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Characterizing ASOCOPI: Its Affiliates, Ideals, and Contributions

Caracterizando ASOCOPI: sus afiliados, ideales y contribuciones*

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This article presents the results of an on-line cross-sectional questionnaire and further discussion about the characterization of ASOCOPI's affiliates, their expectations of being a member, and the contributions that the association has made to their professional development. The respondents' answers were analyzed by following a statistical analysis and a content analysis under a survey research approach. Findings reveal that the Association has highly qualified and experienced English teachers who maintain expectations in relation to encountering opportunities to update its teaching and research knowledge, creating professional links, and knowing about academic events and studies in the field. Contributions are oriented to their teaching, research, and professional practices. Discussion highlights prominent issues about the Association's profile, trends, and ideals.

Key words: Affiliates' profile, ASOCOPI, language teacher association, professional learning community, teacher development.

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Este artículo presenta los resultados y la discusión de un cuestionario en línea sobre la caracterización de los afiliados de ASOCOPI, sus expectativas de ser miembros, y las contribuciones que la asociación ha brindado a su desarrollo profesional. Las respuestas de los participantes se analizaron siguiendo el análisis estadístico y el análisis de contenido bajo el enfoque de investigación de encuesta. Los resultados revelan que la asociación está compuesta por profesores de inglés altamente calificados y con experiencia, los mismos que mantienen expectativas para encontrar oportunidades para actualizar sus conocimientos de enseñanza e investigación, crear enlaces profesionales y saber sobre eventos y estudios relacionados. Las contribuciones se orientan hacia las prácticas de enseñanza, investigación y la profesión. La discusión resalta aspectos esenciales acerca de la asociación, sus tendencias e ideales.

Palabras clave: asociación de profesores de lengua, ASOCOPI, comunidades de aprendizaje, desarrollo profesional, perfil de los afiliados.

Introduction

Taking into account the central topic of the 50th ASOCOPI Annual Conference: *Half a Century Making History in ELT: Tracing Back Our Footsteps*, this article aims at sharing with ASOCOPI's community the results of a survey carried out during the first semester of 2015. The results reveal a characterization of ASOCOPI's affiliates, their expectations of being a member, and the contributions that the association has made to their professional development. The study is founded on the principles of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Teachers Associations. Methodologically, it is grounded on a survey research project, in which a statistical analysis and analysis of content were used to analyze numerical and in-prose data obtained from the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire. Being ASOCOPI the main research body, a description of the association is initially included, followed by the theoretical framework, research methodology, and emergent findings from the participants' responses in the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire. The discussion focuses on ASOCOPI's institutional profile found in the survey research project and the relevance and importance of holding it as a professional learning community of teaching and research for its affiliates' professional development and growth.

Conceptual Framework

ASOCOPI is a Colombian non-profit, professional, and private association of teachers of English whose purpose is to “stimulate professional cooperation, boost high academic levels, and promote the exchange of ideas and resources in the country and overseas (our translation)” (Estatutos de la Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés, n.d., p. 1). The Association has an average of 170-200 affiliates nationwide (in June 2015). Its mission looks

for contributing “[to] the betterment of English Language Teaching [ELT] in Colombia by means of promoting quality educators.”¹ Its objectives mainly aim at:

- Promoting social service, teamwork, quality teacher training, and development of academic and research opportunities among English language teachers nationally and internationally.
- Strengthening the sense of belonging among the members of the profession.
- Becoming a natural forum for innovations in ELT in Colombia.
- Representing the membership before governmental and nongovernmental entities at local, national, and international levels.
- Organizing activities to support English teachers in both pedagogic and linguistic competences.

Falcão and Szesztay (2006) define language teacher associations of this type. They state that these associations must be composed of a team of professionals or institutions, from different regions and groups, which needs to be specialized in the areas of interest to the association. These members must have a sense of teamwork in order to permanently reach the association’s purpose and objectives, promote research and study, and develop or revitalize the association through evaluation processes. By taking into account this definition, ASOCOPI as a language teacher association carries out the stated premises. ASOCOPI is a formal association of English language teachers in Colombia with a defined purpose, mission, and objectives. Its work covers different fronts, say, academic, professional, and governmental at local, national, and international levels. English language teachers can voluntarily be a member and offer their work to the association.

Different associations of language teachers around the world display a similar profile and objectives. We made a *Google* search covering information about their purposes, objectives, and professional work. We also use the *Southern Conference on Language Teaching* (SCOLT)’s official website (<http://www.scolt.org/>) as a search engine to find more foreign language associations of the kind. A bit more than forty associations that provide resources and leadership for the advancement of research and study in the area of language teaching and learning around the world were studied. As a result, we noticed that their purposes commonly address providing professional development and leadership opportunities to their members, promoting excellence in language teaching and research, and cooperating and supporting state, national, and international organizations in the enhancement of second language study, teaching, and language policies. Those associations aim at encouraging teachers to improve professionally (teaching practices, research, publications, updated training, cooperation);

¹ ASOCOPI’s purpose, mission, and objectives were taken from its official website, <http://asocopi.org>.

promoting the work, interests, and voices of language organizations; encouraging, supporting, and directing programs involving the exchange of pedagogical and scholarly information; and consolidating efforts of government, teachers, administrators, students, and researchers involved in language teaching.

