

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY

# The First Words

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Lexical development in EFL children in the  
Netherlands

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09-12-2011

**BA-Thesis – Taal- en Cultuurstudies – Taal & Ontwikkeling**

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# 1. Introduction

In recent years the number of primary schools providing Early Foreign Language Education has rapidly expanded in the Netherlands. According to Europees Platform (Europees Platform, 2011), there are about 600 schools teaching four year old children a foreign language (mainly English) for a few hours per week. This trend is in line with the advice of the Dutch Education Council (Onderwijsraad, 2008), which states that children should start learning a foreign language at preferably age 4. Their reasoning is that children are best at learning languages at an early age because they can learn it in a way that is relatively similar to how they acquire their first language. They also state that a second language brings positive cognitive development and an understanding of language with it. One other reason for early language education is to make sure the Netherlands can keep up with international developments (speech van Bijsterveldt, 2011). This trend also fits in with the intention of the EU to ensure European civilians have a certain proficiency in at least two foreign languages. Although the reasons for early foreign language education appear to be solid, there are still large gaps in knowledge for researchers on this matter. As a small contribution to filling the gap, the current paper investigates the effect of internal and external factors on the growth of Dutch and English passive vocabulary over time. It seeks to answer the question of which factors affect the receptive vocabulary in both languages and whether English has a negative effect on the children's Dutch receptive vocabulary.

This paper will start by describing a theoretical framework followed by its central research questions and hypotheses. My investigation involved tests conducted to measure vocabulary over time. The tests and their results were conducted and obtained in the context of the Foreign Languages in Primary school Project (FLiPP) which tries to get an insight into the level of English of five year old Dutch children. The method used in conducting the tests will be explained, and the results will be described and interpreted. The final parts of the paper will be a conclusion and a discussion section with the main conclusion that both the Dutch and English passive vocabulary improve over time.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In 1986 English as a foreign language became an obligatory subject for Dutch children in the last two years of primary school (10-12 years old). The goals that were set in this type of education called EIBO (English in primary school) were mainly communicative. In recent years, however, parents and schools have felt the need to respond to the broadening of English as a lingua franca in Europe by demanding earlier foreign language education in the children's curriculum (Goorhuis-Brouwer *et al.*, 2005). This need corresponds to plans of the European Commission to make people proficient in three languages. The Commission states that in order for children to cope with that many languages, the learning of the first foreign language should start as soon as possible (Kubanek-German, 1998). Recommendations of the European Commission are based on a report stating that

“...an early start can confer considerable advantages on children by activating such natural languages acquisition mechanisms as they possess, (...) and by providing them with a linguistic and intercultural experience which can have a beneficial formative influence on their cognitive, social, cultural, acoustic, linguistic and personal development (including qualities of persistence and participation) and on their sense of self.” (European Commission, 2011)

The most important part of this statement deals with the children's linguistic development: children learn a second language in which they can eventually express themselves. One of the reasons why the European Commission state that children should start young is that if they do, they will ultimately attain a higher level of proficiency. Moreover, it is not only the parents, but also the European Commission who believe that a good pronunciation in a foreign language is most easily obtained by starting very young (Verspoor *et al.*, 2011). Although native-like proficiency in a foreign language can be reached by adults for some aspects (i.e. grammar), other aspects tend to be more difficult (i.e. pronunciation) (Singleton & Ryan 2004). The age effect will be discussed later.

Another aspect of this statement that has drawn (and still receives) a great deal of attention in research on early foreign language learning is the cognitive benefit of bilingualism. Bialystok (i.e. 1991; 2008) has done a considerable amount of research on

this finding that children who are bilingual are better at executive control. Executive control implies that they outperform monolinguals when it comes to decision making or solving technical problems. Diaz and Klinger (1991) state that there are even more cognitive gains in terms of the ability of classification, creativity and reasoning. The children's overall metalinguistic awareness seems to be beneficially affected by being in touch with another language. Their most important point is that it appears that only a small amount of input is necessary to have these advantages. This would mean that children with a few hours of English per week can already benefit from these cognitive benefits. Malakoff *et al.* (1991) state that "both languages should be supported academically and emotionally by both the community and the society"; if this is not the case, cognitive benefits are unlikely to be found. Since English has a high prestige in the Netherlands, this should be the case for children in early foreign language education as well. In short, the early learning of a foreign language is thought to be beneficial for the development of the child as a whole.

Although both the literature and the European Commission seem to suggest that being bilingual at an early age is beneficial, not everyone agrees with this. Conflicting results have actually been found regarding this issue (there is a large amount of individual variation (Genesee *et al.* 2004)), the starting age (Singleton *et al.*, 2004) and much more. Therefore, in order to attain insights into some internal and external factors influencing the learning of English at an early age (for a summary see Unsworth *et al.*, 2011); an overview will be given in the next sections. External factors include socio-economic status, whether or the teacher is a native speaker (NS) and the amount of input on the learning of English. The external factor 'length of exposure' will be combined with the internal factor 'age of onset'. Also the influence on the L1 and children learning English as a third language will be discussed.

Lexical development in children has been a much researched field. However, not all previously mentioned factors have been studied thoroughly. In those cases broader studies will be referred to.

## **2.1 Age of onset and length of exposure**

A topic of ongoing interest in second language learning is the age at which learning the language should commence. In the introduction it was stated that a popular belief is that

learning a second language should be started at a very young age. However, mixed results are actually found.

On the one hand there are studies stating that children should start as soon as possible since their brains are sensitive to language before a certain age. Lenneberg (1967) supports this idea and states that after puberty the ability to learn grammar is almost gone due to neural maturation. Around the age of 14 the brains would be fully developed and no grammar can be learned anymore, an idea that fits in with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Consequently the ability to learn language has a clear cut-off point for him: the onset of puberty. Other studies state that this ability slowly deteriorates with time (i.e. Singleton & Ryan 2004). However, this hypothesis states nothing specific on the development of lexicon (the subject of this paper). Later research by Isel *et al.* (2010) does: the representations of the lexicon seem to be influenced by aging of the brain. This would mean that the ability to learn language, and more specific words, is heavily restricted due to maturation of the brain, thus no one can become proficient in another language if they start at a later age.

However, research by Harley (1998, as cited in Muñoz 2008) shows that even though results agreeing with the CPH have been found in language acquisition in natural settings (that is, without instruction in class), no evidence seems to exist for extending these findings to class settings. As Muñoz (2008) points out, foreign language settings tend to be quite different from naturalistic ones due to the fact that the amount of exposure is limited to an average of an hour per week and the source of input is limited to the teacher who does not always speak in the target language. In addition not every teacher offers the same quality and quantity of input.

This difference in learning environments shows another point of consideration: the length of exposure seems to be a better indicator of the ultimate attainment of foreign language learners (i.e. Muñoz 2008, Kubanek-German 1998), but tends to be overlooked in most studies. The length of exposure usually means the amount of months/years a person has been exposed to the target language. However, in EFLL this length of exposure may not be that meaningful considering the limited amount of time spent on English weekly. This is why a point linked to length of exposure, namely the amount of input per week, will be discussed in the next section.

## 2.2 Quantity of input

In order to be able to learn a language fluently, exposure is necessary. According to Singleton & Ryan (2004) “exposure time per se is widely recognised as a crucial factor in differentiating levels of language proficiency” (p.201).

However, it appears that the exposure time in EFLL classes differs considerably from immersion programmes and natural ways to learn another language. Singleton & Ryan (2004) describe the difference of learning through immersion and foreign language learning as follows: a naturalistic learner hears the language throughout the day, whereas in a class setting this is at most a couple of hours per week. This suggests a large discrepancy in ultimate attainment. Muñoz also states that “*an early starting age produces long-term benefits when associated with greater exposure, as in immersion programmes, but not when associated with limited time and exposure, as in typical foreign language learning classrooms*” (2008, p. 582) This means that an early start facilitates language only when quite a large amount of exposure is present, which is not always the case foreign language education in the Netherlands.

