

# Creating a Program to Improve English Proficiency for Women Entrepreneurs in Panama

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of  
WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

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## **Abstract**

The Canal de Empresarias (CdeE) organization works with business women to provide them with entrepreneurship opportunities in Panama City. In order to increase opportunities for these business women, CdeE wants to provide them with English language education. Through interviews and focus groups with CdeE participants, we determined the greatest barrier in language learning is lack of opportunity to learn and practice. Through interviews, we learned what participants need to learn English and we have outlined a curriculum for the CdeE organization to implement into their program. Our program will help focus on basic levels of English language in entrepreneurship, but also specifically their elevator pitches. Teaching these women English language skills in these specific topics will help their businesses grow worldwide and increase their networking skills.

## Acknowledgements

Our group would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their support and guidance with this project.

- Our sponsor, Canal de Empresarias.
- Our CdeE contact, Larú Linares
- Our advisors, Professor James Chiarelli, Professor Alejandro Manga, and the center Co-Director Professor Grant Burrier
- Canal de Empresarias members that participated in focus groups and surveys
- Worcester Polytechnic Institute and The Laurie Leshin Global School

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## Executive Summary

English is a critical tool for success in international business, yet there is a significant gap in English education in Panama, particularly for businesswomen. Historically, traditional gender roles have confined women to domestic responsibilities, but recent decades have seen a shift towards more modern views, especially in the business sector. This evolving perspective allows women greater freedom to define themselves through entrepreneurship, although the playing field is still not level.

To address this gap, Canal de Empresarias (CdeE) was established with a mission to support women-led businesses, reduce gender inequality in business, and improve access to financing and markets for women entrepreneurs. As part of their initiative, CdeE has enlisted us to develop a curriculum that teaches English language skills specifically tailored to helping their members deliver elevator pitches and respond to business-related questions in English.

## Project Goals

To design an effective English language program for Spanish-speaking businesswomen, we first needed to assess participants' interests, proficiency levels, and the challenges they face. Our partnership with Canal de Empresarias was central to this process. In communications with our sponsor, we gained insights into enrollment in their existing one-year program, helping us estimate the number of potential participants.

The development of the program involved data collection using focus groups, surveys, and supplemental interviews. Surveys were designed to support focus group data, gathering quantitative and qualitative responses about participants' English speaking, writing, and comprehension skills. The focus groups aimed to uncover barriers to learning English, evaluate current local education practices, and understand participants' expectations from the program.

Interviews served as the most in-depth method of data collection, validating findings from earlier phases and offering detailed insights into curriculum development. While focus group and survey data shaped the content of the curriculum, interviews played a key role in determining the instructional methods to be used in the program.

## Results

We gathered our data from 4 focus groups, 2 interviews, 99 survey responses, and participant observation, providing a comprehensive view of the English language learning needs of businesswomen. Participants came from a wide range of cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, ages, business experiences, and English proficiency levels, resulting in data from a diverse group of participants.

The primary focus of our research was understanding participants' current English skills, their desired proficiency, and the barriers and fears preventing them from achieving their goals. Common themes we noticed were lack of proficiency leading to fear of embarrassment when speaking. These challenges were often linked to participants' age, race, gender, and cultural experiences, particularly a culture of shame ingrained from childhood in Panama.

The most prevalent finding was the participants' overall low confidence in their English abilities. This lack of confidence resulted in participants being too afraid to practice and improve their language skills. Learning this solidified our goal of creating a space where women would feel comfortable to practice and face their fears when learning English.

## Recommendations

After data collection we were able to draw conclusions to create a curriculum for CdeE moving forward. Our focus group gave us data on specific individuals more in depth, but our survey gave us a broader sense on the CdeE members' goals within the English sector.

We want to recommend a learning platform such as “Canvas”. Canvas is an educational platform used to manage coursework for the teacher and student. Canvas aligns well with Microsoft websites and has a variety of features. It contains a discussion board to post virtual links for the hybrid sessions. It will allow a space to post recorded virtual and in-person lessons in the “modules” section. It has a “files” tab where informational readings, handouts, and other coursework can be posted.

One of the best features of Canvas for this curriculum is the discussion channel for everyday questions that students may encounter. Canvas will allow students to have an open dialogue with each other and their instructor.

Through our focus groups we were able to gauge a curriculum based on the needs expressed. Due to the fact that the English level of the students varies, we want to start with simple grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This will prepare students with a broad, beginner-level understanding of the language. After the students feel comfortable and are able to hold surface level conversations in English, they will advance to business level vocabulary.

Learning vocabulary skills designed around entrepreneurship and business will help educate and teach participants new ways to integrate advanced words into their current knowledge. With this they will obtain beginner skills for presenting their elevator pitch in English. The next step will be going through each student's elevator pitch and giving them skills to translate it to English and fully understand the topics they are expressing.

To ensure these women have the necessary skills for a successful elevator pitch, we want to take the extra step to help them comprehend and respond to any questions that potential stakeholders might have. Creating “mock” questions and interviews will help them be fully prepared for any opportunity that appears in English.

Our goal with this curriculum is to advance the students' knowledge in English but give them skills to accomplish any opportunity given to them. The members of CdeE are very knowledgeable and capable women, and we want them to have the tools to grow as not only entrepreneurs, but individuals.

# 1 Introduction

In a Global economy, proficiency in multiple languages is critical in many cultures to obtain better jobs and social mobility. In Panama, an estimated 15% of the population can speak conversational English (Witmer, 2018). This is a consequence of Panama's economy being centered mainly around primary and secondary industries, or industries that deal mainly in resource extraction and product manufacturing, and operating the canal zone (Casado, M. A., 2001). The average citizen is therefore not incentivized to become educated, as there are few career opportunities that are accessible only with higher education. If the country aims to modernize its people and its economy, more of the population needs to learn the business skills required to breach new markets and create new enterprises outside of the primary and secondary sector. Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) would greatly improve Panamanian entrepreneurs' access to international markets and resources, including finance capital, foreign specialists, consumers, and research material. All of these factors are required for the spawning and continued growth of tertiary- and quaternary-sector industries, which are composed of businesses that provide services, operate in tourism, innovate in information technology, etc. (Lieber, 2024).

In an attempt to expand the new enterprise of Panama City, Canal de Empresarias (CdeE) was founded to leave a lasting "impact on the development and growth of businesses led and managed by women, thus reducing inequality between women and men at the business level, improving the performance of these companies, their access to financing and new markets and income." Canal de Empresarias provides support to women entrepreneurs by pairing them with mentors and assisting with developing business strategies (*Canal de Empresarias, 2019*).

Canal de Empresarias has tasked us with creating a curriculum that teaches English speaking and vocabulary to their enrollees and prepares them to perform elevator pitches and to answer questions about their businesses, in English. In the background chapter, we assessed the current English education in Panama and the role of the English language in international business. We also determined the current state of Panamanian women in entrepreneurship and the role of our sponsor, Canal de Empresarias, in assisting businesswomen. In order to assist our sponsor in creating an English-speaking program, we worked with the CdeE organization to determine what practices would best benefit participants. We conducted focus groups and interviews to assess the needs of businesswomen in an English language learning program.

Our approach to these interviews and focus groups is outlined in the methods chapter. Finally, we analyzed the data collected in our focus groups, interviews, and surveys as described in our results chapter. This data was used to create a curriculum for the Canal de Empresarias organization to implement into their business program. Our final chapter discusses our recommendations to the CdeE organization on how to implement the English Learning curriculum into their business program for it to be most successful.

## 2 Background

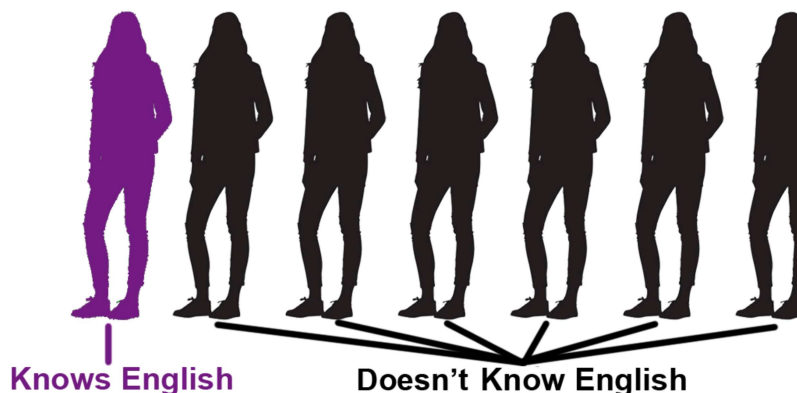
English is a very valuable tool for international business but there is a lack of English education in Panama, especially for business women. Traditional gender roles generally relegate women to domestic spheres, but there has been a gradual shift towards the modern viewpoint in recent decades, especially in the business world. Modern perspectives afford women a more liberal way of life; one where they can define themselves and their livelihoods through enterprise (Flabbi, Piras, & Abrahams, 2017). The Canal de Empresarias organization is working to increase the entrance rate of women into entrepreneurship by providing unique, tailored learning experiences that help even the playing field.

### 2.1 English Education

Long regarded as the hegemonic language, English is a valuable tool that creates countless opportunities, particularly in international business. To the Spanish-speaking Panamanian, the English language is a significant obstacle to building new companies in the tertiary and quaternary sectors, which harbor some of the most potentially lucrative opportunities in the country. Learning English instantly offers a leg up to those seeking financial assistance from international banks and investors (Lieber, 2024). In Panama, English education is regularly offered in private schools, but English education in public schools is mostly limited to tutors (Witmer, 2023). For adults seeking to learn, options are limited to mostly private tutoring, but Canal de Empresarias looks to host a new program included in its five-step “journeys” system tailored to the needs of their women entrepreneurs.

**Figure 2.1**

*15% of Panamanians can speak conversational English.*



## 2.2 International Business

The Panama Canal was constructed and solely operated under the United States until 1979, when the gradual cession process to the Republic of Panama began. Starting January 1st, 2000, the U.S. halted participation in the canal and Panama gained full control (Casaso, 2001). Gaining full control of the canal allowed Panama to radically shift its economic strategy with public policies funded by the new source of income. The departure of the United States from the Canal Zone offered an opportunity for new investments into the local economy, creating jobs and bringing revenue to the government (Casaso, 2001). The presence of the canal incentivized large Multinational Corporations (MNCs) to establish themselves in Panama in order to closely monitor trade activity, and shippers flocked to the country in order to locally register ships in their fleets and receive lower passage rates (Autoridad Canal de Panamá, 2024).

In 2007, the Republic of Panama established a special fiscal regime called the System of Multinational Headquarters (SEM) in order to facilitate international investment (Sum, 2024). With the passage of Law 41, which established the regime, 146 MNCs have obtained SEM licenses and established themselves in Panama, and invested 1 Billion USD of their own capital and created 6,000 jobs (CF Editorial Staff, 2018). Among the MNCs were many financial institutions like Western Union, Brink's, and Visa, which provided foreign investment capital totaling more than 5 Billion USD in Q1 and Q2 2017 alone. (CF Editorial Staff, 2018). Partnerships with these companies and taking advantage of the investment they added to the economy necessitated some amount of English ability, since Entrepreneurs needed to communicate their ideas to the foreign investors and operatives hosted by these companies' headquarters in Panama City.

## 2.3 Women in Entrepreneurship

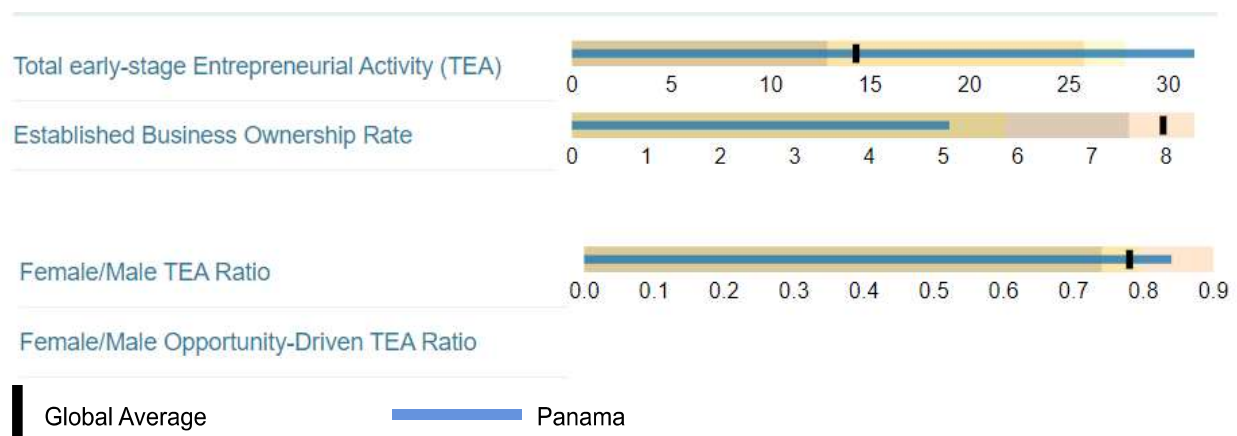
Historically, women in Panama have been engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship, mostly in primary and secondary sector businesses like retail, food services, and artisanal crafts. However, limited access to education, financial resources, and formal business networks have been significant barriers to greater prosperity. This is opposed by a liberalization of Panamanian society towards acknowledging and valuing the contributions of women in the

business sector, largely prompted by American social and economic influence. “the reasons that motivate people to pursue entrepreneurship, the highest percentage of women indicated that they do it as a source of income, to continue a family business or to make a social impact.” (Roper, 2020) These challenges to gender biases can infringe upon their confidence, making it more difficult to thrive in the mental discipline of entrepreneurship.