In addition, Pickering (1999) and Falcão and Szesztay (2006), not only defining what a teacher association is and how it should work, discuss the challenges that this type of associations currently face. The authors agree on defining a teacher association as a community that is composed of professionals in the field of education voluntarily gathered to learn from themselves and their experiences by keeping defined purposes ahead. Members of a teacher association need to take charge of their actions by focusing on processes rather than events in order to make it develop professionally (Pickering, 1999). The challenges that a teacher association may face deal with making contacts, obtaining resources, constructing a solid structure, and engaging in and providing activities and events (Falcão & Szesztay, 2006, Pickering, 1999).

When facing these challenges, Falcão and Szesztay (2006) affirm that finding and keeping active members becomes a difficult task since an association of this type is based on voluntary work in “fast-paced, work-dominated, multi-connected lives” (p. 13). The reasons for people to take part in teacher associations have to do with gaining practical benefits and a sense of belonging to a professional community. Gaining practical benefits, these authors explain, refers to the opportunities with which the association can provide the participants to attend conferences, get discounts, attend other events, have access to magazines and forums, and get updated information about their professional interests. A sense of belonging deals with the feelings that these associations can give to their members to belong to a community, to be part of a team, and to have networking opportunities. ASOCOPI’s challenges are also in finding and keeping active members and, although this association offers its affiliates with opportunities to develop teaching and research practices through programmed training, workshops, conferences, and a specialized journal, more opportunities are always expected.

Considering these premises of a language teacher association, we understand that a language teacher association functions as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for its members’ professional development and growth. DuFour (2004) sees any PLC as every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education, collaborative structures, and a focus on building capacity for continuous improvement. Besides, Pickering (1999) and Stoll and Seashore (2007) understand a PLC as a group of professionals critically sharing and interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way. The efficiency of a PLC counts for its capacity to promote and sustain the learning and involvement of its professionals with a collective purpose, so that the community can transform itself for the better. Dufour, Pickering, and

Stoll and Seashore agree that the minimum principles that a PLC should hold are expanding members' abilities, maintaining a shared sense of purpose, continuous learning, and refining assumptions and systems of thinking. These principles help the PLC to understanding the complex interrelationships between creating learning and professional development.

By following Wallace (2011), we agree that professional training and growth must relate to the manner of polishing language teachers' qualifications in teaching, learning, and research practices and knowledge. Apart from polishing such qualifications, professional development and growth need to lead teachers to take control of their own professional competence development, as Fandiño (2010) suggests; to emphasize how to work collaboratively, as Rincón (2015) points out; and to foster more autonomous and self-reflective work, as Viáfara (2007) and Viáfara and Ariza (2008) recommend. More experienced and knowledgeable peers are in charge of accompanying this training under a critical-reflective approach on acute problems in language teaching and research in context. In learning communities for professional development and growth, as language teacher associations must be, members need to share time and energy with other members for the PLC to emerge and for their professional development to grow. Then, associations' gatherings, events, and products must deal with critical sharing and reflective questioning about teachers' pedagogical development and practicum experiences, as Fandiño (2010), Stoll and Seashore (2007), and Viáfara (2007) suggest, in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting way. In an exercise of this kind, to our understanding, the efficiency of such communities also becomes evident in their capacity to promote and sustain the essence of professional development with a collective, reflection-oriented purpose.

Language teacher associations, ASOCOPI included, have to work on what teachers need for professional development and growth (DuFour, 2004; Richards & Farrell, 2005). This work should focus on learning and preparing to understand teaching and research principles in practice, trying out new strategies in the classroom, and examining different dimensions of teaching and research practices. By following ASOCOPI's purpose and mission, we notice that this association, as others worldwide of the same kind do, strives to create a collaborative culture for collective enquiry into best practices for language teaching, learning, and research. ASOCOPI's set of objectives portrays actions that are oriented to continuous professional improvement of their members and of the Association itself as a PLC. ASOCOPI's annual conferences, workshops, its journal and newsletter are also notable evidences of the Association's hard work for the professional training and growth of its community and the institution itself.

Different authors suggest elements that any PLC should have. Below, we highlight the seven elements that are common in the review:

1. Having a shared vision and clarity of purposes. Both help determine why the community exists, what it has to do to achieve its purposes, and how its members

- have to act to achieve its vision (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).
2. Focusing on learning for all and highly valuing the knowledge the individuals bring to the community (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2006; Pickering, 1999; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).
 3. Working collaboratively to build shared knowledge, reinvent practice, share professional growth, and enrich the PLC (Bolam et al., 2005; Pickering, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).
 4. Acknowledging collective responsibility and commitment (DuFour, 2004; Graham, 2007).²
 5. Supporting members by appropriate structural conditions and human resources (Fullan, 2006; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).³
 6. Having an action orientation to reach the established objectives (DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2006; Graham, 2007, Pickering, 1999).⁴
 7. Reflecting on and evaluating learning: Evaluation should be an ongoing process that provides useful information to determine, mainly, the effectiveness of the PLC in achieving the intended purposes (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2006; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).

