in rural areas, which are often marginalized in dominant educational discourses. By examining the historical trajectories and contemporary dynamics of these practices, teachers can identify patterns of inequality, resistance, and adaptation. These patterns have characterized the implementation of language policies in rural areas. This knowledge not only enriches Colombian understanding of the sociocultural dynamics that influence English teaching in diverse contexts but also provides a solid foundation for designing more inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical strategies. In addition, this type of study can highlight successful local initiatives and persistent challenges, thereby

informing the development of more equitable and effective education and language policies for Colombian rural communities.

On the other hand, improving English teaching in rural areas of Colombia requires a comprehensive approach that combines targeted public policies with innovative teacher education programs. By addressing topics such as plurilingualism, interculturality, situated teaching, and community-based service learning, an educational environment can be created to improve rural students' language skills and contribute to their communities' sustainable development. In a similar line of thinking, Ramos Holguín and Aguirre Morales (2016) sustain that

English teachers must have a proper introduction to the teaching techniques in rural areas and also to the pedagogical models that have been proven to be most effective in that zone. Teachers must be introduced to the community's relevant ethnographic information in order to smoothly enter into the community, avoiding conflicts that could arise by not having cultural information about the group in question (p. 215).

This article argues, then, that the opportunities for improvement in English teaching in rural areas of Colombia are evident if public policies and teacher education programs are tailored to the needs and interests of rural communities.

Statement on the use of Artificial Intelligence

While developing this article, the authors used ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude to search for and identify academic sources relevant to the topic of study. After using these tools, the authors reviewed and modified references and content to ensure validity and quality. As such, they assume full responsibility for the content and quality of the publication.

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English in the Dark. Learners, Parents, and Teachers' Perspectives of English Language Teaching and Learning in a Rural School in Boyacá

Inglés en la Oscuridad. Perspectivas de Estudiantes, Padres, Madres y Docentes Sobre la Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Inglés en una Escuela Rural en Boyacá

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Abstract

This article reports on research conducted at a rural school located in Boyacá, Colombia, as part of an ethnographic exploration in which learners, parents, and teachers presented their perspectives about English Language Teacher/ Teaching (ELT) evolution, progress, and challenges within teaching and learning practices and community dynamics. Results offer a landscape of how English has been taught in a rural context, as well as the way English teaching and learning have changed in the last 60 years, concerning information access and institutional organization. The community acknowledges changes in terms of teachers' qualifications and didactic strategies; they also point to challenges regarding material and technological resources in rural contexts. The case of the rural school illustrates how ELT education has evolved in Colombia along an ever-changing/challenging trajectory in the territories.

Keywords: Education, English language learning, English Language Teacher/ Teaching, rural education

Resumen

Este artículo reporta una investigación que se desarrolló en una escuela rural en Boyacá- Colombia, como parte de una exploración etnográfica en la que estudiantes, madres, padres y docentes presentan sus perspectivas sobre la evolución, progreso y retos de la enseñanza y el ser docente de inglés en relación con prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera y dinámicas propias de las comunidades. Los resultados ofrecen un panorama de la enseñanza del inglés en un contexto rural, y las formas en que su enseñanza y aprendizaje ha cambiado en relación con el acceso a las tecnologías de la información y la organización institucional. El caso de la escuela rural ilustra cómo ha evolucionado la enseñanza y docencia de inglés en Colombia, en medio de trayectorias dinámicas y retadoras en los territorios.

Palabras claves: Educación, aprendizaje del inglés, enseñanza de inglés, educación rural

Introduction

This paper details a research process conducted at a rural school located in the province of Ricaurte, Boyacá, Colombia. The focus of attention was learners, parents, and teachers' perspectives regarding their English Language experience during their school years. The information they provided, through group and individual interviews, pointed to the modification of the educational infrastructure in their rural areas throughout the last 60 years. Participants also related changing factors in the conditions to access information for educational purposes. The points this rural community highlighted draw a landscape of English Language Teaching/ Teachers (ELT) in Colombia in the middle of challenges associated with geographic location, economic and human resources for education.

A participant in the research process stated that learning in the 1970s and 1980s was like being in the dark, with no access to information and educational resources. Those two elements are less scarce today but still represent inequities and asymmetries in rural territories. Although there have been historical developments in terms of educational infrastructure and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the rural areas, including artificial intelligence (AI), today English teaching and learning in Colombia experiences new challenges and conditions inherent to global and national dynamics. Consequently, the educational policies regarding the maintenance and adaptation of schools' infrastructure and their technological resources, including English materials that come to the rural learners' hands, have played a major role in their learning experience.

The ethnographic approach used in this research process generated several insights into students', parents', and teachers' perspectives when learning and teaching English in Colombia. The gathered and analyzed information portrayed how the process of being a child and learning in a rural country has been since the early implementations of ELT in an Andean South American country. Within a national framework, after the mid-1950s, Colombia implemented neoliberal developments that accentuated the division of urban and rural areas. Industrialization was an indicator of economic success and received the government's attention, increasing the contrasts between urban industrialized sectors and rural contexts. On the opposite side of industrialization, there was a population living in rural contexts where electric light, drinking water, and educational services were luxury resources.

Learner's conditions in rural areas mirror national tendencies in terms of historic economic, cultural, and educational policies and projects. In that regard, 'Learning in the Dark' portrays a rural community seeking knowledge and information while pursuing goals associated with being educated, having more opportunities, and pursuing a better lifestyle. Although challenging, rural and learning communities in Colombia are involved in educational processes, pursuing improvements for their lives. This includes learning a foreign language, such as English, and the possibilities it brings for social justice in education in rural contexts.

The following section refers to previous works and papers exploring ELT in Colombia and discusses relevant theoretical elements of ELT and rural education throughout history.

Theoretical Framework

There are several works exploring English Language Teaching and Learning in Colombia over the last 60 years. This section discusses the state of the art related to ELT and rural education. ELT in a country located in Latin America, such as Colombia, implied theoretical developments and field innovations in challenging contexts. English Teachers in Colombia have, historically, proposed ways to address language teaching and learning based on trending or traditional methods or approaches, and using adaptive abilities to transform, create, and propose innovative and contextualized elements for education.

Bastidas (2017), for instance, reflects upon the 2015 ASOCOPI (Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés) conference and half a century of history of ELT in Colombia. This author defined the historical studies in the field as scarce, nationally and internationally (Bastidas, 2017). The history of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in Colombia is connected to multiple elements such as national policies regarding learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), instruction conducted by private and public organizations or institutions, teaching practices, and research in the discipline. ELT in Colombia, then, includes a broad sweep of actors such as policymakers, international and national public/private organizations, teachers, learners, and local communities.

Following the author, Durán Estupiñán (2024) presents a historical revision of ELT in Colombia, asserting that around the 1950s, English teaching emerged and initiated a path of consolidation in Colombia through institutions such as Fulbright, Instituto Colombo Americano, and ASOCOPI. Some research and academic discussions proposed and questioned elements associated with language, culture, interculturality, gender, and bilingualism. For instance, being bilingual in Colombia, according to national plans and policies, means proficiency in using, mainly, English as a foreign language, as stated by Guerrero (2008). Such a statement allowed a critical revision of the concept and its implications in a pluricultural and diverse country.

Within that perspective, the idea of bilingual education in Colombia omits other languages in the country and only focuses on English. A key idea about a bilingualism plan promoted by the government in Colombia is related to the prevalence of English as an alternative to Spanish, the official language (Guerrero, 2008). This assumption aids a symbolic power hegemony in favor of the English language and English language speakers in Colombia. Such tendencies promoted the development of public policies, plans, and organizations, as

well as academic and teaching discussions in a growing field of study in Colombia in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In Boyacá, works and authors in the field of language education included rurality as a research interest to contextualize teaching materials and practices. The attention of such papers connected rural education and ELT, focusing on intercultural understanding and cultural belonging after the implementation of contextualized curricular units (Ramos-Holguín et al., 2019), or materials development for enhancing EFL speaking skills (Ramos-Holguín et al., 2018).

Language teaching and learning occur amid social, cultural, political, and economic factors. Le Gal (2018), for instance, states that ELT includes not only pedagogic and technological activities but also interconnections of sociopolitical and sociocultural issues. The author expands on topics such as technologies and teacher certification in Colombia, according to the national government's policies and guidelines, and highlights a tendency towards "marketization" of education while implying the need for a bottom-up pedagogical approach focused on contextualized constructions regarding ELT (Le Gal, 2018).

In terms of general tendencies in ELT, universities and language teacher training centers produce academic and pedagogical developments in the field. Fandiño-Parra (2021) encapsulates works in ELT within sociocultural constructivism and reflective hermeneutics, and states that universities have produced projects that explore methodological approaches within phenomenological interpretivism and emancipatory social criticism. ELT research in Colombia innovates and connects to areas and disciplines that complement the understanding of language teaching and learning processes, contexts, and power relations.

Colonialism implicit in ELT is another discussion gaining space in research and academic communities. Fandiño-Parra (2021), Granados-Beltrán (2022), and Nuñez-Pardo (2022) address how ELT is a component of a sociocultural, economic, and political landscape where inequalities and forms of domination belong to global and local dynamics. Approaches such as this within the TESOL academics evidence a sweep in research interests that connects pedagogical to social, political, and humanistic considerations. ELT researchers positioned as decolonial authors are one face of an academic community reconstructing knowledge in the field.

ELT in Colombia is a political act immersed in complex social, cultural, and economic elements. In a dialogue with Canagarajah's (1999) statements, English offers possibilities to resist and construct contextualized practices benefiting communities. Resistance and local constructions of knowledge in rural contexts in the Global South face challenging conditions and barriers to access education and information on equal terms, compared to urban areas and other privileged locations. In this direction, Laboratorio de la Economía de la Educación (LEE) from Universidad Javeriana stated that rural contexts have fewer educational opportunities compared to their urban counterparts (LEE, 2023).

The report mentioned refers to a country in which 26,7% of the educational population lives in rural contexts. Rural areas are part of complex cultural, economic, political, and social dynamics. Educational practices are the result of the national and local interpretations of the above-mentioned elements. ELT for rural contexts is a field of opportunities to expand communities' knowledge and perspectives, and their historical transit amid international, national, and local conditions. In the following section, we present elements regarding research methodology, context, and participants belonging to a rural school located in Boyacá, Colombia.

Methodological Approach

This article reports a qualitative research process in which, with ethnographic elements, learners, parents, and teachers presented their perspectives regarding English language teaching and learning in a Colombian rural area. The participants were five adults between 25 and 70 years old, ten primary and secondary students between 8 and 16 years old, and two teachers between 40 and 50 years old. The research took place in a rural school located in Boyacá, Colombia. Boyacá has been labeled as one of the most rural regions in Colombia (Cataño, 2018). Within Boyacá, the delimitation of provinces is based on economic and sociocultural features and affinities in territories. The province where the school is located is named Ricaurte.

As researchers, the process included immersion in the community (Ocejo, 2018) and seeking dialogue and conversation about how people from the context experience or have experienced ELT education. Without seeking causality (Draper, 2015), the dialogues shed light on local dynamics sparked by the emergence of ELT in the rural community. Maintaining a historical line in the participants' interventions, group and individual interviews were the main instruments for data gathering. Knott et al. (2022) offered guidelines and considerations to plan and organize the interviews, which included the selection of the participants, the type of interview, and ways to maintain communication.

By conducting semi-structured interviews with five parents, ten students, and two teachers from a school located in the Ricaurte province in Boyacá, Colombia, the information about their experiences when teaching and learning in a rural context outlined two main constructs in coincident narrative lines. Those two elements are 1) the development of educational infrastructure in the rural context, which includes material and human resources in the specific area of study, and 2) the emergence and transformation of ICTs in the rural ELT experience. Within these two elements, in-depth discussions and components appear in the following section.

Data Analysis and Findings

The participants presented insightful perspectives about their learning experiences and the conditions under which schools worked in the last 60 years. The information outlines, mainly, two analysis categories. One relates to the development of educational infrastructure for rural areas and its impact on teaching and learning processes in rural contexts. The development of educational infrastructure implied the addition of human resources to lead English Language processes at a newly created rural secondary level. Additionally, the dynamics between urban and rural areas and the exponential development of ICTs permeate the experiences of rural learners to the extent of including the use of AI tools in the school's daily dynamics.

The coming titles expand on the participants' interventions, recreating the English Language Learning experience of parents and current students, as well as teachers' perspectives on the educational processes in their contexts. The first section presents a discussion related to being a student since the second half of the 20th century in Colombia, evidencing a conjunction between drive and the possibilities available in the context. Being in the dark did not imply the renunciation of participating in learning processes. Even immersed in difficult conditions, rural learners did experience and invest in their education and became agents of social transformation.

Being in the Dark. Learning English in a Rural Context

Pedro, an adult who studied at a rural school in the Ricaurte province in Boyacá, characterizes his context as distant and compares the lack of information to being in the dark. In his case, he studied in a rural primary school and later went to study secondary school in an urban school. Back then, there was no rural secondary school in his context, and that impacted his educational experience, as referred to in the following excerpt:

“Cuando yo perdí séptimo hicieron un paro indefinido y entonces yo vivía aquí en la vereda y muy distante, medios de comunicación eso era a ciegas, a gritos; ni a señas porque estábamos muy lejos. Entonces yo me iba los domingos por la tarde y al primer chino que me encontraba le decía bueno, ¿qué dijeron los profesores, que van a hacer clases? Si no, a oscuras. No recuerdo si ya había luz; No lo recuerdo; creo que no”.

[When I failed seventh grade, there was an indefinite strike, and back then, I lived here in the countryside, it was very distant, with no means of communication, it was like being blind, yelling, not a signal because we were far away. Then, on Sunday afternoon, I wandered and asked the first kid I found, well, what did teachers say about classes? If I did not do that, it was like being in the dark. I do not remember if we had electricity. I do not remember; I think we did not.] (Pedro, personal communication, June 12, 2024)

Because of how distant the urban school was, Pedro did not have information about classes or news about a teachers' strike happening at that time. In his intervention, he adds

the fact of not having electricity, even in the urban room his mother booked for him. A look back at the time when he studied at school contextualizes different conditions in terms of access to information and basic services. Those issues, according to Pedro, caused his failure in that year's course. From his perspective, studying during the seventies and eighties was difficult because of economic and material resources, as referenced in the following excerpt:

“El estudio era con las niñas. ¿Por qué lo hice yo? Porque pues me consideraba y me consideré que fui buen estudiante y quería ser diferente a los compañeros aquí en la vereda. ¿Por qué? Porque uno con el estudio es otra persona en la cual cambia. ¿Cambia por qué? Porque aprende uno la convivencia con los compañeros, pierde el miedo, pierde muchas cosas; tiene una oportunidad más adelante”.

[Studying was very difficult. Why did I do it? Because I considered myself a good student, and I wanted to be different from my partners here in the countryside. Why? Because you change when you study. Change how? Because you learn how to live with your partners, you lose fear, you lose a lot of things; you have an opportunity further.]
(Pedro, personal communication, June 12, 2024)

Pedro's desire to study, because he wanted to be different and better than other people living in the rural context, contrasts with an expression he uttered to imply the difficulties involved in studying under constraining conditions. Both elements add to a sense of self-image, a line of research explored by Ramos-Holguín et al. (2021). One of the restraining conditions is the absence of foreign language instruction in the rural context. García Botero and Reyes Galeano (2022) had similar considerations in other regions in Colombia when they state that teaching English in Quindío's region is scarce and “has reflected more flaws than advancements” (p. 51). Certainly, the coincidence describes conditions shared in different rural contexts and a general tendency of ELT in Colombia.

