STRATEGIC PLAN TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL SKILLS IN ENGLISH INSIDE COMMERCIAL AREAS OF COLOMBIAN COMPANIES, BASED ON AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

By

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A Thesis Submitted to

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

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Abstract

of Strategic Plan to Improve Professional Skills in English inside Commercial Areas of Colombian Companies, based on Autonomous Learning

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Submitted to the Humanities Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Modern Languages Degree

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This research project establishes a complete proposal of a strategic plan which pretends to be a tool for learning English in autonomous ways, specifically applied in commercial areas from Colombian companies, using as diagnosis structure a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), used in lots of companies because of its high effectiveness level related to strategic results; in fact this method accurately allows to identify which factors permit and which other affect an English learning process, especially when are involved self-directed and autonomous methodologies, those have bigger risks of dropping out the English courses than traditional studying methods. This research as well pretends to improve the commercial procedures highlighting the importance of English and intercultural communication during international trade agreements. In addition; this project uses as basis some of the internationalization proposals established by government, some governmental organizations and the company used for finding out the need of interpreting English inside the commercial area.

Also, through the SWOT analysis were discovered external and internal factors and which influence the most when employees have tried to learn English and from there were established strategies for making easier that process, due to this research pretends to become a tool a benefit for any kind of Colombian company. On the other hand, the research also establishes the most effective methodologies related to autonomous learning, combining it with the improvement possibility of the commercial regular procedures by exploding the typical behavior of the Colombian business culture. Finally, it was taken as a sample Corferias Bogotá, a company where it was able to perform a situational analysis, they were of so much help as providing real data for consolidating the established strategies and were transcendental for this proposal which shows the specific steps any company can follow for improving professional business English skills.

Keywords: Strategic Plan, English Learning Process, Commercial Areas, SWOT Analysis, Self-directed & Autonomous Methodologies, Intercultural Communication, International Trade Agreements, Internationalization Proposals, Colombian Business Culture.

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Table of Contents

Abstract II

Acknowledgements IV

Table of Contents V

List of Tables VIII

List of Figures IX

Introduction XII

CHAPTER I. RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT 1

A. Description of the Research Problem: Problem's definition 1

B. Research Questions 5

C. Rationale 6

D. General and Specific Objectives 8

CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 10

A. Dynamics for Business Intercultural Communication, International Relations and Issues 10

1. Description of the current need of business English in commercial areas 13

2. Definition of the Colombian business culture 14

3. Examination of the corporate second language importance for an enterprise based on the theory of second language acquisition by Krashen 16

4. Colombian linguistics policies from El Ministerio de Educación Nacional: P*lan Nacional de Bilingüismo* 20

B. Statement of Theoretical Assumptions 21

1. Background of autonomous learning concept: model, characteristics and theory 22

2. The role of e-learning and ICTs nowadays 27

3. Common European framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment (CEFR) 29

4. Theoretical Analysis of Pedagogical Basis, Model for autonomously teaching and learning 31

5. Cognitive agent, continuous models and inductive logic programming from audio-visual input 32

C. Establishment of Strategic Planning on Labor Context 33

1. Description of the ranges and effects of this type of planning 34

2. Strategic plan influences within a company 36

3. Usefulness, relevance and relation of strategic plans within the commercial corporative structure and the intercultural businesses 40

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY 48

A. Type of Research 48

1. Research Methodology: Research Exchange - Explanatory 49

B. Population and Sample selection criteria 49

C. Collecting Data Instrument 51

1. Methodological structure 52

D. Research Results 67

CHAPTER IV. STRATEGIC PLAN PRESENTATION 68

A. Statement of the Strategic Plan Phases 68

1. Situation analysis 69

2. Situation diagnosis 70

3. General and specific objectives 70

4. Strategies for autonomous English learning – SWOT analysis 71

5. Action plan, Plan tracing and assessment 87

CHAPTER V. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 92

References and Bibliography..... 96

List of Tables

Table 1. Levels description of the Common European framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment 30

Table 2. SWOT Matrix Weaknesses & Strenghts 81

Table 3. SWOT Matrix Opportunities & Threats 82

Table 4. SWOT Matrix Strategies (WO) & (SO) 83

Table 5. SWOT Matrix Strategies (WT) & (ST) 84

Table 6. Analysis of results for strategic objective 1 85

Table 7. Analysis of results for strategic objective 2 86

Table 8. Analysis of results for strategic objective 3 86

Table 9. Analysis of results for strategic objective 4 86

List of Figures

Figure 1. English level in Colombia, general ranking 5

Figure 2. Structure for developing a strategic plan 34

Figure 3. Effects of a strategic plan 36

Figure 4. Stages of a strategic plan 41

Figure 5. The components of a SWOT analysis 44

Figure 6. Internal and External Factors' Analysis 45

Figure 7. Outcome indicator of the English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standards, sample taken within Corferias 53

Figure 8. Outcome indicator of the learning methods describing each one based on professional and academic experience, sample taken within Corferias 54

Figure 9. Outcome indicator of the actual autonomous learning during work journeys, sample taken within Corferias 56

Figure 10. Outcome indicator of the e-learning process for learning English and acquiring different skill through it, sample taken within Corferias 57

Figure 11. Outcome indicator of the behaves that difficult the autonomous learning process into the highest and the lowest scale, sample taken within Corferias 58

Figure 12. Outcome indicator of the hardest language common skills into the English learning process, sample taken within Corferias 59

Figure 13. Outcome indicator of the factor which influence the most when people is trying to learn or improve their English level, sample taken within Corferias 61

Figure 14. Outcome indicator of the possibility that represents managing documents in English during a normal work journey, sample taken within Corferias 62

Figure 15. Outcome indicator of how employees feel when they are facing with a negotiation in English, sample taken within Corferias 63

Figure 16. Outcome indicator of the importance that represent the hardest elements such as grammar, phonetic and reading comprehension, which are usually ignored, sample taken within Corferias 64

Figure 17. Outcome indicator of the autonomous learning and tries to find out if people are able to learn through this methodology, sample taken within Corferias 66

Figure 18. Results of the research about which is the English level of employees 67

Figure 19. Planning meeting for a Strategic Plan Establishment by Miriam Engelberg 68

Figure 20. Statistics outcome of the first question from the survey 73

Figure 21. Statistics outcome of the second question from the survey 73

Figure 22. Statistics outcome of the third question from the survey 74

Figure 23. Statistics outcome of the fourth question from the survey 75

Figure 24. Statistics outcome of the fifth question from the survey 76

Figure 25. Statistics outcome of the sixth question from the survey 76

Figure 26. Statistics outcome of the seventh question from the survey 77

Figure 27. Statistics outcome of the eighth question from the survey 78

Figure 28. Statistics outcome of the ninth question from the survey 79

Figure 29. Statistics outcome of the tenth question from the survey 79

Figure 30. Statistics outcome of the eleventh question from the survey 80

Figure 31. Action Plan Development 88

Figure 32. Action Plan Stage 2 89

Figure 33. Action Plan Stage 3 90

Figure 34. Action Plan Stage 5 91

Introduction

Acquiring a new language is a total race where the most competitive will have a better life quality; this research tries to fill this gap by presenting a complete strategic plan which would contain a more effective route for accomplishing this task.

Using common terms as the feasibility of concentration, determination and dedication any person focused on companies' internationalization process would be able to maintain and rule all kind of business negotiation in a foreign language; this research project pretends to be a tool inside commercial areas helping employees into the large process of learning English.

Speak, understand and interpret a second language such as English, facilitates public and trade relations at the time of closing business deals; it would make this process easier. Also, it represents a huge advantage when companies are about to export or import new products and services. In addition, this research aims to provide alternative English learning tools through autonomous methodology by using a strategic plan for individuals and business, in order to give a different range of the self-directed learning and also the theories that support this kind of learning and intercultural business communication.

The relevance of this project reside in the globalization process Colombia is experiencing nowadays, when technology and technological aims require to be in the forefront of development to contribute to the growth of companies, for this reason English has become an essential tool as it facilitates the management of information while dealing with international business, marketing, and in general foreign trade.

During the development of this research different factors that interfere in employees' lives while following an English learning process would be revealed; in order to achieve it,

this study compiles a complete theoretical framework compound by a concept description that would contribute on the strategic plan development, those issues are:

- Business Colombian Culture and Intercultural Communication including internationalization process, also it identifies the needs of English skills in commercial areas
- Second language acquisitions theories and governmental policies
- Self-directed and autonomous learning skills, pedagogical methodologies, electronic aids role. The research line follows a better communication process

Those aspects would highlight the main failures companies experience when they try to invest in foreign markets, by using a SWOT analysis which would determine and establish a clear, solid structure of the issues that do not allow employees to learn English.

Finally, the aims of this research are to generate a strategic plan as a proposal with regard to the above mentioned components as well as the importance of mastering English as a second language, within multinational organizations specifically at commercial area. This would be made to suggest implementation of methods for autonomously English learning through establishing strategies in a practical way as autonomous learning's diagnosis model. And to recommend future directions for research, practice and application; providing a comprehensive view of the importance of business English skills applied in processes from commercial areas.

Chapter One

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

A. Description of the Research Problem: Problem's definition

Companies in Colombia need to strength their commercial area; it is one of the most important areas of a company. However, all the earning this area makes are leaving companies without a possibility of obtaining a bigger market portion, nowadays this problem has one root: employees' lack of business English skills.

Colombia is trying to stand out as one of the most important countries with greater commercial offer; it means that learning a new language has become commercially the hardest skill to acquire and the only one which would help to commit this goal. It generates an opportunity to get a higher market position, in this way internationalization strategies are driven by good communication. The probability of winning or losing a business depends on the ability to communicate effectively in English as this project analyzes the possibility of doing international business.

Competition, in marketing, requires effective communication as it makes a business successful, so is important to act in function of globalization and resources to achieve objectives; additionally; mergers between companies and international acquisitions are fundamental points of reference at the time of negotiation. (Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2012)

These are some of the reasons why it is necessary to learn English, from every point of reference such as employees and any commercial potential employees from every type of company.

Some experts like James Hoyle, CEO of Go English and Cleave Miller, CEO of English 360 talk about the importance of practice in learning English, it is essential to provide students tools that can use during dealing with real business situations focused on the benefit of the company, (Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2012).

The business trend seeks to participate effectively in the international market, for this, it is necessary to manage a common language. Nicholas Barraso, expert on languages (EADS Training Department), talks about the importance of managing international English, if it is implemented a corporate language culture any kind of work would be achieved effectively. (Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2012)

This research aims to provide strategies for autonomously English learning through a strategic plan for individuals and businesses that need to learn it as a step for internationalization processes in commercial areas from Colombian companies.

Globalization, the fallen of the antique economic barriers, intercultural communication and the acceleration of technology and science, exerts a massive pressure on the society generating the need to develop communicative competences in one or more foreign languages, this enables the equal participation in global culture, without losing the sense of belonging to our culture. (Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MinEducación], 2005)

Learning a second language as English creates a strategic perspective that allows each person to increase communication skills, in addition to obtain a better understanding of the world's situation and its effects, taking into account the Colombian context, how our Latin society is being benefited or affected by this new concept of cultures involved into ours. The

ability of dominating English facilitates the good management of new technologies and contributes to a complete social and cultural integration, as new behaves are introduced.

Nowadays bilingualism is essential to succeed in the field of globalization. For this reason, it is necessary to develop the talent of professionals in order to provide better quality of life and opportunities which at the end would accomplish one bigger goal: the improvement of the country's development, making it viable. (MinEducación, 2005)

As it has been proposed, this project aims to make a little contribution to the country's sustainable development main plan, which should be promoted in all scopes, initiating from education, training of competent citizens who commit themselves to participate in a new life project.

The probability that Colombia competes with other countries either in technology, commerce, science or any area depends on a huge educational effort, therefore it is necessary that the most part of population speaks at least one foreign language, this would facilitate the understanding of systematic, scientific, technological, and commercial information etc. (MinEducación, 2005)

The ability of having access to international materials with huge conceptual value, depends on the understanding of other languages, this would represent a closer step into the use of interactive systems, networks and extensive databases, mainly in English as the most global language in international technology.

In recent years, new options have come when talking about self-directed learning. Mobile technology and the impact on young people by the use of social media have accelerated the level of interest for learning, this means to acquire new knowledge for free.

To approach on a high level of autonomous learning methodology it is important to be self-motivated. Today, social networks, internet and new technology are tools that have caught the attention of people no matter their social and economic position. These tools ease the learning of any language especially English as Colombian culture is closer to it, even though most of technological information is in English, this would guarantee the success of the autonomous English learning mission.

Nowadays, virtual learning has a bigger impulse than before; it fosters trust of students, promotes autonomy and establishes aims for quick and effective learning (Godwin-Jones, 2011). Also, this learning methodology offers many possibilities to students for showing their potential, which sometimes is not possible in a classroom, because teachers usually tend to choose or rank potential and non-potential students. In addition, this as a way for learning generates responsibility on students and autonomy on their decisions, even the evaluation method is totally impartial (Atehortúa, 2010).

According to an article published by "El Tiempo" newspaper, Colombia in comparison to other South American countries has one of the lowest level of English, ranked at 46 place. The measurement was performed by the EPI *(English Proficiency Index*). Even, the article also mentions the position of other Latin-American countries where: Panama is ranked at 56, Venezuela at 49, Ecuador 48, Chile 44 and Peru 39 (www.ef.com.co/epi, 2011).

The poor quality of public education in Latin America, combined with a poor literacy rate is one causes for English low rates, says the report of Education First (EF). According to the study, Hispanic countries internationally show very low English level for not having any support on the research field.

As it has been told the main goal for teaching and learning English successfully is to achieve fluid communication (not the same than a native, but completely enough for getting on all kind of situations). To achieve this objective it is recommended to implement communication strategies having higher priority than grammar. (El Tiempo, 2011)

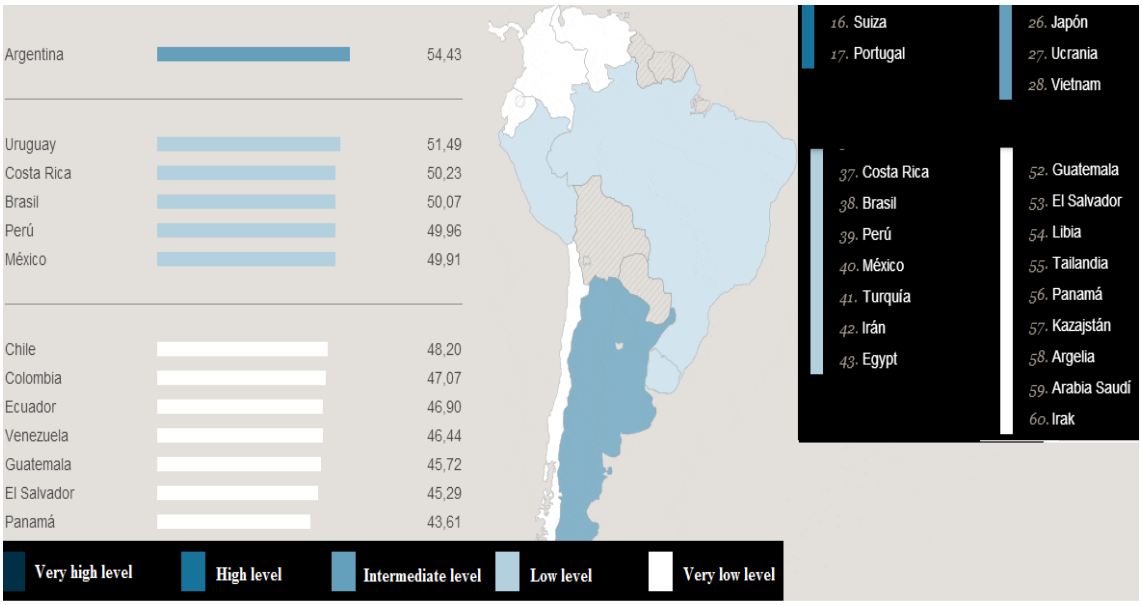


Figure 1. English level in Colombia, general ranking
Source: http:// www.ef.com.co/epi
Retreived from Índice De Nivel En Inglés (EF EPI)

B. Research Questions

These questions were established in the problem statement and were previously explained, however, here there is a brief introduction for each question.

- What is the importance of understanding and interpret English in the commercial area of a company?

Understanding and interpreting a second language, allows the establishments of new trade relations with other countries, this is a great contribution to the Colombian economy

- What is the importance of autonomous learning to master a second language like English?

Learning English through autonomous methods has become a need, now people are usually busy with work activities and for them it is difficult to take classes in a specific place, also after finishing their work journey they are very tired for taking English lessons, this stood out the advantages of self-directed learning

- Which methodology allows to identify students' weaknesses and threats for proposing appropriate strategies while learning English?

The SWOT analysis is a model or a methodology that identifies risks and strengths of a company; this analysis is quite used for fulfilling specific objectives and become those into plans. For this reason, this analysis model is a good element for discovering the aspects people have to improve, in addition it is recognized as a good tool for implement strategies according to factors that affect learning.

C. Rationale

This project was designed for creating a strategic plan to improve professional English skills based on autonomous learning, in addition to bring together the concept of self-directed learning and the ranges of autonomy.

Nowadays the basis of the international procedures is the intercultural communication. Colombia is looking forward to be one of the countries with more foreign representations through commercial operations that include the visit of companies from abroad to invest in national products and services (Lacouture, 2014).

This means that companies are looking for hiring the most competitive staff. Therefore this research supports the non-stopping professional development, as well as finding out the best way to improve professional skills keeping in mind the employees' progress within a company. Following the concept above, this Strategic Plan pretends to be a tool inside commercial areas leaving the companies' staffs the possibility to have a better job quality by means of autonomous learning.

Furthermore, this research project aims to the constant development of international business skills with two main focuses:

- The companies, which transform the training it is given to employees, promoting international communication and commercial operations such as export or import processes
- The employees acquiring new knowledge applied directly on their jobs and also providing the companies and to themselves growing opportunities.

All those goals will be achieved with the support of the strategies expressed in the strategic plan proposal that at the end would be the result of the research, due to during work routines established today in the companies, there is not enough time to improve and get a perfect second language, and at that point comes up the need of having methods for autonomous learning, so the employee and the organization are committed to their continuous learning and feedback to have fresh ideas.

Also the research would be a tool to the personal and professional development, this would be seen as indirect help to the social responsibility policies within companies, giving a better perspective of corporative environment for business, which would benefit every single

employee, initially inside commercial areas, but with further researches this plan could be specifically applied to every area within any kind of companies.

This research opens the gate of autonomous learning with social sense, into the application further researchers using focus groups could be able to prove the effectiveness of this strategic plan and improve it through the experience giving the employees the opportunity to expand their cultural awareness.

The experience from the analysis taken in Pfizer Venezuela, S.A. (Carvajal & Rodríguez, 2010) has proved that the fact of improving a language and applying it into a labor environment brings independency to meet other cultures, customs, behaviors and ways of life, those are increasing influences at the time deals are being closed and determinate the way of acting.

Finally the research developed here response to the current need of English in commercial environments, as well as the other fields in Colombia such as education, social development, and globalization possibilities (MinEducación, 2005) according to government policies of assuring better life quality.

D. General and Specific Objectives

General Objective:

To propose a strategic plan which reunites self-directed and autonomous learning for improving professional skills in English inside commercial areas of Colombian companies.