These elements clarify that any PLC, to be effective in the professional development and growth of its members, must initially have its purpose and objectives, and the way to reach them clear enough. As the name indicates, a PLC must focus on learning about its field of study under a collaborative approach, in which each member holds responsibility. A PLC

² DuFour (2004) highlights the importance of collective commitment to benefit the PLC in different ways, including ensuring supportive structures, processes, and resources in place; modeling what is valued; asking critical questions; celebrating progress and challenging violations of commitments. Graham (2007) sees commitment to achieve PLC's purposes as a commitment to ensuring student learning, a belief in the power of true collaboration, a model of distributed leadership and decision-making, and an ongoing process of reflection and inquiry.

³ Fullan (2006) states that structural conditions have to do with time, space and communication structures. Human resources aligned with a culture of openness, trust, and respect, as well as cognitive skills and supportive leadership.

⁴ Pickering (1999) calls it *implementation*, the act of assigning task forces to carry out the learning projects. DuFour (2004) names it as *action learning process*, a process that focuses on outcomes rather than intentions by means of an action learning process. Learning by doing is the premise that PLCs need to follow, according to DuFour et al. (2006). This process involves professional dialogue or what Graham (2007) calls "purposeful conversations by actively engaging others in dialogue focused around teaching and learning" (p. 7).

needs to offer the necessary support, conditions, and resources to accomplish the tasks. The manner in which collaboration and accomplishment of tasks happen serves as points of reflection on the learning achieved and on the approach to evaluate the processes followed.

We noticed that these seven elements are also present in ASOCOPI. The association states the reasons and purpose of its existence in its mission and objectives statements. Its events and publications are the result of the affiliates' work, which make language teaching knowledge and practices for the members' professional growth visible. All this work needs collaboration, commitment, and supportive relationships, which are part of the challenges the association faces today. We can then say that ASOCOPI is a Colombian association of English language teachers with a defined profile and purpose, which prompts working as a learning community for the professional development and growth of its affiliates. This article in essence looks for reflection on and evaluation of the intended purposes and work of the association.

Method

This study follows a survey research design (Griffee, 2012) to identify and describe ASOCOPI affiliates' demographic data and their opinions about expectations and contributions with the association. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (as cited in Griffee, 2012, p. 53), this design follows five steps: planning the survey, sampling, designing the instrument, conducting the survey, and analyzing the data. In order to identify ASOCOPI affiliates' demographic data and their expectations, the survey design had four main topics:

1. Affiliates' academic characteristics: gender, age, level of education, teaching occupation, years of experience, and type of institution.
2. Characteristics of the members' affiliation: years of being a member, work or contributions done for the association, number of events attended with the association, and type of participation in the events.
3. Expectations and contributions: as a member and participant, reasons of accomplishment, and the association's contributions to the affiliate's professional development.
4. Profile, trends, and ideals: the association's profile, trends in language methodologies and research, future ideals, and suggestions for the association strengthening.

The sampling was 78 ASOCOPI affiliates. An on-line cross-sectional questionnaire was designed, piloted, and adjusted before being delivered to the affiliates. The questionnaire includes both close- and open-ended questions (see Appendix).

Two approaches of data analysis were used to identify and describe ASOCOPI affiliates' demographic data and opinions. A statistical analysis (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014) was applied for numerical data. It was organized in a frequency distribution pattern in order to identify and examine respondents' assignment of numerals to their demographic and academic characteristics and levels of accomplishment of expectations.

A qualitative analysis of content was applied to examine meanings within the body of textual data provided by the respondents. Weber (1990) and Berg (2001) indicate four steps for the content analysis process, defining the units of analysis, coding, comparing, interpreting, and validating codes. The units of analysis were defined from the main themes in each question of the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire. Each chunk of text that represents a relevance of the main themes was assigned a code. In order to interpret and give consistency of the coding process and emergent meanings, two matrices of analysis were designed. The first one serves to compile similar textual data and code chunks of text according to the units of analysis; the second one serves to compare, interpret, and understand the properties of the emergent codes. Inductive reasoning, constant comparison of codes, and validation with the conceptual framework, as suggested by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) and Krippendorff (2013), allowed the emergence of findings and the discussion.

Findings

The major task of this research study was to survey ASOCOPI's affiliates to identify and describe affiliates' demographic information and their opinions about expectations and contributions to the Association. The purpose of the data analysis was to generate credible and practically useful findings about the major task of this research study for all the members of the association. To achieve such purpose, the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire answers as regards affiliates' demographic data were analyzed by following a statistical analysis, and the meanings in their answers about expectations of being a member, contributions to the association, and its trends, profile, and ideals were analyzed by following a qualitative analysis of content.

A link for the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire was sent to the 172 active members of ASOCOPI in April 2015. Three reminders to answer the questionnaire were sent between April and June so that more affiliates could answer it. Seventy-eight affiliates, 44 female and 34 male, finally provided their answers. Findings emerged from that number of respondents. Below, we initially show the characterization of the affiliates' demographic information and professional profile. Afterwards, we present the identification of their expectations and contributions. A discussion of findings follows the report of the findings.

