

Universidad Hispanoamericana

Faculty of Education

**The impact of implementing traditional methods such as the use of worksheets for coloring, tracing, and passive listening compared to play-based learning approach in enhancing vocabulary learning on preschool children in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez located in Barva, Heredia during the I quarter of 2026.**

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He revisado y he hecho las observaciones relativas al contenido analizado, particularmente lo relativo a la coherencia entre el marco teórico y análisis de datos, la consistencia de los datos recopilados y la coherencia entre éstos y las conclusiones; asimismo, la aplicabilidad y originalidad de las recomendaciones, en términos de aporte de la investigación. He verificado que se han hecho las modificaciones correspondientes a las observaciones indicadas.

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## DEDICATION

This special academic achievement is dedicated to my family, whose love, support, and encouragement have guided me throughout every stage of this journey. I want to thank them for believing in me, staying by my side during the moments of doubt, and celebrating each accomplishment with me along the way.

To my parents, for their sacrifices, patience, and unconditional love. Their hard work and efforts have provided me with opportunities that have allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. This achievement would not have been possible without their constant support and unfailing confidence in me.

To my grandmother, who always demonstrates her love and support to me, shares her wisdom and constant motivation, her strength and kindness that always inspires me, and who I am profoundly grateful to for the role she plays in my life. To my aunt, for her encouragement and support, which have been such motivators on this journey, I am deeply thankful for the way it has helped me along the way; and to the rest of my close family who have never failed to support me, show up, and be an important part of my life.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to myself, in recognition of the perseverance, dedication, and effort that made this accomplishment possible. This journey has taught me the value of resilience, and this achievement serves as a reminder that hard work and determination can make dreams come true. I now know that I can have the strength to achieve my goals if I set my mind to it and have God's unwavering and loyal support and love through every step of the way.

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I am profoundly grateful to the administration, teacher, and staff of Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez for their collaboration and willingness to facilitate the information and valuable time to support this project. Their collaboration made the implementation of the study possible. I would like to specially thank, the children who participated in this project. Their enthusiasm, engagement, and willingness to learn provided the inspiration and foundation for this research.

Finally, I want to deeply thank my family and friends for their constant encouragement, understanding, and support throughout my academic journey. Their confidence in me and unwavering love, and belief in my abilities gave the motivation to continue working toward my goals. During moments of uncertainty their support gave me the motivation to complete this important milestone in my professional career.

## ABSTRACT

Vocabulary development in preschool is a central component of early language learning, since it influences children's communication skills, cognitive growth, and long-term academic achievement. Throughout this developmental stage, vocabulary learning is mainly shaped by the instructional approaches teachers use, the learning environment, and the types of interactions children experience. Therefore, traditional methods, such as worksheets, tracing activities, and passive listening, have been involved in early education for a very long time, yet research suggests that these approaches may not fully align with how young children acquire language. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), "rich vocabulary instruction requires exposure to words in meaningful and engaging contexts" (p.20), thus underscoring the importance of active learning experience. This investigation will explore how traditional strategies influence different aspects, such as attention, engagement, fine motor development, and creatively, and how all these factors interact with the process of vocabulary learning.

Meanwhile, modern approaches such as play-based learning and immersive language environments offer more effective support for children's natural learning processes. Play-based strategies encourage exploration, interaction, and emotional engagement, which contribute to stronger vocabulary retention and deeper comprehension of words. In fact, Immersive English practices in Costa Rican preschool programs integrate the language into daily routines and meaningful activities, thus giving children authentic opportunities to use English purposefully, as Vygotsky (1978) noted, "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment" (p.90). By contrasting traditional and play-based methods, this project highlights the key factors influencing vocabulary learning in early childhood.

**Key words:** Vocabulary-Learning- immersive- play-based learning approach- traditional methods

## RESÚMEN

El desarrollo del vocabulario en la educación preescolar es un componente central del aprendizaje temprano del lenguaje, ya que influye en las habilidades comunicativas de los niños, su crecimiento cognitivo y su desempeño académico a largo plazo. Durante esta etapa del desarrollo, el aprendizaje del vocabulario está determinado principalmente por los enfoques pedagógicos que utilizan los docentes, el ambiente de aprendizaje y los tipos de interacciones que experimentan los niños. Por lo tanto, los métodos tradicionales, como las hojas de trabajo, las actividades de trazado y la escucha pasiva, han estado presentes en la educación inicial durante mucho tiempo; sin embargo, las investigaciones sugieren que estos enfoques no siempre se alinean con la manera en que los niños pequeños adquieren el lenguaje. Según Beck, McKeown y Kucan (2013), “la instrucción rica en vocabulario requiere la exposición a las palabras en contextos significativos y atractivos” (p. 20), lo que subraya la importancia de las experiencias de aprendizaje activo. Esta investigación explorará cómo las estrategias tradicionales influyen en distintos aspectos, como la atención, la participación, el desarrollo de la motricidad fina y la creatividad, y cómo todos estos factores interactúan con el proceso de aprendizaje del vocabulario.

Por otro lado, los enfoques modernos, como el aprendizaje basado en el juego y los entornos de inmersión lingüística, ofrecen un apoyo más efectivo a los procesos naturales de aprendizaje de los niños. Las estrategias basadas en el juego fomentan la exploración, la interacción y el compromiso emocional, lo cual contribuye a una mayor retención del vocabulario y a una comprensión más profunda de las palabras. De hecho, las prácticas de Inmersión en Inglés en los programas de educación preescolar en Costa Rica integran el idioma en las rutinas diarias y en actividades significativas, brindando a los niños oportunidades

auténticas para usar el inglés de manera funcional. Como señaló Vygotsky (1978), “el aprendizaje despierta una variedad de procesos internos de desarrollo que solo pueden operar cuando el niño interactúa con las personas de su entorno” (p. 90). Al contrastar los métodos tradicionales con los basados en el juego, este trabajo destaca los factores clave que influyen en el aprendizaje del vocabulario durante la primera infancia.

**Palabras clave:** Vocabulario- aprendizaje- inmersivo- aprendizaje play-based – métodos tradicionales

**CHAPTER I**  
**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### 1.1. Research statement

Early childhood is an important and decisive stage in the development of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills, and the methodologies applied during this time can have a long-lasting impact on children's future learning, in fact, "early literacy activities promote school readiness and higher reading achievement", this report mentions how children who engage and are exposed more frequently to early literacy activities tend to be equipped with better skills and thus be more prepared for future challenges such as primary school and even achieve higher goals such as higher reading abilities (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024, p.15). How much does the way of teaching in early childhood shape a child's future learning and success? It is an educator's responsibility to encourage and provide meaningful and appropriate learning experiences that foster curiosity, autonomy, creativity, and proper social interaction, while ensuring that children acquire main skills, such as vocabulary, communication, and problem-solving, which will support their future academic and personal success.

As much as it is a duty for teachers to seek the best and most beneficial teaching strategies, it also represents a challenge to be able to plan and implement proper dynamics to enhance and promote meaningful learning while adapting to the newer and evolving generations' needs. Therefore, as an attempt to meet these new requirements and expectations, in Costa Rica, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) has promoted innovative methodologies that emphasize active and meaningful learning rather than traditional and repetitive instruction (Ministerio de Educación Pública [MEP], 2014). Therefore, within this context, the case of Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva, Heredia, represents an important opportunity to explore how new approaches, particularly Play-Based Learning, can strengthen English vocabulary learning in preschool students.

Play-Based Learning is widely recognized as a highly effective pedagogical strategy for young learners, because it nurtures skills such as exploration, creativity, and authentic language development rather than rote memorization. Research shows that when teachers use play-based approaches in preschool classrooms, children benefit not only in their cognitive and literacy development, but also in social, emotional, and physical areas (Langton, 2023). Although some may see play as mere recreation, philosophers and educators have historically emphasized its unique value. Socrates suggested that play was one of the most natural ways of acquiring knowledge through interactions and experiences, and it supports children's development as it encourages them to express thoughts and emotions freely, giving them the chance to apply their knowledge (Grondin, 2018). These ideas remain relevant today, as early learning experiences based in play contribute not only to language development but also to holistic growth, since they provide a more meaningful and educationally enriching learning experience, as UNICEF (2023) states, "Playing and learning is crucial for every child's development, starting from when they are born."

Despite having proven benefits as an effective educational tool, its full implementation in Costa Rican education still has its flaws and setbacks. The consistent application of Play-Based Learning in classrooms remains limited due to several obstacles, among these are the reluctance of some teachers to move away from traditional practices, the lack of adequate resources, and the pressure to comply with curricular demands. Consequently, as it was previously mentioned, many children still experience a rigid and teacher-centered form of instruction that does not fully nurture curiosity, imagination, or a genuine enthusiasm for learning. In fact, worksheets and traditional activities, while useful for developing certain motor skills, they can limit or restrict

children's opportunities to internalize vocabulary through meaningful and authentic real-life experiences (Taylor and Boyer, 2020).

One of the main challenges that has been observed amongst the students of Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez are the difficulties faced when it comes to vocabulary learning and implementation. This research aims to show that play-based strategies go beyond reinforcing skills such as creativity, autonomy, critical thinking, and social interaction, they also enhance English vocabulary. At the same time, the study aims to provide educators with practical alternatives to traditional teaching methods and to respond to the concerns of parents by demonstrating that play is not only a recreational activity, but a powerful and intentional tool for learning. By incorporating strategies such as exploration and discovery, preschool students at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez will have the opportunity to strengthen their English foundations while participating in dynamic, meaningful, and age-appropriate learning experiences (Yogman, et al., 2018).

To address the goals on this research, this investigation proposes the implementation of both methodologies the traditional approaches and the play-based approach, with the intend of comparing them both and determining the best approach to enhance vocabulary learning amongst preschool students attending Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez during the first quarter of 2026. By combining these two approaches, preschoolers will not only learn new English vocabulary but also be able to use it confidently in authentic, meaningful contexts.

This research will be beneficial because it addresses the challenge of meaningful English vocabulary learning in preschool and will provide evidence on whether play-based strategies are more effective than traditional methods. The results can guide teachers in adopting practices that enhance language learning while also fostering creativity, social interaction, and critical thinking.

Additionally, it will help parents recognize the educational value of play, supporting a shift toward more engaging and child-centered approaches in Costa Rican classrooms.

### 1.1.1. Background of the problem

In early childhood education, the teaching of a second language such as English requires methodologies that are more appropriate for younger students and their cognitive, emotional, and even social needs. Traditionally, English teaching/learning for the preschool level, have mostly relied on methods such as worksheets for coloring and tracing, repetition, and passive listening activities. These strategies have been broadly used in preschool classrooms because they provide structure, routine, and opportunities to practice basic skills. As previously stated throughout this project, while these strategies may support certain skills, they often limit active participation, exploration, and meaningful interaction with language, which are essential skills to achieve good vocabulary learning, especially during the early years of life in the educational journey.

About the effectiveness of play-based approach in different areas of English teaching/learning, there have been several investigations conducted about this topic and it has shown how strategies and activities under this methodology can be so effective. For instance, the investigation carried out by Castro (2025) is especially important and interesting because its purpose is to see and explore the effectiveness of implementing Play-Based Learning strategies that can help the target population (Pre-K students at Saint Jude School) improve their pre-writing skills during the given period (1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2025), this investigation focused on practical investigation and measurable outcomes. The object of study or the population for this research were the students from the pre-K level at Saint Jude School I Semester 2025. This study is especially interesting because there tends to be a lot of misinformation regarding Play-based learning and how can it positively impact students learning development.

For this study, the author used different techniques and instruments to carry it out, for example, it employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, which both align

with a mixed-method approach to assess the effectiveness of Play-based learning. More specifically, the author implements tools such as Pre-test of Skills (Checklist), which was used as a standardized assessment that measures the improvement of the pre-writing skills before and after the implementation of the Play-Based Learning Strategies. Another instrument used was the Play-Based Learning Strategies that serve as an intervention to stimulate skills and provide the opportunity to have detailed records to track frequency and types of the activities conducted. And finally, anecdotal records, this instrument allows the researcher to gather feedback and document student engagement, behavior, participation, interaction, and the use of the different materials used during the play-based sessions; this instrument works to collect qualitative details that may not fit into the checklist such as unexpected behavior or a response. For this research project, the main resources of information were different authors and organizations that provided trustworthy information about the topic in hand, for example, Harvard and Cambridge University and the UNICEF and LEGO Foundation, as well as Walther, L., Play, V., and so forth. The direct source for the investigation was the target population of the research, the pre-k students from Saint Jude school which is from whom she obtained the investigation results. The sources were divided in primary, secondary and tertiary.

The author divided the conclusions of their work according to the different objectives they established at the beginning of their work, so summarizing these conclusions we understand that this study confirmed that Play-Based Learning had a strong positive effect on pre-writing skills in pre-K students at Saint Jude School. At first, students showed uneven development, for example, most of them had basic abilities like pencil grasp and fine motor play, but some of them struggled with skills such as tracing accuracy and shape tracing. Therefore, through playful, interactive strategies, students became more engaged, motivated, and emotionally connected,

which also supported their social and emotional growth. By the end of the investigation, there were noticeable and significant improvements across all the indicators, those being: pencil grasp, bilateral coordination, and fine motor play that increased from 60% to 90%, while tracing accuracy and shape tracing increased by 40%. However, the greatest progress occurred in the skills that were weakest at the beginning, thus showing that Play-based learning is especially effective for areas needing the most support. Finally, it was evident that overall, play-based learning proved to be a flexible, impactful, and relevant method for fostering early childhood development in both academic and personal areas.

Finally, as far as the recommendations made for this investigation, in fewer words, are that as teachers we must formally integrate Play-Based Learning into the early childhood curriculum to support both academic and socio-emotional growth. Additionally, teachers should begin each year with diagnostic assessments to tailor instruction and receive professional training to effectively apply play-based learning strategies. It is especially important that class schedules include structured play-based activities targeting fine motor and pre-writing skills, supported by continuous formative assessments to track progress and adapt teaching. Finally, future research should examine the long-term effects of play-based learning on writing readiness and early literacy.

In summary, this investigation is especially interesting because it highlights how something as play can become an imperative and useful tool to enhance skills such as pre-writing abilities which could be considered to only be taught through a traditional method, it demonstrates how effective Play based learning in a preschool context.

Moreover, another research conducted by Rodríguez (2023) presented the target population as students attending pre-k level at Amadita Primary School in Coronado, San José during the second semester 2023. The purpose of investigation is related to play-based learning and its impact on the fostering of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills amongst children. This research seeks to understand the play-based method for the English language learning process in preschool children, it is also expected to understand the phenomena by exploring the facts through the standpoint of a natural environment and solve practical problems. The application of this study is related to the study of game-based teaching methods to learn a second language (English), together with the application of neuro-didactic techniques to achieve a learning transformation. This is especially important since it encourages an innovative methodology to encourage the learning of a second language, which is such an important skill to have.

The instruments required for this research were measurement scales, as well as the semi-structured interview and documentary review. For instance, tools such as questionnaires to gather qualitative information by speaking to the participants and gathering information needed. Additionally, observation is used, as well to collect data for the ongoing investigation. For this research project, the main resources of information and the primary source were the teachers, boys and girls who teach and receive preschool education at the institution Amadita Primary School. The sources were divided in primary and secondary.

The author of this investigation concluded several important aspects, for example, the thesis highlights the benefits of Play-Based Learning in enhancing both soft skills and language learning among young learners. Moreover, students expanded their English vocabulary, interacted fluently across different contexts, and developed curiosity and confidence to ask questions, explore, and construct knowledge naturally through play, which was one of the main

goals of this research. An important detail is that, according to the information, the consistent use of English by teachers and assistants, along with engaging and well-prepared play strategies, supported learning and encouraged creativity, motivation, and communication; teachers acted as facilitators, guiding interactions and ensuring smooth learning experiences.

However, challenges were also noted, including the presence of learning disabilities in students, such as ASD and ADHD, which require specialized teacher training and resources, and limited exposure to English at home, which can clearly hinder language practice. Despite these obstacles, the methodological strategies applied proved effective in motivating students, fostering creativity, and supporting continuous improvement in both knowledge and language skills.

Regarding the recommendations that the author proposed for this investigation we can identify that the teacher's interview emphasized the importance of offering varied, engaging activities and attractive materials to keep students' interest and engagement in Play-Based Learning. Teacher disposition is also crucial, for example, knowing when to guide and when to allow students to explore freely, thus fostering creativity, independence, and deeper learning. Play-based learning provides opportunities that go beyond traditional tasks, encouraging curiosity and skill development through play. Therefore, it was suggested that schools must continue training teachers, acquiring suitable materials, and supporting playful methodologies to ensure smooth implementation of this methodology; truth is that teachers benefit from ongoing professional growth, enjoying the process alongside students while creating safe, engaging environments that promote both knowledge building and second language development, with the English language used consistently to strengthen communication skills.

In summary, this investigation shows how Play-Based Learning can effectively help preschool children develop English language skills and 21st-century abilities. The different activities allow students to be more open to communication, be more confident, expand their vocabulary and explore with curiosity even while facing challenges, it is a source of information that provides useful insights on the power that play has on children's cognitive development.

Lastly, another investigation conducted by Corella (2023), had students of Jardín de Niños El Roble During the First Semester, 2023, who were the objective of the study that was going to be carried out. It is especially interesting to notice that the motive or purpose of this investigation was that this research acts as a tool to generate knowledge that gets to have a direct practical application, basically, to put all the theory about the use of games and music to practice and determine a result, this means linking theory with real-world field, it aims to provide understanding towards the phenomenon that it is investigating, this being the impact music and games in the improvement of listening and speaking skills in English amongst preschool students.

For this research project the author used many instruments that benefited and made the execution of this project possible, for example, the author used observations, which entailed to observe the population and the phenomenon occurring in order to collect information, this tool was used with the aim of identifying how music and games influence the learning of social and cognitive skills as well as the learning of a second language (English). The main sources of investigation for this investigation project were the participants which is from whom the data was going to be directly collected from, in this case the preschool students from Jardín de Niños El Roble. Additionally, the researcher gathered supporting and background information from different articles and web pages. The sources were divided in primary and secondary.

As for the conclusions, about this investigation we understand that this study demonstrates that the integration of music and games as ludic activities significantly enhances student's motivation in class, it also facilitates concentration and contributes to the development of English listening and speaking skills amongst students. Both teachers and students recognized these tools as enjoyable, practical, and cost-effective resources that can be implemented in the classroom dynamic. Overall, the incorporation of music and games yielded favorable outcomes, confirming their value as effective pedagogical strategies.

Finally, the recommendations that were proposed because of this investigation are that music and games should be systematically incorporated into lesson planning to strengthen the development of English listening and speaking skills in young students. Their use should be progressively implemented and evaluated to ensure the continuous measurement of outcomes and benefits as well as progress. Furthermore, establishing specific time frames for such evaluations is advised to enhance ongoing improvement. Moreover, it is suggested that future studies continue to explore the application of ludic strategies involving music and games to further enhance language learning processes in different areas of education including early childhood education.

