

THE SEAVER FOUNDATION

#1157104



**CHILDRENS
VOICES IN ACTION:
EVALUATION OF
VOLCANES
EDUCATION
PROJECT**

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The Seaver Foundation

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FOREWORD

*It has been a pleasure to work on this child-centered evaluation of VKEP. In 5 years of talking to children about the charitable and voluntary services they receive, this has been the most positive evaluation received. VKEP is a crucial provision within the community of Volcanes, and it provides safety, consistency and an overwhelming sense of opportunity to children. There are no major concerns arising, but space to listen to children's subtle messages and make adaptations to the project provisions accordingly. The most significant recommendations are the added role of a school counsellor, or similar, on site to nurture and guide children as individuals in to their future beyond VKEP. The Seaver Foundation would like Mayra, Victor and the wider community of leadership and beneficiaries at VKEP to consider these recommendations, * and welcomes applications for grants to be issued in order to respond to them in the future. It would be an honour to continue working with VKEP, and to play a role in further empowering children by responding to what they have told us, and ensuring they see action as a result of them sharing their voices.*

1. SUMMARY FINDINGS

- ✚ **VKEP is of extreme importance** to the children of the Volcanes community. The children feel **overwhelmingly positively** towards it, and its **objective values are engrained** within them.
- ✚ Children are **generally satisfied with the physical environment** at VKEP and value all of their classrooms, library and space. Some note the absence of always having drinking water and glasses available, and others note ways in which the garden area could be improved and extended.
- ✚ Children feel **VKEP offers opportunities** to them, that would not otherwise be present. This relates to education, employability and community development.
- ✚ In particular, children state **the importance of learning English** in relation to increasing their employability options and feel **confident** in this field due to their learning in VKEP.
- ✚ Children find **computers more difficult** than English, they mostly recognise value in learning ICT skills, but are generally less confident in their abilities in this area.
- ✚ Children understand that **education, and ambition are important** to VKEP, and in general this creates a very **conscientious** approach to academia. On occasions this **can creep into anxiety** about their studies and the future.
- ✚ Children have a **diverse range of high ambitions**, these are unique to the individual, but mostly include some form of **life-long learning**, whether that be continuing in traditional schooling, or moving into practical skilled fields.
- ✚ Whilst children feel **confident they will achieve in educational goals**, this **does not always transfer in to confidence to reach their dreams of employment**. Whilst feeling secure in VKEP they are generally more wary of the un-knowns beyond this and do not appear to have clear pathways for transferring educational attainment and defined dreams, into a reality for their future.
- ✚ Children **value feeling happy or loved**, and time spent on **fun and community support**, as highly as being educated at the project. This evidently follows through into their hopes for the future. Children highlight the importance of environmental campaigns, green play areas, football and positive encouragement from others as important factors within this.
- ✚ There are **mixed feelings towards the current Volcanes community** from children, whilst a small majority are satisfied, there is a significant proportion feeling dissatisfied with an unclean environment and feeling unsafe due to conflict or crime. Some children find **comfort and safety** from this **in their time at VKEP**.
- ✚ **Relationships amongst children and adults are mixed**, whilst there are many positive relationships there is also a minority of children with concerns about being able to **trust** others. Children express a desire for adults to support and encourage them.
- ✚ Children show a **particular motivation for, and clear ideas of how to, develop their community in the future**. This refers to improving the area environmentally and by giving back to and supporting the people around them.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ It is recommended VKEP **do not make any major changes**, as the current formula is effective, and well established within the community of children. Smaller changes are advised below.
- ✓ It is recommended that VKEP incorporates **additional written objectives**, that relate to children's **wellbeing** now and in the future. Based on children's voices, these should be inclusive of happiness and loving support. VKEP already practices this organically, however having it in writing as a listed goal will assure children of their feelings that aspiring to these things is of equal value to education.
- ✓ It may be considered that **sharing some of the focus of academic education, with other practical forms** of life-long learning may move VKEP's objectives, closer to the heart of the children's own dreams. This may mean reconsidering if 'staying in school' beyond compulsory age and clarifying life-long learning as a concept inclusive of other skills types.
- ✓ VKEP may consider looking at **methods employed for teaching English**, and how these generate a feeling of confidence within children, and whether these could be **used to enhance ICT provision**.
- ✓ It is recommended a **'school counsellor' or similar role is employed**, to be a trusted adult to talk to and help children navigate towards their future dreams. This person would ensure each student is known as an individual and assist them as such. It is predicted this would help improve trust, highlight any concerns of safety or anxiety for any child, and transfer the confidence VKEP provides in the present, in to their future.
- ✓ VKEP should **extend its links with the wider community** of Puerto Vallarta, allowing children insight in to the working world. To keep some form of familiarity for children, this may be done via former VKEP students returning to talk to children and present their world of employment, or by extending the reach of existing extra-curricular programmes which integrate throughout town, such as football.
- ✓ Children's **enthusiasm and passion for improving the environment** around them should **continue to be harnessed**. Leadership opportunities should continually be offered to the children, and improving or creating **green, play areas** near to the project should be considered a priority to improve wellbeing for all.
- ✓ In any instance when **drinking water facilities** are broken or unavailable, they should be repaired as a priority to ensure it is available and accessible to children at all times.

3. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

3.1 TASK UNDERSTANDING

- Baseline measures were taken to gauge children's understanding of the task and their general mood on the day of responding, as this could inevitably impact responses on other elements.
- In emotional selection tasks, children generally used a range of emotions, and understood the task well. 'Happy' was the most commonly used positive emotion, whilst 'worried' was the most commonly chosen negative emotion. As a baseline measure of how they felt 'today,' 96/ 106 children chose a positive emotion, of which 81% chose 'happy.' There is some suggestion this is thought of as the 'correct' response culturally to the question, 'how are you today?'
- Once the confidence scale task was explained, evaluators felt all but one of the children understood the task. Some children marked only on the extremes of the scale, not using the line to express a variable level of confidence, and with 8 marking only on the positive extreme.
- In 'Keep or Remove' only one child appeared to lack understanding, and baseline measures demonstrated children were happy to use both the heart and the dustbin to represent their preferences. 86.8% of children kept 'today,' with a range of reasons given if responses were negative.
- Where a response is marked as 'other,' this tends to refer to when a child said they did not know or gave multiple conflicting answers.
- During the free expression task children were asked to mark on the paper what VKEP meant to them. It may be inferred that some children took the task literally and drew the project area itself rather than its significance to them personally. Therefore these items were used only to support more reliable existing findings from other data.
- Once present at the project, evaluators at TSF volunteers ran an additional focus group asking students about their aspirations, how VKEP and their community could help them to meet this. Children showed a good understanding of this and the data was used to support existing findings from other data.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

- 106 children participated in the task, representing more than 25% of children registered at the project at the time of the evaluation being performed. 66 children participated in the free expression task. A good mix of males and females took part with slightly more females represented at 58%. Overall gender differences were not detected.
- Children ranged from 6 – 18 years old, with both the mode and mean falling at age 10 years. 77% of participants fell between the ages of 7 and 11 years old.
- Children of the age 13 and above, were more likely to respond negatively across all scales. Older children were more likely to express stronger opinions, and to choose to 'remove' items they were not pleased with. The average number of items removed across all children was 5.9; however 80% of those aged 13 and above removed more items than this, with a maximum of 12/38.