On the other hand, sufficient exposure does not necessarily mean that children learn the language well. For example, Ceñoz (2011) found that children with a starting age of 8 and an input of 400 hours of English outperform children of 4 years old with an input of 700 hours when it comes to a cloze-test, vocabulary and pronunciation. Results on this subject are not clear, however (i.e. Garagorri 2002).

On the whole, most studies claim that the amount of input is a good indicator of ultimate attainment, if the input is correct and in the foreign language. There are no studies yet that claims figures relating to how much input is necessary for a large vocabulary.

## 2.3 Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status (SES) has been shown to have an effect on the ultimate attainment of the L1 (i.e. Hoff & Naigles 2002, as cited in Unsworth, *et al.* 2011). Also Hoff (2003) states that children from lower SES families build their vocabulary more slowly than children who come from higher SES families. However it is not clear why this is the case. Hoff (2003) states that this is because of a difference in the way different SES mothers speak to their children. The effect of SES on the language development in

the L2 has also been researched. It appears to have the same effect (Scheele 2010; Kubanek-German 1998).

There are several ways to find out what the SES of certain families is (i.e. income, neighbourhood, etc.), but the easiest way seems to be to ask them what education they have had. According to Nikolov *et al.* (2006) the educational level of the parents is the best predictor of SES.

## **2.4 Native Speaker**

According to Goto Butler (2009) teachers should have a high proficiency of the language they teach. Arguably, native speakers have the highest proficiency possible, which is why they are preferred most. However, not all schools in the Netherlands (providing Early English) have teachers who are native speakers.

In her oration Janet van Hell (2010) states that in order to teach children how to speak proper English, they should be taught by native speakers. She reasons that children are only capable of learning a language without an accent at a very young age. In order to take advantage of this, children are best taught English before group 7 (when they are 10 years) and should at least get classes of near-native speakers. Also, she believes that if the Netherlands wants to keep their international position the government should pay attention to the level of English in training new teachers (van Hell, 2010).

On the other hand, some people state that non-native speakers can be preferred since they have the experience of learning the language and thus can help children who are having problems with it. In their literature study, Nikolov *et al.* (2006) concluded that in order to provide good education, the teachers should be proficient in both the L1 and the L2 of the children.

## **2.5 Effect on L1**

Although the Dutch Board of Education and the European Commission agree on the early implementation of foreign languages, several issues have been put forward. Especially the Dutch Political Party for Freedom (PVV) and the Stichting Taalverdediging (Foundation for language defence) (2011) have raised some issues as they feel that the Dutch language is being repressed by implementing English in primary schools. Both



reason that more English will be at the expense of the Dutch proficiency (e.g. PVV, 2011)

Several research projects have been done on the effect of learning a L2 on the first language (for an overview see de Bot & Herder, 2008). For example immersion programmes in Canada (with 50% French and English) show that there is no negative effect on the development of the first language (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). In the Netherlands similar results have been found by de Bot & Goorhuis-Brouwer (2005; 2010). They state that the development of Dutch is not delayed by English. Furthermore weak children improve their Dutch over time in a way that there is hardly any difference anymore. These results suggest that the PVV and Stichting Taalverdeding should have no reason to be worried about the implementation of English: the L1 appears to develop normally.

## **2.6 Children coping with a L3**

In the Netherlands some children attend school who have not yet been exposed (or have very limited exposure) to Dutch. This means that their Dutch is not yet as established as that of their peers and thus are acquiring Dutch and learning English at the same time, when their first language is not fully developed either. Unfortunately there is limited research as to whether these children should start learning English. No evidence has been found regarding the influence of English and Dutch on their first language. However, although participants were limited in number, de Bot and Goorhuis-Brouwer (2005) state that children coping with a L3 do not seem to be influenced in their development of Dutch when learning English. Also, their English seems to improve as well. Over time they even appear to overtake their Dutch peers in English. However, no definitive conclusions can be drawn from these results.

### 3. The current paper

As stated in the Introduction, the current paper will focus on the lexicon acquired by EFLL children after one year of English. The reasons for this are simple: words are the building blocks of language, put differently, without words it is impossible to communicate (in spoken language). Also, the first things children learn in EFLL are words, because it is impossible to learn any learner grammar or anything else without using words. The focus of the paper will be on the passive (that is, comprehension) part of the lexicon, since hardly any active vocabulary can be expected after a few hours of English. Also comprehension of a word is necessary in order to use the word. There is a standardized test available to test children on their passive lexicon. This test is the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) (Dunn & Dunn 2007). To be able to make a comparison between languages, both the Dutch and the English passive vocabulary will be tested with those picture selection tasks in order to answer the following question:

*What is the result of one year of English as an early foreign language in primary school for children in the Netherlands on their passive vocabulary in Dutch and English and what factors influence the growth of the passive lexicon of children in both languages?*

In order to answer the main questions, the following questions will be answered. Not every question is necessary for a complete answer (3&4), but in order to provide a more complete picture, these will be answered as well.

1. *Does the Dutch passive vocabulary increase?*
2. *Does the English passive vocabulary increase as well?*
3. *Do boys and girls have equally high scores?*
4. *Are children with an extra language able to learn English as well?*
5. *Do children from higher SES families score better on the tests?*
6. *Do children who start earlier have an advantage? Or can there be an advantage in scores when it comes to length of exposure in months?*
7. *Does the amount of English per week in school matter for the results?*
8. *Does it matter if children are taught English by a NS or not?*

The literature discussed earlier in this thesis has shown some interesting insights in what results can be expected. Hypotheses will be given per subquestion:

**1. Does the Dutch passive vocabulary increase?**

According to the literature it can be expected that the passive Dutch vocabulary will at least be steady throughout time. No decreases were found. Considering the children are developing normally, increases in vocabulary can also be expected.

**2. Does the English passive vocabulary increase as well?**

Over time, the expectation is that children do learn some words of English. Although no great numbers can be expected. Furthermore, a large amount of variation should be expected.

**3. Do boys and girls have equally high scores?**

No literature was found on differences of vocabulary learning in gender. However, the hypothesis is that the scores will be similar.

**4. Are children with an extra language able to learn English as well?**

Several studies suggest that children with another L1 can very well learn both Dutch and English at the same time.

**5. Do children from higher SES families score better on the tests?**

According to some papers, children from higher SES families outrun children from lower SES families when it comes to vocabulary learning.

**6. Do children who start earlier have an advantage? Or can there be an advantage in scores when it comes to length of exposure in months?**

There is still considerable debate on whether or not an early start ensures success. Children in immersion do benefit from an early start, but the amount of exposure is not equal to EFLL situations. Therefore the expectation is that children who start earlier with EFLL do not benefit from the early start. The length of exposure can matter since the longer someone learns a language, the more proficient they will be.

**7. Does the amount of English per week in school matter for the results?**

According to the literature the best indicator for the level of proficiency is the amount of minutes a child receives input in school. Therefore the expectation is that children with a (relatively) large amount of English per week, will have higher scores in the English test. No setbacks are expected for the Dutch vocabulary when children receive more input.

**8. Does it matter if children are taught English by a NS or not?**

Since native speakers are the most proficient in their language and this level of proficiency is important for the quality of the input, higher results for those children can be expected. Furthermore, native speakers do not (or hardly) code switch so the input is all English, which may not be the case for non-native English speakers.