In summary, this investigation is interesting because it aims to explore how music and games can improve English listening and speaking skills in young children, it shows how by observing students during playful activities the researcher could collect the necessary data to assess their improvement, in fact the investigation showed how interacting with music and games increases students' motivation, enhances concentration, and effectively supports language development.

To provide accurate and broad information regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of both educational methodologies, the present study aims to compare the impact of traditional teaching methods and Play-Based Learning strategies on English vocabulary learning among preschool students who are actively enrolled in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva, Heredia, during the first quarter of 2026. By analyzing both approaches, within the same educational context, this investigation seeks to also provide rich evidence to support the appropriate selection and implementation of different methodologies for English teaching in early childhood education.

### **1.1.2. Problematization**

This research will be focused on addressing a real cognitive situation presented amongst preschool students attending Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva, Heredia, Costa Rica, 2026. This is an independent public kindergarten that was once part of the school that carries the same name. The preschool portion of the institution became independent, thus functioning on its own as a kindergarten until today. In recent years, the institution has implemented a bilingual methodology which allows students to be in contact with the English language, for at least an hour during the day every day; in fact, as of the year 2025, this methodology started being implemented in the level of Interactive II (Materno), since it used to be only for the preparatory (Preparatory) groups. Moreover, there only two groups, out of the ten in the institution, that are working under an immersive English methodology, which means that students are in contact with the language throughout the whole school day. Since these changes have been rather new, some students, especially the ones under the new Immersive English methodology, have experimented important changes, such as going from a regular Spanish-speaking work-method to an all English one.

The Play-based learning approach might come off as a rather modern teaching/learning methodology, however, the truth is that remarkable philosophers, such as Socrates, have emphasized that play is, in fact, the most natural and direct way of learning, as it encourages children to actively construct knowledge through interactions and new experiences (D'Angour, 2013). While some may question play-based learning's ability to properly prepare students for future steps in life, the reality is that it does align rather adequately with the reality of early-childhood education.

An important weakness that has been detected amongst the students of Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez in these two immersive English groups, is that the students are very used to working with traditional methodologies such as the use of worksheets for coloring, tracing, or passive listening, and while these strategies are important to develop necessary abilities such as certain fine motor skills, amongst others, they tend to be repetitive and rigid, thus hindering their ability to learn vocabulary. However, there are other methodologies such as the Play Based Learning approach in which they can work with exploratory and discovery learning (when children learn by investigating and experimenting with sensory materials), with which they can still strengthen their fine motor skills and reinforce vocabulary learning through critical thinking. The main issue in hand is that students are used to the traditional methods and since they still can't read or write, language learning is very low and vague, since they perhaps trace the word and listen to its pronunciation but don't get to use it in real-life contexts as much as they should in order to interiorize it. For this investigation project, the target vocabulary that will be enhanced will be related to the topics of body parts, and colors, which are basic contents that the kids are already familiar with in their native language and that are also included in the program from the first year of preschool.

In summary, the main objective of this research project is to juxtapose the impact that the traditional methodologies in bilingual preschool teaching have in English vocabulary learning in preschool children in Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, against the modern approaches such as play based learning through exploration and discovery, which provide the possibility to enhance the learning of vocabulary in the target language, in this case English.

In this research, the Play-based learning approach, more specifically through exploration and discovery, aims to show its effectiveness in the area of vocabulary learning related to body parts, and colors, amongst preschool children from. According to Friedrich Fröbel who is known as the father of play-based learning and kindergarten, “Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child’s soul” (Fröbel, 1887), it is evident that Fröbel saw play as the way children meaningfully learn and grow; he said that when kids play, they’re not just having fun, they’re expressing what’s inside of them, such as their thoughts and feelings., that’s why he believed play should be at the center of early education, because it helps children develop language, social skills, and critical thinking in a natural way. Through these play-based strategies, the project aims to address the challenge that the target population for this investigation is currently facing, after doing an initial assessment of the kids’ vocabulary management, these new strategies will be implemented through a period of time in which kids are expected to improve their vocabulary domain in these three topics (body parts and colors), after the estimated time for the investigation has passed, students will be assessed once more to measure their improvement and then obtain the results to compare how play-based learning methodologies impact vocabulary learning against the way the traditional methods do.

### **1.1.3. Justification of the problem**

This research will focus on addressing a cognitive situation observed in preschool students attending Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva Heredia, Costa Rica, during the first quarter of 2026. As it has already been explained, this public kindergarten has implemented in recent years a bilingual methodology of immersive English with two groups out of the ten in the institution. These changes have posed challenges, as many students are still used to the traditional methods they once worked with, such as using worksheets to trace or color, which, while being valuable for fine motor development, provide limited opportunities for vocabulary use.

This research aims to highlight the comparison between traditional methods and play-based learning regarding vocabulary learning amongst preschool students. Students will work under both approaches to determine the different impact of both with vocabulary focused on body parts and colors. For the traditional methods, worksheets will be implemented; however, through play-based strategies such as exploratory and discovery learning (in which children learn by investigating and experimenting with sensory materials), this investigation intends to demonstrate how working through play is especially effective in early childhood education and motivate its regular incorporation in daily class executions in other groups in the future.

This importance of this research project relies on the fact that early childhood is a critical stage for both cognitive and linguistic development, therefore, if children do not experience opportunities to learn vocabulary through authentic, playful, and social contexts, their second-language learning may remain superficial at best and will be limited to rote memorization without real comprehension or use of their knowledge. The sole and constant use of traditional approaches can highly affect several areas of their development in the future, for instance, their

language learning skills, since they will experience reduced classroom engagement, weaker communication skills, and poor development of creativity, confidence and autonomy (Justice, et al., 2022). By contrast, with Play-based learning, students can connect the new vocabulary they are learning to real-life experiences, which ensures that their learning is meaningful and long-lasting.

Ultimately, this study aims to demonstrate that play-based strategies not only strengthen English vocabulary learning but also support holistic development by encouraging critical thinking, creativity, autonomy, and social interaction (Ekeh, 2023). It also seeks to provide teachers with practical alternatives to traditional methods and to address parental concerns by showing that play, far from being “just fun,” is a powerful educational tool. Preschool students at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez will be able to build a stronger foundation in English while engaging in joyful, authentic, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

## **1.2. Formulation of the problem**

### **1.2.1. Research Question**

What is the impact of the implementing traditional methods such as the use of worksheets for coloring, tracing, and passive listening compared to play-based learning approach in enhancing vocabulary learning on preschool children in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez located in Barva, Heredia during the 1 quarter of 2026?

## **1.3. Objectives of the investigation**

### **1.3.1. General objective**

To determine the impact of implementing traditional methods such as the use of worksheets for coloring, tracing, and passive listening compared to play-based learning approach in enhancing

vocabulary learning on preschool children in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez located in Barva, Heredia during the 1 quarter of 2026.

### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

- a) To examine how play-based learning supports vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional teaching practices in preschool education.
- b) To determine the perception of students towards the implementation of traditional teaching practices versus exploratory/learning with play-based learning approach.
- c) To analyze the role of teacher training in implementing play-based and traditional methodologies for English language instruction in preschool.

## **1.4.Scope and limitations**

### **1.4.1. Scope**

This research focuses on comparing the effects and the impact of traditional methodologies and play-based learning approaches on English vocabulary learning among preschool students attending Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva, Heredia, Costa Rica, during the first quarter of 2026. The study will specifically target students enrolled in the immersive English groups. The vocabulary themes to be studied include body parts and colors, as they represent fundamental and appropriate language content for preschoolers.

Additionally, since both methodologies aim to be implemented, traditional approaches will involve activities such as worksheets for coloring, tracing, and passive listening, while play-based learning will include strategies like exploratory and discovery learning. This research seeks to determine which approach promotes greater and more meaningful vocabulary comprehension and retention through observation, assessment, and comparison of students' performance under both methodologies.

#### **1.4.2. Limitations**

Some limitations were encountered during the development of this investigation. One of the main challenges was the frequent interruption of the planned schedule due to special activities and events organized by the kindergarten, which occasionally limited the time available for the implementation of the instruments created for this project, it took time and dedication to define the schedule and ultimately achieve a successful implementation of all instruments. Additionally, the naturally short attention span of preschool children required constant adaptations to maintain engagement and ensure accurate data collection.

Another limitation involved coordination with classroom teachers to obtain access to instructional time, as the implementation of the study had to be adjusted to accommodate their schedules and planned lessons. Furthermore, the limited duration of classroom sessions and variations in students' attendance, mood, and daily participation may have influenced individual performance during some activities. Despite these limitations, the study was successfully completed and provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of play-based learning for English vocabulary acquisition in preschool education.

**CHAPTER II**  
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## 2.1. Introduction

Vocabulary development in preschool is a central component of early language learning, since it influences children's communication skills, cognitive growth, and long-term academic achievement. Throughout this developmental stage, vocabulary learning is mainly shaped by the instructional approaches teachers use, the learning environment, and the types of interactions children experience. Therefore, traditional methods, such as worksheets, tracing activities, and passive listening, have been involved in early education for a very long time, yet research suggests that these approaches may not fully align with how young children acquire language. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), "rich vocabulary instruction requires exposure to words in meaningful and engaging contexts" (p.20), thus underscoring the importance of active learning experience. This chapter will explore how traditional strategies influence different aspects, such as attention, engagement, fine motor development, and creativity, and how all these factors interact with the process of vocabulary learning.

Meanwhile, modern approaches such as play-based learning and immersive language environments offer more effective support for children's natural learning processes. Play-based strategies encourage exploration, interaction, and emotional engagement, which contribute to stronger vocabulary retention and deeper comprehension of words. In fact, Immersive English practices in Costa Rican preschool programs integrate the language into daily routines and meaningful activities, thus giving children authentic opportunities to use English purposefully, as Vygotsky (1978) noted, "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment" (p.90). By contrasting traditional and play-based methods, this chapter highlights the key factors influencing vocabulary learning in early childhood.

### **2.1.1 Background of the institution**

According to the Institutional Monograph for the Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, also known as Pedro Murillo Pérez Kindergarten, the following information has been compiled. It is an independent preschool center who was once a part of the elementary school with a similar name. This public educative center is located in Barva, Heredia, Costa Rica, it belongs to the educative circuit number 4, additionally it belongs to Heredia's regional office.

This preschool education center was founded in 1951 during the administration of Otilio Ulate, and as it was previously mentioned, it used to be a part of Pedro Murillo Pérez School. On December 27 of 1997 this kindergarten became independent. From the year 1998 to the year 2000 this principal was Ruth Carballo Avendaño who holds a master's degree, that being the first principal this institution had after its autonomy. By the year 2003 there were four groups of the level of nursery also known for its name in Spanish as "Interactivo II", and in this same year the level of transition or preparatory started receiving English classes. Finally, the institution currently has five groups of interactive II, five groups of the transition level and as of 2026 a new pilot plan for the level of interactive I for 3-year-old children. In terms of infrastructure, the institution currently has 11 classrooms, one for each group, also a dining room, an English classroom, and a computer lab. As well as playground and enough restrooms. Moreover, each classroom has the appropriate furniture.

## **2.2. History of English teaching in Costa Rica**

### **2.2.1. English teaching in Costa Rica in 21<sup>st</sup> century**

English is the language spoken by the largest number of people all around the world, it is even official in 67 countries, therefore, it entails a great deal of importance in regard to teaching to the coming generations of ESL learners in the educational systems. Globalization and

technological advances have an important change upon language teaching and the importance of English specifically as a tool for worldwide communication. In this context English teaching and learning focuses more on providing more meaning to the language and its use on real-life situations. In fact, current educational approaches aim to emphasize student participation, interaction, and development of skills such as critical thinking, and collaboration. For this same reason, English classrooms include more dynamic strategies, such as the use of technology, and methodologies that fit learners' needs and contexts, thus seeking efficient, effective, and confident communication (OECD, 2018).

The techniques implemented in this context focus on fostering different skills in students, needed to succeed in the modern world with confidence and in smart ways. Technology plays a very important role in this modern approach to education; however, its efficiency doesn't rely only on implementing technology with the existing teaching methods, it requires much more than that by being used strategically. For example, these tools have positively supplemented English teaching by providing authenticity and literacy amongst students with skills such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening, thus helping students learn faster and easier, according to UNESCO (2019), "using technology can improve some types of learning in some contexts, but the learning benefits disappear if technology is used in excess or in the absence of a qualified teacher", this quote reassures the importance that good quality educators have in the educational context to improve and ensure learning.

A report created by Walter Araya and Allen Quesada (2025), which was produced as part of the "Décimo Informe Estado de la Educación", analyzes the efforts to modernize English teaching include updates to curricula and even increased attention to communicative competences. However, it does highlight how there are still important gaps that must be filled in

this area, for instance hinders such as disparities in instructional time, teacher preparation, and resource distribution mean that many students do not consistently receive effective English instruction that is always aligned with contemporary pedagogical goals. Finally, all and all, the report still highlights that one of the most important 21<sup>st</sup> century demands are integrating meaningful language use in preparation for global communication supported by modern and constant changing technologies. Recent political intentions look forward to implementing technology as well as good-quality English instruction from an early age.

### **2.2.2. English teaching in preschool: MEP**

Recently, preschool education in Costa Rica has received positive modifications that represent an important progress for the English teaching and learning process. In fact, The “Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP) has implemented diagnostic evaluations of English proficiency for preschool teachers and have given job and further formation opportunities for teachers who reach higher language competency language bands under the “Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER)”, for example, for some educational centers, preschool teachers have been requested to prove their knowledge of the English language, in fact, by obtaining results between the rankings of B2 and C1 according to the TOEIC test scores; this allows the possibility to have preschool groups under the immersive methodology. Additionally, for those groups who are not in the immersive modality, they can participate in the English by experiences one that allows each group to have a portion of the school day in which they receive English, also extremely beneficial for their progress in the early stages of the educational journey (MEP, 2024).

According to the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) (2019) approximately more than six hundred English teachers have been tested to see what English level displaying almost a basic

domain, six hundred and fifteen teachers had a result of B1, which can be located as an intermediate level, therefore, these entities, such as Universidad of Costa Rica aims to provide development opportunities for teachers who have a basic domain of the language in order to improve their level of proficiency, such as instating and alliance with the “Escuela de Lenguas Modernas”, which provides different tools for teacher training, as well as the creating of different pedagogical materials for MEP’s disposition, thus a allowing teachers to meet this requirement established by the Dirección General de Servicio Civil and MEP itself; the goal is to ascertain that English teachers incorporates to the system with at least and linguistic band classified in B2. The article highlights the importance of willingness and disposition on the teachers end to stay in the path of improvement as well, for instance, in this same information it mentions how around 2000 to 3000 teachers have shown interest in willingly take a test to ascertain their current English level, which shows a desire and space to improve.

However, these modifications have yet to become a nation-wide, since many public preschool institutions don’t have access to good quality English instruction at the moment. According to Ángela Ávalos (2024), by the year 2023, around 21,3% of preschool aged students were actively receiving English lessons in kindergarten, in fact, this news article called the 22.136 children who had English classes “privileged”, because the opportunity of learning a second language during early childhood is unattainable. The government has had as a goal to make preschools bilingual in Costa Rica, initially, the time frame was set to be accomplished by 2022, however, this was not accomplished and it’s still a work in progress. However, for every educator who has a position as an English teacher, having an English specialization, they must have a certified proficiency of C1 or B2 levels, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), in fact, this is a requirement for teachers who want to

receive a permanent appointment in the public sector. As an additional insight, it is important to highlight that, clearly, even from a foreign point of view, there is still so much work to be done in the preschool education area.

### **2.2.3. English teaching in preschool stages curriculum**

The curriculum for preschool education is particularly interesting, in the Costa Rican preschool curriculum, English instruction is embedded within the broader framework of preschool education by MEP, this curriculum emphasizes on holistic development in early childhood education, it aims to work through flexible, engaging, and meaningful pedagogical experiences, involving play-based learning for example; note that there is no a specific curriculum fully dedicated to English teaching in preschool (MEP, n.d.). Recent MEP curricular orientations specify that English learning must be implemented in an immersive model in preschool, by integrating foreign language experiences into daily routines and activities rather than isolated lessons (MEP, 2023). These curricular guidelines align English learning with the program's emphasis on play, interaction and developmental appropriateness by prioritizing communication, meaningful engagement, and socio-cognitive growth from the earliest educational stages. In fact, according to the *Orientaciones Para La Adquisición De La Lengua Extranjera En Un Modelo Inmersivo En El Nivel De Educación Preeescolar* (MEP, 2022), English in preschool must be delivered by bilingual preschool specialists, since they are able to provide with the most accurate language experience.

According to MEP (2021), the immersive English methodology is fully based on the current preschool study program, and it fully aligns with the different orientations to develop different skills amongst preschool students while conducting learning through a natural and spontaneous way, and these methodologies are to be contextualized by each teacher according to

the region; the most important aspect of this project is to make sure that teachers communicate in English with children throughout different moments throughout the day, thus aiming to favor students' production and oral comprehension in a progressive manner. Kelyn Fernández (2021) mentions a key detail about English teaching in the preschool stage, and it is the ideal that children display more confidence in the process of learning a new language thus allowing more meaningful learning experiences of significative learning. The immersive method is especially important because as the *Orientaciones Para La Adquisición De La Lengua Extranjera En Un Modelo Inmersivo En El Nivel De Educación Preeescolar* (MEP, 2022) mention, the immersive model “refers to the learning of a foreign language in a natural manner, similar to the process of acquiring the mother language” (p. 32, author's translation).

### **2.3. Preschool English teaching: Traditional methods**

#### **2.3.1. List of traditional methods in teaching English to preschoolers**

Traditional methods of teaching English are a key aspect to shape language instruction, and they have played an important role for decades now. These methods, while useful to develop certain skills amongst students, it is always important to consider that they tend to be teacher-centered in learning environments. There are different main traditional approaches that fall under the traditional method category, for instance, the Grammar-Translation method, the Direct method and the Audio-Lingual Method can be listed as the main traditional approaches that can be used in classrooms, in fact the core of traditional methods include lectures and rote memorization, in which the teacher is the primary source of the information being given (Nazarova, 2024). However, for this thesis project, the focus is directed towards more simple traditional techniques that are applied in real-life environment classes, since those structured methodologies, are not fitting for preschool children.

Pointing to a more accurate, perceivable and realistic context of a preschool classroom the traditional methods are mostly perceived in a more tangible way, for instance, in preschool many teachers rely on the constant use of worksheets for activities such as coloring, tracing, and implementing passive listening in class dynamics. These are often beneficial for developing skills in the fine motor area and attention to detail. Relying too heavily on these techniques may restrict children's opportunities to explore, question, and actively engage in their own learning process. It is evident that the teacher-centered strategies tend to focus on repetition and memorization rather than creativity, communication, and skills such as problem-solving. As a result, young students may become less motivated and even less likely to develop critical thinking and self-expression skills that are essential during the early stages of childhood education. Lucas (2023) discusses how traditional and teacher-centered methods can provide structure and foundational skills, but they may also limit creativity, exploration, and active participation. Therefore, it is important to find a balance and analyze what the best approach for acquiring English vocabulary amongst young students is; to achieve this, it is extremely necessary to comprehend the way traditional methods impact certain aspects of language development.