Characterizing ASOCOPI's Affiliates

All the 78 respondents were active members of the association by the time they answered the questionnaire. Fifty-five of them were older than 36 years old while 23 ranged in age from 20 to 35 years old. These members filled out the questionnaire from different towns in the country, being towns in the Departments of Cundinamarca (with 28 respondents), Antioquia, Boyacá, and Valle (with seven respondents each) the ones with more participants. We highlight the fact that there were respondents from ten other Departments around Colombia, even from the USA and the UK. This fact indicates that ASOCOPI has had some type of presence in these places (see Figure 1).

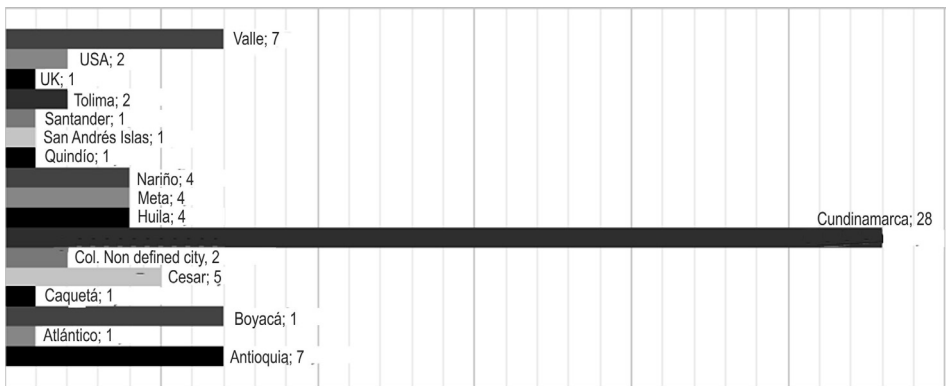


Figure 1. Places From Which the Respondents Answered the Questionnaire.

Concerning their education (see Table 1), respondents displayed high levels of education in formal programs related to language teaching and learning. In percentages, 7% of the participants hold a PhD degree, 57.3% an MA, 16.9% are specialized, and 18.8% hold a BA. In numbers, five male respondents have a PhD degree mostly in Education and Second Language Acquisition. Curiously, no female member respondent reported having a PhD; however, 27 of them hold an MA degree (compared to 18 of the male respondents), 11 are specialized (compared to three males), and six hold only a BA (compared to eight males). The commonest MA programs are in Applied Linguistics (14 members) and Education (nine members). Other MA programs taken, with one or two in number, are in ELT and Autonomous Learning, Didactics, Linguistics and Spanish, Language Teaching and Pedagogy, ICT for Education, TESOL, Literature, and Cultural Studies. Other respondents are specialized in English Teaching Didactics, Pedagogy or

Methodologies, and in Informatics or Multimedia for Language Education. With respect to the respondents holding an undergraduate degree, 14 of them have one, mostly in Foreign or Modern Languages and in Compulsory Education with emphasis on ELT. There is a member whose BA is in Business and another in Genetics; however, by tracing their other answers in the questionnaire, they are perceived as working as language teachers. All of these affiliates' degrees have been obtained from public or private universities at almost equal percentages, except for doctoral programs, which have been completed at private universities only.

Table 1. Respondents' Level of Education

	Undergraduate degree	Specialized	MA	PhD
F	6	11	27	0
M	8	3	18	5

With respect to their current job (see Table 2), 14 of the female respondents work as school teachers, all at the secondary level, 23 as university teachers, and seven at language centers. Only eight of the male respondents are schoolteachers (seven at secondary level and 1 at the elementary level); 23 are university teachers, and three are at language centers. Then, percentages indicate that 58.9% of the respondents work as teachers at university level, 28.2% at schools, and 12.8% at language centers. The types of institutions where they work are both private and public, 53.26% and 46.74% respectively.

Table 2. Current Job and Types of Institution Where the Respondents Work

	Female		Male	
Elementary teacher	0	0.0%	1	2.3%
Secondary teacher	14	24.8%	7	16.1%
Language center teacher	7	12.4%	3	6.9%
University teacher	23	40.8%	21	48.2%
Other	0	0.0%	2	4.6%

	Female		Male	
Type of Institution				
Private	18	40.91%	20	58.82%
State	23	52.27%	12	35.29%
Private & State	3	6.81%	2	5.88%

The participants are well-experienced language teachers: 50% have over 16 years of teaching experience, 20.5% from 11 to 15 years, and 29.4% less than 10 years (see Table 3).

Table 3. Respondents’ Years of Teaching Experience

	0-5 years	%	6-10 years	%	11-15 years	%	Over 16 years	%
F	6	13.6	7	15.9	7	15.9	24	54.5
M	2	5.9	8	23.5	9	26.5	15	44.1

The final issue about the characterization of ASOCOPI’s affiliates is about the role they had had in the number of Association’s academic events, and its annual conferences or workshops attended (see Table 4). Eleven of them have attended over 10 conferences, 40 from one to three, and 27 between four and nine. Affiliates’ roles in these events can be as attendees, presenters or, organizers. None of the respondents have been only an organizer, but they have been only attendees (30 of them) or presenters (13 of them), and 25 have been both. Ten of the respondents have had the three roles in either of the events.