## 4. Method

The current investigation takes place in the context of the Foreign Languages in Primary school Project (FLiPP). This longitudinal research projects aims to investigate the effects of Early English on the English competence of children at this early level of education, and which factors influence the acquisition of the foreign language. The children taking part in this project were and will be tested at three points in time: fall 2010, spring 2011 and spring 2012. In order to see the effects of EFLL, the children will be compared with non-EFLL children and EIBO-children. The effect of the teacher's proficiency will be a core point in the research as well as the number of hours of English per week required for the necessary for the child's proficiency. The questions Project FLiPP tries to answer then are the following:

- "What are the effects of introducing English earlier in the curriculum (i.e., in kindergarten or 'groep 1' instead of grade 5 or 'groep 7')
- How important is the teacher's proficiency level in English?
- How many hours a week are necessary to ensure that pupils learn English successfully?" (Project FLiPP, 2011)

In order to answer these questions, a large battery of tests was conducted targeting the children in the first year of primary school who are learning English as a foreign language. Amongst the receptive and productive tests are tests that focus on pronunciation, morpho-syntax, lexicon, working memory, et cetera. As stated earlier, the focus of the current paper is on the receptive vocabulary in both Dutch and English.

The current paper uses part of the data gathered by Project FLiPP in fall 2010 and spring 2011 to answer the questions mentioned in chapter 3. In order to get insight in the levels of passive vocabulary knowledge two tests were used: the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Dutch (PPVTNL) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test English (PPVTEN). These tests developed by Dunn & Dunn (2007) are widely used to get an insight in these levels. In this part of the paper a description of the children participating in this experiment will be given. After that the different materials and the procedure will be described.

#### **4.1 Participants**

The children were selected through a letter sent by Project FLiPP (see Appendix for consent forms) to their parents which stated that there would be research about English in primary schools. The parents were asked to sign the consent form and fill in a short questionnaire so that the children could take part in the project. This means that participation depended on the parents of the children.

In this experiment 66 children (29 boys and 37 girls) took part. The children come from fourteen schools in the Netherlands. As can be seen in Table 1, the children are not equally divided over the different variables. Half of the children (33) receive English from a native speaker, the other half is taught English by a non-native speaker. There are five children who have been raised with another language than Dutch or English at home. The amount of minutes of English ranges from 40 to 225 minutes per week.

#### **4.2 Materials**

To find out what the receptive vocabulary knowledge of the children in Dutch and English is, a test called Peabody Passive Vocabulary Test (PPVT-4) was used (Dunn & Dunn, 2007). This is a standardized test and useable for children from the age of 2;6 up to adults. For the Dutch version of the test other pictures and words were used. Both tests measure mostly nouns, verbs and attributes.

In order to find out background information on the children, parents were asked to fill out a questionnaire. Through these answers some helpful insights could be found on socioeconomic status, a third language et cetera. Also the parents were asked to sign a consent form so children could be tested, recorded and filmed.

<b>School in:</b>	<b>Amount of boys</b>	<b>Amount of girls</b>	<b>Is the teacher a NS?</b>	<b>How many children with L3?</b>	<b>Minutes of English per week</b>
<i>Wijk bij Duurstede</i>	2	4	No	0	75
<i>Utrecht</i>	2	3	No	2	40
<i>Pesse</i>	3	1	Yes	0	60
<i>Amsterdam</i>	2	5	No	0 (6 missing)	60
<i>Culemborg</i>	2	2	No	1	40
<i>Oud -Beijerland</i>	2	0	No	0	75
<i>Wageningen</i>	2	3	Yes	1	60
<i>Ridderkerk</i>	3	1	Yes	0	60
<i>Waalwijk</i>	2	3	Yes	0	40
<i>Laren</i>	2	3	Yes	0	90
<i>Ede</i>	0	4	No	0	120
<i>Rosmalen</i>	1	4	No	0	120
<i>Groningen</i>	3	2	Yes	1	130
<i>Dordrecht</i>	3	2	Yes	0	225
<b>Total</b>	29	37	-	5	-

Table 1 – Distribution of children per school, gender, NS, L3 and amount of English per week in min.

### 4.3 Procedure

After the consent forms and questionnaires had been collected, the testing could begin. Every child was told that they would soon be asked to do some English games. The children were all tested individually in a quiet room, so no data would be ruined due to noise interference. The child sat behind a computer with the tester next to them. A camera was placed in such a way that it would record the tester, the child and the screen.

The first series of tests were conducted from September to December 2010, the second series from May to July in 2011. Not every child was tested by the same examiner, but through instruction and practice beforehand on the way to conduct the tests was kept the same. Both tests took approximately 10-20 minutes.

The procedure was as follows. It was explained to the children that they would soon see four pictures and hear a word. They were instructed to point at the corresponding picture. When they did not know which one to point at, they were instructed to pick one anyway. Then the assistant told them that they were going to listen to the first item and praised the child with positive encouragement every time (s)he pointed at a picture. The answers were noted on paper and later entered in an Excel file. Both the Dutch and English versions of the test were conducted in the same way, the only difference being that the English version was conducted in English if the child seemed capable of understanding that version.

To determine the level of passive vocabulary of the children, (at least) two levels should be defined. All the levels or sets of words consisted of twelve items. The first level is the lowest level or basal set (the minimal level a child has). Depending on the age of the child, a set was selected. The examiner's task was to test every set before the first until maximally one mistake was made. In the Dutch version the maximal number of mistakes for this level was four. The second level that could be found was the highest level or ceiling set (the maximum level of the child). Again the starting point depended on the age of the child, but now the levels were going up until the child made 8 mistakes (or 9 in the Dutch version). For both the basal and the ceiling set, every set should be conducted completely: stop a set would not be interrupted when the amount of mistakes was reached. Both the basal and the ceiling set are needed to determine the level of passive vocabulary of the child. When these sets were found, the total number of mistakes was subtracted from the number of items taken. This number is called the raw score and will be used in this research. In the next section the results of the children on both tests can be found. Every factor (Gender, L3, SES, NS, Minutes per week & Starting age combined with Months of exposure) will be discussed separately.

## **5. Results**

In total raw scores on the PPVTNL and PPVTEN (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) of 66 children will be analysed. Not all five variables can be completed because the parents did not always return the completed questionnaires. At first the results of all children will be looked at. The paper will focus on any differences in gender, followed by descriptive data on the variable L3. The next variable to be discussed is the social economic status (SES) of the children's parents by looking at the parent's educational level. The fourth variable concerns whether the children have a native or non-native speaker as an English

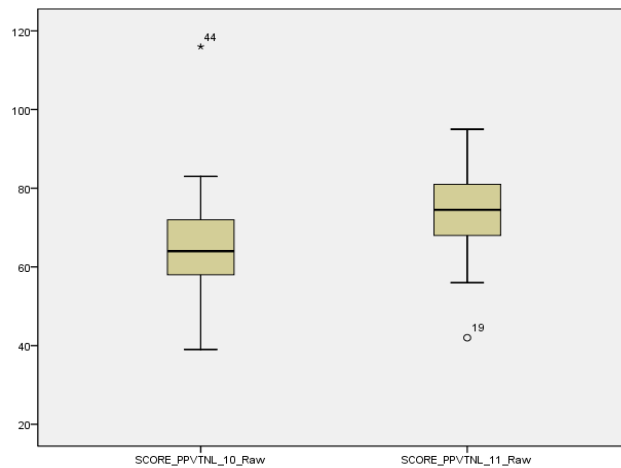


teacher. Subsequently the amount of English taught per week will be analysed. Finally a combination between starting age and length of exposure will give some insight on the effects of this on the scores. For every variable the range and mean will be given. The boxplots of the different variables can be found in the appendix.