### **2.3.2. Use of worksheets for coloring**

#### **Characteristics of worksheets for coloring**

The use of worksheets to accomplish different tasks such as coloring, is a well-known and widely implemented practice in preschool teaching, it seeks to reinforce learning through visual recognition and fine motor activities. Children are typically expected to color images that represent the meaning of specific words (for example, animals, colors, or food items) after the teacher has introduced them. While this tool can be effective as a practice or part of a

consolidation method, this approach alone is usually teacher-directed, with limited verbal interaction, and focuses on completing a predefined task rather than encouraging spontaneous language use amongst students; it can be said that such form-focused activities emphasize accuracy and recognition over active communicative competence (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). The solely use of worksheets may lead to the presence of passive listening in class dynamics, in which students are mostly guided by what they hear (and even by what they see) and not actively participating in the learning process to build their own knowledge by using their senses and learning critical thinking skills. Additionally, as it has been previously mentioned, worksheets contain different exercises that focus mostly on strengthening fine motor skills which is also positive for their development process, for example the tracing exercises to foster letter recognition, early writing skills, and fine motor development; however, how positive is its effect over language learning?

### **Method strategies for worksheets for coloring**

Regarding strategies associated with this method include, amongst others, a simple process of starting by presenting the target vocabulary orally, then asking children to repeat the words, and finally assigning a worksheet with which the learners can review the topic by coloring or tracing related images. With this working method, the teacher needs to make sure that the worksheets are completed correctly. With this type of methodology, it is especially necessary that the teachers keep proper and accurate track of the students' cognitive development, for instance, by asking follow-up questions after performing the main task (Cameron, L. 2001).

### **2.3.3. Tracing strategies**

#### **Characteristics of tracing dynamics**

Tracing activities are one of the most commonly used in preschool classrooms since they strengthen pre-writing skills, motor development, hand-eye coordination and spatial sense in a minor scale, tracing lines and shapes supports the visual-motor coordination necessary for handwriting fluency (Maldarelli, 2015); when children perform these activities they follow lines, shapes, letters, or patterns with a writing tool (that being a pencil, crayon, color pencil, markers, or even fingers). Tracing strategies can start of simple and grow in complexity as the child advances and acquires domain of the tasks and their controlled hand movements, in fact, tracing interventions can improve line and circle formation, which are foundational for handwriting. Additionally, this traditional strategy has been long used for several decades as a staple in preschool education, however, this strategy is mostly worked through worksheets and similar structured activities. Tracing can have outstanding cognitive outcomes when it is implemented far beyond the use of worksheets and involves active interaction.

#### **Strategies for tracing**

According to Euro Kids Preschool (2024), there are several strategies teachers may implement when they use tracing methods with their students, for instance, tracing activities should start off with simplicity using basic patterns and tasks, as an example, children begin by tracing simple figures, so they can gradually progress and improve; secondly, it is important to use multisensory approaches, this is where limiting to color pencils and worksheets is not fitting anymore, instead it should more interactive and dynamic, teachers can use textured paper, finger painting, or sand trays to add tactile elements; thirdly, tracing can be integrated with other subjects, these methods have the potential to enhance interdisciplinary learning, since children

can outline figures or patterns related to other educative contents; in fourth place, in order to make it more appealing and creative rather than in the traditional way, teachers can implement technology and use interactive apps, thus fostering excitement and engagement, it is important also to let children use their imagination when it comes to performing the designated tasks related to tracing, let the kids use different colors, textures, and even materials to trace.

#### **2.3.4. Passive listening strategies**

##### **Characteristics of passive listening**

Passive listening is also a technique that has been used in education throughout years, and it's an activity that it's characterized for being teacher-centered and not making the child the center of the learning process, instead it relies more on rote memorization and appealing to students concentration capacity, which at this age is still forming and developing. Under this technique children receive auditory input without being encouraged to respond, interact, or actively participate in the process. This technique has been used because in early childhood education because it is a way to expose children to vocabulary, pronunciation, and basic language patterns, however, throughout time, this technique has been proven to be more effective after performing some important modifications to it, especially since it is for young children, for instance, by combining it with active participation from children to promote knowledge and the production of expressive language skills and deeper comprehension of the content. In fact, younger students are characterized by being social actors who have the capacity of contributing with different ideas, their own experiences and even their creativity to bring great influence over the learning process (James and James, 2004), this is one of the main reasons why involving their participation is key to achieve a more meaningful learning experience.

## **Strategies for passive listening**

In the preschool classroom passive listening takes place in different moments such as listening to stories, recordings, songs, audio recordings, or even teacher monologues, however, these provide limited opportunities for children to interact or engage in the class, in fact Jalongo (2010) explained and emphasized that classroom listening in early childhood education is often unidirectional, with children primarily receiving input from the teacher in structured instructional contexts, there is almost no active room for participation, however the mere act of listening is key for classroom education. While these activities are not completely inefficient, they could hinder progressive learning and active participation from students. While students dedicate time to think and process and what they are hearing, and this could help them understand some information, in the long run, student integration makes learning much more meaningful. It's important for teachers to analyze the context and situation of the students who are the target of the specific learning experience that is taking place.

## **2.4. Play based learning Approach**

### **2.4.1. History of Play based learning approach**

Play-based learning is a well-known, child-centered approach that recognizes play as a fundamental aspect for learning. Even though, play doesn't have one specific origin as a tool for learning, it does come from a long list of educators, theorists, and even developmental psychologists who collectively throughout the years considered play as a fundamental and meaningful context for learning, with which children can actively construct knowledge, develop cognitive and social skills, as well as engaging with their surroundings in natural and appropriate ways. As a matter of fact, regarding the mere origins of early childhood education, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German educator who is known as the founder and pioneer of early childhood

education, the space in which children can get their own time for learning, believed that play was the highest expression of human development in childhood, because it allows children to genuinely and freely express their souls, thus making it vital in the learning process' in this matter there are big names of important people who supported the development of play based learning, for instance, María Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Piaget (Monroe University, n.d.).

Lev Vygotsky, Russian psychologist who also focused on the study of the way children learn and develop, proved to support play-based learning, he believed that learning and cognitive growth are deeply influenced by social interactions play an outstanding role in learning, teachers who support play-based learning consequently are willing to work and encourage collaborative learning. Vygotsky proposed an implication within its theory related to the Zone of Proximal Development, in relation to play-based learning, it can be tailored to a child's Zone of Proximal Development as it provides learning experiences that challenge students but are still attainable, as it is clearly stated by Vygotsky (1966) "play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development", it is an exceptional and reliable tool.

#### **2.4.2. Features of Play based learning approach**

According to the UNICEF (2018), "Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills"; play as a teaching/learning approach, provides opportunities for children to actively engage with students with their surroundings, play allows children to use their five senses to learn and develop knowledge in a more independent manner, as well as their cognitive and social skills.

One of the main traits play-based learning displays is that it is mostly child-directed which allows further growth; however, there are two types of play that can be identified in an

educative environment which have the primary focus, which are free play (directed by children themselves) and guided play (involves some level of teacher guidance without taking away from children's autonomy)(Caven, 2022). Moreover, when play takes place in a controlled and educative environment, enriched the learning process as it is not as rigidly structured and much more flexible thus providing time and space that allow natural exploration, by being a method that focuses and emphasizes more on the way kids engage, and not solely on the outcome. Finally, as a mostly child-centered approach, play greatly fosters innovation and meaningful experiences, it provides creative and imaginative spaces that support growth and personal and academical development, in fact, as Danniels and Pyle (2018) quote, play is described as “voluntary, internally motivated, and pleasurable”.

As it has already been mentioned, implemented well-thought and meaningful playful spaces helps students develop way more than their motor skills, in fact, play can foster very important cognitive skills that children must develop to face the different challenges that will come their way as they grow and go through different life stages, that's just how important and powerful play can be, in fact, Sitorusi, et. al., (2025) mention how “play-based learning can improve students' cognitive development in early childhood, pointed out that children who engage in play-based activities have enhanced creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities than other children who do not take part in play-related activities”. Play-based learning allows children to approach challenges independently thus strengthening problem solving and critical thinking skills that they can put to the test and improve as they perform a natural and fun daily activity for them. Additionally, related to the inside development, play has a positive impact on proper emotional intelligence development, it helps students manage feelings,

empathy, and resilience as they interact with others and experiment with different materials and tasks.

It is important to highlight that, as afore mentioned, play-based learning has a deep and positive impact on physical development. In development, children can strengthen their fine and gross motor skills which are especially fostered and boosted with play-based activities. Several gross motor skills such as running, jumping, and climbing can be included as one of the many areas that are greatly benefited by this methodology, truth be told, physical development is one of the most important domains of development and growth that human experiment during early childhood, and play supports the optimal conditions for this development as it encourages movement amongst other healthy actions (Sitorus, et. al., 2025).

Regarding the development of skills, play-based learning opens the door for a great variety of different skills that influence different aeras of growth, for instance, language and communication development; through play, children can create connections through conversations and in interactions with their peers as they play. Additionally, via pretend and exploration, students can expand their creativity and imagination, as well obtaining stronger social and emotional skills such as empathy, conflict resolution, and cooperation, moreover, by implementing meaningful and fun playful spaces, motivation and love for learning may be improved. Students have the opportunity to select, direct, and determine the duration of their own activities, thus increasing the chance of them genuinely enjoying them as they discover their own processes for accomplishing tasks (College, 2025).

According to Magrid (2025), “In recent years, play-based learning has gained recognition as a powerful approach in early childhood education, offering a holistic way to support child development”, what’s interesting about play is that it provides multi-dimensional learning

benefits, as it has been explained already; different types of play require planning, focus, and organization as it features experiential learning; moreover, with strategies such as storytelling and role-play can support communication and even integration across domains such as cognitive, physical, and social development by introducing cognitive, physical, and social development into play activities.

### **2.4.3. Role of the teacher**

As this methodology is oriented towards being child-centered, the teacher's role is not as dominant in the way that the educator shouldn't be rigid in telling students what to do, instead their main function is to be a guide and help for students as they navigate play through learning. A teacher's responsibility as they implement play-based learning is to support children's active and constant construction of knowledge and be attentive to not just stand back and limit themselves to watch. Amongst their roles it is to interact with children during play time, they can extend thinking by several means, such as conversation and scaffolding, also resort to well-planned observation to assess knowledge and progression. Likewise, dedicating proper time to design didactic and meaningful materials can be extremely helpful to allow children to explore, experiment, and learn; its important teachers find balance between child-initiated play and teacher-supported learning by helping children make sense of what they do and discover during play time, it's important for teachers to know how to adjust their involvement as children move through phases of play (Atlantic OER, 2025).

A key aspect in play-based learning is to integrate motivation and encouragement. Teachers have the ability to scaffold play experiences while always giving students autonomy as they are thoughtfully guided in learning by facing different challenges and opportunities to grow. Teachers must be active and responsive, but not controlling (Smedsrud, et. al., 2024).

#### **2.4.4. Role of the student**

The student, in this context, is the most important part; it's the key piece of the learning process, to whom the responsibility to explore and learn is given to (Piaget, 1951/1999). Students need to be active participants of the different dynamics under the play-based learning methodology, rather than being a passive recipient of the information that surrounds them. Play-based learning is one of the methodologies that encourage children to develop and display autonomy as they become in charge of constructing their own knowledge. Play aims to provide meaningful learning experiences that allow exploration and interaction, in fact, children indeed learn best when they are actively engaged in meaningful, play-based experiences rather than just partake in rigid and strict activities.

According to the UNICEF (2018), play must be meaningful, joyful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive, however, to fully take advantage of the cognitive benefits of play-based, children need to be fully active and engaged in the process. Children need to be mentally active in order to properly develop play-based tasks. In this scenario, they have the central role since they are allowed to use their previously acquired abilities and make their own choices in the learning process; this approach recognize students as competent learners who can build understanding through experience curiosity, and collaboration. Under the play-based learning methodology students are on the right path to be set up for early academic success and lifelong learning. Children must express and expand their understanding of their new experiences.

#### **2.4.5. Strategies as part of the Play Based Learning Approach**

According to UNICEF (2018), play itself is an outstanding strategy for learning and teaching, in fact there are at least three categories in which play-based activities support these educative processes, for instance:

1. First we have learning through play in organized pre-primary setting, this involves play experiences that are enhanced as students get ample time and space to engage freely in play, it is considered kids' work and the "vehicle" they use to acquire knowledge and different skills, play can occur in different forms such as imaginary play, cooperative play, associative play, physical play, and play with objects.
2. Second, there is Learning through play in the home environment and in the community. It is important to not forget that children don't only learn in school, in fact, the different environments that surround them are an important influence on their development. It is interesting to notice that the interaction and relationships that children establish with family and friends have a significant impact on the way children understand and experience the world around them and these environments are amazing opportunities to promote learning to play since early childhood.
3. Third, learning through play in the early grades of primary school. Finally, even though this investigation project is based on play-based learning for the level of preschool, this methodology is not set only for that level, truth be told, learning through play in the early grades can set children up to be independent and keep

contributing and constructing their own learning from that moment on, and it instills and encourages interests and motivation in students.

According to the State Library of Queensland (2022), “Learning by exploration helps your child develop a strong sense of self as they investigate topics, objects, and scenarios that interest them”, in fact, play-based learning is also known for incorporating a great variety of different instructional strategies within its implementation that allow children to be the main character in the learning process. Exploration and discovery are two of the main strategies in play-based learning, students get to interact with several didactic materials, experiment with different ideas, as well as learning to through trial and error which is a key aspect for proper growth and development. These two core areas of play-based learning encourage and foster different skills, for instance, learning encourages children to ask questions, make predictions, and even solve problems either independently or collaborative, thus fostering curiosity, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation which supports deeper learning and long-term understanding.

## **2.5. Vocabulary in the process of learning English in preschool stages**

### **2.5.1. Definition of vocabulary**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), the word vocabulary refers to “a list or collection of words, or words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined.”, another definition by the Cambridge dictionary (n.d.) states that vocabulary means “all the words known and used by a particular person”, it basically entails the different words that we know, learn or use and in this project it will be evident the way people, in this case children act in relation to vocabulary in the learning process.

### **2.5.2. Process of acquiring vocabulary in preschool stages**

Vocabulary learning in preschool is a fundamental part of early language development, as it sets the basis for future reading comprehension, communication, and academic success. At this stage, children learn new words most effectively through meaningful social interaction, play, and sensory experiences rather than through rote memorization. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), “young learners need multiple and varied exposures to words in rich contexts to develop deep and usable word knowledge” (p.17). Preschoolers learn through exploration and imitation, effective vocabulary instruction integrates songs, stories, gestures, and everyday conversation that connect words to real life experiences they have. These types of approaches not only strengthen comprehension but also foster curiosity, creativity, and confidence in language use, thus making vocabulary learning a natural and engaging process that supports all areas of early development.

### **2.5.3. Benefits of learning**

During the preschool years, children begin forming essential linguistic pathways, and the words they get to learn become a tool they can take advantage of to express ideas, formulate questions, and interpret experiences in meaningful ways. Therefore, developing a strong early vocabulary supports and prepares the kids for later skills such as reading and writing tasks. Snow (2017) states that “children’s vocabulary growth in the early years is closely linked to their reading comprehension and overall literacy outcomes” (p.34), emphasizing that early word learning has long-term implications for academic performance, because when children enter school with a rich vocabulary base, they are more confident, more expressive, and better equipped to engage in learning across all subject areas. Vocabulary learning is also especially important because it contributes significantly to cognitive development. As children learn new

words, they form mental categories, strengthen memory pathways, and enhance their ability to reason and build connections. Learning vocabulary supports the development of symbolic thinking, which is the understanding that words represent objects, actions, and ideas; this is fundamental for both language learning and cognitive growth. When preschoolers learn new words through meaningful interaction, they are simultaneously building cognitive structures that support problem-solving, attention, and conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, another reason why vocabulary is so important is that it strongly influences social and emotional development, because it supports children's ability to communicate emotions, negotiate conflicts, and build healthy relationships with peers and teachers. Children who have access to a broader range of words can express their feelings more precisely, reducing misunderstandings and behavioral challenges (Hart and Risely, 2003).

In preschool contexts, especially in bilingual or second-language learning environments vocabulary learning becomes even more significant. For children, learning English as a foreign language through early exposure to vocabulary with different routines and dynamics can strengthen different cognitive skills, as previously mentioned. These early experiences help them develop confidence structures encountered in later grades. Nation (2013) highlight that "successful vocabulary learning involves repeated, meaningful exposure across varied contexts" (p.16), which is especially important for young students learning a second language. When preschool programs emphasize vocabulary within an immersive and supportive environment, children are more likely to use English purposefully and naturally.

In children aged four to six, attention and engagement function as interconnected cognitive and emotional processes that directly influence how learning occurs. Attention works as the mechanism that filters and prioritized incoming information, thus allowing kids to focus

on relevant linguist input while they ignore distractions presented in their surroundings. In fact, according to Ruff and Lawson (1990), during this stage of development, attention is still maturing, which means that younger students can often sustain concentration for only short periods of time, from around 10 to 15 minutes, after this time span, their attentions tend to shift.

In preschool education, attention span and engagement are key factors that determine how effectively children acquire new vocabulary. Young learners have naturally short attention spans, meaning that their ability to focus one single task is limited and they can easily fluctuate depending on the interest that the dynamic provides. When it comes to teaching vocabulary, especially in a second language such as English, educators must carefully design activities that maintain children's attention while encouraging participation and curiosity. Research shows that vocabulary retention increases and improves when children are actively engaged, rather than passively listening or completing repetitive worksheets (Smith and Jones, 2021). For this reason, strategies that include movement, play, and visual support are essential to sustain focus and make vocabulary learning meaningful. Therefore, by creating dynamic lessons that alternate between the four main skills, listening, speaking, and doing, teachers can support both attention and memory formation in early language learning.

Engagement, on the other hand, is more related to the emotional and cognitive involvement of children in the learning process. When young students feel connected to the content they are learning and see its relevance, their engagement naturally increases, thus leading to a deeper vocabulary comprehension and more frequent use of new words in context. In contrast, activities that rely heavily on passive listening or mechanical repetition can reduce motivation and lead to cognitive disengagement. In fact, learners learn vocabulary more effectively when instruction incorporates songs, games, stories, and peer interaction, as these

activities, as these activities stimulate curiosity and emotional investment, to ascertain that meaningful learning is gained it is equally important to provide students with significant time to develop their ability to use their knowledge and apply these skills in real and meaningful situations, in preschool we can allow them explore and implement their knowledge at their own time and pace in a familiar environment (Kong, 2021). Therefore, preschool teachers must consider not only what words to teach, but also how to teach them-through experiences that invite exploration, participation, and meaningful communication.