Panama is a center for social liberalization relative to the rest of Latin America. Many neighboring societies and cultures remain rooted in old-world cultural and social traditions. The *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* uses a scale from 0 to 32 to grade the Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) of nations around the world, which is a measure of the percentage of the 18-64 population of various countries who are either a nascent entrepreneur or owner-manager of a new business (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021). Panama received a score of 31.2, which is more than double the world average of 14.3 (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021). The same index also grades the female/male ratio of TEA in various countries. Panama has a ratio of 0.84 Females to every one Male, which is slightly below the regional average of 0.9 (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2021). This can be visualized as the “slope of the growth curve,” as TEA is only a measure of new businesses being founded and not a measure of the total entrepreneurial activity of the region.

**Figure 2.3**

*Statistics of Panama's Entrepreneurial activity compared to global and regional averages*



Note. From: *Entrepreneurship in Panama*. (n.d.). GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. <https://gemconsortium.org/economy-profiles/panama-2>

One of the most significant challenges faced by these women entrepreneurs in Panama is the high concentration of traditional values which define their roles in the society. The “machismo” culture, in which men are dominant over women, is an unfortunate consequence of these values in Latin society (Nuñez et. al., 2015). Men assert themselves over every affair in Women’s lives, limiting them professionally, affecting them emotionally and mentally, and disrupting their confidence in professional settings. In a society lacking female role models, it is challenging for the new generations to build and use networks of mentors, investors, and like-minded individuals. Mentorship and networking are crucial to empowering women with the knowledge and skills necessary for success and personal growth. Without creating opportunities for these women, the cycle of gender inequality in entrepreneurship will perpetuate (Stinnet & al., 1983).

## **2.4 Canal de Empresarias**

The sponsor organization Canal de Empresarias (English: Channel of Women Entrepreneurs) is an organization that works to promote women's entrepreneurship by providing support through networking and resource opportunities. Their educational program is run in a five-phase “journey” format over the course of one calendar year. Through these phases, Canal de Empresarias focuses on the themes of financial autonomy, empowerment, and community development. Topics covered include soft skills, creativity and innovation, entrepreneurship and business model development, mentorship, and marketing and finance strategy. To better support the future of female entrepreneurs, Canal de Empresarias hopes to add an additional sector of education to their program: the English language. Through this additional step, they hope to offer participants a leg-up in the international market, expand their confidence in communication, and open doors to new opportunities.

**Figure 2.4**

*Canal de Empresarias*



Note. Canal de Empresarias celebrating 10 years of its program educating Panamanian businesswomen. From: *Canal de Empresarias*. (2019, November 23). *Mujeres Empresarias y Emprendedoras de Panamá*. <https://canalesmpresarias.org/>

Canal de Empresarias' program is largely taught by volunteers who have experience in business and education. They have a network of over 300 mentors, many of whom completed the program themselves in previous years. These mentors have created their own training program called *Master Mentor*, and contains all the content necessary for becoming a CdeE volunteer including education and onboarding.

Our sponsor also hosts an online platform where the products generated by women completing the program can be sold. This website hosts a wide variety of products from food, handicrafts, agriculture, and technology produced by graduates of the Canal de Empresarias annual program. This company seeks to help women in all aspects of starting a business, from the early stages of creating the product, all the way to marketing and sales (*Canal de Empresarias*. 2021).

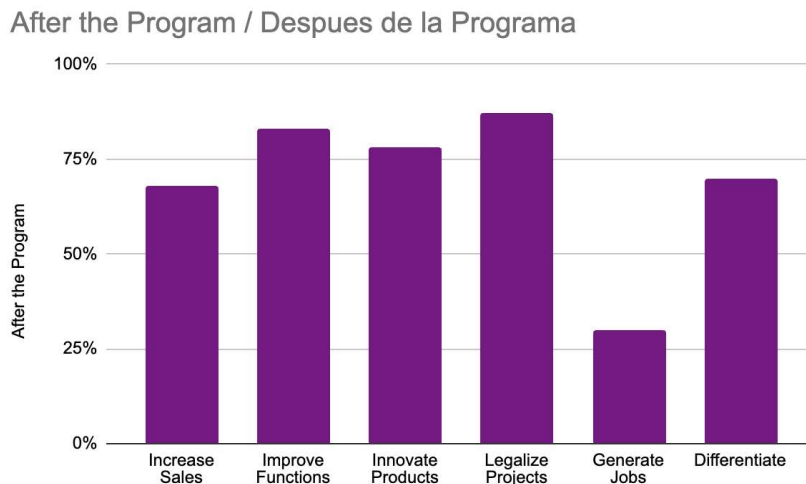
## 2.5 Canal de Empresarias Participants

Canal de Empresarias is an organization that works to empower women so that the gap between men and women at a business level is reduced (Canal de Empresarias, 2021). Since 2014, the program has received over 17,500 applications from women of all ethnic, cultural, and fiscal backgrounds. Of these, 6,000 female entrepreneurs have been accepted to date, including 526 refugees (Canal de Empresarias, 2021). According to Canal de Empresarias, 90% of the participants require support in defining their project and 94% of the participants require support in formulating their business plan before joining the program.

As seen in Figure 2.5, participation in the program resulted in increased performance of the participant's businesses. 68% of women managed to increase their sales, and 87% formalized and legalized their business ideas after completing the Canal de Empresarias program. Graduates have gone on to start 6,600 companies, create 7,400 new jobs, and earn \$70 million in profit (Canal de Empresarias, 2021).

**Figure 2.5**

*Percentage of program participants who perceived business improvement*



Note: Figure adapted from: Laru Linares. *Canal de Empresarias*. (2021).

## 2.6 Purpose and Research Questions

The objective of this IQP is to further the educational programs for prospective and newly established female enterprises, in an effort to further this social trend and leave a lasting impact in the lives of many who dream of one day achieving independence through enterprise. In order to increase job opportunities and open up more people in the country to work, Canal de Empresarias is sponsoring the creation of a program where aspiring businesswomen can practice their English language skills.

The goal of our research is to answer the question: how can Canal de Empresarias provide an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) program which builds confidence and preparedness in Panama's Women Entrepreneurs so they can participate in global enterprises?

### 3 Methods

Since only 14% of Panama speaks English, opportunities to practice the language are scarce (Gritzner, C. Linnea, C., 2009). In partnership with Canal de Empresarias, the objective of this project was to create a self-perpetuating program for Panamanian businesswomen to practice English and overcome the fears and barriers present when learning the language. In order to achieve our goal of creating such a program, we determined subsidiary goals to complete:

- I. Identify beneficiaries of this opportunity to practice language skills.
- II. Establish effective practices for English learning.
- III. Determine resource availability.
- IV. Outline the program.

Working towards these sub-goals guided our research, and led us to accomplish our larger objective of building confidence in Panamanian businesswomen and helping them expand their professions globally.

#### 3.1: Methods Selection

In order to design an efficacious English program, we needed to assess participant interest, proficiency level and the challenges and barriers faced by these businesswomen.

Part of the development cycle was determining the logistics of our partnership with Canal de Empresarias. In the first meeting with the sponsor on the 26th of August, we received a rough idea of the enrollment in the existing one-year program (Figure 3.5.2) and therefore had an idea of the number of people our program would service. When evaluating the tools we could use to gather information, the team and the sponsor agreed that focus groups, surveys, and supplemental interviews would be the optimal methods for data collection in a tiered format. We received a space within the Fundación Ciudad de Saber office complex to conduct our focus groups from. (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1**

*Focus Group 4*



Note. Focus groups were run virtually, hosted from a private meeting room provided to us by Fundación Ciudad de Saber.

The survey existed mainly to gather lots of supporting data to confirm the inferences made in focus group data. Among the sections of the survey, there were questions asking respondents to rate their English speaking, writing, and comprehension on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, and short-response questions asking for them to tell us stories or simple facts using English.

Our focus groups were to be used to determine the quality and effectiveness of English language programs offered in Panama's public and private learning institutions, the knowledge gaps of potential beneficiaries, boundaries to English faced by potential beneficiaries, and what the beneficiaries want to see from the program. Based upon the data, we created questions for the interviews which allowed us to explore topics like local education practices to fuller extents.

The interviews were the deepest tier of data collection. We used them as an opportunity to clearly confirm inferences we formed based upon interactions with focus group participants, and explore select topics. Data collected here was mainly used to determine curriculum instruction, whereas data from focus groups and surveys determined the content within the curriculum.

### **3.2: Identifying Beneficiaries**

Although we had a basic understanding of the program's beneficiaries, a qualitative analysis was necessary to gain deeper insights into their needs, fears and barriers and how to effectively address them. We also aimed to assess their skill levels to target areas for improvement. Data collection through focus groups and surveys provided the required information.

Through this process, we are able to learn the participants on a personal level. We learned about their strengths and weaknesses, their goals, and what truly motivated them to make a difference in society. Many of these women come from diverse backgrounds and have their own personal attachment to their business. Included in our survey were a few demographic questions such as age and gender. We also asked questions about their current English knowledge which could be seen as a reflection of their education.

### **3.3: Establishing Effective Practices for Learning English**

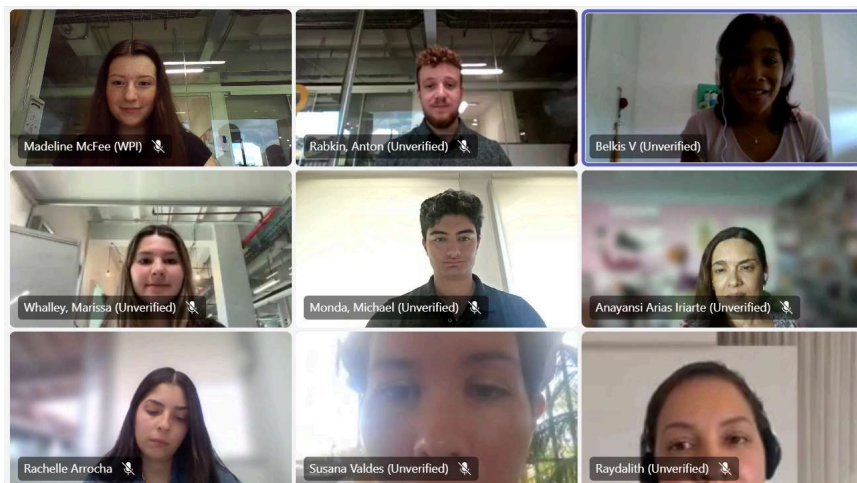
In order to ensure that this program would be effective, we determined the best English language practices. To gain insight, we relied on interviews as well as literature review research, as described in the Background chapter of this paper. We interviewed Canal de Empresarias members to learn their current teaching practices. Although they were not teaching English as part of their program, knowing their current pedagogical methods helped us adapt them to an English program. The goal of our program was not to teach English but to create a space for English to be practiced and strengthened. Assessing what techniques strengthen language skills helped us create an environment within our program that would be the most beneficial.

In order to gain further insight, we held focus groups and interviews with Canal de Empresarias participants. We designed the survey and focus groups to determine what English knowledge participants already had and what knowledge they hoped to gain. Our main focus with this program was to help the Canal de Empresarias businesswomen overcome barriers when speaking the English language. With our interviews, we hoped to identify their fears and design the English curriculum to help them overcome their barriers. This information helped us format the program so that our curriculum fits the needs of the Canal de Empresarias program and effectively helped participants overcome their challenges.

We ran 4 focus group sessions with the same group of participants each time. In the first session, we gathered information on barriers and fears associated with language learning as well as the current level of English language proficiency each participant had. Questions asked of participants during this focus group can be found in Appendix D. In this first focus group, we also received a lot of feedback on how participants would want this English program to look. In the following focus groups, we received detailed personal details about participants, including information about their businesses. We also discussed more in-depth and received a clear understanding of what participants wanted for this program.