Specific Objectives:

1. To diagnose the current needs of English language on commercial labor environments by using a SWOT matrix for providing a context of autonomous English learning degree.
2. To establish strategies related to the researched models such as pedagogical self-directed and autonomous learning theories, electronic educational aids as ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and e-learning for improving the professionals' quality inside Colombian companies.
3. To formulate action plans and methods of assessment for guaranteeing the acquisition of commercial and business English skills to improve the international relations and the intercultural communication.

Chapter Two

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Dynamics for Business Intercultural Communication, International Relations and Issues

Globalization implies more multicultural encounters, this means that business world requires more consciousness of the effects that could enterprises suffer, especially by the constant different commercial needs of expansion and new markets investments. The current internationalization strategies such as: products, marketing and advertising innovation inside foreign markets, expansion of businesses through exportations according to the new concept of virtual bureaus (Estrategias de internacionalización de empresas, n.d.), try to improve international relations through the base of commercial deals: communication among different cultures. However, these processes are related inherently with direct foreign investments which is an strategy with so high costs and extensive requirements of resources; so the only way most companies have access to is the exportations plan, of course with the support of governmental organizations that in Colombia have brought the new concept of "Exporting Culture" (Barber & Darder, 2004).

Colombia as a developing country but with lots of natural resources and totally capable of generating new wealth within the globalization context, usually forgets the categories involved into international business: communication and culture. This way of communication has certain goals according to the main growing goals of the companies, like implementing new technologies, minimize the risks of working on one only market, and be competitive; those are just few examples of the commercial operations that use intercultural

communication and are based on strategic alliances, fusions and joint ventures which must need the exchange among cultures (Hofstede, 1997).

Sometimes enterprises do not realize that the main obstacle which does not allow a successful international business, is the cultural relation taking into account the technical aspects of every negotiation and the natural contrast of cultures. One example well known are the foreigners sometimes worried about the lack of punctuality due to the low foresight and informal way Colombians manage business deals (Puyana, 2005). Those aspects are ignored and most important the entrepreneurs are not conscious of the socio-cultural factors which influence the style for businesses, and are in constant change by current economic dynamics demands. Practical socio-cultural elements describe the possibility of having an intercultural competence; it shows the new definition of culture in two levels: similarities and multiculturalism (Elosegui, 1997), which are currently ignored, rejected, out of the Colombian managers' focus.

According to this theory, the similarities supposed the absorption from one culture to the other; it says that cultures cannot live with others until one takes the values, rules and beliefs, so this would eliminate the differences. This issue makes reference to the colonialism time when the idea was to impose new customs over others. This fact is usually seen in Colombia, when multinational companies bring their cultures and business cultures, behaves and procedures absorbing the common Colombian behaves, which would be explained later in the Colombian business culture chapter.

On the other hand is the multiculturalism a result for the respect that should exist between the differences brought by the adaptations of the beliefs from lots of cultures, so the multicultural speech is looked as care of the other culture, it is focused on the same images

that joint them together. This reveals the survivor nature of cultures; those want to show their most important features.

Multiculturalism tries to respect the individual autonomy even though it brings lot of risks like racism, and reject of the other cultures caused by the crash of identities, one example of it is the management of uncertainly decisions. It is a repetitive concern even inside Colombia; the different idiosyncrasies try to reject themselves. Another example of foreign identities crash is the Anglo-Saxon cultures against Colombian culture. The first ones do not allow the waste of time and prefer the deals to be closed as soon as they can, also they cannot stand unpunctuality and delays; in contrast Colombia because of the culture, the society and government rules is usually unpunctual, it is related to the aboriginal people who lived here before the Spanish colonizers first settled down, (Ogliastri, 2001) they had an agricultural economy so when they cultivate the could not decide the time they could pick up the fruitful products, they waited until the earth and weather gave them the results, so there was born the concept of time management, unlike Anglo-Saxon cultures that see time as a resource that runs all of their activities, for Colombia, Latin America and Arabic cultures the time is an instrument, a tool that they could use according to the needs they have.

This research tries to highlight the importance of the multiculturalism concept for managers and commercial employees, training them that it's not only important express in a foreign language but also understand and apply the last tendency found related to the dynamics for intercultural business and communication, which is precisely the concept of intercultural relations. It establishes that cultures could learn one from another not only making clear which are the differences among them but also sharing values and coexistence spaces.

Intercultural relations as a trend looks for the interaction of both cultures, due to the companies want a portion of market benefits, this phenomenon could improve through the establishment of new company policies such as a second corporative language that employees should use during their communications. This new concept simplifies the similarities and multiculturalism trends; it presents a highline about the differences as methods of learning as well as the successful negotiations. As Hofstede (1997) says, if cultures have clear their identity, their minds would be open to new possibilities; this guarantee a successful connections not only personal but professional and a full understanding of behaviors and attitudes.

Finally, cultures that tolerate the management of uncertainly decisions, called by Hofstede (1997) "ambiguous", are way more opened to the intercultural exchanges but those which do not tolerate these indeterminate decisions usually reject the exchanges.

1. Description of the current need of business English in commercial areas

Talent is the differential value that today leads companies to win the current war of talent for building up a worthy business' competitive advantage (Green & Cheese, 2008). By means of the companies' development, it pretends to demonstrate and make clear the talent's synchronized and proactive usefulness inside a bilingual environment through a corporative language policy, so following the autonomous learning method as would be described later and the talent's promotion will add value and innovation, selecting and training high performance teams, as a way to succeed.

Besides as Delobelle (2007) expose on his article about the commitment a manager has to create on his employees' minds, he describes strategies and methods that a manager has to

follow when he delegates tasks especially during the application of a new project like this strategic plan for the autonomous learning. The author denotes the importance of the impact that has the accomplishment of new needs among the employees on the business general objectives. These methods aim to upgrade the skills of employees and also try to settle a strict position according to the range of effects on the results at the commercial area and about the customers' satisfaction.

Today every company looks for different markets and to expand and open new branches overseas, especially the international operations require a new language, a global language that could make everybody understand statement of businesses. An example of it is the new policy of corporative language, the new procedures established by shareholders are sent in English, and the news which involve everyone in the company sent in this language.

Finally, entrepreneurs should be based on the linguistic politics made by the government that at the same time are coherent with the research line tending to guarantee the English learning, emphasizing on the improvement of procedures, international relations, and operations; this acquirement become a company's priority, especially in the commercial area when the team performs different kinds of international operations, letting out the fact that speaking in a foreign language is a requirement to be promoted. This new conception brings social benefits to employees as professional growth, better communication ways, which builds a society inside the company interested on the global commercial dynamics.

2. Definition of the Colombian business culture

According to Ogliastri (2001) negotiate includes making an agreement coexisting with the differences among cultures around the world, as a result the concept Negotiate is a normal

process everyone experiments. This includes an acceptable agreement for both parts leaving them benefits, and also it is profitable and efficient about time, resources and energy.

So here are mentioned the theories that look for investigate the features of Colombians when they practice the intercultural communication and business according to the economic dynamics demanded by the current globalization process.

The models established by Ogliastri (2001) supposed that until 2001 Colombia as well as the rest of Latin America had the traditional negotiation process. This is about the better exchange for one part just to sale. Colombians offer widely open conditions to the international operation sometimes losing the position in front of the customer.

On the other hand it has been found the integrative negotiation the new international trend that pretends to give the same percentage of benefit among the parts involved, there is no improvisation, and the negotiation is prepared with offers of profitable trade. Ogliastri during his research had found some features every Colombian tends to develop when tries to establish an international business or relation, here are the most important: the informal environment, the process is personalized and emotional, they prefer what is being told and the written part is just a requirement, the time is flexible as a tool multiple project can be develop at the same time with the same effort for all, sometime they tend to improvise, this gives the impression of non-organized people with no order to manage. The contact with civil servants or other important managers is one of the highline points, the references show that the company involved in the negotiation is important and has the power to finish any contract.

This theory settles the point that the strategic plan tries to approach in the way English is acquired to improve the processes during the commercial processes in any kind of company,

taking concepts from social responsibility but in the international operations compound of the commercial area.

Finally this research tries to include into the Colombian business culture the new concept of self-directed learning, more than autonomous, showing up the skills to be self-conscious of the advantages of studying by itself an also it's better to understand the concept of the lifelong learning acquired from experiences which undoubtedly are always giving us the opportunity to develop new phases of real learning. As a SWOT analysis supports the general and specific topics that we want to study as a useful tool that could measure the success of the process of self-learning.

3. Examination of the corporate second language importance for an enterprise based on the theory of second language acquisition by Krashen

The use of language nowadays has reached a different context, it used to be employed just as a mean of communication but now it is an important aspect of companies' planning and policies. It also used to be a human resources issue, as they were trying to conduct the company in one whole team, but now with the internationalization processes it has become one of the management most important aspect to be careful with (Thomas, 2006, 2007).

Language brings different multicultural challenges, as those were described before; the implications come when managers have to analyze what are the elements for achieving effective communication, which is really hard when employees do not have the foreign language level required. These policies for corporative second languages have to capture the linguistic knowledge form employees and transform it into assertive communication (Thomas, 2006, 2007).

These corporative policies pretend to change language behavior which consciously or unconsciously acquired, that is the point when comes to table the theories conceived by Krashen (1987), he performed lot of researches about the process of acquiring a second language. He says that the language acquisition is a similar process when a child is learning his mother tongue or first language.

The acquisition of a second language is a subconscious process and usually people do not realize they are actually learning something, but they are conscious of the use of language as a communication tool (Krashen, 1989). Also while he researches this process he contemplates the following hypotheses, which would allow the creation of learning strategies easily applicable to autonomous learning theories:

- There are two different processes, while learning languages: acquisition (it says that language acquisition is unconscious) and learning (it says that language acquisition is possible by the use of grammatical rules)
- Acquisition of grammatical instructions, sounds, words, among others, are always the same process, it keeps the same order for children and adults
- The learning process has the role of monitor or editor; it can make changes in what had been learnt. An example of it is a word with wrong pronunciation or wrong spelling, through learning every student would be able to edit or monitor their knowledge correcting it.
- A language is acquired using the context and the cultural knowledge of the world. Extra-linguistic information will help language learners to understand the language, where it comes from, how is the community that uses the

language and then they can interpret language as an ensemble of different structures

- There are some emotional factors that affect language acquisition:
    - Motivation: Usually motivated students perform better when they acquire a language
    - Self-confidence: when students are confident and have a good self-image and self-esteem they tend to acquire easily a language
    - Anxiety: low levels of anxiety let students acquire languages faster among groups or individually, even as Krashen (2004) said within classrooms.

Krashen (1989) summarizes his theory of a second language acquisition mentioning that the acquisition process is more important than actual learning; this mentioned process is possible under the following conditions:

- The knowledge that is about to be learnt has to be understandable using different pedagogical aids
- Students have to apply an emotional filter, this would allow the acquisition of a new language

According to the theory above, Krashen (1989) mentions that learning is valuable for beginners in contrast for people with high linguistic knowledge, as the learning process for them do not represent an advantage while acquiring a new language, this would produce non-motivated students. Following this concept, learning helps when it is the principal source of information for beginners and for students who do not have the opportunity of practice outside classrooms.

There is a relation between exposition amount (how much time people is getting used to the new language) and skills people dispose while learning. As more time people have for usual practicing more vocabulary, grammar rules, etc., could be acquired, age is also one of the skills Krashen keeps in mind, as this range would be a tool for deciding which pedagogical methodology has to be used. Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979) checked some empirical theories regarding to the effects of age in the second language learning process, they came into two main conclusions:

- Adults that had references from a second language since they were children develop faster a second language than those children who did not have any approach to the language. Due to the time and the exposition to the language were constant.
- Pre-teenagers acquire faster a language than younger kids, as they are more disciplined and are constantly exposed to the new language

There are other theories that talk about second language acquisition, which influence in some way Krashen's statements; however for this research Ellis (1985) was taken as the most important influence, whose principles would help to the development of the strategic plan for improving business English skills through autonomous learning.

- Acculturation Model: described by Brown (1980) as the adaptation process to a new culture. A language is an expression of the culture and the second language acquisition is linked to societies, the one of the learner and the other one from the language he/she wants to acquire (Ellis, 1985)
- Schumman's model (1978) summarizes the acquisition process as the process when a person can be involved into the receipt culture. Students learn the

language while are also learning from the group that uses this language trying to adapt themselves into that society, those aspects are determined by the social and psychological distance between the students and the culture of the native speakers from the language they pretend to learn.

- Accommodation theory: it pretends to show how the inner group dynamics of the language users reflect the basic social and psychological attitudes from their society. Giles (1979) sees the inner group dynamics as a constant negotiation which is revealed with every single interaction and those are constantly changing as different points of view are.

4. Colombian linguistics policies from El Ministerio de Educación Nacional: P*lan Nacional de Bilingüismo*

Almost 20 years ago there was conceived an Bilingual Education Law (ley 115 de 1994) which in Article 21, taken from La Ley General de Educación states, that every educational institution must offer to their students learning tools for acquiring a foreign language since basic level. El Ministerio de Educación set in the nineties the curriculum guidelines to steer the teaching and learning of students in primary and secondary education.

Although in late 2004, El Ministerio de Educación adopted the Common European Framework of Reference for the strength of its proposal and its applicability to the education sector, so supplying the need for a common frame of reference for learning, teaching and assessment the language. From that reference framework, were established first level goals of language for different populations, then proficiency standards were formulated in English for primary and secondary education, which were published in December 2006.

B. Statement of Theoretical Assumptions

Nowadays much is said about self-learning, self-education or long distance education (where students must work and study independently to achieve their academic goals), however it is not a quite term innovative.

Autonomous study is a method of learning in which the student is responsible for the organization of work and the acquisition of different skills at their own speed. It implies that learner takes responsibility and control of the personal learning and the planning process, implementing and evaluating decisions on the learning experience, (Fraile, 2006). The autonomous learner as active subject of their own learning, formulates goals, organizes knowledge, constructs meanings and uses appropriate strategies and selects the moments that it considers relevant to acquire, develop and learn (Fraile, 2006).

The student must be able to identify their learning needs and to go to the information sources and training processes to find those needs. This learning view is not limited by the four walls of the classroom because its limits expand to all the scenarios in which students interact; it means they have the world by classroom. This type of learning has been applied widely in the process of instruction related to professional training in various disciplines, the development of human resources in the business and the continuing education, etc. (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje [SENA], 2005).

The ability of autonomous learning has become a factor that surpasses ordinary skills in the evolutionary branch. This ability development depends on behavioral change according to the given environment. So, through the continuous knowledge acquisition road, human minds would have become successful at some point when they get independency and

discipline no matter their environmental context and even if they are able to modify their needs for acquiring the knowledge they require and apply it within the background they usually get along (Angarita, 2010).

1. Background of autonomous learning concept: model, characteristics and theory

Human beings have had to educate themselves to understand their environment, for instruction or create tools for survival. Then, it can be said that, the concept of autonomous learning has lived with man forever, because it is the person who makes his own learning rules, who sets goals and who chooses what is more important or valuable to learn.

Aristotle, Plato and Socrates were a clear example of self-learning as they called themselves self-taught because they always questioned what was happening around them and tried to create ideas that describe what they saw and felt.

Now let's see some theories that may help to understand the learning process. Some of them taken from an analysis performed by a Mexican researcher interested on improving learning processes (Rocha, 2008).

Socrates' theory is based on two moments the irony and maieutic. The first moment is the irony, where the student asks questions until he realizes that he knows nothing of what he thought or he knew. The second moment is where the student interrogates until he gets the knowledge through his conclusions, which is defined as the act of obtaining knowledge within himself (The Loner, 2009).

Furthermore Jean William Fritz Piaget based his theory of cognitive development combined with his epistemological studies with children widely known as genetic

epistemology on human cognitive functions; he observed the way how learning took place, it was to be adapted to the interaction with the environment (Rocha, 2008).

According to his theory, cognitive structures within a person determine how they perceive and how new information will be processed. For example (Assimilation), which says that if new information can be understood with existing mental structures, then the new information segment is incorporated into the structure. However, if the information differs significantly to the existing structure, it will be rejected or transformed in some way so that it can fit within the existing structure (Accommodation).

We could say that assimilation and accommodation is a balance process where both interact together and it also works as a regulator process, so the process of equilibration between assimilation and accommodation is set over three more complex levels, according to Piaget:

1. Equilibrium is established between the schemas of the subject and external events.
2. Equilibrium is established between the subject own schemes.
3. The balance is translated into a different hierarchical integration schemes.

Regardless of the case, the person has an active role in building their knowledge, in a way that as soon as there is new information, ideas increase in complexity and robustness making learning richer and deeper.

On the other hand socio-cultural theory of human learning by Lev Vygotsky, which as the name suggests, it describes learning from the social process (Rocha, 2008). Vygotsky explains how having a role in society is important in the development of cognition and learning, it occurs because from social interaction is given the origin of human intelligence.

According to this theory, learning has 2 levels: first, through interaction with others, and second, the integration of that knowledge in the mental structure of individuals.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the active participation of children considering cognitive growth as a collaborative process because they acquire cognitive skills as part of their induction to a way of life. Shared activities help children to interiorize the ways of thought and behavior of their society and to appropriate them.

Finally Jerome Bruner emphasizes that learning is an active process in which people construct new ideas and concepts based on their previous experiences and knowledge, (Rocha, 2008). Bruner postulates the theory of cognitive development where his main interest is the development of mental abilities. Indicates a prescriptive theory of instruction because it proposes rules to acquire knowledge, skills and at the same time provides the techniques for measuring and evaluating results.

According to his theory, there are three principles that guide the development of instruction:

1. Disposition: this must be related to the experiences and contexts that make the person willing and able to learn

2. Spiral organization: here the instruction should be structured in such a way that students can easily apprehend

3. Go beyond of the given information: which must be designed to facilitate and complement the knowledge gaps.

The student before studying autonomously should do a self-assessment to know how responsible he/she would be studying independently. Here are some questions that could guide students to see their true objectives, as follows:

- In what occasions or issues are you really autonomous?
- Would you like to have more autonomy? In which way?
- What additional achievements would you get?
- Why do you think studying independently will help you to accomplish your goals?

Now, pretending that the student answered yes to some of these questions and answered other questions he asked himself while doing the self-assessment, here it will be displayed the features that a student who wants to learn English autonomously must have.

- First and overall, a person who studies autonomously is characterized by having fixed targets and achievable goals which allow him to follow the step by step process. These objectives should be as clear and realistic as possible.
- Without a permanent motivation, it is very difficult that the process reaches the end or not complies with quality standards that are expected to have when this method is used to learn. An autonomous learner is characterized by seeking inspiration and makes the process something different to keep him motivated.
- An autonomous student is always looking for a space to realize and fulfill his activities. The working area for his homework is a place where he has all the necessary material to develop his learning process.
- Students must create strategies that will help them to improve their understanding of the information and to solve problems. They must keep in mind that in this context a

strategy is the way a person could use information and directs it to their learning process.

- An important feature of an autonomous student, is that he always set tasks that he can accomplish and that are directly related to its objectives and learning process.
- It is also important to remember that the student must bring the autonomous experience to the field of reflection on the development of strategies; this reflection aims to make a feedback after a certain period of study.

To summarize, it is important that an autonomous student should acquire characteristics such as:

- Plans his own learning.
- Advises himself and others.
- Evaluates the process of self-learning.
- Self-motivation.
- Manages his own learning.
- Organizes his own learning.
- Advises other students.

However, the strategic plan, which will be shown on the next chapter, can help achieving or exceeding these features, and then all students will find the appropriate tools to learn English autonomously.