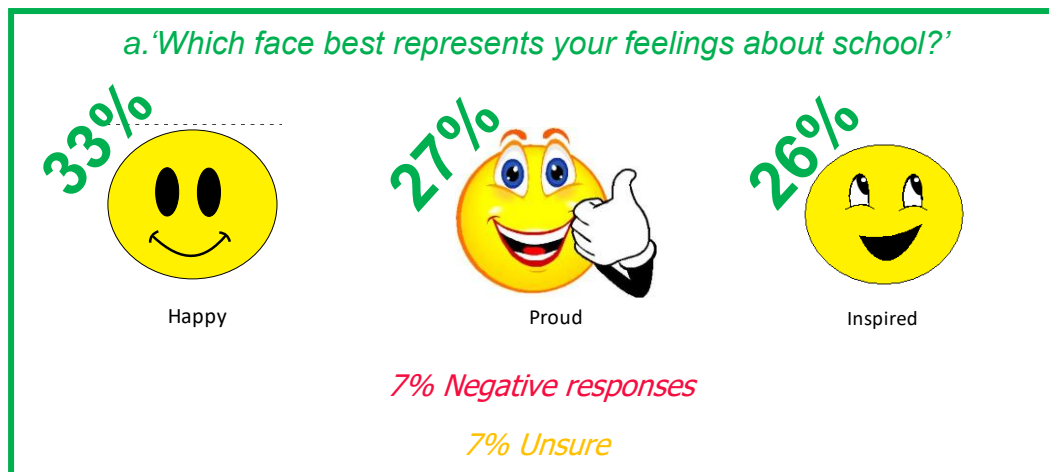
4.3 EVALUATION OF TASK

- During task completion some children found some difficulty in the translation and understanding with one evaluator. Following this, two evaluators completed some of the activities together, however it was found children generally were less open and comfortable in this environment.
- On confidence scales, there were some queries over the word 'confianza' used for 'confidence,' for which a directly relevant translation of meaning was not found. It is suggested in the future children are asked to assess their competency. There was some reported confusion with interchangeable names used to describe VKEP. The use of the word 'Volcanes' is the name of the area the community resides in, and children sometimes referred to the project as 'school.' It is suggested in the future an image recognisable to be uniquely symbolic of the project is used alongside any chosen title.
- The picture used to demonstrate 'my community now' was critiqued by one participant saying that it did not represent the community they lived in. They stated that houses were brick with glass windows. One participant said they could not answer community questions as they did not reside in the area.
- The additional aspirations task was made up of a focus group, meaning there is some loss of privacy and speaking up was the only method to communicate which may limit some children's responses. Evaluators then chose a sample of responses to include in data which they found to be representative of the group, this may lend itself to some researcher bias, however findings from this task supported more reliable existing findings from other data.
- Overall children responded very positively to the task and appeared to enjoy it. % of children, chose to keep the task, however it is noted these answers may be biased by the presence of the evaluator.
- Children report mixed emotions towards talking about their feelings with others, with 69.8% being positive, and 28.3% negative. Given reasons for this included the relief of worries, and lack of trust in what others may do with information shared, respectively. It is inferred therefore that for some children, mixed-method, external communication tasks such as this, may allow them to share more freely.
- Reporting of the results has exceeded the initial goal of within 3 months for a number of reasons. The additional task, and the need to cross reference all tasks, provided significantly more data to analyse. Staff working hours have been interrupted within the charity, there was an ICT failure and project growth in another area has taken priority where immediate risks and needs were identified as urgent. It is expected these results remain current and relevant to children and staff attending the project where no major changes have been reported. The initial charge agreed to cover resources with VKEP has been waived in light of this delay.

Overall this is a positive exercise, of which a good proportion of children were represented, understood and engaged well. Children generally enjoyed being able to exercise voice, and ownership over the project of which they are the heart. In future, any similar activity, should aim to incorporate teaching about children's rights to participate in decisions that affect them, in order to further rationalize the tasks they are doing and empower children with knowledge of their rights.

4. ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S FEEDBACK OF VKEP'S MEETING OF ITS OBJECTIVES

5.1 Objective 1: Children 'Go to school'

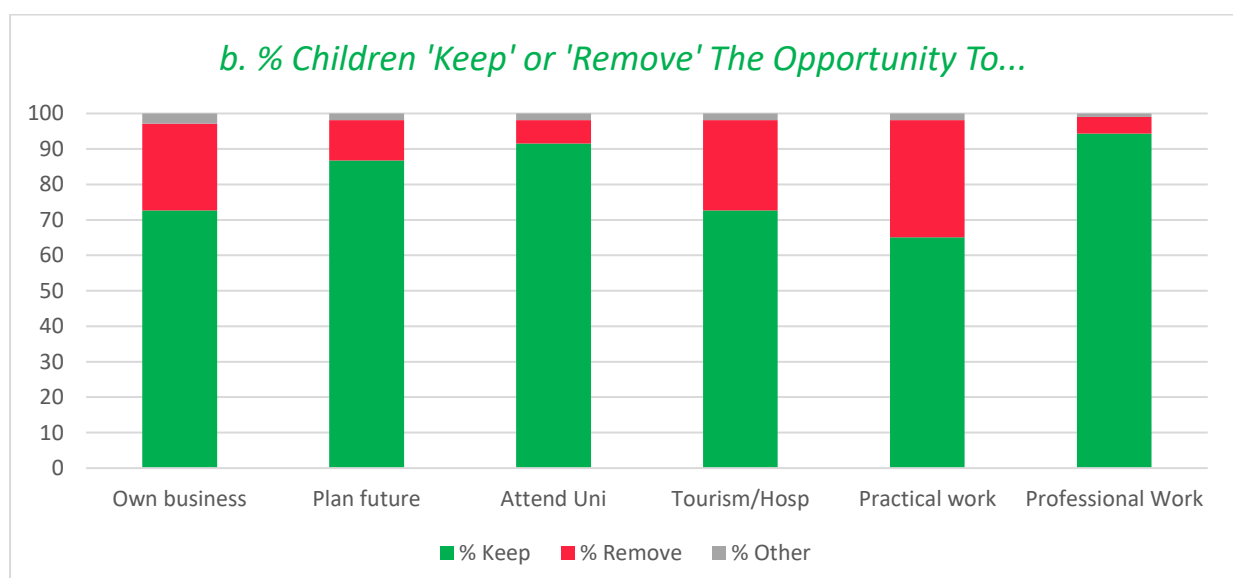


- **86%** of children responded to 'school' with a **positive emotion**, and these were fairly evenly split between happy, proud and inspired.
- 7 children felt negatively about school, there were no consistent reasons noted for this.
- All of the **7 children that felt negatively towards school, felt positively towards VKEP**. This indicates that the two learning environments are considered distinct, and VKEP offers a preferable learning environment for some.
- Whilst discussions about teachers did not feature highly in most children's responses, the second most popular career choice was a teacher, demonstrating children's value of the profession.

**No formal attendance registers were made available limiting the understanding of this objective, particularly in relation to public governmental schooling provision. Reported attendance at VKEP is high.*

5.2 Objective two: 'Inspire lifelong learning,' and 'Stay in school, Dream big.'

5.2.1 Children's Dreams



- Children generally demonstrated a good idea of what they would like to do in the future. Of the 6 options presented in 'Keep & Remove,' Children generally had multiple future prospects that would please them, and 1 to 2 that would displease them.
- 1/3 of children did not remove any of the future options, however, even these children did have specific career ideals in mind when prompted.
- Older children in particular demonstrated direction in their dreams. All but two children over the age of 14 years old demonstrated preferences in their future education and employment prospects.
- The most popular choice of future opportunity was to work in a professional field (94%), with groups of children articulating aspirations for **Doctor (6), Teacher (6), Engineer (3), Architect (3), Police (3) and Vet (3)**. These careers would require further studies, and by default correlate well with the desire to **attend University (91%)**. These are not definitive of life-long learning, but show aspirations to be educated beyond school age.
- The least amount of children would wish to work in a practical role, demonstrated on the cards by pictures of those working in services and uniform such as cleaners and mechanics. However it should be noted that 65 % of children would work in this industry and individual children vocalised dreams of being a **cleaner, van driver, and gardener**.
- 73% of children would be happy working in tourism and hospitality, or owning their own business. The third most popular career choice (after Doctor and Teacher), was **Chef (5)**, which may indicate a preference towards vocational learning and creative skilled work, moving away from traditional academic schooling for many.

c.



Individual differences were largest in this field.

Whilst some professions were popular

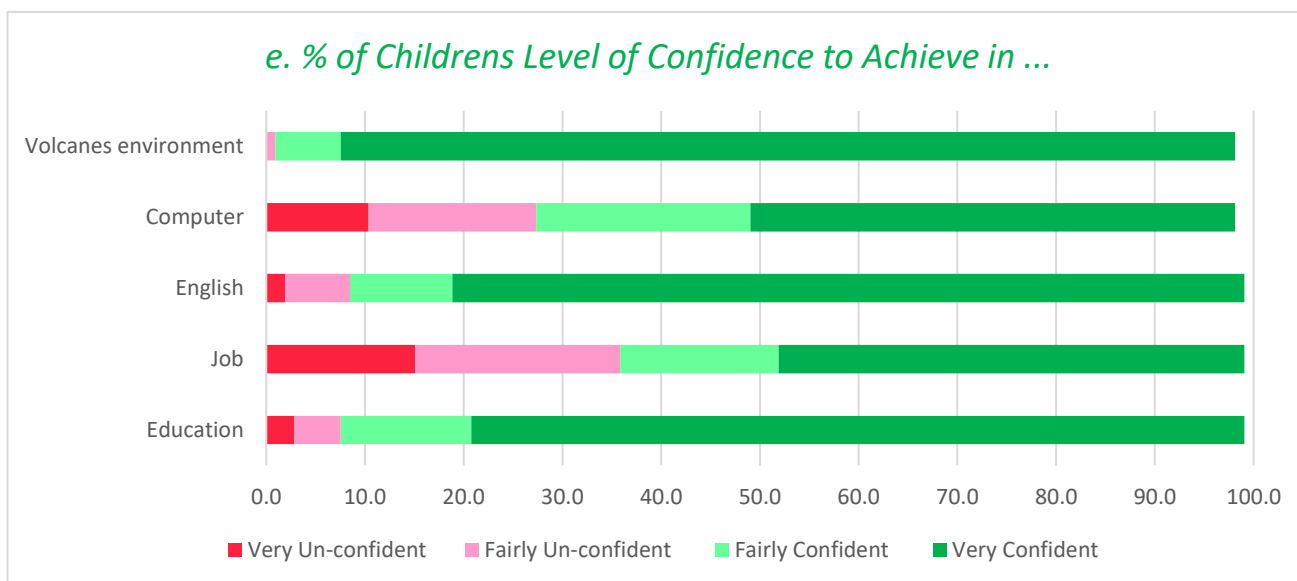
every CHILD Made their UNIQUE MARK

& there were 26 different career aspirations mentioned upon prompting, ranging from owning a fashion business to being a football manager, from a guitarist, to an ICT technician; from owning a dog adoption centre, to being a neuro-surgeon.

- It is worth noting that for many children, 'dreaming big' does not necessarily involve staying in school or committing to lifelong learning in the formal sense of the word. They refer to just wanting to be happy, travelling, having a family, being a housewife, doing sports or taking over their parents business.
- Children consistently demonstrated that dreaming big also refers to other changes that are needed to make them happy, especially relating to family, helping others and improving the environment around them. See section on community below for further exploration.
- When drawing what VKEP meant to them, happiness, love and green spaces, featured 4 times more regularly, than any representations of staying in school or academia.

d. "I don't have ambitions, but rather goals and one of those is to continue studying in order to have a good job. I think that if the project continues, I can achieve it (the goal) and in turn give the opportunity to someone less like me so that they too can study and achieve their goal."