### Figure 3.3

*Focus Group 4 Screen Capture*



Within the survey we created, specific English gauging questions were implemented to give us a baseline of the language. We gave them 5 questions to answer in English, ranging

from a basic to advanced level. The responses informed us with a wider sense of the Canal de Empresarias program, beyond the small six-participant focus group. We were able to analyze this data to give a general starting point for the curriculum.

We conducted two interviews, one with our sponsor (transcript in Appendix F) and one with our focus group translator who occasionally works with the CdeE organization (transcript in Appendix E). These two interviews were different from the focus groups because the interviewees both work with many different women trying to learn English and they were able to provide insight that they have observed.

### **3.4: Determining Resource Availability**

To create this program, we needed to understand what resources we have available to make it happen. The first step in doing this was to communicate with Canal de Empresarias members to determine what resources are available to allocate to an English program. We were interested in learning where their current resources came from and how they supported their current programs. We began by assessing the logistics for this program including where it will be held, who will be leading this program, and how we reached out to individuals that are interested in participating. Knowing these things helped guide us when we were creating the outline of the program and determining how it would run. A lot of this data gathering occurred from communications with our sponsor.

**Figure 3.4**

*Sponsor Meeting*



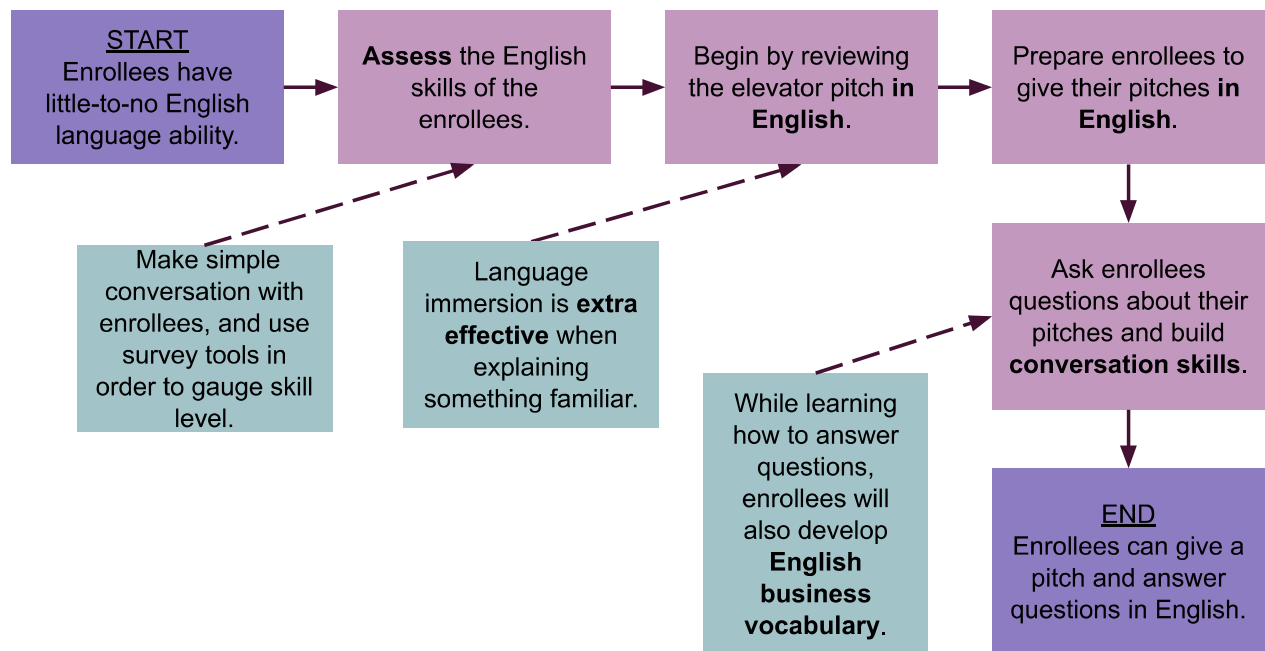
Note. Pictured from left to right: Madeline McFee, Marissa Whalley, Larú Linares, Anton Rabkin, Michael J Monda. Photograph taken by Alejandro Manga. This photo was taken during the team's weekly meeting.

### 3.5: Outline the Program

We worked to establish a framework for the curriculum while we were conducting our research. Ideally, we would have completed these segments sequentially, but were forced to work on both simultaneously due to complications related to how ID2050 was conducted.

The outline of the curriculum was made with the oversight of the sponsor, with clearly defined start- and end-goals for participants. The start-goals reflected what we believed the English level of participants would be upon enrolling in Canal de Empresarias, and the end-goal reflected the minimum skill level we wanted enrollees to attain. These were conjoined by a series of modules which was designed to mimic the structure of extant Canal de Empresarias educational curricula. **Figure 3.5** is a render of the outline in a format designed to fit on 8.5"x11" paper.

**Figure 3.5.1**

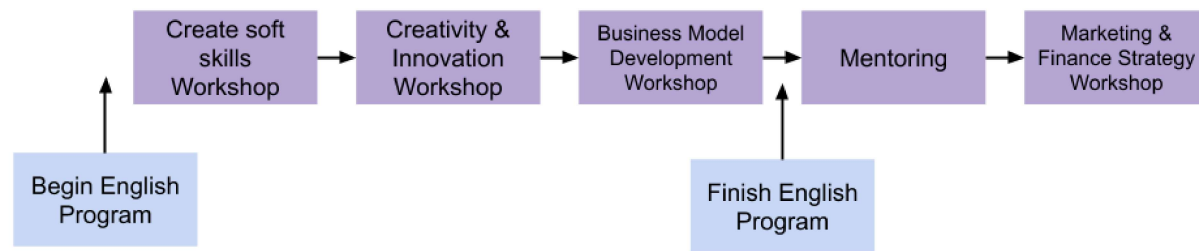


### *Program Outline*

Further discussion with the sponsor revealed the time frame over which the program would be taking place. Originally intended to fit within the third of five “Journeys,” or modules within the CdeE curriculum, the plan became to begin English education immediately upon enrollment in the first Journey. The sponsor wanted enrollees to be able to perform an elevator pitch in English and be able to answer questions posed by potential investors, so the end-goal remained in the third module, where enrollees designed their elevator pitches and learned how to give them in Spanish. After this “final exam,” students can return to desired parts of the curriculum to review and continue learning vocabulary, situational language, and practice everything they’ve learned over the course of the English program.

**Figure 3.5.2**

*English program's intended position within the existing "journeys"*



Note. The English program will begin at the start of Canal de Empresarias's journeys and end after "Business Model Development" with participants giving a business pitch and answering questions in English. Figure adapted from: Laru Linares. *Canal de Empresarias*. (2021). [Slide show; Power Point].

### 3.6: Research and Design Limitations

There were few limitations within our research that may have affected our results. Our focus groups, survey, and interviews were all limited by sample size. The survey that we created was distributed to participants of the Canal de Empresarias organization, so everyone taking the survey already had some interest in participating in the program. Of the 5,000 current and former students on the sponsor's mailing list, 99 responded to our survey. With only a 2.02% response rate, there are concerns that the data does not sufficiently correlate to the sentiments of the population. If we were able to receive more responses, it would have increased our confidence level in creating a program the participants wanted.

In addition to the survey, we conducted 2 interviews and conducted 4 focus groups. All 4 focus groups were conducted with the same 6 participants which limited our sample size greatly. If we were able to expand our focus groups to have new participants each time, we would have increased the scope of data we were able to collect. Of the two interviews we conducted, one was with our sponsor and one was with a translator who works with university organizations within Ciudad del Saber and sometimes with the Canal de Empresarias program and participants. Although our focus groups acted as large group interviews, if we had interviewed individual participants, we may have gained a broader perspective to better inform us in creating our curriculum.

## 4 Results and Findings

Our results are compilations of data obtained from research methods, which includes the aforementioned four focus groups, two interviews, 99 survey responses, and participant observation. Through these sources, we were able to obtain a substantial amount of data from a large and diverse group of participants. Our participants spanned across a multitude of cultures, socio-economic statuses, ages, business experience, and English knowledge, providing us with a broad dataset to base our results on.

In our research, we focused on gathering data on several key themes. ‘Barriers and Fears associated with learning English’ was a particularly dominant theme in our research. Before appending an additional program to the CdeE curriculum, it was crucial for us to understand what obstacles enrollees would need to overcome in order to participate. Many of these barriers were associated with a lack of language proficiency and fear of embarrassment associated with making mistakes when speaking a new language. Others were focused on the culture of shame within Panama ingrained in them from early childhood. The prevailing theme, though, was the low level of English among enrollees and low confidence stemming from that.

### 4.1: Current English Level of Participants

During our survey, we created a section called “English Knowledge Evaluation / *Evaluación de conocimientos de inglés*,” wherein we evaluated their English knowledge and had participants evaluate themselves. Specifically, we prompted the question, “How comfortable are you with **speaking** English? / ¿Qué tan cómodo te sientes **hablando** inglés?” (responses see figure 4.1.1). We created a linear numeric scale, 1 representing no comfort (“Not at all comfortable / *Nada cómodo*”), and 5 representing complete comfort (“Completely comfortable / *Completamente cómodo*”).

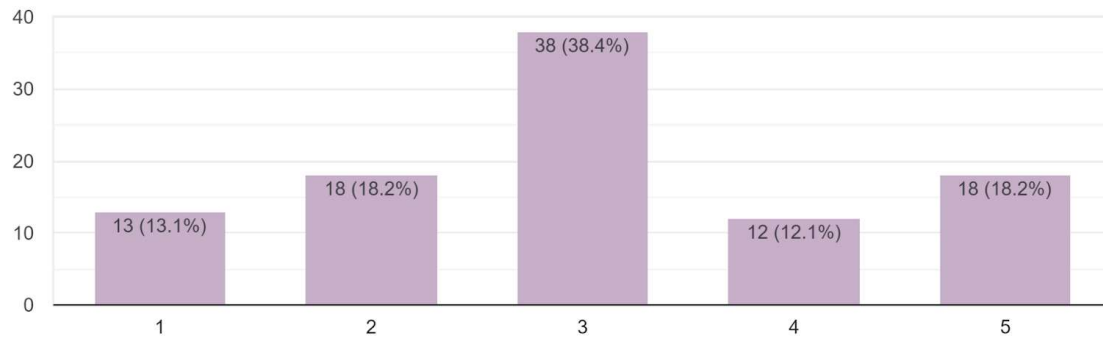
The responses were spread across the entire range. The most frequent survey response was “medium comfort” with 38 (38.4%) in level 3 (middle of the row comfortability), and the least was “medium-high comfort” with 12 (12.1%) in level 4 (between middle and high comfortability). Levels 2 and 5 both had the same response frequency of 18 (18.2%). 13 respondents (13.1%) were uncomfortable (low comfortability). The sample size is 99 survey responses.

**Figure 4.1.1**

*Comfortability when speaking English*

How comfortable are you with speaking English? ¿Qué tan cómodo te sientes hablando inglés?

99 responses



Note. Data from 99 survey responses

## 4.2: Demographic of Participants

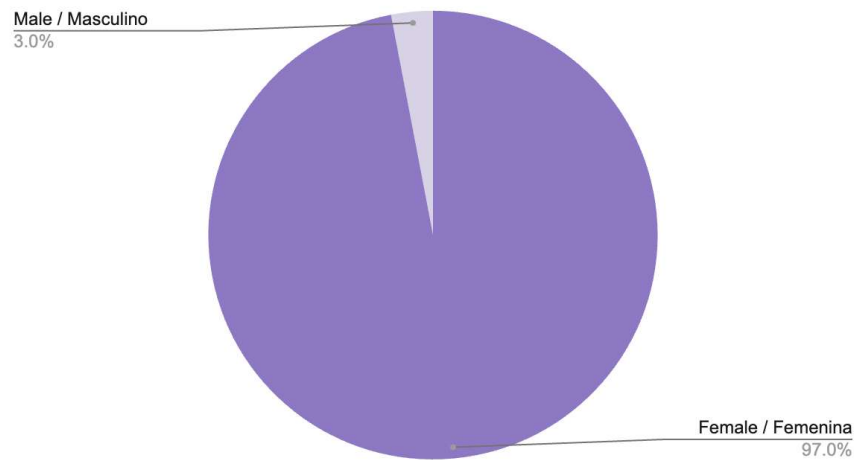
Our survey asks a set of various questions to gauge demographics. Age and Gender were specifically asked in the survey to the 99 participants. The sex of our survey population was 97% Female and 3% Male (Figure 4.2.1).

When categorized by decade, the data is organized in a bell curve focused on the 40-49 age bin (Figure 4.2.2). The minimum age is 24, and the maximum is 67. The mean age is 45.82 years, and the standard deviation is 9.01 years.