2. The role of e-learning and ICTs nowadays

ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunication. It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but it focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other kind of media. Modern information and communication technologies have created a "global village," in which people can communicate with others across the world as if they were living next door. For this reason, ICT is often studied in the context of how modern communication technologies affect society.

Information and communication Technology has opened up new possibilities for teaching and learning. Their great potential is evident in the possibility of interaction, communication and information access, it means becoming an interactive and active mean. This integrates technologies environment or learning environments with different levels of virtualization available to the teaching of information and communication channels to promote various forms of education (Ortí, n.d.).

According to Ortí (n.d.) from la Universidad de Valencia, ICT represents lot of advantages for the students when they practice autonomous learning:

- Variety of information: it is possible to have access in a large range of information on diverse fields. This allows the student to develop different skills such as analysis ability which allow the students to evaluate the quality and credibility of used sources.
- Instructional flexibility: The rhythm of learning and the feedback in the process may be different for everyone as different kinds of students are. This autonomous methodology adapts to all needs that arise when learning.

- Increased motivation: Ortí's (n.d.) researches show that students are more motivated when using ICT.
- Collaborative activities: Proper use of ICT on a work group can enhance collaborative and cooperative activities among students and collaboration with other centers or institutions through networks.
- Enhance educational innovation: The new educational tendencies use the newest technologies that promote new methodologies. While it is not a cause-effect relationship, it is clear that teachers who use new technologies tend to seek new methods for teaching which would try to improve society. Also those teachers tend to promote the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills for making easier to their students the process of adapting in adult world.

In the same way, Ortí (n.d.) explained that ICTs are used for educational purposes but must attend to potential hazards that can negatively influence the acquisition of knowledge. Among them are:

- Pseudo-information: Being able to access to lots of information, does not mean being better informed or formed, it is necessary, therefore, to provide students with tools that allow them to select relevant information from which it is not, and distinguish the information with tendentious or manipulative purposes.
- Information overload: Internet offers the possibility to get much information in a short space of time; therefore, the student may not have the time to reflect and interiorize the relevant information, resulting in some cases of information overload taking place the effect of cognitive saturation, which would prevent learning.

- Technological dependence: this is one of the risks of ICTs' application, where users give greater value to the "know how" and are not interested on the "know that" so for avoiding this, it is necessary to indicate that inputs used must be subordinated to the educational process, but never the opposite.

3. Common European framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment (CEFR)

CEFR is a framework of reference designed to provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive base for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency (Council of Europe, 1971). It is used in Europe but also in other continents and is now available in 39 languages. The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. It also defines three 'plus' levels (A2+, B1+, B2+). Based on empirical research and widespread consultation, this scheme makes it possible to compare tests and examinations across languages and national boundaries. It also provides a basis for recognizing language qualifications and thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility.

Table 1. *Levels description of the Common European framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment*

Proficient User	**C2**	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herselfspontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recogniseimplicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneouslywithout much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	**B2**	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	**A2**	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: www.coe.int
Retreived from: Linguistic Source (1971)

4. Theoretical Analysis of Pedagogical Basis, Model for autonomously teaching and learning

The theoretical standing of student-centred learning (SCL) which means autonomous learning is often surprisingly absent in the literature. However, it appears to relate primarily to the constructivist view of learning in the importance it places on activity, discovery and independent learning (Carlile & Jordan, 2005). Cognitive theory also highlights activity but in a different form than it is supported by the constructivism (Cobb, 1999). The cognitive view supports the position that the idea in the activity of learning is computed in the head, or as often described "in the mind". The constructivist view of activity is related more to perform physical activities, for example, projects, internships. Student-centred learning has some connections with the social constructivist view, which emphasizes activity and the importance for communities of practice in the learning process. However, the definitions of SCL do not necessarily highlight the importance of peers in learning (Bredo, 1999; Cobb, 1999).

The University of Glasgow (2004) presents us some methods for autonomous learning. This University identified four main strategies when performed a study on autonomous learning, nowadays they use these within the University as follows:

1. Strategy: it tries to make students more active in acquiring knowledge and skills, it might include exercises in class, fieldwork, use of CAL (computer assisted learning) packages, etc.
2. Strategy: it tries to make students more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it.
3. Strategy: it is focused on interaction, such as the use of tutorials and other discussion groups.

4. Final strategy: the University of Glasgow is focused on transferable skills. This last strategy is not mentioned in other definitions of the student-centred learning but does look beyond the immediate course requirements to other benefits to the student in later employment.

5. Cognitive agent, continuous models and inductive logic programming from audio-visual input

Researchers from the University of Leeds have found the way how to learn autonomously by an inductive logic program from audio-visual input, (Magee, Needham, Santos, Cohn, & Hogg, 2004).

First of all, they explain their learning framework. They divide learning framework in two: low-level (continuous) object learning, and high-level (symbolic) protocol and relationship learning. They say that to facilitate autonomous (fully unsupervised) learning, a space-temporal attention mechanism is required to determine 'where' and 'when' significant object occurrences and interactions take place within the input video stream of the scenario to be learned from. The object models produced during low-level learning are used to produce a symbolic stream for use in the high-level learning.

In autonomous learning is not possible to know a-priori what types of visual (and other) object properties are important when determining an object context within a dynamic scene. For this reason the use of multiple (in fact large numbers of) features such as color, texture, shape and position etc.; are proposed.

C. Establishment of Strategic Planning on Labor Context

A strategic plan on labor context combine a program which establishes solutions and action plans according to certain goals and as consequence it solves the issues that initially conceived the plan.

It is a useful tool inside companies, and can be formulated objectives such as the following: To suggest solutions to current problems, to improve processes for fulfilling goals, to establish controls or assessment methods to measure the effectiveness of the strategic plan, and to turn ideas into effective actions (Guia de la calidad, 2014).

Its importance reside in the analysis performed of the current situation of a company and tries to determine what aspects (weaknesses and threats) a company should improve, in order to have a good market position, in addition to improve incomes and earnings for the company.

Strategic plan is a process that pretends to establish objectives for satisfying the needs of Entrepreneurs and consumers; additionally the purpose of a strategic plan in commercial context looks for increasing customers' satisfaction from the received products or services (Espinoza, 2012).

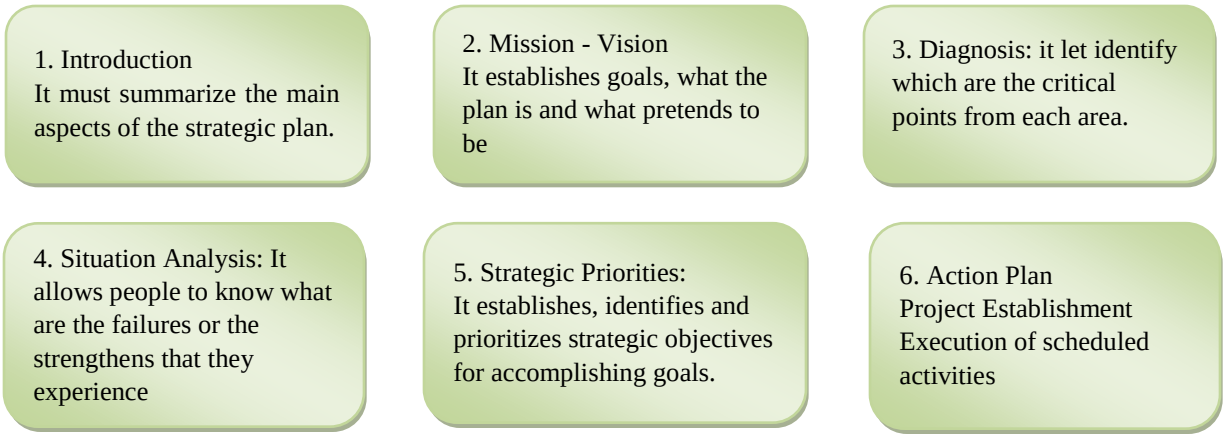


Figure 2. Structure for developing a strategic plan
Source: Guia de la Calidad
Retreived from: www.guiadelacalidad.com

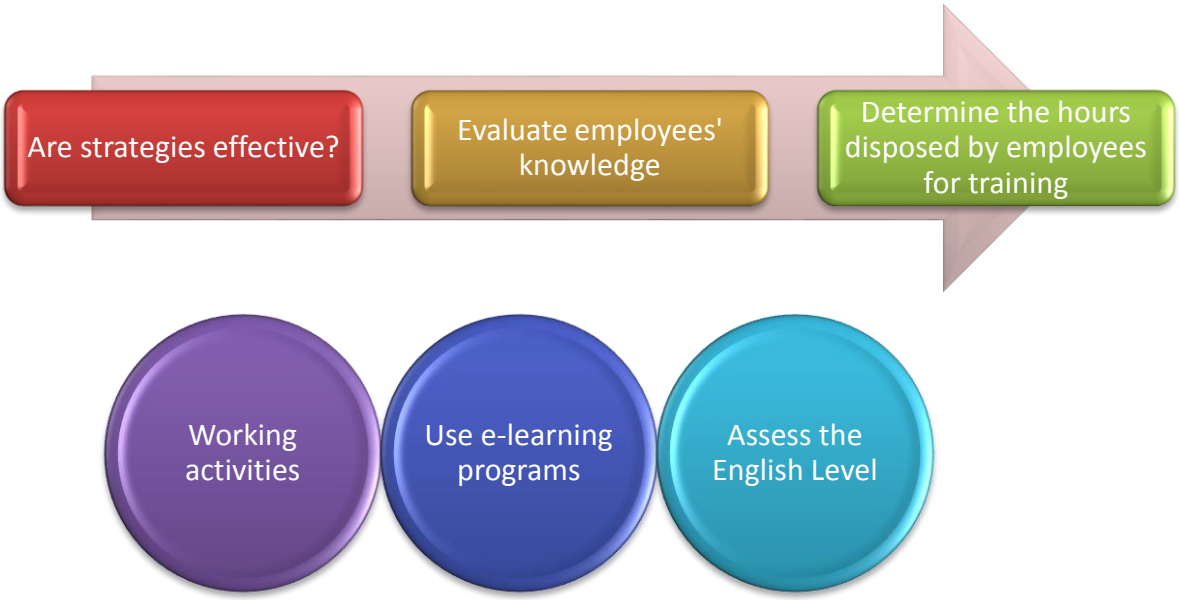
1. Description of the ranges and effects of this type of planning

A Strategic planning allows these effects chain where the primary statement brings as consequence new policies that could be used within a procedures manual from any type of company, the following four graphics are parts of a full diagram and would be described each for a complete understanding of all:

When a strategic plan is being applied the business strategies as initial step then it is necessary to have on the job training, checking how the employees would apply these

strategies and how all of them benefit their regular functions, and finally evaluate how the working time is being more effective and how the time is being approached.

The following diagrams show the three first phases when applying a strategic plan, there comes the effectiveness of the strategies, and are assessed in comparison with the past situation and the current work of the employees, and finally companies would be able to decide if the strategies can compound standardized processes.



Finally, this could be used as a base for controlling the implementation of this strategic plan; learning a language can be hard and difficult to establish how the employees are improving, but getting some statistics from the e-learning programs the company could be more focused on the weaknesses and the issues employees have with the autonomous learning process.

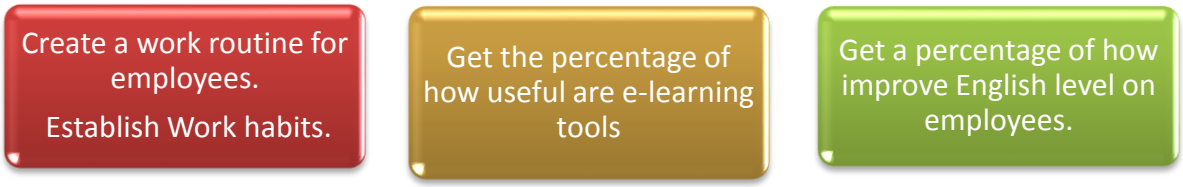


Figure 3. Effects of a strategic plan
Source: Guia de la Calidad
Retreived from: www.guiadelacalidad.com

2. Strategic plan influences within a company

A strategic plan includes different phases that try to establish appropriate and competent policies; those are easily applicable to the procedures related to employees' progress during their time working for companies. This means that to develop a strategic plan, the plan itself has to analyze which would be the most relevant strategies according to the autonomous learning, creating guidelines and work habits that support the companies' general view of their future plans.

The strategic plan developed in this research, understood as a roadmap promotes an English autonomous learning focused on the commercial area, this plan implies the following phases:

- **Quantitative, numerical objectives:** Those would set which are the results companies are expecting to get from the investment made on the plan
- **Exhibit phase:** it shows which policies and guidelines could be created to reach the goals

- **Timeframe:** this phase is about aligning the plan establishment with a budget structure setting the specific time to show results, compare, assess and implement corrective actions, this would include a corporative second language policy on the labor environment

Looking for a basis that could influence the learning process in companies, Camacho (2004) has established a well-known research finding methods to promote autonomous learning inside classrooms. Camacho (2004) highlighted electronic aids as one of the most successful ways for acquiring a new language, and also described that some activities that involve the relation between the learners after the virtual lessons helped to assess the learnt topics.

This research proposal is developed according to the lineament of Scharle and Szabó cited by Camacho (2004), which encourage learners to take active roles in their learning process, generating responsibility in all of them, comprehensive skills, and create some attitudes including motivation and self-monitoring covering cognitive and affective dimensions that at the end are fundamental factors which do not allow people to keep learning.

The method includes three phases: **1. Consciousness**, showing to the students their learning styles and how to use their skills for learning; **2. Change of attitudes**, this phase was conceived for introducing the students to the practical stage of their knowledge it means learning through experience; and **3. Roles transference** the students have the role of teachers they are responsible of what they are learning and understand why this is relevant for them. This useful research keep in mind coherent tools that are a compliment to the procedures in the commercial area, in fact the variables taken into account as part of the organizational

priorities are: professional development, education, access to the information, and cultural improvement, this undoubtedly contribute to new languages acquisition and learning.

Through auto-access language centers, as Camacho (2004) explained, are used strategies to develop skills implicitly without discussion with learners, merge the guides established by government and ministry of education with the theory of audio-visual input based on a logic programmed models for learning (Magee, Needham, Santos, Cohn, & Hogg, 2004). It keeps in mind these aspects at the time of writing a strategic plan up.

Thus, following the strategic plan definition and establishment, described above, this research pretends to be a comparative source in accordance with:

- Management of specific strategies aimed to use methods that include cognitive agent (learners) continuous models (programs) and inductive logic from the strategies proposed, to guarantee perceptual observations from the relation between symbols and images which would make the learners memorize in a completely autonomous way, vocabulary and business skills in new language, applied in commercial areas procedures.
- Company renewal: keeping in mind the corporative macro-processes (strategic macro-processes: strategic planning, communication management, platform of services regarding the company's commercial activity and management control), and observe how these elements compliment to each other with the development of strategies within the talent improvement program.

Additionally, the variables that affect enterprises have to be analyzed, as a result the plan could be included as part of administration procedures, it refers to a guideline that

contain strategic objectives, corporative strategies and operative strategies which would lead the plan application to be a profitable project.

In that sense, as the features of autonomous learning are being discovered nowadays the strategic plan includes pedagogical terms that could be interpreted as a proposal stimulus for learning and with the goal of improvement the target range of the commercial area.

The strategic plan looks for the improvement of communicative competence levels and takes to the rise up of new chances as those:

- New cultures encounters
- Collective corporative growing
- Equal conditions of learning and careers development
- Greater success of Colombian industries

The evaluation of the achievements reached within a particular period of time would demonstrate the business opportunities against the investment made by the company including the plan guidelines, this part would be considered as description as the strategic plan is just a proposal:

- Perform a monitoring phase on the working diagram establishing different skills defined by the strategic planning; as a result the corporative goals would work together with the plan goals, so at the end analyze the possible updates to that diagram to assure the execution of the general objectives of the proposed project.
- Expectations and needs examination
- Training and welfare activities about autonomous learning

- Performance review (professional development evaluation, discussion expectations and plan's accomplishments)

3. Usefulness, relevance and relation of strategic plans within the commercial corporative structure and the intercultural businesses

A strategic plan is considered as a methodology that is adopted for accomplishing goals and objectives, is used by any organization to plan how and where a company according to its mission and vision will be positioned, taking into account the behavior of global market.

The strategic plan establishment is huge help when defining goals for solving companies' issues, they are also important to turn weaknesses into opportunities, a strategic plan helps to identify and work on the threats that exist for a company, also contributes to the progress and development of an organization.

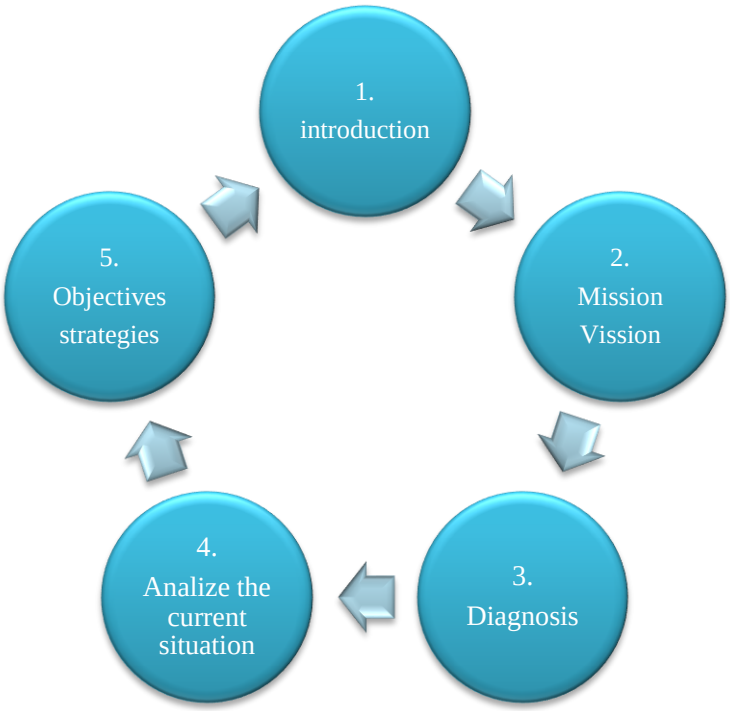


Figure 4. Stages of a strategic plan
Source: Guia de la Calidad
Retreived from: www.guiadelacalidad.com

As it is wide known a strategic plan is composed of six basic phases, as the following would be described:

- **Introduction:**

The introduction is the presentation of any proposal to carry out a strategic plan and briefly describes how to implement it. To develop a strategic plan is important to consider the values and beliefs of the company, in other words, the philosophy established by the enterprise. It is essential, to project the ideas that is intended to achieve and to expose the responsibilities and commitments to fulfill the strategic plan.

- **Mission:**

The mission is the function whom helps companies to highlight their fundamental factors and the establishment of this during the development of a strategic plan is because it is the reason why vision is fulfilled (Thompson, 2006).

The aspects to keep in mind in a strategic plan mission are:

- Plan Reason to be, why to establish a plan, and for what
- What is looking the strategic plan for?
- What does the plan pretend to be or represent within a company?
- Where exerts the activities the company?
- Which are the consequences of applying this type of planning within a company?

- **Vision:**

A vision refers to what the company pretends to achieve within a period of time by using a strategic plan, even though it is possible to relate it as the projections of companies, it tries to show how to solve the current issues, the vision also shows where they want to be in nearly future, this also names the long-term goals, in order to get a good position in the market or achieving other market segments.

The main purpose of the vision is to serve as a motivation for the achievement of objectives (Thompson, 2006).