Traditional teaching methods in preschool settings, such as worksheets, and extended passive listening, often fail to align with the natural patterns of attention and engagement in young children. Preschoolers' attention system is still developing, and sustained focus depends heavily on active involvement and even sensory stimulation (Posner and Rothbart, 2007). Therefore, when instruction relies primarily on passive or teacher-centered approaches, children's attention decreases more rapidly because the learning environment does not provide enough opportunities for movement, emotional connection, or even self-expression. This directly impacts vocabulary learning, as limited attention reduces the cognitive processing required for acquiring new words and for them to display long-term retention. On the other hand, interactive and play-based approaches, like the ones promoted by Costa Rica's "Ministerio de Educación Pública" (MEP), appeal to children's natural curiosity and need for interaction, which strengthens both attention and engagement.

**CHAPTER III:**  
**METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Research Type**

#### **3.1.1 Applied purpose**

This investigation or research can be considered to present applied research. According to Babbie (2021), research focuses on solving real-world problems and improving practical situations, which align with the purpose of this investigation. One of the key characteristics of the applied research is that it uses existing theories, concepts and even methodologies to address practical situations, as previously mentioned, and decision-making needs; this type of research serves as a bridge between theory and practice by transforming knowledge into actionable results. As Kumar (2019) explains, “applied research is conducted to solve a specific, practical problem of an individual or group” (p. 12), which fully aligns with the purpose of this investigation. The reason is that this project seeks to provide practical, evidence-based solutions to an educational issue identified in the immersive English preschool groups at the target institution (Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez).

The reason is that its focus is to provide practical and feasible solutions to an educational challenge that is observed in a real classroom environment, in this case especially, the difficulty that preschool children in immersive English groups experience when learning and retaining vocabulary. The discoveries or findings obtained aim to inform and improve teaching practices at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez and potentially guide other preschool teachers that have faced similar situations in their institutions, as well as enhancing learning outcomes in early childhood education. This type of research specifically, focuses on solving real educational problems and improving teaching practices in practical contexts. Due to its importance, the focus of this study is on solving a real educational problem, specifically determining which teaching method presented in the study, that being play-based learning and traditional methods, is more

effective for improving English vocabulary in preschool; more specifically, this study aims to determine how traditional methods and play-based learning strategies influence English vocabulary learning among young children, thus identifying which approach produces more meaningful and long lasting learning. One of the main reasons why finding the most accurate strategies is the impact it has on younger students in diverse areas of development, such as cognitive and emotional, thus especially supporting literacy learning (International Literacy Association and NAEYC, 2009).

In fact, rather than focusing solely on generating theoretical knowledge, this research intends to directly inform and better diverse classroom practices, as was previously mentioned. Given (2016) explains that applied studies “produce knowledge that has immediate relevance for real-world settings and professional practice” (p.45). The analysis of this information is especially important since it can provide useful insights that can serve as a guide for teachers to select and implement effective strategies for vocabulary teaching. Ultimately, the applied purpose of this investigation is to enhance the quality of early English instruction and support children’s linguistic, cognitive, and socio emotional development through more appropriate and engaging pedagogical methodologies.

### **3.1.2 Temporal dimension**

According to the analysis of this research, it displays a transversal temporal dimension. A transversal temporal design refers to studies that collect information “within a clearly delimited period of time rather than across multiple phases” (Sanlkind, 2010, p. 112), which corresponds to the organization of this investigation. The research will collect data at a single point within a specific and limited period, which is the first academic quarter of 2026. During this timeframe, both traditional and play-based learning strategies will be put to practice and observed at the

same time, and the vocabulary outcomes will be assessed before and after the intervention within the same quarter.

As a clarification, this investigation does not follow the same group of students over an extended period or across multiple academic cycles, it is not considered longitudinal. Instead, the transversal temporal dimension is more fitting because its design allows the comparison of the two methodologies within a defined short-term period, providing a snapshot of their impact on vocabulary learning in preschool aged children.

### **3.2 Framework**

Considering this research, the analysis of a problem can be situated within different levels, known as macro, meso, and micro frameworks. According to Boeren (2019), the macro level framework focuses on a broader system such as national educational policies and even large-scale trends that influence teaching and learning across a country or region; on the other hand, the micro level leans more towards institutions such as schools, programs, or communities, by examining or analyzing how policies and practices are implemented within specific organizational contexts; in an educational context it can even contemplate interaction within teachers and students including classroom dynamics and learning environments, it also includes socioeconomic background, motivation, attitudes, confidence, and access to resources that influence learning outcomes; finally, the meso level framework refers more to educational institutions such as schools, universities and training centers, focusing on teacher quality, school resources, curriculum implementation, and learning environments.

### **3.3 Character**

This research focuses on providing mainly a descriptive character, as its main purpose is to document, analyze, and compare the effects or the impact of two different instructional

approaches, which are the traditional teaching methods and play-based learning strategies, on preschool children's English vocabulary learning within immersive English groups.

A descriptive character in a research project as the one in question focuses on portraying the characteristics, patterns, and behaviors of a population without manipulating variables in a way that seeks to establish a cause-and effect relationship (Cohen et al., 2018). Considering the information provided on this investigation, the clear goal is to observe and describe how children interact with each methodology, how they respond during the learning process, and most importantly how their vocabulary performance changes after the implementation of each approach. This investigation relies on measurable outcomes, as well as classroom observations that capture engagement levels, spontaneous vocabulary use, and participation.

Considering a wider perspective, although this research involves the comparison of two methods, its intention is not explanatory, because it does not aim to establish a definitive causal relationship or test a theory. It is also not correlational because the focus is not on calculating statistical relationships between variables. Likewise, it is not exploratory, because the topic is already well established in existing literature, and the study is not investigating an entirely new phenomenon. Instead, the research aims to describe what occurs within a real classroom context, detailing the behaviors, learning outcomes, and differences observed when each one of the pedagogical methods is applied. Therefore, this descriptive character allows for a comprehensive understanding of how each strategy functions in practice and how it supports or even challenges vocabulary development in young learners. (Fraenkel et al., 2019)

### **3.4 Research nature**

This investigation has a mixed nature, by this term we mean that it incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how

traditional and play-based learning methodologies impact English vocabulary learning amongst preschool children, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) explain, “mixed methods research integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone” (p.4). Regarding the quantitative nature of the study, this research project will use measurable data obtained from pre- and post-assessments of vocabulary knowledge in the topics of body parts and colors. These assessments will allow the possibility of comparing numerical results from the implementation of traditional methods versus play-based strategies, providing objective evidence of the changes and improvements perceived in vocabulary retention and comprehension.

On the other hand, this study can also have a qualitative nature because the research incorporates interviews to experts in English teaching and even to students, as well as observational techniques that aim to analyze children’s engagement, interaction, behaviors, and use of vocabulary during English classroom activities. The teacher observations, activity implementations, and classroom notes will help capture aspects that numerical scores cannot fully represent or depict clearly, such as the motivation students have, their attention, expressive language attempts, and even their spontaneous and natural vocabulary use in natural contexts; qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals interpret their experiences, how they construct their words, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences which is essential for interpreting children’s classroom behaviors (Aspers and Corte, 2019). It is evident that contemplating both natures, qualitative and quantitative data strengthens the investigation by allowing the researcher to evaluate not only how much vocabulary children learn with different techniques in a determined amount of time, but also the way they learn it, how they behave

during the process, and finally which methodology, as previously mentioned, offers more meaningful and developmental appropriate learning experiences.

### 3.5 Subjects and sources of information

#### 3.5.1 Subject

The subject of this research are preschool children between the ages of 4 and 6 years old enrolled in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez, located in Barva, Heredia. These students participate in daily English instruction and serve as the primary population for observing the effects of traditional and play-based learning strategies on vocabulary learning. It is important to highlight that aspects such as their performance, engagement, and response during the activities are the central focus of the study.

#### 3.5.2 Sources

##### 3.5.2.1 Firsthand sources

**Table 1**

*Firsthand sources used in the research process*

<b>Author or authors</b>	<b>University or Organization</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>
Castro, A.	Saint Jude School	Costa Rica	2025
Rodríguez, M.	Amadita Primary School	Costa Rica	2023
Corella, A.	Jardín de Niños El Roble	Costa Rica	2023
Ministry of Public Education	Programa de Inmersión en inglés para la Educación Preescolar	Costa Rica	2023

*Source:* Developed by Victoria Sofía Marín Camacho (2026)

### 3.5.2.2 Secondhand sources

**Table 2**

*Secondhand sources used in the research process*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Year</b>
Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez	Monografía Institucional	n.d.
Taylor, M. E., & Boyer, W.	<i>Play-Based Learning: Evidence-Based Research to Improve Children's Learning Experiences in the Kindergarten Classroom</i>	2020
Richards, J.C., & Rodgers, T.S.	Approaches and methods in language teaching	2014
Cameron, L.	Teaching languages to young learners	2001
Piaget, J.	Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood	1999 (republished)

*Source:* Developed by Victoria Sofía Marín Camacho (2026)

### 3.5.2.3 Thirdhand sources

**Table 3**

*Thirdhand sources used in the research process*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Year</b>
Wilson college	<i>What is Play-Based Learning?</i>	2025
Nation, I. S. P.	Learning vocabulary in another language	2013
Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L.	Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction	2013
Salkind, N. J.	<i>Encyclopedia of Research Design</i>	2010

Source: Developed by Victoria Sofía Marín Camacho (2026)

### **3.6 Sampling and type**

#### **3.6.1 Population**

The population for this research project contemplates the entire group (could be people events, organization, amongst others) about which the conclusions related to the topic of study are being drawn. It is important to highlight that the sample for the investigation should be derived from the population. According to Concept of Satishprakash Shukla (2020), “population refers to the set or group of all the units on which the findings of the research are to be applied”, this refers to the individuals who also share common characteristics and are the broad focus of the study.

In this regard, the population consists of the whole number of preschool students who attend Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez.

### **3.6.2 Sample**

A sample is a portion of individuals, elements, or units that are selected from a larger population, which aim to participate in a research study. They represent the portion of the population from which the researcher collects data in order to draw conclusions about the group as a whole (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

According to Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza (2018), the sample is chosen based on specific criteria that align with the study's objectives and allows the researcher to obtain relevant and manageable information, therefore, the sampling process for this study is based on the characteristics and the availability of the population that belongs to immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez. Since the number of students enrolled in these groups is limited, of around 15 students per group, the sample consists of the total population of children who meet the criteria required for the study, which are the students from both immersive English groups.

### **3.6.3 Probabilistic or Non-Probabilistic Sample**

The type of sampling applied in this research project is non-probabilistic sampling. What is non-probabilistic sampling? It refers to a sampling technique in which the selection of the participants does not rely on a random selection. Instead, individuals are chosen based on their accessibility, relevance to the study, or the researcher's judgement. In non-probabilistic sampling, not all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected, making it especially useful in educational and classroom-based research where the accessible population is limited (Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza, 2018). This method is commonly applied in qualitative or mixed-method research and in studies where the goal is to gather information from the existing groups rather than to generalize findings to a larger population.

In this context, the immersive English groups were selected for several reasons, for example, they are currently exposed to both traditional and play-based instructional approaches, they include preschool children, which is the targeted developmental stage for vocabulary learning, the researcher works directly with these groups facilitating observation, assessment and data collection, and finally, the institution authorizes access to these groups as part of their instructional process.

### **3.7 Techniques and instruments**

In educational research, the techniques and instruments refer to the specific procedures and tools that are used to gather information that will answer or serve to obtain results from the different variables proposed to support the objectives. Techniques describe how data are collected, for example through observation, interviews, assessments, or rating scales; while on the other hand, instruments are the actual tools used in these techniques, such as checklists, questionnaires, anecdotal records, and so forth. The use of appropriate techniques and well-designed instruments is essential because it increases reliability, credibility, and the accuracy of the findings, as McLeod (2019) notes, effective data-collection tools are crucial for ensuring that “the evidence gathered truly represents the phenomenon being investigated” (p.4). In this way, selecting suitable techniques and instruments allows the researcher to produce meaningful and trustworthy conclusions.

For this research project, five instruments have been developed to meet the different needs each objective present in order to gather the necessary information for this investigation, in this case for the first specific objective the information will be gathered through an observation of class dynamics related to vocabulary learning in preschool, as well as pre and posttest to assess learning in more accurate manner for the subjects’ age. For the second specific objective,

the information will be gathered through a simple survey performed to the students regarding their personal experience in the English-learning journey. Finally, for the last specific objective, the information will be gathered through a formal interview made to the English MEP advisor in Heredia, Costa Rica.

### 3.8 Variables

Specific Objectives	Variable	Conceptual Definition	Instrumental Definition	Operational Definition
To examine how play-based learning supports vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional teaching practices in preschool education.	The support given by play-based learning to vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional methods.	The impact and support that the play-based learning methodologies bring to the process of learning English vocabulary instead of the impact that traditional methods have.	Instrument 1: Test Technique: Pre-test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This pre-test presents different simple worksheets that students must perform to put their knowledge to the test, the pre-test focuses on being more traditional based to see students' performance under this methodology.</li> </ul> Instrument 2: Test	The variable is considered valid through this instrument if 70% of teachers select the positive or affirmative response options in at least 70% of the questionnaire items related to their training, methodological application, and instructional decision-making. This indicates that teacher training has a

			<p>Technique: Post test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This post test is focused on play-based learning, is shows different activities that students must perform after working under both methodologies to be able to assess their knowledge under a more dynamic methodology.</li> </ul> <p>Instrument 3: Checklist</p> <p>Technique: Observation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This third instrument focuses on</li> </ul>	<p>measurable influence on how teachers implement play-based and traditional approaches during English instruction in preschool.</p>
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			<p>different aspects that can be observed during different class dynamics related to play-based and traditional methods.</p>	
<p>To determine the perception of students towards the implementation of traditional teaching practices versus exploratory/learning with play-based learning approach.</p>	<p>The perception of students have towards the implementation of different methodologies in class (play-based learning, traditional methods)</p>	<p>Determine the perception that preschool aged students have towards the different dynamics and identify which one is more accurate and efficient for them and their own process.</p>	<p>Instrument 4: Questionnaire Technique: Survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This instrument focuses on gathering one of the most important pieces of information for this research, which is students perspective, it is fully adapted to their age, for</li> </ul>	<p>In the questionnaire, the variable is considered valid through this instrument if 70% of students select one of the methods over the other (e.g., Play-based learning strategies) in at least 70% of the statements related to the questions. This indicates that students' responses</p>

			<p>example, inquiring about their favorite activities to learn English, and what new words they have learned by coloring and what do they learn by actively participating.</p>	<p>consistently reflect their perceptions of how traditional practices influence vocabulary growth when compared with play-based learning strategies.</p>
<p>To analyze the role of teacher training in implementing play-based and traditional methodologies for English language instruction in preschool.</p>	<p>The role of teacher training in the implementation of play-based and traditional methodologies for ESL learning in preschool.</p>	<p>Consider the English MEP advisor's point of view regarding the importance of teacher training quality in the efficiency of the implementation of different educational</p>	<p>Instrument 5: Questionnaire Technique: Interview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This final instrument includes several questions aimed at the MEP advisor to get his professional perspective on the importance of teacher training, for example, questions</li> </ul>	

		methodologies (play-based and traditional methods)	related to the necessary preparation and resources teachers get.	
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**CHAPTER IV**

**ANALISYS AND DATA INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.1. Analysis and interpretation of data**

This chapter presents the results from the analysis gathered from the different instruments that were implemented for this project. The intend for different dynamics were to show whether kids learn better by being taught under traditional methods or play based learning in the process of learning English as a second language. These instruments presented different dynamics that were aligned with both methodologies and then observe the impact it had on the target students who performed them.

The target population for this study were preschool children between the ages of 4 and 6 years old, the number of students who participated were a total of 33 students, those divided into two groups who are a part of the immersive English program established by the Ministry of Public Education in Costa Rica. Both students performed the same activities to obtain the results.

In order to collect the information for this investigation, several instruments were applied, these included observations conducted through a checklist, interviews, and pre and posttests. The purpose of these instruments was to identify whether preschool children obtained better learning results by traditional or play-based methods and its impact on their ability to learn new vocabulary related to different topics according to their curriculum.

In the following information the different instruments will be explained as well as each of their results, the analysis and interpretation of the information obtained will gravitate towards the process of language learning, more specifically English vocabulary learning amongst preschool aged children, this collection of data is extremely valuable since it will demonstrate and give a clearer insight on what are the most effective methods to enhance vocabulary learning and how can preschool education be improved and more meaningful in a real life context.

#### 4.1.1 Observation

The first step to conduct this investigation was to perform a classroom observation in both of the groups that participated to determine the way they interact and implement English vocabulary in a regular classroom environment, for instance, to observe whether they use vocabulary spontaneously, if they use it in interactions with their peers and teachers and so forth.

With the indicators included in this observation it is also possible to better understand what resources, didactic materials, and even activities are better for them and their cognitive development in this area. Also, what methodology is most fitting for their cognitive needs. The information collected with this instrument is also an appropriate tool to guide teachers on the way they must plan and what activities can work better to promote language and vocabulary learning amongst children.

This observation was carried out by implementing a checklist. (*Annex 1*)

1. **Student information:** Two groups were observed for the application of this instrument; it was a total of 33 students divided into two groups. The first group corresponding to “Interactive 1” with 18 students and “Preparatory” with 15 students. These preschool students go from the ages of 4 to 6 years old.
2. **Classroom environment:** The sitting arrangement for both classrooms is in small groups per table, the way they are seated allows children to work in teams and promote peer interaction to enhance vocabulary use. For the first group, kids are sitting in groups of 6, for the second group, students are seated in groups of 4, with one group of 3. Both classrooms are modest sized and are surrounded by diverse didactic materials to support learning and educative play time. For both classrooms, the walls are filled with educative decoration, items such as the calendar, experiences of the day and other several bulletins

are in English to promote language learning. The different areas of the classroom like the different environments, for instance “reading corner”, “art corner”, or “backpack area”, “sanitizing area”. Both classrooms have similar aspects and the same bulletins and bilingual decoration.

3. **Students’ behavior:** Students, especially at this age are very energetic, these children are extremely energetic, cheerful and very willing to participate in the different activities that were executed during their class meanwhile the observation was taking place. The students display a moderate behavior, as expected, some students are more participative than others, but when they are called upon most of them, if not all of them respond positively. However, some of them tend to also be quitter but still participative. Due to their ages, the teacher is a key aspect the execution of the class, the teacher always intervenes and guides the students through the learning path they are following in the moment. Students reacted much better to directed active games to approach topics, meanwhile during the performance of worksheets their attention tends to drift, this goes for both groups equally even considering their difference in age.