English was not included among the subjects taught. In this direction, Elsa, a woman from a rural context, references what she studied in the eighties and what she recalls about school dynamics:

“En primaria, le enseñaban a uno cinco materias que eran Ciencias Naturales, Sociales, Matemática y Español, Religión. Me iba bien, pues un poquito en el Español sí... pues no es tan difícil, pero creo en todas me iba bien. Le exigían a uno bastante. Uno aprendía mucho porque le exigían y le exigían a uno harto”.

[In primary school, they taught five subjects: Science, Social Sciences, Math, Spanish, and Religion. I did alright, a little bit in Spanish, yes... it is not that difficult, but I think I did well in all of them. It was very demanding. One learned a lot because it was very demanding.]

(Elsa, personal communication, June 12, 2024)

The participant mentions the five subjects she studied in primary school, including

Science, Social Science, Math, Spanish, and Religion. English was not part of the studied subjects. According to Guía 34 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2008), until

the mid-1980s, the educational system in Colombia was centered on the Ministerio de Educación Nacional's decisions. From this administrative national organization, elements such as curriculum, textbooks, topics, and programs were designed and implemented with a top-down perspective. Thus, national guidelines experienced problems in terms of local articulation in rural areas. As an example, in the participants' experience, more than forty years ago, English was not an area of exploration. In the studied rural context, foreign language instruction appeared with the addition of basic and middle school services.

That happened until 2009 when the Secretaría de Educación de Boyacá enabled the school to provide educational services for basic and middle school, as issued in the corresponding operating license. This is an example of how isolated rural centers of education merged into rural schools throughout decades and generations. The installation of a rural school that included English in the school curriculum transformed how the community moved in the territory and the experiences in a subject taught in the context for approximately 15 years. The development of school infrastructure for foreign language teaching shows the evolution and impact of efforts for gaining equity in the rural educational offer.

English, in this context, bridges the gap between the type of education in urban and rural schools. English language teaching, as well as other social sciences and humanities, appeared in the rural context to broaden the experience of education and to approach knowledge from other areas of study. Adding middle school instruction changed the dynamics of the context related to education access. Before that, the highest common grade was fifth. Elsa recalls that “back then, the person who completed fifth grade was uncommon. It was very advanced” (personal communication, June 12, 2024). Broadening the scope of the academic levels and including other middle school subjects, such as English, implies gaining opportunities within education and expanding academic and cultural opportunities for the rural educational community.

Having a dedicated English language teacher in the rural school helped to maintain and stabilize Foreign Language (FL) instruction in the context. In contrast, Elsa narrates her experience in a context where the rural educational infrastructure was not constant or stable:

“En ese tiempo todo era a pie, el que llegaba pues como que no le gustaba, de pronto venía por allá de la ciudad. No le gustaba el campo dictaba clases de 8 días, o sea se estaba la semana y decía que no, que él no volvía, que esperarían a que le enviaran a otro profesor. Y uno ahí espere, entonces finalmente pues no nos dictaron clase. Ese año pasaron muy pocos niños como de 40 y pico que éramos del curso, pasaron como 3 más”.

[At that time, everything was on foot; the teacher who arrived did not like it, maybe the person came from a city. He/she did not like the countryside, taught classes for eight days, stayed the week, and said no, that was not coming back. We had to wait for another teacher to be sent. And we, there, were waiting; in the end, we did not have classes. That year, very few children approved, 3 out of 40-something.]

(Elsa, June 12, personal communication, 2024)

The participant narrated how difficult it was to have a teacher in the context in 1981, and how the teaching and learning schedule was unstable. That situation caused the failure of most of the students and led them to repeat the same course the next year. In such conditions, even the lessons were not happening at the usual rate, compared to urban schools. In terms of ELT, learners in the studied rural context say that instruction in the foreign language did not exist, although conditions changed generationally, as referred to in the following excerpt:

“Ni siquiera lo básico de decir: buenos días, o gato, o perro, o lápiz. Que yo recuerdo que cuando ya estudió mi hermana la menor, a ella sí ya empezaban a enseñarle, por ejemplo, que lápiz, que cuaderno, que gato, que perro. Ella empezó en la primaria como en el 87, 88. Sí, pero entonces en ese tiempo sí ya empezaban a enseñarles como lo más, pues digamos que ya cuando ella estaba como en tercero, cuarto de primaria. O sea, como ya en el 90. Entonces ya les empezaron a decir que sí ya les empezaron a enseñar como palabras, digámoslo así. Pero como tal inglés no, a mí sí no me alcanzaron a enseñar nada”.

[Not even the basic vocabulary: good morning, or cat, dog, or pencil. I remember that when my younger sister studied, they started to teach her, for example, pencil, notebook, cat, and dog. She started primary school in 1987- 1988. Yes, but at that time, they started to teach them more, as when she was in third or fourth grade. In the 1990s. Then they started to teach them words, let's say it. But about English, they did not teach me a thing.]

(Elsa, personal communication, June 12, 2024)

The participant described English language learning processes that were different from her sister's. Elsa says she learned nothing when she studied in the late 1980s, whereas her younger sister had instruction related to English Language vocabulary. This contrast shows that ELT has evolved in the last 60 years in Colombia, mainly visible in an educational infrastructure aiming to bridge inequalities in the territories. Such evolution offered a more complete educational program that included English Language Teaching and Learning as a subject, enacting social justice in the territories.

Nevertheless, despite organizational efforts supported by the community and government policies, the development of an educational infrastructure that includes ELT still presents challenges in rural contexts. As mentioned by Ramos Holguín and Aguirre Morales (2016), one of those challenges is that English language teachers avoid working in rural schools; besides, teaching programs fail to insert pre-service teachers in a rural context education, and explore possibilities or advantages linked to an English Teaching position in a rural school.

This study describes a rural context that had two basic primary teachers in the central head office. Due to a low number of students, one of the teachers was removed. That implies a reduction of the educational infrastructure represented in the presence of teachers in the contexts. Rural schools and ELT undergo conditions of evolution and challenge at

the same time. Such scenery reflects social, cultural, and economic elements that affect the educational offer in rural schools. The described ELT historic evolution developed from being in the dark, having no teachers, electricity, and educational material; it then led towards more democratic access to information, not completely available and free in the rural context, and the addition of basic and middle school programs.

Those elements concur in a thriving and dynamic rural community more immersed in English language teaching and learning processes. The following section discusses the access and use of ICTs for ELT, including AI. Globalized technologies in rural schools represent another dichotomy of evolution and challenges for English language teaching and learning in Colombia. From electric light, booklets, and dictionaries to AI assistance in different tasks, rural communities explore, use, and transform their practices and experiences when learning in their context.

Luzia and AI. Access to ICTs in Rural Contexts

Currently, ELT in the rural context, even in the first years of basic education, faces new conditions associated with the use and access to ICT. About the presence, modifications, and evolution related to ELT in the rural context, a shift in foreign language teaching is evident in what primary teachers currently do. Illustrating this, teacher Arturo described the way he approaches English in multigrade classrooms:

“El inglés, por ejemplo, este año, lo que es tercero y cuarto trato de manejarle los mismos temas, ¿sí? Los unifico. Y a veces hay temas que son igual para todos. Pero entonces, la dificultad es diferente ¿sí? Entonces, es diferente. Entonces, pues ahorita sí gracias a Dios, a la tecnología hay videos, entonces manejo ahí el video beam”.

[English, for example, this year, for third and fourth grade, I try to work on the same topics. I unify them. Sometimes, topics are the same for everyone. But the difficulty level is different. It is different. Now, thanks to God, there is technology and videos. I use the video beam.]

(Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024)

The teacher implies English is being taught as part of a group of subjects. They include “all of them, the basics: Math, Spanish, Social Science, Biology, Technology, English, Religion, Ethics, Physical Education” (Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024). The strengthening of an educational infrastructure throughout time in Colombia includes teaching and learning practices incorporating the English language as a subject not only for basic secondary school but also for basic primary school. For basic primary school teachers in rural areas, who commonly have multigrade classrooms, English is not generally their area of specialization. Nevertheless, initiatives from Secretaría de Educación de Boyacá propose teacher development workshops. Teacher Arturo highlights the material he received and the experience of having support and being able to share with colleagues:

“El último que estuve que fue antes de pandemia, bueno. Una experiencia muy bonita y aprende uno muchas cosas. Uno eso, de los grupos, por ejemplo, ahí fue donde empecé a interactuar con esos grupos de trabajo donde comparten. Inclusive hacían como los jueves era, en la tarde, hacían un meet. Y uno compartía, bueno cómo le fue con tal actividad. Nos dejaban unas actividades a realizar y uno tenía que compartir con los compañeros [...] Y tantas cosas que uno aprendió ahí. Por ahí todavía tengo material”.

[The last one I attended was before the pandemic, good. It is a nice experience, and you learn a lot. That is one thing, about the groups, for instance, it was there where I started to interact with those work groups, where they shared. They even had a meeting on Thursday afternoon. There, you shared how you did with the activity. They assigned activities to do, and you had to share with your partners [...], and so many things I learned there. I still have material.]

(Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024)

Instances for teachers’ training and quality access to ICTs and teaching material are some of the recommendations arising in the participants’ statements:

“De pronto sí hace falta aquí, la otra vez yo le decía al rector, material manipulable en el aula. Y eso se puede adquirir por el CONPES, pero entonces no sé... Fichas, eso hay bastante material. Yo creo que más que todo fichas, así material manipulable. Eso hay como bingos. En las instituciones tienen bingos de inglés... bueno. Hay bastante material bueno para trabajar. De pronto si allí mejorar lo de un televisor, algo así, que hace falta en el aula”.

[Maybe what is missing here, I told the principal, is handouts for the classroom. And you can acquire that through CONPES, but I do not know. Cards, there is a lot of material. I think that most of all, cards are a material that can be used with your hands. Bingos. Schools have English bingos... well. There is a lot of good material to work with. Maybe a TV set, something like that, things that are not in the classroom.]

(Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024)

Currently, learning English involves the use of technological devices. For instance, Angélica, a student who underwent all the different learning stages in the rural educational system, got to the University and brought her teachers’ advice: “I remember my university teacher said: No, start with Duolingo. She told me to start with Duolingo because I was lost. Believe me, English is very difficult for me. I mean, a lot” (Angélica, personal communication, June 14, 2024). On her way through the different stages of education, she acknowledges it is a subject that has not been easy for her. At the university, her teacher’s advice was to use Duolingo, an app focused on languages, vocabulary, and oral and written production.

The contrast of the material suggested to Angélica at the university and the one she remembers from her school reveals a change, as she mentions in the following excerpt:

“Yo me acuerdo, en ese tiempo, nos ponían, eran cartillas. Estaba como el desafío, creo que era, que eran matemáticas. Había inglés, en la Santillana había inglés. Pero pues no era así como tan... Habían [sic] como cuentos en inglés y así cosas, pero profundo, profundo, no me acuerdo bien”.

[I remember, back then, they gave us booklets. There was a challenge, I think, in Math. There was English in Santillana, there was English. But it was not that... there were like tales in English and things like that, but in-depth, I do not recall well.]
(Angélica, personal communication, June 14, 2024)

While Duolingo was one of the alternatives proposed by the university teacher, Angélica used booklets at school and remembered seeing some storybooks. The change in the way to access the English language resides in a shift towards using phone apps and spending more time learning through a screen device. In a rural context where information access, including contact with the English language, was through the teacher, booklets, and other members of the community or students, the use of technological devices presents a new set of practices and a turn towards ICTs, even in rural contexts where connectivity has not developed greatly.

In this line, Angélica remembers her experience in the English classroom where board and notebook use prevailed during the lessons: “Everything was on the board and things we did on the notebooks, exercises. She asked us to go to the board. Or we had to learn things in English and go to the front of the class” (Angélica, personal communication, June 14, 2024). Now, her son, a five-year-old boy studying in a rural school, has experienced English differently. She describes how YouTube videos impacted his language development, in which the English language played a major role:

“Cuando él nació, a mí me recomendaron unos muñequitos que se llaman Dave y Ava. Están en español y están en inglés. Pues yo se los colocaba y la mayoría se reproducían era en inglés. Casi todos cantan canciones en inglés. Él empezó a hablar hace muy poquito, como a los cuatro años y medio. Pues normalmente uno le habla en español. Y él decía palabras en inglés. Por ejemplo, él no decía sí, sino ye, ye. O sea, cosas así. Cosas, palabras. Palabras la mayoría en inglés?”.

[When he was born, people recommended some cartoons named Dave and Ava. You find them in Spanish and English. I watched the cartoons, and most of them were in English. He recently started to talk when he was four and a half years old. Normally, one speaks Spanish to him. And he said words in English. For example, he did not say “sí” but ye, ye. I mean, things like that. Things, words. Mostly English words.]

(Angélica, personal communication, June 14, 2024)

English learning in Colombia evolved throughout generations. The recent COVID-19 pandemic impacted the need and use of screen devices to communicate and participate in the educational system, even in rural contexts. In the following excerpt, a 12-year-old student presents the way the pandemic introduced him to AI as a tool to complete activities while studying from home. He narrates when he started using AI apps for his school assignments:

“Cuando hubo la pandemia. Porque era virtual las clases. Entonces como ninguno tenía un celular así táctil, mi papá me compró uno. Empecé desde tercero a utilizar. Como en Naturales y Matemáticas más, y en Inglés también.”

Yo, en este momento estoy utilizando totalmente casi la que sale con Zapia. Aunque a veces, otras veces utilizo Google, porque no me da las respuestas que no tiene”.

[During the pandemic. Because classes were online. So, as no one had a touch-screen phone, my father bought me one. I started to use it from third grade on. In Science and Math, and in English too. At this moment, I am using exclusively the one that comes with Zapia. Sometimes I use Google because it provides answers Zapia does not have.]

(Gustavo, personal communication, July 18, 2024)

About the way students learned about AI chats and apps, Lorenzo, also a 12-year-old rural student, states that it was through TikTok, a video social network, that he learned about AI engines: “ChatGPT, AI apps. Several such as Zapia, Luzia, Pi. Because they help me with school assignments, it is better. Gemini. I learned about them through TikTok” (Lorenzo, personal communication, July 18, 2024). Students are making more constant use of AI as a tool in their learning processes compared to an increase in the same direction by teachers. Teaching practice by a current teacher reflects the use of technology and his perceptions towards ELT materials for a group of rural students:

“Pues aborita sí, gracias a Dios, a la tecnología. Hay videos, entonces manejo ahí el video y se le ponen los videos, canciones. Y mucho material que baja uno de internet. Sopas de letras, cuadros mágicos. Bueno, tantas cosas que consigue uno en la red. Pues uno siempre guiándose por el plan de estudio. De acuerdo al tema”.

[Now, thanks to God and technology. There are videos, I work with the videos, I play videos, and songs. And there is a lot of material you can download from the internet. Crossword puzzles, magic boards. Well, there are a lot of things you can find on the net. Always guiding oneself according to the study plan. According to the topic.]

(Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024)

While the participant teacher states that he makes use of technology to plan and work during classes, there are some constraints related to the rural area where the school is located. The teacher argues about difficulties in establishing an internet connection inside the school. The strategy he uses is to previously download the material at his house, “you must download it at home. And then you bring that already downloaded because here, sadly, the internet connection is not good. So, it is better to prevent it and not to cry later over it” (Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024). ELT in a rural context presents challenges to access technologies, although currently there are more devices.