## 5.1 All children

### PPVTNL

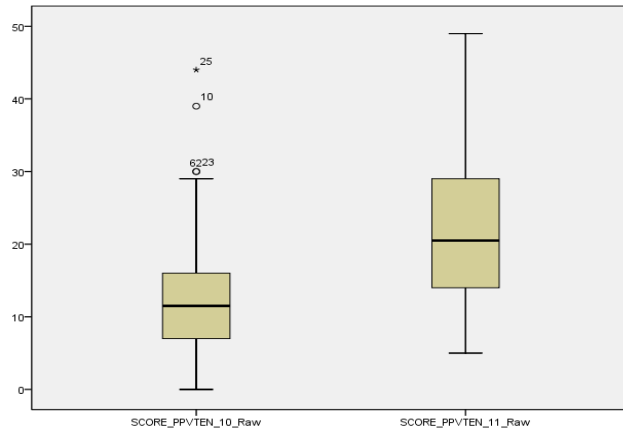
The average score for all children in 2010 is 65.26 with a range of 77 between 39 and 116. In 2011 this raises to 74.44 with a range of 53 between 42 and 95. This increase can easily be seen in figure 1. Also in 2010 one heavy outlier can be found which causes the range to be larger.



**Figure 1 - Raw PPVTNL scores all children**

### PPVTEN

The average score for the English version of the passive vocabulary test increases as well (12.97 to 21.12). The range in 2010 is 0-44, whilst in 2011 it is 5-49. Figure 2 shows the average scores.



**Figure 2 - Raw PPVTEN scores all children**

## 5.2 Gender

### PPVTNL

In this experiment 37 girls and 29 boys took part. In 2010 girls score lower on the PPVTNL with a mean of 64.05 while the boys have a mean of 66.79. In 2011 the boys still outrun the girls with a mean of respectively 77.03 and 72.41. Both girls and boys increase in average scores (figures 3 & 4).

### PPVTEN

For the English version of the passive test, boys again score higher than girls. In 2010 boys score an average of 13.45 while girls score 12.59. In 2011 the average score for the former is 21.90 and 20.51 for the latter (figures 5 & 6). Ranges of both boys and girls are quite large. In 2010 girls score between 2 and 44, in 2011 this is 5-49, both with some outliers. Boys in 2010 score between 0 and 30, in 2011 the scores range from 5 to 35.

## 5.3 L3

The number of children having to cope with another language besides Dutch and English is just 5, while 55 children do not have to do this. Even though five children who speak a third language is a limited number, their results will be shown. When looking at the results, this will have to be borne in mind. For six children it is unknown if they speak another language at home, therefore these results cannot be shown.

### PPVTNL

Both groups of children improve their scores over time. In 2010 children with a third language start at an average score of 58.60, 'normal' children on the other hand score 66.49. Range of the former is 39-79, the latter range is 48-116. By 2011 this evens out with L3 children having a slightly higher score (76.40 compared to 74.85). In 2011 ranges are less large for both groups (no L3: 42-95, L3: 60-95). (Results are shown in figures 7 & 8.)

### PPVTEN

Scores for the English passive lexicon test for L3 children range between 15 and 30 in 2010 with an average of 21.40. For children without a L3, scores range between 0 and 39 with an average of a mere 11.89. In 2011 both groups score better on the test, with L3 children outrunning the others with an average of 23.20. Non L3 infants score an average of 19.69. The range in scores for L3 children in 2011 is 9-35, for the other children this is 5-40. (Results can be found in boxplots in figures 9 & 10.)

## **5.4 Social Economic Status (Educational level parents)**

For this variable, three groups have been created. The first group (Low,1,2,3,4) consists of children with parents who have had lower education, that is primary school (1), LBO (lower vocational education) (2), MBO (middle vocational education) (3) or HAVO/VWO (general secondary education/preuniversity secondary education) (4). In total twelve children are in this group. The second group (fourteen children) consists of children with one parent who is higher educated (HBO (higher professional education) (5) or WO (university) (6)) and another who only attended primary or secondary school. In the third group (25 children) both parents are higher educated. Also educational data of fifteen children's parents are missing. The first group will be called Low, the second Medium and the third High.

### PPVTNL

All three groups improve their scores considerably (group 1: 67.33 to 74.17, group 2: 63.07 to 73.86, group 3: 68.76 to 77.68). What is striking is that the second group has the lowest scores at both times. The third group scores best. Scores for the first group range between 50 and 79 in 2010, later this range is 66-85. The second group

respectively scores between 56 and 79, & 64 and 89. The third group ranges from 48-116 in 2010, and from 62-95 in 2011. (Results can be found in figures 11-13.)

### PPVTEN

In 2010 children in the first group seem to have a slight advantage on the others with an average of 13.75 and a range of 4-28. The second group scores 12.21 (range 0-20) and the third 12.40 (range 2-30). In 2011 the advantage of the first group is not present anymore. They now have an average of 16.17 (range 5-34) whilst the second group scores 20.86 (range 5-40) and the third scores 22.40 (range 5-37). The latter group also has the biggest growth. (Results are shown in the figures 14-16.)

## **5.5 Native Speaker (NS)**

This variable is equally distributed (33 children in both groups). No data are missing.

### PPVTNL

Children without a native speaker as a teacher of English (the first group) score 67.24 (range 48-119) on average in 2010 and 73.36 (range 62-91) in 2011. The native speaker group scores less in 2010, namely 63.27 (range 38-83). In 2011 they outperform the first group with an average of 75.52 (range 42-95). Again both groups improve. (The scores can be found in figures 17 & 18)

### PPVTEN

Both groups improve their scores on the English receptive test. Children in the first group (no NS) start with 12.55 (range 0-44) in 2010 and climb to 21.85 (range 5-49) in 2011. Children with a NS teacher start with a slightly higher score of 13.39 (range 2-39) and end with a slightly lower score (compared to the first group) of 20.39 (range 6-37). Differences between groups, however, are limited. (Figures 19 & 20 show the results.)

## **5.6 Total minutes English per week**

The current variable has been divided into seven groups, depending on how many minutes per week (40, 60, 75, 90, 120, 130 & 225) children are being taught English. This results in groups of 5 to 20 children.

### PPVTNL

The fourteen children in the first group (40 minutes) on average score 65.07 (range 48-81) in 2010 and 73.00 (range 42-95) in 2011. The second group (60 minutes) consists of twenty children with an average score of 62.80 (range 48-80) in 2010 and an average of 75.40 (range 56-95) in 2011. Eight children with 75 minutes of English per week have an average score of 76.50 (range 53-116) at the first measuring time and an average of 78.38 (range 71-91) at the second point. The next group (90 minutes) consists of five children. Ranging from 50-83 in 2010, the average is 65.40. In 2011 the average score is 69.00 (range 57-85). Nine children with 120 minutes of English per week score 64.33 in 2010 (ranging from 56-72), whilst scoring 72.33 in 2011 (range 66-82). The penultimate group (130 minutes) of five children has an average score of 59.60 (range 39-82) in 2010, and 75.80 (range 60-87) in 2011. The final group consists of five children having 225 minutes of English per week. On average they score 64.80 in 2010 within a range of 56 to 72. In 2011 this average rises to 76.20 ranging from 69 to 83.