For the students who are younger, their attentions spans are much shorter, however, they were very eager to participate, and even at the short age of 4 years old is always impressive to notice how fast and efficiently they learn, absorb, and even get to implement new vocabulary words English even within a short time after first coming in contact with them.

As an overall analysis of the observation and taking into consideration the different aspects of the checklist, it is possible to determine that for the first group of “Interactive 1”, students demonstrated a strong participation and enthusiasm during vocabulary-centered activities, kids frequently used English vocabulary naturally throughout the day, particularly during games,

songs, classroom routines, and hands-on activities. Students showed clear understanding of vocabulary meanings by connecting words to tangible objects and real-life classroom situations, which strengthens their knowledge. In addition, students displayed excellent retention skills, remembering and reusing vocabulary after repeated exposure through playful interaction and repetition. Although, peer interaction is clearly still developing, students noticeably supported each other during collaborative activities and responded positively to teacher feedback, when the teacher corrects them if they mispronounce a word, they quickly adjust and adapt which is an admirable trait in these children. Their confidence level was especially notable, as most students were willing to participate and experiment with new language according to their level without fear of making mistakes. Overall, the observations suggest that play-based learning created a motivating and comfortable environment that supported vocabulary acquisition, participation, and communicative confidence.

As for the group of Preparatory 3, they demonstrated strong vocabulary comprehension and retention abilities, particularly during structured classroom activities and routines. Students showed the ability to understand vocabulary meanings and apply them correctly in functional phrases and everyday classroom expressions. In comparison to the other group that was observed, they possessed a broader vocabulary range and could form more complete sentences in English. However, interestingly aspects such as spontaneous use of vocabulary and peer interaction in English occurred less frequently, as students often relied more on teacher guidance and even structured participation, or sometimes only when directly asked. The observation indicates that while this group had stronger linguistic foundations, they would continue benefiting from play-based activities that encourage a more natural and familiar communication, collaboration, and confidence during unstructured interactions.

## 4.1.2 Tests

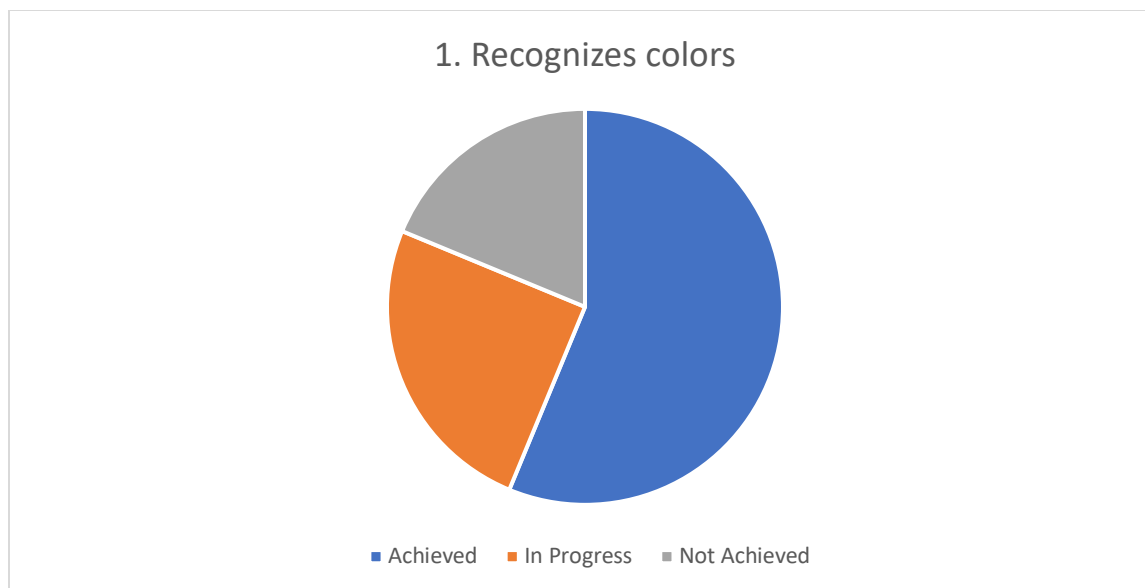
### 4.1.2.1. Pre-test

The following are the results obtained from the different tasks included in the pre-test to determine the level of English vocabulary learning obtained from students by implementing only traditional-based methods, in this case worksheets to approach the different topics designated for this level. Each chart corresponds one of the indicators that were evaluated.

*(Annex 2)*

- **Group 1:** Interactive 1

**Figure 1**

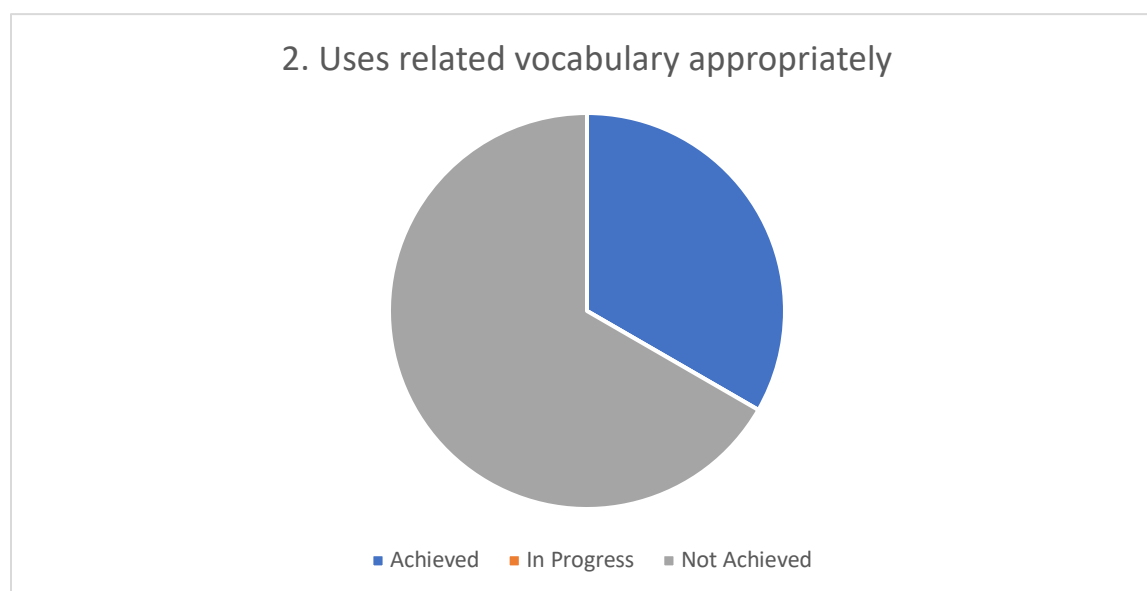


*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

For the first indicator, which centers on observing if the students can identify the different colors they have to use or they see in the first part of the test. This exercise was successful, most children recognized the color whether it was only coloring the drawings with the right colors

without even being given an instruction, saying the colors out loud while pointing at them, or saying the right color when asked. All kids demonstrated good skills when this first part was completed.

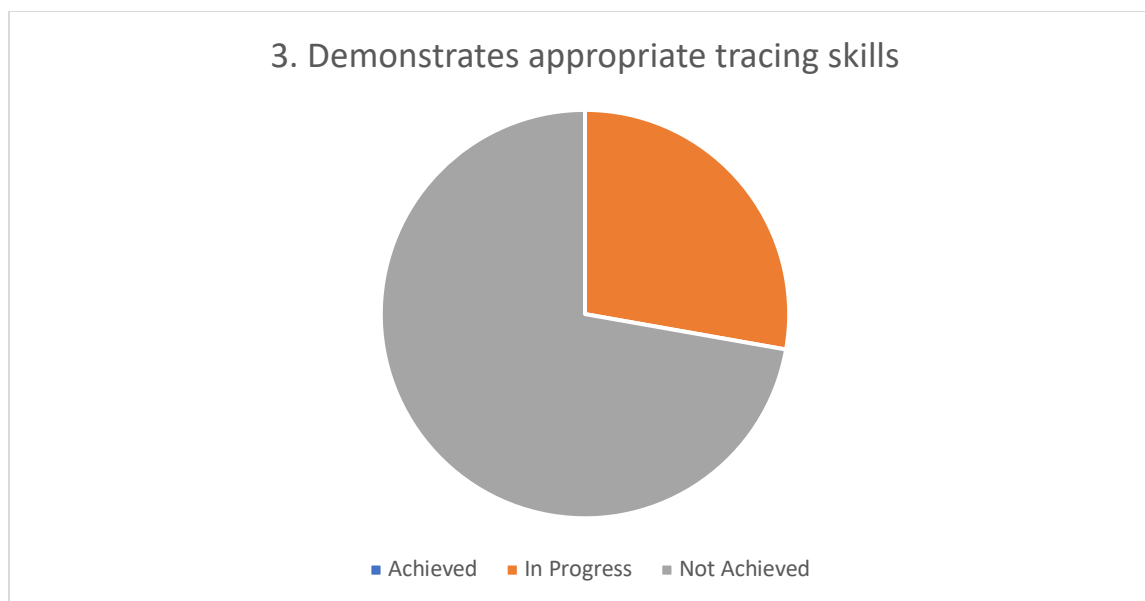
**Figure 2**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

For the second indicator, focusing on using the related vocabulary it is evident that worksheets do not encourage children to interact or actively use the vocabulary words they already know or much less learn a new word, especially at this short age when students need to be the center of the learning process. During the execution of this pretest, some students did mention the words without being asked to do so, however it was a minority and in reality, most of the students were only focused on coloring, even only coloring the letters instead of interacting and practicing the vocabulary words or appropriately completing the tasks.

**Figure 3**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

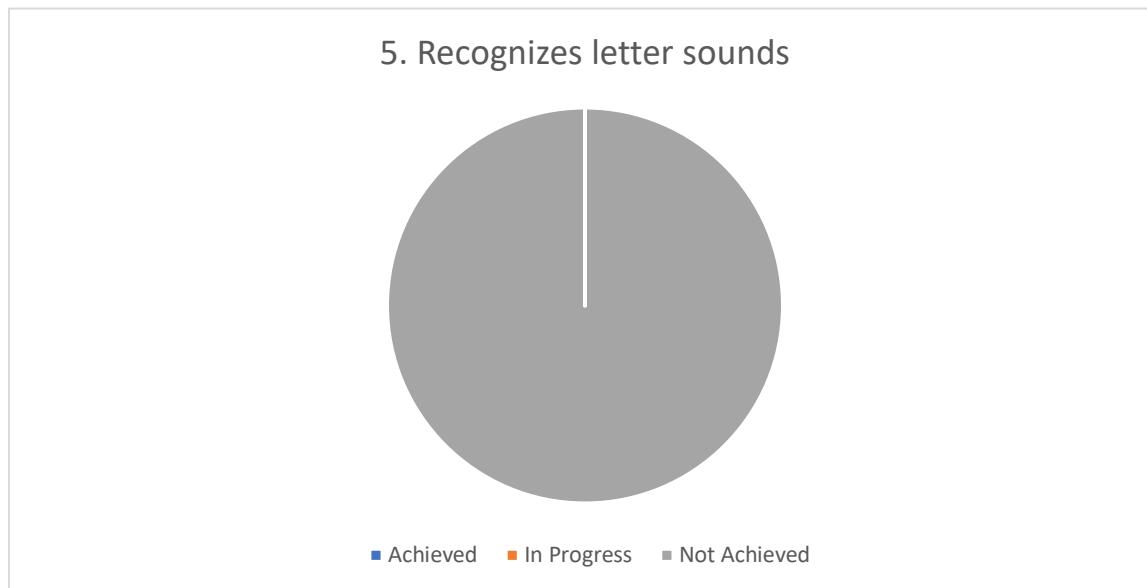
Regarding the third indicator, which aims to demonstrate appropriate tracing skills, for this group, the children are on the starting level of preschool so their skills are clearly still developing, therefore, since this was a new topic for them which entails recognizing letters, their skills were not developed in this area yet, students performed this part of the test, but did not achieved the goals. It is important to note that the children who are in the process of developing these tracing skills followed the lines that marked the way in the worksheet.

**Figure 4**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

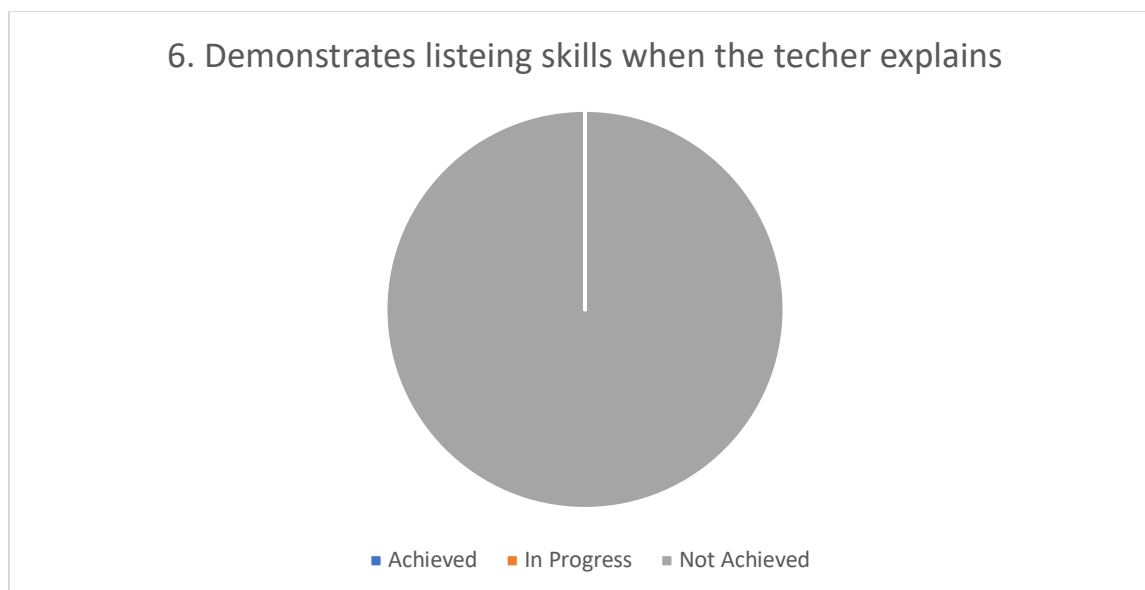
Regarding the fourth objective, the results are similar to the previous indicator, students were not as familiarized with letters yet, and by implementing a traditional method, such as a worksheet clearly did not help them develop the knowledge and skills they needed to successfully identify and interact with this topic, they were also not able to recognize the letters they were seeing in their paper before them.

**Figure 5**

*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

About the fifth objective, about letter sounds, this was perhaps the one that was going to be the hardest to fulfill; by performing worksheet students were not able to learn or produce letter sounds, they performed the work on paper, but not significant active knowledge was produced on these students.

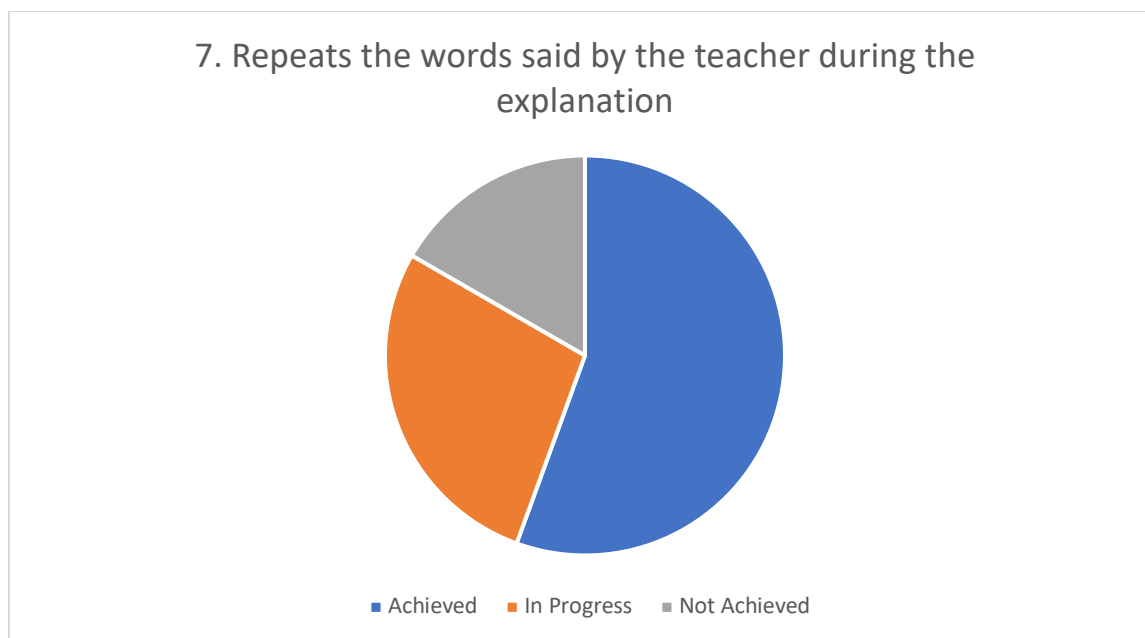
**Figure 6**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding the sixth objective, it is focused on observing if the kids are demonstrating proper listening skills while the teacher explains, and while the students work daily on displaying listening skills for different instructions throughout the day, in this case while they were listening to the explanations that were given about the different images, the idea was to determine if they formed new knowledge or learned English vocabulary words, their retention was not present. Due to their age after a short period of time, it is normal and expected that when kids are exposed to only listening without having an active participation, their attention will drift thus resulting in no vocabulary words being learned, in fact, after asking the kids if they remembered anything, none of them did, even after relying on repetition they were not able to relate it to any personal experience. Students need to be asked questions and have more didactic materials in order to formulate active knowledge, they need to be active participants not just passive listening especially at this crucial age in their development.