The following aspects should be considered to make the vision of a strategic plan:

- View the company in the future, keeping in mind the aspect that produce the issues, in addition to consider how the company would be if those issues are solved

- Projecting the image of the company, how the strategic plan would improve this, does not matter if it is internal or external
- The activities that will be conducting the company and what it will offer in the future.

- **Diagnosis**:

It establishes the situation of a company, considering internal and external factors, this analysis is performed according to the goals of the mission. It pretends to find the root of the problem, and the strategic plan as a tool would try to solve it.

The purpose of making a diagnosis is to diminish the risks and threats that appear and affect the fulfillment of goals (Chaparro & Martínez, 2009).

Objectives of diagnosis are:

- To assess the failures of the company.
- To identify the needs of the company and improvement options.
- To propose strategies according to the needs of the organization.

The diagnosis is performed through SWOT analysis in order to identify the main threats and weaknesses as well as strengths and opportunities, then it gives as result an action plan in order to increase the improvement options.

- **Analysis of the current situation:**

Based on the diagnosis obtained through SWOT, this type of analysis assesses the aspects that must be implemented on the action plan to determine which the potential risks may appear and how they can be mitigated.

The SWOT analysis identifies weaknesses, opportunities, strengths and threats of a company:

Figure 5. The components of a SWOT analysis

The structure of the SWOT analysis seeks to mitigate the aspects described above and to take advantage of the good point the company has, for this reason is performed the following classification:

Figure 6. Internal and External Factors' Analysis

According to previous information, the SWOT is conformed in two parts, internal analysis and external analysis. The internal analysis refers to the strengths and weaknesses, as it determines which factors of the company could be controlled; in contrast to the external analysis, it refers to opportunities and threats that exist in the market, these aspects are not controlled by the company.

The structure of a SWOT analysis should list the following data, when it refers to the internal analysis:

- Which are the aspects that the company is stronger than competitors?
- Which are the aspects that the company believes that competitors are better?

- **Strategic Aims:**

As explained in the previous section, once situation is analyzed, the objectives are established it follows a structure in order to prioritize the most critical issues that require attention in first instance.

Strategic objectives are aimed for solving the shortcomings of a company according to the diagnosis performed. These objectives have to be measurable and should have a term to be accomplished; additionally, it is convenient to control this fulfillment by monitoring, this to determine the effectiveness of objectives.

- **Action's plan:**

Once defined aspects to improve is proposed an action plan which determined:

- Schedule of activities
- Resources
- Responsibilities
- Methods for Monitoring and assessing

An action plan is the establishment of tasks this is given to each person according to the proposed strategies as solutions for encountered problems. The deadline for the fulfillment of the tasks should be short and should be defined.

The action plan defines the following questions:

- What?
- How?
- When?

It also establishes the people that will perform the tasks. To fulfill the action plan should be defined the following parameters:

- Objectives
- Date for Compliance Task

- Resources for performing tasks with quality.
- Determine the specific place for carrying out the tasks.
- Financial Resources
- Establish processes to carry out the tasks
- Evaluate the processes for determining results
- Evaluate outcome

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

A. Type of Research

Quantitative Research

This methodology was used during the development of this research to determine the feasibility of this proposal due to it was applied a statistic analysis to quantify the results of what people need to learn English and why they are not able to learn.

It refers to the systematic empirical research which collects and analyzes data on variables of social phenomena in this case the difficulties during an English learning process and the objective is to develop and employ mathematical models as the statistics to get results, those diagrams will be shown below with the detailed results.

The following are some characteristics shown from this type of research:

- It uses a tool for collecting data, in this case it was applied a Survey.
- The results from this instrument (survey) are used to quantify data.
- It can be generated statistical outcomes from collected data.
- Any hypothesis establishment does not apply.
- Methodology is based on analysis of results.

In addition, the tool implemented in this project is a quantitative statistic, this tool intends to find the different causes of problem, and to achieve it a sample was taken however it would be described below.

1. Research Methodology: Research Exchange - Explanatory

This project is based on parameters of explanatory research because it describes or raises the problem (the improvement of English level for companies and employees in commercial areas through autonomous learning) and tries to explain which behavior caused this problem: Difficulty while practicing self-directed learning and lack of language proficiency.

Hypothesis is part of the methodology, however, it applies to projects that have as base theories under assumptions and it requires method of observation and deduction, these features are part of scientific research, therefore, this hypothesis part is not applied to this project, as it has not been developed a scientific research, due to this project is based on the Explanatory method (cause-effect), (Morales, 2012).

The methodology used in this project is quantitative and its purpose is to provide alternatives for mitigating causes of problem. This research seeks answers about the facts that cause the research, that's why this type of research is perfectly adjusted to this project as being ideal for finding the mentioned causes of problem (Sabino, 1992).

B. Population and Sample selection criteria

As the main goal was to establish contact with the real society which would be affected by the research developed, it has been established the general population as follows:

The strategic plan establishment pretends to become a useful tool within the learning, acquiring and business English skills development processes inside the commercial area context exclusively.

It has been chosen as population the commercial area staff from Colombian companies which need English as tool during the performance of their functions and that need English to improve their quality jobs, keeping in mind their commonness of their life styles need of English and lack of time.

For this purpose, the sampling technique used was a non-probabilistic one, including both topics intentional and casual as was established by researchers from La Universidad Autonoma de Mexico (González, Calleja, Lopez, Padrino, & Puebla, 2009).

It means, the casual technique was preferred due to people who answered the survey was the easiest for contacting but that accomplished the characteristics above (commercial area staff needing English to perform their normal job tasks) and also intentional because they fulfill the profile required and would be a complete source of information that fit perfect with the strategic plan.

The sample chosen were the Corferias employees, a company based in Bogota, this company receives thousands of foreigners every year from a large range of sectors due to the trade shows they organize; even more specifically the staff from commercial area, which are used to deal with foreigners not only for simple questions as wondering locations but also for the internationalization plan the company has; this includes usual negotiations as dealing with exhibitors and visitors.

The survey was applied to 33 employees from Corferias which has 55 commercial area employees. Covering approximately a range of ages from 23 to 35 years old, being a significant sample for this research, all of them are bachelors from different careers business administration, marketing and also international and public relations.

This research is looking for the most general perspective from each of one in a way that their life styles are completely different from each other and not relevant being a representative of the target that would use this strategic plan, identifying English needs and current skill for the company and themselves improvement.

C. Collecting Data Instrument

A survey involves the collection of information from a specific individuals sample through their answers from questions, the survey was chosen because its versatility, efficiency and low cost.

Surveys are different as many variables can be measured and data can be collected from many people and depending on the survey design, relatively quickly, as an example, nowadays thanks virtual tools or pages it is easier to deliver the surveys to the target and have the results immediately when they answer.

A survey of 11 questions was applied, where 9 were closed questions and 2 had multiple-choice questions, all of them in Spanish as one objective was to assure the quality of the results, some of the employees do not have the sufficient level for answering a survey completely in English, specially the open questions that need arguments, in this way the Spanish survey contribute to have exact data, assuring the correct use of quantitative methodology.

The survey was opened from February 3rd to February 15th into a website specialized in surveys application, where people can access (without having to create an account) and answer the survey. The survey link was sent by email to the target people and in a certain period of time it was closed to download the results.

1. Methodological structure

Initially, a test of 9 questions with only one answer and 2 questions with multiple choice options were applied, for having a total of 11 questions.

The test was implemented through web from 03/02/2014 for a period of thirteen days as it was before explained.

This tool helped to determine (according to previous investigation) the Viability of autonomous Learning for improving business English skills of target population and need to use the language within commercial areas for companies and its employees, with following results:

QUESTION # 1

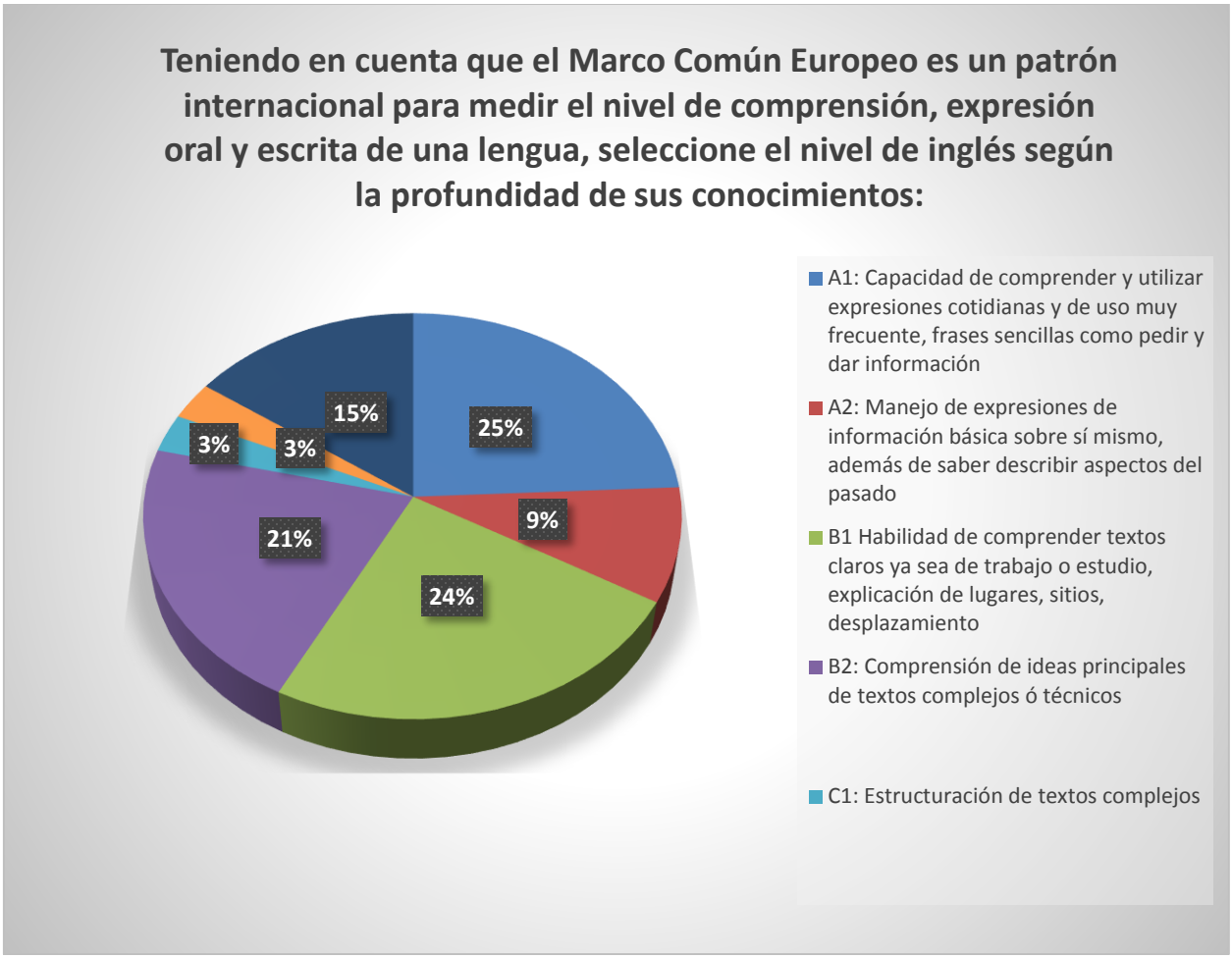


Figure 7. Outcome indicator of the English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standards, sample taken within Corferias

This question seeks to ascertain the level of English proficiency of workers. According to the chart, the highest percentage represents people who need to step up their English because they have basic level (A1), and in second place are people who have level B2. This indicates the need to extend the concepts and practices for language proficiency.

Moreover, this result shows the importance of English as an essential business tool for any company even more in the commercial sector where it is necessary to establish public international relations to expand business opportunities, however as the statistic shows the

highest percentage of people are not able to engage a business conversation in English according to the standards described before. This result is only a possibility to potentiate strengths and work on weaknesses of workers giving them the tools for improving English through practice.

QUESTION # 2

Figure 8. Outcome indicator of the learning methods describing each one based on professional and academic experience, sample taken within Corferias

This result demonstrates that communication is more relevant than grammar, also it can be deduced that Practice is essential as learning methodology and can be useful for drawing-up the strategic plan. The graph also shows that learning methods exposed above such as visual and active learning have on average the same level of importance (an average of 15% to 19%). In first place it is found the auditory learning method with 19%, this allows the possibility to perform different interactive activities involving videos, documentaries and music, making the fact of learning English easy and interesting according to the students' preferences. Then, it is found the visual learning system with 15%, which is very important because through this method is easier to associate terms, definitions with images representing meanings, by using drawings, flowcharts and summary tables is possible to learn words and concepts. The following method of learning is practice with 28%, this method has great importance due to through continuous exercises of communication, grammar and listening, and the students acquire confidence in the language by having real experiences where they are pushed to use the language, this also improves the fluency when speaking.

Another method of learning that resulted interesting among people who answered the survey is active learning with 19%, because this methodology implements activities in group, this helps to improve the interaction among students, who most of the times are shy to participate or say something in a foreign language, they could practice together, improve together and correct each other's mistakes. In addition, there is reflective learning with 11%, it is more difficult has a higher degree of difficulty because it requires data analysis such as statistical analysis, management reports, and technical data, among others; and all of them while learning a topic, people find it so hard that usually stop learning for being worried of the data analysis.

The last learning method is the theoretical, even though it is not considered as the most necessary when learning, it is important because the theory creates a basis and a context for the usual whys specially when grammar issues and helps to solve concerns that may appear in a learning process. And finally, it is important to highlight the 2% of people who are not identified with any of the methods, maybe a further research and interview with them could strengthen the strategies for autonomous learning.

QUESTION # 3

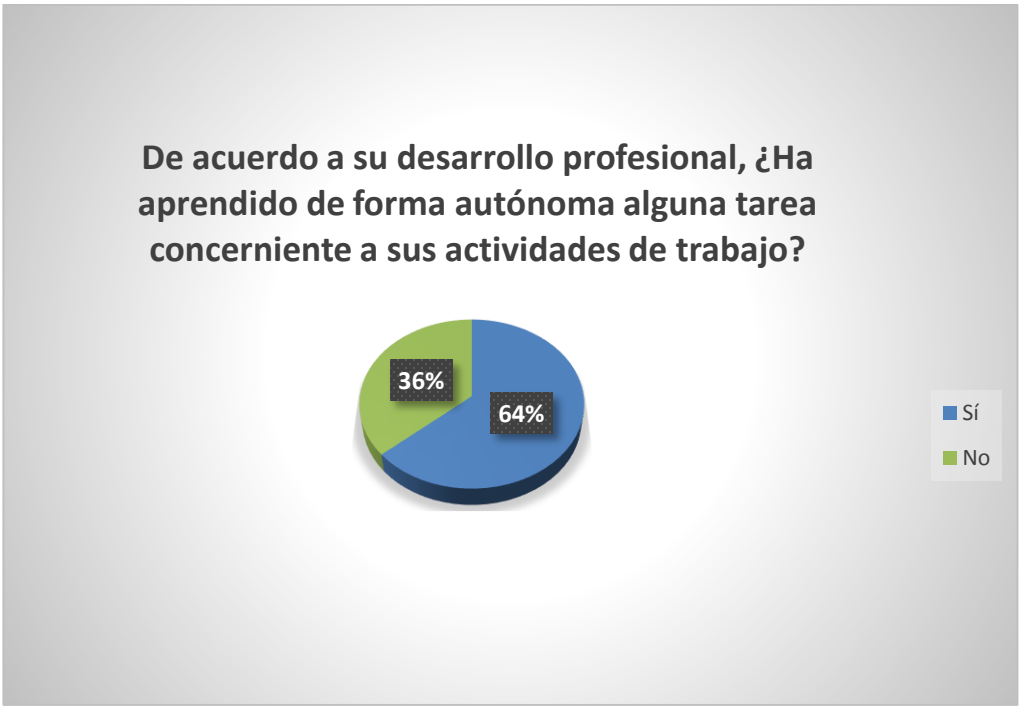


Figure 9. Outcome indicator of the actual autonomous learning during work journeys, sample taken within Corferias

Result confirms it, most people (64% against 36%) learnt something by their own decision, any work activity even the most minimum. This can be taken as reference to motivate autonomous learning of a language applied when employees are developing their regular job activities.

It is a general tendency when the autonomous learning topic come to the light that every single employee have learnt something on their own and specially from their mistakes, some activities performed on the job training are autonomously learned; however it is clear that a strong knowledge basis is only obtained if the person decides which strategy use to assure his/her success, besides the responsibility they acquire to do their tasks with quality, this principle could be applied when learning language applied in commercial areas like a mission the employees have to accomplish with some indicators.

QUESTION # 4

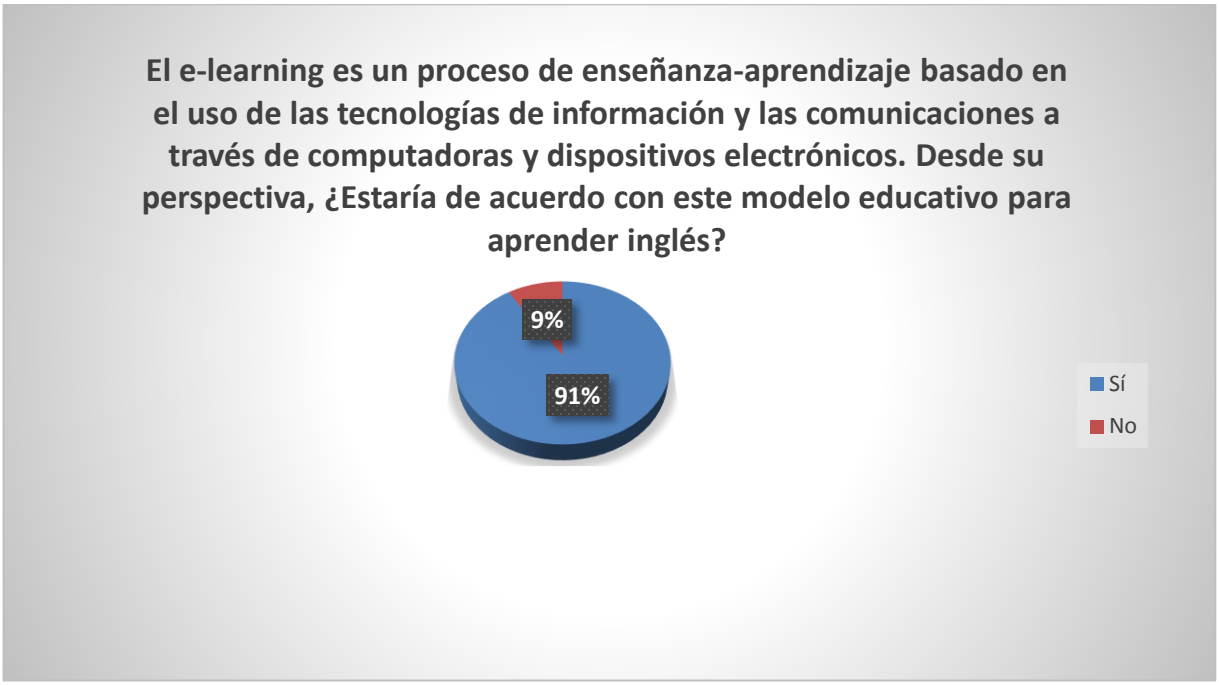


Figure 10. Outcome indicator of the e-learning process for learning English and acquiring different skill through it, sample taken within Corferias

91% of people are agree with use of technology as learning tool, this result helps to establish how important is technology nowadays as one of the factors which inspired the proposal of a strategic plan in this project.