A discussion regarding the use of technological devices, ICTs, and AI in ELT rural education raises the question of purpose and pedagogical implementations. The participant teacher states that using WhatsApp to maintain communication with students and parents facilitates the work. Tech devices help to share material with vocabulary and to prepare events such as the School’s English Day, as mentioned in the following excerpt:

“Por ejemplo, los chiquitines de primerito, les va muy bien. Hay unos pues más avanzados porque dicen que allá en la casa les ponen que en el celular, que aprenderse los nombres de los animales, de los colores. Con los mismos juegos que les bajan en las aplicaciones del celular. Entonces pues más bien les va como bien en Inglés. Los grandecitos a veces sí traen, pero ahorita los que tengo, por ahí los de cuarto. El año pasado que tenía quinto ellos casi todos traían su celular, y también eso me facilitaba. Porque yo les compartía en WhatsApp entonces los videos, las canciones, entonces las cogían rápido. El año pasado hicimos lo del English Day con la profe que estaba antes y por ejemplo se aprendieron la canción fue por eso”.

[For instance, the little ones in primary school do very well. Some are advanced because they use cell phones at home to learn the names of animals and colors. With the games, they download them to the phone apps, too. So, they do well in English. The big ones sometimes bring their phones, the ones I have in fourth grade. Last year, in fifth grade, they all brought their phones, and that made the work easier. I shared videos and songs through WhatsApp, and they learned fast. Last year, for the English day with the previous teacher, they learned the song because of that.]

(Arturo, personal communication, July 9, 2024)

The discussion about ways to use ICTs and AI in ELT, especially in rural contexts, is still a possible line for future research initiatives. For now, the participant teacher perceives that technology generates parents' involvement in their children's learning practices and improves English learning. In this direction, he made a call for parents' more active role in the rural school educational process, as mentioned in the following excerpt:

“Comprometer a los padres de familia. Que se hagan activos en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de los niños. Y pues por ejemplo eso, mucho utilizando los celulares, tecnología. Y lo que decimos, en el medio ya ahorita esto es muy fácil bajar un video, un tema relacionado con inglés, ¿sí? Para que lo practiquen”.

[Trying to involve parents. Make them more active in their children's teaching and learning processes. And that, using phones, technology. And what we say, in our context now, it is very easy to download a video on an English-related topic. For students to practice it.]

(Arturo, personal communication, June 17, 2024)

Globalized technologies appear in rural contexts to be part of the educational offer and foreign language teaching and learning practices. Screen devices and internet access represent a variation of technologies and experiences in rural contexts. In a transition where the absence of English teachers and materials was the common point, now global social networks, ICTs, and AI are part of learners' knowledge and communication practices. Still immersed in challenging conditions where even basic public services are not constant, the internet is part of a new way to approach ELT in Colombia, even in rural contexts. Next, we present the conclusions related to these aspects and to the historical development of an educational infrastructure that includes English Language Teaching and Learning.

Conclusions

In the last 60 years, ELT in Colombia has experienced changes and adaptations enacted by public and private organizations, teachers, and learners. The partial development of educational infrastructure has brought human and material resources to the context. Regarding rural education, the development rate is not the same as compared of urban schools. Rural contexts went from having scarce or non-existent materials/teachers to facing the incursion of technologies and screen devices in daily school activities. The educational community adapted the available resources and persisted in participating in EFL teaching and learning processes.

ELT has been part of progressive expansions of the educational offer in the Colombian territory. Experiencing English Language Teaching and Learning in rural contexts implied both a connection to global sociocultural/political conditions and more equal access to education. In such a complex scenery, English represents the presence of a Global North interpreted from local perspectives. Rural communities and rural education are part of national and international dynamics since ELT represents an evolution of educational infrastructures and technological developments in the 20th and 21st centuries. Additionally, English Language instruction in Colombia portrays the available resources in the contexts and the ways communities use them.

Currently, the development of ELT outlines several steps towards equity in the educational offer and information access in rural contexts. Colombia, being a rural country located in Latin America, gained reach in terms of the organization of a national educational system with equal conditions across the territories. Nevertheless, historical asymmetries in diverse and pluricultural territories present contexts where ELT and general education need more support to bridge social and economic gaps. The support mentioned should foster the same lines presented in this article: educational infrastructure that includes material and human resources for the contexts and access to information and communication technologies, even in places that are distant from urban areas.

Some future research could reflect the ways AI is being used in rural contexts/multigrade classes and how it is aiding or affecting English Language Learning. Some other considerations could include connections or disconnections between AI and critical thinking/literacy, gender issues, and interculturality. In terms of the educational infrastructure, some further analysis could consider the quality and conditions of rural education and how communities construct, adapt, and question the provided educational services.

Finally, in the research reported in this text, the participation of the community and their perspectives illustrated a context built of life stories, experiences, and forms of resisting violent conditions. Rural learners and schools have faced difficult challenges transitioning

from having no or little access to information and education in their contexts to building an educational infrastructure that includes ELT. Although the English Language has been addressed mostly in its grammar and vocabulary dimensions, it represents possibilities and tools for Colombians to participate in a national and global dialogue.

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Sustainable Development Goals: Contributions from the Colombian ELT Community Research

Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible: Aportes desde la Investigación en el Área del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en Colombia

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Abstract

This article reports the results of a documentary review of contributions the Colombian English language teaching (ELT) community has made to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations General Assembly between 2000 and 2023. This document shares the contributions to quality education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, peace, justice, and strong institutions. The contributions are analyzed considering the studies conducted by Colombian researchers and scholars that have shared the results in Colombian indexed journals endorsed by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (Minciencias) with the language community. In that sense, the journals revised are *HOW, Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, GIST: Education and Learning Research Journal, and Colombian Applied Linguistics*. Likewise, this investigation implies a documentary review framed in qualitative-historical research that traces several topics within the ELT communities during the past 24 years. The findings report specific information regarding the contributions considering the actions generated in and outside Colombian language classrooms as spaces mediated by dialogue and concrete actions, which are intended to improve education, reduce inequalities, and construct peace-based environments to promote stronger institutions and a more equitable society.

Keywords: ELT community, English as a foreign language, historical research, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una revisión documental acerca de las contribuciones que la comunidad de profesores colombianos de inglés ha hecho a los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) propuestos por la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas entre 2000 y 2023. Dichas contribuciones versan sobre cuatro objetivos concretos: educación de calidad, igualdad de género, reducción de desigualdades, paz, justicia e instituciones sólidas. Los resultados se generaron a partir de los estudios realizados por investigadores y académicos colombianos que han compartido sus investigaciones en revistas nacionales indexadas y avaladas por el Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación (Minciencias) con la comunidad de lenguas. En ese sentido, las revistas revisadas son *HOW, Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, GIST: Education and Learning Research Journal, and Colombian Applied Linguistics*. Asimismo, este estudio es una investigación cualitativa-histórica que rastrea varios tópicos dentro de la comunidad mencionada durante los últimos 24 años. Los hallazgos reportan información específica respecto a las contribuciones considerando las acciones dentro y fuera de las aulas colombianas como espacios mediados por el diálogo y las acciones concretas, que buscan mejorar la educación, reducir las desigualdades y construir entornos de paz para promover instituciones más fuertes y una sociedad más equitativa.

Palabras clave: comunidad ELT, inglés como lengua extranjera, investigación histórica, objetivos de desarrollo sostenible (ODS)

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been a topic of extensive coverage in all fields of progress, education, and change in all the countries involved, including Colombia. These goals in the educational environment involve more egalitarian and inclusive societies where all participants achieve synergy with their environment. “The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity and allow for sustainable development by 2030” (Deloitte, 2024, para. 1). As an action plan, it covers various areas and disciplines that aim to improve the living conditions of current and future generations. Focusing on the 17 SDGs is complicated, considering it tackles multiple areas, such as economic, social, and environmental issues (Halkos & Gkampoura, 2021; United Nations, 2024). For this reason, to direct a study based on the SDGs, delimiting them is essential to clearly and concisely present the scope against the stated goals.

This study analyzes the research results of the Colombian English language teaching (ELT) community in the context of the SDGs (United Nations, 2024). Four SDGs were selected from the seventeen:

1. SDG 4 focuses on quality education, that is, to ensure inclusive and equitable high-quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.
2. SDG 5 focuses on gender equality, that is, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
3. SDG 10 focuses on reduced inequalities, that is, inequality within and between countries.
4. SDG 16 focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions, that is, to (a) promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, (b) provide access to justice for all, and (c) build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that the Colombian ELT community creates synergies with these topics and, through publications in nationally indexed journals, shares the results of their research, which can contribute in some way to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. This Agenda, in turn, is about the integration and consolidation of issues of international interest that contribute to building a better society, one that is sustainable over time and across generations. In that sense, the research question that guided this study was the following: What contribution has the Colombian ELT community made to analyzing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5, 10, and 16 between 2000

and 2023? The objective is to share the contributions and advancements made by the ELT community concerning the mentioned goals and period.

Theoretical Framework

SDGs and Colombian ELT Community Research Contributions

United Nations member states established the SDGs in 2015 as a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity and peace for all by 2030. These arose from the need to improve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Griggs et al., 2014; Katila et al., 2019; United Nations, 2024).

SDGs should apply to all countries, since they were created to address global issues, such as inequality, health, and climate change; and to build a sustainable future for both current and future generations. In that sense, the agenda for sustainable development addresses 17 SDGs, which are interconnected and encompass the global challenges people face daily, such as poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace, and justice. Complying with these goals ensures everyone's protection (United Nations, 2024).

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs produces annual reports that provide an overview of global implementation efforts. The reports highlight areas where progress has been made and where further action is required, while reflecting on and analyzing the achievement of the goals and the project proposed on the agenda.

Moreover, it should be noted that sustainable development requires a comprehensive strategy or holistic focus that includes economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection, redistributing and improving resources, and enhancing humanity's global perspective (Sachs, 2014; Fenner & Cernev, 2021; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2019).

Despite the previous requirements, due to COVID-19, the agenda for sustainable development has had great difficulty in pursuing the plan proposed from three areas: political, economic, and socio-cultural (Fenner & Cernev, 2021; Clemente et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic only explains part of the decline in some SDGs. For instance, in education, global progress has not been fast enough. The pandemic resulted in learning loss in 4 out of 5 of the 104 countries studied.

However, the efforts made were not in vain, and the results increased. The SDGs 2023 report provided the following information: For SDG 4, related to quality education and graduation rates, it was observed that, between 2015 and 2021, there was an increase in primary education (85 % to 87 %), lower secondary education (74 % to 77 %), and upper

secondary education (53 % to 58 %) worldwide (United Nations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024). Nonetheless, “lower- and middle-income countries face a nearly \$100 billion funding gap preventing them from achieving their education goals” (Edmond, 2023, par. 4); and it is estimated that, without additional measures, only 1 in 6 countries will achieve universal secondary school completion (United Nations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

On the other hand, the information contained in the same report shows that international commitments to promote SDG 5, related to gender equality, have made progress in certain areas: cases of child marriage and female genital mutilation have declined in recent years, although not fast enough with population growth pace; the proportion of women in the political sphere is higher than ever before. Women’s representation in parliament is 30.9 % in countries that implement legal gender quotas, compared to 21.2 % in countries that do not by 2022 (United Nations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024). “Reducing both within- and between-country inequality requires equitable resource distribution, investing in education and skills development, implementing social protection measures, combating discrimination, supporting marginalized groups and fostering international cooperation for fair trade and financial systems” (United Nations, 2023a, par. 4).

Likewise, COVID-19 triggered the highest rise in inequality between countries in three decades. In fact, through their interconnectedness, SDG 5 and SDG 10 have been negatively impacted not only under the direct influence of the pandemic, but also through the means and effects of crisis management (Shulla et al., 2021). The change in inequality between countries fell from a pre-pandemic forecast of -0.8 % to a post-pandemic of 4.4 %. In the same way, the number of refugees reached 34.6 million in 2022, of which 41 % were children (United Nations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

Regarding SDG 16, there was more than a 50% increase in conflict-related civilian deaths by 2022, largely due to the war in Ukraine. “As of the end of 2022, 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide –an increase of 19 million compared with the end of 2021 and two and a half times the number of a decade ago” (United Nations, 2023b, para. 17). Finally, it is noteworthy that 2021 saw the highest number of intentional homicides worldwide in two decades (United Nations, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2024).

Despite the efforts and progress made on the 17 goals, the 2030 Agenda is still far from being achieved due to various factors: First, some research has shown that it is necessary to identify possible synergies and trade-offs to achieve the different SDGs, and improving progress towards one SDG can either strengthen or hinder progress towards another goal. Second, unequal access to resources limits sustainable development, environmental crises, gaps between SDG visions and actual capabilities, and geopolitical issues (Fonseca et al., 2020; Anderson et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022).

Anderson et al. (2022) found that, as components of the SDG system and with negative associations, only SDGs 10 and 16 had a negative impact (i.e., trade-offs) with the additional 8 or 11 goals. Challenges in achieving the SDGs are related to economic, social, and environmental concerns (OHCHR, 2019). At this point, it should be highlighted that success in implementation depends on how global ambitions are integrated into national contexts and adapted to their priorities by national governments to achieve the goals, as well as good synergies between the SDGs (Weiland et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the SDGs, which cover various action areas, have produced dissertations of global importance. It is essential to “collaborate between state and non-state actors at all political levels (global, regional, national, subnational) in various areas of society (politics, society, and economy) and across different sectors (energy, transport, food, etc.)” (Weiland et al., 2021, p. 90). The annual reports offer opportunities for discussion and analysis, which are also common in the language research area. Casa (2021) aimed to integrate the SDGs into an English subject in the first year of primary school and early childhood teacher training, since these teachers will show the future generations the culture of sustainability. Therefore, the results showed that the design and application of materials have a positive impact on sustainability.

Similarly, Manzano (2022) had the initiative to create spaces to integrate education for sustainable development and foreign language (English) learning in schools in Almería through content and language integrated learning (CLIL), that is, through sustainability and the English language. The result was an international congress at which a sustainability proposal for the operations center was discussed and defended. With that, various research studies provided data that contributed to understanding the impact of the SDGs from the beginning of their implementation to the present.

As the studies come from different disciplines, analyzing these objectives from multiple perspectives was possible. Likewise, throughout its research career, the Colombian ELT community has produced studies related to specific SDGs. This study will highlight them. From the Colombian EFL classrooms, the importance of conducting studies on the topics of equality, gender, quality of education, peace-building, and society (given that Colombia’s history has suffered from armed violence) became necessary, as well as other issues that are not purely local or of a national interest, but have allowed the creation of studies with this international vision, contributing to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

In that sense, this study highlights the contributions of the Colombian ELT community through studies developed as part of the processes related to the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL). Likewise, a study in Colombia by Chavarro et al. (2017) showed that the challenges of the SDGs are exacerbated by the country’s low research and innovation capacity. However, elements such as biodiversity, cultural richness, potential

for food production, transition to peace, increased scientific production, and collaboration, among others, can be viewed as opportunities for sustainable development.

Regarding the research carried out by Colombian researchers, it should be noted that, in recent years, some topics have been part of the EFL panorama, including gender equality, inequality, and peace and society building. These are somehow linked to the possibility of reducing inequality gaps and creating an inclusive world in which there is space for everyone, which is somehow aligned with the SDGs. After establishing a historical trace in the national journals indexed and endorsed by the Minciencias, the traceability of the research of Colombian researchers was determined, as well as the topics that were part of these studies, how they have changed over time, and where ELT research in Colombia is projected.

