

**NEEDS OF FASHION AND TOURISM COMPANIES FROM MEDELLÍN  
CONCERNING THE HIRING OF BILINGUAL AND MULTILINGUAL PERSONNEL  
THAT SUPPORT THEIR INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESSES**

**TRABAJO DE GRADO PARA OPTAR AL TÍTULO DE PROFESIONAL EN  
LENGUAS MODERNAS**

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## Abstract

It is essential to take into account that to successfully achieve internationalization, companies have to face and overcome some barriers, one of those is the language barrier; for that reason, they hire professionals that have command of foreign languages to help the companies to establish themselves in international territories. The companies from Medellín are not external to the multiple benefits that internationalization can bring to them and to the city's development since the city has been gradually working on the consolidation of its international relations as a local development engine, leaving behind the economic standard based on the industry in order to enter into the commercial services (Cortés, 2015). Due to that, some universities created language programs with the objective to train professionals that have proficiency in different languages, for example the ECCI University created the Modern Languages program as a response to the needs for internationalization that the companies in the city have. This research aims to identify the needs of fashion and tourism companies in Medellín regarding the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that supports their internationalization processes. Through semi-structured interviews and data collection from 10 fashion and 10 tourism companies, the study delves into the needs of these two clusters, seeking to understand the role that a modern languages professional could play in the internationalization process in fashion and tourism companies, in order to know if the study plan offered by the ECCI University for the Modern Languages program really meets the companies' needs for internationalization.

**Key words:** Internationalization, globalization, culture, fashion cluster, tourism cluster, modern languages, professional profile.

## Introduction

Nowadays, thanks to globalization, companies look for entering new markets with the aim of gaining recognition, improving their competitiveness and earning more profits. That process is known as internationalization. In the city of Medellín, the process of internationalization has been possible through the international positioning of economic activities around the cluster strategy, which helps Medellín to consolidate an image of an attractive city abroad and to promote the arrival of visitors who want to live, explore or conduct business in the territory (Pineda, 2016). This strategy has guaranteed the integration of different industries and entrepreneurs in order to strengthen the city as a competitive and sustainable territory in Colombia for the purpose of attracting new investors to the city. Due to their relevance within the cluster strategy, the fashion and advanced manufacturing cluster, and the business tourism cluster stand out. While the fashion sector has a long trajectory and it has been a key sector for the city's economy throughout its history. The tourism sector has been gaining popularity during the last decade and it has turned into one of the most profitable sectors thanks to the promotion of the territory as a sustainable destination and as a suitable place to go into business.

Taking into consideration the relevance of both clusters in the international field, the following research is aimed at identifying the needs of fashion and tourism companies' from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingualism personnel that supports their internationalization processes, which will allow us to ascertain how well known the professional profile of the Modern Languages program is. To achieve this objective, a thorough research of topics and previous studies related to globalization, internalization process, modern languages in the entrepreneurial field and interculturality were carried out. For example, three studies made in

Bogota by the Ean University were taken as a point of reference because they cover themes such as the situation of modern languages professionals in the labor field, Colombian business context and international business. Associated with the ECCI University, some studies in which the authors explore the employability of modern languages professionals in one economic sector such as the flower exporting were found.

Subsequently to the bibliographic research, a basic internationalization context in the city was obtained and it was possible to make a semi structured interview. After this, the 20 entrepreneurs from Medellín that belong to the sectors previously mentioned were interviewed and thanks to their answers, an analysis was made, which contributes to shed light on the current outlook of the company's needs internationalization process, their needs respecting the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel in the departments involved in the internationalization processes, and in turn, to know if the degree's plan study of Modern Languages program established by the ECCI University adjusts to the current labor market demands in fashion and tourism companies established in Medellín.

### **Problem statement**

Considering the great growth and economic development that has occurred in the city, it is essential to emphasize two sectors that have contributed enormously to the economy of Medellín. The first cluster that stands out for its transformation and innovation over the years is Fashion and Advanced Manufacturing, which has more than 9,500 registered companies. This cluster is in charge of manufacturing 45% of the total textiles in the country, in addition to employing 30% of the city's population (Gonzalez, 2017). For this reason, the city has been considered as the country's fashion center on multiple occasions, hosting events such as



Colombiatex and Colombiamoda, which are of the most importance for the Latin American textile industry.

Meanwhile, the second cluster is tourism which contributes to the sustainable and economic development of the city, in addition to positioning the region as a smart destination. In fact, during 2021, the Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico de Medellín stated that the capital of Antioquia received 676,652 tourists, of which 225,979 were foreigners and 450,673 nationals, which represents an increase of 162% to the figure registered in 2020 (258,604), along with a hotel occupancy of 76% compared to previous years (2021, par. 5).

Based on this information, within the internationalization processes the use of a second language or even more becomes a key factor in the business environment, since in order to build business relations in the international field with other economic agents, the exchange of constant and high-quality data is essential for companies. For this reason, various programs related to language learning have been created in the city of Medellín. Nevertheless, most of them have a pedagogical emphasis and are not focused on administration, only one which is the Modern Languages program from the ECCI University differs from them since it offers the possibility of learning 3 languages (English, French and German) alongside subjects related to administration and marketing. However, the college and the program are relatively new, that is why the professional profile and the skills that a modern languages professional have are not well known by the entrepreneurs. Therefore, the objective is to find out the needs of fashion and tourism companies from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that support their internationalization processes, which leads to analyze the criteria that entrepreneurs take into account when hiring bilingual and multilingual staff and to determine if the professional

profile and the study plan offered by ECCI University adapts to those companies' requirements for internationalization.

### **Justification**

Medellín has experienced a remarkable economic growth and transformation in recent decades, becoming an important tourist and fashion center nationally and internationally. This evolution has led to a significant increase in the number of companies in the fashion and tourism sectors that seek to expand their operations beyond local borders.

The internationalization of tourism and fashion companies in Medellín presents several challenges and also some opportunities that were analyzed during this research. On the one hand, tourism in the city has experienced a notable progression thanks to its climate, the beauty of its landscapes and the cultural richness it offers. In fact, according to the Observatorio Turístico de la Subsecretaría de Turismo de la Alcaldía de Medellín, during 2021 national and foreign tourists, in the center of the city, left sales for about 23 million dollars, which represents a growth in revenue of 4.9% compared to 2019 (2022, par. 3). This has implied an increase in the demand for products and services related to tourism, such as hotels, travel agencies, clothing and accessories for tourists. On the other hand, the fashion sector in the capital of Antioquia has gained such recognition in both locally and internationally, becoming the main venue for one of the most important events in the textile and clothing sector known as Colombiatex, where hundreds of business people sell and buy textile products as well as they try to establish connections with different manufacturing and textile machinery companies. As a result of the economic growth, relevance and the impact that both sectors have in the city, there is an opportunity for the modern languages professionals to be part of those fashion and tourism

companies that are currently involved in an internationalization process, because this kind of professional is able to help the organization to be more recognized abroad, attract more customers by doing a market study and establish more international ties with companies, institutions and entrepreneurs.

For that reason, the purpose of this research is to identify the needs of fashion and tourism companies' from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that supports their internationalization processes by interviewing 10 companies from each sector, and based on that information, to clarify if the professional profile offered by the ECCI University meets the requirements that exist in the current fashion and tourism labor market of Medellín.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this study is the first one in the ECCI University located in Medellín with a focus on two specific clusters and their internationalization processes. Besides, this project is part of a research carried out by a professor at the same college which, has by name "Retos y oportunidades de los profesionales de Lenguas Modernas en un contexto de creciente internacionalización de la ciudad de Medellín". Hence, the results obtained in the present research will be very useful for the University, considering it will contribute to the design of strategies to enhance this professional profile. Likewise, the research findings are expected to encourage the hiring of professionals in Modern Language in order to fulfill administrative and commercial positions in the organizations of those two sectors.

### **Research question**

What are the needs of fashion and tourism companies from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that supports their internationalization processes?

### **Research objectives**

#### **General objective**

To identify the needs of fashion and tourism companies from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that support their internationalization processes.

#### **Specific objectives**

To determine through a semi-structured interview the needs for internationalization of ten tourism and ten fashion companies in terms of hiring bilingual and multilingual personnel.

To establish the criteria and skills that organizations take into account when hiring bilingual or multilingual staff in the company.

To contrast the needs expressed by the entrepreneurs with the first study plan of the Modern Languages program from the ECCI University in order to determine if the study plan really meets the expectations of the companies that are in the process of internationalization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This theoretical framework approaches the following categories: globalization; internationalization process; interculturality, culture and languages; modern languages and fashion and tourism clusters, where some theories and concepts will be exposed for the

comprehension and support of this research and at the same time they will be useful for the development of the analysis of this study since they will be contrasted with the results obtained in the interview carried out with fashion and tourism companies in order to generate new knowledge about the variables analyzed in this study.

## **Globalization**

At present, thanks to the phenomenon known as globalization, the world has ceased to be a large group of nations isolated within themselves between their own cultural and bordering barriers, to become an increasingly extensive but close place in terms of distances, communications, and opportunities (Rueda, 2008, p. 52). In fact, globalization has allowed a greater integration at the economic and business level between countries by using different strategies such as trade in goods and services, the transactions of money among countries in search of financial profitability or for the creation of companies in the productive sector, international flows of workers and people in general (Banco de la República [Banrep], 2006, p. 7).

While Banrep approaches this phenomenon from the economic point of view, Nayef and Stoudmann (2006, p.2) offer a broad definition of what globalization is, taking into account not only the economy but also plenty of social and cultural factors. According to them, “globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities.” This definition includes aspects such as culture, linguistics, politics, and economy but also aspects related to the environment that the human being cannot control. Despite the two definitions of globalization are proposed from different points of view, both meanings are not only essential for this research

because they help us to understand what globalization is, the impact and scope that this phenomenon has on human activities worldwide, but also because this term is the predecessor of one of the key concepts of this study which is internationalization.

### **Internationalization processes**

Thanks to globalization, companies around the world develop strategies with the purpose of achieving internationalization. From an economic point of view, this concept has been defined by Vidal as “the way in which a company plans totally or partially its activities in an international environment” (2016, p. 10). However, internationalization does not limit itself to economic aspects of an enterprise. According to Knight, “is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions” (2003, p. 1). That way, these last two authors complement each other and give us a much more extensive outlook of what internationalization is and what this procedure involves.

It should be pointed out that some authors did not limit themselves to define the concept of internationalization, instead they studied the companies’ internationalization processes in depth, hence, some theories and models were developed with the purpose of providing a step by step of how to enter successfully in international markets. For example, in the Jordi Canals Model (1994, analyzed by Becerra, Guzman, Rodriguez and Trujillo, 2006), it is stated that the immersion in the international market depends on the motivation, as well as on the current situation of internationalization in the sector that the company intends to reach. That immersion is also affected by the economic forces, the market forces and the business strategies to successfully reach this process. In addition, the company must have a quality product or service and then establish the market target where the product or service will be offered. Once done,

Canals argues that it is important to entrust the responsibility of the process to a person that knows in depth the peculiarities of customers from the destination country, as the distribution and publicity guidelines (1994, cited in Becerra et al., 2006). Another model that gives a distinct way to enter to an international market is the Network Approach proposed by Johanson and Mattson (1998, analyzed by Becerra et al., 2006), who suggest that organizations should have business networks that allow information exchange between the company and external agents, with the objective of looking for relationships with strategic partners and in that way enter the international market. The Canals Model and the Network Approach model help us to understand how some companies tend to consolidate their business relationships abroad to get new opportunities in the international area and at the same time provide us a point of reference to contrast and relate some of the answers given by the companies in the interview regarding the strategies they implement to reach internationalization.