Technology has become an important part in the lives of people as it facilitates access information, conduct transactions, improve communication with people and foreigners, as well as many other activities everywhere according to the needs of the user, this is great help as it is not necessary to move somewhere to study and all the contest will be available all the time, a person also learns how to solve his/her doubts while learning.

QUESTION # 5

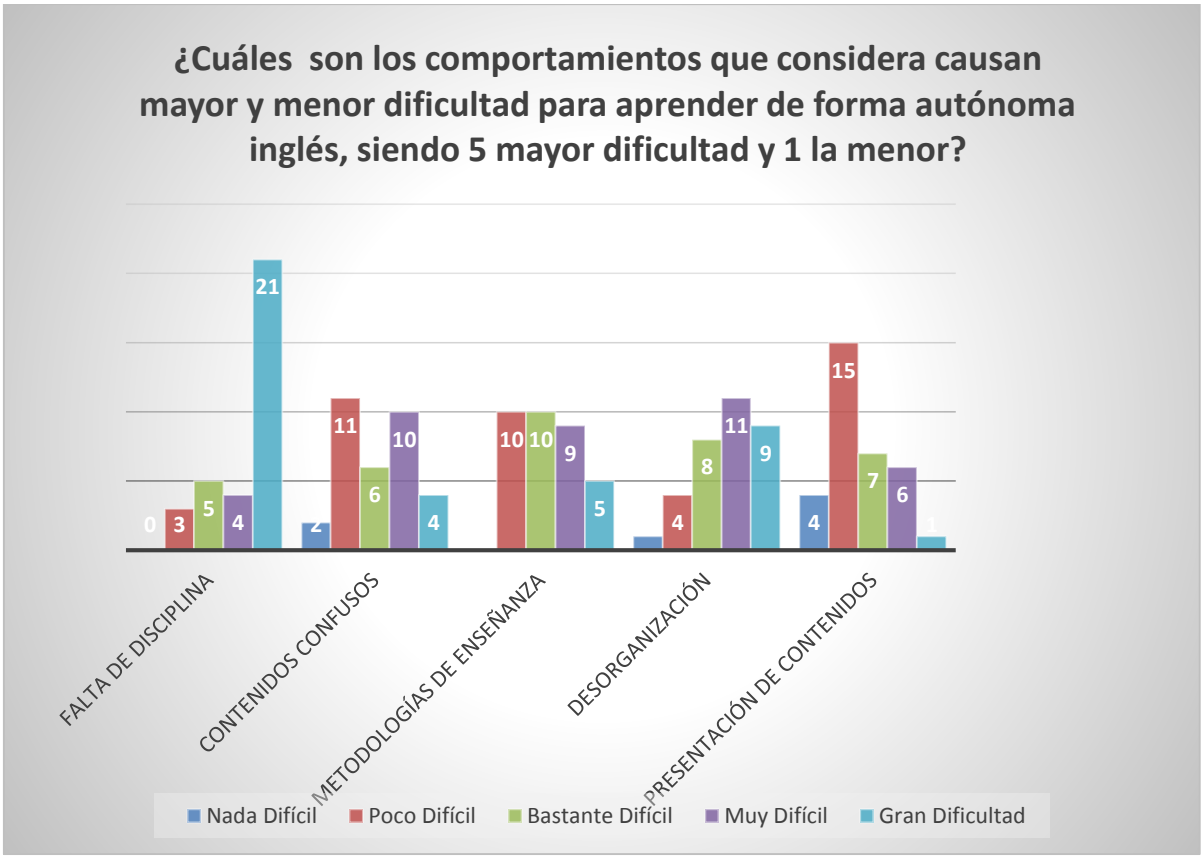


Figure 11. Outcome indicator of the behaves that difficult the autonomous learning process into the highest and the lowest scale, sample taken within Corferias

This question pretends to find the obstacles for an effective learning process, from the autonomous perspective which is mostly the reason why people usually feel demotivated, leave their current courses or simply rejected them. These are the lack of discipline with

76.14% followed by contents presentation 64.71% this identifies the difficulties for learning, because the rhythm of life the style and behaves leaves Colombian people with no discipline unless is something they are being forced to do, because if they do not they will face bad consequences. The plan could introduce a change of mind including a different perspective from the company to its employees, and also emphasize the benefits of acquiring and improving English skills.

QUESTION # 6

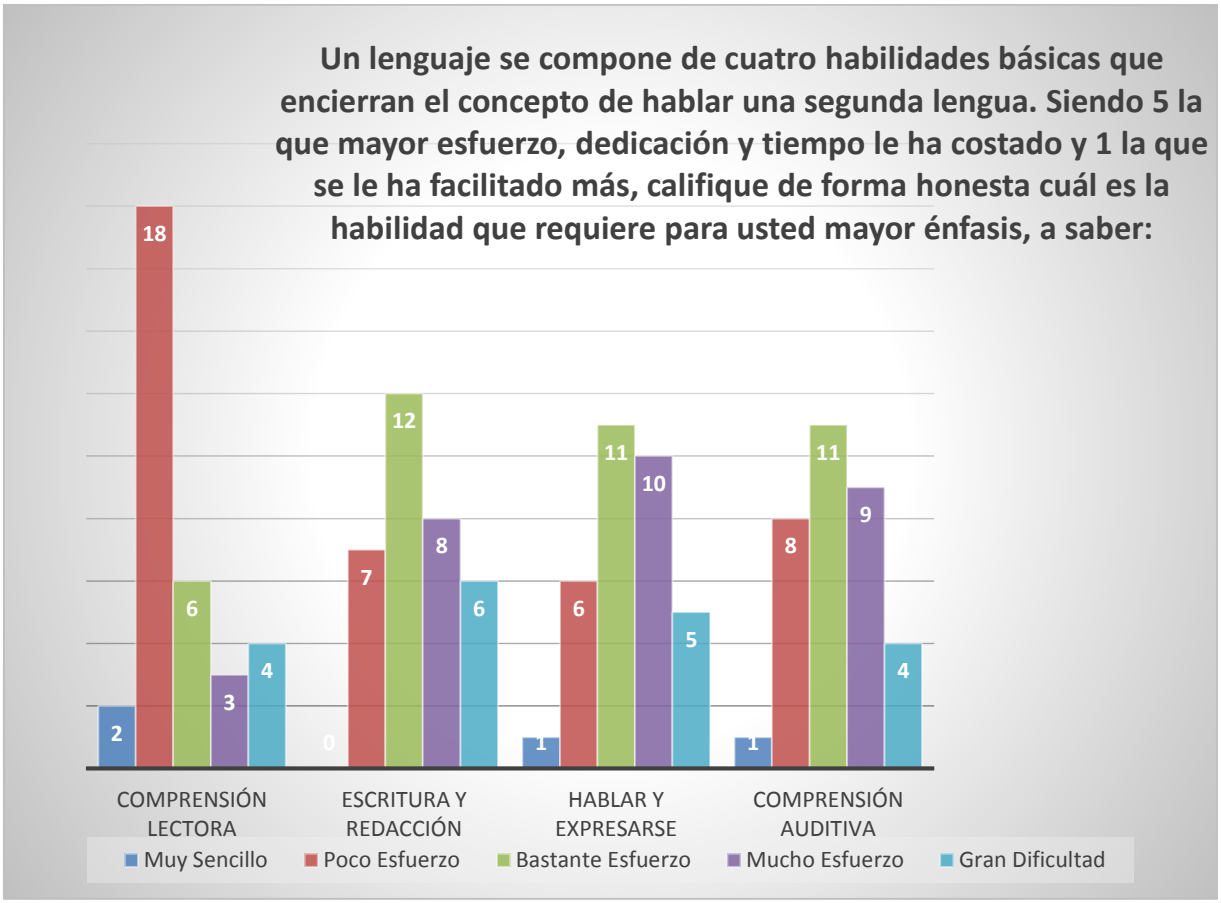


Figure 12. Outcome indicator of the hardest language common skills into the English learning process, sample taken within Corferias

This question let population target know the language regular skills which force them to get them big efforts more than the other, which can be complemented with the reasons why they do not take advantages of the autonomous learning process. As the graphic represents reading comprehension 72.73% and talking and expressing 63.64% are the highest per cents of difficulties which is pretty obvious talking is a consequences of listening and as well reading so this aims the project as gave the focus of the tools for improve learning.

Although the four skills are important, the result helps us to have a focus about which aspect is possible to work in each person, on the other hand it is also necessary strengthen communication in English as it is one of the aspects that generates greater difficulty to students.

QUESTION # 7

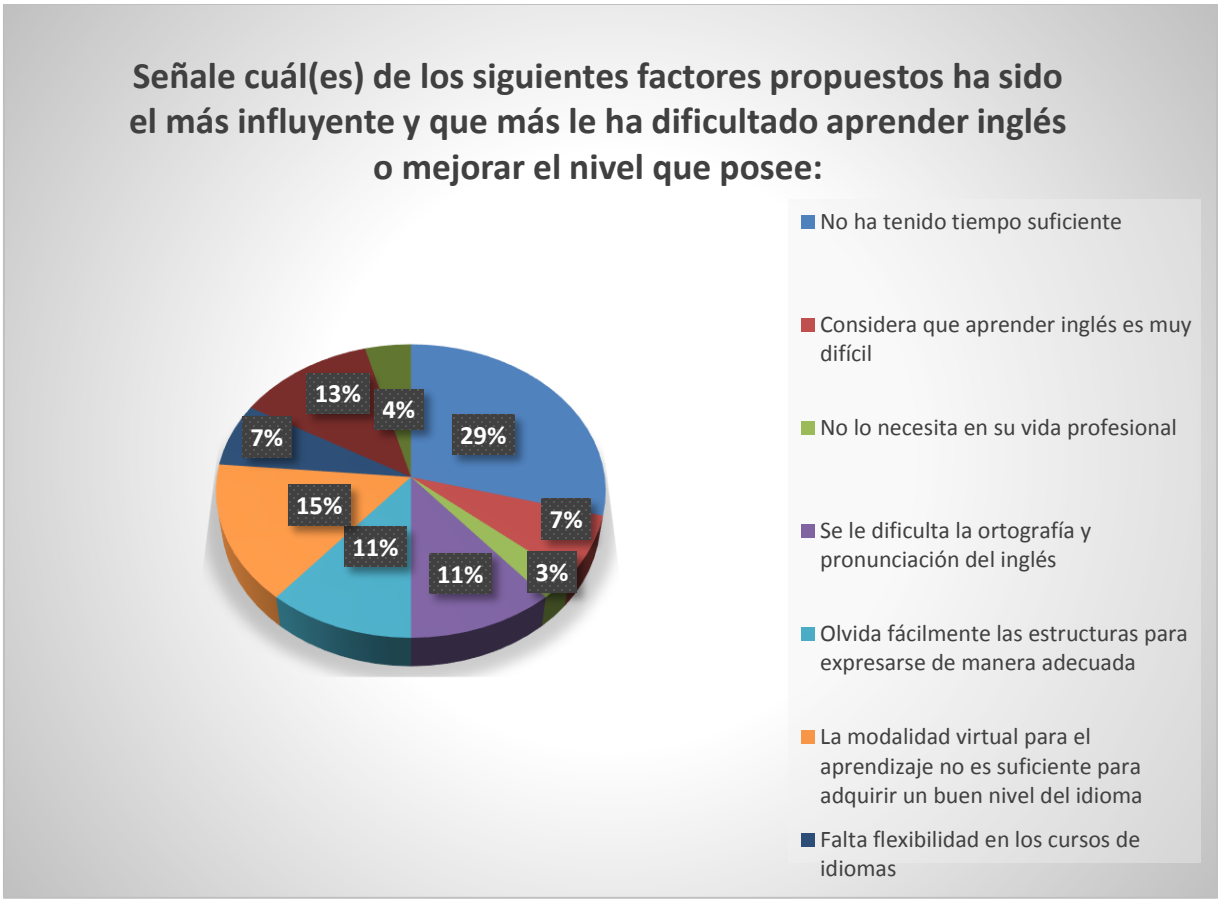


Figure 13. Outcome indicator of the factor which influence the most when people is trying to learn or improve their English level, sample taken within Corferias

As well as the questions above, this tries to go deep in the difficulties, why is so hard to study by themselves if people apparently have all the tools they need, lack of time as main factor with 29% and the virtual tools which are not considered to be enough for acquiring a language 15% denotes the highest per cents. Taking time from working hours would be the taking care of responsibility company new policy. Because people need to get new habits applied in their social lives and also to find the advantages of e-learning and ICTs as the new educational tools.

QUESTION # 8

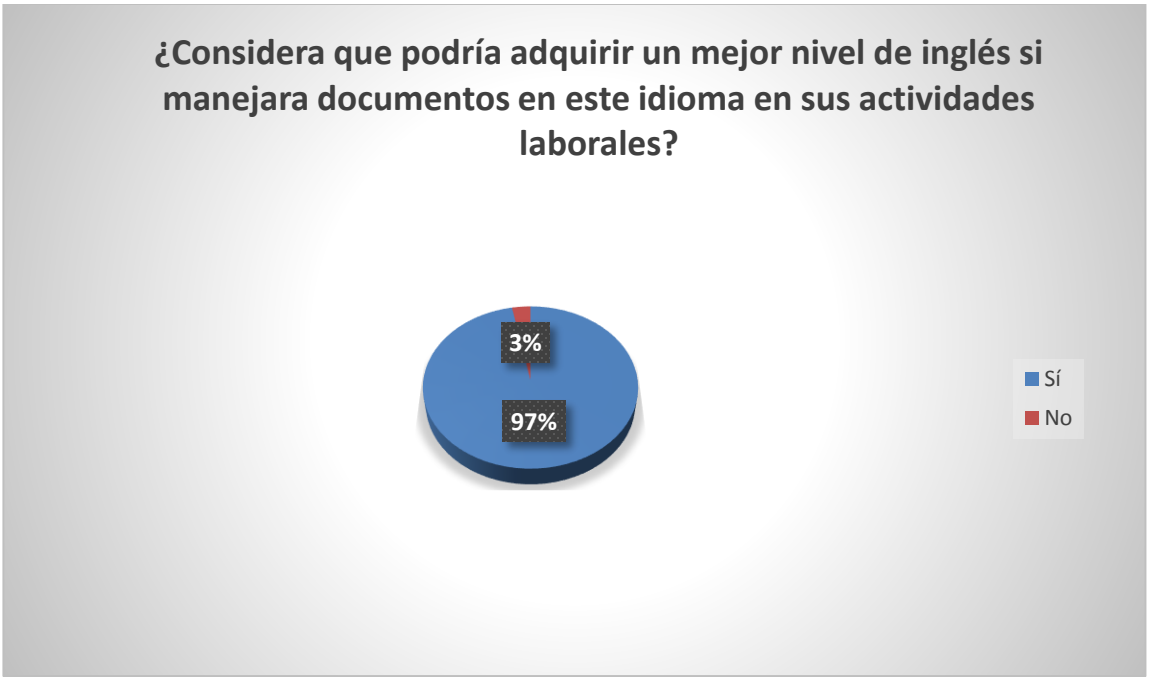


Figure 14. Outcome indicator of the possibility that represents managing documents in English during a normal work journey, sample taken within Corferias

This question tries to present in advance a strategy which could be perfectly applied inside a company, as a language policy. Having the 97% choosing yes due to practice and regular behaviors of use the language are the best ways for learning and also would support the e-learning system, as the employees would feel improved their job qualities having new challenges every day. This fits perfect with the commercial area as long as more use of English more vocabulary, skills and how to deal with foreigner business culture are the development of any career inside a company.

QUESTION # 9

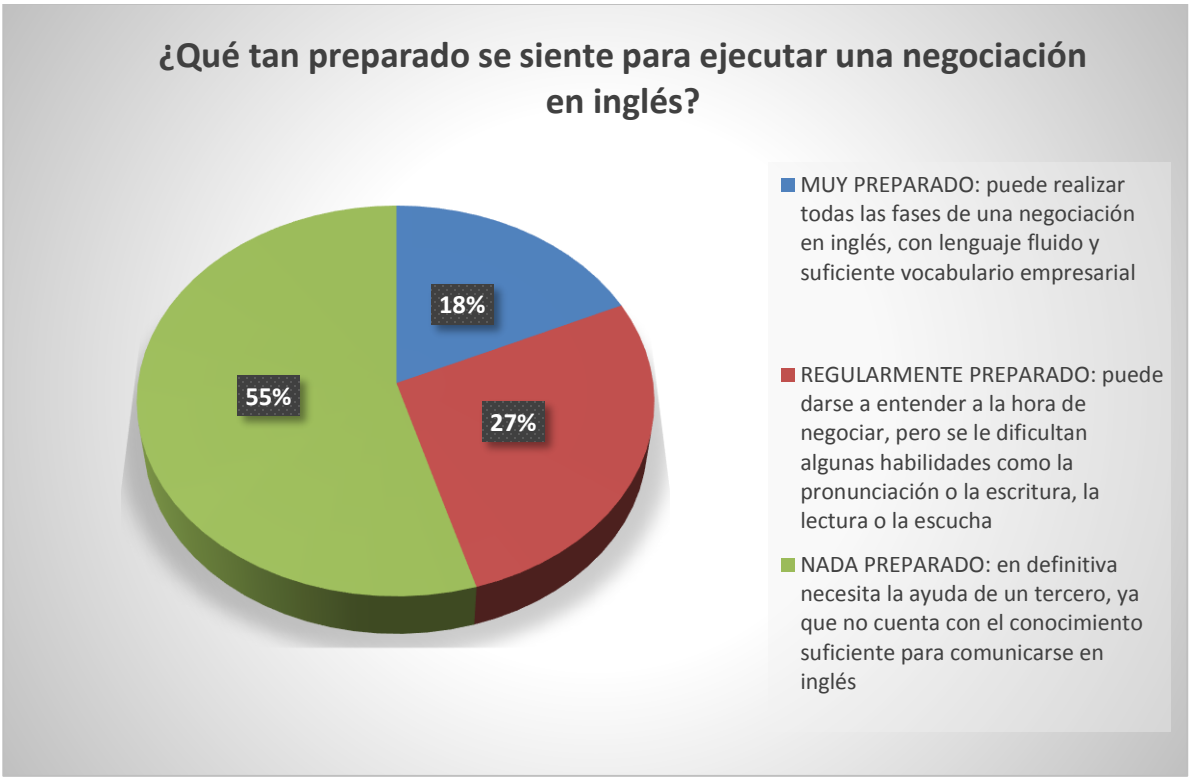


Figure 15. Outcome indicator of how employees feel when they are facing with a negotiation in English, sample taken within Corferias

This question was asked in order to know, how much preparation people feel they have for a negotiation entirely in English. Considering that many of them, work in a specialized area it is necessary to know if they are able to deal with this situation and know how prepared they would be doing this activity. As can be seen from the chart, only 6 people are very well prepared for negotiation and this represents only 18% of the whole commercial area employees, a really low rate. But the other 27 people are not enough prepared for a negotiation this resumes the 27% of employees with little preparation and the 55% without any English skill for facing a negotiation in English, it indicates that this skill needs to be

strengthened and improved; there is where the strategic plan will take place and guide people to feel sure and enough trained to make a negotiation for themselves.