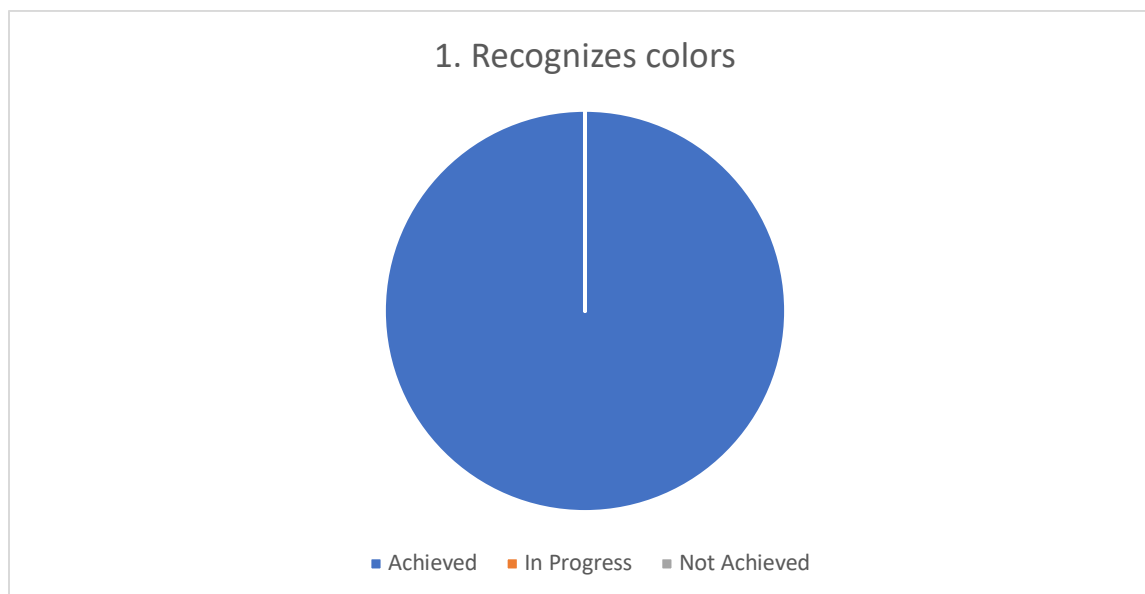
**Figure 7**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Finally, this is something these students tend to do, especially happening with this group, they like to repeat the words that the teacher emphasizes even when they are not asked, most children repeated this tendency during the explanation, however, there were some students who did struggle a little more with completing this aspect, some of them do not repeat the words without being asked or told to, they don't do it by themselves, however, as it can be perceived in this chart the highest percentage of students do repeat the words, however, this was done while they were listening but not knowledge was formed which at the end was the main goal, learning new vocabulary words.

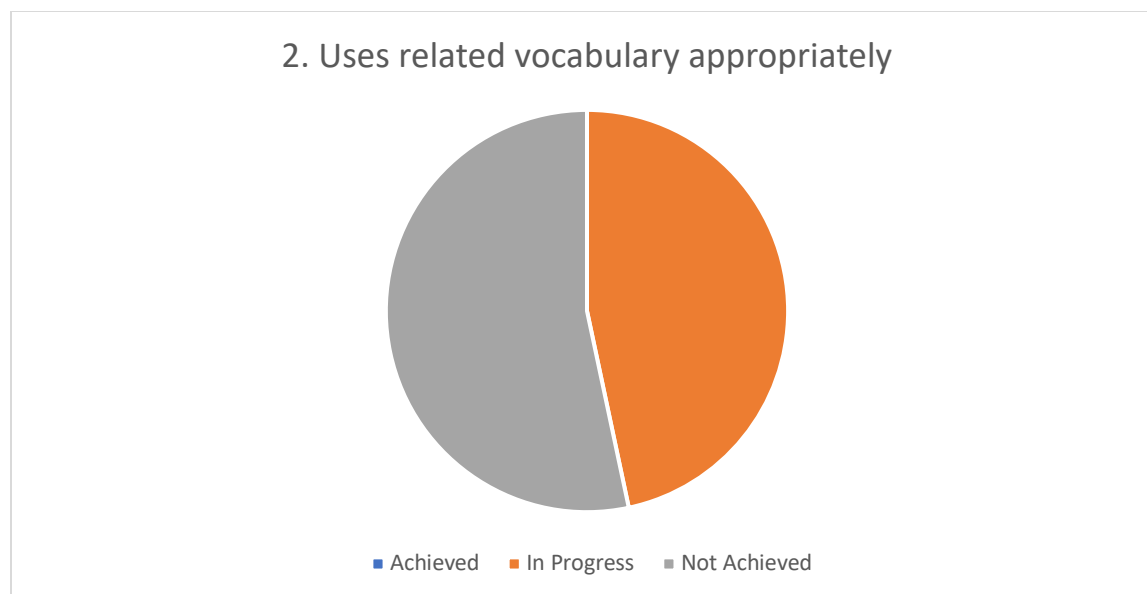
- **Group 2:** Preparatory 3

**Figure 8**

*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

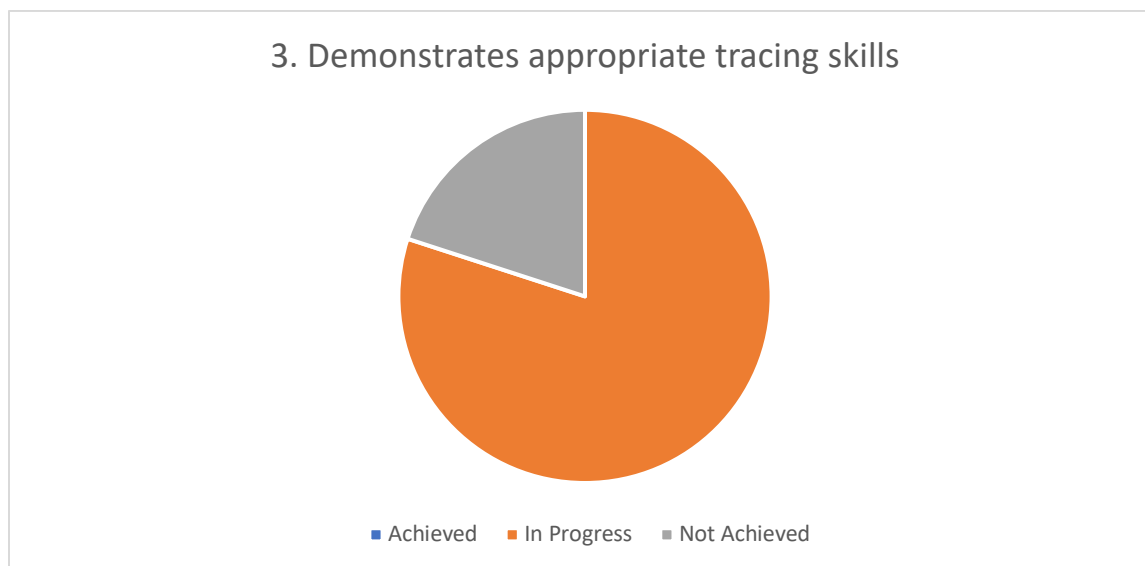
Regarding this first indicator for the group of Preparatory 3, all of the students in general were able to recognize the colors in the coloring task, they performed the worksheet successfully. However, they were not motivated to say the vocabulary words corresponding to the colors out loud, they did not use them in peer interaction or practice the word, they just listened to the instruction saw the drawings and colored the drawings thinking about what they were, but not active vocabulary learning was taking place, mostly reviewing.

**Figure 9**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

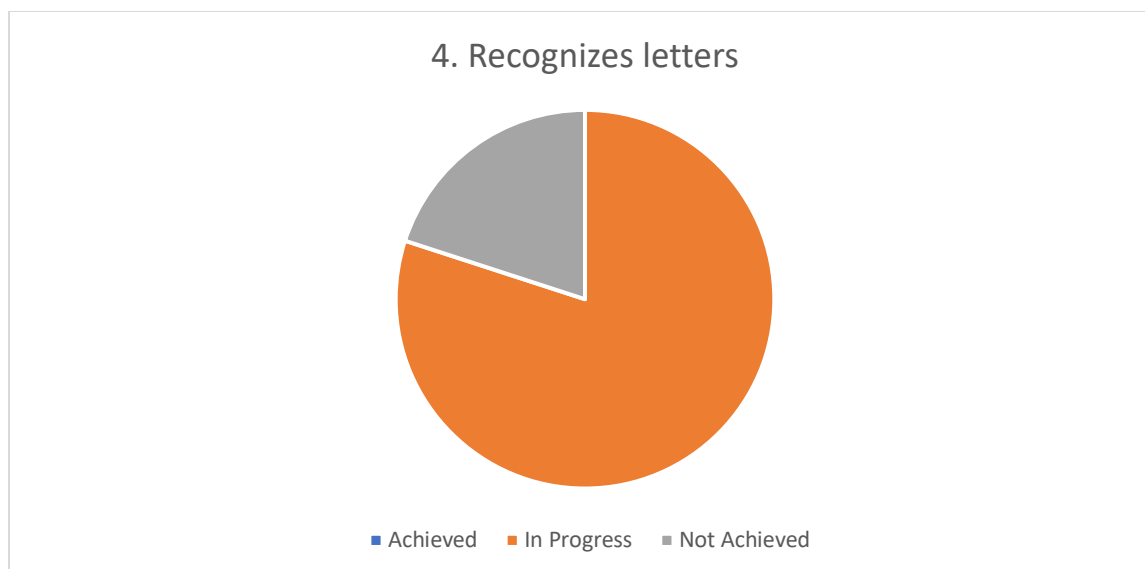
Regarding the second indicator for this group, it is surprising to notice how it is harder for them to use vocabulary, even if they have previous knowledge, in this group of older children it is perceivable that they are a little more self-aware of making mistakes and also in this group there is an interesting matter that involves children's personality because some of them were even not as comfortable with speaking out loud, additionally, they are more focused on just performing the task on paper that they were given so this type of traditional methods do not encourage them to speak up and use the vocabulary words, even if they know them, they are limited to just completing a paper, so the goal of having students express their forming knowledge was not met.

**Figure 10**

*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

As it is evident in the evaluation of this third indicator, most children at this stage are successfully developing their tracing skills, they were able to follow the patterns and even write their own names in the test, however, it is a topic they are already familiar with and this exercise was performed as a review. Some students, the ones who did not achieve the purpose of the indicator, just colored the letters, not demonstrating appropriate tracing skills.

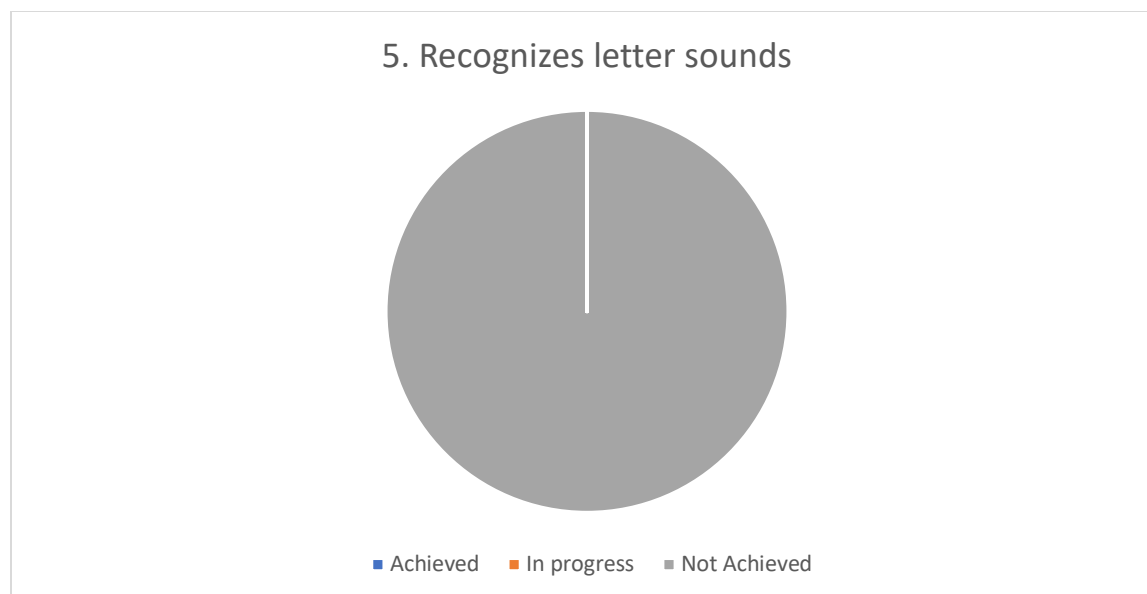
**Figure 11**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding the fourth objective, this indicator was particularly interesting because most students only recognize the letters on their name, and give less importance to the rest, as part of the process of learning to write their names and beginning to interact with the alphabet, then again, students were not motivated to say the letters they recognized, they were limited to only following the traces. It was evident for some that they knew how to identify the letters since they made the successful effort to write their names on their own.

**Figure 12**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding this indicator, while it's true that the part of the test that included letters was more centered on tracing, students by being in contact with letters because they were meant to work on paper only, were not motivated to exercise, practice or produce letter sounds, therefore, they did not recognize the sounds of this letters. For these specific tasks it is evident that traditional methods are not especially fitting.

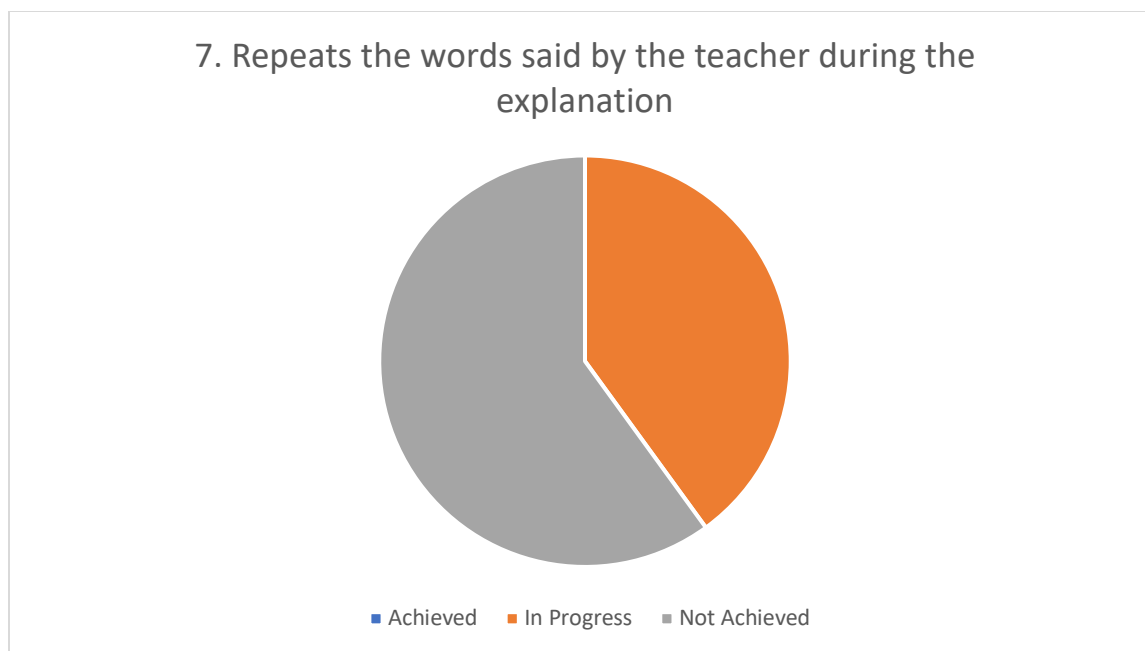
**Figure 13**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding the sixth objective, the students on this group listened, however, they get distracted and don't fully focus on the task that is taking place. Their attention constantly shifts since they are not actively involved but just passively listening, again in this group, any retention was achieved through passive listening, kids listen and understand in the moment, but no meaningful knowledge is constructed, because any of them were able to answer the questions after the explanation was given, retention was not achieved.

**Figure 14**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Surprisingly for this indicator, these older students do not feel as motivated to repeat the words after the teacher during the explanation, unless specifically asked, they are able to just not motivated to by the task itself, which is ultimately the goal, they are more focused on just listening so not at actual active practice takes place, kids just listen while others still get distracted or have some trouble remembering the words after wards, since they don't get the opportunity to be actively involved.

#### **4.1.2.2. Post-test**

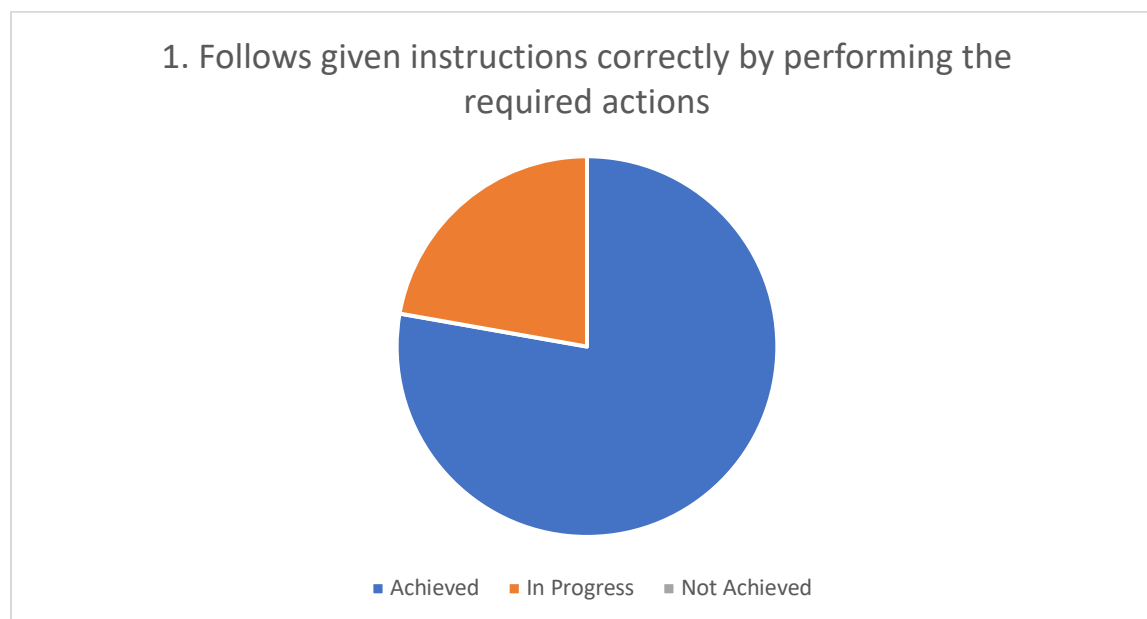
After the implementation of the post-test which focuses on performing only active play-based activities to measure and evaluate if children learn more through play-based learning and if some knowledge and vocabulary is learned even within a short period of time after the application, with this post test, it is possible to determine this approach enhances vocabulary learning and retention better than the traditional methods. It also assesses whether this

methodology also provides spaces for active participation, repetition and practice, which is exactly what students need to strengthen their learning and comprehension long term. (*Annex 3*)

The results of the post-tests are displayed through graphs for each indicator to better observe the performance and improvement of students in each indicator that was considered during the evaluation.