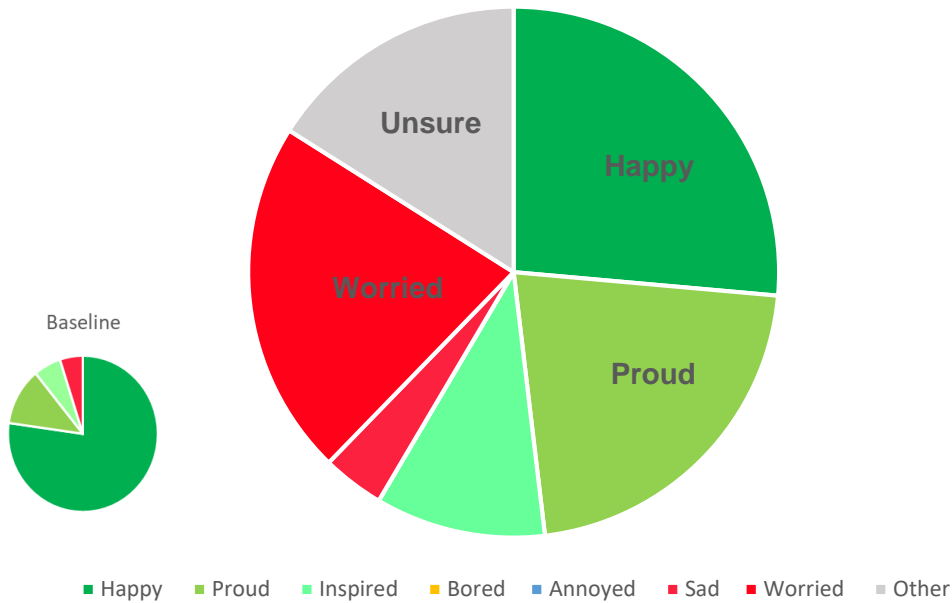
5.2.2 Children's Confidence to Achieve Their Dreams



e. Ave. Scores of Confidence to achieve in	Education	Job	English	Computers	Volcanes environment
(% of maximum possible 100% confidence)	84.6	62.5	86.2	68.7	93.1

- Children demonstrate feeling very secure and confident in their abilities within VKEP at 93.1% average, and still within the 'very confident' region for their abilities in general Education.
- This drops quite significantly to 62.5% for getting the job they desire after VKEP.

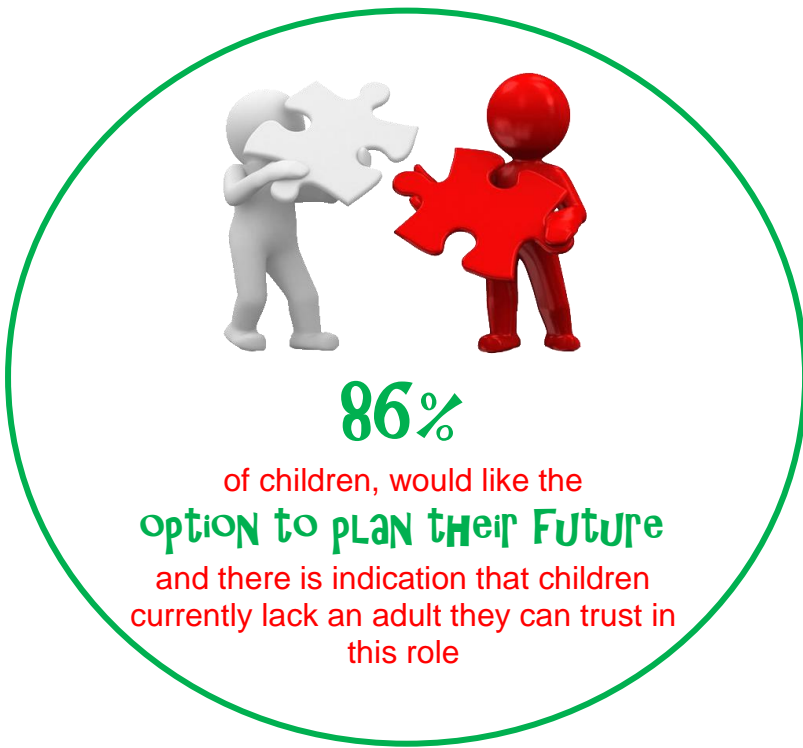
f. Emotions Associated with 'How I Feel About My Future?'



- Whilst children’s dreams of employment demonstrate high ambition, their confidence to achieve this is lowest of all the items assessed.
- Feelings about the future, were significantly more negative as a group with more than ¼ children describing being worried. 36/38 children who described feeling ‘worried’ or ‘sad’ about the future, did not describe feeling that way in general on the day, indicating this is triggered by thinking about the future.
- 16% of children were unable to answer, or offered mixed, confused emotions when describing how they felt about the future, by far the highest of any field.
- When elaborating on these negative and unsure feelings, **28 children expressed concern at not knowing what it will hold and whether they can achieve what is expected in education.**
- There was a general feeling of being very **conscientious** in education and wanting desperately to achieve, but **for some this crept into worrying** about if this did not happen, and a lack of knowing about the wider community outside of this.

g. *“My Dad doesn’t think I can be anything in the future”*
“I’m scared of working alone”
“In the workplace ... maybe they’ll treat me badly there”

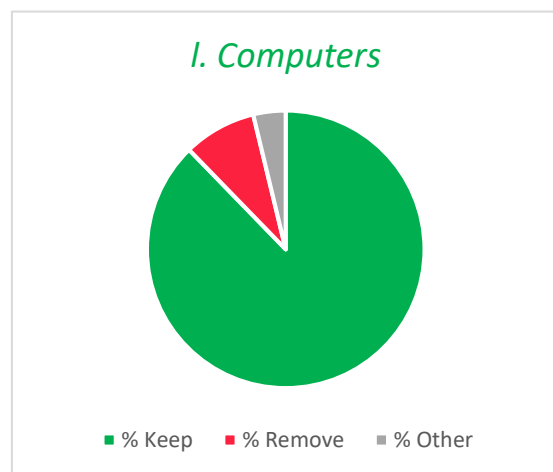
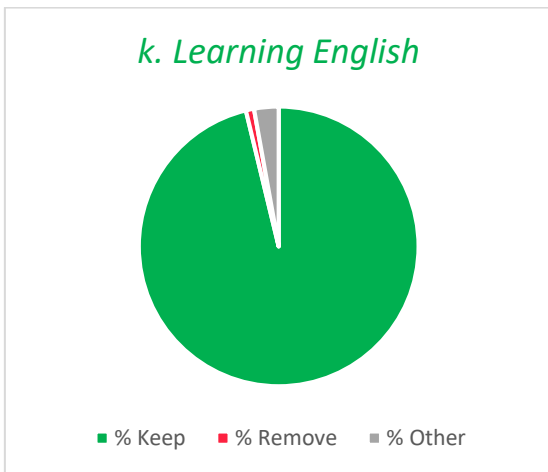
h. Results indicate that for many children, their confidence to achieve is confined to their familiar, current environment, in particular in relation to the support they receive from VKEP. For some this drops significantly when leaving the security of VKEP & imagining how to convert this into success in employment in the wider community.