### PPVTEN

Children who have 40 minutes of English per week improved their average score from 12.50 (range 0-30) to 17.07 (range 5-34). With 60 minutes of English, twenty children score an average of 12.70 in 2010, whilst in 2011 they score 23.20. The first score ranges from 3 to 44, the second from 7 to 49. The third group (75 minutes) increase on average scores from 10.50 (range 3-28) to 21.25 (range 5-33). Children with 90 minutes of English per week score 14.00 (range 4-20) in 2010 and 23.00 (range 14-34) in 2011. Children with two hours of English score 13.67 (range 7-20) in 2010. In 2011 this average score increases to 20.00 (range 8-40). The penultimate group with 130 minutes of English per week score 19.80 in 2010 and 23.60 in 2011. Scores range from 3 to 39 in 2010, and from 14-29 in 2011. The final group of five children (225 minutes) scores 10.20 in 2010 (ranging from 4 to 16) and 21.60 in 2011 (range 6-35).

## **5.7 Starting age combined with months of exposure**

This variable has been divided into four groups. In total 60 children will be analysed in this section, since data are missing for six children. The first group consists of 12 children with a starting age (for English) of 47-52 months and a length of exposure of 6-7 months. The second group (18 children) consists of children with the same starting age

as the former group, but differ from it in that they have had a length of exposure of 8-9 months. The third group (15 children) has started English at the age of 53-59 months and has had an exposure of 6-7 months. The final group differs from the third in that they have had an exposure of 8-9 months.

#### PPVTNL

For all groups scores on receptive Dutch vocabulary seem to improve. For children with a length of exposure of 6-7 months scores are higher than for the rest, but the differences are minor. The first group improves from 71.33 (59-116) to 75.67 (56-91). The second group starts at an average of 64.72 (ranging from 50 to 83) in 2010 to 73.56 (ranging from 62-95) in 2011. The third group starts at 66.40 (range 53-79) and moves to 76.87 (range 64-95). The final group, then, starts at an average score of 60.00 (39-80) and goes to 73.60 (42-92).

#### PPVTEN

Children in the first group increase their average score from 8.00 (range 0-15) in 2010 to 18.75 (range 7-34) in 2011. The second group of children have an average of 11.83 (range 2-39) at first. This improves to 15.89 (range 5-29) on the second point of measurement. The third group of children do best in 2010 with 18.60 (range 3-30), but stays behind the fourth group with a score of 23.53 (range 5-35) in 2011. The final group then, starts with an average of 14.40 (range 3-44) and outruns the other groups with a score of 28.00 (range 5-49) in 2011.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 General findings**

The goal of this study was to obtain insight into the results of young Dutch children on passive vocabulary after one year of English. Both the Dutch and English vocabulary were taken into account. Further aims were to find out which factors influence the growth of the English vocabulary and whether or not the Dutch vocabulary was threatened by learning English at this very young age. The main hypotheses of the paper were that an increase in the Dutch passive vocabulary as well as an increase in the English passive vocabulary may be predicted. On the basis of the data presented here, it can be concluded that all children who were tested improved both their Dutch and English passive vocabulary over time. This means they learn some English in school, without delays in their development of vocabulary in Dutch. In both tests the means increased by almost ten points.

The next sections will discuss the hypotheses on the different factors: Gender, L3, SES, NS, Minutes of English per week and the Starting age combined with months of exposure. After that the limitations of this study will be discussed.

### **6.2 Gender**

It was hypothesized that no gender differences should be found in the results on both tests. The results were not so very clearcut. In both tests and on both measuring times boys score somewhat higher than girls. The differences are, however, minor: just one or two points. Since the distribution of the children for gender was not equal, these differences might be assigned to that circumstance. Clearly, more children should be taken into account to confirm or dismiss any hypothesis on this factor.

### **6.3 L3**

According to the literature discussed above, the hypothesis that children with an extra language can learn English as well as Dutch at the same time seemed to be worth stating. In 2010 the children with a third language scored considerably lower on the Dutch PPVT, in 2011 this difference was no longer present. Moreover, their Dutch passive vocabulary scores were slightly higher than those of the non-L3 children. The English of both the non-L3 and the L3 children increased as well. Children with a third

language performed much better in both 2010 and 2011 on the English PPVT. The difference was almost ten points. Unfortunately the number of children with a L3 was so limited that no strong conclusions can be drawn.

#### **6.4 SES**

For this variable three groups were made: Low, Medium and High – corresponding to different educational levels of the parents. In the first group both parents have had lower education, in the second group one of the parents has had lower education, while the other has had higher education, the final group then consisted of two higher educated parents (for the explanation, see above). The hypothesis was that children from higher educated parents scored higher on both tests than children from lower educated parents. The second group was thought to be in between. Results on the PPVTs were not completely consistent with the hypotheses: children from higher SES families did score best in both times and both tests. Children from the second group (medium) score lowest on the PPVTNL in 2010 and 2011, the Low group is the intermediate one. For the English version of the test the lower group outruns the others followed by the third group in 2010. In 2011 they score lowest on the test. The Medium group places second and the Higher group first, just as expected. For this variable more children are needed, since not every group had the same number of children in it. In this way the hypotheses can be either dismissed or confirmed.

#### **6.5 NS**

It was hypothesized that native speakers were needed as teachers since they are the most proficient in their language and are not able to code-switch to Dutch so all the given input is English. The data show no clear results. For the Dutch PPVT children with a NS of English score less than the non-NS in 2010, in 2011 the tables have turned. The literature provides no information on these results, so nothing can be concluded from this. The English PPVT shows similar results: in 2010 NS-children start with an higher average, in 2011 this advantage can no longer be found. The differences in scores are minor (less than 1 point). These results seem to suggest that for these children it does not matter if they are being taught English by a native or non-native speaker.



## **6.6 Amount of minutes of English per week**

On this variable the literature was clear: the more input, the better the results. Furthermore, the amount of English per week should have no influence on the Dutch vocabulary. This latter hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the data. All the children improve their Dutch vocabulary over time, the amount of English does not show a clear influence on the results. The former hypothesis is more difficult to confirm or dismiss. Children with 130 minutes of English per week outperform all the others (even children with 225 minutes of English per week). On the whole the data seem to suggest that the more input the children get, the higher the scores on the PPVTEN are. The differences are again minor: the biggest difference is ~6 points between children with 40 minutes and children with 130 minutes of English. When five children in the group of 225 minutes per week are not taken into account, the average scores increase with the amount of time spent on English per week. More research should be done on this with larger groups of children so more general conclusions can be drawn.

## **6.7 Starting age combined with months of exposure**

It was hypothesized that the starting age would not have a large influence on the results. The other part of the hypothesis, months of exposure, stated that differences in results could be expected: the longer the exposure, the more you can learn. In order to get an insight in these variables, four groups were made: (1) Starting age of 47-52 months and an exposure of 6-7 months, (2) had the same starting age but an exposure of 8-9 months. Group (3) started English between 53-59 months and have had an exposure of 6-7 months, while the final group (4) started at the same age with and exposure of 8-9 months.

All groups improved their Dutch passive vocabulary over time, no large differences could be found. Children with less months of exposure do seem to be better at the Dutch PPVT. The English PPVT did not show many interesting data: although all groups improve their averages, no large differences were found, except for the last group (late start, long exposure). This group scores 5-10 point higher than the others. This seems to suggest that a later start and a longer exposure indicates a better English receptive vocabulary.

## 7. Conclusion

The main question in this thesis was “*What is the result of one year of English as an early foreign language in primary school for children in the Netherlands on their passive vocabulary in Dutch and English and what factors influence the growth of the passive lexicon of children in both languages?*” For the first part of the question it was hypothesised that both the Dutch and the English passive vocabulary improve throughout time. These hypotheses could be confirmed: After one year of English these young children have learned some English, without any setbacks for Dutch. Even though a large amount of variation between children was found, all children improve both passive lexicons. This includes children with another first language. The found variation in scores between children could not be accounted for by whether or not the children had a native speaker as teacher. Both groups scored equally well. Furthermore, as was hypothesized the SES of the parents did turn out to be a good indicator: Especially children with higher SES families scored better on both tests. Also the more English children receive per week, the better the results are. However, it should be noted that children with a longer exposure to English seem to be slower in their Dutch vocabulary development. Overall, both the Dutch and English passive vocabulary improved, even for children with another first language.