QUESTION # 10

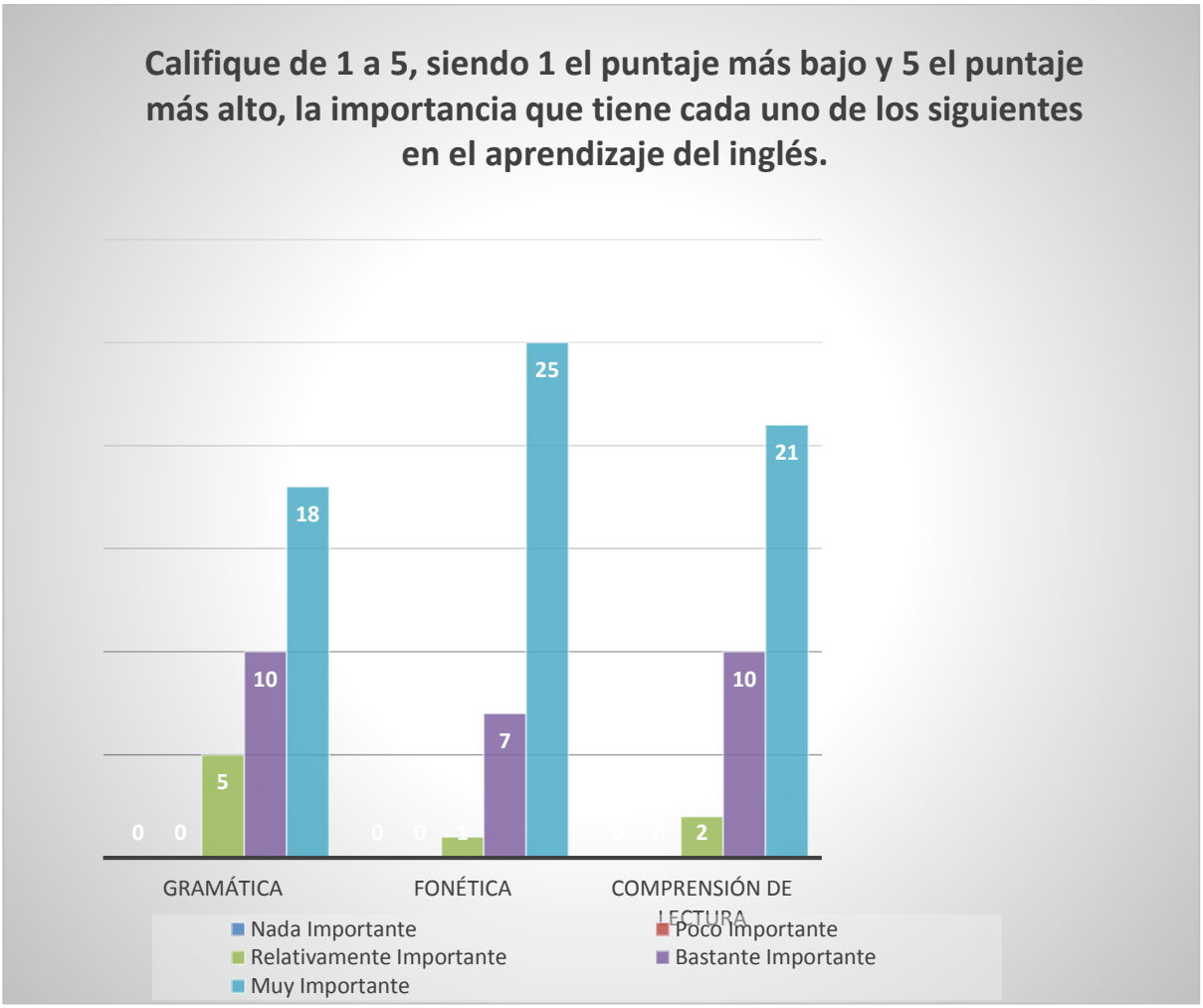


Figure 16. Outcome indicator of the importance that represent the hardest elements such as grammar, phonetic and reading comprehension, which are usually ignored, sample taken within Corferias

The results showed that for the interviewed people, Phonetics is the most important skill in the English learning process but grammar is not so much, however what is wanted to

emphasize is how interviewed people do not see the same importance that all the factors have when learning a new language.

But if we analyze every item separately all the aspects are important for the employees, the first example of it is grammar where 84.85% chose very important for the learning process, then phonetics 96.97% as very important item to keep in mind when learning and finally 93.94% for reading comprehension, this is one of the basis of this proposal people will see all the skills as a unit, an ensemble they should learn together all the same time, this is an important objective that will be detailed later.

QUESTION # 11

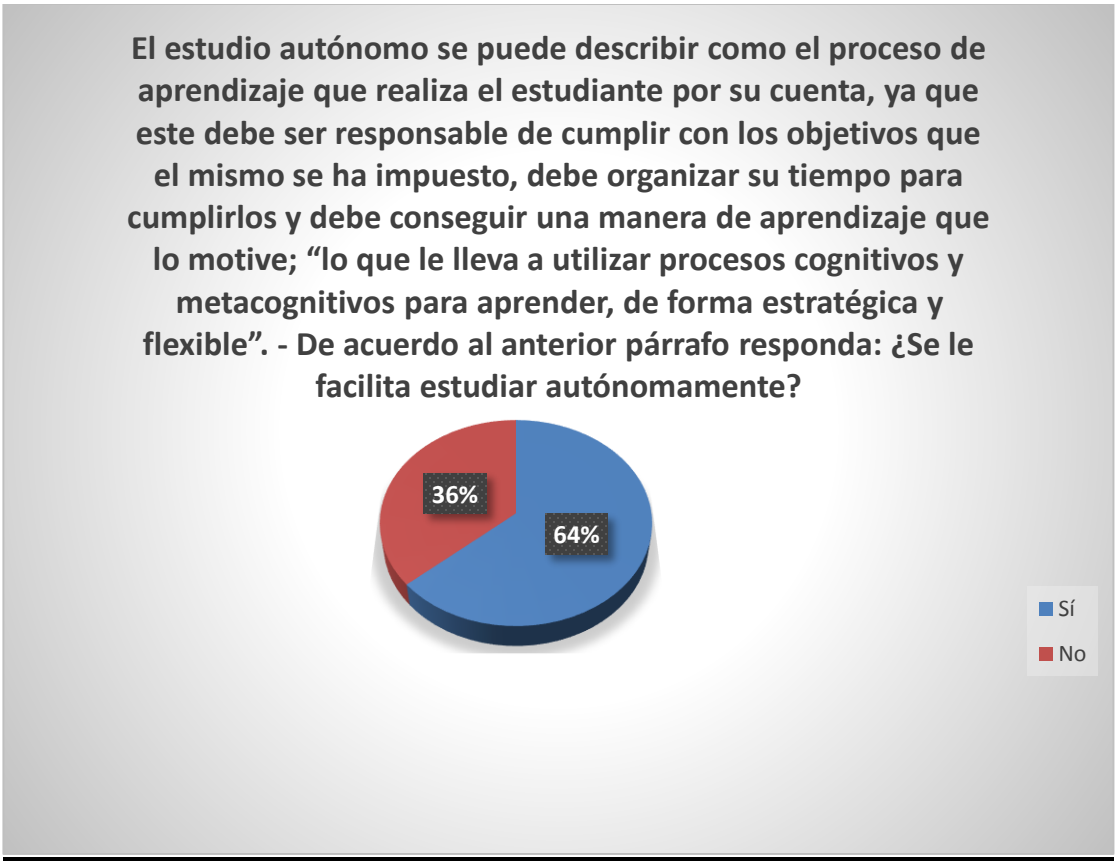


Figure 17. Outcome indicator of the autonomous learning and tries to find out if people are able to learn through this methodology, sample taken within Corferias

It was found that the 64% of people answered that is easy for them to practice autonomous learning which means that the strategic plan will be so easy to follow for them and even they can accomplish the objective of learning or improving a language in less time and all by themselves, having real experiences while working.

But the other 36% of people said is not that easy for them, so the strategic plan is the solution to be able to handle electronic aids and it will be also helpful as a guide to acquire different knowledge and skills.

In this question it is really obvious the awareness of the employees about the importance of autonomous learning and also that they are able to take responsibilities for their own learning process, therefore this strategic plan proposal would be carried out easily as long as people keep in their minds how useful could be for their jobs and how many benefits they could get by having a good English level for commercial agreements.

D. Research Results

According to results obtained it is possible to establish a cause and effect relationship of problem:

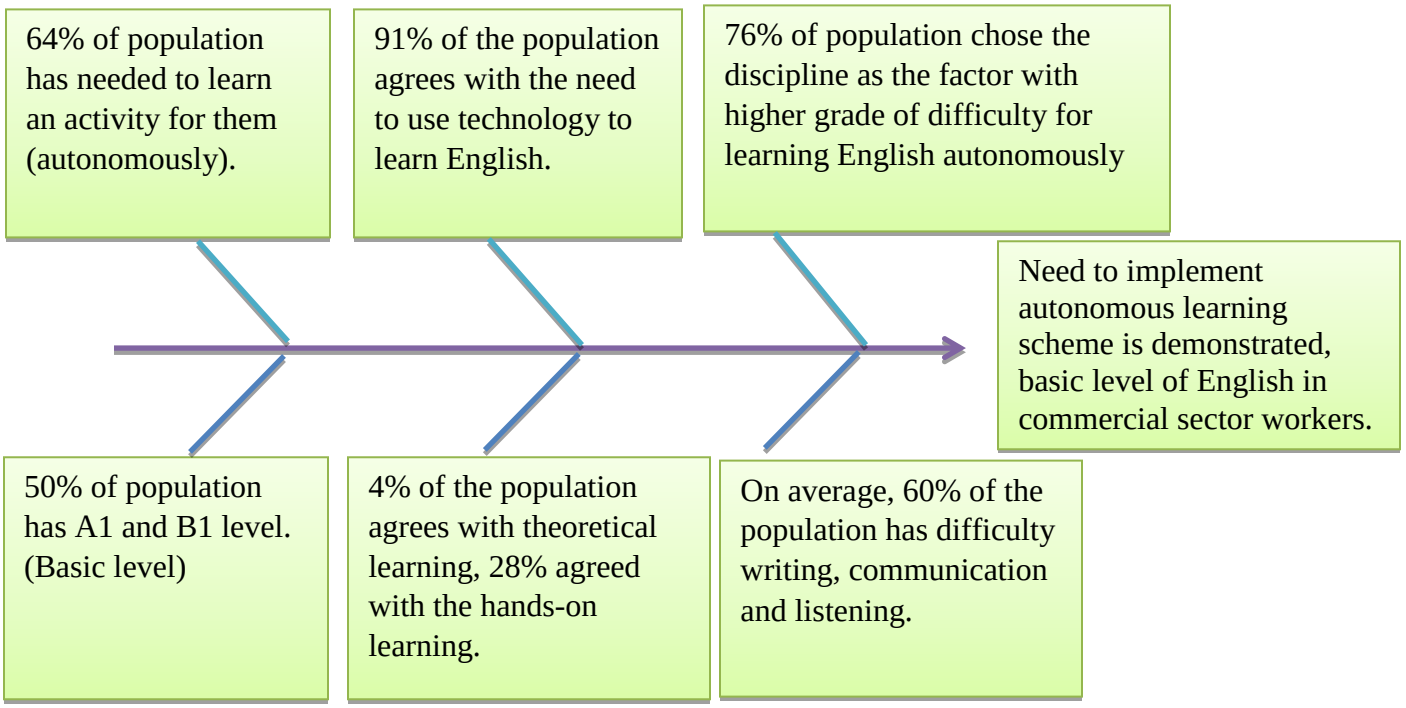


Figure 18. Results of the research about which is the English level of employees

Chapter Four

STRATEGIC PLAN PRESENTATION

A. Statement of the Strategic Plan Phases

This section of the research would describe the parts of a strategic plan, each one has been developed during the whole project, and has used the theoretical framework as basis for developing its concepts. In addition, it pretends to be a proposal as this plan is not going to be executed. It also pretends to show a systematical approach as business English Skills has become a priority into Colombian companies, especially inside commercial areas as they are constantly contacting foreigners.

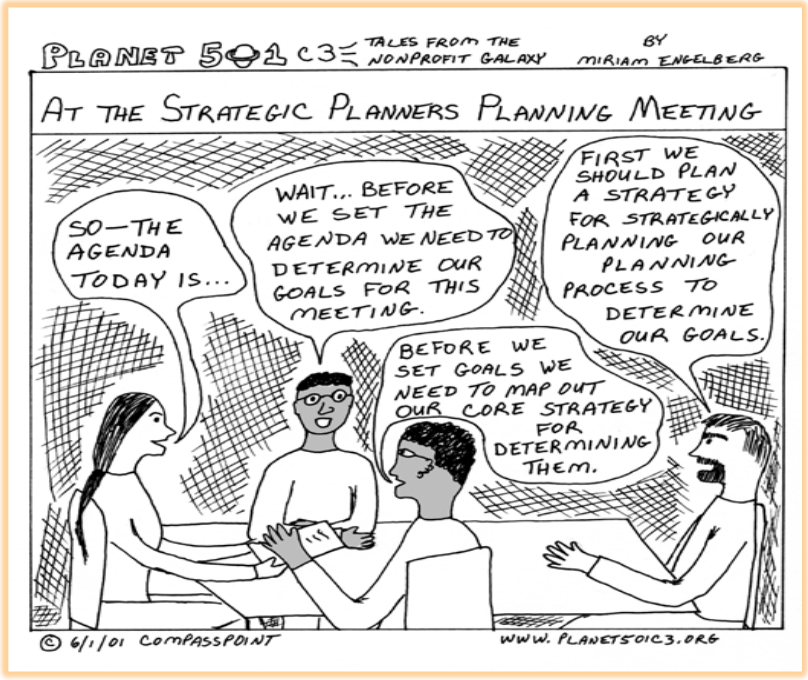


Figure 19. Planning meeting for a Strategic Plan Establishment by Miriam Engelberg

Source: www.compasspoint.org/planet501c3
Retreived from: Planet 501c3 (2001)

1. Situation analysis

Initially a strategic plan development has to be focused on the results of the survey results above, due to from there it is obtained the required information for performing a SWOT analysis. According to those results, it was found that people values more practical, active, auditory and visual learning, these learning tools could be used as the basic techniques for having motivated students and it is possible for them to acquire English skills a bit easier than other kind of students. Just as it was described in the survey people would like to have some other responsibilities at work such as managing documents in English, opening the possibility on being aware of how important practice in the workplace is and it likewise could improve their confidence and this would evidence that they are more prepared to face any situation that requires English Business Skills.

From these results it is also important to note that people is interested on learning and improving their English Level by studying independently, however many of them have some problems at the time of being actually studying and it is due to the lack of discipline and organization, along with it is added the lack of time as the sample pointed in the survey.

An important part which is necessary to highlight from collected results, is that potential English students do not keep in mind the 4 main skills (Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing) as a unit to learn English, from there spread lot of issues out like for them phonetics and reading comprehension are more important aspects than grammar, through the strategic plan they would recognize these aspects above would be recognized as equally important and studied as a unit rather than separately.

2. Situation diagnosis

The diagnosis is developed based on a SWOT analysis (presented below), which attempts to design viable strategies, which would be complemented by an action plan; both could be implemented in further researches. Taking into account the autonomous methodologies applied to people and into training programs form Colombian companies.

The next step is to gather all this information and make a SWOT analysis, where deeply will be known the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that may encounter the person and or company when implementing the plan, it will also guide students through an action plan explaining them the activities to achieve the goal of learning and improve their English level.

3. General and specific objectives

General Objective

To consolidate strategies and a management model for improving employees' level of English from commercial areas through autonomous learning tools as a benefit for companies in relation to time, resources and competitiveness.

Specific Objectives

- To identify weaknesses and threats people experience when try to learn English in order to implement strategies in these aspects.
- To recognize people's strengths like abilities and skills related to autonomous learning methodology.
- To propose technological aids as tools for providing learning alternatives.

- To execute a SWOT structure analysis as part of the strategic plan, as it will identify the people's skills for learning English and also it will be useful for implementing autonomous learning methods by identifying aspects as weaknesses and threats.

4. Strategies for autonomous English learning – SWOT analysis

This strategic plan looks for make easier the process of autonomous English learning, using as main strategy the development of a SWOT analysis, which would find skills of employees and reinforce weaknesses and threats that may appear. However, there are other studies on the same subject (autonomous learning through SWOT), but none has been focused on learning a second language, applying it in commercial procedures.

- **General (SWOT) Objective**

To identify strengths and weaknesses of employees who want to improve their English skills, likewise threats that may hinder learning process and the opportunities that can be exploited for making easier the autonomous English learning.

- **Specific (SWOT) Objective**
    - To analyze strengths and weaknesses of employees for implementing strategies relevant for an action plan design.
    - To identify threats or risks to employees (external factors), that should be considered in the course of their learning.
    - To use the weaknesses as motivating factor, that is to say, submit the weaknesses as challenges to improve the level of English through autonomous learning.

- To implement resources such as technology and mass media as opportunities to facilitate autonomous learning of English.

Methodology

The obtained results from the quantitative measurement of the sample taken within Corferias, will be considered a reference for establishing weaknesses, strengths, opportunities and threats of employees through a SWOT analysis. Then the obtained analysis from the SWOT matrix will establish strategies, which could be applied through an action plan proposal.

SWOT analysis development

Nowadays, SWOT analysis matrixes are used inside companies as a management tool, due to it generates action plans with successful outcomes, as it make proposals come true. One advantage of the SWOT analysis is that it is easy to use; the format is simple and can be applied to a variety of situations, people and events for solving issues. In Addition, for the correct development of the matrix these aspects are being considered: strengths and weaknesses correspond to internal situations of a company and opportunities and threats refer to external situations. (Sanabria, 2011).

In this project the strengths and weaknesses will be taken as the existing people's skills, such as: knowledge, skills, attitudes and potential to carry out the strategic plan. Also, opportunities and threats will be taken as external factors, in this case: Opportunities are potential resources provided to employees, guaranteeing a successful autonomous English learning process, and threats are captured from constraints or risks that may exist. (Nicholls, Thoburn, Crecy, & Smart, 2007, 2008).

- **Question #1**

This question is intended to identify the employees' level of English, taken from the sample chosen in Corferias, following the Common European Framework standards.

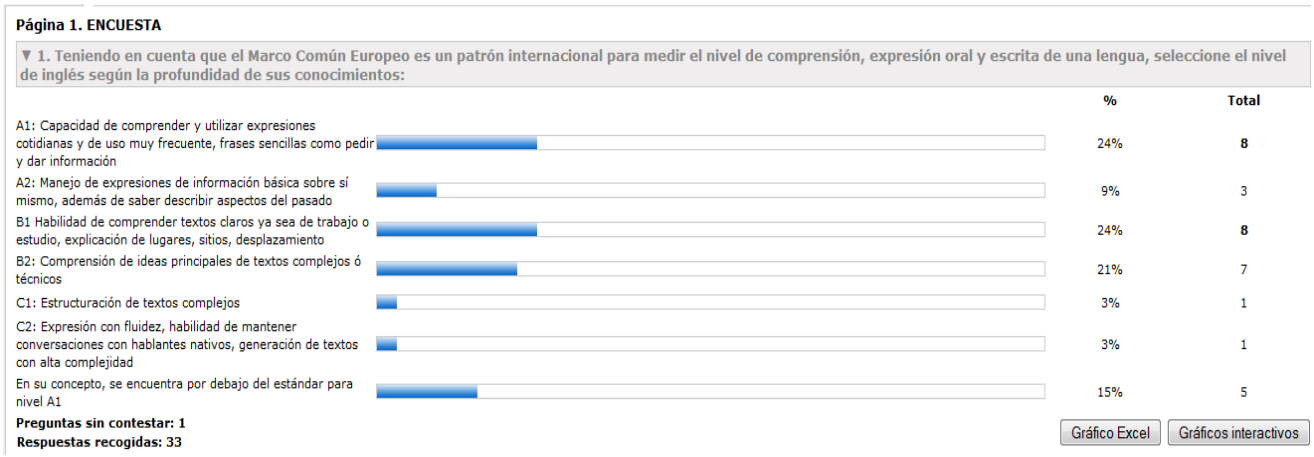


Figure 20. Statistics outcome of the first question from the survey

Comments (Weaknesses): Half of people who answered the survey are in Basic English levels (A1, B1).