j. "Teachers at Volcanes are really nice and don't tell me off and I can plan my future with help from them"

- There were multiple indications that children desired more presence of someone available to talk to and guide them. On the few occasions when adult staff at VKEP such as teachers are discussed, there is indication that they are valued for their role as someone to encourage and guide them, as much as formally educate them.
- Throughout their free discussion of interpersonal relationships and confiding in others about their concerns, there was a presence of **16 negative remarks around adults, most commonly pointing to lack of trust as a reason.**

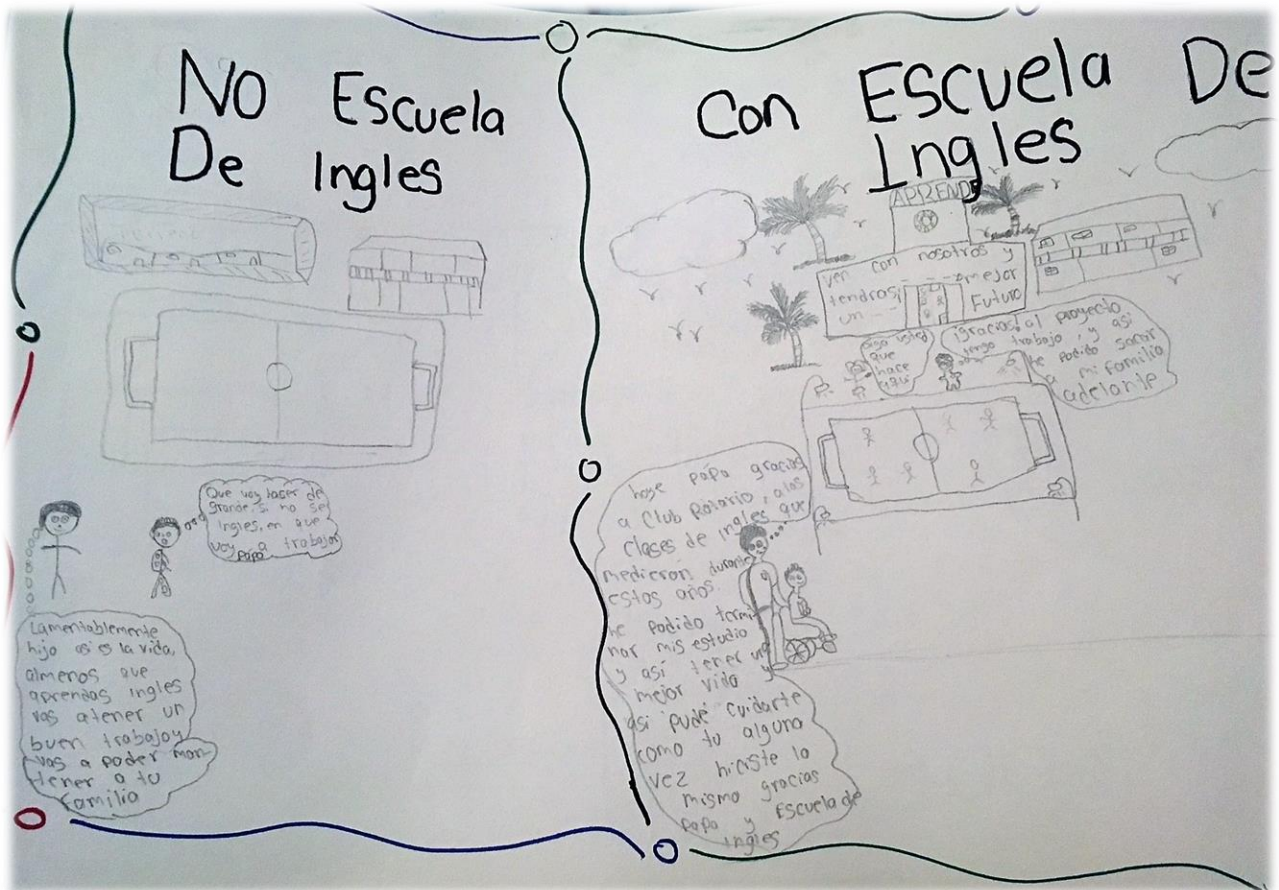
5.3 Objective three: 'Providing children with English and computer skills.'



m. Ave. Scores of Confidence to achieve in..	Education	English	Computers
(% of maximum possible 100% confidence)	84.6	86.2	68.7

- The results of keep and remove, show that whilst computers rate more negatively than English, they are still better than the average score across all items on this task. The difference between the two is less stark than that of the confidence indicating that confidence is more of the issue with computers rather than enjoyment or wish to continue learning.
- On average children were **more confident in English than they were with computers**. As a percentage of possible maximum confidence, the average children rated their abilities in English was 86.2%, whereas computer confidence was rated 68.7%.
- There were **7 comments about computers being difficult or not understood** and enjoyed; and 13 positive comments relating to the ability to use them for **research, fun and future opportunities**.

n.



"English will help me get a job "worthy of myself" and to be more employable because then I can talk to the Americans and understand them"