**Figure 4.2.1**

*Participant Gender*

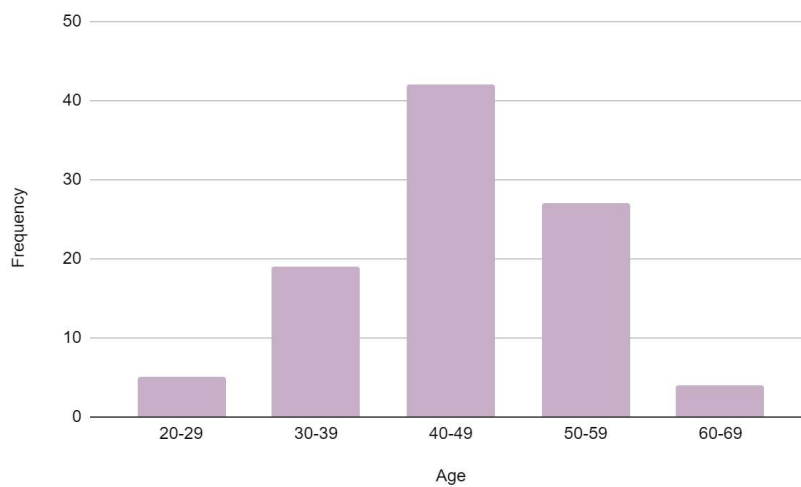
What is your sex? ¿Cual es tu sexo?



Note. Data from 99 survey responses

**Figure 4.2.2**

*Participant Age Histogram*

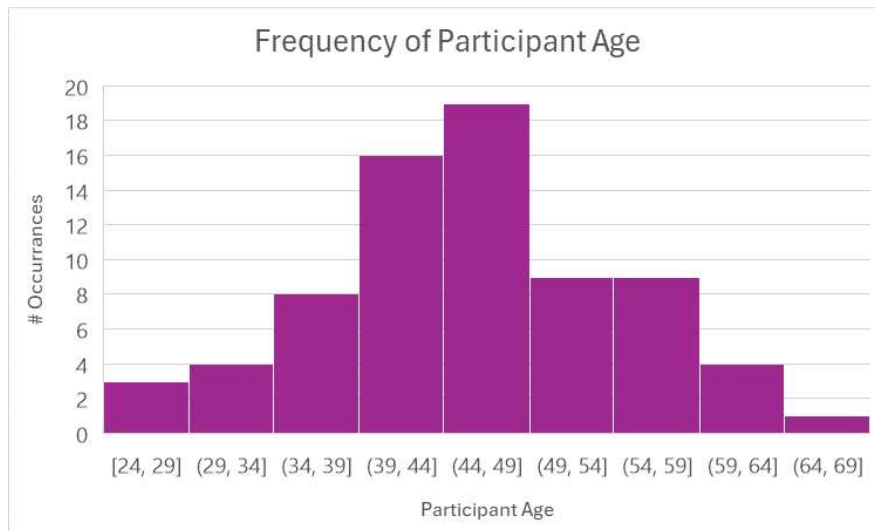


Note. Data from 99 survey responses

The data may appear to be a non skewed bell curve, but by decreasing the bin width from 10 to 5 (Figure 4.2.2), and performing a Kernel Density Estimation (Figure 4.2.3), we discover there is a slight positive bias in the age data of survey respondents. This further codifies the age of our target demographic by demonstrating the extreme density of the population in the 40-49 age range.

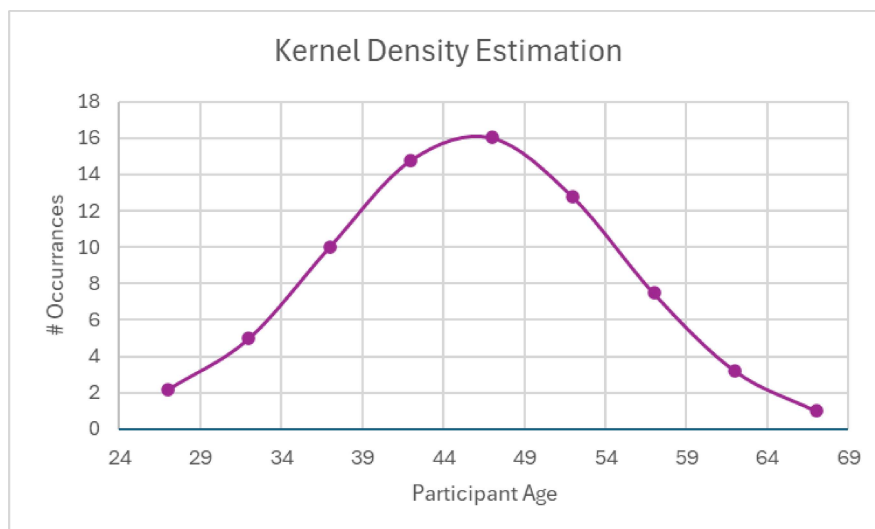
**Figure 4.2.3**

*Participant Age Histogram, refined*



**Figure 4.2.4**

*Kernel Density Estimation*



We were able to gauge more demographics through our focus groups, such as socio-economic status. Although no questions were specifically targeted to collect this data, we were able to deduce it based on the education they received and the opportunities they had growing up. Our participants' socio-economic status varied across the entire spectrum with some only being able to afford public education, others having a mix of public and private, and others completing their entire schooling in a private program.

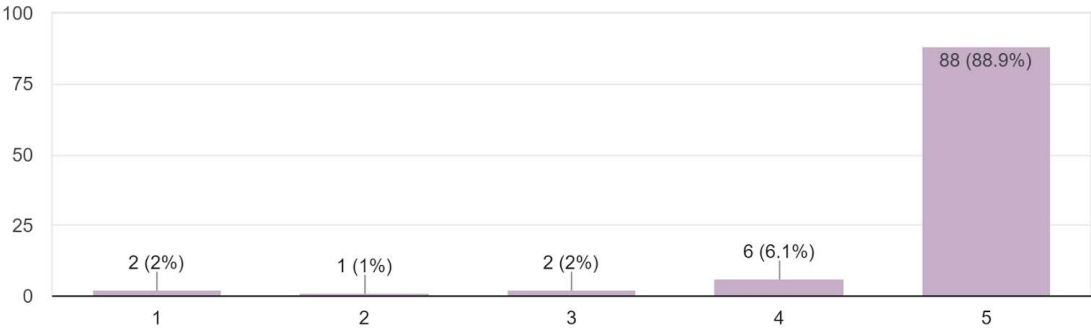
**4.3: Desired Practices For Learning English**

After categorizing qualitative demographics data and the current English level of participants, our next step was to gauge whether participants were actually interested in appending an English curriculum to the Canal de Empresarias program. The answer: a resounding yes. 100% of focus group participants and 95% of survey participants said that they would be willing to dedicate time to practicing their English skills in spite of their busy schedules.

**Figure 4.3.1**

*Level of Interest*

Are you interested in participating in additional English Practice through the Canal de Empresarias program? ¿Estás interesado en participar en prác...glés a través del programa Canal de Empresarias?  
99 responses



Note. A vast majority of CdeE participants are interested in adding an English program to their curriculum. Data assembled from 99 survey responses.

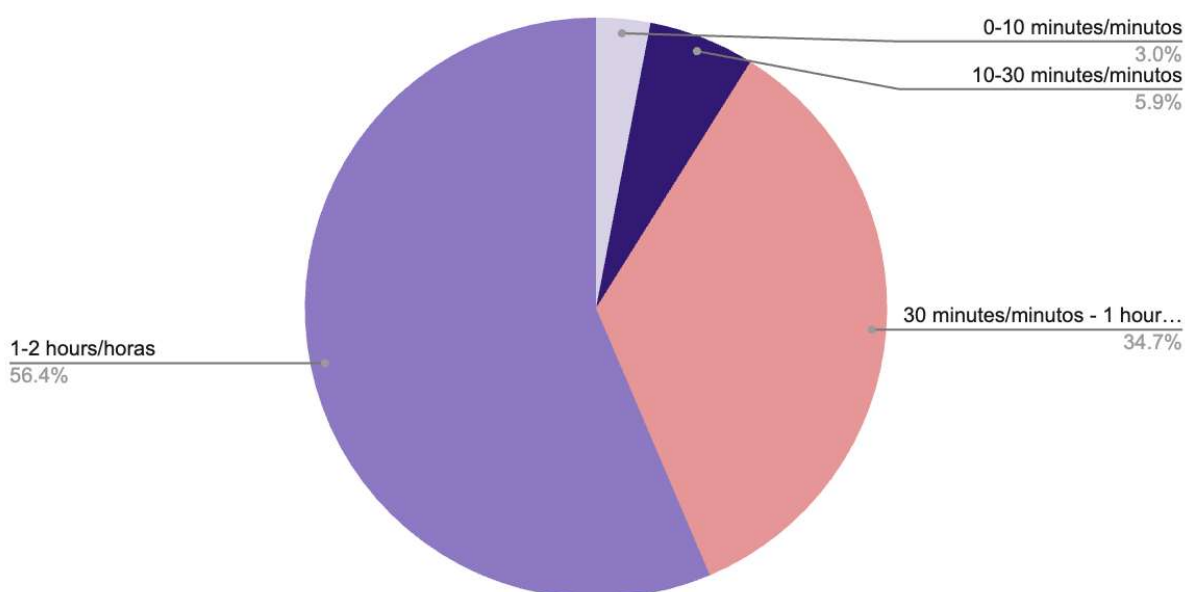
Despite the high level of interest among those we surveyed, time restrictions are a major concern when implementing the program. 56.4% of participants were willing to dedicate 60 to 120 minutes per week to practicing the language, 34.7% were willing to dedicate 30 to 60 minutes per week, and 8.9% were unwilling to dedicate more than 30 minutes per week.

**Figure 4.3.2**

*Time Restrictions*

How much time a week do you intend on spending to practice your English skills?

¿Cuánto tiempo a la semana piensas dedicar a practicar tus conocimientos de inglés?



Note. Data from 99 survey responses.

Establishing an accessible yet productive public square was another priority for the team. With many CdeE enrollees living in rural villages or foreign countries far from Panama City, in-person sessions beyond the occasional workshop are a logistical challenge. However, the impersonal and occasionally glitchy environment of online meetings threatened the productivity of these sessions.

The majority of the surveyed were willing to compromise with a hybrid environment: One with frequently recurring online discussion sessions and online repeated practice, with the



I, J, & K). Participants mentioned interest in activities such as karaoke, attending a cultural cafe, or visiting a museum. Other focus group participants suggested visual learning methods which included patterns, colors, and repetition.

When it came to preferred topics covered in the English curriculum, a theme mentioned in nearly every single answer was “business.” Participants acknowledged the importance of conversational English for use in their daily lives, however, stated that speaking and understanding English in a business context was the most crucial step to advancing their enterprise.

Respondents mentioned topics such as finance, sales, marketing, interviewing, budgeting, customers, commercials, and entrepreneurship. Although business English was a priority for the participants, many also noted what skills they want to develop to improve their conversational skills. These include communication, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation. These are visualized in Figures 4.3.4 and 4.3.5.

**Figure 4.3.4**

*Effectiveness Word Cloud*



Note. This figure displays common words found in 99 survey responses to the question: “What would make an English program most appealing and effective for you?” The more common the word, the larger it is. Figure generated by <https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/generatetwordcloud>

### Topics Word Cloud



Note. This figure displays common words found in 99 survey responses to the question: “What topics would you prefer to be covered?” The more common the word, the larger it is. Figure generated by <https://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com/generatetwordcloud>

#### 4.4: Barriers Associated with Learning English

In both our focus groups and our survey responses, we discovered the barriers which often come with learning English as a second language (ESL). Out of 94 survey responses, 46% said that they did not have the time to dedicate to learning a new language. The next most common barrier is lack of opportunity to practice, as many respondents said they don't have anyone to practice with and this stunted their growth.

However, what we discovered to be the most common barrier through conversations in our focus groups was socio-economic status. Our focus groups participants had varied educations with some only being able to afford attending public schools, and others completing their schooling either fully or partially in a private program. It was quickly evident to us that those who grew up in a higher social class, and were therefore able to afford private education, could understand and speak English at a far greater level. Those that were only able to attend the public school system struggled to communicate with us in English, with some requiring a translator to adequately communicate with us.

With the combination of English being an important tool for financial gain in Panama and the socio-economic barriers associated with learning it, many families are stuck in the cycle. Poorer families, especially those far from the city, seek to learn English in order to expand their job opportunities and grow their family's wealth and are unable to because they lack the necessary resources. On the other hand, families in a higher socio-economic class are more easily able to access English-learning opportunities such as private schools and tutors, giving them a significant advantage in the job market.