### **Interculturality, culture and languages**

Despite the internationalization's definitions and theories are mostly bound to economic and business processes, it is important to keep in mind that the interculturality plays a crucial role for companies at the moment they intend to enter to foreign markets, since "operating internationally means having to interact with trans-continental intermediaries, distinct government agencies, and foreign institutions, which reside in different language environments" (Brannen, Piekkari and Tietze, 2014, p. 495). In this way, it is not only essential for enterprises to be clear about the business and the objective of negotiations abroad, but it is also important to consider the interests of the other party, it means its culture, its way of doing business, and how the linguistic interaction will be carried out. Thence, the concept of interculturality is relevant for

this research because modern languages professionals develop intercultural competences during the degree, thus they are able to interact and negotiate with the foreign entrepreneurs even if they do not share the same culture.

Besides, culture is defined as “the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts” (McKelvie and Pappas, 2022). However, it is important to clarify that not all social groups have the same behavior or the same customs. It depends on various factors, so the culture is not the same in each country or territory. That is why according to Observatorio Vasco de la Cultura (2018) culture also provides the singularity and symbolic element that allows to represent and to build a differentiated identity (p. 5), but also it enables the construction of an external image and creates a bond between the concerned parties, and as an essential part to create those bonds there is language. Mastering the individual’s language with whom one seeks to have a professional relationship is a vital aspect to build trust and, in that way, cultural distances can be shortened and intercultural dialogue can be developed between two or more parties. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a multilingual culture in organizations because it is more efficient to have a multilingual staff that is not only focused on having command in English or any other languages but also knowledge of other cultures as long as this will make difference in the internationalization process of the companies in the city.

For that reason, interculturality is an essential aspect to take into account. In fact, Hall’s theory (1976, analyzed by Maldonado, 2007) focused on interculturality, he argues that these interactions rely on the environment and the self-management that each culture manages since the success or failure of the agreement will depend on the cultural knowledge of the other part in



terms of business and relationships. Also, according to Canning (2009, p.8) “interculturality acknowledges that language skills alone are insufficient for an understanding of complex cultural contexts”. Taking as points of reference the statements proposed by Canning and Maldonado, Modern Language professionals from the ECCI University should not only have proficiency in English, French, German and administrative knowledge, but also in-depth cultural insights in order to perform tasks and jobs that can support the companies’ internationalization processes.

### **Modern languages**

It is important to bear in mind that interculturality encompasses not only the tolerance for other cultures but also the use of a language, which plays a relevant role to the construction of international relationships within the company. Therefore, Quirós (2008) argues that a language is considered as a basic input in the production of a service, the communication (p.7) and Martinaj supports the idea of Quirós by arguing that “languages are tools for communication, the carriers of entire worldviews, and the repositories of culture and identity” (2020, p. 161).

After defining what a language is, this research is also closely related to the term of modern languages since one of the purposes of this project is to discover if the fashion and tourism companies interviewed would hire a modern languages professional that can support their internationalization processes. Actually, according to Kohl (2018) the concept of modern languages was conceived to make a distinction between classical languages like Latin or ancient Greek that are no longer spoken in a territory but they are still studied for cultural and linguistic purposes; likewise Cambridge dictionary stated that this term refers to “the languages that are spoken at the present time, especially European languages” (n.d). It is also important to highlight that those languages are not only spoken in a country but also spoken in business sectors.

Considering the literature review, Kohl and Cambridge dictionary agree that Modern Languages are those languages that are currently spoken in the world, and complementing these ideas, Wainwright proposes that those languages are also used in the business environment by stating that “the languages more commonly used in the markets with which British industry generally is concerned, are, in rough order of priority, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, and Russian” (1970). In fact, thanks to globalization and internationalization, the world has been in need to learn languages not only for communication with others, but also for cultural, social and business interests. Nowadays authors like Kohl (2018) say that modern languages should no longer be seen as a skill, since the intercultural competence is a vital factor in modern languages program that offers more than simply the knowledge of a second language and that factor distinguish the learning of modern languages from the kind of learning offered in language centers that tends to focus just on teaching practical language skills.

### **Fashion and tourism clusters**

Once the concept of modern languages was defined and its relevance to this study was established, it was inquired about the possible sectors where modern language professionals could support the companies’ internationalization processes and at the end, it was concluded that the fashion and tourism clusters suit to the purpose of this research due to the international trajectory that each cluster has. For better understanding of the concept of clusters, for this study it was used the definition given by Porter (1998, p. 78), where he defined clusters as the "geographical concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field." The implementation of this system has been evidenced mainly in the global economy, especially in developed countries, where it is managed by groups of several clusters that interact strongly

with each other in technology and knowledge aspects to generate innovation, and whose result is manifested in productivity, growth, and generation of value.

Thanks to the cluster initiative in Medellín, there has been a radical increase of business owners interested in being part of the territory's growth, allowing the city to exceed the 381 million dollars in foreign investment obtained with the installation of foreign companies and reinvestments (Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico de Medellín, 2021, par. 3), and as a result, the capital of Antioquia has become a strategic point not only for the touristic activity of the region but also for being a host territory in terms of businesses.

In fact, Medellín continues to consolidate itself as an important center of design, creativity and fairs in Latin America, that is why two of the most important fashion events take place in the city (Colombiatex and Colombiamoda). Actually, due to the high demand for textile and clothing products in the city, the Fashion and advanced manufacturing cluster was selected for this research. When this cluster was created, it was defined as a concentration of specialized companies and institutions that have the aim of manufacturing clothes, and in that way, they can create a proper business environment where they can improve their competitiveness, profitability and performance in the city (Trujillo, 2009). Nowadays, this cluster not only increases participation in the national market but also attracts foreign investors that help to consolidate as one of the most profitable economic sectors in the region. Moreover, it helps in a direct way the tourism cluster by promoting business tourism in the region.

The second Cluster of this research focuses on tourism and according to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) tourism is defined as “Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their

usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes” (n,d). Furthermore, Santana (1997, mentioned by Altimira and Muñoz, 2007, p. 688) refers to the touristic activity as an integrated system of interacting elements. In this system, three elements are evidenced: dynamic, static, and consequential. The first one refers to the demand by people, their desires and needs; the second one represents the offer of the sector, services, activities and the physical and social environment where they are developed; finally, the consequential element is the short and long-term impact caused by tourism activity and by the relationship between supply and demand. In fact, Medellín has consolidated the three elements mentioned above. For that reason, according to Red Cluster Colombia (2009), the Business Tourism Cluster has become one of the most relevant clusters for the economy of the city since it is focused on the development of the territory and the positioning of the region making it known as a smart, sustainable, and accessible city for everyone.

### **State of the art**

This state of the art compiles studies that will show us what has been written and analyzed related to the problem statement of this research. There will be studies about the internationalization process of companies, Medellín’s cluster strategy and the advantages it has to gain recognition abroad, some researches that expose the role of a modern languages professional in international enterprises were conducted by universities and an overview of the Modern Languages study plan from the ECCI University will be introduced to give a context on the training that this kind of professional have.

## **Internationalization benefits**

Considering that internationalization is the process of expanding operations and presence across borders, that immersion in foreign markets not only applies for companies, but also for territories and it can bring multiple benefits to both of them. As it is stated by Observatorio Vasco de la Cultura in its study “Internacionalización de la cultura” (2018), internationalization allows a country or a city to create an image of a territory that will be projected to foreign countries in order to gain prestige. Internationalization is also known as branding, and culture plays a significant role in it to create a consolidated identity abroad. Now in terms of entrepreneurial benefits Rueda (2008) mentions that the earning of more profits, reduction of operating costs, improvement of competitiveness, consolidation in emerging markets and the use of legal conditions in a foreign country are some positive results for a company in terms of internationalization. The statements of these two authors are linked to this research because they show the benefits that internationalization can have in a territory or in an entrepreneurial context and that allow us to comprehend the reasons why companies start this process and how they help at the same time to improve the city’s internationalization that was taken into consideration at the moment of creating this research.

## **Culture and languages**

The capital of Antioquia is not external to the multiple benefits that internationalization could provide. In consequence, the city has worked to become a suitable destination to carry out international business with multinational enterprises and investors that come from different countries. Therefore, it has been evidenced that the businesses and interactions with those

various foreign economic agents can not only be determined by the administration and negotiations skills but also by intercultural competences.

Nevertheless, on multiple occasions, many companies do not manage the same business culture and do not have a language-qualified staff, generating some issues for the enterprises of the city in terms of the internationalization process, especially if they are increasingly approaching new markets, regions, and cultures, which leads them to face more languages and in certain cases cultural shocks (Welch & Welch, 2017). Due to some challenges such as cultural shocks, different languages, and politics, the enterprises need to hire external personnel to carry out their foreign economic activities. Concerning to the language barriers, Enrique Fanjul (2022) argues that even in meetings or interviews with potential external clients they use the support of an interpreter, which is something distasteful to companies from those countries which can easily rule out the entrance into commercial negotiations with the people who need an interpreter (p. 4). The contribution of these authors is fundamental because it provides an overview where it is evident that apart from the economic limitations of companies may have, there are indeed cultural, economic and linguistic barriers which can make it difficult to enter new markets.

And despite the fact that the Colombian government has been working to promote foreign language learning in recent years, the Arismendi's study (2016, p. 112) points out that a particular emphasis has been given to bilingualism in Spanish-English, thus depriving students of having multilingual learning, this is complemented by Graddol (2006, interpreted by Ushioda, 2017), who argues that governments around the world invest in promoting the learning of English as a second language because of the economic needs they have. In addition, concerning to the English language and its influence in the globalized world, Ushioda (2017, p. 471) took as

references the statements of Crystal (2003), Graddol (2006), and Lo Bianco (2014), who argue that English is basically a common educational skill, a basic commodity in the global labor market and a world auxiliary language.

Therefore, people learn it because of its use and the advantages that it brings in social and commercial contexts. This tendency to learn only English can affect the motivation of learning other languages and that may have an impact on the needs for internationalization in companies since, as it was mentioned before, Arismendi (2016) points out that bilingualism is not enough in a globalized world and Vulić (2010) complements that idea by saying that companies look for multilingual people to gain access to new opportunities that they can find in the international markets.

Ushioda's perspective allows us to understand the reason why Medellín has primarily promoted the learning of English as an international language instead of other languages. However, authors like Arismendi and Vulić provide a compelling argument that often this language is not sufficient for the context of internationalization. This argument helps us to obtain a reference point to analyze with the answers given by the companies if more than one language is really needed in the international field.

### **Language programs in Medellín**

As a result of the previous statements proposed by Arismendi and Vulić and also because of the continuous internationalization of Medellín, many higher education institutions and certified language academies in the city have established languages programs and courses in order to promote the learning of other languages different from Spanish among the population of the city. However, it must be taken into account that there are few programs associated with

foreign languages in the capital of Antioquia and most of them are oriented towards training language teachers.