### 7.1 Limitations

While the results support the fact that children can learn some English vocabulary in school at a very young age, there are some limitations to this study. The first thing is the low number of children in each group: some groups consisted of no more than five children, no strong conclusions can therefore be drawn. Also the groups were unbalanced for gender. Furthermore, the subdivision into native/non-native speakers is a relative one. Non-native speakers can vary quite considerably in their proficiency. Had this been taken into account, different results could have been found. The influence of learning English on the L1 of non-native Dutch children should also be looked at: it would be unbeneficiary for these children if their first language would be delayed by learning Dutch and English at the same time. Another pitfall can be found in the retrieval of the data: not all tests were conducted by one tester. Several testers have worked with the children which may shine through in the results. Also it is unclear what the influence of different teachers and methods on the results is. A final limitation is that the amount of

input at home has not been taken into account. These assessment points may have important implications for further research.

Up until now no clear evidence is found on whether or not children in EFLL benefit from starting young (as stated in the theoretical framework). This study seems to provide no new point of view on this either. Therefore, further research should focus on this aspect for EFLL children. Another implication for further research is that it should look at whether or not children need a native speaker as teacher or whether they can do with a teacher with a lower level of English. These studies should look at what level of proficiency a (non-)native teacher should have in order to teach the children English. This point (quality of the input) relates to what method (f.e. communicative or audio-lingual) should be used to gain the highest results. A final implication for further research is that it should look at the first language of non-native Dutch children: no structural research on this has been done yet.

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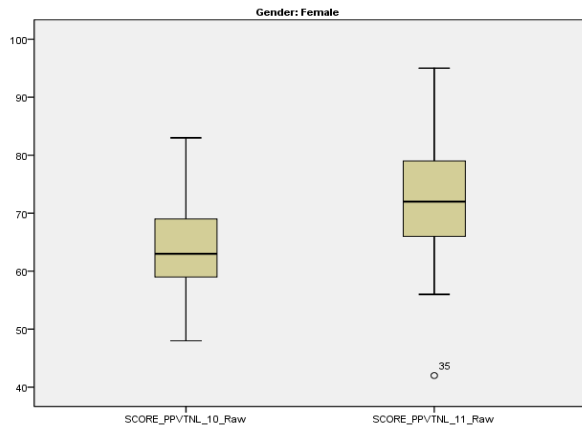
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## **9. Appendix**

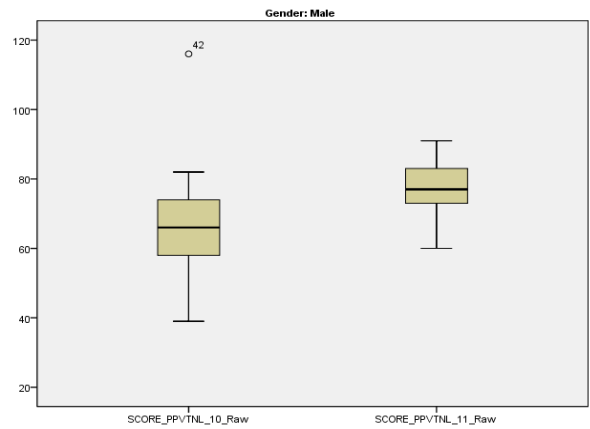
1. Figures (boxplots) of different variables (3-42)
2. Parental questionnaire – © Project FLiPP