Table 4. Number of Annual Conferences Attended by Respondents and the Roles They Have Had in Them

Number of Conferences	Female		Male	
1-3	24	54.5%	16	47.1%
4-6	8	18.2%	12	35.3%
7-9	4	9.1%	3	8.8%

Number of Conferences	Female		Male	
Over 10	8	18.2%	3	8.8%
Roles while attending Conferences				
Attendee	16	36.4%	14	41.2%
Presenter	7	15.9%	6	17.6%
Organizer	0	0	0	0
Attendee/Presenter	16	36.4%	9	26.5%
Attendee/Organizer	0	0	1	2.9%
Presenter/Organizer	1	2.3%	0	0
All roles	4	9.1%	4	11.8%

Describing ASOCOPI's Affiliates' Expectations and Contributions

In this part, we describe the respondents' opinions about accomplishment of expectations and contributions given and received as being part of the association. The description includes not only the expectations and their level of accomplishment but also the association's contributions to the affiliate's professional development, and the association's trends in language teaching and research. This set of findings emerged by examining the meanings within the body of textual data provided by the 78 respondents in the on-line cross-sectional questionnaire (see Appendix).

Expectations and their level of accomplishment. In the qualitative analysis of content, we found meanings towards five types of expectations that the respondents had for being part of ASOCOPI:

- 1) *To get updated about language teaching matters.* Respondents have expectations to participate in academic events in order to know or get updated about language teaching matters such as current or trendy language education approaches, methodologies or research, teaching skills, language teaching materials, technology incorporation in language teaching, and evaluation of language learning. Most respondents (44) agree that they have been able to share, compare, or improve their knowledge, skills and professional profile about language teaching matters and research with experts or colleagues either as presenters or as attendees in ASOCOPI's academic events. The respondents affirm that this is the

type of knowledge and skills that they further apply in their classes and research projects. Equally, sharing their knowledge and skills gives them the possibility to visualize the current situation of language teaching in Colombia. Five out of the 44 respondents who point to this expectation consider it not to have been met at all, mainly, they say, due to the few possibilities to participate in the events or because they find language teaching matters presented in the association's annual conferences repetitive.

- 2) *To create links with top researchers, teachers, or other colleagues.* Eighteen of the respondents point to this expectation. In their answers, they acknowledge the manner in which ASOCOPI's academic events (annual conferences or workshops) have made it easier for them to create such links with national and international colleagues. Only three out of the 18 affiliates who point to this expectation consider it not to have been met because the only chance to create such links are present in the association's annual conferences; they expect to see the opportunities also in the workshops and in the association's official website and publications.
- 3) *To receive information about language teaching events.* Such information refers to upcoming academic events on language teaching, current postgraduate programs and courses, or academic opportunities on language education such as publishing, being a presenter or attendee, or work. Additionally, the respondents want to receive information about specialized journals (including ASOCOPI's journal, *HOW*) and books on language education. Fifteen respondents agree on the fact that the association has informed them about the mentioned aspects, although they would like to receive this information with more clarity, frequency, or promptness.
- 4) *To know about or collaborate in current research studies.* Eleven respondents have the expectation to know about or collaborate on current research studies on English language education in Colombia. They affirm that this expectation has been reached since ASOCOPI keeps them informed about those studies and has opened spaces for them to talk about it with presenters, who are also researchers. The annual conferences help participants to stay updated and improve their research practices.
- 5) *To take part in the decision-making about language teaching national policies.* In addition, two respondents, as part of ASOCOPI's community, expect to take part in the decision-making about language teaching national policies. Although they feel they have contributed to decisions on language teaching in their work contexts, they would like to see ASOCOPI more involved in the decision making of language

teaching policies with the Ministry of Education nationwide or Secretaries of Education in their regions.

By counting the respondents' answers to the question to know if the association has carried out their expectations, the frequency distribution reveals that 81% of the participants have progressively seen their expectations carried out. The association, with its academic events and published material, has provided spaces for its affiliates to improve their teaching and research knowledge and create professional links. However, 19% of the respondents say that such expectations have not yet been met because they have just become an ASOCOPI member, have participated in just one of the association's annual conferences, have seen few possibilities for its realization, or did not provide a reason for their negative answer.

Contributions of the association and its affiliates. The analysis of content indicates a set of contributions in two senses: contributions that the association has given to its affiliates' professional development and growth, and contributions that ASOCOPI's members have given to the association's development. In the first sense, the respondents state that the association has contributed to their professional development and growth in three ways:

- 1) *Contributions to their teaching practices.* ASOCOPI has helped its members improve their language teaching in its publications and academic events. The contents presented in these issues keep the association's members updated about language teaching methods, approaches, theories, and needs. This work, the respondents affirm, helps them not only innovate or improve their teaching practices with new ideas, trends, techniques, or strategies, but also be aware of the manner in which language learning or teaching may occur in Colombia and overseas.
- 2) *Contributions to their research practices.* ASOCOPI has contributed to its members' research practices by letting them know about language research topics, methods, approaches, theories, and results of recent studies in its publications and academic events. Such provision of knowledge has helped its members strengthen their research skills that may promote their interest in doing research in language education in their contexts either by replicating learned studies or by creating similar ones.
- 3) *Contributions to their professional practices.* This type of contributions refers to the fostering of motivation to develop a better professional profile. The respondents affirm that by creating professional links, attending the association's academic events, and sharing knowledge with colleagues, they want to study more, do further research, improve their English proficiency level, build an open-minded teaching role, and understand the importance of language teaching practices. Because of this, they learn that their work can also be shared in the events or publications of the association.