While keeping track of the latest publications in the ELT field, research on the most common topics took place. The journals included in the investigation were the following: *HOW, Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura, GIST: Education and Learning Research Journal, and Colombian Applied Linguistics*. The selection of these partner journals was based on their crucial role in disseminating research and promoting scholarly dialogue in the field of ELT in Colombia. These journals offer the ELT community a specific space to publish high-quality research on language and culture. Significantly, their

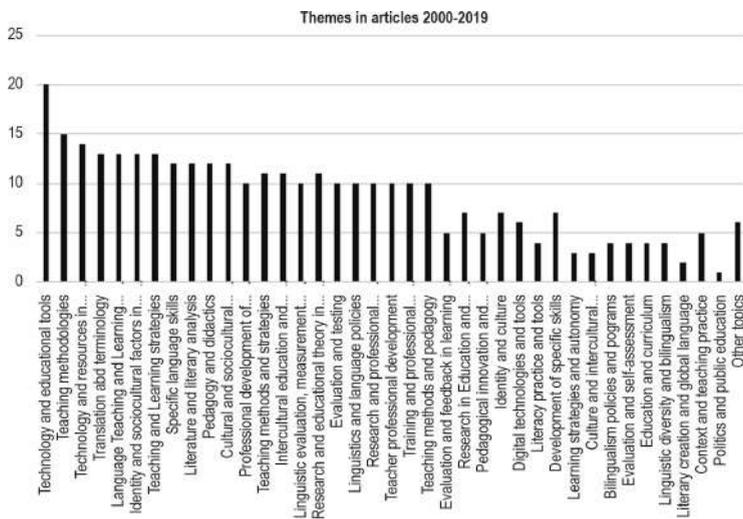


Figure 1. Statistics about the Topics of the Articles in the Mentioned Colombian Journals 2000-2019

Note. Own work.

focus is primarily on ELT, unlike other Colombian journals that cover varied educational fields. This selection of the five journals was also based on their metrics, as evident in the following current statistics:

Table 1. Journals' Metrics

Journal	Citations	h-index	i10-index
Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development	18038	69	370
Colombian Applied Linguistics	8816	48	201
HOW	4979	39	132
Íkala: Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura	2040	23	70
GIST: Education and Learning Research Journal	31	3	1

Note. Adapted from Google Scholar.

According to Figure 1, the most prevalent topic was technology, technological resources, and devices. Among these studies, we find various studies on implementing information and communication technologies (ICTs) in ELT practices.

Another topic widely explored was methodologies, considering the four basic language skills: Reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Among these studies, we could see some related to improving these four skills. Besides, another noticeable topic was centered on the sociocultural influential aspects from 2000 to 2019, exploring themes such as bilingualism, identity, decolonization, interculturality, curriculum, literary studies, evaluation, assessment, translation, identity, and professional development. One of the most relevant events that changed at some point the way education was implemented and perceived was undoubtedly the pandemic; because of COVID-19, teachers had to adapt to online classes, and new EFL practices were considered during this period. Consequently, new perspectives in terms of research emerged. Considering this, the following topics were explored during 2020-2023 (Figure 2).

As it is presented in Figure 2, the most explored topics refer to interculturality and diversity, professional development, translation and subtitling, linguistic analysis, technological tools, identity and culture, methodologies in EFL teaching, education policies,

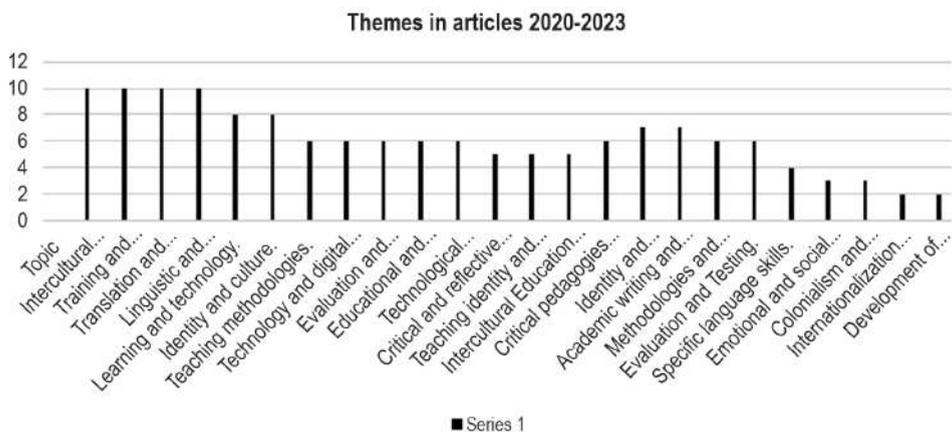


Figure 2. Statistics about the Topics of the Articles in the Mentioned Colombian Journals 2020-2023

Note: Own work.

inequalities, assessment and evaluation, decolonization of ELT practices, academic writing and publication, and identity and gender.

In the previous itinerary, through the articles published during the past 24 years, as may be seen, there is a wide range of topics which have been very relevant when contributing to the Colombian ELT community from different perspectives and practices, going beyond the EFL classroom and raising their voices towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

Research Design

This study is a documentary review that followed Morales’s (2015) systematic process to investigate, collect, and organize information related to the study topic: the Colombian ELT community’s contributions to the SDGs. The analytical technique used was the study of selected publications in the period of 2000-2023. This period was divided into three phases in the documentary record (Martínez & Palacios, 2019).

Also, data collection consisted of a documentary analysis of publications produced in national journals indexed and endorsed by Miciencias in the ELT and EFL field. For the document analysis procedure and the document selection criteria, the study proposed by the Investigation Committee (CIFE, 2017, as cited in Martínez & Palacios, 2019) was followed, which consisted of four phases. The first was centered on selecting five

nationally indexed journals focused on EFL/ELT and endorsed by the Minciencias; these journals were classified over time in categories C, B, A2, and A1, besides the fact that their focuses are mostly on ELT unlike other journals which are platforms for publishing articles across diverse fields of education. The second phase used a combination of keywords related to the four SDGs selected for this study. For the third phase, a broad time range was identified to search for articles in the five journals; likewise, the study considered articles published in all editions between 2000 and 2023, and only research results from Colombian researchers were considered. Finally, in the fourth phase, the studies were filtered, and those published articles that addressed the SDGs proposed in the study were analyzed.

This qualitative research followed a systematic and critical research process, which included the collection and analysis of primarily qualitative data, supplemented by quantitative information to support this study, as well as their integration and joint discussion to report the results. The quantitative data shows statistics against the research trend of the Colombian ELT community at three different points in time: from 2000 to 2009, from 2010 to 2019, and from 2020 to 2023; these statistics reflected which topics were the most researched and which had the highest tendencies for those years. Moreover, a quantitative analysis was performed using the PSPP statistical treatment program³. On the other hand, the qualitative data provided an overview of the analysis of the studies specifically related to the SDGs. In addition, the qualitative data were analyzed using the MAXQDA software.

Data Analysis and Findings

In this section, the results are reported in three different periods: from 2000 to 2009, from 2010 to 2019, and from 2020 to 2023. Altogether, they provide evidence through mostly qualitative information with the integration of quantitative data to support this research. Thus, the results highlight the ELT tendencies and the contributions from this community to the selected sustainable development goals.

SDG4: Quality Education

196 ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2000-2009

Figure 3 shows the main tendencies and supports data presented. During this period, studies on quality education emphasized that teacher training should integrate theory,

³ Perfect Statistical Professional Presented is a free and open-source statistical analysis program that uses graphs or charts to highlight trends and findings, avoids technical jargon, explains complex concepts easily, and frames the data within a goal.

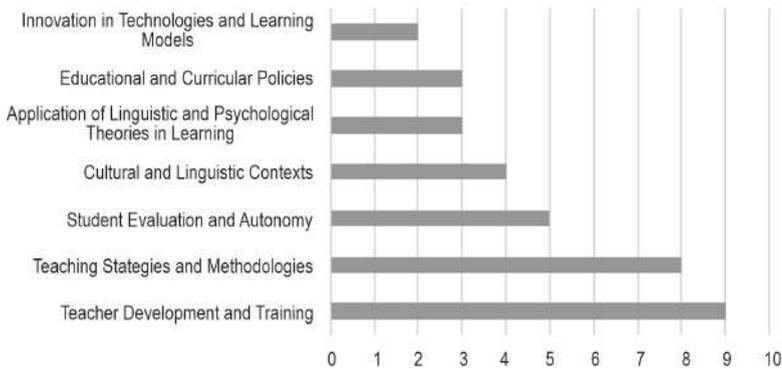


Figure 3. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 4 between 2000 - 2009

Note. Own work.

practice, and continuous education through innovative methodologies, fostering autonomy and reflection as fundamental pillars to strengthen the teaching process. In this regard, research on the subject highlighted how communicative approaches and project-based learning (PBL) proved to be effective teaching strategies, promoting student participation and the development of language skills through more flexible methods. Likewise, self-assessment emerged as a key tool to foster student autonomy and responsibility, yielding positive results in the Colombian context.

Regarding cultural and linguistic contexts, the need to include indigenous and regional languages in bilingual education was underscored, promoting critical cultural awareness that strengthens intercultural competence (de Mejía, 2006; González, 2007). This represented a significant step forward in advancing the debate on recognizing Colombian native languages in educational policies. From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's concept of mediation highlighted the importance of social and cultural factors in English learning, while the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and multimodal models marked an advancement in teaching, although their implementation required greater infrastructure and teacher training.

Finally, educational and curricular policies were found to require better adaptation to local realities (Cárdenas, 2009), particularly in rural areas, to ensure a significant impact on educational equity and quality. These findings set a precedent to revise bilingualism policies in Colombia, since bilingualism was considered a monolithic and homogeneous concept based on the English language (Guerrero, 2008).

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2010-2019

Figure 4 shows the main tendencies and supports the data presented. Studies on educational quality indicate that the ELT community has made significant progress in key areas. Those benefited from innovative strategies such as simulation games, translanguaging, gamification, and the use of blogs, fostering autonomous and creative learning. Additionally, formative assessment through social networks and the curricular alignment of teaching materials contributed to optimizing the educational process.

However, the implementation of innovative approaches faced challenges, including the lack of integration of advanced technologies and PBL, as well as the misalignment of textbooks with the official curriculum. These studies highlighted the critical role of teacher training, emphasizing that communities of practice and critical pedagogy strengthened teacher identity and agency, although technological training remains a pressing need (Bedoya et al., 2018).

Moreover, inequalities in access to English learning persisted, particularly in rural areas, where the digital divide and socioeconomic barriers limited learning opportunities (Herazo et al., 2012). Therefore, while technology –including virtual reality and artificial intelligence– presents promising solutions, its implementation requires greater investment in infrastructure and teacher support.

Finally, as previously reported between 2010 and 2019 regarding policy issues, there is still a need to better adapt bilingualism policies to local contexts by balancing English instruction with the preservation of indigenous and local languages. This remains a challenge for the ELT community to ensure a more inclusive and contextually relevant educational approach.



Figure 4. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 4 between 2010 - 2019

Note. Own work.

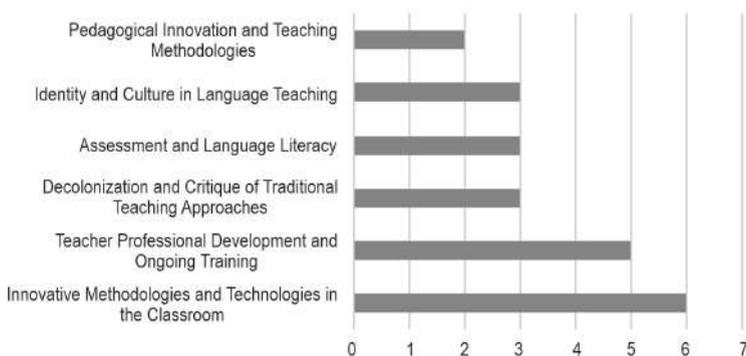


Figure 5. ELT Tendencies in data SDG 4 between 2020-2023

Note. Own work.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2020-2023

Figure 5 below shows the main tendencies and supports data presented during this period. The ELT community made progress in the implementation of innovative methodologies and the use of technologies in English classes, including digital platforms such as Schoology, and methodologies such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Studies reported that these approaches are essential to enhancing student participation and strengthening both linguistic and disciplinary competencies. In Colombia, where access to educational resources remains limited, the integration of technology addresses the need to improve educational quality, underscoring its relevance to SDG 4.

At the same time, Colombian researchers emphasized decolonizing teaching through translanguaging and decolonial pedagogical practices, challenging traditional approaches that have historically marginalized native languages and local perspectives, particularly in indigenous and rural communities (Fandiño, 2021). This has sparked academic debates regarding biased language teaching and learning in the educational field.

Additionally, when it comes to teacher professional development, educators in rural areas continue to face significant barriers to access continuous training (Barrientos et al., 2023), especially in innovative methodologies such as CLIL. Likewise, continuous and authentic assessment, adapted to students' real-life contexts, has proven crucial to measuring progress and bridging the gap between theory and practice, an essential issue in the Colombian educational context.

Finally, studies highlighted that, although critical pedagogy remains underutilized due to a lack of specialized training, it represents a powerful tool to foster critical thinking and social participation (Herrera & Portilla, 2021). These elements are particularly relevant in

a country like Colombia, known for its significant cultural diversity and persistent social inequalities.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2000-2009

Figure 6 below shows the main tendencies and supports the data presented for this period. Studies conducted by the English language teaching (ELT) community revealed that gender dynamics in the classroom remained influenced by stereotypes and inequalities, affecting students' participation and identity construction (Castañeda, 2008; Durán, 2006).

Traditional gender roles limited equity in academic interactions, shaping the perception of women in educational settings and the workplace; and, at the same time, gender identity and language learner identity interacted, enabling students to challenge stereotypes through their communication styles and adopted roles. These studies also highlighted the crucial role of inclusive education and curriculum diversification to promote equity by incorporating pedagogical practices that challenged gender norms and strengthened students' self-esteem (Posada, 2004). However, the persistence of stereotypes in student interactions underscored the need for increased sensitization and teacher training in gender equality, as unconscious biases continued to shape classroom dynamics.

Nevertheless, findings between 2000 and 2009 did not provide specific data on gender inclusion and equality in the English classroom. Instead, they emphasized the necessity of

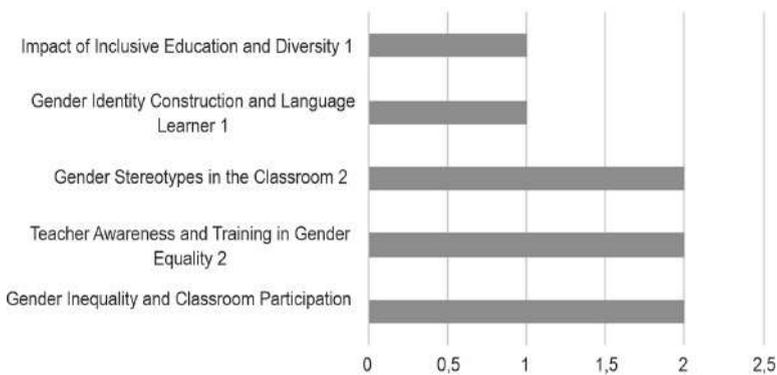


Figure 6. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 5 between 2000 - 2009

Note. Own work.

pedagogical strategies that promote equality, representation of diverse voices, and critical thinking. Addressing these issues is essential to foster a more inclusive learning environment within Colombian educational policies.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2010-2019

Figure 7 below shows the main tendencies and supports the data presented that advances in gender equality in Colombia have been limited.

Studies indicated that gender stereotypes continue to shape the social perception of voice, image, and cultural narratives, reinforcing traditional roles in the representation of individuals (Aguirre, 2018). In that sense, gender identity, far from being static, is constantly negotiated based on sociocultural and personal factors, with literature serving as a space to challenge established conventions (Hincapié, 2018).