o. There were very few negative comments about English

55 positive comments

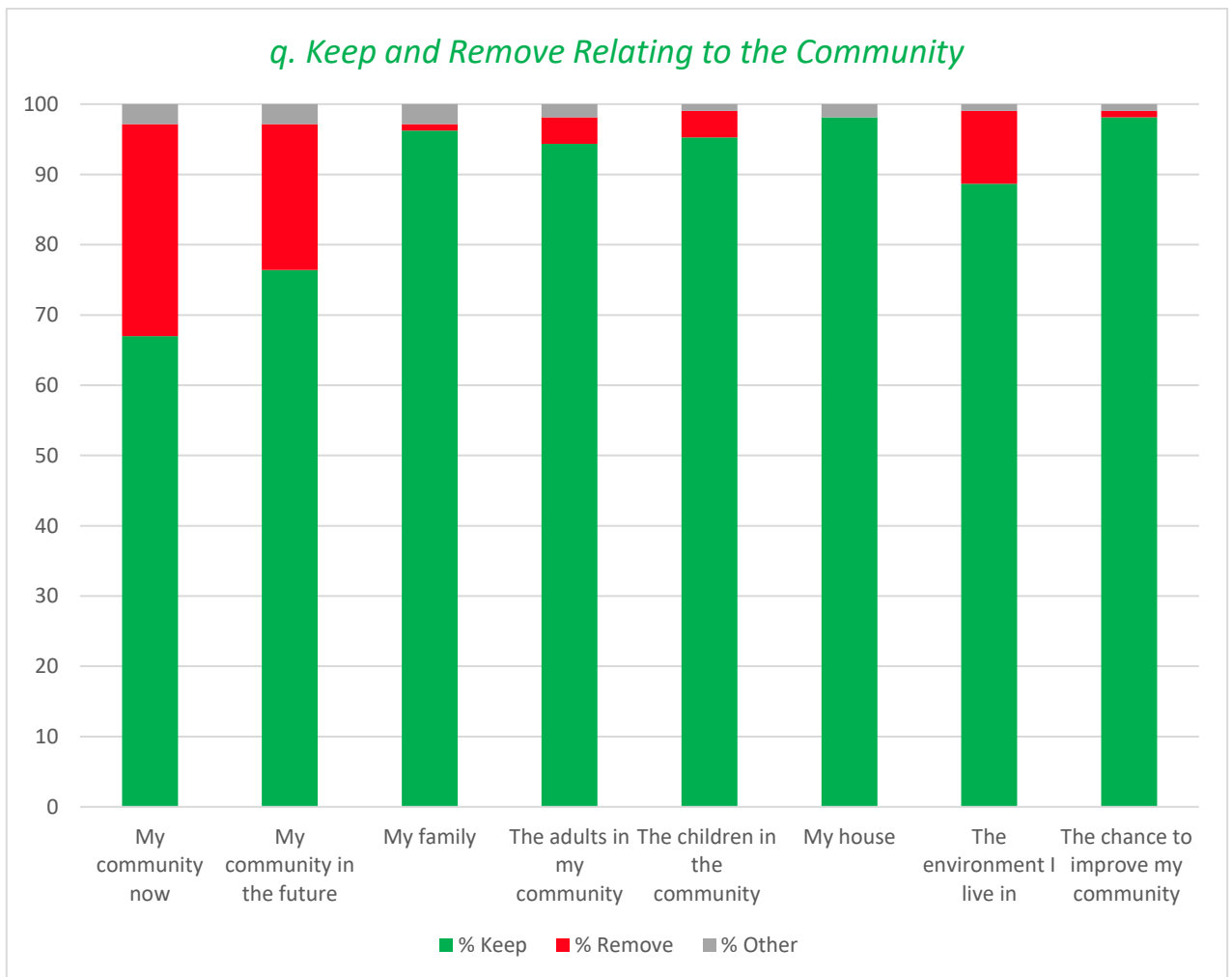
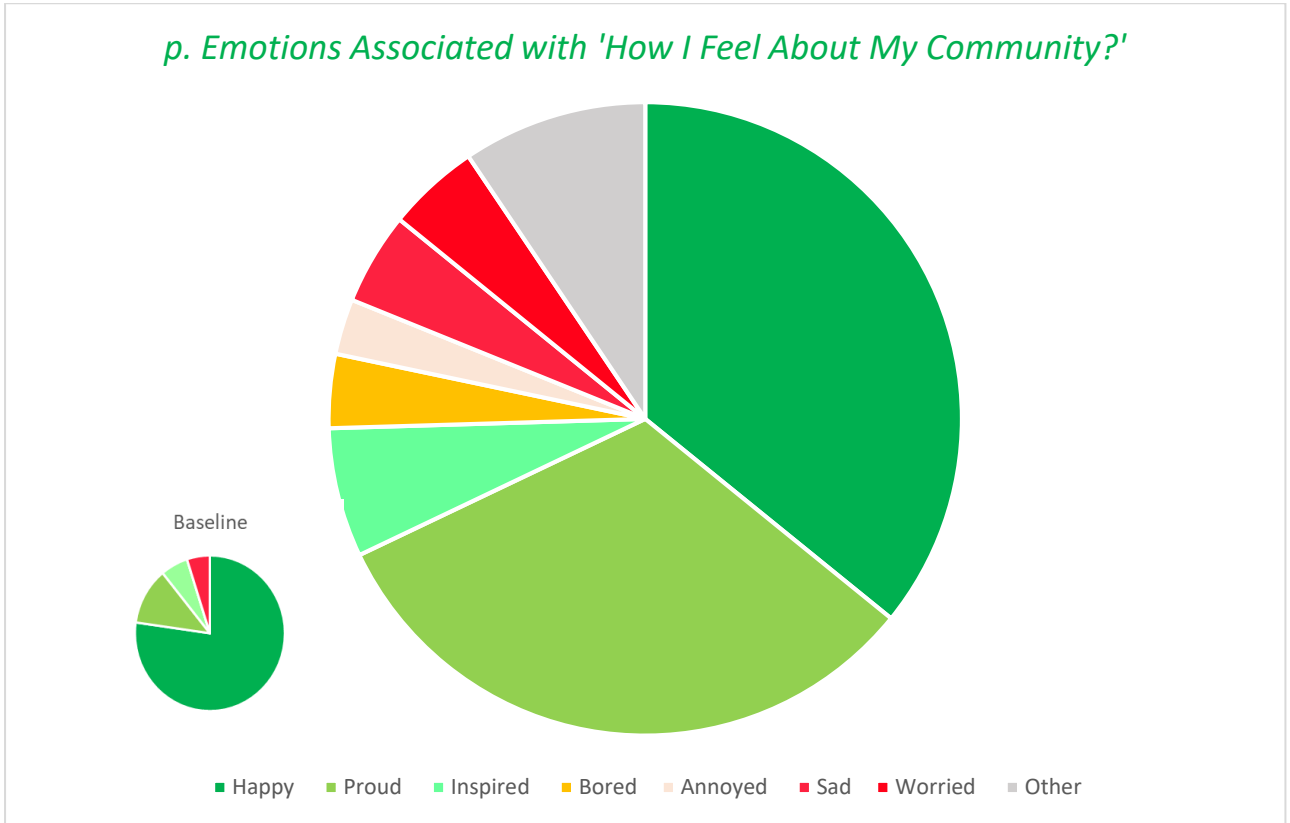
more than 50% of the number of participants. 34 of these positive comments related to the future

opportunities in work and communication

that learning English provides.

5.4 Objective four: 'Strengthen their sense of community by incorporating values'

5.4.1 Feelings About the Community Now



- When responding to how they felt about ‘my community now,’ overall children had some of their least positive responses across all tasks.
- ‘My community now’ was one of the most removed items, falling lowest only after ‘sewing’ and the ‘opportunity to work in a practical field’ (excepting baseline measures).
- **1 in 4 children did not respond with a positive emotion when asked how they felt about their community now**, with 10 unsure responses and negative responses fairly evenly split between **sad (5), worried (5), bored (4) and annoyed (3)**.