**Table 1** *Programs associated with foreign languages in Medellín*

<b>University</b>	<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Emphasis</b>	<b>Modality</b>
Universidad de Antioquia	Licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras	English and French	Pedagogical	On-site
Universidad de Antioquia UDEA	Traducción Inglés - Francés - Español	English and French	Translation	On-site
Corporación Universitaria Adventista UNAC	Licenciatura en Español e Inglés	English	Pedagogical	Virtual
UNAD (Universidad Abierta y a Distancia)	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en inglés	English	Pedagogical	Virtual
Universidad Católica Luis Amigó	Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con énfasis en Inglés	English and another optional language	Pedagogical	On-site
Universidad ECCI	Lenguas Modernas	English - French – German	Administrative	On-site
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana	Licenciatura en Inglés-Español	English	Pedagogical	On-site
Universidad Santo Tomás	Licenciatura en Lengua extranjera inglés	English	Pedagogical	Virtual

*Note.* The table shows a list of universities from Medellín that offer a bachelor's degree related to foreign languages with their respective emphases, modalities and languages they teach. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

As shown in Table 1, for the current research it is important to know the programs created in Medellín related to foreign languages and it was evidenced that most of the bachelor's



languages programs in Medellín are designed to train students to become language teachers. There is only one program called Modern Languages offered by ECCI University (n.d), which has as a professional profile aimed at training professionals that are able to carry out the internationalization commercial agreements between the companies and institutions and the external environment. In the same way, these professionals are capable of working in multilingual and intercultural contexts in a company. Furthermore, they can work as multilingual business advisors, especially in the marketing department. In this regard, to successfully accomplish these tasks, they must have intercultural competence and knowledge about the country where the business is going to be done, and also have good command in languages that are most used in the business world since “the mobility of capital and the interactions with different economic agents (entrepreneurs, suppliers, and employees) require not only a close relationship and coordination, but also a constant and high-quality exchange of information” (Ly et al., 2018, p. 113).

Concerning to the modern languages professional profile, the study made by Cerón, Franco, and Prieto (2010) is pertinent to mention it as long as it describes the professional profile of modern languages of the Ean University, which is the most similar to ECCI University’s profile in the country, as a response to carried out tasks such as translation, and interpretation in the languages for which they are trained, editing and proofreading of texts, leadership and ability in negotiation processes, and customer service. What’s more, the skills that must be applied in the work environment are in research with a corporate and business focus and a high level in the four linguistic skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) in English, French, Italian, Portuguese and German according to the European reference framework.

Regarding both professional profiles, according to Caldas, Pachón, Silvara and Zambrano (2013), in their research about “La competitividad en el programa académico de Lengua Modernas entre la Universidad Ean y la Universidad ECCI”, these authors highlight that one of the biggest differences between the ECCI University and the Ean University is that the latter has a special emphasis in the translation and organizational communication field, while the ECCI University focuses on marketing and administration. This study has relevance in the present research because it demonstrates to us the different focus that both degrees have, proving that the modern languages professionals can work in a wide range of roles beyond the pedagogical field.

### **Modern languages professional employability**

Despite the broad field of job opportunities available to modern languages professionals, universities face a dilemma regarding the employability of this type of professionals in this field. The issue is that “languages have been largely promoted as a skill (a high level), rather than as a humanities discipline from which students will graduate with humanities-type skills such as intercultural competence, independent learning, self-motivation” (Canning, 2009, p. 2). Actually, that statement is complemented by a study carried out by Alzate et al. (2021) called “Realidad laboral de los egresados en lenguas modernas de la Universidad Ean, where the authors give a current outlook about the modern languages professional employability. This study is taken as a point of reference for this research because they highlighted that the survey respondents have stated that they found difficult to find job opportunities that stick to the modern language professional profile since this one is not well known or clear for the entrepreneurs, causing a lack of knowledge among the corporate sector about what kind of tasks and in what post a professional of this program can perform.

In addition to the lack of awareness about the professional profile, there are other factors to be considered that affect the labor demand of the graduates in careers related to languages. This is backed up by Cerón, Franco, Prieto, and Mendoza (2013) in the research of the Ean University called “La comunicación y el profesional de lenguas modernas en las empresas colombianas”, where they mention that companies prefer personnel trained in specific areas, who know and can respond to the needs of their own positions using the knowledge in a foreign language (p. 42). Likewise, in this same study made in Bogotá, 48 companies from countries like Germany, France and Italy addressed the role that a modern languages professional could have in those firms and only 4% of them think that for making commercial activities in their organizations it is necessary to hire modern languages professionals while 68% already hire specialized professionals who speak other languages. These percentages reveal that having an outstanding command of one or more foreign languages is not enough for today’s entrepreneurial world. As a matter of fact, this data is relevant in our research at the moment of comparing the companies’ answers concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel in fashion and tourism companies from Medellín with the answers from the study made by Cerón, Franco, Prieto, and Mendoza (2013).

Even at the Modern Languages program of the Ean University a survey was carried out in that institution by Alzate et al. (2021), where 87 graduates participated and one of the conclusions from that project says that the professional emphases offered by their institution, which are translation, organizational or digital communication, are not fully taught in depth since the degree does not take into account the requirements that large national and foreign companies really have. In addition, the graduates consider that they compete with people with more specific knowledge when they apply for a job position.

Complementing the conclusions conducted in the research of Alzate et al., a study based on the perceptions of the Modern Languages program from the ECCI University located in Bogotá was carried out by Smith and Claro (2015). In this study, 45 Modern Languages students from the 3rd to 5th semester were interviewed, and it was concluded that there is a lack of clarity regarding the job opportunities available in the industry for this type of professionals. Precisely, the results of the researches made by Alzate and Smith and Claro, reveal that both degrees, Modern Languages program from the ECCI University and Modern Languages program from the Ean University have shortcomings concerning the recognition of the tasks these professionals can perform and also those programs have shortcomings with the teaching of the specific emphases, which can affect the recognition of modern languages professionals in the entrepreneurial sector.

### **Study plan of Modern Languages Program from the ECCI University**

It is also important to make it clear that the present research was carried out taking into account the curriculum established by the ECCI University in 2015 for the Modern Languages program in Medellín with an emphasis on Administration which so far is still valid for students.

**Table 2** *First Modern Languages study plan from the ECCI University in force since 2015*

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Credits</b>
	Basic English Skills	<b>8</b>
	Competencias en Lengua Materna	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	Basic Oral Practice	<b>3</b>
	Fundamentos de informática	<b>3</b>
	Cátedra ECCI (V)	<b>1</b>

	Intermediate English Skills	8
	Lenguaje y Redacción	3
	Mercadeo Básico	2
2	Intermediate Oral Practice	3
	Fundamentos de Administración y Economía (V)	1
	Optativa de Formación Integral (V)	1
	Upper -Intermediate English Skills	8
	Taller De Redacción Académica	3
	Semantics and Vocabulary	3
3	Upper - Intermediate Oral Practice	2
	Teorías Organizativas Actuales (V)	1
	Ética (V)	1
	Les Compétences Du Niveau Français Débutants	8
	Introduction to Translation	3
	General Reading Skills	3
4	Pensamiento Estratégico	1
	Optativa de Formación Integral (V)	1
	Investigación I	2
	Les Compétences Du Niveau Français Intermédiaire	6
	Fertigkeiten Zur Grundstufe	4
	Investigación II	2
5	Emprendimiento (V)	1
	Énfasis Profesional 1 Inglés	2
	Conversation for International Business	3
6	Les Compétences Du Niveau Français Avancé	3

	Fertigkeiten Zur Mittelstufe	4
	General Business Translation	2
	Compétence D'expression Orale et Écrite	2
	Énfasis Profesional 2 Administración	2
	Legislación Laboral (V)	1
	Plan de Negocios	2
	Innovación Tecnológica	2
	Discussion Publique	4
	Fertigkeiten Zur Oberstufe	4
	Multicultural Context	5
7	Énfasis Profesional 1 Francés	2
	Gestión del talento Humano (V)	1
	Seguridad Industrial	1
	Seguridad Social Empresarial	1
	Conversation Avancée Pour Des A aires Internationales	5
	Öffentlicher Diskurs	4
8	Énfasis Profesional 2 Alemán	2
	Semantik und Wortschatz	4
	Investigación Aplicada	2
	Responsabilidad Ambiental (V)	1

*Note.* Virtual subjects are specified in the table as (V). Adapted from *Pensum académico de lenguas modernas*, by Universidad ECCI, n.d. In the public domain by Universidad ECCI. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

As it is shown in the image 1, within this study plan, the English language has 53 credits out of 144 making it the language most seen in the whole Modern Languages program, even the subjects in English are present from the 1st to the 7th semester of the curriculum.

Secondly, there is the French language, which starts from the 4th semester to the 8th semester and it has 29 credits out of 144. In third position there is the German language with 22 credits distributed between the 5th and 8th semester. There are other subjects that are taught in Spanish like those focused on marketing and administration that have 11 credits, which correspond to the emphasis of the program.

**Table 3** *New Modern Languages study plan in force since 2023*

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Credits</b>
	Basic English Skills	<b>8</b>
	Competencias en Lengua Materna	<b>3</b>
<b>1</b>	Pensamiento lògico matemàtico	<b>3</b>
	Introducciòn a la Admon y Economía	<b>3</b>
	Càtedra ECCI (V)	<b>1</b>
	Intermediate English Skills	<b>8</b>
	Anàlisis Textual	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	Mercadeo Para El Siglo Xxi	<b>3</b>
	Contextos Empresariales	<b>3</b>
	Electiva No Tècnica	<b>1</b>
	Upper -Intermediate English Skills	<b>8</b>
<b>3</b>	Taller De Redacciòn Acadèmica	<b>3</b>
	Comportamiento Del Consumidor	<b>3</b>

	Academic English Skills	3
	Ética (V)	1
	Français Debutant	8
	Meaning And Context	3
4	Análisis De Mercado	2
	Translation	3
	Metodología De La Investigación	2
	Français Élémentaire	8
	Deutsch Für Anfänger	6
5	Project Management I	2
	Innovación Tecnológica (V)	1
	Français Pré-Intermédiaire	3
	Grundlegende Kenntnisse	8
	Gestión De Proyectos II	2
6	Service Clients	2
	Emprendimiento (V)	1
	I+D+I (V)	1
	Fortgeschrittene Sprachverwendung I	6
	Discussion Publique	4
	Conversation For International Business	3
7	Electiva (Administración)	2
	Electiva Profesional (V)	1
	Investigación Aplicada (V)	2
	Fortgeschrittene Sprachverwendung II	4
8	Conversation Avancée Pour Des Affaires International	3
	Empowerment Of Human Resources	3



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Interkulturelle Kommunikation In Geschäften	3
Electiva (Lengua)	2
Opción De Grado	2
Responsabilidad Ambiental (V)	1

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*Note.* Adapted from *Plan de estudios*, by Universidad ECCI, n.d. In the public domain by Universidad ECCI. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

In Contrast to the former curriculum, in the recent study plan, there was a considerable change in the study focus, because, although it also has subjects for learning the English, French and German languages, the new plan prioritizes the administrative emphasis in the degree by increasing the number of credits for these subjects from 11 to 22.

In terms of languages, on one hand, English was reduced to 43 credits out of 144, as well as French with 26 credits. On the other hand, the number of credits for the German subjects increased from 22 to 27.

### **Methodological framework**

The following research has a qualitative approach which is described by the authors Sampieri, Fernández and Batista (2014) as the approach that seeks to understand the perspectives of the participants investigated by analyzing their experiences, opinions, contexts and the way they see reality. For this reason, it is the method that best suits the characteristics of this research since the results will be expressed in an analysis that leads to identify the needs of fashion and tourism companies from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel that supports their internationalization processes. Also, it should be pointed out that this research

is part of a bigger investigation called “Retos y oportunidades de los profesionales de lenguas modernas en un contexto de creciente internacionalización de la ciudad de Medellín”; which is currently being made by the professor Anyela Heredia from ECCI University and whose objective is to identify challenges and opportunities that the modern languages professionals have in the internationalization context of Medellín. To achieve the purpose of that bigger research, this project contributes to it by analyzing the needs for internationalization concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel in two important economic sectors in the city (fashion and tourism), this is with the aim of having an entrepreneurial context before analyzing the challenges and opportunities that the modern language professionals have at the moment of applying for job positions in the internationalization context of Medellín.