With respect to the contributions that ASOCOPI's members have given to the association's development, the analysis revealed that the respondents consider participating in the association's activities as the contribution they can make to it. For example, attending the annual conferences or workshops, presenting in these events by sharing their teaching experiences or research results, or publishing in the association's editorials are considered as contributions to the association's development. Other examples are being part of the organizing committee of those events, the editorial committee of the association's journal, *HOW*, or the board of directors of the association. Spreading information about ASOCOPI's activities and paying the yearly fee are also considered as contributions by the association's affiliates.

Discussion

We want to start this discussion with the perspectives that ASOCOPI's affiliates had with respect to the Association's profile, trends, and ideals. It is notable that the respondents primarily see ASOCOPI as an association of English language teachers that pushes to construct an academic community of professionals in the field of language education in Colombia. Its focus, the respondents assert, is on improving English language teaching in the country by presenting key speakers and colleagues' work in its events and publications. This effort is also an opportunity to welcome and support the teacher-affiliates' work and to disseminate their knowledge so that others can learn from their experiences. The respondents also admit that ASOCOPI is starting to participate in the decision making of education national policies for foreign language teaching. This characteristic strengthens ASOCOPI's profile since it turns the association into a highly recognized community in Colombia, which is composed of qualified members looking to have an impact in the field of language education.

Although ASOCOPI is a community of language teachers that fosters knowledge in every aspect of English education, the respondents identify tendencies in its events and publications. They perceive that the most common topics seen are in language teaching approaches and techniques (usually CLT and CLIL), incorporation of technology in language education, language teaching material and resources, curriculum design, and cultural awareness. They also account for research approaches and methods in language teaching and learning (usually action research, descriptive and narrative research) plus recent discussions about national policies. These tendencies certainly mold the affiliates' language teaching and research practices. The respondents value such influence because it has produced in them a broader vision of teaching and contextualization of practices, plus a higher level of responsibility for their profession at work.

With respect to the ideals that the respondents believe in as members of ASOCOPI, they affirm that they can have the possibility of becoming better English language teachers by

learning from the presentations at the association's academic events. They consider such improvement to be the result of not only autonomous work, self-confidence, critical thinking, open-mindedness, and collaborative work learnt from the events' key speakers and colleagues, but also from the association's help and accompaniment. This last fact is also the result of ASOCOPI's effort to create respect for this profession and its training and support for language teachers in seasoned pedagogical and research practices (see for instance Cárdenas, 2015), which have turned teachers into teacher-researchers on language education matters in context. One last ideal considers ASOCOPI as a professional learning community. The affiliates believe that ASOCOPI can consolidate a strong and high-quality professional learning community. This community can do two tasks. On the one hand, it can assume teaching practices, professional development and growth, and language policies critically in our country. On the other hand, it can open a space for the Colombian English language teachers to have their voice heard about these matters with the aim of transforming language education practices in Colombia.

All previous aspects of ASOCOPI's profile, trends, and ideals from the respondents indicate that they see the association as a strong community in which they can improve professionally and participate to varied extents in the transformation of language education. One of the fields in which they are interested in participating is the decision making of national language education policy. In the meaning of their answers, we could see a general understanding that such policy must be generated through practices and not through what is codified and written by external forces. This understanding goes in line with Spolsky (2004), whose work postulates that the widespread use of other languages—English in Colombia, for instance—is officially recognized and sanctioned through the legal and governmental parties as the second language for bilingualism practices seemingly without the consideration of the policy-practice relationship. As a result, language educators are obliged to match in any manner the needs of all students whose first language is not English in order to carry out the corresponding law. In addition, Pennycook (2010) states that policies must emerge from the relationship between language, locality, and practice and the manner in which these three aspects are mutually constituted, an understanding that the respondents also reveal in their answers. Their eagerness to take part in the decision making of national language education policy is an example of the resistance to the current state-centric view of language policy. This policy penetrates a diverse range of institutions (law, education, medicine, printing), instruments (books, regulations, exams, articles, corrections), and regulates the language use, thought, and action of different people, groups, and organizations without having studied them thoroughly (Pennycook, 2001).

Cárdenas (2015) affirms that “ASOCOPI has played an important role in the development of the profession via its annual conferences, its sustained presence in regional workshops which are nurtured by joint efforts of local scholars and the Association's Board of Directors” (p. 7). Respondents' answers confirm this statement. They recognize the association's efforts

to create a collaborative culture for collective enquiry to continuous professional improvement of its members. The association understands what Fandiño (2010) states saying that (language) teachers need to be “significant agents of change” (p. 111) in situational teaching events. As findings demonstrate, the association’s academic events and editorials have highly contributed to this recognition. However, in our point of view, such efforts have reached only the dimensions of professional development and teacher impact if we consider Short’s (1994) dimensions of teacher empowerment⁵ (also, as cited in Fandiño, 2010) to develop competences in their teaching, research, and professional practices. Opening spaces for sharing knowledge, presentations, dissertations, or workshops in academic events and editorials seems not to be sufficient effort for the association and its affiliates to be involved in decision making in context and nationwide, and to enhance teacher-members’ self-efficacy and autonomy in their practices. ASOCOPI should also produce its own research studies situated in its own and members’ needs (its members can be the researchers), create strategic projects in which its members’ practices are strengthened, and design programs in which positive language education insights can be evident. Inquiry and support in these teaching, research, and professional practices can create reflection on and improvement of language education practices, as Quintero-Polo and Guerrero (2010) demonstrate in their study about pedagogical innovation and formative research; or can improve not only the members’ educational contexts but also the entire educational system (Cárdenas, 2000).