In this context, masculinity has been constructed through discourses of power and violence, where symbolic figures, such as the death of the father, reflect dynamics that impact both family and social relationships. As a result, art and literature matters have emerged as tools of resistance, enabling the redefinition of identities and empowerment in contexts of discrimination.

Within the Colombian educational system, gender gaps persist in access to education and academic success, underscoring the need for policies that promote equality, including bilingual education, where inequalities in implementation and benefits remain. The studies reviewed did not report significant progress in educational policies, curricula, or institutional frameworks explicitly addressing gender equality.

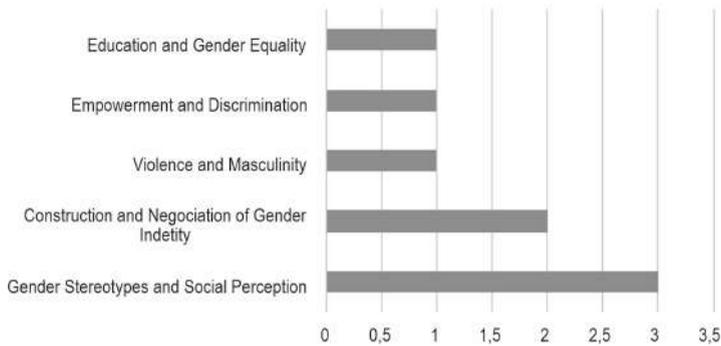


Figure 7. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 5 between 2010 - 2019

Note. Own work.

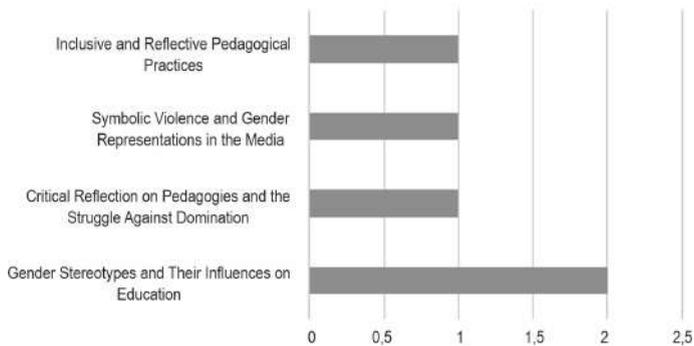


Figure 8. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 5 between 2020 - 2023

Note. Own work.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2020-2023

Figure 8 shows the main tendencies and supports data presented. Studies indicated that gender stereotypes profoundly influence educational practices and classroom interactions, shaping both teaching and the identities of teachers (Rodríguez, 2022) and students.

Findings revealed that these stereotypes not only reinforce traditional roles, but they can also be challenged through student narratives and critical pedagogies. In this sense, transformative pedagogies, grounded in feminist epistemologies, criticize power structures and seek to evidence gender inequalities in the Colombian educational context (Nieto, 2023).

In the same way, research on gender highlights that symbolic violence in the media, particularly in advertising, reinforces an image of women as sexual objects, as well as the normalization of unattainable standards, reinforcing dynamics of inequality both inside and outside the classroom. In response to this reality, advances in the ELT community point to inclusive and reflective pedagogical practices as an alternative to fostering more equitable learning environments. These studies emphasize the importance of teachers critically examining their own gender biases and adopting educational approaches that promote equality and diversity (Rodríguez, 2022). Finally, the reviewed studies did not provide data on initiatives promoting educational or institutional policies for gender equality.

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SDG 10: Reduce Inequality within and among Countries

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2000-2009

Figure 9 below shows the main tendencies and supports data presented. In this period, new tendencies emerged, because this time was influenced by new reflections regarding the

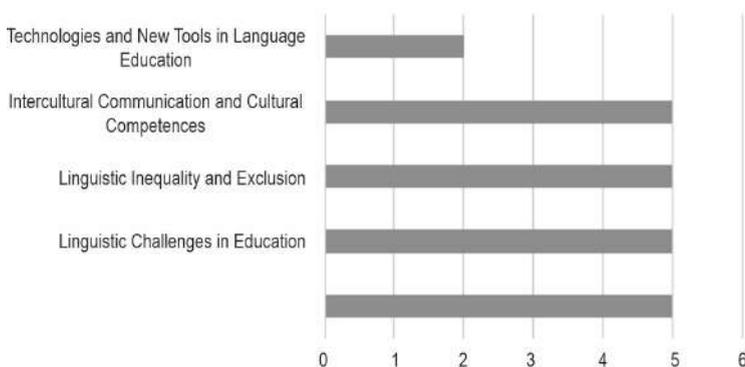


Figure 9. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 10 between 2000 - 2009

Note. Own work.

adaptation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR); the implementation of ELT textbooks, which seemed to be limited by the different school settings and their social realities; the decolonization of research practices; the new gender-based studies; the intercultural practices; the tribal languages in Colombia; and the professional developments.

One of the projects about bilingualism that promotes the awakening of the ELT community's awareness was called the COFE project (Colombian Framework for English), and its main objective was to improve the teaching of EFL in secondary schools in Colombia. "Through this project teachers made a complementary arrangement between the government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and Colombia for the improvement of teaching EFL" (Rubiano et al., 2000, p. 37). In that sense, through this project, high school teachers and university professors added new features to the curriculum that reinforced the development of the four basic language skills; besides, they had the chance of being more exposed to activities, to promote their professional development, and they relied on research for reflecting more in their teaching practices.

Moreover, another article proposed a study about the need for teachers' development, so that they could raise their voices about the standards necessary for the profession. "Results suggest that EFL teachers experience needs in three different domains of their professional lives: as workers, as instructors, and as learners" (González et al., 2002, p. 29). Considering this, another aspect that is very relevant when it comes to EFL teaching practices is concerned with the teachers' autonomy in terms of changing the teacher and the school practices (González et al., 2002).

Similarly, another article identified the processes of innovation in the language curriculum. Thus, some studies reflected the need to create more flexible curricula, considering the real needs of the educational contexts, reflecting on students' needs and expectations (Usma & Frodden, 2003).

In the same line, more studies about reducing inequalities show that “Colombia Bilingüe reduces bilingualism to the learning of English by Spanish speakers, disregarding the linguistic complexity of the country and perpetuating inequalities in terms of linguistic prestige” (Mejía, 2006, as cited in González, 2007, p. 312). In this way, a relevant aspect to consider regarding the Colombia Bilingüe program is the need for post-method approaches that promote higher professional growth among English teachers in Colombia.

Moreover, Usma (2009) developed a study that entails an equitable plan for ELT practices in private and public schools to reduce inequalities (p. 19). In the previous articles, there was a challenge that started with the modifications of a curriculum in EFL settings, breaking down the barriers of the status quo to promote the contextualization of the ELT practices in Colombia despite the implementation and adaptation of foreign policies. For example, the CEFR and its guidelines are implemented not only in developed countries, but also in developing countries. In this way, the Colombian ELT community becomes more aware of the importance of analyzing their practices inside and outside the classroom, being also agents of social change.

Additionally, EFL teachers and professors are also required to take international tests, the most common are the IELTS and the TOEFL, which are accepted by many universities to get permanent job positions. Other tests are the In-Service Certificate in English Teaching (ICELT) and the Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT), as stated by González (2009): “These teaching certifications may represent some forms of standardization, exclusion, inequality, and businessification in the professional development of EFL teachers” (p. 183).

Considering these inequalities, we have a controversy, since nowadays there are many studies based on the decolonization of ELT practices and communities; however, these tests are still a requirement for teachers and, mostly, university professors to get better job opportunities. In this sense, the studies explored in the articles from the five journals presented the panorama created as the effect of implementing the normativity mentioned and revealed only the contribution of the ELT community to four SDGs, but not the reduction of inequality within this community.

Progress toward this SDG demonstrated that bilingualism played a crucial role in the cultural resilience of indigenous communities (Alarcón, 2007). However, structural barriers persisted, particularly in rural areas and contexts where indigenous languages were marginalized by English-centered educational policies (de Mejía, 2006).

In education, linguistic challenges included the gap between colloquial and academic language, gender disparities in English learning, and the need for innovative strategies, such as the use of hypertext to enhance writing, and the integration of values in the teaching process. Studies also revealed that the exclusion of indigenous languages and the stigmatization of Creole in San Andrés and Providencia reflected forms of linguistic discrimination that limited the teaching of minority languages and the possibility to keep sociocultural inequalities (Flórez, 2006).

Similarly, intercultural competence emerged as a crucial factor in ELT, given the intrinsic connection between language and culture in the English learning process. Hence, findings revealed that teachers faced challenges while integrating interculturality into the curriculum due to a lack of training in that field. Finally, technology was increasingly recognized as a powerful tool to improve English instruction, particularly in universities, although its impact presented disparities between 2000 and 2009 due to limited resources and the lack of teacher preparation in this regard.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2010-2019

Figure 10 shows the main tendencies and supports the data presented related to this SDG between 2010 and 2019.

On the one hand, regarding this period, several authors highlighted in their articles a linguistic discrimination in terms of a “native speaker idealization”, and a mother tongue restriction (Vanegas et al., 2016). In this regard, there is a linguistic policy for the Certification



Figure 10. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 10 between 2010 - 2019

Note. Own work.

of Foreign Language Competence implemented in some universities (Restrepo, 2012), which promotes the implementation of international tests, valid only for two years, favoring international businesses and policies that nurture the technification and marketization of EFL. In that time, there was still a need to raise the voice regarding the implementation of an international test as a demand for English language teachers and professors to get job positions in universities. Since the ELT community has been promoting the decolonization of ELT practices, this requirement is still a permanent contradiction.

On the other hand, findings from studies related to this SDG revealed that ELT in Colombia has faced multiple linguistic and cultural challenges, particularly for indigenous communities and academics in peripheral contexts (Usma et al., 2018). The data suggested that specific areas, such as language barriers in higher education, the preservation of regional identities, and academic publishing difficulties highlighted the need to broaden equality in access to bilingual education and academic networks. Globalization has intensified these tensions, since English is perceived both as a tool for global communication and as a potential threat to local languages. However, cultural resistance and efforts to balance English learning with the preservation of Colombia's rich linguistic diversity have been observed.

From a pedagogical perspective, the use of metacognitive strategies, tutoring, and effective feedback strengthens students' autonomy and language skills, facilitating their academic development. However, higher education in Colombia continues to face challenges related to academic ethics, including a lack of awareness about plagiarism (López & Fernández, 2019) and barriers to academic publishing, underscoring the need for greater emphasis on training in academic integrity and accessible scientific production.

Additionally, some studies suggested that the dynamics of violence in Colombian society have influenced perceptions of fatherhood and gender roles, reshaping representations of masculinity and affecting the identity of new generations (Orozco, 2018). These findings highlight the need to address such issues from a critical perspective in both education and social research.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2020-2023

Figure 11 shows the main tendencies and supports data presented. Among the topics explored in the period (2020-2023), there is one about the difficulties of English teachers to publish scientific articles (Cárdenas, 2019) in some Colombian journals, since the percentage of rejected articles written by Colombians is high. Thus, these researchers must submit their articles to foreign journals after the rejection of their work, since the standards for publication in the Colombian journals are increasingly demanding, and these are more willing to publish articles written by foreign English language teachers.

In the same way, “native speakerism” is a new concept that emerged due to the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers, and due to the discrimination against

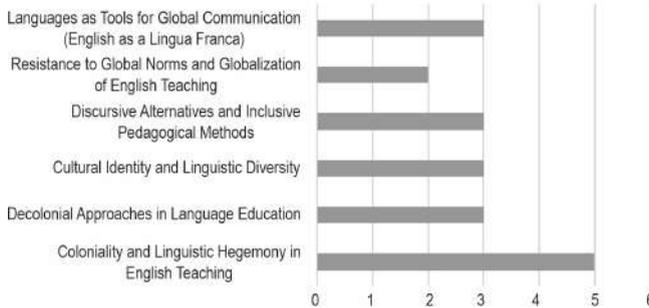


Figure 11. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 10 between 2020 - 2023

Note. Own work.

non-native speakers and the idealization of native speakers in some contexts. This position was perpetuated for many years until the EFL teachers raised their voices and tried to reduce inequalities, as proposed in SDG 10, regarding reducing inequalities and neglecting the concept of native speakerism, deracializing ELT practices.

Other changes on ELT in Colombia were about the critical and unsubordinated pedagogies (Castañeda & Méndez, 2022), emerged from the decolonized practices, leaving aside imperialism and the hegemonic discourse coming from some dominant countries, exploring English as a lingua franca (ELF), a common language to communicate but with some requirements. This language can be considered a global one, because of economic reasons, power, and ease of access to this language.

On the one hand, now there is a tendency to promote not only bilingual teachers but also multilingual teachers who are aware of and implement intercultural practices in their EFL settings, which can be seen as ELF settings. On the other hand, there are other voices to be considered, like those of indigenous communities, because their languages have been neglected and culturally oppressed. Thus, indigenous people are now EFL teachers in different school environments having wide cultural and linguistic richness; all of that is part of their communities and is worth spreading.

In the Colombian context, some bilingual programs have been implemented; for example, COFE and Colombia Bilingüe. These have guidelines based on the CEFR. Through the implementation of these programs, there have been more reflections upon several perspectives: decolonization of ELT practices, plurality of literacies, ELT in rural areas, professional development, students as citizens of the world, supranational language policies (Gómez et al., 2023), governmental agendas, bilingualism (Alarcón, 2007),

mainstream research, and curriculum, among other topics of current interest in the ELT community.

Likewise, inequalities do not imply only the economic ones, but also those of the education system. In the EFL/ELF contexts in Colombia, teacher/professors researchers are planning new methodologies in their communities of practice, keeping in mind the processes of inclusion, exclusion, and stratification that accompany current school reforms (Usma, 2009): multiple intelligences, learning standards (Cárdenas & Hernández, 2011), blind and visual impaired students (Arenas, 2012), sign language, hard of hearing individuals (Castillo & Flórez, 2020), and dyslexic individuals' narratives on their process of becoming English language teachers (Cuervo & Castañeda, 2021).

Studies in ELT revealed that ELT in Colombia continues to follow colonial models that associate language with modernity and prestige, while indigenous and Afro-Colombian languages remain underestimated and marginalized (Gutiérrez & Aguirre, 2022). This linguistic colonialism positions English as an instrument of power, affecting the representation of both ethnic and local communities, and generating tensions in the classrooms.

To counteract this hegemony, decolonial approaches advocate for an ELT model that values local languages and worldviews (Fandiño, 2021), promoting inclusion through pedagogies that challenge the dominance of English foreigner models. This is one of the ELT community's most significant contributions to SDG 10, as it reflects a commitment to reduce inequality in a country recognized worldwide for its multicultural and linguistic richness, ensuring the preservation of indigenous cultures.

Additionally, studies suggested that teachers' training should integrate a critical perspective that strengthens future educators' cultural identity and promotes translanguaging as a strategy to respect Colombia's linguistic diversity. Findings also indicated that inclusive pedagogical methods aim to reject linguistic hierarchies and to adapt ELT to local realities, resisting the globalization of a homogeneous model (Mosquera, 2022).

Likewise, redefining English as a lingua franca (Macias, 2010) would allow for the recognition of its multiple cultural and linguistic variations, meaning the moving beyond the imposition of hegemonic norms and fostering a more equitable and representative learning experience within the Colombian context.