- **Group 1:** Interactive 1

**Figure 15**

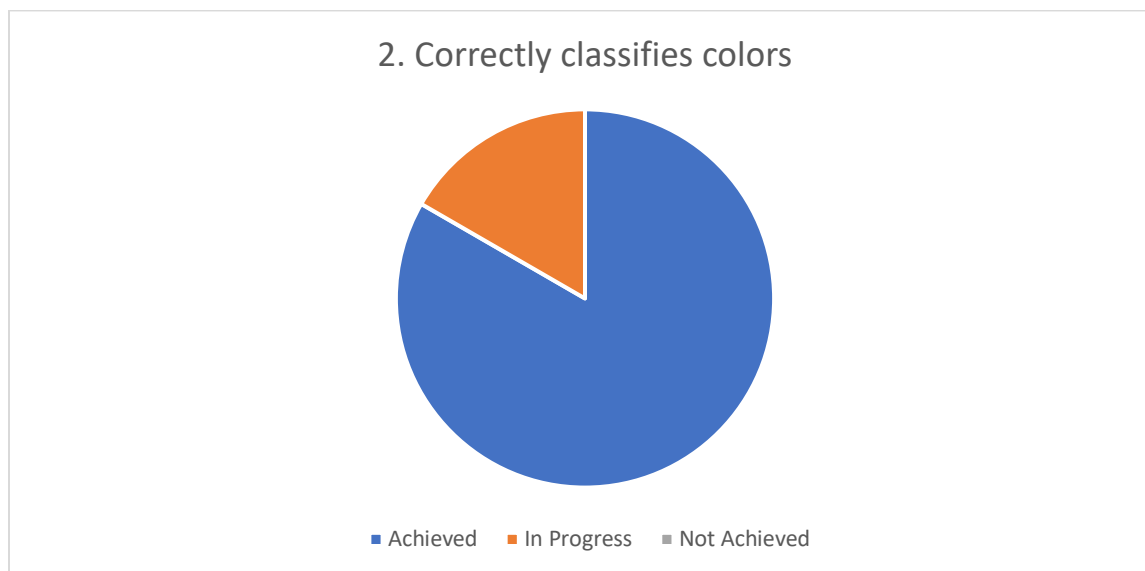


*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

According to the first indicator, students in this group were fully engaged in the play-based activities. In this group there are some children who have especial conditions such as autism; therefore, their instruction-following skills are hindered by it, however, they displayed a good engagement and participation in the different games that were carried out. When with these

considerations, the activities were performed successfully, and almost all students did participate in the different tasks.

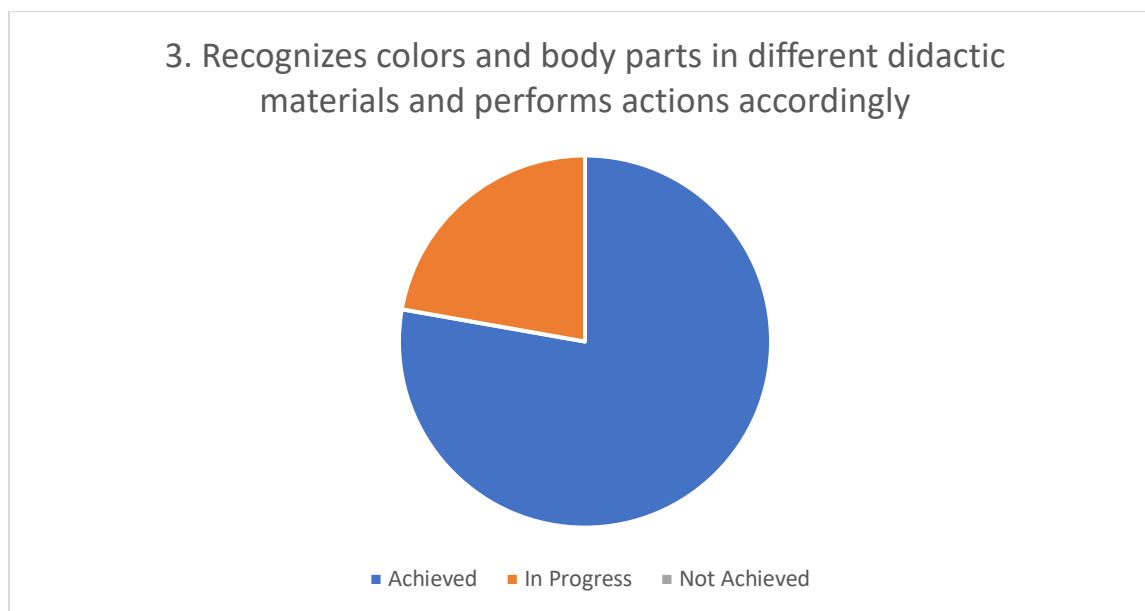
**Figure 16**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding the indicator number 2, these students greatly benefitted from the tasks performed related to colors and color classification, they used several didactic materials, such as pompoms, small colored toys, tweezers, and different colored containers. These materials as part of a classification game were extremely productive and important because all the students who participated did it successfully; while performing this task, students were also motivated to repeat the colors in English while participating in the game. They were all eager to participate and be in contact with these didactic materials.

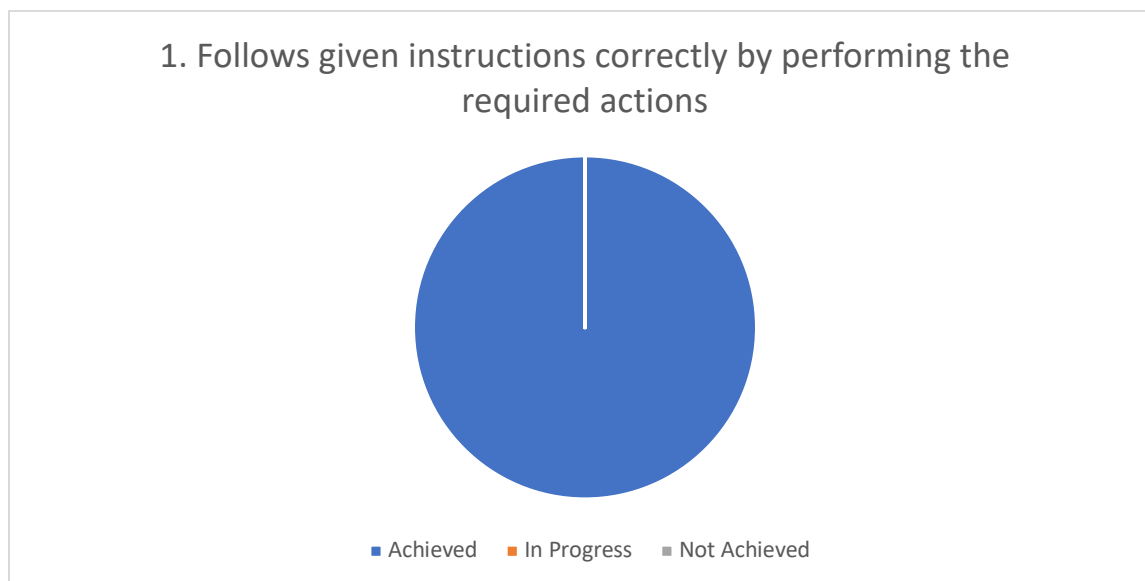
**Figure 17**



*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

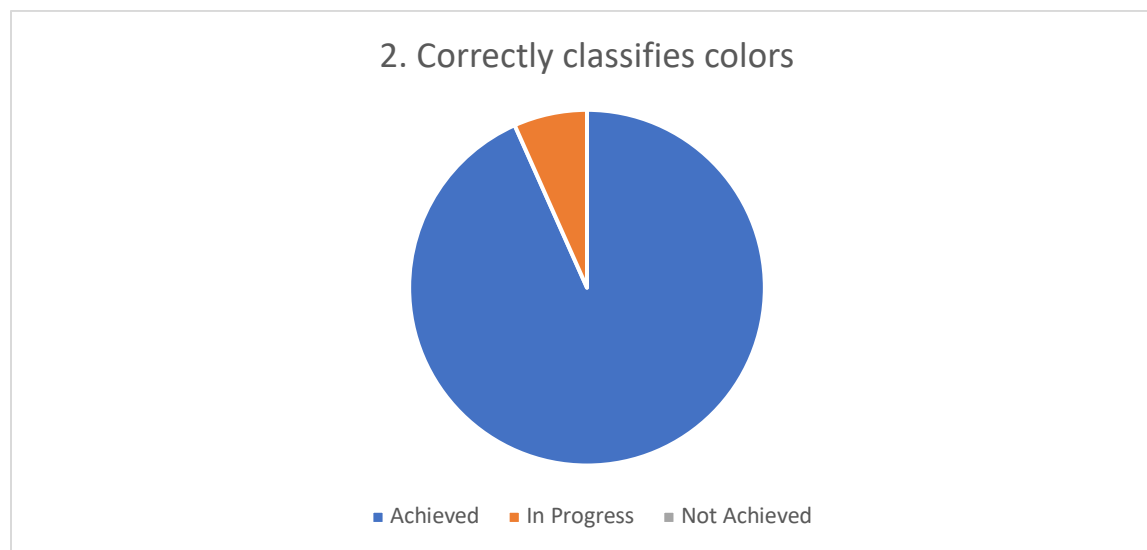
According to the third indicator, students in this group understand and follow instructions much better and they are active participants and seeing the teacher fully involved, using English vocabulary repeatedly and most importantly using physical gestures. They came in contact with the vocabulary words with audio visual materials such as videos, then the teacher had an interactive conversation with students in which they touch their own body parts and use the new vocabulary words they learned. In fact, while playing Simon Says they successfully recognized the body parts names and were able to understand the words, apply them in context and relate it to their own experiences. Additionally, in the color hunt game, students were especially eager to participate, and they could interact with different objects that surrounds them and link it to this knowledge they are consolidating.

- **Group 2:** Preparatory 3

**Figure 18**

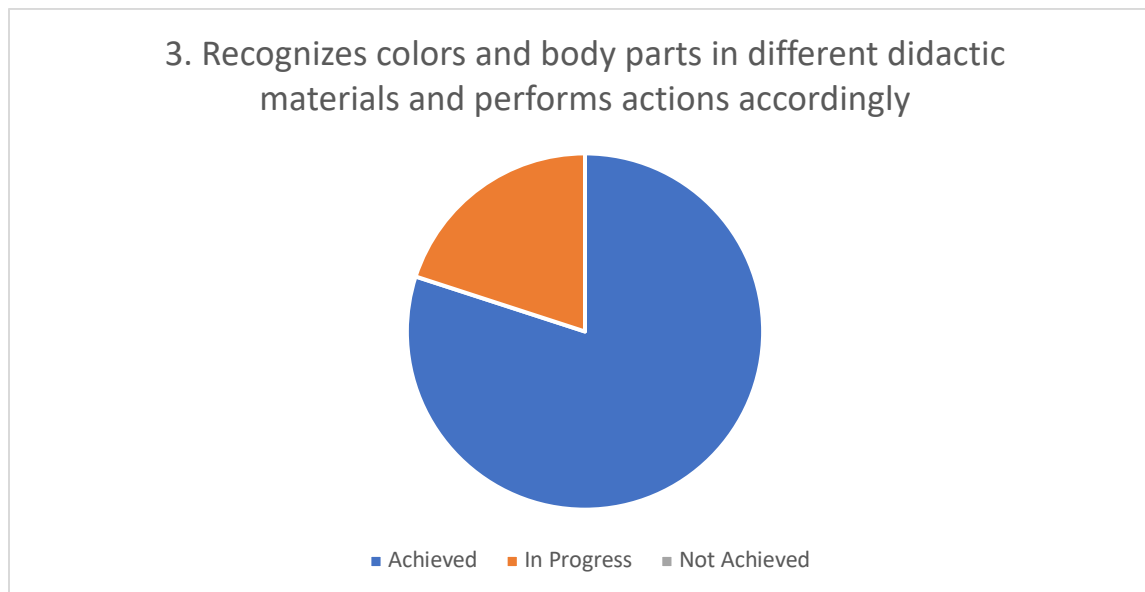
*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

About this first indicator for the group of Preparatory 3, students were all willing to follow instructions appropriately and perform all the tasks successfully, they all completed the tasks and understood the instructions of the games. An important detail about this group is that they have already received English classes previously, therefore they are already familiar with some words, but now with this play-based activities they were motivated to interact with these words in a real-life contexts and even motivated to repeat and say the words out loud as they participating and the games having fun and even running around the classroom.

**Figure 19**

*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

Regarding the second indicator in the evaluation for the group of Preparatory 3, all students successfully performed the tasks related to colors they could already recognize the colors and interact with them by classifying them properly and looking for items that matched the colors they were indicated to look for. This group also used different didactic materials which motivated and enhanced students' engagement in the task, Students were able to identify the colors, match them to their corresponding container and identify the items in the classroom that matched the color they heard in the instruction.

**Figure 20**

*Source: Developed by Victoria Marín Camacho (2026)*

According to the third indicator, students properly accomplished the task they properly understood the instructions for the game as the teacher was constantly modeling for them; while performing the tasks, they heard and repeated the different vocabulary words constantly and were able to interact with them and also relate them to the materials and objects around them. The body parts identification was especially meaningful since they recognize the vocabulary words on their own bodies; the color hunt was especially interesting since they also had no trouble finding the objects with correct colors. By implementing games, it becomes evident how students are much more engaged.

#### **4.1.3. Interviews**

##### **4.1.3.1 Interview to the Ministry of Public education's adviser**

For the completion of this instrument, a formal interview with Heredia's MEP adviser, he gives his professional point of view regarding the effectiveness of implanting play-based and

traditional methods and the impact it has on students, especially at this young age when they are just starting their learning journey and even more since this is a key stage in life for kids to develop their cognitive area. (*Annex 4*)

- **Name:** Randall Centeno Hernández
- **Position:** Heredia's MEP adviser

Questions	Answers
Question 1: How important is teacher training in early childhood education for effectively teaching English vocabulary to preschool students?	The advisor explains how teacher training is not as simple as it may seem, he mentioned there are specific steps, techniques, and details teachers must know to teach vocabulary effectively, especially with young children. Training ensures teachers understand how to teach properly and what it is not as convenient teaching.
Question 2: How does the MEP prepare teachers to implement appropriate methodologies for English instruction in preschool?	For teachers in the public sector, the adviser mentioned there are trainings such as webinars and workshops, but they are sometimes limited or inconsistent. Even so, teacher training is essential because it helps educators apply the curriculum correctly and they are properly guided as to how to choose

	the most effective methodologies to guide and instruct students.
<p>Question 3: To what extent does teacher training influence the successful implementation of play-based learning strategies?</p>	<p>According to the adviser, play is fundamental for young children’s learning, but it must have a purpose. Training helps teachers understand how to connect play with learning goals instead of just playing without direction. Play is something that requires a teacher to be thorough and careful, contrary to popular belief, training ensures that teachers don’t take play lightly but instead give an enriching cognitive purpose.</p>
<p>Question 4: What is your point of view regarding the importance of learning vocabulary in preschool and using appropriate methodologies?</p>	<p>The adviser’s point of view explains how vocabulary is the foundation of communication. However, it must be taught through a structured process with repetition, context, and gradual Independence. Without proper methods, students may forget what they quickly, it’s true that vocabulary can be thought of something relatively simple to learn and implement, but structure is needed to make it meaningful.</p>

<p>Question 5: What are the benefits of play-based learning and traditional methodologies? Is one more effective?</p>	<p>Play-based learning is more effective because it promotes communication, interaction, and understanding. Traditional methods like worksheets only help if they have a very clear purpose, but generally, they do not support speaking and listening which are key skills. In the process of language learning especially in preschool aged children, it is important to work with these skills to make learning more meaningful and lasting, these are the main skills to be worked in preschool.</p>
<p>Question 6: What challenges do teachers face when applying play-based methodologies without sufficient training?</p>	<p>Teachers may rely only on intuition, teach vocabulary in isolation, give too many words at once and fail to provide context for them. This leads to students knowing words but not knowing how to use them. He added that worksheets hardly give students context regarding vocabulary learning, so they may see words written or have pictures to color, but this does not ensure they can practice and use the words if they are in a more active context while learning through their senses.</p>

<p>Question 7: How can teacher training help balance play-based and traditional methods?</p>	<p>The adviser does not strongly support balancing if traditional methods are passive. Play should be the main approach, and any traditional activity should only be used if it clearly supports a learning objective, in fact he mentions the main thing to focus on as the maturity level of the targets involved, which in this case are children, it is a reality that most preschool aged children, especially the younger ones, do not have the necessary skills to perform an elaborated worksheet, and they are not expected to, additionally, it is a fact that active participation and learning through the senses is the best teaching/learning approach for younger students, therefore, this is why he suggests that balancing is not as appropriate as actually focusing on play-based tasks especially on preschool.</p>
<p>Question 8: What pedagogical skills should teachers develop to teach vocabulary through play-based learning?</p>	<p>Teachers need to understand vocabulary teaching processes, use repetition, be observant, creative, dynamic, and kind. They must adapt activities and create a safe, supportive environment. These are the most</p>

	important skills a teacher should have when performing their duties.
Question 9: What recommendations would you give teachers to improve vocabulary learning through play-based strategies?	Teachers should connect all activities into a meaningful sequence, teach vocabulary in context, provide repetition and exposure, and give students multiple opportunities to use the language. Again, the adviser emphasized that teachers need to find a focus and a purpose or each game they will implement always have an educative, clear purpose and properly organize the vocabulary they will implement or strengthen in students.
Question 10: Do teachers in the public sector have the necessary resources to achieve quality English teaching in preschool?	Material resources are generally sufficient. The main challenges are teachers' English proficiency, overuse of traditional methods, and lack of training. Improving training would greatly enhance teaching quality. According to the adviser, he indeed believes that teachers could have the necessary resources, however, there is always room for improvement, however, the answer focused on teacher development and actions with the resources they do have and their adaptability

	<p>to do their work, resources such as some technology and materials are generally available in several regions in the country so the important aspect is what the teachers do with what they have.</p>
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#### 4.1.3.2 Student interview

For the completion of this instrument, an interview was performed to some students from each group, precisely two students from each group under the immersive English dynamic for MEP. Students were asked questions related to the way perceive learning what is more beneficial for them in the way they understand their own learning process. (*Annex 5*)

- **Names;**
  - **Interactive 1:**
    - Lisa (Student 1)
    - Lucas (Student 2)
  - **Preparatory 3:**
    - Madison (Student 1)
    - Mathías (Student 2)

**Important note:** As for the kids' information, always putting their safety and privacy first, only first names are given.