- **Question #2**

It is important to determine the most effective learning methods, keeping those in mind for establishing the strategic plan.

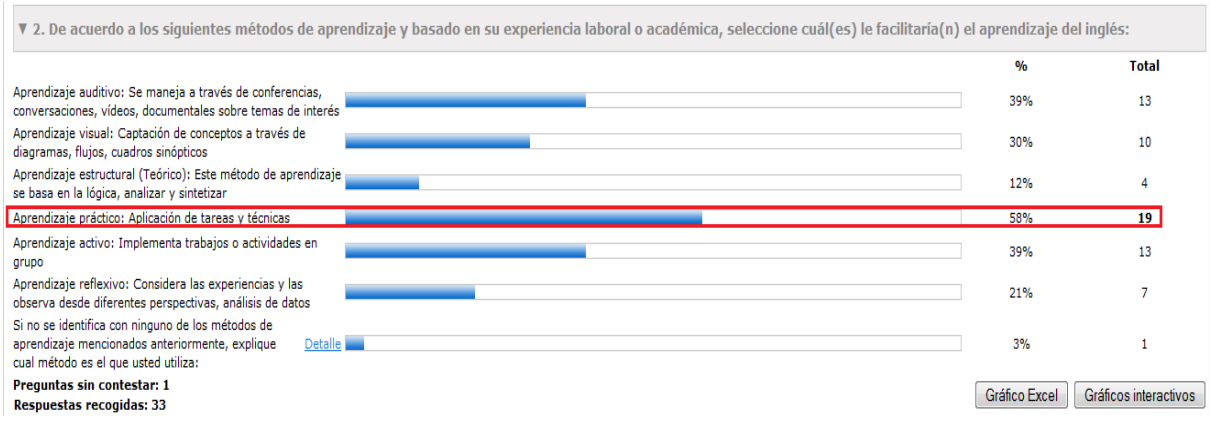


Figure 21. Statistics outcome of the second question from the survey

Comments (Opportunities): More than half of people think that the best way to learn English is implementing communication techniques.

Comments (strengths): 25% of employees, who answered the survey, have ability to understand texts either from work or study, and also can give some description of places, and displacements.

- **Question #3**

While professionals develop themselves, all of them learn from any activity something autonomously, this experience obtained emphasizes the importance of autonomous learning in labor environments.

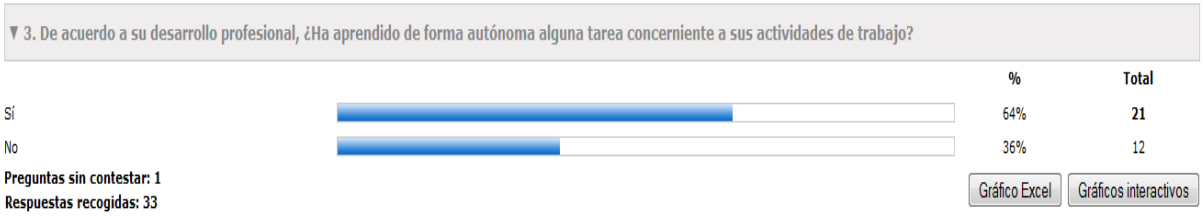


Figure 22. Statistics outcome of the third question from the survey

Comments (Opportunities): According to survey results, autonomous learning is a relevant need for any task or activity. Other opportunity could be an increased offer of alternative methods which include autonomous learning methods. Also some people suggest to install office package in English, and finally they suggest to use e-learning platforms for training.

Comments (strengths): People usually use observation as a learning method, it makes the easier the learning process through images, videos, photos, etc. Also the employees from the sample have the habit of reading and they also like to do research as it is part of their jobs.

- **Question #4**

Technology is an influential factor of learning process.

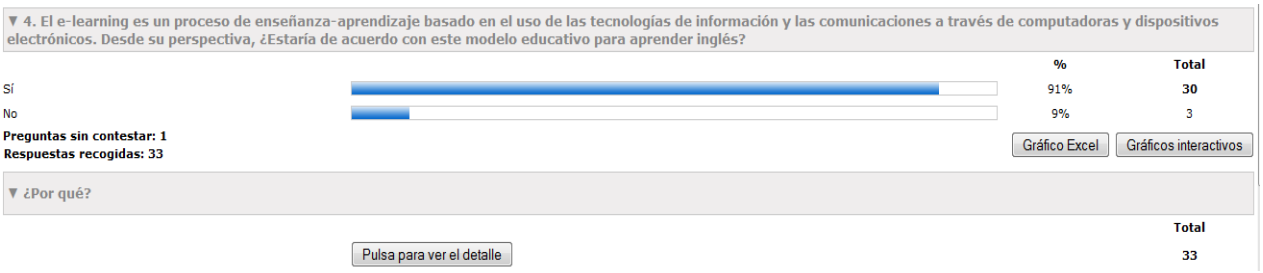


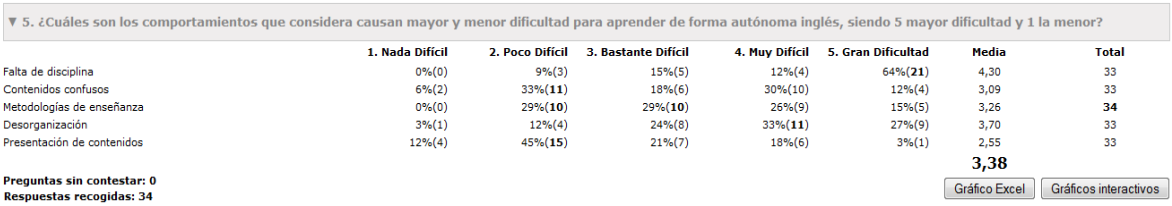
Figure 23. Statistics outcome of the fourth question from the survey

Comments (Opportunities): Technology allows people to have enough time for different activities; they can use their free time for studying while entertaining. Also, technology as a study tool is a mechanism that prevents the regular stress generated by fear of making mistakes in public and technological methods for learning allows dynamic processes for acquiring knowledge. Another advantage of the technology is that it allows learning through playing games, as well as it helps people to feel free to choose their time for studying (Self-directed learning level) and it has become essential for every task anyone wants to solve.

Comments (Threats): Nowadays the usual method for virtual learning is common and boring, for this reason, some people, most of the time, do not recognize the importance that virtual courses have.

- **Question # 5**

An important aspect for learning English by autonomous methods, consist in acquiring a studying routine as it has been determinate



▼ 5. ¿Cuáles son los comportamientos que considera causan mayor y menor dificultad para aprender de forma autónoma inglés, siendo 5 mayor dificultad y 1 la menor?

	1. Nada Difícil	2. Poco Difícil	3. Bastante Difícil	4. Muy Difícil	5. Gran Dificultad	Media	Total
Falta de disciplina	0%(0)	9%(3)	15%(5)	12%(4)	64%(**21**)	4,30	33
Contenidos confusos	6%(2)	33%(**11**)	18%(6)	30%(10)	12%(4)	3,09	33
Metodologías de enseñanza	0%(0)	29%(**10**)	29%(**10**)	26%(9)	15%(5)	3,26	**34**
Desorganización	3%(1)	12%(4)	24%(8)	33%(**11**)	27%(9)	3,70	33
Presentación de contenidos	12%(4)	45%(**15**)	21%(7)	18%(6)	3%(1)	2,55	33
						3,38	

Preguntas sin contestar: 0
Respuestas recogidas: 34

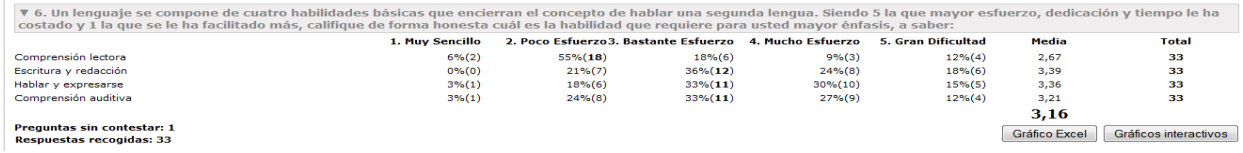
Gráfico Excel | Gráficos interactivos

Figure 24. Statistics outcome of the fifth question from the survey

Comments (Weaknesses): Usually those are the elements that do not allow people to learn English through autonomous methods**:** Lack of discipline, Confusing contents, wrong teaching methodologies, and disorganized information.

- **Question #6**

Identifying people skills it is easier to learn, also identifying learning difficulties of people helps propose strategies.



▼ 6. Un lenguaje se compone de cuatro habilidades básicas que encierran el concepto de hablar una segunda lengua. Siendo 5 la que mayor esfuerzo, dedicación y tiempo le ha costado y 1 la que se le ha facilitado más, califique de forma honesta cuál es la habilidad que requiere para usted mayor énfasis, a saber:

	1. Muy Sencillo	2. Poco Esfuerzo	3. Bastante Esfuerzo	4. Mucho Esfuerzo	5. Gran Dificultad	Media	Total
Comprensión lectora	6%(2)	55%(**18**)	18%(6)	9%(3)	12%(4)	2,67	**33**
Escritura y redacción	0%(0)	21%(7)	36%(**12**)	24%(8)	18%(6)	3,39	**33**
Hablar y expresarse	3%(1)	18%(6)	33%(**11**)	30%(10)	15%(5)	3,36	**33**
Comprensión auditiva	3%(1)	24%(8)	33%(**11**)	27%(9)	12%(4)	3,21	**33**
						3,16	

Preguntas sin contestar: 1
Respuestas recogidas: 33

Gráfico Excel | Gráficos interactivos

Figure 25. Statistics outcome of the sixth question from the survey

Comments (Weaknesses): According to the graph (average 3.16%), people have difficulty with writing, communication and listening skills in English.

- **Question #7**

It is important to identify external factors that affect people when they try to learn English.

Figure 26. Statistics outcome of the seventh question from the survey

Comments (Threats-external factors that hinder learning): As was highlighted before those are the external factors that keep people away from learning specially when is about autonomous learning methods, Lack of time, virtual courses for learning are not enough to improve English level, there is no time for practicing, the disposed time for learning English is really short, and finally contents of the current virtual programs are very basic and learning becomes boring.

- **Question # 8**

It is important to recognize the internal factors that contribute for learning autonomously

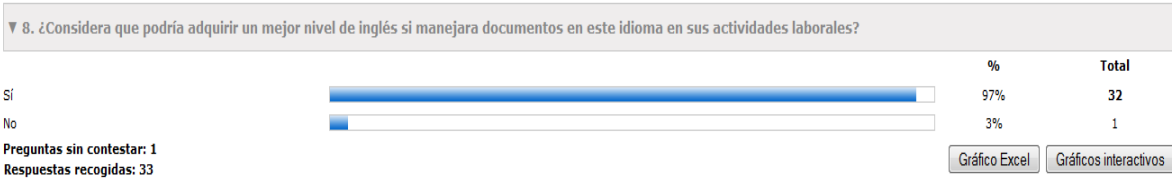


Figure 27. Statistics outcome of the eighth question from the survey

Comments (Opportunities - internal factors): The regular use of English documents help employees to be familiar with the language, as consequence they would be practicing the language most of the time.

This new document management policy requires employees to make bigger efforts for learning, as it constitutes a practical exercise. Those work activities will have best results; as it would increase the interest for learning.

Also, it is important to highlight the fact that good study material is important to learn English, and the fact of manage documents in English implies the improvement of skills. This learning technique allows learning more vocabulary. As the use of documents in English at work would become routine and it definitely would facilitate learning.

Comments (Threats- external factors that hinder learning)

- Use English documents would bring as result to prolong the execution of work activities.
- For people who do not have a good level of English the activities work would difficult.

- **Question # 9**

It is important to contextualize work-related activities for learning English.

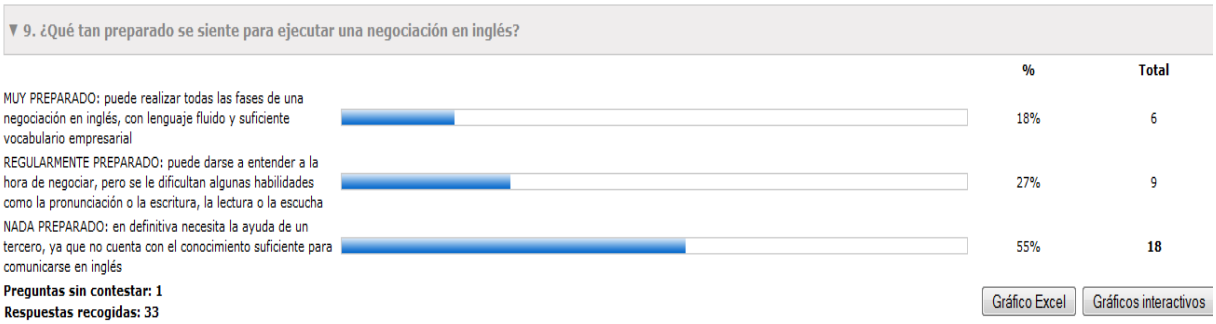


Figure 28. Statistics outcome of the ninth question from the survey

Comments (Weaknesses - Internal factors that hinder learning)

- According to results of sample that was carried out, more than half of people do not have the ability to conduct a negotiation in English.

- **Question #10**

According to the following elements of a language as grammar, phonetics and reading comprehension, each person determined their strengths and weaknesses in English learning process.

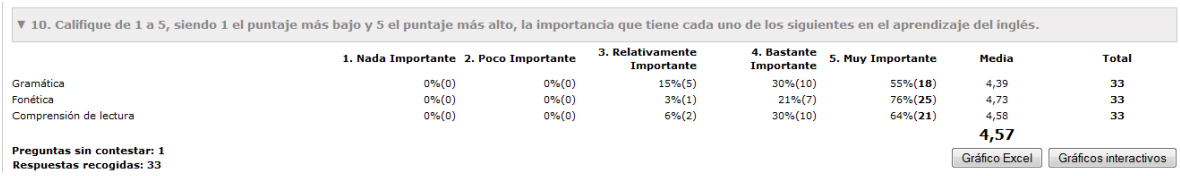


Figure 29. Statistics outcome of the tenth question from the survey

Comments (Opportunities - external factors that hinder learning)

- According to opinion of people who underwent the survey, they give the same importance to grammar, phonetics and reading comprehension.

- **Question #11**

Establishing the importance of autonomous learning encourages people to have a better life quality because every individual is motivated to exceed themselves.

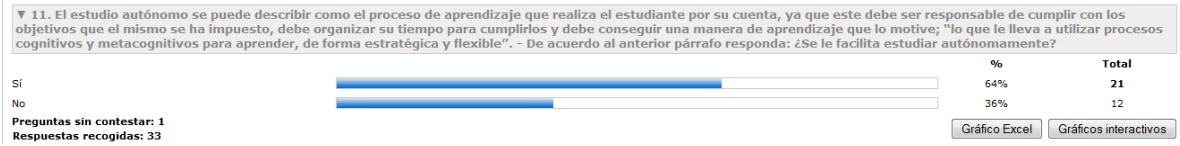


Figure 30. Statistics outcome of the eleventh question from the survey

Comments (Strengths-Internal factors contributing to learning)

- Desire to learn creates motivation to take advantage of the free time.
- Study autonomously must be a personal challenge.
- Desire to learn Generates motivation and discipline.
- To Study autonomously through virtual means is alike of important than studying in an educational center.
- With a good working materials work would easy learning English.
- Education is an effort of each person, which consists of organization and discipline to ensure success.
- Learning is facilitated through the research, led by the person interested in learning.
- Some people have the discipline and interest to learn for themselves.

Comments (Weaknesses- internal factors that hinder learning)

- The Study autonomous is not a good alternative because it is difficult to find the correct answer when there is doubt.

- Doing two things at once is exhausting and with the current job activities there is not enough time for studying English.
- Some people are not interested in studying English autonomously.
- Some people need someone to lead them in learning.
- Is necessary to have some knowledge of English to learn easy and correctly.
- Some people do not have time to study.
- Some people are easily distracted. (Lack of discipline)
- Lack of interest.
- Lack of methods to learn autonomously.

Table 2. *SWOT Matrix Weaknesses & Strenghts*

Weaknesses (W)	**Strengths (S)**
1. Half of the people who underwent the survey are in basic level of English (A1, B1). 2. Lack of discipline. 3. The virtual programs are not understandable. 4. Inadequate teaching methods. 5. Lack of organization. 6. Level low of writing in English. 7. Difficulty in communication and listening in English. 8. More than half of people do not have the ability to conduct negotiations in English. 9. People do not practice the language.	1. Personal challenges. 2. Desire to learn. 3. Ability to understand texts of work or study, explanation of places and tourist sites. 4. Easiness with auditory learning. 5. Easiness with visual learning. 6. People to learn through of practice and group work. 7. All people have learned by yourself some work activity with satisfactory results. 8. 91% of people use technology as a learning method. 9. 55% of people have ease with reading comprehension in English. 10. People are aware of the need to learn English. 11. People need to handle business documents in English. 12. According to the results of the survey for people is easy to learn autonomously.

Table 3. *SWOT Matrix Opportunities & Threats*

Opportunities (O)	**Threats (T)**
1. Using technology and media as learning tools. 2. Technology allows greater availability of time. 3. Virtual learning prevents the strain generated by the fear of mistake in public. 4. The use of technology and media for learning are dynamic media. 5. The technology allows learning through play. 6. The technology allows freedom of schedules. 7. The technology allows familiar with the language. 8. Technology is essential for any activity to develop. 9. The Technology is useful as tools study since it does not it require of a PC to access the information. 10. More than half of people think that the best way to learn English is implementing communication techniques. 11. According to the survey result, it follows that autonomous learning is a necessity that is required for any work or activity. 12. The topics of program virtual should to have exercises of phonetics, grammar, reading comprehension, and communication techniques. 13. Provide methods of autonomous learning. 14. Implement e-learning platforms for autonomous learning.	1. Lack of time. 2. The virtual mode for learning is not enough to acquire a good level of language proficiency. 3. Low intensity of the hours dedicated to learning English. 4. The program content is very basic and learning becomes boring. 5. Using documents in other language, delay activities of work. 6. People who consider not having a good level of English do not want to practice it at work.

Table 4. *SWOT Matrix Strategies (WO) & (SO)*

Strategies (WO)	**Strategies (SO)**
1. The use of technology and learning techniques through the virtual program will help improve the level of English. 2. The technology has the benefit avoid displacement to anywhere, this is an advantage that leads to people to have discipline in learning because is possible easily access information. 3. The techniques of reading, phonetics and grammar, will help students to improve English proficiency and in turn will help them to generate confidence to actively participate. 4. The virtual program is a dynamic and appropriate learning method focusing it to interest of each person; in this case, the interest of the companies and workers corresponds to commercial sector. 5. One of advantages of virtual programs is the organization of activities as it provides the ease and interest students in learning. Additionally, the exercises are interactive, which generates interest in program participation. 6. Students can to use technology to learn English permanently, even after hours of virtual program; a good technique is using email to improve writing. 7. Implement listening and pronunciation techniques. 8. Implement exercises involving business situations. 9. A good way of speaking English is practicing it at work.	1. Motivate to students by implementing dynamic assessments through technology. 2. To use commercial texts and make exercises business simulation. 3. Make activities auditory interaction. 4. Assign group activities. 5. Suggest activities where people constantly interact with technology. 6. Identify people who have better English pronunciation for support their coworkers in virtual activities. 7. Demonstrate the advantages of autonomous learning. 8. Suggest exercises and techniques of pronunciation. 9. Suggest exercises and techniques of reading. 10. Suggest exercises and techniques of grammar. 11. Motivate to students to use the virtual program.