**Gender PPVTNL:**

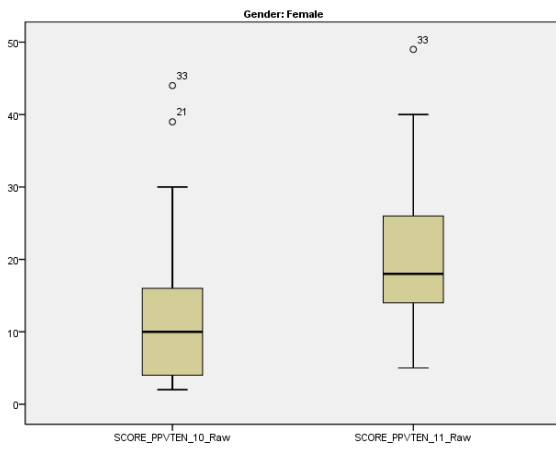


**Figure 3 - Raw PPVTNL scores female**

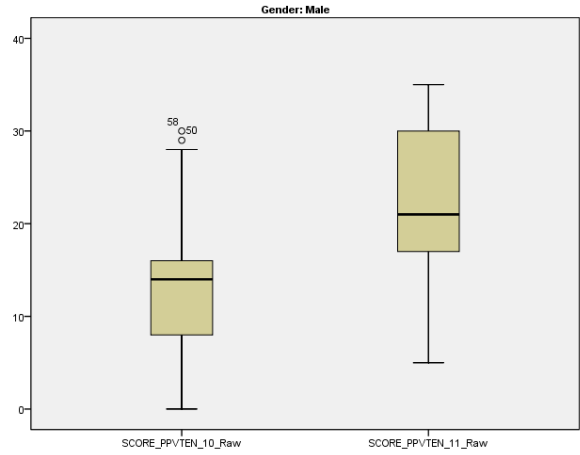


**Figure 4 - Raw PPVTNL scores male**

**Gender PPVTEN:**

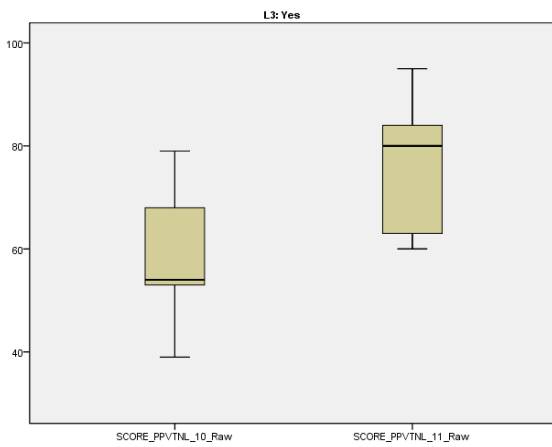


**Figure 5 - Raw PPVTEN scores female**

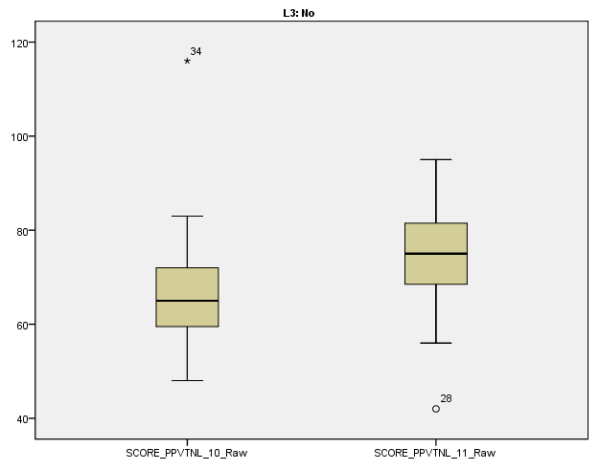


**Figure 6 - Raw PPVTEN scores male**

**L3 PPVTNL:**

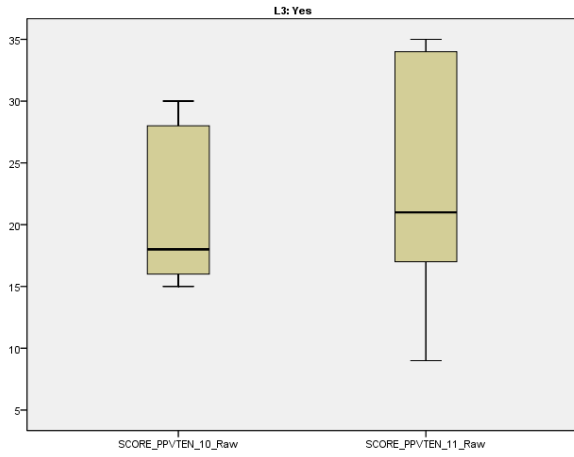


**Figure 7 - Raw PPVTNL scores with L3**

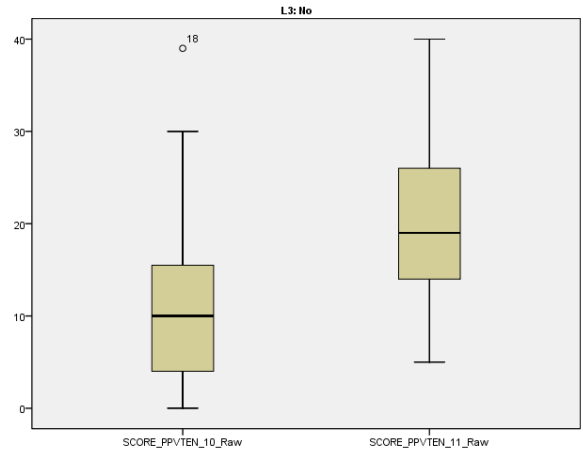


**Figure 8 - Raw PPVTNL scores no L3**

**L3 PPVTEN:**

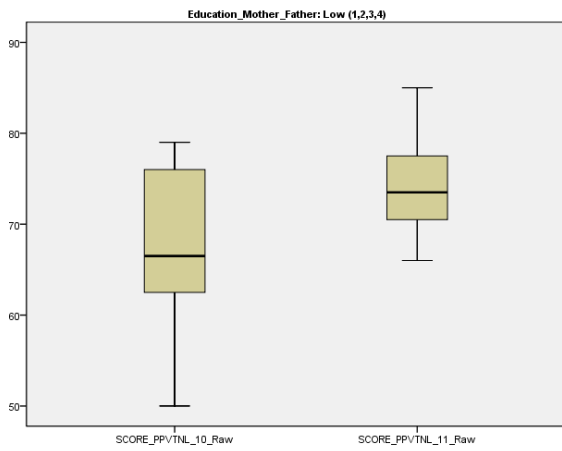


**Figure 9 - Raw PPVTEN scores with L3**

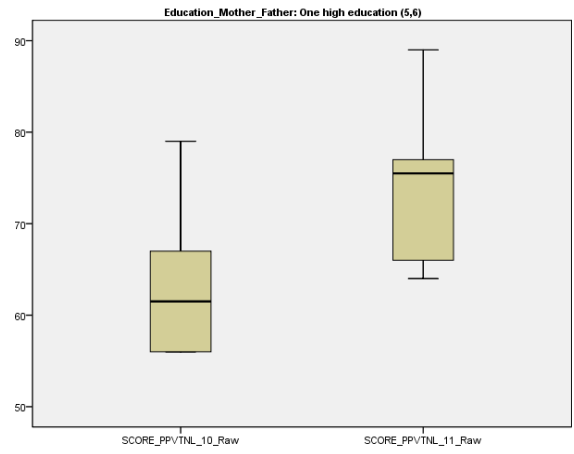


**Figure 10 - Raw PPVTEN scores no L3**

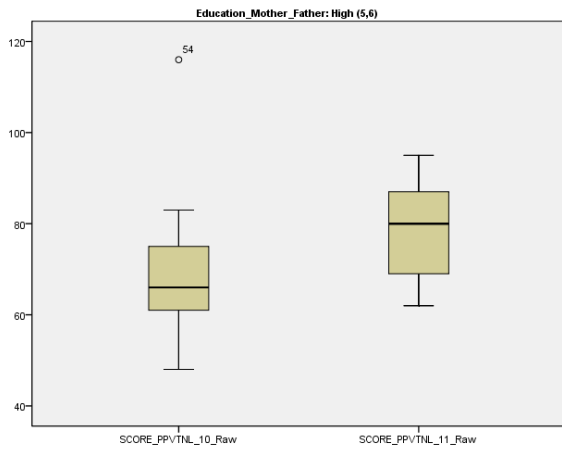
**SES (educational level parents) PPVTNL:**



**Figure 11 - Raw PPVTNL scores low education**

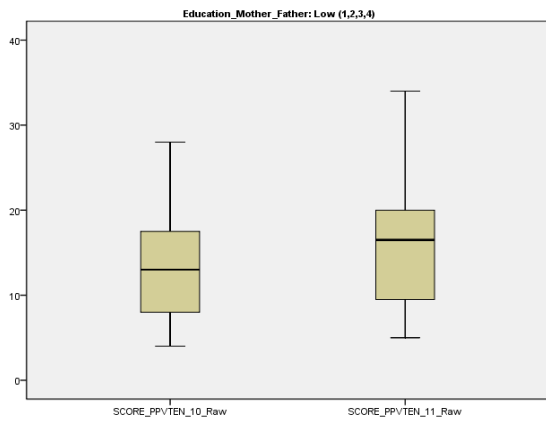


**Figure 12 - Raw PPVTNL scores medium educ.**

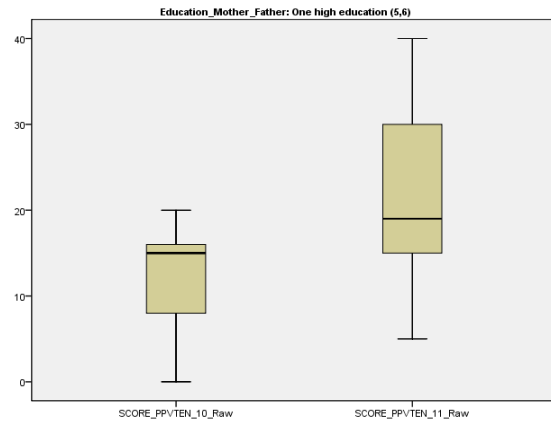


**Figure 13 - Raw PPVTNL scores high education**

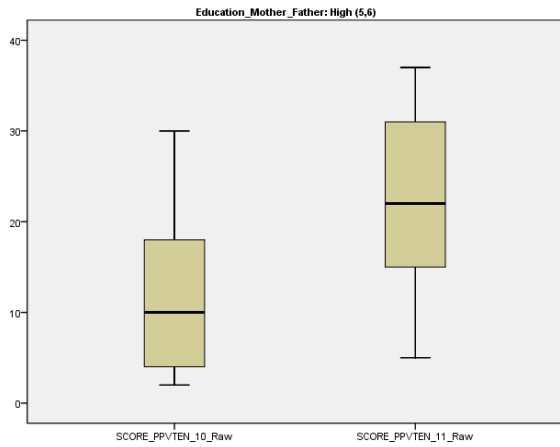
**SES (educational level parents) PPVTEN:**