### Figure 4.4.1

[illegible]

27

## 4.5: Fears Associated with Learning English

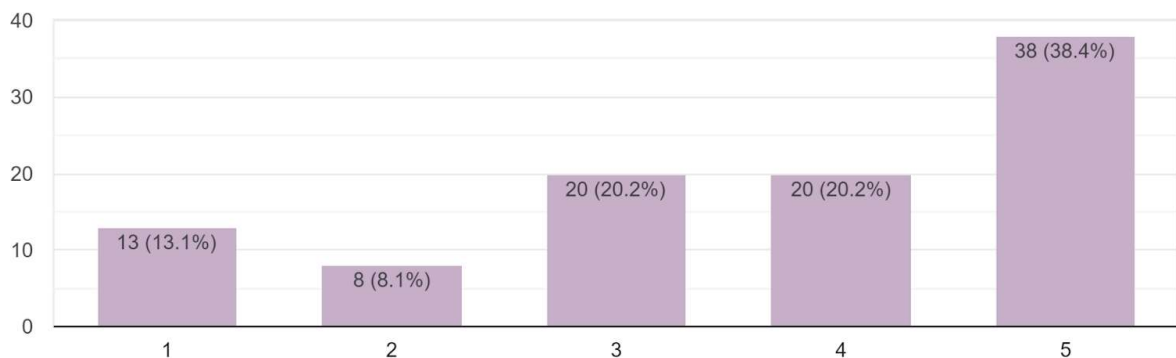
Evidenced by both our focus groups and our survey, fear is a factor that can greatly impact one's ability to improve language skills. Many participants stated they didn't want to speak because they are afraid they would mispronounce words or use incorrect grammar. Many women experienced heightened fear when it came to business scenarios. As seen in Figure 4.5, a majority of survey participants felt at least slightly worried about using English in their work environment. In our first focus group, a participant stated that "There is something in the [Panamanian] culture which makes them not want to embarrass themselves." Many participants agreed that the "prideful nature" of many Panamanians induced a fear of being wrong and led to them not even attempting to speak English. Because of this, many women in the focus groups agreed they would like to be in learning situations where they are pushed harder to practice and improve.

**Figure 4.5**

*Participants' Level of Worry Regarding English in the Workplace*

How worried are you about using English in your workplace? ¿Qué tan preocupado estás por el uso del inglés en su lugar de trabajo?

99 responses



Note. Data from 99 survey responses

## **5 Discussion**

In evaluating the data, we seek to establish recommendations for the sponsor which guide them in creating a program in accordance with the goals and objectives of the sponsor organization and which meets the wants and needs of the target population.

### **5.1: Beneficiary Classification**

Based upon the data, the average beneficiary can be described thusly: female, age 45-46, low-medium english skill, willing to dedicate 30 - 120+ minutes weekly to a program. This is, however, not the target demographic of the curriculum. The recommendations made to the sponsor will be in accordance with their use cases for the program, and therefore be targeted at a new program which is adaptable to all women participating in Canal de Empresarias.

### **5.2: Effective English Education Practices**

According to the data presented in figure 4.1.1, the population is distributed along a slightly left-biased bell curve, with almost the same percentage of respondents being mildly to highly uncomfortable as being mildly to highly comfortable with speaking English. Based upon interactions in the focus groups (Appendices H, I), the target population is afraid of mispronouncing words and forming incorrect sentence structures. The investigators did not notice many mispronounced words or incorrect sentence structures during the focus groups, indicating that fears may stem from shortcomings on a professional level. Additionally, participants of the focus group held 9/17 expressed frustration on how English is taught in the local education system. They feel as though the material plateaus and they are taught nothing but the basics over and over again (Appendix I). The program should therefore aim not to patronize participants with repeated practice of the basics, but instead to further their knowledge by pushing them to adapt to real scenarios like those in the workplace.

Data collected during focus groups provided us with many possible directions in which to take our English education program. Participants had many suggestions and preferences for how they would like the program to be run. The most common methodology mentioned by participants was “practice.” Having sat through countless hours of classroom English education,

they do not deem the standard process as effective. Instead of passively listening to a teacher lecture them and teach them grammar or vocabulary, it would be more effective for them to actively participate (Appendix I). Through active participation, students will be able to practice their conversational and written skills in a fun and relaxed environment while gaining experience with vocabulary and pronunciation, and most importantly, increasing their confidence with the language. Activities should be run in a group setting with one or more teachers who are proficient in English. The teacher(s) will provide an opportunity for students to speak English amongst themselves, and should let them do so as freely as possible while occasionally correcting mistakes.

Many possible activities were suggested to us by our focus group participants. Some suggested activities which incentivize visual learning through the usage of colors, repetition, and object identification (Appendix I). One way this could be implemented is through a board game or visual game which contains cards with pictures, numbers, or colors. Participants will have to draw a certain amount of cards and then create a sentence using them. For example, if a participant drew cards with the number 4, the color yellow, and a picture of a house, a possible response would be “4 people live in the yellow house.”

Games, in general, were commonly mentioned by our participants as being effective. Other options include but are not limited to Scrabble, Charades, or Pictionary. Another option for visual learning is by watching movies. Participants mentioned that they get significantly better at understanding the language and learning vocabulary by watching English movies with Spanish subtitles. Once comprehension levels increase, participants could go back and rewatch the movie without subtitles to gauge their progress. This activity would be easy to conduct asynchronously, providing participants with good practice while working around their busy schedules. Although visual activities can be very beneficial, participants stated they must be used with diverse topics as repetition on a small scale is not helpful when learning the language, only recognizing patterns of speech is (Appendix I).

While all of the previously mentioned activities can be run virtually, participants mutually agreed that an occasional in-person activity would be very beneficial for practice and to build confidence with proper socialization (Appendix I). One possible in-person activity would be a workshop setting, similar to the one held on 30/9/24 at Ciudad del Saber. Groups can be provided tasks to work on and complete them collaboratively while creating connections and perfecting their English skills. Experienced English speakers can occasionally speak at the front,

presenting new topics and ideas, as well as go around the workshop to gauge progress and correct mistakes.

Another activity similar to a workshop would be attending a cultural cafe, possibly one hosted by the Panama American Center in Ciudad del Saber. This cultural cafe would provide an excellent environment for those learning English to speak with those fluent in the language, incentivizing peer-to-peer learning and socialization. There are also options for practicing English outside of a typical conversational environment. Participants mentioned that they would be interested in participating in outings with their cohort in order to interact with their peers, while practicing their English skills in a fun environment (Appendix I). Some outing ideas that were mentioned were karaoke, visiting a museum, or going to lunch together. In this stress-free environment, students will be able to practice their skills comfortably amongst themselves and gain confidence in their ability to speak English in public.

With many possible outlets for practice laid out, it is important to discuss exactly what topics participants were interested in covering. In an ideal scenario with time and resources permitting, the participants would like to take a holistic approach to learning the language: reading, writing, and speaking, both in casual and business settings. However due to time restrictions faced by students and Canal de Empresarias, it is unlikely that this ideal scenario is feasible. Luckily, focus group participants were willing to compromise and focus primarily on the parts of English they deemed most valuable to their professional development (Appendix J). Although conversational skills and basics such as grammar and vocabulary must be covered in order to gain an understanding of the language, higher level teaching should be focused on business-oriented English. Participants are interested in expanding vocabulary to help them describe their products and reach new customers.

The program should culminate with participants able to give an elevator pitch and answer questions in confident English. In order to accomplish this goal, the final parts of the curriculum must be tailored to individual participants and their businesses. Teachers should get to know every student and their businesses and help them learn the vocabulary necessary to talk about it. Students should practice talking about their businesses amongst themselves in order to gain feedback and ideas from their peers and they should give several practice elevator pitches in front of their groups before completing the final step: a mock pitch in front of a panel of investors.

When participants were asked to rank speaking, understanding, reading, and writing, all mutually agreed that speaking and understanding were most important to them. Reading came second and writing was deemed least important. Participants found it crucial to develop precision in vocabulary and speaking in order to speak clearly and efficiently while conveying their intended message accurately. They were also interested in more complex topics such as the differentiation of formal and informal vocabulary, learning idiomatic expressions, and using emotional language to invoke importance and meaning (Appendix I). Although many of these skills are obtainable only through years of practice, teachers are encouraged to focus on these complex topics with more advanced students.

### **5.3: Available Resources**

When determining what platform would be best for an English education program, we received mixed responses on what participants wanted. Some individuals preferred the idea of in-person classes while others wanted remote learning. As seen in figure 4.3.3, there was no general consensus on how and when these lessons should occur. Based on the data we gathered, a hybrid model would be the best approach. This would mean having regularly occurring online sessions with some optional but highly recommended in-person events mixed in. Although hosting in-person events could be challenging with participants living all across Panama and some internationally, Canal de Empresarias has previously hosted successful in-person events.

The time availability for the virtual meetings varies. While some participants are home every day with their kids or working 9-5, meeting availability poses an issue. A way we could cater to participants with different schedules could be recording virtual lessons. This way all participants will be able to get the same lessons with commonly asked questions. However, those unable to attend sessions live will miss the opportunity to have their speaking mistakes corrected. Another asynchronous option would be for teachers to provide a series of pre-recorded videos that students can watch in their own time. Watching these videos would provide a productive baseline for students and they can practice what they learned through online meetings or in person events.

There could also be a virtual channel where students and teachers can actively discuss challenges they have. This could be through email or a texting platform, such as WhatsApp or an educational platform similar to Canvas. Canvas is an educational platform used to facilitate course management for teachers and students. Modules and files can be uploaded by an educator and accessed at any later date by students. A canvas site would allow clear communication from the teacher to student. The sight would allow them to upload links to virtual meetings, post recorded lectures, and inform students about in person meetings. Canvas also has a discussion channel where students would be able to easily communicate with each other and professors.

**Figure 5.3**

*Canal de Empresarias Workshop on 30/09/2024*



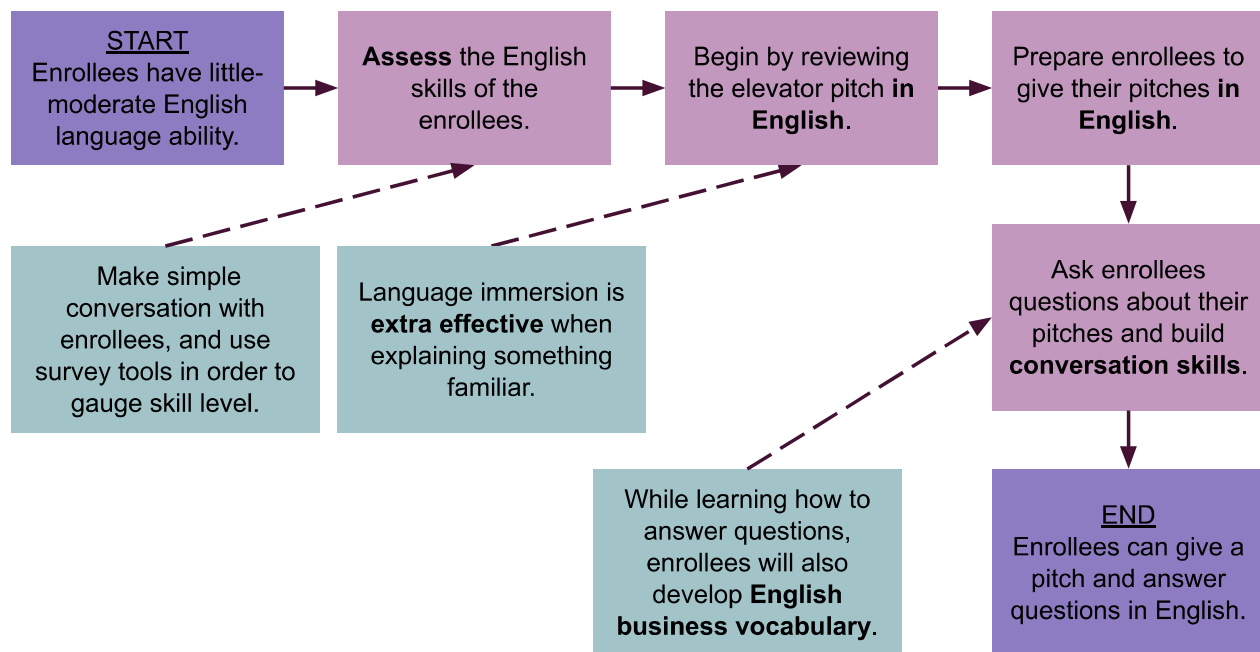
Note. This figure is a picture we took at a Canal de Empresarias workshop that happened at Ciudad del Saber. We did not participate in the workshop but we conversed and got to know some of the participants.

## 5.4: Holistic Program Outline

The following section is the “deliverable to the sponsor organization.” It is the culmination of the team’s effort to create an ESL program which builds confidence and preparedness in Panama’s Women Entrepreneurs so they can participate in global enterprises. Figure 5.4.1, the revised program outline, is the organization of this deliverable.

**Figure 5.4.1**

### *Program Outline*



Note. This is the same Figure 3.5.1 seen previously on page 15, it has been shown again for convenience. The modifications to the program outline include the START block, which reflects the place we expect enrollees to be with their English skill post focus groups and survey.