SDG 10, focused on reducing inequalities, has been widely explored in the field of ELT practices in the period 2000-2023. New methodologies and reflections have emerged as key points to be considered. These have contributed to the field of ELT. Still, some inequalities need to be solved to have a more equitable society and participants who promote their critical thinking to favor different communities of practice.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2000-2009

During this period, there were no topics registered in the articles about this SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions within the five journals analyzed, as this topic gained more relevance in later years.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2010-2019

Like the 2000-2009 period, no articles published within the five journals analyzed for the present study were recorded in these years. However, these topics were present in one way or another within the reflections of the ELT community.

ELT Colombian Community Contributions to SDGs: 2020-2023

Figure 12 below shows the main tendencies and supports the data presented. SDG 16 strives to achieve all the above to encourage peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure equal access to justice, and construct efficient institutions at all levels. People across the world must be free from any fear of possible violence or feeling unsafe in terms of their ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. However, current and new violent conflicts around the world are derailing the global path towards peace and the achievement of SDG 16. Regarding the ELT field in Colombia, very few studies have been published in the five journals (United Nations, 2024).

On the one hand, Aristizábal and Ortiz's (2023) article reflects on the armed conflict in Colombia and how this situation has affected ELT practices. These victims have been heard

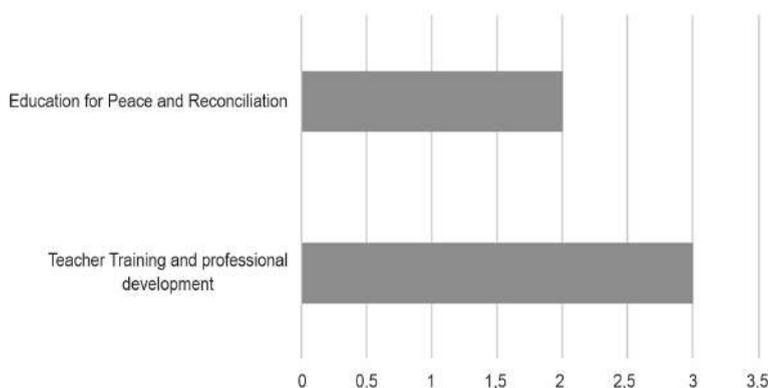


Figure 12. ELT Tendencies in Data SDG 16 between 2020 - 2023

Note. Own work.

by the Peace Commission agency, where people who have experienced violence in Colombia can raise their voices and try to get an indemnification. On the other hand, we found the study developed by Aldana (2021), which talks about ELT as a peripheral field in which peace construction has not been explored enough in the ELT community.

Thus, the ELT community's contributions to SDG 16 highlighted how English language education can be addressed as a powerful tool for peacebuilding, fostering intercultural understanding and empathy among students from diverse backgrounds (Aristizábal & Ortiz, 2023). The findings indicated that future teachers play a key role as agents of peace, integrating approaches that promote reconciliation and dialogue within their pedagogical practices.

Additionally, studies suggested that Colombian students' training should incorporate a critical and inclusive pedagogy, enabling them to question structures of inequality and conflict while developing strategies that foster respect and peaceful problem-solving. In line with this, teacher training curricula should integrate principles of peace and reconciliation to generate a positive impact in the Colombian communities.

Authors such as Aldana (2021) identified six main tendencies in how peacebuilding can be addressed within Colombian ELT, including critical peace education, social activism, global citizenship, and reconciliation. Notably, despite the relevance of this topic, the number of studies related to SDG 16 remains limited, considering the number of journals consulted and the volume of issues and articles published between 2000 and 2023. Thus, regarding this SDG 16, it is suitable to do more research about this topic and promote peace and justice in the ELT classroom, to have stronger institutions that respond to the new requirements of this changing society. In Colombia, with an existing armed conflict, it is necessary to reflect more on these topics that have started to be more recognized and valued by Colombians.

Finally, studies also revealed that reflection and mentoring support help transform these challenges into opportunities for growth, strengthening teachers' professional identity and refining their strategies to manage complex classroom situations with flexibility and resilience while developing their conflict-resolution skills (Aguirre et al., 2022).

210 Conclusions and Limitations

The SDGs are represented as a call for action. These are proposed for all the countries, and include: No poverty (SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate

action (SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) (United Nations, 2024).

As observed, four of these goals are mostly referred to in the education system: 4, 5, 10, and 16. Although many studies reflect the voice of the teachers and professors who expect to have a more equitable society, reducing inequalities. However, there are still more topics to be explored in terms of governmental policies for bilingual or multilingual programs in Colombia, to promote the knowledge, spread, and make aware of the tribal languages, and accept inclusion and the decolonization of ELT practices.

Although some progress has been made, challenges remain. Regarding SDG 4, there are disparities in access to quality education between urban and rural areas, which affects the teaching of English in the most remote areas. Since 2004, Colombia has implemented a National Bilingualism Program (PNB), which is regularly updated and has been subject to changes over the years, to improve the teaching of English in the Colombian education system, with a focus on teacher training and curricular improvements favoring EFL and ELT. In this context, the Colombian bilingualism strategy aims to achieve intermediate level proficiency in English by 2025 for secondary school students, although it should be noted that the bilingualism policy opened some space up for the indigenous Colombian languages through recognition and efforts, to integrate educational technologies, and to strengthen teacher training, scholarships and training programs. Thus, teachers continue to improve their teaching and English skills and contribute to a fairer and higher-quality education.

Similarly, in relation to SDG 5, progress has been made in improving the gender equality perspective in access to quality education for girls and women, while the challenge remains for women in rural and vulnerable communities, who are the most affected and face the greatest obstacles when it comes to learning English and seizing their opportunities. Also, empowerment programs were implemented to train women and girls in vulnerable communities through ELT and provide them with better educational and employment opportunities. In addition, it is worth noting that gender equality studies have increased by 300 % since 2015 in publications in Colombian indexed journals, which shows that there is now more awareness of the topic and that the results of such research are not aligned to the research interest of Colombian English teachers. As a result, Colombia has made significant progress in the areas of EFL and ELT, in line with the SDGs 4 and 5. However, it is needed to ensure that these advancements remain sustainable over time, that efforts are directed towards strengthening these goals, and that the latter benefit all population groups equally.

Concerning SDG10, there are still some inequalities that need to be solved to have a more equitable society, and participants who raise their voices to favor different ELT communities. These inequalities refer to the spread and acknowledgement of tribal languages, the implementation of more contextualized materials in ELT, reducing inequalities between

native and non-native teachers, the implementation of standardized international tests as part of the decolonization practices, as well as the search for more egalitarian and fair societies where the process of learning English as a foreign language can be seen from multiple perspectives.

Regarding SGD 16, there is still a long path to be discovered by the ELT teachers, professors, pre-service teachers and stakeholders, so they must propose different practices, strategies and methodologies to be implemented in the ELF classrooms to promote peace. This is very important in a country like Colombia, which has experienced an armed conflict for many years. Besides, it is also necessary to promote practices based on social justice, where all the students can have the same opportunities and try to be more resilient after being restituted, after experiencing armed conflicts and displacements, or after being victims over the years. In this way, educational institutions can be stronger.

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From Brick-and-Mortar to Cyberlearning: The Evolution and Impact of Distance Learning on ELT in Colombia

Del Aula al Ciber Aprendizaje: Evolución e Impacto de la Educación a Distancia en la Enseñanza del Inglés en Colombia

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Abstract

This paper investigates the integration of distance learning models and English Language Teaching (ELT) in Colombia through a conceptual reflection on their historical evolution and impact. Over the past sixty years, ELT in Colombia has undergone significant changes, adapting to evolving educational environments. Through a reflective analysis of the literature and historical developments, the paper explores the transition of distance learning from traditional correspondence to AI-enhanced platforms and evaluates its effects on ELT. It critically discusses the challenges encountered throughout this evolution, including issues of equitable access, digital literacy, and maintaining human connection. Despite these challenges, the paper underscores the advantages of distance learning, such as tailored educational experiences and improved access for underserved populations. By reviewing the historical, current, and future contexts of ELT in Colombia, this paper stresses the importance of ongoing innovation and adaptation in ELT methodologies to fulfill the requirements of the digital era.

Keywords: Cyberlearning, digital era, distance learning, English language teaching (ELT)

Resumen

Este trabajo explora la integración de los modelos de aprendizaje a distancia y la enseñanza del inglés (ELT) en Colombia. En los últimos sesenta años, la enseñanza del inglés ha experimentado cambios notables, ajustándose a los entornos educativos cambiantes. Este artículo también examina el desarrollo histórico del aprendizaje a distancia, que va desde los cursos convencionales por correspondencia hasta las plataformas mejoradas con IA, y evalúa sus efectos en el ELT. Asimismo, discute críticamente los desafíos encontrados a lo largo de esta evolución, incluidos los problemas de acceso equitativo, alfabetización digital y el trabajo cooperativo. A pesar de estos desafíos, el documento subraya las ventajas del aprendizaje a distancia, como las experiencias educativas personalizadas y el mejor acceso para las poblaciones desatendidas. Al revisar los contextos histórico, actual y futuro del ELT en Colombia, el artículo enfatiza la importancia de la innovación y adaptación continuas en las metodologías de ELT para cumplir con los requisitos de la era digital.

Palabras clave: Ciber aprendizaje, era digital, aprendizaje a distancia, enseñanza del inglés (ELT)

Introduction

Education, traditionally conceived as a complex interplay between teacher and learner within a physical classroom, has been a cornerstone of human society for millennia. The entrenched paradigm has persisted for centuries, where knowledge transfer and construction occurred primarily in face-to-face settings. However, the last few decades have witnessed an overwhelming shift in educational thought, challenging the notion of education as a purely physical experience (Simonson et al., 2019). While the seeds of this transformation were shown centuries ago, it is only recently that the concept of education transcending geographical and temporal boundaries and limitations has gained widespread acceptance in Latin America (Valdés Montecinos & Ganga-Contreras, 2020). This paradigm shift has been met with some resistance but has opened new doors for learning and contributed to a more open, accessible, and inclusive education.

The emergence of digital technologies has catalyzed an unprecedented revolution in education, accelerating the pace of change at an exponential rate. Within this revolutionary transformation, technology has become an integral part of teaching and learning practices, reshaping the educational landscape. Simulated virtual laboratories, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), and Virtual Learning Objects (VLOs), among other emerging tools and resources, facilitate the development of skills and competencies, while chatbots powered by artificial intelligence (AI) enhance the learning experience. Similarly, assessment methods now employ big data protection mechanisms as well as geo-localization and sensory and biometric recognition technologies (voice recognition, facial and fingerprint identification) to improve the conditions for ensuring academic integrity and online assessment while serving as a mechanism for promoting learning (Leal Afanador, 2021). The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has not remained untouched by this transformation. The infusion of digital tools and resources has enriched language learning experiences (Muñoz Fandino & Tulande Rengifo, 2023; Su & Zou, 2022; Tu & Barlett, 2024) and created opportunities for learners to act on new language learning affordances (Acosta-López, 2023; Nocchi, 2018; Richards, 2015).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research, particularly after the COVID-19 outbreak, focusing on the relationship between language learning and technology-mediated tools, resources, and platforms. There have also been efforts to conceptualize the impact of new technologies on second and foreign language learning, resulting in the emergence of constructs such as digital language learning (DLL) (Godwin-Jones, 2022; Li & Lan, 2022) and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) (Su & Zou, 2022). However, a comprehensive understanding of how these elements interact within distance learning (DL) models remains elusive. While these empirical studies and constructs offer valuable insights into technology-mediated ELT, their application to the specific context and characteristics of DL models in Colombia requires further exploration.

The integration of technology-mediated online learning and ELT in Colombia represents a unique case for discussion and research. Organizations such as ASOCOPI have played a pivotal role in shaping the field for over six decades, and *HOW Journal* has consistently contributed to critical discourse and knowledge advancement. This paper aims to contribute to this legacy by examining the historical trajectory—not of online learning or virtual learning, but of the renovated DL model and ELT in Colombia—analyzing the current landscape and envisioning future directions. By discussing the convergence of DL models and the evolving nature of ELT education, this paper seeks to identify challenges, opportunities, and potential pathways for the field's development.

Historical and Conceptual Overview of Distance Learning in ELT

Today, DL Education is widely supported by a variety of technological resources, platforms, and techno-pedagogical innovations. However, the history of this model traces back centuries, which reveals the long-standing efforts of humanity to shorten distances and transcend geographical and temporal barriers. Knowing its humble beginnings and the conceptual and theoretical tenets supporting the model is relevant to understanding the current state of DL in Colombian ELT. Some researchers suggest that the historical origins of DL go back to the time of the epistles between Plato and Dionysius in 357 BC and 367 BC., or even to earlier times in civilization such as the Sumerian, Egyptian, and Hebrew civilizations with the so-called instructive letters (Alfonso Sanchez, 2003; Peters, 2002). However, the development and evolution of DL Education that are of interest to this discussion are those of more contemporary periods and respond to more conceptual outlooks.

The concept, as we know it, seems to have first emerged in 1728 when a Boston newspaper published an ad that offered self-instructive materials and correspondence tutoring. This early form of distance education was characterized by using mail for sending and receiving educational content, which enabled learners to study remotely. The pioneering work of Isaac Pitman in the 1840s marked a significant development in distance education when he introduced shorthand instruction by mail and established the foundations for correspondence education. Pitman's efforts culminated in the creation of the Phonographic Correspondence Society, a precursor to more formalized Correspondence Colleges.

Bozkurt's (2019) historical analysis suggests that by the mid-19th century, language learning by correspondence was beginning to take shape. Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt established an institution in Berlin to teach languages through correspondence. This is very likely the first formal attempt at language teaching via distance education. This innovation was followed by further advancements such as Anna Eliot Ticknor's initiative

in Boston, which promoted home-based study through monthly correspondence between teachers and learners. The success of these programs demonstrated the potential of DL to offer educational opportunities to those unable to attend traditional classrooms due to geographical or social constraints. As DL evolved, so did its reach and accessibility. In the early 20th century, distance education expanded further with the creation of institutions like the International Correspondence Schools. In Sweden, in 1986, Hermod founded what would become one of the largest language distance teaching organizations. This played a pivotal role in shaping global perceptions of distance education. In the United States, some universities, such as the University of Chicago and Moody Bible Institute, started to offer distance education programs (Simonson et al., 2011).

Moving forward, the introduction of radio and television as educational media in the 20th century marked the start of a major transformational wave for the DL model as described by Leal Afanador (2021) and Bozkurt (2019). This was an important leap for distance education since it made it more dynamic and interactive. In Colombia, for example, several radio stations such as Radio Sutatenza were dedicated to educational purposes (Osse Rivera, 2015). In the 1960s and 1970s, distance education expanded globally. The Open University in the UK, founded in 1971, and Germany's FernUniversität in 1975 are examples of the growing institutionalization of this model.

The late 20th century's fiber-optic communication systems revolutionized DL once again by allowing for high-quality live interactions that laid the foundation for modern online learning platforms. By the early 2000s, DL had become a versatile model in Colombia and Latin America (Valdés Montecinos & Ganga-Contreras, 2020), offering both formal academic programs and informal personal development courses. One of the first attempts at teaching English under this model in the country was the BBC's English Multimedia Course, distributed by El Tiempo newspaper with a collection of 30 CD-ROMs.

In the context of ELT, DL has long been seen to reach learners in remote areas or those with limited access to traditional classroom settings. The integration of new technologies and approaches, such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning, CALL (Mirani et al., 2019), Digital Language Learning -DLL (Godwin-Jones, 2022; Li & Lan, 2022), Technology-enhanced Language Learning - TELL (Su & Zou, 2022), and e-learning platforms, have further expanded the possibilities of distance language education. These current outlooks on language teaching and learning have enabled the creation of more interactive, communicative, and learner-centered approaches, which align with contemporary principles of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and foreign language pedagogy as well as the principles of the Distance Learning Education Model marked by its current transformational wave.