The characterization of ASOCOPI’s affiliates reveals that ASOCOPI is an association composed of well-educated and experienced English language teachers. We are completely convinced that all that knowledge and experience can strongly contribute to the betterment of the association and even more to the members’ teaching and research practices if efforts of all the members are collaboratively oriented to doing so in unison. A change in the way the association’s affiliates believe that they can contribute to the association is needed. Participating in the association’s academic events and editorials cannot continue being perceived as the only way to contribute to the association’s development. Initiatives that go through the motions of collegiality and mentoring look for enhancing advances and reflection in language teaching in-context, or for increasing the impact of seasoned or innovative teaching practices are highly indispensable to strengthen the image of the professional community of the association. As stated before, ASOCOPI can support the projects and show their results to the national community and the government so that its professional

⁵ Short (1994) states six dimensions for teacher empowerment: (a) Professional development: opportunities to grow and develop professionally from the work place. (b) Autonomy: self-control about aspects of their work life. (c) Involvement in decision-making: responsibility for critical decision-making that affects their work. (d) Teacher impact: their influence on school life. (e) Teacher status: respect and support from their colleagues. (f) Teacher self-efficacy: skills and competences to build learning.

community can also gain credibility, recognition, and higher participation in the field of English language education both within the country and overseas. In order to do so, members of the association must be active so that they can permanently revitalize it. The association must be a team that is composed of both professionals and formal institutions of teacher organizations on different fronts: academic, governmental, managerial, and organizational. Ibarra (2004) suggests that an integration of these fronts helps find coherence among these powers in terms of the necessities of the contexts, which eventually lead the organizations and its members to a clear horizon over teaching practices. Consequently, without an integration of fronts plus active participation of all the association's members, and their collaborative work and solid industry, the development of the association will be a difficult task, mostly for the ones that have been designated to formally represent or lead the association.

The authors of this article, the same ones who proposed, designed, and conducted the study presented in it, are experienced teachers and researchers and have been members of the association for a time. We are fully conscious that it may be difficult to find and maintain members in the association doing active work. We are also aware of the difficulty to find a natural grouping of people who feel comfortable working together. However, we are also completely sure that any member finds a place in an association when they know the manner in which they can contribute to it, the skills they can develop, the professional growth they can acquire (sense of achievement, as Falcão & Szesztay [2006] explain), the tasks and responsibilities to do and the spaces to do so. ASOCOPI needs to think of, state, and constantly share and discuss these aspects to all its community through different means since it is not enough to maintain members and make natural grouping by displaying a set of rights and obligations of the affiliates (Estatutos de la Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés, n.d.) on an official website.

Special care is necessary when finding or maintaining members, and when allowing them to team up. Ibarra (2004) also warns that, in some cases, teacher organizations can construct ideals and responsibilities attached to outdated, narrow paradigms. These antiquated power structures, as Richmond and McCroskey (1992) call it, constrain the emergence of modern, innovative proposals and visions that can support reforms with high levels of creativity and evolution in the field of education. ASOCOPI must be careful to construct its affiliates' contributions, projected achievements, tasks, and responsibilities and not allow them to fall into the areas as already warned of in statements. Its objective when doing so must be towards the unification of a profile for the member's work within the association. In agreement with García-Guadilla (1997), affiliates' contributions, achievements, and responsibilities in a teacher association should look for integrating each member's work so that they can feel identified with the association's development as they can strengthen their own profiles and practices.

ASOCOPI has done valuable work integrating its affiliates and helping them to grow professionally—the respondents' answers to the fulfillment of their expectations and the association's contributions to their professional development are evidences of such work. It denotes coherence between the association's objectives and the teaching progress thus far obtained in its affiliates. However, by analyzing the general set of results in this survey study, more can be expected. The respondents' meanings in their answers point to having an association that holds a higher level of formality with member groups in different regions of the country and with specialized groups in varied topics of interest, as also Pickering (2011) suggests. For example, this expectation can be accomplished by the exchange of newsletters, journals, and conferences with other organizations in the field of English language education. Respondents also suggest ASOCOPI include presentations by the board of directors in the annual conferences to inform all members about how the association functions, its current projects, and the results obtained from its ongoing activities (this suggestion is also one offered by Pickering, 2011).