Upon beginning the first journey in the Canal de Empresarias program, we expect the women to have low to medium working proficiency with English based upon interactions in the focus groups. Women are able to understand English when spoken slowly, but interactions with native speakers could prove difficult due to slurred speech, regional accents and vocabulary, and a more casual speaking pace (Appendix E). Women also struggle with speaking in a professional setting due to embarrassment or lack of ability (Appendix H, I), although most in the focus group were fairly competent and sufficiently communicated their business ideas.

It is important not to patronize enrollees or to purposely give them learning material which is below their skill level. Focus group participants expressed frustration at how English was taught in Panama's public institutions, saying it felt very repetitive and unchallenging and did not inspire repeated practice (Appendix I). The program should have a clear progression in which women are rewarded for using the new vocabulary and speaking tendencies taught in these early stages. This is a psychological reward. The program needs to be structured such that it feels cathartic or otherwise satisfying to apply new knowledge.

When choosing an instructional model to teach language, it is the recommendation of this IQP team that the sponsor largely reject the Prussian model and its derivatives (such as reformed Prussian models in American public schools). The Prussian model is defined by six characteristics: centralized control, compulsory attendance, standardized curriculum, teacher authority, class-based structure, and a focus on discipline and obedience. The goals of this system were to create obedient factory workers in an industrializing society, and consequently stifle student creativity, critical thinking, and agency (Clark, 2008).

This is incompatible with a program focused on the individual student and which contains individual opportunities to learn vocabulary specific to their businesses (Appendix E, F, H, I, K). Additionally, participants have reinforced the effectiveness of language immersion, and have expressed desire to practice English in a “cultural cafe” format. This type of open and unstructured format, similar to the workshop the team visited on 30th September, necessitates the teacher to relinquish most control of the environment.

Instead, the team encourages the sponsor to follow an altered Montessori format. This format focuses on fostering creativity, independence, and critical thinking via the student-centric learning environments, which are promoted in Canal de Empresarias's existing curricula (Association Montessori Internationale). The program should include elements of hands-on learning like the cultural cafe, rely on enrollees' intrinsic motivation, and a prepared environment where enrollees can learn according to their wants and needs. Additionally, the student focus of the Montessori format lends itself to an online platform where enrollees can learn material at their own pace. This type of online platform is already in use by the sponsor, as commuting to Ciudad del Saber is not feasible for many enrollees, so implementation of the program will be that much more convenient.

Enrollees should be able to obtain enough knowledge through the Montessori structure and interactions with instructors to form coherent elevator pitches in English. Enrollees should be discouraged from using online translation tools, and encouraged to use their knowledge and translate to the best of their ability. This ensures they are certain of the meaning of the words they use in their pitches. Enrollees should also be taught situational diction and idiomatic expressions (Appendix H), in order to avoid situations where they unintentionally form backhanded sentences or sentences which can be reasonably interpreted as offensive.

Armed with sufficient understanding of the English language such that they can communicate appropriately and concisely, enrollees will undergo a series of mock pitches before a panel of judges selected by the sponsor. Judges will ask questions specific to enrollees' pitches in order to further tailor their individual learning around their businesses.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Over the past 10 years, the organization Canal de Empresarias has been a resource for women entering the entrepreneurship roles in Panama. However, a comprehensive English speaking sector has not yet been developed into this program. After conducting two interviews, four focus groups, and a survey we have gathered sufficient data to begin the implementation of a new sector of the CdeE journey. This addition to the journey is specifically designed to help members with their English in the use of their Elevator Pitch, a tool used to help each individual's organization grow.

With the program we have created, students will have the skills to confidently give their Elevator Pitch in English to any stakeholders and also be able to comprehend and respond to any follow-up questions being asked. With the skills learned, students will be suited to communicate their goals, network with global investors, clients, and partners to strengthen their businesses.

This program will truly make Canal de Empresarias stand out from any other entrepreneurship support programs in Panama. Further implementation of this sector into the journey will boost the success of the program and make students go farther in their entrepreneurship journey.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Code Book

| Primary Code                                                                | Secondary Codes                   | Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Participants                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Educational Gaps in English Language Learning for Panamanian Business Women | Education                         | “[My biggest barrier to English learning is] <b>The courses have not worked</b> for me, I cannot keep up with <b>the educator's pace</b> ”                                                                                                                                            | Survey Participant 1                         |
|                                                                             | Language Barrier                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                              |
| Barriers and Fears Associated with English Language Speaking and Learning   | Fears                             | “[My biggest barrier to English learning is] <b>embarrassment</b> when <b>speaking it</b> ”                                                                                                                                                                                           | Survey Participant 2                         |
|                                                                             | Barriers                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                              |
| Limited Resource Availability                                               | Time                              | “So they [Canal de Empressarias Participants] need specific <b>vocabulary</b> that sometimes might <b>not be as easily obtained as with a regular English course</b> . And on top of that, perhaps just reading and writing because it's one thing to speak and then when it comes to | Focus Group Translator<br>/<br>Interviewee 1 |
|                                                                             | Practice                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                              |
|                                                                             | Opportunity for Language Learning |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                              |

|  |               |                                                                                                    |                      |
|--|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
|  |               | grammar I've seen the challenge like through email."                                               |                      |
|  | Affordability | "[My biggest barrier to English learning is] The few opportunities to enter an affordable program" | Survey Participant 3 |

## Appendix B: Survey Questions

### English Program Survey for Canal de Empresarias

#### Study description:

This questionnaire is intended to gain feedback from students of Canal de Empresarias about the possible addition of English education into the program. Please answer all questions honestly to the best of your ability. This form should not take you more than 10 minutes.

#### Consent form:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZH2HcMzvoOxG4Q2x68Oj2JB8mz16SZJAHEShcOlhKL4/edit?usp=sharing>

1. Do you consent to participation in this survey
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
2. Are you at least 18 years of age
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

#### Section 1: English Knowledge Evaluation

1. How comfortable are you with speaking English?
  - a. *Rate on a scale of 1-5*

2. How comfortable are you with understanding English?

*a. Rate on a scale of 1-5*

## **Section 2: Barriers to English Education**

1. How worried are you about using English in your workplace?

*a. Rate on a scale of 1-5*

2. Have you ever missed an opportunity because of your lack of English knowledge?

*a. Rate on a scale of 1-5*

3. What about the English language do you want to learn most?

a. Vocabulary

b. Casual Conversation

c. Business skills

d. Other

4. What is your biggest barrier when learning English

*a. Open Response*

## **Section 3: Program Interest**

1. Are you interested in participating in additional English Practice through the Canal de Empresarias program?

*a. Rate on a scale of 1-5*

2. What would make an English program most appealing and effective for you?

*a. Open Response*

#### **Section 4: Program Elements**

1. Would you prefer this program be in person or online, and what day/time would work best for your schedule?
  - a. *Rate on a scale of 1-5*
2. What topics would you prefer to be covered?
  - a. *Open Response*
3. How much time a week do you intend to spend on practicing your English skills?
  - a. 0 - 10 minutes
  - b. 10 - 30 minutes
  - c. 30 minutes - 1 hour
  - d. 1 - 2 hours
4. What changes would make you more interested in this program?
  - a. *Open Response*

#### **Section 5: English Knowledge Test**

1. What is your name?
  - a. *Open Response*
2. What is your job?
  - a. *Open Response*
3. What did you eat for breakfast?
  - a. *Open Response*

4. What is your current level of education?

a. *Open Response*

5. What do you usually do on weekends?

a. *Open Response*

6. What are your hobbies?

a. *Open Response*

7. Tell us a short story about yourself

a. *Open Response*

## **Section 6: Personal Information**

1. What is your sex?

a. Male

b. Female

c. Other

2. How old are you?

a. *Open Response*

## Appendix C: Focus Group Questions

### Introduction

- Make conversation: “How is your day?”, “What are your plans today?”, “How are you feeling?”
- Introduce ourselves, state we are the focus group moderators
- Give brief presentation
- Explain the purpose of the study
- Consent - printed forms

### English General

- Why do you want to learn the language?
- How comfortable are you with English comprehension?
- How comfortable are you when speaking English?
- How comfortable are you when listening to English?
- How comfortable are you when writing English?
- How comfortable are you with negotiating in English?
- Please rate your English ability.

### Barriers to English-Speaking

- How is your English business vocabulary?
- Have you performed an elevator pitch in English?
- What worries you about using English in the workplace?
- What barriers do you feel like you have to or will have to face using your English skills?
- What are your biggest fears when speaking English?

- What are your biggest challenges when speaking English?
- What about the English language do you want to learn more about?
- What specific vocabulary would you like to learn?
- What motivates you to be proficient in this language?
- Have you ever missed any opportunities based on a lack of English skills?

### **Gauging Interest**

- Do you think an additional step of the curriculum would have advanced your English skills?
- What would make an English program most appealing and effective for you?

### **Suggestions for program**

- Would you prefer this program be in person or online, and what day/time would work best for your schedule?
- What topics would you prefer to be covered?
- How much time are you willing to take to complete this program?
- What changes would make you more interested in this program?
- Any other comments or suggestions?

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Canal de Empresarias Employees**

### **Introduction / Language Learning**

- What is your role at Canal de Empresarias?
- How long have you worked here?
- Is Spanish or English your first language?
- When did you learn English?
- What can you tell us about your language-learning experience?
- What methods or techniques helped you the most when learning a language?
- Do you interact with the participants of CdE often?
  - If so, from a bilingual perspective, what do you believe their strengths and weaknesses are in language ability?

### **Fears / Barriers**

- What were your fears/barriers when learning to speak both languages?
- Were you ever held back from any opportunity due to a language barrier?
- Did you ever feel embarrassed or ashamed due to a lack of proficiency in a language?
- What common difficulties do you think Spanish-speaking women might face when learning English for entrepreneurship purposes?

### **Language Curriculum Design**

- What key English language skills do you believe are most crucial for women entrepreneurs (e.g., negotiation, marketing, networking)?

- What strategies do you think would best motivate and empower women to succeed in both learning English and entrepreneurship?
- Are there any gaps in existing language learning programs or entrepreneurship training for Spanish-speaking women?

## Appendix E: Interview Transcript with Interviewee 1

Interview with INTERVIEWEE 1

19/9/2024 9:53 AM at Canal de Empresarias office, room 003.

MARISSA WHALLEY; WPI assistant investigator

INTERVIEWEE 1; City of Knowledge employee, translator for the team's focus groups

MARISSA WHALLEY: So, what is your role at Canal de Empresarias?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Well so, my role in the City of Knowledge Foundation it's actually being the study abroad coordinator so I coordinate these types of programs. In terms of Canal de Empresarias, I've worked with them in the past in order to make collaborations happen between other university students and their entrepreneurs.

MARISSA WHALLEY: How long have you worked here?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Two years.

MARISSA WHALLEY: So, you speak both languages, is Spanish or English your first language?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Spanish is my first language.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Then, when did you learn English?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Almost as soon as I learned Spanish.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Ok really so like right away?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yeah.

MARISSA WHALLEY: What can you tell us about your language learning experience, if you remember?

INTERVIEWEE 1: So, in terms of like academics I went to an English immersion school. So, most of my classes were in English since pre-k and aside from that at home I had the unique experience of having one parent speak English until I was like two or three and then my other parent speaking Spanish.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Ok. So immersion was pretty helpful?

INTERVIEWEE 1 Yeah.

MARISSA WHALLEY: What methods or techniques helped you most when learning the language? Probably immersion?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Yeah. On top for that i think that for me, something that's still to this day something I need to practice more is listening. Especially, like with different accents and so I can

have a great conversation with someone from the mid west that speaks slower and has like a more different way of pronouncing words than someone that's like from the deep south, like it takes a while for me for my brain to like actually understand them, so movies are very helpful actually.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Do you interact with the participants of Canal de Empresarias often?

INTERVIEWEE 1: Every once and a while I do, yes.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Then, you might not be able to answer this but, from a bilingual perspective, what do you believe their strengths and weaknesses in language ability are?

INTERVIEWEE 1: So in my experience working with a few of them I think that a lot of them have the desire to speak so they are not afraid of speaking English with native speakers because again there are some students that come from the US. However, I think that maybe that a challenge or an opportunity they have would be for one the vocabulary they use because again, their businesses are mostly like niche. So they need specific vocabulary that sometimes might not be as easily obtained like with a regular like English course. And on top for that, perhaps just reading and writing because it's one thing to speak and then when it comes to grammar I've seen the challenge like through email.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Yeah, we have a survey and we are getting responses and are starting to see that common issue. So what fears and barriers do you have when speaking either language or do you have any?