Case (2016) and Leal Afanador (2021) argue that this new wave acknowledges the ubiquity of the internet and, with a forward-looking perspective, predicts that companies will

no longer own the internet as we know them today. While all products and services will still require the Internet, it will be tied to the added value of information and communication, through the emerging and flourishing “Internet of Things” (IoT), enabling real-time interconnectivity between devices and people. The exponential increase in data volumes and speeds linked to 5G connectivity that allows educators and learners to interact in ways never seen before; the adapting learning platforms that use algorithms to adjust learning pathways; the use of big data; and the rapid evolution of AI, among other technology advancements, support this new revolutionary wave that looks for a more inclusive and effective model. A model that parts ways from the orthodoxy and limitation of traditional learning environments through a generational and paradigmatic change that uses disruptive technologies that can lead to educational innovations while bridging the digital gaps in global society and reducing learning limitations attributed to the model.

Historically, the limitations of DL in ELT were due to the lack of real-time communication and interaction between learners and instructors. However, these challenges are being mitigated with the rise of language learning approaches and advancements in digital technologies discussed before. Today, DL models in ELT offer real opportunities for meaningful communication, learner autonomy, and collaborative learning—principles that are central to both SLA and modern language teaching methodologies. The evolution of DL, particularly in ELT, reflects broader shifts in education that prioritize flexibility, accessibility, and the integration of technology. This transition from the limitations of language learning common in the brick-and-mortar DL of the past to current advances driven by the prospect of 6G and 7G technology, AI, and cyberlearning sets the stage for understanding the current landscape of DL in Colombian ELT.

The Current Landscape of Distance Learning in Colombian ELT

This section investigates the evolution and present landscape of distance education within ELT in Colombia. It analyzes the predominant learning models —namely, online, blended, and hybrid (Bozkurt, 2022), alongside the key factors driving their implementation, including the pandemic’s influence, institutional guidelines, evolving pedagogical approaches, and current challenges. Furthermore, it discusses pertinent policies and regulations to offer a holistic view of the current state of ELT in the country.

González et al. (2000) highlighted that the origins of DL in Colombia date back to early training and one-way instructional practices. The initial instances of distance education were observed in non-formal education settings, with American International Schools introducing correspondence courses focused on technical training as early as the 1930s. One notable and highly successful DL initiative in Latin America was Acción Cultural Popular (ACPO),

established in 1947, which provided a variety of educational and training programs for farmers through Sutatenza radio. Additionally, in 1967, the Colombian government created the Popular Training Fund to extend educational opportunities to underserved communities. This initiative developed educational programs such as Primary Basic Education for Adults and Baccalaureate on Radio and Cultural Television, using radio, television, and print materials (Maya & Preto, 1988).

González et al. (2000) identify the 1970s as a pivotal decade for the expansion of distance education worldwide, marked by the creation of prominent national DL institutions, including the Open University in England (1971), Spain's UNED (1973), the FernUniversität in West Germany (1974), and Costa Rica's UNED (1978). In Colombia, a key milestone was achieved in 1972 when the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana launched the television program "Educators of New Men" (Arboleda & Rama, 2013). Shortly after, the Universities of Antioquia and del Valle adopted distance education in 1973, followed by Santo Tomás and La Sabana in 1975. Another major development came in 1982 with the establishment of the National Open and Distance University (UNAD) (Arboleda & Rama, 2013; Yong & Bedoya, 2016).

Yong et al. (2017), expanding on the work of Arboleda and Rama (2013), Chacón (1997), and Taylor (1999), describe the evolution of DL in Colombia as occurring in three distinct phases: the first being epistolary education using printed materials, followed by education using audio and video resources, and finally, the integration of online platforms and digital content. More recently, Duarte-Gastélum (2024) points to a new way of interactive education driven by artificial intelligence technologies.

In Colombia, ELT has experienced considerable transformation due to advancements in telecommunications and technology (Mendieta & Barkhuizen, 2019). A 2015 study by the British Council revealed that greater access to technology has reshaped the way Colombians learn English and is expected to further drive growth in the field. With the increase in internet and mobile subscriptions, more Colombians are connecting online and engaging with English-language content at a growing rate.

The British Council's research also showed that many English language learners credit their language proficiency to frequent exposure to English-language media, such as television, movies, and music, all of which are easily accessible through modern technology. Moreover, online resources and social media have been crucial in supporting English learning, especially for those at more advanced levels. The study also noted the widespread use of English language learning apps, with significant downloads of British Council English applications on Android and iOS platforms between 2013 and 2014 (British Council Report, 2015).

In recent years, there has been a notable rise in enrollment for online English language courses. This surge in DL within the English teaching field has been driven by several factors,

such as the increasing digitalization of society and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (González-Lloret et al., 2021). Data from the National Higher Education Information System (SNIES, for its acronym in Spanish) reveals that virtual higher education enrollment doubled between 2019 and 2022. The number of students enrolled in online programs increased from an average of 221,625 in 2019 to 446,063 in 2022.

According to an analysis by the Ibero-American University Corporation (2022), over 2.3 million Colombians are currently enrolled in higher education, with 16% choosing to study through virtual modalities. This represents a 4% increase compared to 2022, when only 12% of students opted for online learning. The report also indicates that Colombia offers a total of 15,077 higher education programs, including 1,186 virtual options, of which 49.8% are at the undergraduate level and 50.1% at the postgraduate level. The regions with the lowest numbers of virtual learners are Vaupés, San Andrés, and Guainía, while Bogotá, Valle del Cauca, and Antioquia have the highest enrollment in virtual education.

To better understand the status of ELT in DL, it is essential to clarify key terms related to online teaching models. *Online learning* allows students to access course materials, engage with instructors and peers, submit assignments, and take exams—all within an online environment. *E-Learning*, an integral part of this educational framework, includes a diverse array of digital resources such as online courses, virtual classrooms, multimedia content, interactive activities, and online assessments. According to Kumar Basak et al. (2018), e-learning offers learners the flexibility to access educational materials and participate in learning activities remotely and at their own pace.

The origins of DL for undergraduate English teaching programs in Colombia can be traced back to the 2000s. Over time, more universities in the country have started to offer bachelor's programs in English through virtual and DL formats, providing greater flexibility for students pursuing careers as English language teachers. According to a study by Morena et al. (2022), while 19.6% of students currently favor in-person English classes, 49.6% indicated that they would prefer online learning in the future. Additionally, 29.1% expressed a preference for a blended model that combines virtual and in-person instruction.

Distance education developed as a solution to the accessibility and quality issues faced by traditional educational systems. By catering to a broader student demographic, DL seeks to use the advancements made in teaching, science, and technology by various institutions. This method helps overcome obstacles related to geographical distances and the significant expenses of commuting. As noted by Yong et al. (2017), higher education options in Colombia are classified into distance and virtual learning formats. Table 1 presents data from the SNIES, detailing the bachelor's programs in English available through virtual and DL modalities in 2024.

Table 1. English Bachelor's Programs: Virtual and Distance Learning

University	Location	Bachelor's program	Modality
Universidad Santo Tomás	Bogotá, D.C.	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés	Distance
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana	Medellín	Licenciatura en Español e Inglés	Distance
Universidad INCCA De Colombia	Bogotá, D.C.	Licenciatura en Español e Inglés	Distance
Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios -Uniminuto-	Bogotá, D.C.	Licenciatura En Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés	Distance
Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia UNAD	Bogotá, D.C.	Licenciatura En Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés	Virtual
Corporación Universitaria Adventista – UNAC	Medellín	Licenciatura en Español e Inglés	Virtual
Corporación Universitaria del Caribe – CECAR	Sincelejo	Licenciatura en Inglés	Virtual

Note. Adapted from National Higher Education Information System, SNIES (2024).

Online university programs dedicated to ELT have gained popularity in Colombia, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Virtual education* constitutes a fully online learning environment where interactions between students and instructors occur exclusively through technology platforms (Moore et al., 2011). The authors note that virtual programs provide flexibility, access to up-to-date digital resources, and the ability to reach students in remote areas. However, there are potential downsides, including a lack of face-to-face interaction, reliance on stable internet connections, and maintaining motivation and organization. Moreover, critics argue that virtual ELT environments may undermine the development of integrated language skills and the understanding of socio-cultural and linguistic uses of English in context (Pabón-Romero & Puerto-Cáceres, 2020). They assert that the lack of genuine, face-to-face communication can impede learners from practicing and absorbing the cultural and pragmatic subtleties of the language.

Distance education is characterized by the separation of students and teachers in different physical locations, using technology to facilitate connections and access educational resources. This flexible approach eliminates the need for students and instructors to be physically present together. It opens educational opportunities for individuals who may encounter geographical, temporal, or personal obstacles by harnessing technology. As highlighted by Abuhammad (2020), this mode of learning is particularly beneficial for those with limited access to traditional education.

A *hybrid learning model* integrates the advantages of both in-person and online education. In this approach, students regularly attend face-to-face classes while enhancing their learning through online activities. Another flexible model, known as the *HyFlex Model*, allows students to decide how they want to engage with the course material, whether in person, via live online attendance, or through recorded sessions (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). The shift to online education in Colombia has prompted a reevaluation of traditional teaching approaches. Constructivist and active learning theories, which emphasize student autonomy and knowledge construction through real-world experiences, have gained increased significance. Methods such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) and the Flipped Classroom model are well-suited to virtual environments, enabling students to collaborate on real-world problems and develop critical thinking skills (Inoue et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021; Sarwa et al., 2021).

Table 2. Virtual Learning Modalities

Term	Definition	Characteristics
Online learning	Education provided through the Internet	Any Internet sources for learning
e-Learning	Teaching technologies for online learning	LMS, synchronous and asynchronous interaction
Hybrid	Integration of online and face-to-face learning	Face-to-face and online interaction
Hyflex	Flexible model for learning	Students can choose to attend virtually or in person
Virtual and distance education	Colombian main learning modalities	Virtual: e-Learning Distance education: hybrid

Note: Adapted from Mineshima-Lowe et al. (2023), Moore et al. (2011), and Yong et al. (2017).

Table 2 shows that technological advancements have been essential in enhancing modalities of education in ELT in Colombia (Mineshima-Lowe et al., 2023). Language Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle, Canva, and Blackboard offer a range of tools for developing interactive content, enabling both synchronous and asynchronous communication and assessing student learning (Swerczenski, 2021). Additionally, video conferencing applications such as Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams have simplified language learning interactions between teachers and students, even from remote locations (Dhouha, 2024). Nonetheless, the adoption of these technologies encounters obstacles, such as the digital divide, which restricts internet access and device availability in certain areas of the country, such as in the departments of Vaupés, Vichada, and Chocó, with access rate of 10.6%, 4.6%, and 14.6%, respectively (Zapata, 2023). Moreover, the quality of internet connections can significantly affect the learning experience, especially in rural regions or places with limited coverage. Low academic performance and lack

of teacher training in using these tools can further impede the effective implementation of DL models (Aguirre, 2021; Pineda & Celis, 2018).

According to Jacobus et al. (2022), it is crucial to recognize that the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development -OECD, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization -UNESCO have advocated for the adoption of distance education and the privatization of higher education in developing countries. For instance, Brazil has welcomed international suggestions and removed barriers to corporate investment in education, including allowing publicly traded companies to participate. The entry of for-profit enterprises into the market has certainly played a significant role in Brazil's notable increase in distance education enrollment. Conversely, nations like Chile and Colombia have faced internal resistance that has hindered the extensive distance education and the privatization of education. For instance, in Chile, student movements have opposed the commodification of education, leading to widespread manifestations against policies that favor privatization and neglect public education. Similarly, in Colombia, concerns about educational equity and quality have sparked opposition to privatization efforts.

National educational policies have played a key role in the regulation and promotion of distance education. The Ministry of National Education (MEN, for its acronym in Spanish) has implemented regulations that facilitate the integration of technology in education, such as the National Digital Education Plan, which aims to incorporate digital tools into teaching and learning practices. Additionally, Law 115 of 1994 establishes the legal framework for education in Colombia, ensuring that education is accessible and flexible, thus supporting DL models. The Ministry's guidelines on using digital platforms in higher education have also motivated institutions to create language teaching programs that use distance methodologies (Pineda & Celis, 2018). Moreover, the initiatives and measures adopted by higher education institutions to modernize teaching methods and integrate digital media have resulted in a transformed educational landscape that encompasses hybrid models and various modalities recognized by Decree 1330 of 2019. MEN has put in place regulatory frameworks to monitor the performance of different learning programs provided by higher education institutions.

Despite these progressions, research on the quality evaluation system for virtual education in higher education remains limited (Yong et al., 2017). Thus, the absence of specific regulations for distance education in language learning can hinder the standardization of teaching quality. Therefore, educational policies need to continue evolving to guarantee that distance education in ELT is not only accessible but also of high quality and relevant to the Colombian context (Cruz Arcila, 2017).

This represents a vital area for further investigation concerning students' teaching and learning processes in this model of education, as well as the resources being used. Ultimately, despite its rapid expansion, virtual education in Colombia still trails behind both face-to-face

and distance education in terms of enrollment figures. Even with government efforts to promote the virtual modality, face-to-face enrollment continues to be the predominant trend in the Colombian higher education system (Jacobus et al., 2022). As of 2023, only 16% of higher education students were enrolled in virtual programs, compared to the majority who still prefer in-person modalities (Portillo et al., 2023). This disparity might be attributed to limited internet access in rural areas, concerns over the quality and recognition of virtual degrees, and a cultural preference for traditional classroom settings.

Impact of Distance Learning on ELT Learners and Teachers

The interplay and synergies between DL and ELT in Colombia have impacted both learners and teachers as well as traditional educational practices and dynamics. For learners, on the one hand, DL has brought to the table greater flexibility and access to English language education, particularly for those in remote and poor areas (Huamán et al., 2022). Using digital platforms, multimedia resources, and interactive tools has also fostered increased autonomy, allowing learners to take more control over their language acquisition process (Herrera Bohórquez et al., 2019). On the other hand, teachers are navigating new instructional paradigms that require them to adapt their pedagogical approaches, embrace technology, and often transition from being central figures in the classroom to facilitators of online and blended learning environments while engaging in ongoing teaching and language training.

Efforts made by MEN, for example, the “Talkativ-E Conversation Program” for teachers and the national policies and projects to bridge the gap in terms of accessibility for learners, and current academic discussions in recent studies (Acosta-López, 2023; Munoz Fandiño & Tulande Rengifo, 2023; Ricardo et al., 2020) suggest that technology and distance modalities have become increasingly crucial in Colombian ELT, especially in recent years.

One such impact is the increasing number of online English programs, especially since the government established regulations for online educational systems in 2010 (MEN, 2010). In 2015, Colombia already had 15 online programs specifically focused on preparing teachers to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and to fulfill the government’s goals by making Colombia the region’s best-educated country by 2025, it adopted the Foreign Languages Competencies Development Program (PFDCLE), formerly named the National Bilingual Program launched in 2004, to leverage Colombia’s human capital via language learning. Similarly, DL has positively impacted learners since it has increased access to English learning opportunities, especially for students in rural areas or those unable to attend traditional in-person classes. Although there is no exact data on the number of students and/or teachers who have benefited from this model, a good

indicator could be Colombia Aprende's clubs, launched in 2020, that have attracted at least 12,000 learners, of which around 4,500 are primary and secondary school teachers from all over the country. Likewise, the Global Classroom project brought together more than 400 Colombian classrooms with peers abroad to promote international educational projects and the practice of English.