Moreover, even though it is necessary to have a previous context of the topic by doing research about the most relevant matters that will be analyzed, this project uses an inductive method, as Sampieri et al (2014) indicated, a qualitative research is based on logic and inductive process because this one firstly explores and describes, for later explain a general perspective. Taking the previous statement about the inductive process into consideration, the current research takes as a basis the recent context of internationalization in Medellín, also some concepts like interculturality, modern languages and clusters. After clarifying concepts and obtaining a previous outlook of the internationalization context in the city, a semi-structured interview was carried out with 20 companies, in order to analyze their particular answers and thus have an overview and a general idea about the needs for internationalization of fashion and tourism companies from Medellin concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel.

In addition, this study is exploratory, since according to Sampieri et al (2014) it is carried out when an investigation problem or topic has been little studied, they also mention that this type of study helps to understand unknown concepts and phenomenons with the purpose of getting and expanding new information of particular contexts. This is one of the reasons for doing this project, because, although there are few researches related to modern languages programs in Colombia and internationalization, most of them do not focus on a specific sector of the economy and they were made by the Ean University where the central theme was the role of modern languages professionals in foreign companies located in Bogotá, some others studies were made by the ECCI University where the emphasis was the role of modern languages professionals in French fashion companies and another in flower exporting companies from Antioquia. Those researches were taken as a point of reference to do the current one, which is carried out regarding the needs for internationalization of 20 fashion and tourism companies from Medellín concerning the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel. Even though the research is focused on knowing the needs for internationalization, it has a special emphasis on the bilingual or multilingual staff hiring, making it the first one of its types in the city.

### **Sample**

After a thorough bibliographic investigation on official websites such as the Chamber of Commerce of Medellín, it was established that the sample would be 20 companies, 10 in the tourism cluster and 10 in the fashion cluster that are from Medellín. It has to be noted that all of those companies do not have their main headquarters located in the city, regardless of being founded in Medellín. The main criterion for selecting the enterprises was the immersion that each one has in the international field. Nevertheless, all of them were selected through a

convenience sampling because the companies interviewed were chosen based on the accessibility to information, their willingness and availability of time they had.

## **Population**

The population determined for the elaboration of the project were companies belonging to the fashion and tourism clusters in the city of Medellín and its surroundings. These two clusters were chosen because of their importance for the development of the city, while the fashion cluster was chosen due to its long trajectory and because it is one that attracts plenty of tourists that want to invest in the industry of fashion. The tourism cluster was chosen because of its growth in recent years. In fact, due to its economic growth, it is one of the most competitive and profitable sectors in the city, being one of the most important destinations in Colombia.

For the development of this research the name of the companies interviewed will remain anonymous, as well as the names of the interviewees in view of the fact that they signed an informed consent, which stipulated full anonymity. To see the format of that document, see annex 2. It should be noted that to detail the information obtained, a distinction will be made as follows: **Company 00F** for companies belonging to the fashion cluster; **Company 00T** for tourism companies, including letters **MI**, **S**, **M** and **L** specifically for micro, small, medium and large enterprises.

## **Instrument**

The instrument used for data collection was a semi-structured interview, since it allows to obtain different experiences, points of view and opinions from the interviewee in a more personal way, where the questions are usually open (Sampieri et al, 2014). This interview was

elaborated for companies belonging to tourism and fashion clusters in Medellín. And the trajectory of the company, its markets, its international process and the bilingual staff hiring were taken into account for the development of the interview.

Those interviews were made through cell phone calls, video calls, visits to the companies and also during a visit to the Colombiatex event that takes place every year in Medellín, which is the largest textile, inputs, machinery, technology and fashion fair event in Colombia where fashion companies participate and promote their brands.

### **Research phases**

The project was developed in 4 phases.

#### ***Phase 1 Literature review***

In this phase a literature review was carried out regarding theories and some concepts related to internationalization, globalization, interculturality and modern languages. In addition, academic studies were taken into consideration where the main topics are related to modern languages programs, the role of a modern languages professional and the cluster strategy in Medellín.

#### ***Phase 2 Sample selection***

In this second phase, a pre-selection from an extensive database provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Medellín was made of 10 companies from the Fashion Cluster and other 10 companies focused on tourism in the city.

### ***Phase 3 Interview***

The questions for the analysis of the investigation project were created, subsequently, contact was made through mails, audio recordings, visits and calls with the consent of the companies to coordinate an interview. To collect the information required for this study, the questions were asked to people closely related to the companies' internationalization processes and the hiring of bilingual personnel, some of them were founders or CEOs, others directors from the administrative, the commercial and the human resources departments.

### ***Phase 4 Analysis***

In this phase, after having the answers of the sample, the data collected were tabulated in a table gathering the answers according to the question, then those answers were categorized depending on their similarity in order to facilitate its analysis and the elaboration of graphs with the answers given by the interviewees. This allowed better management of the information provided.

After making an individual analysis of each question in both sectors, the analysis of fashion and tourism companies were based on the previous theoretical framework and state of the art with the aim of contrasting and complementing the answers given by the companies with the theories, studies and concepts in the theoretical framework and state of the art.

### **Interview's questions**

In the first part of the interview basic inquiries were made about the work position of the person, moreover, that information allowed having a perspective about the company such as the activity, number of employees and the main headquarter.

In the second part of the interview some questions focused on the internationalization process were asked to each company, including details about the strategies in international markets, the departments involved in the internationalization process and the requirements for hiring bilingual or multilingual staff in the company. And the last part of the interview was focused on questions about the Modern Languages program of the ECCI University. To see the complete list of questions, see Annex 1. The complete interview for the fashion and tourism companies can be seen in the Annex 3 and in the Annex 4.

### Analysis of fashion companies

**Table 4** *Fashion companies' characteristics*

Fashion companies					
Name	Main headquarters location	Countries where the company has international presence	When was the company founded?	Number of employees	What does the company do?
Company <b>01FS</b>	Medellín	Greece, Mexico and the USA	2012	18	Manufacture and sale of clothing made of leather and fabric
Company <b>02FL</b>	Itagüí	Ecuador and the USA	1981	330	Textile transformation company, it does printing, dyeing and textile finishing
Company <b>03FL</b>	Guarne	Brazil, Ecuador, the USA, Venezuela and some countries of Europe	1978	Between 800 and 1200	Company specialized in the manufacture of leather products
Company <b>04FL</b>	Itagüí	Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile,	1939	More than 500	Manufacture and export of textiles

		Ecuador, Germany, México, Panama, Peru and the USA			
Company <b>05FS</b>	Sabaneta	Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Spain and USA	2018	26	Manufactures underwear and outerwear
Company <b>06FL</b>	Girardota	Brazil, Argentina, USA, Dominican Republic, Canada, European fishing countries (Spain, Portugal, Norway, Italy)	1964	1800	Manufacturer of resins, filaments and industrial threads for the manufacture of fabrics, tires, nets, everything related to industry and fishing
Company <b>07FS</b>	Medellín	Worldwide	2005	20	Imports supplies and gives personalized services of decoration with jewelry
Company <b>08FMI</b>	Medellín	USA	2015	5	Manufactures streetwear
Company <b>09FS</b>	Medellín	Mexico and USA	2008	50	Manufactures streetwear
Company <b>010FMI</b>	Medellín	Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Mexico	2018	10	Imports and commercializes supplies for the manufacture of cycling uniforms

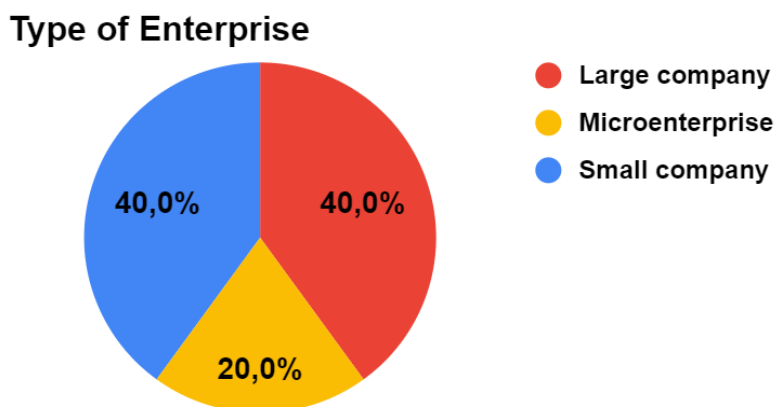
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*Note.* For the fashion companies' sample (**F**), the size and number of employees of each one were taken into account with the following criteria: a micro company (**MI**) with 10 or fewer employees; a small company (**S**) with 11 and up to 50 employees; a medium-sized company (**M**) with up to 200 employees and large company (**L**) with more than 200 active employees. In



addition, the table shows the countries where each company has an international presence and the year of its foundation specifically in the city. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

**Figure 1** *Type of enterprise (Fashion sector)*

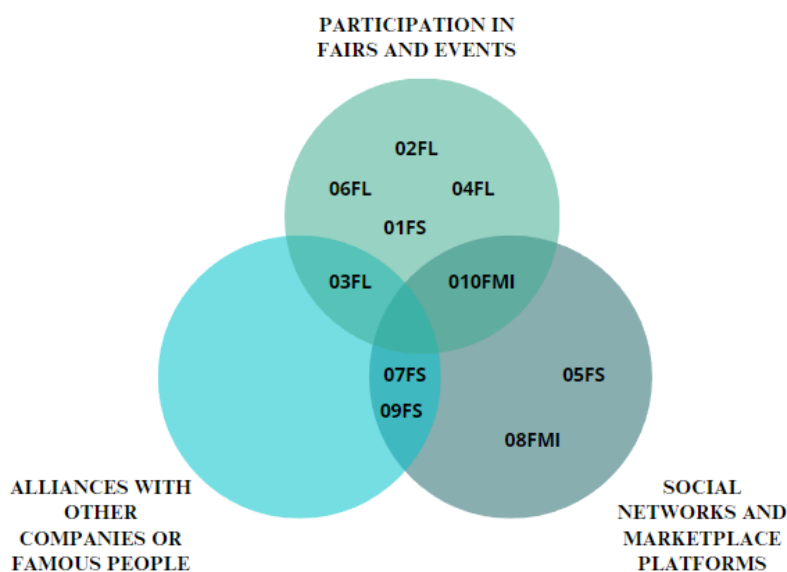


*Note.* Total percentage of fashion companies according to their size Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Analyzing the information in Table 4, there is a tendency for fashion companies to have an international presence mostly in speaking-Spanish countries from Central and South America such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Chile, and Peru. This usually happens because as it was explained by Clark and Pugh (2001), companies look for close countries to establish presence there in order to avoid linguistic, cultural and social differences. The last statement is complemented by Fanjul (2022) who argues that the language barrier is one of the barriers that hinder the interactions and the negotiations with non-Spanish speaking countries.

After consolidating and gaining confidence in speaking-Spanish territories that are physically close, enterprises look for opportunities to enter bigger markets, especially in non-Spanish speaking countries, where the most mentioned country was the USA as it can be seen in Table 4, then 6 companies stated that they have a presence in European countries such as Greece, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Norway and Italy and for 3 companies the Brazilian market was taken into account. An important aspect to highlight is that none of the companies answered Asian and African countries.