INTERVIEWEE 1: So when speaking both, actually I don't like when I don't know what a word like to be is but it happens to be in both English and Spanish and sometimes I say it in Spanish

but then my brain just can't find a word in Spanish even though I know what is it, the same happens to me in English, so vocab.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Were you ever held back from an opportunity due to a language barrier:

INTERVIEWEE 1: No, not that I'm aware of.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Do you ever feel embarrassed or ashamed due to a lack of proficiency in a language?

INTERVIEWEE 1: sometimes, maybe not with English or Spanish but I also speak French, probably intermediate French, I'm more, let's say, cautious when I speak in French.

MARISSA WHALLEY: What common difficulties do you think Spanish-speaking women might face when learning English specifically for entrepreneurship?

INTERVIEWEE 1: So i think that on the one hand its time because most of these women are not only entrepreneurs and have their own business but they are also mothers and i think that something pretty evident when they come here and are part of the Canal de Empresarias program because sometimes some of them have to bring their kids over with them to the workshops so i think that perhaps its a time thing.

MARISSA WHALLEY: What key language skills do you believe are most crucial for women entrepreneurs? For example negotiation, marking, networking.

INTERVIEWEE 1: Definitely networking and having public speaking skills.

MARISSA WHALLEY: What strategies do you think would best motivate and empower women to succeed in both learning English and entrepreneurship?

INTERVIEWEE 1: probably understanding the possibilities and what doors would be open if they were able to proficiency communicate in a second language. Especially in terms of funding that would be available to them and grants that could apply to. Perhaps offered by foreign governments that would have to be applied to in English.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Are there any gaps in existing language learning programs or entrepreneurship training for Spanish-speaking women? Do you notice any lack of a specific skill?

INTERVIEWEE 1: probably in Canal de Empresarias specifically, I don't think there are any workshops that study a language, I think that would definitely benefit them, especially the ones looking to export. No language education if neither given or recommended.

MARISSA WHALLEY: So do you understand the basis of our project from the focus group meetings?

INTERVIEWEE 1: From my understanding, you're trying to build the curriculum to develop eventually a course that would help them translate their elevator pitch in English, and not only have their pitch in English but be able to answer questions in English.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Do you have any tips or ideas? We're coming into this not speaking Spanish, kind of an outside perspective. In your shoes, you've seen both sides so you might have more insight.

INTERVIEWEE 1: I think that, at least from what I've heard during the sessions, is that they all have different ideas of what would be ideal for them so I think it might be difficult for them to compromise however, I think that based on the way that the entrepreneurship program works already, perhaps a hybrid could work. I also know another group from your program is working with the Panama American Center and they have English circles so perhaps you could ask through them if there's someone that works with that specifically, I know every so often they offer English circles to adults and then for high school students too. They are based on specific topics. A few months ago we had one with students from the university and because their program was focused on migration and sustainability the focus of that group specifically was to address key issues and also key vocabulary in that area.

MARISSA WHALLEY: Yeah that's something we've definitely talked about doing. For hybrid sessions, we were originally gonna do all online and Laru kind of wanted us to do video learning but that doesn't seem like the feedback we're getting, people don't want that. Do you think if we did something like virtual video-type lectures and then a hybrid sense of going to the Panamerican center to practice?

INTERVIEWEE 1: I think that would work for both of them, there are a few that don't live in the city so that would be difficult for them but again if maybe every so many lectures that are recordings then they have this face-to-face experience, maybe 1 hour, where they can use what they learn and maybe share recordings.

## Appendix F: Interview Transcript with Sponsor

Interview with INTERVIEWEE 2

24/9/2024 10:50 AM at Canal de Empresarias office, room 003.

MADELINE McFEE; WPI assistant investigator

INTERVIEWEE 2; Our Sponsor, Canal de Empresarias employee

MADELINE McFEE: So, we just have some general questions to go over with you, the first one is; if you could talk about your role at Canal de Empresarias, what exactly is it that you do?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I'm the manager of female entrepreneurs and social projects and I coordinate all programs and I have 10 years working with CdeE. I manage all processes and training for women and develop alliances with other partners and find opportunities in Panama and other countries to support the achievements and development of women entrepreneurs.

MADELINE McFEE: What was your reason for joining CdE?

INTERVIEWEE 2: My reason? Well I think that the women entrepreneurs need support to develop their business because women face a lot of barriers to grow and create their business and we, the City of Knowledge, have opportunities and expertise to support the women in this process. Because we have tools to overcome the barriers of the women when they need to create a business or they need to generate more time to work on their ideas because the women, wives, mothers, owners of their own businesses are working in other companies. Sometimes sexism is another situation or barrier and the responsibility in the house, the domestic world, all the household chores. The financial support to the women is very complicated in Panama because women don't have access to banking. The owners of houses and cars are of the husband, not the women. Indigenous or refugee women or rural women don't have opportunities to study or develop entrepreneurs. It is very complicated for women in our country.

MADELINE McFEE: Moving into your English knowledge, when did you start to learn English?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Well I never practiced the language because I don't have people to practice the English with. This is a great opportunity to talk with you. My clients don't speak English. I don't have the opportunity and I think that this is a weakness because it's very important to find more opportunities for women to practice English. I need support to translate everything. Here in Panama the education for the language is a weakness. In the public school, they don't have programs about learning the language or they are very bad. In the University, you can practice more the language but you practice more when you visit other countries or visit the United States, or I don't know, Europe, but it's very complicated?

MADELINE McFEE: How did you learn? Did you do classes?

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: I'm gonna help you both, I'm gonna help you with the framing of the question and I'm gonna help her with the language.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Well, it's my motivation. For example in my job, I need to use my job to find or understand information or studies about entrepreneurs or about female entrepreneurs. A lot of studies are in English and I need to translate a lot of information. All the information to create my own proposals and studies. And in my life, it's not important because all my groups and circles speak Spanish but my daughter speaks excellent English and I practice because her school is private and in private school the learning of the language is very good. My husband speaks both technical english because he's cyber security and I understand some words about cyber security and technology information. The barriers in Panama, the people feel shame when they don't speak good English and prefer don't speak.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: You know they feel shame so they prefer to not to speak.

INTERVIEWEE 2: We prefer don't speak. Or let the people that speak good talk to the native of the language.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: So follow up then we go back, do you think that shame has something to do with gender?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Maybe, to the women it's complicated for example when you want to talk about your expertise or your knowledge to the women it's important to create a presentation and talk about your knowledge and demonstrate your professionalism. Those that don't speak good language or don't understand something it's complicated to us because the competition is, maybe we can feel fear, no, if you don't do it good your job, it's complicated to the women. I don't know, I think that maybe something about.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: So she says that the women try really hard to do stuff well and the stuff they think they can't do well, it scares them.

INTERVIEWEE 2: One of my partners here speaks very badly in English but he speaks English. He speaks very bad but he speaks. And I feel fear to speak bad. I don't know, I think this is fear.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: She's scared of doing it wrong. So there was one question that Maddy asked which is the formal process of learning english. How did it start, what process did you have?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I received public education. In my primary school and secondary school and in university I paid the private university to study my two master's in Europe but in Spanish, and don't speak English. When I need to understand a book or information there are the unique moments that I have contact with the language. When I read a book or listen to music or speak with my daughter or practice with my daughter, but I don't have more. I think that I speak very bad. I know that I need more practice and maybe create a schedule that I dedicate maybe 20 minutes per day or to practice the language. But about education, I don't have education with the language.

MADELINE McFEE: Have you ever missed an opportunity because of a lack of the language?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I have 22 years working here and my clients are women that don't speak english and here this is my unique experience of work. And I have my own business. In my business my clients don't speak english but my partners speak english and our client. The little client that speak in english, my partners are in charge of the process. Well one time I lost the opportunity, one opportunity because I don't speak good English and they need something

fluent, good fluent english, and in this moment, until 5 years, I feel that it is very important to understand and speak the language. In 1999 I visited with my family New York. In New York nobody speaks in Spanish, it's complicated and I feel in this place the importance to speak good English, in this moment. Two important moments in my life. The loss of opportunity and when I visit New York.

MADELINE McFEE: How important was the opportunity? Was it like a really big opportunity?

INTERVIEWEE 2: It was very important. Very important. The opportunity was with NGO. This NGO worked with refugees and the salary was very good and I had all the skills that they need but the language was the barrier, a very important barrier.

MADELINE McFEE: With English what do you think your strengths and weaknesses are?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I think that I don't have strengths. If it is 1 to 5, I am 1. I need more practice. I think that it's complicated to me to organize my ideas in English. And I think very slow. I need to pay attention and it's complicated to organize the words and if you speak fast it's more complicated to me. I think that I need more practice.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: So just a little question. If you were to rate Laru's English speaking one to five, what would it be?

MARISSA WHALLEY: Probably a 2 or 3, I've heard worse.

MICHAEL MONDA: There are native speakers in New York that are worse than you.

ANTON RABKIN: I would give you a 3. How she perceives her english and how you do. There is a mismatch.

MADELINE McFEE: Your English is much better than my Spanish. We can understand you.

INTERVIEWEE 2: Thank you

MADELINE McFEE: Our last question is, are there any strategies you think will help women entrepreneurs succeed in learning?

INTERVIEWEE 2: I think to me the best experience or strategy was with Aaron Sakulitch. I was practicing with Aaron to speak. In all our meetings we speak in English and he is very patient and he helped me with the pronunciation and I lost a little of the fear to speak in English. I think that it is very important to have people, maybe like you, that we can speak and receive feedback of the pronunciation or practice the words, the new words, and I think that it's important to generate these strategies to support more women. This program in CdE is a great strategy to support more women, and to me.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: Just one thing that got lost in translation, is the business both yours and your husband?

INTERVIEWEE 2: No mine and my partner's.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: What English client does your partner help with?

INTERVIEWEE 2: All my clients speak in spanish but when we receive clients that speak English, my partners, I have 2 partners, we are 3 women, one of my partners speaks in excellent english. She was taught in English and she attended to clients that speak in English.

ADVISOR/TRANSLATOR: And that business is different from CdE?

INTERVIEWEE 2: Yes, it is different.

INTERVIEWEE 2: And my husband is a cyber security regional enterprise and they work with different banks and big enterprise of communications and in central america.

## Appendix H: Data from Focus Group 9/13

### 9/13 Focus Group Notes

Notes are organized by section. Scribes: Anton Rabkin, Michael Monda.

#### General Notes

- Some participants are enrolled in the focus group specifically because they want to be involved in creating the curriculum.
- Participants desire a lot of practice, far more than the ~10 minutes daily Laru has offered them.
  - Need to determine a format in our meetings this week.
  - The webpage/interactive format that Laru described becomes much more viable.
    - Procedurally generated lessons?
    - Duolingo or Babbel, probably.
- Focus group was productive despite losing ~10 minutes at the beginning.

#### English General

- Why do you want to learn the language?
  - Many enrollees want to use English to advance their businesses.
    - More markets, investor capital, and opportunity seizures.
- How comfortable are you with English comprehension?
  - Many/all enrollees understand English well.
    - “Well” is about to a second-grade level, probably.
- How comfortable are you when speaking English?
  - Enrollees are generally not confident.

- Some did not speak English despite our requests.
  - Afraid of mispronunciation or incorrect grammar and sentence structure.
  - Some are very competent and confident.
    - These are generally outliers, and the people who signed up because they wanted to have a hand in creating the program.
  - 3 enrolled are able to hold simple conversations.
    - These individuals are not educated in English, and are self-taught via exposure.
  - 1 enrolled is able to hold advanced conversation.
  - Lots of filler used when speaking.
- How comfortable are you when listening to English?
- Many have very good listening comprehension skills.
    - This is therefore not something which should be focused on at-length in the curriculum.
- How comfortable are you when writing English?
- Comfortable enough to have fully worked in a full-English environment.
  - Some are more confident reading than listening.
  - Hierarchy of confidence:
    1. Listening/Comp
    2. Writing
    3. Reading
    4. Speaking
- How comfortable are you negotiating in English?

- No data recorded.
- Please rate your English ability.

- No data recorded.

### **Barriers to English Speaking**

- How is your English business vocabulary?
  - No data recorded.
- Have you performed an elevator pitch in English?
  - No data recorded.
- What worries you about using English in the workplace?
  - One participant shared an experience she had, in which failure to communicate caused her embarrassment and led her to avoid direct communication by having another employee translate the conversation.
  - The worries in the workplace are the same fears they have outside of it.
- What barriers do you feel like you have to or will have to face when using English?
  - Enrollees expressed they would have to overcome the feeling of being uncomfortable and the grammar and sentence structure barrier between languages.
- What are your biggest fears when speaking English?
  - Missed pronunciations or incorrect grammar.
  - Blundering an opportunity.
  - “There is something in the culture which makes them not want to embarrass themselves.”