One of the educational institutions that has had an overwhelming impact on ELT learners and teachers in the country thanks to its language teaching programs through the distance education model is the Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD), the biggest university in Colombia with a range of 150.000 learners of which around 10.200 are foreign language learners. UNAD's Virtual Institute of Languages (INVIL) offers a wide range of language courses, including UNAD English, UNAD Kids, UNAD Bilingual, Business English, and French courses, among others. It has 70 regional centers throughout the country and a technological and academic infrastructure capable of serving more than 260,000 learners, and the availability of learning resources 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition, UNAD offers free virtual workshops without pre-registration, allowing students to practice and reinforce their language skills on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, DL has allowed for more flexible learning options, catering to adult professionals and older students. According to the website of Colombia Aprende and MEN, teachers have greatly benefited from DL English programs, such as a 120-hour training process that was implemented for secondary and high school English language teachers. The program sought to directly impact teaching directors of Official Educational Institutions and train them in the formulation of institutional bilingualism plans. The DL model has led to a reconceptualization of the traditional face-to-face model and the binomial teaching-learning, as two differentiated but complementary processes that focus on how people interpret and use materials to understand and transform their environment.

According to Aretio (2020), distance education has traversed a "semantic forest" encompassing several distinct concepts. (i) Distance education by radio and television, defined as a system relying on these media to transmit educational content, provides access to students in remote or underserved areas. (ii) Online education, conducted entirely through the Internet, uses digital platforms and tools to facilitate interaction between students and teachers (Moore et al., 2011). (iii) Virtual education, a digital teaching-learning process, leverages information and communication technologies (ICTs) to create interactive environments without requiring physical presence (Sangrà et al., 2012). (iv) Digital education integrates technology into every aspect of the learning process, fostering digital competencies and enhancing the educational experience (Gisbert et al., 2016). (v) Open and distance learning, as exemplified by the UNAD, operationalizes principles of open education that

enable individuals to engage in self-directed learning, supported by systematic materials and diverse media (Reid García et al., 2021).

Despite the above, the advancement of distance education for language teaching continues by leaps and bounds. It has impacted teaching approaches, as teachers have had to adapt their skills to incorporate new technologies and distance teaching methods since there has been an increased focus on using technology in education, with virtual environments and educational informatics becoming more prevalent in English teaching.

Challenges and Opportunities in Distance Learning for Colombian ELT

There has long been discourse around the efficacy of DL for language acquisition. Certain scholars, such as Pulker and Kukulska-Hulme (2020), firmly endorse its abilities, whereas Jabeen and Thomas debate (2015) its one-size-fits-all suitability for varied learners and elements of linguistic development. Jabeen and Thomas (2015) contend that a hybrid approach, merging online and in-person instruction, frequently provides the most advantageous learning environment for many studying a new language. It is undeniable that the integration of DL in ELT in Colombia presents both challenges and opportunities for learners, teachers, and institutions. As the country continues to modernize its educational landscape, particularly in response to technological advancements, the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to bridge the sociocultural and economic gaps, examining both sides of this shift is crucial to understand its full implications.

One of the primary challenges faced in DL for Colombian ELT is the digital divide, which disproportionately affects students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2022, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE for its acronym in Spanish) published a staggering report on the levels of accessibility during the year 2021. The report revealed that only 60% of Colombian households had access to the Internet at the national level; however, in rural areas of the country, Internet accessibility only accounted for 28%. This percentage presents, without a doubt, a persisting digital divide in the country, which poses a challenge for DL models. Additionally, for those who belong to 60%, there is the issue of low digital literacy, which can significantly impact learning performance (Hillier, 2020) and, therefore, the learners' opportunity to develop communicative competence.

Low levels of digital literacy are not attributed only to learners; teaching digital literacy is also a concern for distance and online learning. In this model, teachers are expected to achieve optimal levels of digital skills to undergo a true paradigm shift, ultimately combining appropriate language learning methodology, educational strategies, and technology-mediated environments (Sánchez-Cruzado et al., 2021). However, while the transition to DL has been

swift for some teachers in response to the pandemic, many teachers have struggled with the integration of digital tools into their instructional methods.

Similarly, from an instructional perspective, language teachers may also face significant challenges in transitioning to digital platforms. This challenge involves the adaptation of traditional ELT principles, methodologies, and approaches to online environments (Choi & Chung, 2021). Considering that language learning often relies on dynamic, interactive exchanges that emphasize speaking, listening, and real-time feedback, especially in communicative approaches, these inequalities in accessibility, low digital literacy, and difficulties adapting current ELT principles to online environments can significantly affect student success and contribute to a widening achievement gap.

In addition, market-driven educational policies and their impact on teaching and learning have raised concerns about the commodification of ELT in Colombia. Neoliberal educational policies have resulted in the standardization and marketization of English teaching, compelling institutions to provide courses and certifications that align with global market demands, which shapes ELT practices and often marginalizes local pedagogical approaches (Guerrero-Nieto, 2018; Guerrero-Nieto & Castañeda-Trujillo, 2024). Similarly, Truscott de Mejía (2006, 2016) also addressed the commodification of English in Colombian education. She critiques the emphasis on English-Spanish bilingualism driven by economic and market considerations, arguing that such policies often overlook the country's linguistic diversity and the importance of including indigenous languages. Furthermore, she argues that teacher education programs should empower educators to navigate and challenge the market-driven demands placed upon them. This market-oriented approach presents additional challenges for ELT in distance learning models, as online programs frequently depend on standardized curricula and assessment tools designed for broad applicability. Such reliance can further marginalize local pedagogical approaches and cultural contexts, potentially neglecting the specific language learning needs of Colombia's diverse communities.

Another key factor in successful language acquisition is sustained motivation and engagement. In the distance and online learning models, where autonomy and self-regulation are not only desired characteristics of learners but fundamental pillars that support them, promoting intrinsic motivation and maintaining students' sustained persistence can become a challenge. Research suggests that academic self-efficacy, teaching presence, and perceived usefulness directly impact learning engagement, while perceived ease of use, among other factors, may influence learning persistence and motivation (Jung & Lee, 2018). The absence of immediate feedback, physical personal interactions, and paper-based activities that mirror traditional face-to-face environments can challenge learners' autonomy and motivation to succeed.

The lack of institutional support or training programs to bridge these gaps and obstacles can further compound these challenges. The poorly premeditated shift of some institutions to offer English language courses and programs online without having the necessary installed structural technological and pedagogical resources, especially during the Covid-19 Pandemic, revealed that an adequate infrastructure covering multiple systems—a metasystem or system of systems— that can support both teachers and learners is required to ensure successful online learning (Valdés Montecinos & Ganga-Contreras, 2020). Institutions must cope with the financial and logistical demands of developing and maintaining robust online platforms. However, the traditional systems of some educational institutions may have little capacity to respond to the evolution of challenging environments such as those posed by the Knowledge Society, the Learning Society, and the Information Society in the digital era (Leal Afanador, 2021).

So far, we have discussed several challenging areas of learning and teaching English online. However, this paper argues that although online language learning, language learning through digital environments, and distance language learning share many similarities, distinguishing between them is important. While most online teaching and learning practices can be considered part of the DL model, not all should or can be categorized as such. Unlike the traditional model that tends to be a little orthodox, conditioned, and unidirectional, in distance education, motivation and individual effort to learn, know, and improve oneself hold great value. Learning to teach, which has been closely associated with face-to-face education, can certify teaching skills but does not guarantee learning. At the core of DL models is the idea of “Learning to learn”, or “Active learning”, which allows the students to design their own learning paths and set their own pace (Leal Afanador, 2021). This requires a higher level of commitment and discipline from the distance learner, but also from the institution that offers this educational model. Despite the challenges discussed earlier, DL presents numerous opportunities to enhance ELT in Colombia.

One key opportunity is the increased accessibility that DL offers (Ali, 2020; Bozkurt, 2019; Choi & Chung, 2021; Leal, 2021; Ricardo et al., 2020). For learners in rural or remote areas where access to quality English instruction may be limited, DL offers a distinct opportunity. This not only improves the reach of ELT programs but also creates a more inclusive educational environment by ensuring that all students have access to the same resources and allowing them to access English instruction without the constraints of geographic location.

The shift to digital English learning also presents an opportunity to redefine pedagogical approaches (Engeness, 2021). DL models enable teachers to build their digital identity while enhancing students’ capacity for self-directed learning. New technologies such as text-to-speech software and Augmented Reality can help teachers design assignments that engage both themselves and their students as active participants in digital environments. With

the availability of multimedia tools, interactive platforms, and real-time communication technologies, teachers can implement more dynamic, learner-centered methodologies.

Additionally, the focus on learner autonomy is one of the most significant opportunities provided by DL. Although research has suggested that some Colombian students in virtual English courses might initially display high dependence on instructors and low self-confidence, relying on external help for assignments, which indicates a focus on course completion and the obtaining of certificates without much effort rather than engaging in genuine learning (Bedoya, 2014), autonomous learning is one of the most important pillars that support distance language learning. Simonson et al. (2019) argue that in traditional education, learners tend to rely heavily on teachers for guidance, with students often playing a passive role. However, in DL, the gap between teacher and student requires students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, fostering learner autonomy as they actively manage their educational progress.

Another significant concern among both teachers and learners in online or distance language learning is the perceived lack of opportunities for real interaction and communication, which are fundamental aspects of communicative approaches. However, research on DL models has demonstrated that emerging technologies such as cloud-based collaborative learning systems, Virtual Classroom Management Systems, Speech Recognition Technologies, and 3D Multi-User Virtual Worlds, among others, can enhance collaborative language learning (Su & Zou, 2022). In their review, these researchers identified 10 theoretical frameworks, nine types of technologies, and 11 benefits of technology-enhanced collaborative language learning. Incorporating cutting-edge technologies, such as AI-powered platforms, machine learning, and virtual reality (VR), offers even further opportunities to transform language teaching.

Despite the challenges in implementing DL in Colombian ELT, such as the digital divide, teacher preparedness, and pedagogical adaptation, the potential for innovation and improvement, as well as the impact of current and prospective technologies like 6G, are substantial and outweigh the obstacles. Addressing the digital divide through investment in infrastructure, offering targeted teacher training, and promoting flexible, blended learning models can add to the potential of DL in ELT. With the capacity to overcome these challenges and a metasystem framed in the renewed learning paradigm of “learning to learn”, consubstantial with the dynamics of a new era of humanity, in which knowledge becomes more fluid, more meaningful, and of immediate applicability and evolution, due to the intensive and accelerated development of technologies, DL models can become a powerful tool for expanding access to quality English education across Colombia while fostering greater equity and inclusivity in the process.

Future Directions for ELT and Distance Learning

This paper has attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of DL educational models, revealing the deep and substantial transformations driven by technological innovations and the current shift in the educational paradigm, one that challenges the conventional face-to-face learning environment and the traditional nature that often characterizes some language teachers who cling to orthodox practices. The title of the article, “Brick-and-Mortar to Cyberlearning,” clearly reflects the overwhelming revolutionary waves that have shaped the renewed concept of DL. As we analyze the rapid evolution of ELT in the DL model, it becomes clear that these transformative waves are inherently linked to the exponential growth and advancement of technology and the efforts of ELT practitioners and researchers to keep up with the disruptive technology-driven transformations that reshape society and education.

The future of DL seems bright and full of possibilities for ELT in Colombia. The potential of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) can further transform the language learning experience in online learning environments by providing enriched, meaningful, and immersive environments that can better simulate real-life contexts for language use (Chng et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023; Koumpouros, 2024; Kuddus, 2022; Lampropoulos, 2022; Qiu et al., 2023; Schmidt & Strasser, 2022).

In Colombia, where geographical and socio-economic disparities present many challenges to education, these technologies offer new avenues for inclusivity. AI can provide personalized learning experiences by adapting content to meet individual student needs. VR and AR can immerse learners in authentic language environments by offering rich, interactive experiences beyond the limitations of traditional classroom settings. Furthermore, the continued expansion of 5G and beyond will enhance connectivity, making these innovations more accessible, even in remote areas. We must consider, however, that as these technologies evolve, Colombian ELT practitioners will need to develop new pedagogical strategies too. This will ensure that teachers and learners can fully exploit the potential of these tools.

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To ensure that Colombian ELT practitioners and institutions can adapt effectively to these technological shifts, it is essential to develop pedagogical strategies grounded in five key areas. First, sustained professional development must be prioritized in the country to help teachers gain practical skills in using AI, VR, and AR in language instruction (Fakhar et al., 2024). Second, institutions must foster collaborative innovation through communities of practice and academic events to promote the sharing of best practices, and where ELT can co-create local solutions to tech-related challenges in online education. Third, efforts must be made to align technological tools with curricular goals to ensure meaningful

integration. Technologies should not be used in isolation but woven into communicative and culturally relevant language learning tasks (Pang & Cai, 2023). Fourth, Leal Afanador (2021) highlights the importance of infrastructure and accessibility. Only when institutions invest in expanding their tech-infrastructure will they ensure that these innovations reach diverse learners, particularly in underserved regions. Finally, conducting research and constant evaluation to assess the effectiveness of new pedagogical strategies and technologies is paramount. Research and accurate evaluation can inform how these technologies are being used in context and how they can be improved to support equity and quality in online ELT across Colombia.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have traced the evolution, transformation, and resignification of DL to understand how this model has contributed to ELT in Colombia over the years. From its humble origins and roots to the current revolutionary wave driven by the most recent technological and educational advancements, it has become clear that the shift in educational thought regarding online and DL is reshaping the landscape of language learning and teaching in the country. Despite limitations and challenges such as the digital divide, low digital literacy in learners and teachers, difficulties in transitioning to digital platforms, and financial and logistical demands for institutions, the potential of DL to make education, including ELT, more inclusive, flexible, personalized, and learner-centered cannot be underestimated.

In this regard, it is suggested to design and apply public policies that guarantee connectivity and devices for students and teachers, especially in vulnerable and rural areas, and foster partnerships between educational institutions, governments, and the private sector for technological innovation in English teaching. It is also imperative to support the constant training of teachers in specific digital skills for teaching English in virtual environments, so they can integrate adaptive learning platforms and digital resources in their classes that might respond to different students' learning styles and rhythms. Furthermore, the promotion of learners' autonomy and self-efficacy is important as well, as these are central to meaningful engagement in online English learning. When students take ownership of their learning process, they are more likely to go beyond minimal course requirements and develop lasting communicative skills. Fostering these capacities also helps resist the growing trend of treating English learning as a quick and transactional path to certification, rather than a deep and contextualized process of language development. Additionally, it is crucial to continuously evaluate and adjust distance education programs based on feedback from educational stakeholders, educational research findings, and learning data analyses.

For the field of ELT in Colombia, the future holds tremendous possibilities with the continued growth and advancement of emerging technologies and resources supported by a learning model that emphasizes a “learning to learn” approach and promotes learning autonomy, collaborative learning, and meaningful learning. Cyberlearning is no longer a futuristic and elusive term; it is a transformative paradigm that challenges orthodox models in an ever-evolving digital era that pushes the boundaries of traditional education and ELT practices. This shift towards a more fluid, technology-driven environment encourages adaptability and fosters innovation in educational policy and teaching methodologies, which can ensure inclusive and equitable access to high-quality English language learning.

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This declaration's purpose is to clarify the expected duties and ethical behavior of all parties involved in the submission, evaluation, and selection processes of manuscripts sent to the *HOW* journal.

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Conference Presentations

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