**Figure 2** Fashion companies' internationalization strategies



*Note.* Three specific strategies were identified in the fashion companies, the information was gathered and then the connection between the strategies implemented by each company was made. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

For achieving that international presence, the companies carry out some strategies which have helped with this process (see graphic 2). For instance, as Sarmiento (2014) mentioned, one of the main strategies to be known in the international field is to take advantage of social

networks and the Internet to generate massive marketing abroad. Indeed, 5 companies interviewed (3 small and 2 micro), which have less than 20 years in the fashion market show a tendency to work hand in hand with social media, websites and marketplace platforms to be known worldwide. As an example, company **05FS** explains that its strategy consists of looking for potential clients and important distributors in different countries thanks to marketplace platforms such as Mercado Libre and Linio. Then we make a link with these clients and we show them our commercial proposal (personal communication, December 29, 2022).

Furthermore, the other 5 firms participate in international category events to create new agreements with possible customers and investors, as well as to get in contact with distributors, bigger companies and entrepreneurs that possess a wide recognition in the global market in order to create new alliances. It is pertinent to underline that 4 of those companies that tend to participate in events are large and have between 40 and 80 years in the fashion market. In one specific case, **04FL** mentioned that apart from the participation in events, they make a market study before delivering the products to the country where they want to make commercial agreements (personal communication, May 12, 2023) this strategy could be perfectly carried out by a modern languages professional, because the professional can play the role of mediator between companies and their cultures in order to establish a business relationship.

Additionally, these multiple strategies have allowed the companies to have business networks as explained in Johanson and Mattson (1998, seen in Becerra, 2006) where due to external agents (organizations, advisors, clients, distributors) the enterprises create alliances and get vital information about the international field, which helps them to better understand the countries where they make an incursion and also to be more prepared to the challenges. As an

example, many companies interviewed participated in the event Colombiatex where they wanted to create those networks mentioned above. Thanks to these strategies, enterprises have gained the possibility to export their products to other countries either through virtual platforms, physical sales points, or both which allow them to participate in the international fashion market.

**Table 5** *Departments that are involved in internationalization process of the company*

<b>Departments</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Number</b>
Marketing	<b>02FL–03FL–09FS</b>	<b>3</b>
Commercial / Sales	<b>02FL–03FL–04FL–05FS–09FS–010FMI</b>	<b>6</b>
Production	<b>09FS</b>	<b>1</b>
Finance	<b>09FS–010FMI</b>	<b>2</b>
Logistics	<b>04FL–05FS</b>	<b>2</b>
Administrative	<b>05FS</b>	<b>1</b>
All departments	<b>01FS–06FL–07FS–08FMI</b>	<b>4</b>

*Note.* The departments indicated by the companies which have the most participation in the internationalization processes. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Apart from the strategies mentioned above, the entrance of the market in other countries has been possible thanks to some specific departments that were revealed by each company in the interview (see table 5), although four companies consider that all departments are involved in the internationalization process and the rest specified more than one, there are two departments that stand out among the rest and those are the commercial and marketing departments.

**Table 6** *Kind of professional usually hired by fashion companies*

<b>Kind of professional hired</b>	<b>Companies</b>
Expert in foreign trade (exports and imports) and international business	<b>03FL–04FL–05FS–06FL–08FMI - 010FMI</b>
Administrator	<b>01FS–02FL–05FS</b>
Expert in commercial processes	<b>02FL–010FMI</b>
Bilingual profesional	<b>01FS–09FS</b>
Designer	<b>02FL–07FS</b>

*Note.* The table shows the kind of professionals most hired by companies to work in the areas mentioned in Table 5 were taken into account. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Meanwhile, based on the information from the table 4, the kind of professionals that are usually hired in the areas related to the internationalization process are people that have studied a degree that belongs to the field of international business and exports, commercial processes and administration, since they are the ones in charge of creating business relationships, managing exportation process, looking for profitability and gaining recognition. Precisely, the results obtained in this part of the research are supported by Jordi canals (1994, explained in Becerra, 2006) who stated that those types of international processes must be in charge of people who know the needs of the company in the international field, the requirements, the type of customer and the characteristics of the country where the clients live in. A minority specified that they hire bilingual personnel.

**Table 7** Fashion companies' needs for internationalization

<b>Needs</b>	<b>Companies</b>
To have staff with a good command of a second language.	<b>02FL–04FL–06FL–09FS</b>
To be updated regarding fashion tendencies.	<b>05FS–03FL</b>
To get more business relationships and alliances.	<b>01FS–07FS</b>
To obtain better tariffs at the moment of carrying out the exportation process.	<b>08FMI–010FMI</b>

*Note.* The companies expressed their main needs for the departments established in Table 3 to make themselves known internationally. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Concerning the needs for internationalization on the table 7, it was found out that the main needs shared by 1 small and 3 large companies is to hire people with a good command of a second language, especially English, also it would be better if those people have knowledge in exports or know how to create a market study. A very particular tendency is that almost all large companies, which also have the longest trajectory, share the same need of hiring bilingual personnel. The other companies made clear that at the moment they have more specific needs that are not related to the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel. For example, the second need also shared by 1 small and 1 large company is to stay updated about fashion tendencies in order to innovate in the creation of their products to satisfy the changing needs of their clients. For 2 small companies the biggest need is to expand the company abroad for the purpose of getting more business relationships, alliances and negotiations in order to be more competitive, recognized in the market around the world. In addition, there is another need related to the

exportation process that the 2 microenterprises mentioned because they want to get better rates at the moment of importing and exporting raw material, supplies and products.

Something that was particular is that none of the companies revealed the intercultural aspect as a need, since for the fashion companies interviewed, this is not considered an essential factor when hiring bilingual staff. According to Fanjul (2020) companies that work in international markets have focused more on analyzing the different existing markets and on knowing the legal and tax aspect of the countries in which they work or they would like to work. However, the same author argues that it is necessary to study how people behave and what are their cultural aspects in order to have good negotiations. To achieve a good negotiation, Fanjul proposes an aspect to improve in the staff of an organization, that aspect is called cultural intelligence, which can be defined as the ability of a person to adapt himself effectively in a new cultural context.

Considering the needs exposed by the fashion companies, they can be considered as an opportunity for the modern languages professional to fulfill them, whether in sales, marketing, customer service, or international relationship, since in this program apart from languages, the students also study topics related to marketing, administration and project management, however, this can also be considered as a challenge because as it was pointed out in Alzate et al. (2021) those topics are not studied in depth and there is no specific emphasis that covers all the knowledge required for the mentioned areas. As it was expressed by company **01FS**, a modern languages professional has an advantage over other people, but you also have to have commercial knowledge. The person must have had some commercial knowledge, I mean, to have worked or to have had some experience with clients (personal communication, May 15, 2023).

**Table 8** *Foreign languages spoken in the departments involved in the internationalization*

<b>Languages</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Number</b>
English	<b>All companies</b>	<b>10</b>
French	<b>01FS–04FL</b>	<b>2</b>
Portuguese	<b>01FS–03FL–010FMI</b>	<b>2</b>
Italian	<b>01FS–010FMI</b>	<b>2</b>
Mandarin	<b>01FS</b>	<b>1</b>

*Note.* The languages that the fashion companies consider most relevant for the internationalization processes, being English the main language for all. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

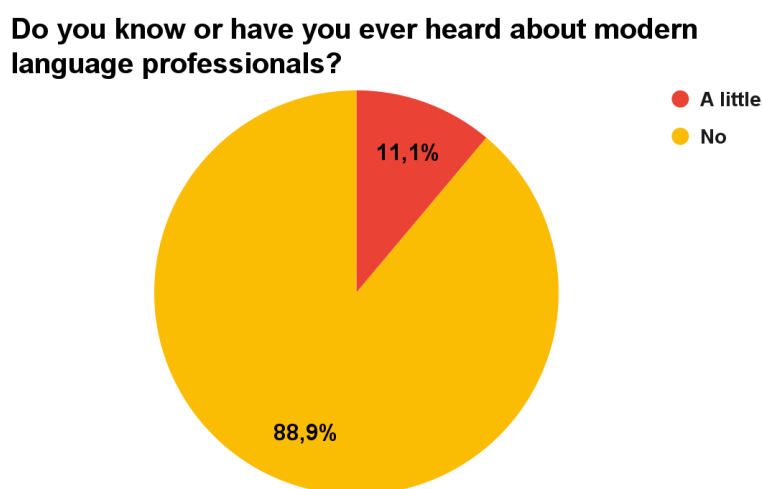
Likewise, when knowing the results of those companies who have hired bilingual and multilingual staff to work there, all companies have hired staff that speaks another language and they highlighted the importance of knowing at least one-second language, where English stood out, but 4 companies specified other languages like French, Portuguese, Italian and Mandarin, these answers can evidence that multilingualism is not as important as bilingualism for fashion enterprises, because for the majority of companies English is enough. After having found out if the companies hire bilingual or multilingual personnel, they were asked for the criteria they take into account for hiring that kind of people, one of the criteria that was most mentioned was to have a good command and fluency mainly in English, just one company stated that fluency in English must be certified to work there. Apart from the criteria previously explained, the companies were asked about the knowledge that the bilingual or multilingual personnel should have apart from proficiency in languages; for the majority of enterprises interviewed, apart from the language proficiency, in a general way, for them, it is important to have people who have



knowledge of everything related to international trade, negotiations and commercial skills alongside customer service. In addition, it was relevant for the research that one of the companies specified that soft skills and assertive communication are important at the moment of interacting with the client.

**Figure 3** *Knowledge about Modern Languages professional*

*Do you know or have you ever heard about modern language professionals?*

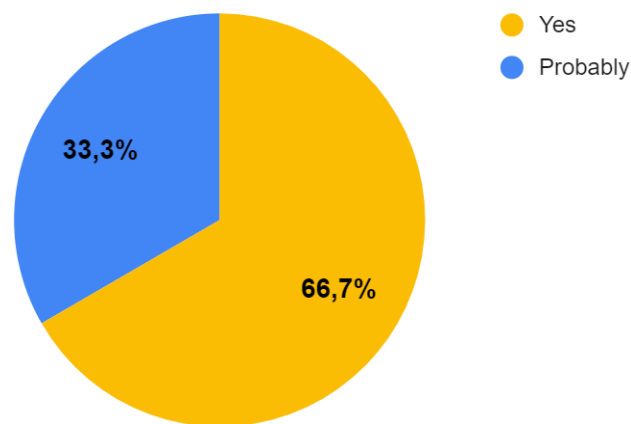


*Note.* Total percentage of companies have not heard about the professionals in Modern Languages. It is important to clarify that these percentages are based on the total of the 9 responses received since one company refrained from responding. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

**Figure 4** *Hiring of modern languages professionals from the ECCI University*

Would you hire a modern language professional?

**Would you hire a modern language professional to work in those areas?**



*Note.* Total percentage of companies' responses regarding whether or not they would hire a professional with the characteristics of the Modern Languages degree. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Lastly, the companies were asked if they have heard about modern languages professionals (see Graphic 3), almost all companies revealed a lack of knowledge about the program, only **Company 09FS** differed from those responses since they have heard little about this profile and they only know that such professionals have a command in different languages. This result is similar to the findings in the investigation of Alzate et al (2021) where the authors stated that due to the lack of knowledge of the modern languages program by companies and entrepreneurs, it is difficult for the professionals of this degree to access job opportunities in the fashion cluster. Nevertheless, after mentioning the ECCI University Modern Languages profile to the interviewee they were asked if they would hire a modern languages professional (see Graphic 4), more than 60% answered they would hire them, while the 33.3 % probably would hire them depending on the professional profile they are looking for and the characteristics and skills of the candidate.