- Enrollee feels that courses available on the market do not help them overcome the fear of speaking, nor do they adequately prepare students for a tense environment like an international workplace.
  - Enrollees expressed they needed more practice and needed to be pushed to speak more English in order to become more fluent (language immersion).
- What are your biggest challenges when speaking English?
  - Enrollees expressed challenges to learning were the root causes of challenges to proficiency.
    - Enrollees expressed they needed more practice and needed to be pushed to speak more English in order to become more fluent (language immersion).
  - Pronunciation.
  - Sentence structure and grammar.
  - Mismatched language and social environments.
    - Enrollee shared an experience where she critiqued a colleague's English because it was too informal.
      - Program should assist enrollees in identifying what vocabulary to use based upon the social setting.
- What about the English language do you want to learn more about?
  - This question was answered in previous responses. This question should be answered concisely when presenting data in the IQP report.
- What specific vocabulary would you like to learn?
  - No data recorded.
- What motivates you to be proficient in this language?
  - One describes how she likes to teach others in her family and her community.

- Success and opportunity seizure are an underlying motivator.
- Have you ever missed any opportunities due to a lack of English?
  - Too embarrassed from previous interactions to approach future ones effectively.
  - Cannot conduct English meetings or present their ideas before English-speakers.

### **Gauging Interest**

- Do you think an additional step of the CdE curriculum would have advanced your English skills?
  - Yes (unanimously).
- What would make an English Program effective for you?
  - Enrollees expressed they needed more practice and needed to be pushed to speak more English in order to become more fluent (language immersion).

### **Suggestions for Program**

- What is your preferred format for this program?
  - Online.
    - Enrollees live across the country, and no reasonable daily commute is possible for in-person instruction.
  - A platform which teaches the same material, so that they can also access the same opportunities in Asia.
    - This is beyond the scope of this project, but is an excellent task for a future IQP or private contractor.
  - Laru would like an online interactive platform, as expressed in the meeting on 9/9.
  - Participants prefer language immersion over more structured teaching methods.
  - Courses which are offered continuously.

- This may conflict with Laru's vision for the program, since it is bound in one part of her "journeys" system.
- A two-instructor format.
  - One instructor uses simple language, one instructor uses advanced language.
    - Both instructors would say the same thing.
    - This helps build inference skills, and can be used to familiarize them with the shared meaning of words with Greek or Latin roots.
- What topics do you want to see covered?
  - Differentiation between formal and informal vocabulary.
  - Idiomatic expressions.
  - Emotional language to invoke importance and meaning.
  - Precision in vocabulary and speaking.
    - Efficiency by using less words to convey precise meaning.
      - Gutting filler.
- How much time are you willing to spend in order to complete the program?
  - At least one year (unanimously).
- Other.
  - Incorporate games which force you to speak english into the lesson.

## Appendix I: Data from Focus Group 9/17

### Focus Groups Notes 9/17

Notes go by section. Scribes: Anton Rabkin, Michael Monda.

#### General Notes

- 3 returning enrollees + translator.
- 2 new enrollees
- When learning any skill, what is your preferred method?
  - Visual learning. Colors, repetition, identifying objects. Something to make you feel like you're learning.
  - Something to challenge them and expose them to new vocabulary.
    - Children's programming in English.
    - Reading.
    - A tool to help them with spelling, writing, and using grammar.
  - Interactive activities.
    - Karaoke.
    - Cultural cafe.
    - Conversations with instructors, classmates, etc. to build confidence.
    - Museum visits.
  - Visual component is very helpful for understanding, but needs to be used with diverse topics. Repetition on a small scale is not that helpful when learning conversation, only recognizing patterns of speech is.

## English General

### ➤ Were you taught English in school?

- One participant describes how she learned “General and Basic English” in primary school.
  - Not as intense as in private school.
  - No bilingual aspect.
  - This participant answered in very advanced English.
- Private bilingual schools taught reading, composition, science and other subjects in English.
  - 6 or 7 classes in English.
  - Similar to the ESL Program in American public schools?
- Universities taught exclusively in Spanish.
- No opportunity to practice outside of the classroom.
- Sometimes the basic information is taught in Secondary school.
  - This basic info is insufficient for forming sentences and holding conversations.
- One participant describes how she was taught only basic knowledge in high school.
  - Formed positive, negative statements and question/responses.
  - Does not feel like she retained any learning.
  - English was a big part of her first job.
    - Needed to attend university English classes.
      - Inconvenient.

- Long hours.
  - Writing remains a challenge due to lack of practice.
- Some participants still choose to speak in Spanish despite slight English education.
  - Indicates lack of development because of no practice.
  - This is the same participant who could not speak last week.
- One participant did have some courses after 3rd grade, and some English courses every year in middle, high school and college.
  - Courses were not very diverse in topic.
    - Like repeating the same topics in history every four years.
  - The repetition did not inspire further practice.
    - Many students dropped by uni level 4.
- One participant speaks about her son.
  - Five or six subjects in English.
    - Science, grammar, literature.
  - Younger students tend to learn easier.
- Most relevant topics and focuses of the curriculum.
  - Comprehension.
    - 2 participants agreed.
    - Some distinguish between oral and literature comprehension.
  - Conversation practice.
    - 2 participants agreed.
    - Seek confidence when speaking.

- Reading.
  - 1 participant agreed.
- Writing.
  - 1 participant agreed.
- Want to build vocabulary which helps them describe their products.
  - Individual tailoring can be done when learning and practicing the elevator pitch.
  - A unique conversational component can also be learned through the pitch, as enrollees become able to answer questions about their products and business model.
    - The pitch deck centered model idea is extremely relevant.
  - Desire for “more clients, people, markets.”
- Do you want this program to grow your knowledge in a general sense, or would you prefer it was very focused on the elevator pitch?
  - Want it to be focused on their businesses.
    - Obtaining international funding.
  - All of them would like it to be broader, but recognize the focus on business and the elevator pitch is more important.
    - Focusing on descriptive language covers both of these cases.
    - Other subtopics cover these cases.
- Do you want to develop English skills solely for your professional life?
  - Participants agreed that both would be covered in an ideal course, but are willing to focus on one or the other.
    - Professional life will be prioritized.

### **Barriers to English-Speaking**

- No opportunity or incentive to practice outside of the classroom.
  - Higher education, business conducted exclusively in Spanish.

### **Suggestions for program**

- Bigger focus on conversational english and immersion.
- Focus on teaching the in-brain translation process.

## Appendix J: Data from Focus Group 9/20

### Focus Groups Notes 9/20

Notes go by section. Scribes: Anton Rabkin, Michael Monda

#### General Notes

- This focus group is in a new format.
  - We will begin by asking a few questions before moving into english pitches from the attendees. Then, we will ask them questions based upon their pitches and gauge their understanding in a more direct way.
  - In the event that no attendees give pitches, Michael will give an elevator pitch and ask questions to get their understanding.
- The attendees can give a “elevator pitch” by describing their ideas in English to a sufficient extent. Little work has to be done in order to help them arrive at the end of the program.
  - Relatively little work.
  - Expand vocabulary, help them ask/answer questions, and build confidence through repeated practice.
- Attendees reiterate that language immersion is the best format for learning a new language.

#### English General

- Have any of you attended a conversation circle, like the one held at the Panama American Center?
  - “Yes. In accordance with my belief that immersion is important, getting into an unstructured, relaxed environment where people can talk about their interests and connect with one another makes learning easier.”

## **The Elevator Pitch**

- One attendee is not prepared for the pitch in English.
  - All participants are partway through the CdE program, and therefore have not prepared elevator pitches consistent with what the sponsor teaches currently.
- Michael performs the elevator pitch for his hydrogen technology company.
  - One participant asks a question which demonstrates high comprehension.
    - “What are the safety risks of having such a system near someone’s home or in their community?”
  - One participant asks a question which demonstrates low comprehension.
    - “How many hours did it take you to make this pitch deck?”

## **Q/R Rating**

- Some attendees understand the pitch and are able to ask questions.
  - The majority are not able to understand complex language like that used in an elevator pitch.
  - Some questions are asked in Spanish, but demonstrate some understanding of the topics covered in the pitch.

## **Other Women’s Businesses (in lieu of no elevator pitches).**

- Creating a company which brings healthy products which assist in children’s development, inspired by helping her child with Autism.
  - CdE helps her with her social purpose.
  - “Because Autism is so hard to diagnose, a kid who is not normal is difficult for the school and for the society.” (toll on resources for limited gain due to no specialization).
- Makeup business started as a company which served children’s parties.

- Objective of the company is to expand and offer courses and more services.
  - Owner has relevant certifications.
- Multicultural cafe.
- Fun setting where everyone can come to practice languages.
  - Organize museum tours, field trips, events to help the approach to languages be easier and more comfortable.
  - Owner was transferred from a Panamanian school to an American school and experienced shock when she could not communicate because the language was so advanced.
  - Invite indigenous tribes and deaf communities to teach traditional languages and (Spanish Sign Language) SSL.

## Appendix K: Data from Focus Group 9/24

### Focus Groups Notes 9/24

Notes go by section. Scribes: Anton Rabkin, Michael Monda

#### General Notes

- This Focus Group protocol is a continuation of the previous iteration where we are asking participants questions about their businesses in order to gauge their ability to provide a pitch in English

#### Canal de Empresarias

- Have you enjoyed the CdE program thus far?
  - Good experience.
    - Each bullet in this tier is a different respondent. Sub-bullets are expansions of responses.
    - “I met another woman like me who wants to improve her business, so we are working together to find tools and improve.”
    - The program has been super valuable for me and other entrepreneurs. A lot of us did not go to school to study business, and this program is giving us the tools and mindset to think like entrepreneurs.
      - “A lot of women are running their businesses, but we can all learn new ways to run our programs and improve business functions.”
- What was your favorite part?
  - Learning how to structure the business. Testimonials and examples can be very helpful, since lots of people when starting a business have no idea what they don’t know.
    - “Knowledge onion” concept.
  - Guidance to complete steps.
  - Human interaction. Makes you feel less alone on the journey.
    - Shared experience, shared mistakes.
- Have you applied any of the skills you’ve learned?

#### Participant Companies

- What stages are everyone’s companies in?
  - In limbo
    - “I don’t know what I’m doing. I don’t have another employee. It’s only me. I made my own website and I’m in the middle of setting up something bigger.”
    - A lot of the people know about me only from my website. I have spent **6 months** in CdE looking to expand my services and treatments. I do not have a commercial property, but my company is set up and running in accordance and in full view of the law.

- Does not have an official company, manufacturing everything at home and marketing her products through instagram.
  - Studying how to sell an idea and build a brand, as opposed to studying how to sell products.
  - Does not have the money for a website or other employees.
    - “I do the marketing, the delivery, and the production.”
  - Very difficult because it's only one person in the company.
    - “This is my only [job].”
- “I want to finish this program and continue my life by working at a company.”
- Business started five years ago.
  - Started practicing face [painting with her kids, and it turned into a children's entertainment business.
  - Looking to diversify business with complementary products and new services.
    - Wants to start an online platform where people can pay to learn skills and prep for certification.
  - Favorite part of being in the Canal de Empresarias program is the human element.
- Why should an investor support your company?
  - Value promise: relaxation.
    - One of the most important things about promoting services like mine is helping people realize there is stress to remove.
    - We do not use disposable tools or plastics, which is good for the environment. Most cosmologists do not avoid materials which damage the planet because they are not trained to do so.
    - I just finished my specialization, so I would also like to develop a program where the focus is introducing these business practices.
    - It's very important for the Panamanian community to preserve natural resources, and many of them want to learn how they can continue to provide good services while not destroying the environment which sustains their communities.
  - “In order to attract an investor, she would stress that her current services are limited by space and employees. Demand is not an issue, and there is therefore no disincentive to invest.
- What is the end goal of your company? (To go public, sale, international expansion, public change).
  - I would like to have a commercial building in a trafficked area which attracts lots of attention. I would like to continue providing services for the time being, and want to expand across the country.
    - I am preparing myself to give classes to all peoples of Latin America.
  - Would like to sell the design for products online in order to attract more revenue, as that is the most

- End goal is to have a large community center. I want to erect a landmark where people can come together to practice new languages and skills independent of the language they speak.
  - Big barrier is financial. None of the women are able to afford commercial properties, let alone something as large as a community center.

## Appendix L: Acronym Table

*Acronym Table*

| <b>Acronym</b> | <b>Meaning</b>                             |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------|
| CdeE           | Canal de Empresarias                       |
| ESL            | English as a Second Language               |
| NGO            | Non-Governmental Organization              |
| SEM            | System of Multinational Headquarters       |
| MNC            | Multinational Corporation                  |
| TEA            | Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity |
| GEM            | Global Entrepreneurship Monitor            |
| IQP            | Interactive Qualifying Project             |
| ID2050         | IQP Preparation Class                      |
| SSL            | Spanish Sign Language                      |
| AMI            | Association Montessori Internationale      |

Appendix M: Gantt Chart