**Interview:** Interactive 1

Questions	Answers
<p><b>Question 1: Do you learn new English words when you play games?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She mentioned she loves games and she remembers a lot of words and likes to tell her mom.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned he loves games, and those are his favorite part, he likes listening to new words.</p>
<p><b>Question 2: Do you learn new English words when you color or trace?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She mentioned she likes coloring and seeing the pictures, she said she remembers some words when she sees nice drawings.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned he also likes coloring, he mentions he only thinks about not coloring outside of the designated line and that he remembers some words. He mentioned that only coloring is tiring sometimes.</p>
<p><b>Question 3: After a game, do you remember the words?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She gave a positive answer, she said she does remember different words.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned he also remember many words after playing games.</p>
<p><b>Question 4: After coloring or tracing, do you remember the words?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> Again, she said she does remember some words after coloring and mentioned the pictures again.</p>

	<p><b>Student 2:</b> Again, he also mentioned focusing on not coloring outside of the lines and using the proper colors, he focused his answer on the technicalities of the worksheet.</p>
<p><b>Question 5: Do you understand the teacher in English?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She said yes, she understands what the teacher tells her and even mentioned some phrases the teacher has said and she has already learned.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned something similar, he also says he remembers words and he opted to say the colors which was a topic he had recently seen.</p>
<p><b>Question 6: Do you learn new words when you listen to songs in English?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She mentioned she loves the songs and that she sings with her mom, she also mentioned she understand words when listening to songs, which was even visible when they listen to a song and she sang along.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned he also loves songs and that he had already memorized several songs the teacher has taught them and talked about what some of them are about.</p>
<p><b>Question 7: Do you learn new English words when you look at pictures?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She said yes, pictures remind her of new words she has learned.</p>

	<p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned something similar saying that he likes looking at pictures and his answer was positive by saying that he does learn new words when the teacher shows them pictures.</p>
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## Interview: Preparatory 3

Questions	Answers
<p><b>Question 1: Do you learn new English words when you play games?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She said yes, she mentioned how playing games allows her to have a good time and she feels like she learns so much during them.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned something similar, he said he also learns when they play and games are his favorite part if the class.</p>
<p><b>Question 2: Do you learn new English words when you color or trace?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She mentioned something very interesting, she took some time to think and said she doesn't really learn new words when she colors, she just does it. She said "no", she doesn't remember words after this.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> This student mentioned he doesn't like it when other people talk to him as he colors, he needs to be fully focused, so he doesn't really practice, he only focuses on doing the task not forming new knowledge.</p>
<p><b>Question 3: After a game, do you remember the words?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She said yes, when she has fun, she feels she learns a lot. She likes saying the new words she has learnt.</p>

	<p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned something similar. He loves games and he mentioned it's his favorite way of learning.</p>
<p><b>Question 4: After coloring or tracing, do you remember the words?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> Again, she said that the papers don't really help her learn new words, but she always performs the task that the teacher asks her to do, she mentioned hoe she prefers cool projects.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He also mentioned again that he doesn't like to be spoken to when he is coloring and that for him it is a task he must perform alone. And he also mentions that he doesn't like when they color too much.</p>
<p><b>Question 5: Do you understand the teacher in English?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> Her answer was positive, she said she does understand when her teacher speaks to her in English.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He mentioned he likes learning English, and that he also understands when his teacher talks to him.</p>
<p><b>Question 6: Do you learn new words when you listen to songs in English?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She said yes, she loves music and she likes listening to words she knows.</p>

	<p><b>Student 2:</b> He said music is also one of his favorite parts of the class and he learns a lot with them.</p>
<p><b>Question 7: Do you learn new English words when you look at pictures?</b></p>	<p><b>Student 1:</b> She mentions that she also likes pictures and that they help her remember words.</p> <p><b>Student 2:</b> He said pictures are also very helpful for him, the likes looking at them and using the flashcards in class.</p>

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This present investigation's main goal was to demonstrate that the implementation of play-based learning strategies had a more positive impact on the process of learning vocabulary in preschool children rather than the sole use of traditional methods such as worksheets, tracing activities on paper, and passive listening, and it has accurate and positive results. The results that were obtained through observation, pre-tests, post-tests, and interviews, revealed that children display higher levels of engagement, motivation, participation, comprehension and even retention when they learn in a more dynamic way, a way in which they can use all of their senses to create knowledge. Therefore, it can be concluded that play-based learning provides more meaningful and developmentally appropriate opportunities for preschool students to acquire English vocabulary in immersive educational contexts.

Concerning the way in which play-based learning supports vocabulary learning specifically, in comparison to traditional teaching practices, students achieved better performance during play rather than traditional tasks, and the reason is precisely that play is completely natural for children and for them at this stage is life it represent a much richer source of knowledge than just resorting to worksheets and passive methods, which don't provide the expected results. It is important to highlight that, while traditional activities allowed students to practice certain skills, more precisely motor skills, it is evident that to support retention and vocabulary learning active playful learning is much more efficient. When student learn through their senses, knowledge and information is related to real-life experiences thus making learning more meaningful, especially for preschool students.

Regarding the perception of students towards the implementation of traditional teaching practices versus exploratory/learning with play-based learning approach, it is especially important to go straight to the source which are the students and determining how they perceive learning at

such young age, the preschool students who were the target of this investigation, provided their input in this matter, one of the most interesting comments that were provided was that for them, coloring is viewed as a serious activity, it is something they need to do individually and in just one way, however, after performing such task, while other skills were developed, even students recognized that no significant vocabulary learning was achieved. Not just retention, but greater enjoyment and engagement were fairly visible through games, movement, songs, and hands-on experiences. This investigation, when put to practice, demonstrated how traditional methods were seen by them as less motivating and generated lower levels of participation. It can be concluded that preschool children not only prefer play-based learning experiences but also perceive them as more effective for understanding and remembering new English vocabulary.

Finally, in education one of the most important parts is the quality of the information and provider, which in this case is the teacher. In Costa Rica this is a matter that requires considerable attention to it, part of this investigation was to focus on the importance of teacher training in the process of supporting language learning. Good quality training is especially important for the implementation of both methodologies. For this specific objective, an interview to the MEP adviser was performed and the information obtained from this task highlighted that effective vocabulary teaching requires specialized pedagogical knowledge, careful planning, and an understanding of children's developmental needs. Additionally, the findings also revealed that teachers who receive adequate training are better prepared to design purposeful play experiences that promote language learning rather than simple entertainment; because play can't be taken lightly in an educational context, it must always have meant, and a direction achieved with careful planning. Consequently, continuous professional development is essential to ensure that educators can effectively implement play-based strategies, thus maximizing students' opportunities to learn vocabulary.

This project demonstrated that while different teaching/learning methods can have pros and cons, but their efficiency lies in the context in which they are applied in, teachers need to go beyond and think outside the box, considering their students' needs while asking themselves if the strategies they are choosing to work with are the most appropriate. In fact, aside from the very important fact that children benefit greatly from the cognitive development and stimulation they obtain from play, it is imperative to consider that the traditional methods such as the ones that played a part in this investigation do not align with the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education (MEP) guidelines, which are set to promote active and child-centered learning experiences. Although worksheets can be useful for reviewing previously learned content, strengthening fine motor skills and even supporting older learners, they are not expected to be an effective method for introducing new vocabulary to a younger demographic of students.

As it was evident with the implementation of the different instruments in this research project, many children completed the traditional tasks without demonstrating meaningful learning, whereas play-based activities encouraged greater involvement and cognitive development. Therefore, this last method should be prioritized as the main instructional approach for vocabulary acquisition in preschool English classrooms, as well as a way to abide by the guidelines that have been established to achieve the expected learning outcomes. How enriching it is to inquire deeply what tools can provide the most benefits to students who are the single most important part of the learning journey, let this be a call to always seek the best for the young minds teacher help guide and form.

**CHAPTER VI**

**PROPOSAL**

Based on the findings of this investigation project, a professional development program is proposed to support preschool English teachers in the implementation of play-based learning strategies for vocabulary instruction, which is one of the aspects that needs the most improvement in this whole process. The results demonstrated that play-based learning promotes greater student engagement, participation, comprehension, and vocabulary retention rather than the traditional teaching practices. However, one of the aspects that clearly impacts both the implementation, and the proper manner of Play-based learning is teacher preparation in ensuring that play activities are purposeful, educational, and aligned with learning objectives. One of the keys is to guide educators in the path of leading the different educational experiences with meaning and educational purpose, this is the first step to achieve a full successful implementation of play-based learning in Costa Rican preschool classrooms.

This proposed course of action would consist of a series of workshops designed to equip preschool English teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement play-based learning effectively. The training would focus on the principles of play-based learning, its relationship with child development, and its alignment with the guidelines established by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP). Additionally, teachers would learn how to design meaningful learning experiences that encourage active participation, exploration, communication, and vocabulary use rather than relying primarily on worksheets and passive activities.

A central component of the program would be the development of practical strategies for teaching English vocabulary through play. Teachers would be introduced to a variety of activities such as role-playing, movement games, songs, storytelling, sensory experiences, scavenger hunts, dramatic play, and collaborative learning tasks. The workshops would emphasize how

these activities can be adapted to different vocabulary topics commonly taught in preschool settings, including colors, animals, family members, body parts, food, emotions, and classroom objects.

Recognizing that many public educational institutions operate with limited financial resources, these workshops would also provide training in the creation and use of low-cost teaching materials. Teachers would learn how to design educational resources using recyclable and easily accessible materials such as cardboard boxes, bottle caps, plastic containers, paper rolls, newspapers, magazines, and fabric scraps. For instance, materials such as the bottle caps could be used for interactive mystery boxes and sorting activities, and recycled materials could support the creation of puppets, flashcards, and dramatic play centers. This approach would ensure that play-based learning remains feasible and sustainable regardless of a school's economic circumstances. Of course, the current study programs appeal to teachers' creativity, but considering all teachers, even the newer ones in the system, could greatly benefit from this help.

Furthermore, the program would guide teachers in selecting appropriate moments to use traditional activities as complementary tools rather than the main source of instruction. Based on the findings of this study, worksheets may continue to serve as reinforcement activities, opportunities to strengthen fine motor skills, or tools for reviewing previously learned content. However, teachers would be encouraged to introduce new vocabulary through more active and meaningful experiences than are play based, thus better aligning with children's developmental needs and learning styles.

Clearly, the implementation of this proposal is expected to benefit both teachers and students. Teachers would gain greater confidence in planning engaging lessons and utilizing a wider variety of instructional strategies, while students would have access to more motivating

and meaningful learning experiences. Ultimately, the program seeks to promote the effective integration of play-based learning in preschool English classrooms, strengthen alignment with MEP educational principles, and contribute to improved vocabulary acquisition among young learners. It's true that MEP currently provides training for teachers in some important areas, but the preschool education sector it has yet to provide an active, interactive, meaningful training regarding the proper and meaningful implementation of play-based learning in the classroom.

The goal is that beyond explaining the importance of play-based learning, it provides teachers with concrete examples and practical guidance for classroom implementation. Many educators recognize the value of play but may feel uncertain about how to translate theory into daily practice; therefore, the workshops would include demonstrations of play-based learning inaction; teachers would have opportunities to analyze real-life situation, discuss potential challenges, and explore strategies for adapting activities to different classroom contexts. By offering practical models and examples rather than solely theoretical information, the program would help teachers develop the confidence and skills necessary to successfully integrate play-based learning into their English lessons.

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## Annexes

- **Annex 1**

**Universidad Hispanoamericana**  
**Bilingual Preschool major**  
**Final thesis project**



### Observation checklist

**Objective:** To examine how play-based learning supports vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional teaching practices in preschool education.

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During the implementation of different activities based on the traditional and play-based methods with preschool students, the teacher will use this checklist to observe and assess how well students learn, understand, and even get to implement the vocabulary by working with both methodologies. Each vocabulary-learning term will be evaluated based on its correct usage, relevance to the project, and clarity in communication.

Group: Interactive 1

Vocabulary Concept	Observed in Project? (Yes/No)	Correct Application (1-3)  1: Rarely observed  2: Sometimes observed	Comments

		<b>3: Frequently observed</b>	
Spontaneous use of vocabulary			
Meaning application			
Use of vocabulary in peer interaction			
Vocabulary retention			
Considerable frequency of target words used			
Variety of vocabulary used			
Confidence in vocabulary use			
Peer modeling and imitation			
Proper response to corrective feedback			

Group: Preparatory 3

<b>Vocabulary Concept</b>	<b>Observed in Project? (Yes/No)</b>	<b>Correct Application (1-3)</b>  <b>1: Rarely observed</b>  <b>2: Sometimes observed</b>  <b>3: Frequently observed</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Spontaneous use of vocabulary			
Meaning application			
Use of vocabulary in peer interaction			
Vocabulary retention			
Considerable frequency of target words used			
Variety of vocabulary used			

Confidence in vocabulary use			
Peer modeling and imitation			
Proper response to corrective feedback			

- Annex 2



## PRE TEST THESIS PROJECT BASED ON TRADITIONAL METHODOLOGIES

Preschool aged students participate in the following traditional learning activities to determine the level of vocabulary learned after implementing this methodology in class.

**Objective:** To examine how play-based learning supports vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional teaching practices in preschool education.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

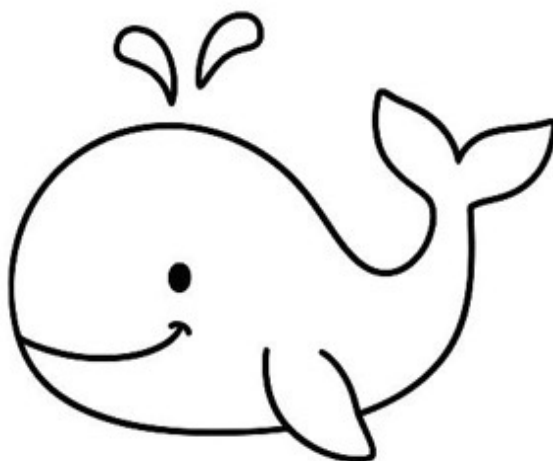
Instructions: Mark the level achieved by the student in each indicator.

Indicator	Achieved	In	Not
		Progress	Achieved
1. Recognizes colors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Uses related vocabulary appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Demonstrates appropriate tracing skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Recognizes letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Recognizes letter sounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

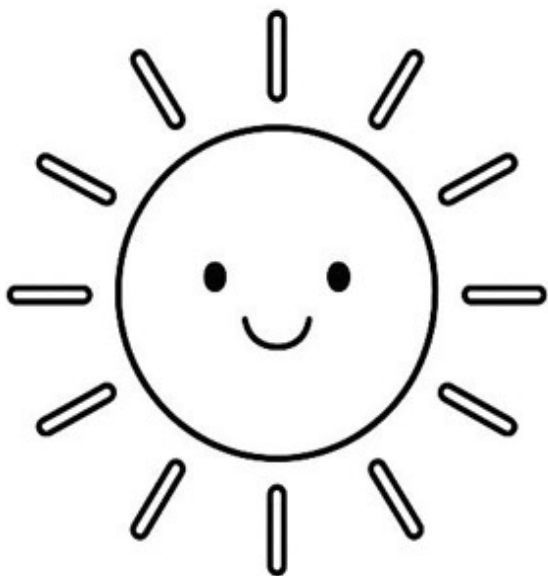
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Achieved</b>	<b>In Progress</b>	<b>Not Achieved</b>
6. Demonstrates listening skills when the teacher explains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Repeats the words said by the teacher during the explanation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**RED**



**BLUE**



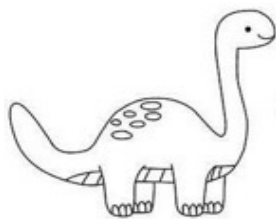
**YELLOW**



**GREEN**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Alphabet Tracing

UPPERCASE

Trace the letters and then color them



### Passive listening test

- Students listen to the teacher explain different items verbally, their characteristics, actions, and so forth. As the teacher describes and talks about the items, students get to see some pictures related to each item. The items are for example: apple, banana, dog, cat, ball, car.



- Students are encouraged to listen only.
- Students are asked to say the words they learned.

- Annex 3

### POST TEST TESIS PROJECT PLAY-BASED LEARNING



Preschool aged students participate in the following play-based learning activities to determine the level of vocabulary learned after implementing this methodology in class.

**Objective:** To examine how play-based learning supports vocabulary learning in comparison to traditional teaching practices in preschool education.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Mark the level achieved by the student in each indicator.

Indicator	Achieved	In	Not
		Progress	Achieved
1. Follows given instructions correctly by performing the required actions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Correctly classifies colors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Recognizes colors and body parts in different didactic materials and performs actions accordingly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Game 1: Simon Says (Body Parts)

Introduce the topic with flashcards or related songs.

Teacher instructions

1. "Touch your head."
2. "Touch your nose."
3. "Touch your ears."
4. "Touch your hands."
5. "Touch your feet."

- Game 2: Color Sorting

**Materials:** colored pom-poms, plastic glasses, child-appropriate tweezer.

Teacher instructions

"Each students gets the space to sort the group of pom-poms they are given according to color.

Put each pom-pom in their corresponding indicated bin.

- Game 3: Color Hunt

**Materials:** colored objects or cards (red, blue, yellow, green).

Teacher instructions

1. "Find something red."
2. "Show me something blue."
3. "Bring me something yellow."
4. "Point to something green."

- Annex 4

## English Supervisor Interview



**The impact of implementing traditional methods such as the use of worksheets for coloring, tracing, and passive listening compared to play-based learning approach in enhancing vocabulary learning on preschool children in the immersive English groups at Jardín de Niños Pedro Murillo Pérez located in Barva, Heredia during the I quarter of 2026.**

### **Purpose:**

The objective of this interview is to collect data regarding the impact of the play-based learning approach versus traditional methods in the process of learning vocabulary in preschool. All information collected is for academic use only and will remain confidential.

**Objective:** To analyze the role of teacher training in implementing play-based and traditional methodologies for English language instruction in preschool.

### **Question 1:**

How important is teacher training in early childhood education for effectively teaching English vocabulary to preschool students?

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**Question 2:**

How does the Ministerio de Educación Pública (MEP) prepare or guide teachers to implement appropriate methodologies for English instruction in preschool?

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**Question 3:**

To what extent does teacher training influence the successful implementation of play-based learning strategies in English classes for young learners?

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**Question 4:**

As the English adviser, what is your point of view regarding the importance of learning vocabulary in preschool and using the appropriate methodologies to do so?

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**Question 5:**

What do you consider are the benefits of play-based learning and traditional methodologies? Is there one you consider more efficient than the other according to MEP guidelines?

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**Question 6:**

What challenges do teachers face when trying to apply play-based methodologies if they have not received sufficient training in this approach?

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**Question 7:**

How can teacher training programs help educators balance play-based strategies with more structured or traditional methods when teaching vocabulary?

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**Question 8:**

From the advisory perspective, what pedagogical skills should teachers develop in order to successfully teach vocabulary through play-based learning?

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**Question 9:**

What recommendations would you provide preschool English teachers who want to improve vocabulary learning through play-based strategies?

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**Question 10:**

Do you consider teachers in the public sector of education have the necessary resources to achieve good-quality English teaching in the preschool level?

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- Annex 5



### **Interview for Preschool Students (5- to 6-year-old students)**

**Objective:** To determine the perception of students towards the implementation of traditional teaching practices versus exploratory/learning with play-based learning approach.

**Instructions:** Students answer the following questions based on their natural and daily experience learning vocabulary in the English language. Students will answer this short interview orally during a brief in person meeting with the teacher.

- 1. Do you learn new English words when you play games?**
- 2. Do you learn new English words when you color or trace?**
- 3. After a game, do you remember the words?**
- 4. After coloring or tracing, do you remember the words?**
- 5. Do you understand the teacher in English?**
- 6. Do you learn new words when you listen to songs in English?**
- 7. Do you learn new English words when you look at pictures?**