These last demands push ASOCOPI to widen its presence in the Colombian regions by taking three actions. (a) Initially by looking for agreements with education secretaries in each region to improve and broaden their participation in the association's events and editorials. (b) By encouraging and giving support to the members of each of the regions in their teaching and research work (facilities, professional training, affiliates' promotion and inclusion). (c) By making connections with the universities of the region (or abroad) that can offer an ampler accompaniment to the affiliates in their teaching or research work and professional growth. Falcão and Szesztay (2006) affirm that this collaborative work provides a sense of belonging to an integrated, networking, professional community; a premise that DuFour (2004) sees as an association with a settled interest in education, collaborative structures, and a capacity for continuous improvement. More of this defined work can certainly give ASOCOPI a more positive reputation in the field. A more positive reputation that can lead the association into a stronger participation in the construction of language education programs (in context or nationwide), or in the decision-making of the national foreign language policies since the association's work will demonstrate further evidences in the manner in which foreign language education really takes place in the country.

A final remark on the discussion of findings has to deal with evaluation. Pickering (1999, 2011), DuFour et al. (2006), Bolam et al. (2005), and Stoll and Seashore (2007) state that for a professional language teaching association's development, the act of reflecting on the effectiveness of its intended purposes and on the processes to achieve them must constantly take place. Ongoing (self) evaluation of what the association does and how it does it can determine future actions of development and improvement. The results presented in this article in essence foster the action of evaluating ASOCOPI's work regarding the fulfillment of its affiliates' expectations and the association's contributions to their professional

development and growth. Although much more participation was expected (only 78 out of the 172 affiliates at the moment of the study answered the on-line questionnaire), the findings offer a panorama of how the affiliates could see the association's work in terms of the purposes of this study. Results and discussion about the effectiveness of its academic events, editorials, and participation in agreements and policies with other academic and governmental organizations for the improvement of English language teaching in Colombia are also expected. For the affiliates, knowing about these issues will certainly give them a sense of belonging, as it will foster their motivation to increase their participation in the association's development.

Conclusion

ASOCOPI is a non-profit, professional and private association of English language teachers with the purpose of contributing to the betterment of English language teaching in Colombia. It works as a professional learning community with established objectives and products. The findings presented in this article reveal that the association has members in different regions of the country and overseas, who are well-educated and experienced English language teachers. They have been active in participating in the association's academic events and editorials from which they have grown professionally by improving their teaching and research practices in context. ASOCOPI has contributed to its affiliates' fulfillment of expectations about staying updated in language teaching and research matters, helping create professional links with key colleagues, receiving information about language teaching events, and taking part in the decision making about language teaching policies in context. Although they expect the fulfillment of their expectations to move to a higher plane, they admit to having received valuable contributions from the association; contributions that have also helped them grow professionally by improving their teaching and research practices in the field of language education.

The discussion offers points of reflection as to the influence that the association's distinctive profile can have on the affiliates' vision of language teaching, the quality of the association as a professional community, and the impact it can have in this field. Suggestions point out that the association still needs to state the manner in which its affiliates can contribute to its development and the manner in which the association, under a collaborative-work approach, can contribute to the field of English language teaching in Colombia.

ASOCOPI should also produce its own research studies based on affiliates' contexts and needs and should keep working in order for them to further their professional development to reach empowerment in such a way that they can take part in the decision making of the national language policy. There is a need, additionally, for the association to be able to count on language teachers and teacher associations, as well as with formal institutions that allow it

to have a greater impact on the academic, governmental, managerial, and organizational fronts.

A strong suggestion is for ASOCOPI to be more visible still in the regions by using strategies like agreements with education secretaries, support of the affiliates' teaching and research, and having a connection with local universities to favor their professional growth. In addition, there is an invitation for the board of directors to find strategies to keep the affiliates informed about the state of the association, its interests, actions, achievements, and projection (for example, a higher use of technological resources for networking is indispensable nowadays). Finally, the study suggests the need of ASOCOPI's self-evaluation for continuous improvement and as a way of projecting its future actions to strengthen and possibly widen its mission and vision.

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Appendix: On-Line Cross-Sectional Questionnaire of the Study

1. Are you Male or Female?
2. What is your age? (Under 20, 21-27, 28-35, 36-45, over 46)
3. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (degree, postgraduate)
4. What is your highest degree title?
5. Which is your current occupation? (Elementary School Teacher, Secondary School Teacher, Language Center Teacher, University Teacher, Administrative Staff, Which position? Other: ____)
6. Do you work for a Private or State Institution?
7. How many years of experience do you have in your occupation? (0-5, 6-10, 11-15, over 16)
8. What is your affiliation with ASOCOPI? (Member, participant)
9. If you are an ASOCOPI member, what expectations did you have about being an ASOCOPI member?
10. Has ASOCOPI carried out your expectations? Y/N. Explain why.
11. What contributions have you made to ASOCOPI?
12. Since when have you attended ASOCOPI Annual Conferences?
13. How many Annual Conferences have you attended since then?
14. What roles have you had in your attendance at ASOCOPI Annual Conferences? (presenter, participant, organizer)
15. What are the most remarkable contributions that ASOCOPI Annual Conferences have given to your language teaching, language research, and professional service? (Contribution per aspect in a table)
16. What makes ASOCOPI distinctive as an association in the field of language teaching?
17. What trends in language teaching methodology characterize ASOCOPI?
18. What trends in language teaching-learning research characterize ASOCOPI?
19. What ideals do you believe in as a member of ASOCOPI professional community?

20. What suggestions would you offer ASOCOPI for strengthening its mission? (ASOCOPIS mission is to contribute to the betterment of English Language Teaching in Colombia by means of promoting quality educators.)