<i>r. Spoken Negative Commentary Relating to the Community</i>	<i>Mentions</i>
Community being unclean or unpleasant	38
Fighting / Violence / Feeling Unsafe	16
Family worries and illness	12

- Results indicate that children’s concerns about their community do not lie within the physical structures of it, and additional spoken data allows us to see the most common explanation is related to the environment being unclean or unpleasant around them, which received 38 mentions in the additional commentary children gave.
- 27 of these comments directly referenced rubbish or littering, and **10 of the children made pro-active suggestions of things they would like to do to improve this**. This included more bins in the area to prevent burning of rubbish; starting campaigns and organizing teams to pick up litter; and fining people who do drop litter in the streets.

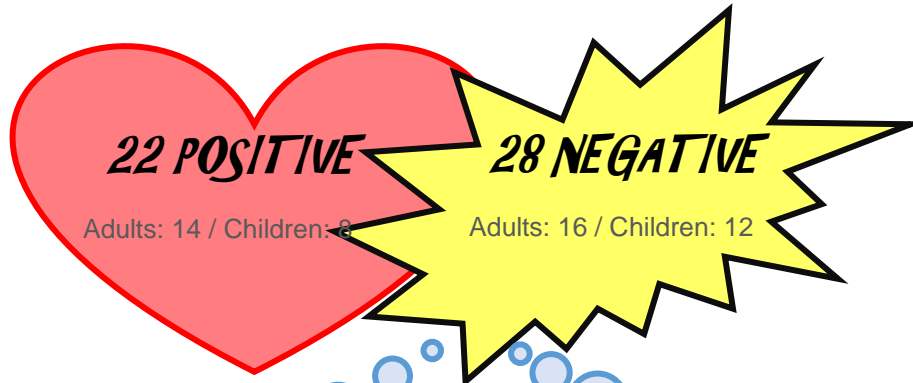
5.4.2 Feelings About Improving the Community in The Future

The importance of **green spaces** was mentioned **23 times** in children’s spoken commentary to the tasks, and especially in relation to **play & creating calm atmospheres**

s. “They should put grass at the school and make teams of people to clean the streets every 2 to 3 days”

- Alongside speaking about this, children showed the value of green areas, and areas to play and have fun, evidently through **55 representations in their drawings**.
- Other less common suggestions for improvement included re-building or building larger housing; preventing water waste and contamination; and adding air-con.
- Concerns around **fighting, violence or feeling unsafe; and worries relating to family and illness** were also mentioned by children 16 and 12 times respectively, despite 90% of children feeling positively towards their family.
- When asked what the community could do to help children achieve their dreams, many children responded by saying reducing violence to others and animals.

u. Spoken Comments About Inter-Personal Relationships



v. *How can your community help you to achieve?*

“By not saying that we can’t”

w. *I’m embarrassed to talk about feelings because my parents are gossipers and talk to people when I’ve told them feelings in the past”*

- Interpersonal relationships featured in children’s explanations about how they felt about all things: today; their school; their home; and the community. There were more references to adult relationships overall, and negative interpersonal relationships often reasoned a **lack of trust**.
- One of the most common answers to how the community could help children to achieve was that they could **encourage them and support them more**.



s. *“I already have an idea of what I want to do, I want to help people ... I like to serve people”*

- Notably the free expression representations of VKEP did **not** show signs of the negative elements discussed about the Volcanes community, indicating these concerns do not carry in to the project.
- **10 less children responded negatively to their community in the future than at present, and the chance to improve my community scored joint highest with their houses and VKEP classrooms (excepting baseline measures) at 98.1 % positive.** Almost all children would value the opportunity to work towards this.
- This correlated with spoken data, where children showed a strong desire to improve the world around them. There were **20 mentions, made without prompting, where children expressed wanting to help others, and improve the environment around them.**

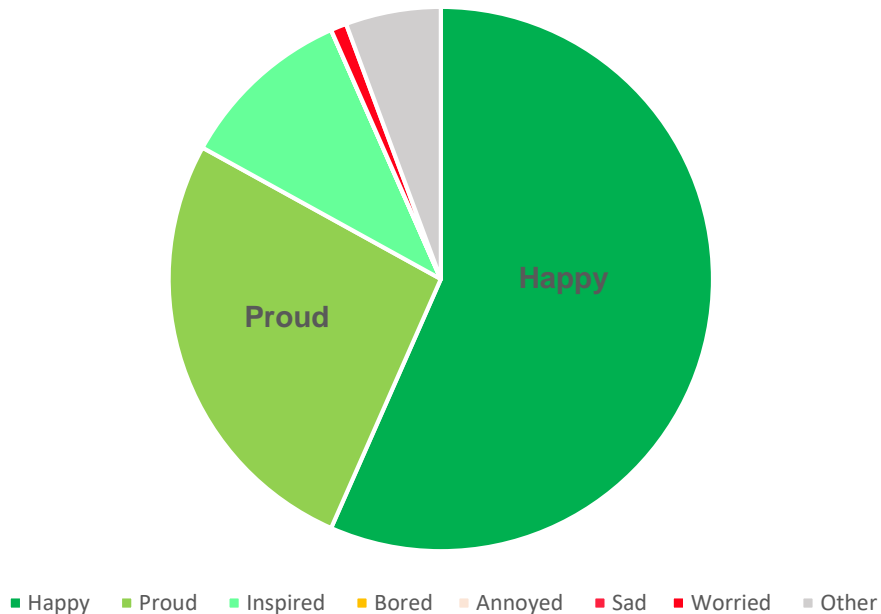
* It is worth noting that children recognised that the community is more developed now than when the project first started.

5.5 VKEP Overview of all Objectives

5.5.1 Overall Feelings and Understanding of VKEP

- Children demonstrate clarity on what the goals and aims of the project are. When asked how the project can help them to achieve their goals, the most common answers referred to learning and studying securely, in particular referencing English, Computers and scholarships.