Table 5. *SWOT Matrix Strategies (WT) & (ST)*

Strategies (WT)	**Strategies (ST)**
1. Suggest that the program of study is made within working hours. 2. The results of the evaluations should be linked to the objectives of the company, for example, increase sales, acquire more business, gain new opportunities in the international market. 3. To measure the level of English the students, should be establish evaluation periods where in each course will increase degree of difficulty.	1. Suggest the virtual program as one objective the commercial's area of company. 2. According to previous assessments, determine the group of people who have better English level to support the rest of group in pronunciation, reading and writing. 3. Propose to company, determine an average two hours daily for make the virtual course. 4. Provide study material where students have to analyze trading methods, learn technical and business vocabulary according to the subject in each unit.

Analysis of results

To carry out the SWOT analysis in the strategic plan, was taken as reference the survey applied to 50 people in the commercial sector of the company Corferias.

This analysis explains what the purpose of the objective established according to the answers from the survey, these are classified and came from the strategies above, in order to ensure the viability of strategies to be implemented assertively on autonomous learning.

After checking those strategies and matching them with the objectives come other strategies which would be the most minimum unit to start the future implementation of this proposal, then there is the action plan which would define the steps to follow, which would lead to fulfill the objectives described below, those would help for measuring the outcomes of the strategic plan, even though the way it is controlled will depend on each company.

The following table shows the proposed strategies for fulfilling the SWOT aims:

Table 6. *Analysis of results for strategic objective 1*

Aim # 1	**Strategies Aim # 1**
To analyze strengths and weaknesses of employees to implement strategies as action plan.	- The use of technology and learning techniques through the virtual program will help improve the level of English. - The technology has the benefit avoid displacement to anywhere, this is an advantage that leads to people to have discipline in learning because is possible easily access information. - The techniques of reading, phonetics and grammar, will help students to improve English proficiency and in turn will help them to generate confidence to actively participate. - The virtual program is a dynamic and appropriate learning method focusing it to interest of each person; in this case, the interest of the companies and workers corresponds to commercial sector. - One of advantages of virtual programs is the organization of activities as it provides the ease and interest students in learning. - Additionally, the exercises are interactive, which generates interest in program participation. - Students can to use technology to learn English permanently, even after hours of virtual program; a good technique is using email to improve writing. - Implement listening and pronunciation techniques. - Implement exercises involving business situations. - A good way of speaking English is practicing it at work. - Motivate to students by implementing dynamic assessments through technology. - To use commercial texts and make exercises business simulation. - Make activities auditory interaction. - Assign group activities. - Suggest activities where people constantly interact with technology. - Identify people who have better English pronunciation for support their coworkers in virtual activities. - Demonstrate the advantages of autonomous learning. - Suggest exercises and techniques of pronunciation. - Suggest exercises and techniques of reading. - Suggest exercises and techniques of grammar. - Motivate to students to use the virtual program.

Table 7. *Analysis of results for strategic objective 2*

Aims # 2	**Strategies Aim # 2**
To identify threats or risks to employees (external factors), that should be considered in the course of their learning.	- Suggest that the program of study is made within working hours. - The results of the evaluations should be linked to the objectives of the company, for example, increase sales, acquire more business, gain new opportunities in the international market. - To measure the level of English the students, should be establish evaluation periods where in each course will increase degree of difficulty. - Suggest the virtual program as one of the objectives of the commercial area in the company. - According to previous assessments, determine the group of people who have better English level to support the rest of group in pronunciation, reading and writing. - Propose to company, determine an average two hours daily for make the virtual course.

Table 8. *Analysis of results for strategic objective 3*

Aim # 3	**Strategies Aim # 3**
To use the weaknesses as motivating factor, that is to say, submit the weaknesses as challenges to improve the level of English through autonomous learning.	- The aims of company should be aligned with aims commercial sector to achieve goals. - This is a motivating factor for people, because will they study in function of objectives.

Table 9. *Analysis of results for strategic objective 4*

Aims # 4	**Strategies Aim # 4**
To implement resources such as technology and mass media as opportunities to facilitate autonomous learning of English.	- The proposal is to implement a virtual program to take advantage of technology. - The activities are completely virtual and interactive where people can to use different applications that will help them to improve level of English.

5. Action plan, Plan tracing and assessment

The following diagram presents the steps after the establishment of a strategic plan, those are the stages any company can follow to asses if the strategies were successful or not, they are presented as a simple lists of tasks that everyone should finish to meet an objective. This diagram is focused in the accomplishment of every single strategy as it gives a useful framework with the specific phases in order to be sure that any key step will not be missed, by using schemes to check if the plan is reliable as follows: Space, economic resources, equipment, helpers as human talent involved during the development, materials, expertise, and systems, every single with the same importance than the others have.

Stage 1 Research and Providing context

Verify problems and issues related to: Autonomous education, e-learning tools, intercultural communication, and business culture

Set a context of the English skills and level of the employees, and also identify ways of learning

Establish the impact of self-directed learning through electronic devices tools for setting efficient strategies

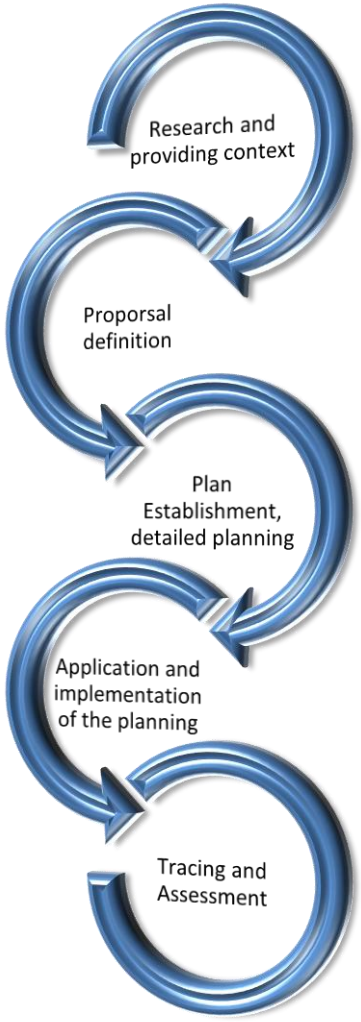
Set a context of the English skills and level of the employees

Emphasize the advantages learning English bring to the employees' life quality and to companies

Analyze causes that generate disinterest to learn the language

Action Plan Development

This tools pretends to be an additional value at the time the companies try to implement the strategic plan as well as being a specific route for the strategic plan's establishment



Action Plan Application

Decided within the companies, choosing the responsible representatives, resources, etc.

Figure 31. Action Plan Development

Stage 2 Proporsal Definition

Formulate according to the situation diagnosis, the plan's main goal, checking how many difficulties the proposal would pass through

Set the main problems and how to use the advantages by a SWOT matrix

Set the methodology followed by the SWOT matrix, and how it responds to the current English needs in the provided context

Establish the learning methodology, following the employees' concept of e-learning usefulness

Design strategies keeping in mind if those are able or unable for applying within the commercial area context

Develop a concept of self-directed learning with the strengths found by the matrix

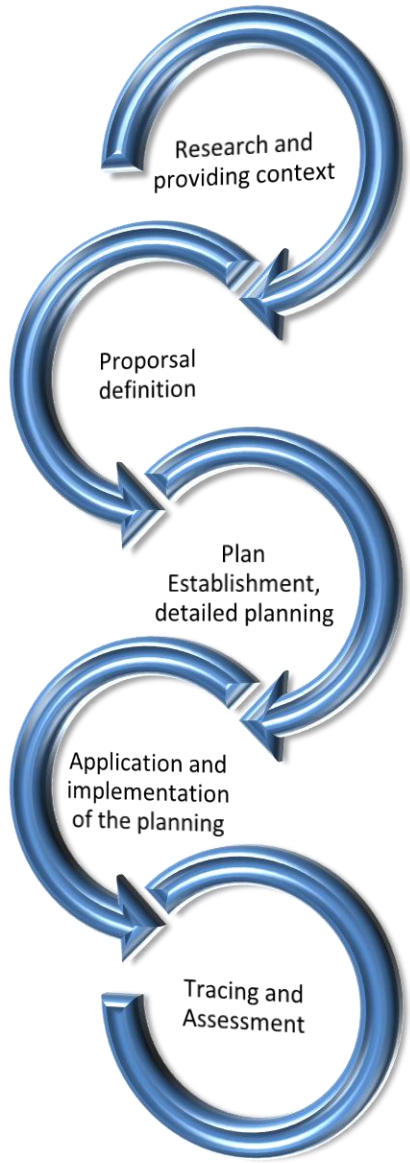


Figure 32. Action Plan Stage 2

Stage 3 Plan Establishment

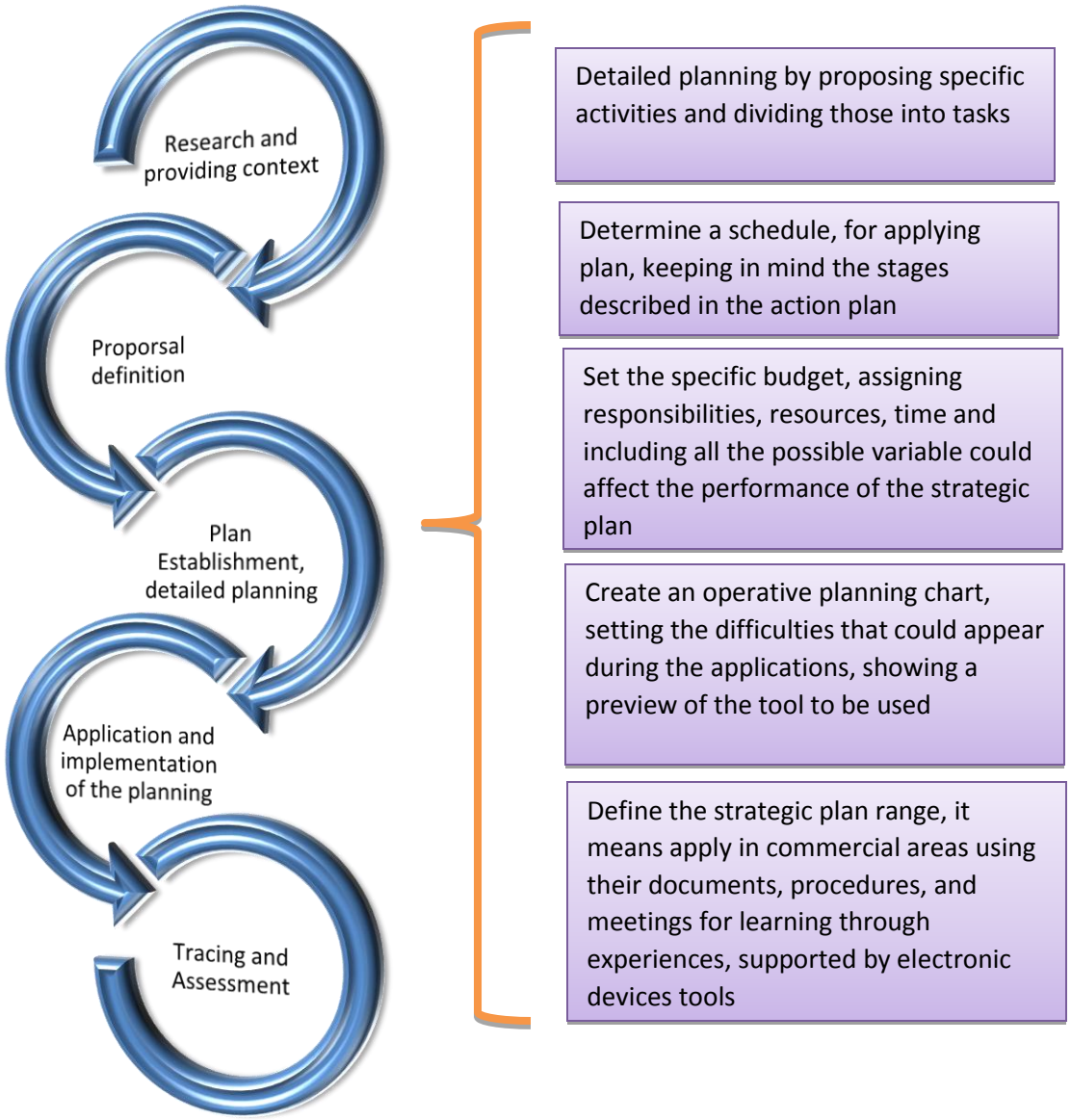


Figure 33. Action Plan Stage 3

Stage 5 Tracing and Assessment

Make a comparison of the expected results throughout the difficulties vs. the situation diagnosis

Prepare periodical assessments according the quality indicators for improving the commercial area effectiveness

Setting criteria for checking the improvement of English business skills

Monitoring the use of resources, the application process, how employees responded to the plan, not just as a management control process but as objectives and goals accomplishment

Select leaders of the application plan, making a report of problems and difficulties found

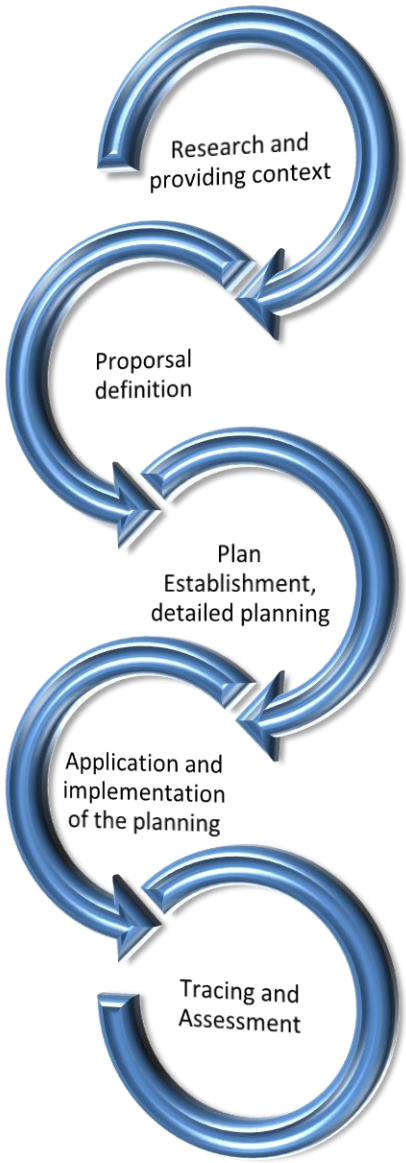


Figure 34. Action Plan Stage 5

Chapter Five

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not all people are ready to carry on with the challenge of studying by themselves, due to lack of discipline, lack of time and other factors that affect their performance while learning. Additionally, there is a clear need to manage a second language specifically for the commercial areas in different companies no matter the sector; these were just few reasons why it was decided to research about how employees could take advantage of their potential.

Initially, a need was identified, previously mentioned (autonomous English learning process) according to rates made by recognized entities such as EPI (English Proficiency Index). The government also established the importance of speaking English through some educational projects documented by El Ministerio de Educación Nacional; however, this has not been good enough for getting a highest ranking of bilingual work force.

Moreover, it is clear that for Colombian companies is a great advantage that its employees speak a second language due to it is a big help now that lot of companies have begun an internationalization process, there is globalization, it also contributes to economic openness, and other benefits that grow companies and take them to be conscious of new business opportunities obtaining potential customers from other countries, this would definitely increase the exportations and the Gross National Product (GNP).

Risk factors should be permanently mitigated if what is intended is to maintain a good command of the language, for this, the strategies proposed in this project complement perfectly the objectives established by different types of companies for fulfillment of goals according to the mission and vision of the enterprises.

The employee motivation also plays an important role in the strategies to get a good result; this motivation should be managed at the conceptual level, being aware of what every person wants and if this matches with the main company's goals specially in the commercial area; motivation should be considered as a challenge to fulfill, in order to create an unity of what people project at short, medium and long term, in addition this would maintain the English autonomous program interesting.

It is important to emphasize, that part of the difficulty to learn independently English is the lack of Study techniques that people can implement to solve the topics, in addition to lack of information search. The result of strategic plan depends on the proactivity that people have to improve their English level; this is one of the most important factors for the fulfillment of the strategic plan's objectives.

A SWOT structure is a useful tool not only to classify of way easy the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities the company has but also to analyze each person's skills so that they can determine the aspects which must be improved. On the other hand, the proposal of the strategic plan, is based in topics and activities related to the interest of the employees, for example, the technical language, that is required when making a commercial agreement with foreigners or if any negotiation requires to manage legal documents, there is the importance of speaking English, another activity that is recommended is to make a marketing plan using strategies of market in English, this will help to get vocabulary and to have an international company while learning. Also, to be able to use the proposed strategies in this project, was suggested talking with the working group, make them aware of the importance of the virtual program for the company and for their professional development.

It was also concluded that currently the technology is important in most of the activities that people do; and for enterprises, it is an important factor for the development and growth, for this reason the research proposed the use of technology to facilitate independent learning, furthermore, because people can easily have access to information without having to move to another place, by such reason, there are more time for to perform virtual activities: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has opened up new possibilities for teaching and learning.

Some of the advantages offered by technology, concluded from the research are: Diversity on the information: Currently on Internet you can find any type of information required about any topic, in addition to multiple applications that people can to use to improve their pronunciation, reading and writing a language, it is also possible to verify other texts when information is not clear.

The research also establishes the relevance of multiculturalism in business, this is essential to know the culture of potential customers and also for building better trade relations and as consequence expand the market. It reminds how important are trade relations at the time of closing a business or advertising a product; there is when the cases show up like the products which are a failure during their advertising campaigns for not knowing the target, this is an issue produced by the use of words with different context and meaning.

The research also helped to develop learning methods and to study weaknesses people have when learning English, as could be a defined a limit for acquiring knowledge and the way they do that process, and this limit can be overcome only if the person is willing to face those limits. Also presents technology as the best way of solving doubts that may appear during the learning period, the invitation originated by this research is to use of technology

and take greater advantage of its benefits. Although some people support an argument that technology is not the best choice to practice the pronunciation of a second language , this argument is moot because currently several virtual applications helps improve pronunciation, with the advantage that the person can to practice frequently without fear of making mistakes in public.

Also it was concluded, that to use the SWOT as a learning strategy allows identify easily the factors of risk internal and external during learning. Always has been used the SWOT in the companies as strategy for other topics, however, no doubt that this system is very useful in learning topics, as adopted in this research. This methodology allows to define strategies easily, once identified the weaknesses and threats, the SWOT allows implementing action plans effectively and with a high degree of probability of good results.

However, it is suitable to be careful not to distort the findings of information. The SWOT is an excellent diagnostic's tool, that allows manage time efficiently, furthermore, it helps to set goals and measure results to people and company. The SWOT as a tool of study plan allows set objectives to measure short and long term, the structure must be adapted according to the working plan that has been stipulated, in some cases could be fitted the schedule according to the dates established for fulfilling goals.

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