### Analysis of tourism companies

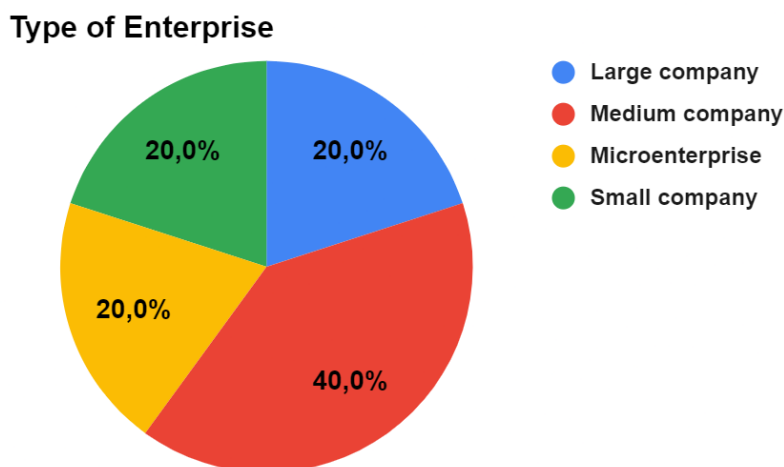
**Table 9** *Tourism companies' characteristics*

<b>TOURISM COMPANIES</b>					
Name	Location in Medellín (commune)	From which countries / continents come the majority of their clients?	When was the company founded?	Number of employees	What does the company do?
Company <b>01TM</b>	Poblado	France, Puerto Rico, USA and Europe.	2009	70	Tourism agency that offers tours.
Company <b>02TL</b>	Poblado	USA, Central and South America and Europe	1997	210	Hotel
Company <b>03TL</b>	Poblado	Worldwide.	1970	210	Hotel
Company <b>04TMI</b>	Does not have physical headquarters	Argentina, Germany, Israel, Mexico, Netherlands, Spain and USA.	2019	6	Tourism agency that offers tours.
Company <b>05TM</b>	Poblado	Asia, Europe and North America	2018	112	Hotel
Company <b>06TS</b>	Poblado	Canada, France, Germany, Spain, USA	2012	13	Tourism agency that offers tours.
Company <b>07TM</b>	La Candelaria	Worldwide	1971	140	Conventions center
Company <b>08TM</b>	Poblado	USA and Puerto Rico	1989	138	Hotel
Company <b>09TS</b>	Does not have physical headquarters	Canada, England, USA and Europe	2013	16	Tourism agency that offers tours

Company <b>010TMI</b>	Does not have physical headquarters	The USA, central American countries and Western Europe	2018	8	Tourism agency that offers cycling tourism in the city
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*Note.* For the tourism companies' sample (**T**), the size and number of employees of each one were taken into account with the following criteria: micro company (**MI**) with 10 or fewer employees; a small company (**S**) with 11 up to 50 employees,; a medium-sized company (**M**) with up to 200 employees and a large company (**L**) with more than 200 active employees. In addition, the table shows the countries or continents where each company has an international presence and the year of its foundation specifically in the city. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

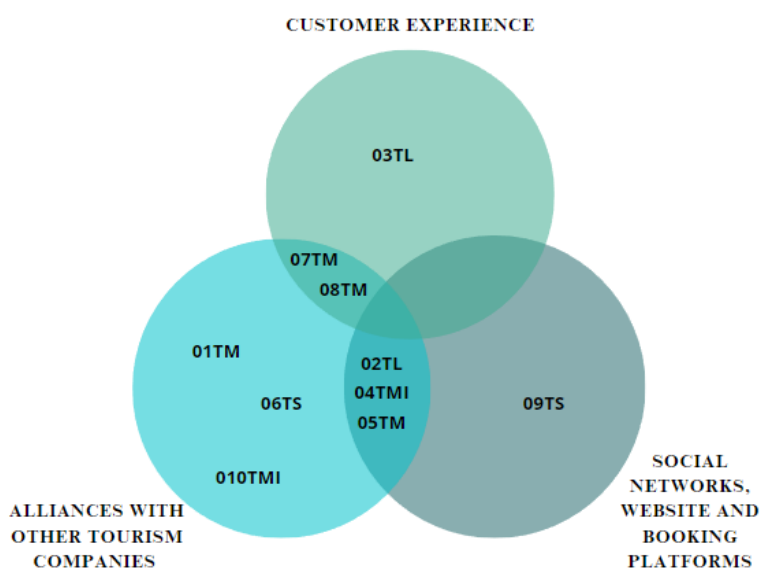
**Figure 5** *Type of enterprise (Tourism sector)*



*Note.* Total percentage of tourism companies according to their size Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Based in Table 9, the results obtained show that most of the companies, despite making it clear that they do not have a physical headquarters outside of Colombia, indicated that their services are more focused on foreign visitors, who largely come from the United States, but also, they receive customers from Latin America and some European countries such as Germany, France, England, Netherlands and Spain. In fact, the tourism in the city of Medellín and its surroundings is considered as inbound tourism, which according to UNWTO are “the activities of a non-resident visitor within the country of reference” (n.d). There is a particularity with company **07TM** which is characterized by being a conventions center, for that reason they specified that the firm receives visitors and promotes business tourism but at the same time, it participates also in events abroad such as ExpoDubai with the objective of consolidating Medellín as a tourist destination of business, fairs and conventions.

**Figure 6** *Tourism companies' internationalization strategies*



*Note.* Three strategies were identified in the tourism companies, then the connection between the strategies implemented by each company was made. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A. and Villa, A. (2023). own elaboration.

Precisely, to attract all those foreign visitors and to extend the international recognition, the companies revealed some strategies as seen in Graphic 6. 8 companies, including the 5 tourism agencies, tend to have alliances with Colombian tourism organizations such as ANATO, PROCOLOMBIA and COTELCO. Some of the companies interviewed get in touch also with people they know from abroad that help them to promote their businesses, in order to attract foreign visitors to the city. An example is the company **01TM** which declared that its main strategy is to get direct clients or alliances with tourism agencies from each country where Colombia is promoted as a potential destination to visit (personal communication, November 9, 2022). Additionally, 4 of the companies interviewed get their clients thanks to a marketing strategy based on the use of social networks, booking platforms, or review websites like Tripadvisor where thanks to the customer's reviews, the tourism enterprises grow and get more visitors. Related to this strategy the company **04TMI** expressed that the point of reference are the booking platforms because this type of media allows the tourist to be safe and reliable with the service (personal communication, November 29, 2022). As a matter of fact, this alliance between the review platforms and the tourism firms is explained by Ballesteros & Vásquez (2019) who mention that having great reviews on those platforms helps to increase the image of the company and strengthen its marketing.

As well as, 3 companies, which have more than 30 years of experience in the tourism market, noted that their main strategy is to be adapted to the customers' needs by updating their portfolio of services each year, with the aim of providing a pleasant experience to the visitors.

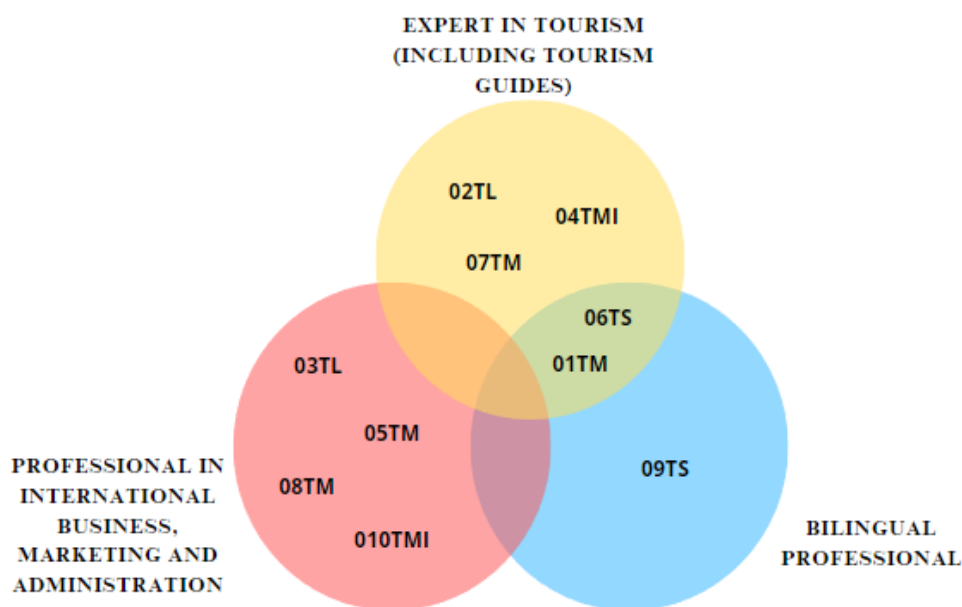
**Table 10** *Tourism departments that are involved in the internationalization process*

<b>Departments</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>Number</b>
Marketing	<b>02TL–04TMI–05TM–06TS</b>	<b>4</b>
Commercial / Sales	<b>01TM–02TL–06TS–07TM–08TM–010TMI</b>	<b>6</b>
Quality	<b>06TS</b>	<b>1</b>
Service	<b>03TL</b>	<b>1</b>
Expansion	<b>010TMI</b>	<b>1</b>
Communication	<b>05TM</b>	<b>1</b>
All departments	<b>09TS</b>	<b>1</b>

*Note.* The departments indicated by the companies which have the most participation in the internationalization processes. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Companies also indicate that there are some departments specifically in charge of making the company grow internationally, among which the commercial and marketing departments stood out the most. It should be noted that for 5 companies a single department is involved in the internationalization process.

**Figure 7** *Kind of professional usually hired by tourism companies*



*Note.* The graphic shows the kind of professionals usually hired by companies to work in the areas mentioned in Table 8. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

And although, the marketing and commercial departments pointed out in Table 10 are the most relevant in the internationalization process of these companies, the type of professionals that these tourism enterprises tend hire are more focused on customer services and guide services, for example people who have knowledge and training in tourism and hospitality, also people who has studied a degree related to administration like international business and people with a good command in English and other foreign languages to facilitate understanding and to provide a better experience to foreign visitors (see table 11).

**Table 11** Foreign languages spoken in the areas involved in the internationalization process

<b>Languages</b>	<b>Companies</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
English	<b>All companies</b>	<b>10</b>
French	<b>02TL–05TM–06TS–08TM</b>	<b>4</b>



German	<b>01TM–06TS</b>	<b>2</b>
Italian	<b>06TS</b>	1
Portuguese	<b>01TM–06TS</b>	<b>2</b>
Mandarin	<b>06TS</b>	<b>1</b>

*Note.* The languages that the tourism consider most relevant for the internationalization processes, being English and French the most prominent languages. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Taking into account the kind of professionals the companies hire and the type of customers they receive, all of the firms have indicated that they have hired bilingual or multilingual staff within the company. Nevertheless, half of the companies stated that they only hire people with knowledge in English and so far, they are not interested in another language as is the case of company **09TS** which argues that it does not matter if the person knows more than English. We just need that language (personal communication, November 30, 2022). The other half has hired people with more variety of languages, apart from English these companies hire people with knowledge in French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese or even Russian, which agree on the idea of Baralo (2015) who states that when a person has a good command in various languages, it is equivalent to have more value in social, cultural, labor and economic terms. Especially for the tourism companies that look to offer their services in several languages in order to have a broader range of communication with people from non-English speaking countries.