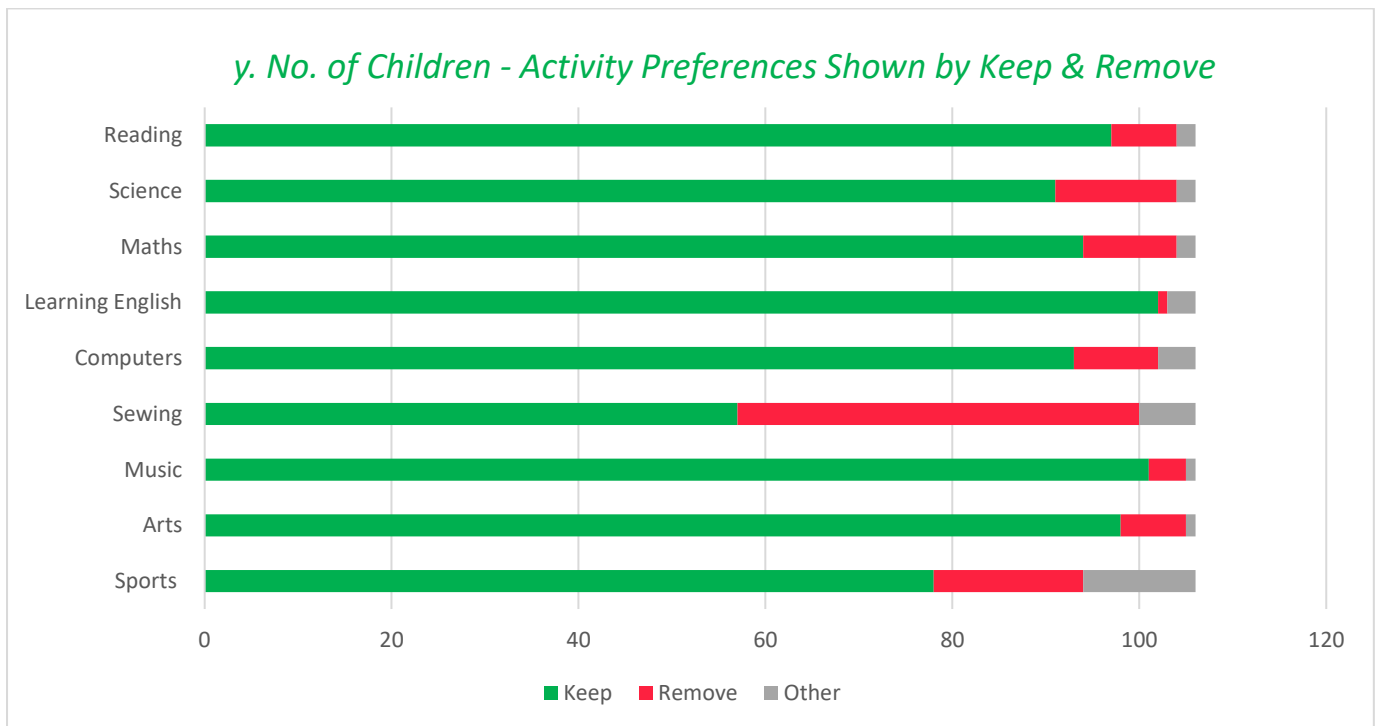
x. Emotions Associated with 'How I Feel About VKEP?'



- Given that 'happy' was the 'go to' positive emotion across all items, it is inferred that when alternative answers such as 'proud' are given for VKEP, they are thought out, and more specific responses.
- There was only one non-positive response to VKEP, which was explained by the child feeling concerned they were going to be dismissed due to poor attendance.
- The results for VKEP were preferable to those of public school provisions and all of the 7 children that felt negatively towards public school, felt positively towards VKEP. This indicates that the two learning environments are considered distinct and that **VKEP offers a preferable place to learn for some.**
- On a number of occasions, children demonstrated **self-awareness of the expectations of the project** including regular attendance and trying hard. For some children this **translated into slight anxiety**, for example when home circumstances may prevent regular attendance.

"(I'm worried I) don't have the studies to get a job; sometimes I can't attend English because I have to look after my Grandma."

5.5.2 Rationale



- Curriculum topics were varied and specific to the individual with the majority of children, 69%, showing some preference by choosing activities they would remove.
- **VKEP teachers, classrooms and library were responded to positively** by all but 1 or 2 children. The garden area was removed by 6 children, and some children elaborated on how this could be improved to be a greener, more well-kept space.
- In free expression tasks, **green spaces featured 47 times, 16 more times than representations of the building in which VKEP is set.**
- The most popular answer as to why they felt positive about VKEP articulated by children, was that it gave them **opportunities, inferring that they may not otherwise have.** Of the 38 separate comments relating to this, many were relating to **work prospects due to education**, in particular English language, security in education, and improving their confidence.
- Other potential reasons for this are indicated in spoken data where children commonly mention feeling **safe and secure**, reasons relating to **play, and positive relationships.** These included 10 mentions of being able to train with a team for football, and 10 mentions of **the fun, support and guidance** teachers at VKEP bring. One child explicitly states that the “teachers at Volcanes do not shout at me like they do at school.”

HAPPINESS, LOVE, play & FUN

featured
26 times,

more regularly than any educational elements, in children’s free task about what VKEP means to them

“VKEP shows me that yes, it’s possible.”

aa. 1 child articulates what is hinted at by many, when he suggests VKEP supplements & improves his education.

"When I arrived I didn't know anything, my average scores were below what I needed and now I am motivated to work harder and my average scores are higher."

ab. What does VKEP mean to you? Drawn or Written Symbols Representing	No. of Representations out of possible 66
Green Space	47
Buildings	31
Happiness or Love	18
Learning English	11
Football	10
Play or Fun	8
Family and Community Support	7
Computers	4
School Learning	3
Opportunity	3
Religion	3
Library	3
Dance	1
Teachers	1

Ami este proyecto se hace bien porque los (teachers) se esfuerzan o hacen el esfuerzo de enseñar a los niños y veo que muchos niños disfrutan este proyecto por como los maestros tratan a los niños y se que se esfuerzan por hacer entender, ~~para~~ para los niños entiendan, hasta que aprendan y lo han logrado debo decir.



Ac. **Football Featured in 10/66 pictures**

drawn to show what VKEP meant to them, with many including, **ONLY Football in their image.**

This demonstrated that whilst not a part of the formal written objectives, this is a significant part of the project in many children's minds.



5.5.3 improving VKEP

- When asked how VKEP could improve in helping the children, the most common responses were improving the environment, in particular with grassy areas; adding mathematics classes; and always having drinking water and glasses available. In addition there were individual mentions of history classes, art classes, supporting other communities and encouraging more girls to learn.

ac. Answers which appeared multiple times on how can VKEP improve?

Cleaner environment, more grass, play, or garden areas.

Maths classes

Have water and drinking glasses available always

An additional kitchen or dining area (that children could access)

Improve security, helping to stop violence or stealing

More classrooms (music room)