Apart from the fact that the applicant must have knowledge in a foreign language or more to be hired, the tourism companies were asked about the criteria they have into consideration at the moment of hiring bilingual or multilingual personnel. For instance, for the conventions

center, which is the only tourism company focused on business tourism, and for almost all the hotels it is important to have a language certification, while the tourism agencies tend to require the certificate of guidance technology given by SENA. Now in terms of skills, almost all the enterprises agree that the hired staff must have soft skills, they seek individuals who are empathetic and helpful towards customers. According to Čuić, Kapeš and Kraljić (2021) tourism is a people-based industry where its employees are, in other words, experience providers. Therefore the soft skills allow them to satisfy the tourists' needs.

**Table 12** *Tourism companies' needs for internationalization*

<b>Needs</b>	<b>Companies</b>
To hire bilingual staff or to train the staff they already have in the command of a second language or even a third one.	<b>01TM–02TL–06TS–09TS</b>
To look for alliances and business partners with the aim of growing and being more known abroad	<b>04TMI–010TMI–05TM</b>
To work on retaking processes that were left behind due to the pandemic	<b>08TM–07TM</b>
To improve its training plans for fulfilling the customers' needs that are constantly changing every year	<b>03TL</b>

*Note.* The tourism companies expressed their main needs for the departments established in Table 10 to make themselves known internationally. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Regarding the needs for internationalization of the tourism firms, almost a half of them (2 small, 1 medium and 1 large) want to hire bilingual staff or to train the staff they already have in the command of a second language or even a third one, where the most important language was English, but French and German were also noted. The remaining companies have explicitly stated that their current needs do not involve the hiring of bilingual or multilingual staff. With

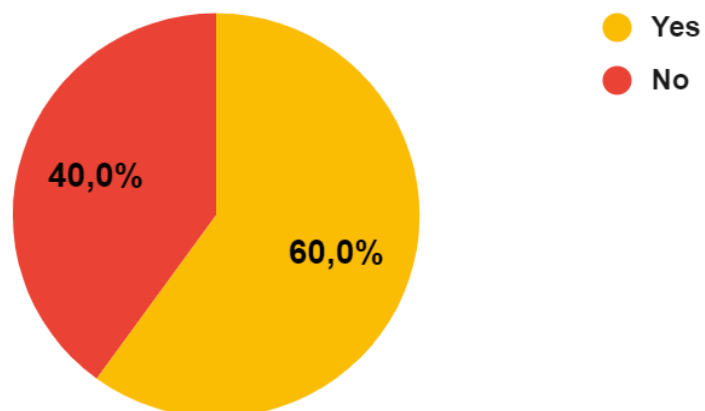
other needs exposed, 2 microenterprise and 1 medium enterprise indicated that they are searching for alliances and business partners with the aim of growing and being more known abroad, again, the Marketing was highlighted as the best strategy to fulfill this need. Also, there are other 2 medium companies that are currently working on retaking processes that were left behind due to the pandemic, at the same time they are managing their resources with the objective of being more recognized abroad through marketing. Finally, 1 large company wants to improve its training plans for fulfilling the customers' needs that are constantly changing every year.

Based on the needs specified above such as looking for alliances, more bilingual staff and the improvement of the services, there is an opportunity for the Modern Languages professionals from the ECCI university to contribute to satisfy these needs through their knowledge in languages and the interaction and relation with foreign customers, since, although the graduates do not come out with a tourism certificate or an undergraduate degree related to tourism. 3 tourism agencies and 2 hotels have expressed that a good command in languages is enough, because they give the opportunity to train the professional in those tourist skills, as **06TS** said, experience is not always required because we give the opportunity to the people to learn about guidance by opening courses with SENA. Clearly, language certifications and experience are always received (personal communication, October 11, 2022). Likewise, as the modern languages professional has received training in making business and negotiations through multilingual communication skills, this can be a good opportunity and at the same time a challenge to build significant alliances with tourism organizations and also make the company more recognized thanks to the marketing skills learned through the Modern Languages program.

**Figure 8** *Knowledge about Modern Languages professional.*

Do you know or have you ever heard about modern language professionals?

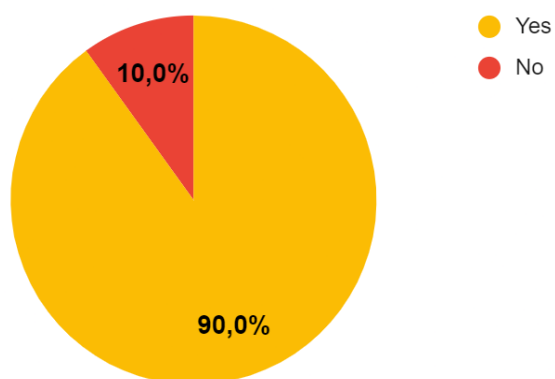
**Do you know or have you ever heard about modern language professionals?**



*Note.* Total percentage of tourism companies that have or not heard about the professionals in Modern Languages. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

**Figure 9** *Hiring of modern languages professionals from the ECCI University*

Would you hire a modern language professional?



*Note.* Total percentage of tourism companies' responses regarding whether or not they would hire a professional with the skills of the Modern Languages degree. Acevedo, L., Urrea, A., and Villa, A. (2023). Own elaboration.

Finally, as seen in Graphic 8, 6 of the companies know about the Modern Languages program or have heard about it, even 3 companies stated that they have hired in their crew professionals of this type. Besides, after having informed them about the professional profile of the degree and the characteristic of the undergraduates, 90% of them, agree that they would hire a Modern Language professional (see Graphic 9), only one company (**05TM**) exposed that just speaking languages is not enough, the employees must have a specific knowledge in the positions to which they want to work (2022), which supports the idea of Cerón et al, (2013) who argues the same by saying that for some companies languages are not enough and they require people with specific studies.

### **In-depth analysis of both fashion and tourism clusters**

After gathering all the information from the answers given from both clusters, the results demonstrate that the size of the company is not a limitation to access to international markets. Since the companies that were interviewed have different sizes regarding their quantity of employees, some of them are microenterprises, small companies, medium companies or large companies and all of them have an international presence and would like to strengthen that aspect of the company. For the large companies, as mentioned by Becerra et al (2006) it is evident that they have more opportunities of making use of their economic resources and the connections with renowned organizations to stand out in the international field. However, as

Fanjul (2022) stated there are also small companies that can have the resources and an added value which may increase the possibility of success in the international markets.

It should be pointed out that the internationalization process does not work the same for fashion companies and for tourism companies, since as mentioned by Pillmayer and Scherle (2013) although internationalization is more focused on the manufacturing sector, tourism embodies internationalization par excellence because this one has achieved an extent of the offer and demand around the world and consequently has increased the overcoming of boundaries. In the case of fashion companies' international presence, it may be evidenced through the commercialization of their products in different stores of the country where the product is exported, as long as the tourism companies' international presence relies on the capacity of the company to attract foreign visitors thanks to the offer of its services that are suited to fulfill the visitor's needs of business and leisure.

Although fashion and tourism companies have different ways to get into international markets, both offer their products and services to speaking-spanish countries like Ecuador, Panama, Puerto Rico, Peru, Mexico and Argentina; however they also offer to other non-Spanish speaking countries, even both sectors share one country where the business relationship is consolidated and it is the United States, 9 enterprises from the fashion cluster export their products there, while the 10 companies from the tourism cluster receive customers from that territory, making this nation an important ally for the economy and growth of these sectors. Another continent that has in common the two sectors is the European continent, where 6 fashion companies have business relationships, whereas 8 tourism companies receive visitors from this continent. Besides, there is a particular case with the territories where Portuguese is the native

language, only 3 fashion companies specify that they have international agreements with Brazil. In the case of tourism enterprises, it was not clear if they receive people from territories such as Brazil or Portugal.

Fashion and tourism companies share the idea that through a good image, good reviews on online platforms, and the use of social media and websites that contain the portfolio of their products and services are the most appropriate marketing strategies for making themselves known in the international market. Additionally, the companies interviewed from both sectors also indicated that they look for creating alliances with bigger and remarkable companies and governmental organizations that belong to the same sector as a way of gaining more renown in the global market. Something that was more mentioned by the fashion firms was the participation in events such as Colombiatex, while on the side of tourism companies the participation in events was not remarkable because only 2 companies stated that they have participated in tourism fairs.

Regarding the departments involved in the internationalization process it was found out that the commercial and the marketing department were the ones that stood out the most among the rest; 12 out of 20 companies interviewed stated that the commercial department is the one that leads the internationalization process while 7 out of 20 declared that was the marketing department. Even though marketing and commercial areas are the most mentioned related to international processes, fashion and tourism sectors possess a diverse recruitment of personnel for reaching international businesses. For example, the kind of professionals that are hired in the fashion firms are people with knowledge about international business and exports, marketing, commercial processes and administration, on the other side the kind of professional hired by the

tourism companies differ from the answer given by the former sector, since these organizations search people with knowledge in tourism industry, hospitality and customer service alongside knowledge in foreign languages. However, the same as the fashion firms, 2 tourism companies that hire people with knowledge in international business are also needed.

100 % of the companies have hired bilingual or multilingual staff, since the 20 companies have people that speak English, either founders and CEOs or employees or both. This result complements the argument of Ushioda (2017) who argues that English is an auxiliary language and everyone learns it because of its advantages. Apart from English, it was found that the second most spoken language in the firms is French, where 7 companies, 2 of fashion and 5 of tourism, have personnel who speak this language. At third position there is Portuguese, which was mentioned by 3 fashion companies and 1 tourism firm.

Regarding the most spoken languages within the companies, they also said some criteria that they take into account at the moment of hiring bilingual or multilingual staff. For example, for the fashion firms it is important that the candidate has a good command of a second language; nevertheless, the answers given by the tourism firms differ from the fashion sector since some tourism firms look for people with legal certifications, either of the language level or of the guidance technology from SENA. Now, in terms of skills apart from the good knowledge in one or more foreign languages, the two sectors have more specific needs. On the side of fashion firms, they need skills related to negotiation, commercial abilities and international trade, while for the tourism enterprises the soft skills and customer service are more important. This could be because of the approach that each sector has, the fashion sector is more focused on reaching exportations agreements, and the tourism sector has more emphasis on good customer



service to create a good image and at the same time to motivate the foreign visitors to come to Medellín and to acquire their services.

Concerning the knowledge of the companies about the modern languages professionals, 13 out of 20 companies indicated that at that moment they had not heard anything about the Modern Languages professional profile or program. Contrary to the other 7 companies, 6 of tourism and only one of fashion know about this kind of professional, only three are well-informed about the specific skills and abilities required for that particular profession, whereas the remaining four firms have limited knowledge and lack a clear understanding of the degree's focus and how the training of the students is. Nevertheless, after clarifying the professional profile to the companies of both sectors the perspective changes, 15 firms declared that they would absolutely hire a modern languages professional, while 3 fashion companies pointed out that they would employ this type of professional only if the person fulfills the characteristics and skills required by the company, one company did not answer this question and the last one is not interested in hiring a modern languages professional because for it, having proficiency in languages it is not enough. As a matter of fact, there is a study made by Beltran, Molina and Yaguara (2022) that shows similar results to this research but it was focused on the companies that belong to the flower exporting sector of Antioquia, for instance, after introducing the Modern Languages professional profile from the ECCI University to 10 companies, 80% of them became interested in having among their employees this type of professional. Now then, when comparing the results of our research with the answers obtained in the study made by Cerón, Franco, Prieto, and Mendoza (2013), it is evident that national companies located in Medellín are more interested in hiring modern languages professionals than the international companies from abroad that are located in Bogotá.

Moreover, the most distinguished need among the fashion and tourism sectors was the requirement of people who were fluent in at least one foreign language. This need of hiring bilingual or multilingual staff was shared by 8 companies. The second most prominent need was related to the expansion of the company based on the alliances and business relationships they can create; this aspect was shared by 5 companies. Lastly, 3 companies shared the need of being updated to the tendencies and work to improve their services and products, in order to fulfill the expectations of their customers.

Based on the 3 main companies' needs for internationalization, which are the hiring of bilingual and multilingual personnel, establishing new alliances for expansion into foreign markets, and staying updated on market trends, the modern languages professional is qualified to fulfill the first two needs, hence alongside the administrative emphasis, the graduate has the knowledge and proficiency in English, French and German in line with the European framework of languages (speaking, listening, writing and reading), where English is the most emphasized language. Furthermore, this kind of professional is trained to work in an entrepreneurial environment where thanks to the language, intercultural and marketing skills, the graduate can support and improve the links between the companies or institutions and the international field.

### **Comparison between the companies' needs for internationalization and the Modern Languages study plan from the ECCI University**

Finally, taking into consideration mainly the former study plan and the companies' needs for internationalization. The former curriculum of the Modern Languages program would meet some of the needs of the 20 companies such as the need of hiring people with the ability of speaking a second, third or even a fourth language, since in each language offered by the ECCI

University (English, French and German) there is a wide variety of subjects for basic, intermediate and advanced skills in each language. Apart from the knowledge of languages, that former pensum provides subjects related to interculturality like “Multicultural Context”, a subject very helpful to interact with foreign customers and international business partners.

The former study plan encompasses subjects related to business communication such as “Conversation for international business”, “Conversation avancée pour des affaires” and “Énfasis profesional 2 alemán”. Precisely, these types of subjects train the students to be able to create strategic business alliances through communicative skills to fulfill the need of expansion that some of the companies have. This pensum offers also subjects like “Mercadeo básico” and “Pensamiento estratégico” that help to create market studies in order to determine prospects, analyze the country and its advantages, and create a good image of the company through Marketing strategies. Although the former professional profile, that was created based on the previous curriculum, states that a modern languages professional is able to work in the tourism and hotel sector but also in international business logistics and negotiation, the reality is that there is a lack of topics related to customer service, logistic, international business and tourism since that study plan is not completely focused on training professionals in the field of tourism or in the field of administration. Nonetheless, despite this limitation, the Modern Languages program is a bachelor’s degree that offers appropriate knowledge to enter those fields by complementing it with further studies.

Compared to the former pensum, the current one has subjects related to customer service like “Comportamiento del consumidor” and “Service clients” that are perfect for the tourism cluster in terms of analyzing the places most crowded by the visitors, the behavior and

preferences of the foreigners; also, those subjects will help the fashion cluster with the negotiation and sales skills. In addition, it should be pointed out that the new pensum is more focused on the administrative and entrepreneurial field than the previous one, since it has some subjects like “introducción a la administracion y economia”, “contextos empresariales”, “mercadeo para el siglo XXI”, ”análisis del mercado” which help to understand and manage international business and trade, that is why this curriculum is more suitable for the fashion cluster taking into account their need and the strategies they carry out to offer their products in international markets.

### **Limitations**

Although each enterprise chosen had at least one contact number or an email address, some of them never responded to the interview request. With other companies, the first contact and the request were made, however, they did not respond again because they were busy and had no time to answer the interview or simply, they were reluctant to respond.

Even though some companies, from other different places to Medellín, were willing to participate in the research, they could not be part of the research because the sample selected must be located in Medellín. For that reason, the present study does not reflect the internationalization process and the companies needs in terms of hiring bilingual and multilingual personnel that supports that process in other fashion and tourism companies located in other cities from Colombia.

## Conclusions

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the responses given by the companies answer the research question of this study, in view of the fact that the interviewees mentioned the general needs for internationalization that each company has, even though not all of them have currently a need to hire bilingual or multilingual staff, they specified the characteristics, skills, knowledge in languages that the bilingual or multilingual staff must have to be part of the company and support their internationalization processes. Moreover, it was observed that in the entrepreneurial sector from the fashion and tourism clusters there is a lack of knowledge about the Modern Languages program and its professional profile since this bachelor's degree is relatively new and it does not have more than a decade in the city; even, the number of graduates does not exceed the 200. However, by mentioning the skills and knowledge that the Modern Language professionals have, the companies showed interest in hiring this kind of professional and some of them even had curiosity about the proficiency in French and German that these professionals have.

After having inquired about the hiring of bilingual and multilingual, it can also be concluded that the language most desired by companies for their internationalization processes is English. Mostly they do not require certifications; instead, candidates only need to demonstrate highly accurate communication skills in a second language. Concerning the languages apart from English, the second language more required by the companies was French. At a third position, there is Portuguese, while German was not emphasized in the internationalization process of the interviewed companies. Although those languages are not as important as English in the international field, they surely are an added value for the companies that hire multilingual

professionals instead of bilingual ones. This is because these professionals offer the opportunity to establish new business relations enabling companies to offer their products or service to a wider range of customers worldwide.

Taking the former study plan as a point of reference, it is concluded that the Modern Languages professional from the ECCI University can apply for tourism and fashion job positions that involve interaction with international markets, thanks to the wideness of its professional profile and its emphasis on providing a language learning different from the methodology seen in language centers. But of course, it would be even better if they complement everything they learned during the degree with complementary studies.

Nevertheless, the former study plan lacks subjects bound to administrative fields, so the graduate can have limitations at the moment of facing negotiation or commercial processes. Given that, sometimes it is not enough just to communicate in only one foreign language, because currently the main need for internationalization of some companies in these two sectors is to hire people who have a good command of a second or third language and who have knowledge in administrative and commercial processes, without neglecting the importance of soft skills, assertive communication and customer service. That is why, the University ECCI evaluated and formulated a new curriculum with a greater number of administrative subjects in order to fulfill the current companies' needs.

Regarding the contributions of this research to the academy, its significance to the Modern Languages degree is emphasized by delving into the companies' needs in Medellin concerning bilingual or multilingual professionals who can work in the fashion and tourism clusters. Also, this study can encourage future researchers to analyze the companies' needs for

internationalization from other clusters of the city and thus to get a complete internationalization context of Medellín that will be complemented by this study.

### **Recommendations**

As a recommendation in this degree project, it is suggested to deepen the administrative and business aspects in the current study plan without detracting from the study of English, French and German, since, although there was a considerable change in the focus of the professional degree, there was also a decrease in the subjects dedicated to learning these three languages. According to the companies, it is essential to have the necessary study in both areas, especially when it comes to the internationalization processes.

Furthermore, it is also suggested to create agreements with the companies of these both clusters, so that the students can accomplish their internship in one of the enterprises of tourism or fashion sector, as when companies heard more about the occupational profile, they were willing to hire a Professional Modern Languages.

Another recommendation is to design a strategy that allows access to the Coterminal degree option with studies more linked to the emphasis that the Modern Languages Program from the ECCI University has and also to the needs expressed by the companies that participated in this research. For example, specializations about tourism industry and fashion industry, commercial processes and exportations.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1. Semi-structured interview

- Nombre del entrevistado (Name of the interviewee)
  - ¿Qué cargo ocupa y desde hace cuánto trabaja en la empresa? (What position do you hold and for how long have you been working in the company?)
  - ¿A qué se dedica la empresa? (What does the company do?)
  - ¿Cuántos empleados tiene la compañía? (How many employees does the company have?)
  - ¿Dónde está ubicada la sede central de la compañía? (Where are the company's main headquarters located?)
  - ¿Tiene la empresa sede en el extranjero? ¿Dónde? (Does the company have headquarters abroad? Where?)
1. ¿Cuenta la empresa con presencia internacional?  
(Does the company have an international presence?)
  2. ¿A qué mercados llegan sus productos o servicios?  
(What markets do your products or services reach?)
  3. ¿Qué estrategias lleva a cabo la empresa para lograr presencia y ser reconocida en el ámbito internacional?  
(What strategies does the company carry out to achieve presence and recognition in the international field?)

4. ¿Qué áreas de la compañía están involucradas en el proceso de internacionalización? (What departments of the company are involved in the internationalization process?)
5. ¿Qué necesidades tienen esas áreas (las mencionadas en la pregunta anterior) en materia de internacionalización?  
(What are the needs for internationalization of the departments mentioned in the previous question?)
6. ¿Qué tipo de profesionales contrata la organización generalmente para los procesos relacionados con la internacionalización de su empresa?  
(What kind of professional does the company generally hire for the companies' internationalization processes?)
7. ¿Emplea o ha empleado personal bilingüe o plurilingüe en alguna de las áreas involucradas en el proceso de internacionalización? ¿En qué idiomas?  
(Has the company ever hired bilingual or multilingual staff in the company in any of the departments involved in the internationalization processes? In which languages?)
8. ¿Qué criterios tiene en cuenta para la contratación de personal bilingüe o plurilingüe?  
(What criteria does the company take into account when hiring bilingual or multilingual staff?)
9. Aparte del dominio en lenguas ¿qué otros conocimientos y habilidades requiere la empresa que tenga el personal bilingüe o plurilingüe?  
(Apart from a good command of a foreign language, what other abilities and skills should the bilingual and multilingual staff have?)
10. ¿Conoce o ha escuchado acerca de los profesionales en lenguas modernas?  
(Do you know or have you ever heard about modern language professionals?)

11. ¿Ha contratado a un profesional en lenguas modernas? o en caso que la anterior respuesta sea negativa. ¿Contrataría a un profesional de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad ECCI para trabajar en dichas áreas?

(Has the company ever hired a modern languages professional? Or in case the answer for that question is negative. Would you hire a Modern Languages professional from the ECCI University to work in those departments related to the companies' internationalization processes?

## **Annex 2. Informed consent**

Consentimiento Informado Empresarios

Yo \_\_\_\_\_, identificado(a)

con la Cédula de Ciudadanía Número: \_\_\_\_\_, declaro que he sido informado(a)

e invitado(a) a participar en una investigación denominada “Retos y oportunidades de los

Profesionales de Lenguas modernas en el contexto creciente de internacionalización de la

ciudad de Medellín”, el cual es un proyecto de investigación científica que cuenta con el

respaldo y financiamiento de la Universidad ECCI, sede Medellín.

Entiendo que este estudio busca identificar, a través de una lectura de contexto,

trabajo de campo y entrevistas estructuradas y semiestructuradas, los retos y

oportunidades que tienen los profesionales de lenguas modernas en el contexto creciente de internacionalización de la ciudad de Medellín, así como las posibles respuestas de los programas de educación en el área con el fin de formular propuestas de mejora curricular. Sé que mi participación se llevará a cabo en Medellín, en el horario 10:30am-11:00m y consistirá en responder una entrevista que demorará alrededor de 30 a 40 minutos. Me han explicado que la información registrada será confidencial, y que los nombres de los participantes serán asociados a un número de serie o código, esto significa que las respuestas no podrán ser conocidas por otras personas ni tampoco ser identificadas en la fase de publicación de resultados.

Tengo conocimiento de que los datos no me serán entregados y que no habrá retribución por la participación en este estudio, sin embargo, reconozco que esta información podrá beneficiar de manera indirecta a sus participantes y que aporta beneficios a la sociedad.

Asimismo, sé que puedo negar la participación o retirarme en cualquier etapa de la investigación, sin expresión de causa y sin consecuencias negativas para mí.

Confirmando que acepto voluntariamente participar en este estudio y he recibido una

copia del presente documento.

Firma del participante:

Fecha:

Si tiene alguna pregunta durante cualquier etapa del estudio puede comunicarse con

Olga Camila Hernández, Presidente del Comité de Ética Institucional de la

Universidad ECCI, [ohernandezm@ecc.edu.co](mailto:ohernandezm@ecc.edu.co).