**Figure 14 - Raw PPVTEN scores low educ.**

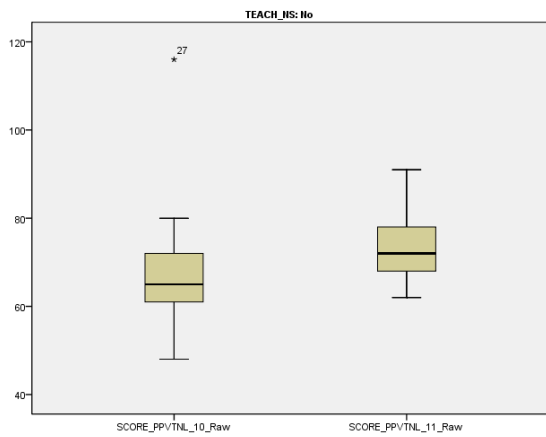


**Figure 15 - Raw PPVTEN scores medium educ.**

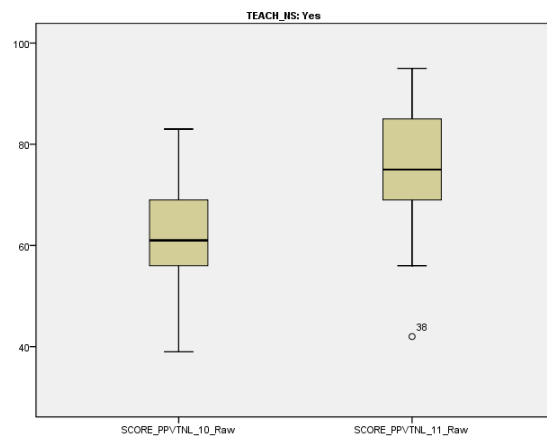


**Figure 16 - Raw PPVTEN scores high education**

**NS PPVTNL :**



**Figure 17 – Raw PPVTNL scores no NS**



**Figure 18 – Raw PPVTNL scores with NS**

### NS PPVTEN:

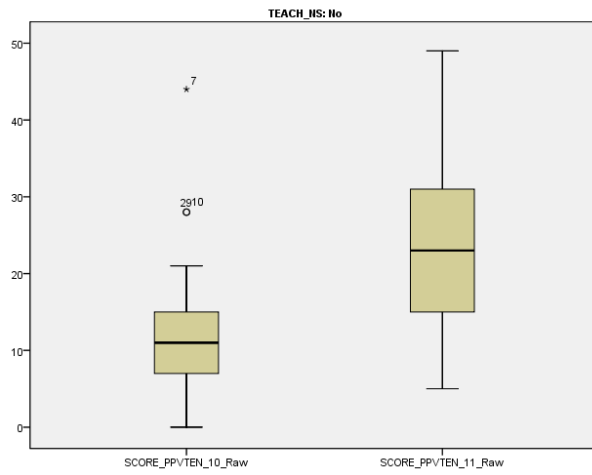


Figure 19 – Raw PPVTEN scores no NS

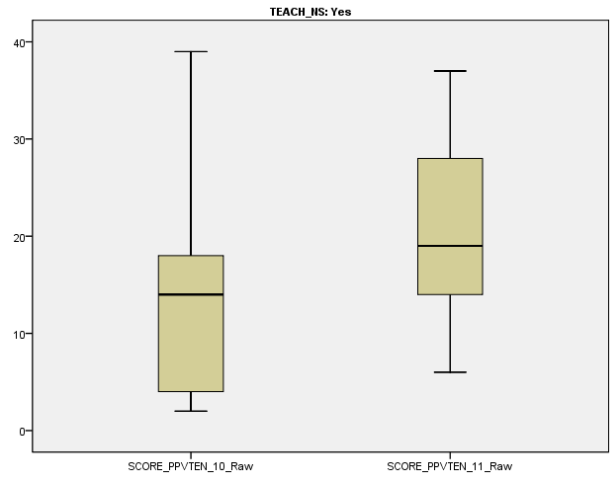


Figure 20 – Raw PPVTEN scores with NS

### Minutes of English per week PPVTNL:

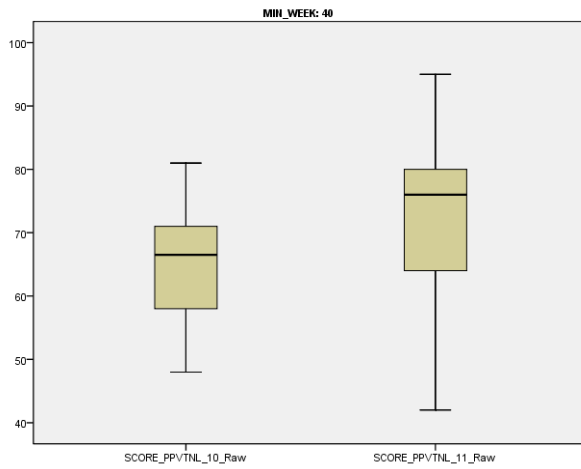


Figure 21 – Raw PPVTNL scores 40 min.

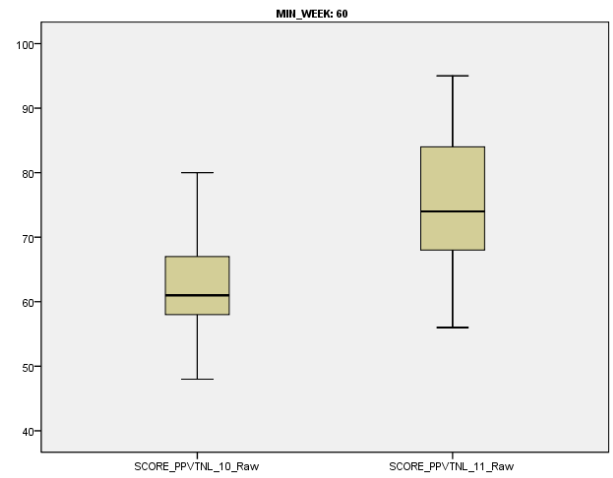


Figure 22 - Raw PPVTNL scores 60 min.

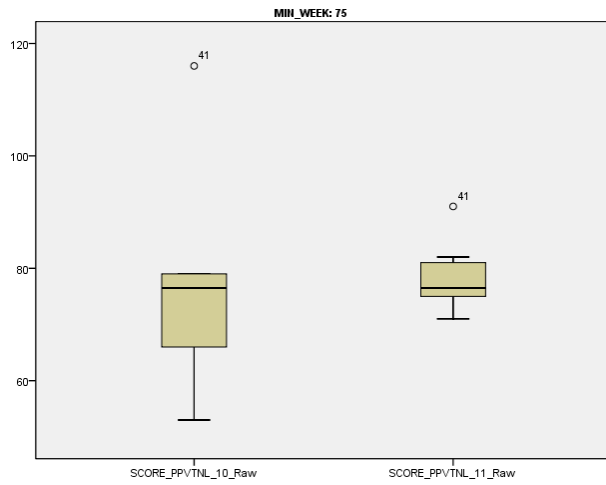


Figure 23 – Raw PPVTNL scores 75 min.

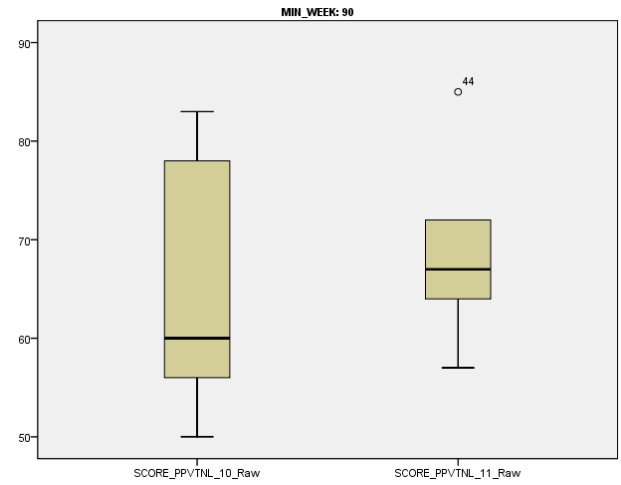


Figure 24 – Raw PPVTNL scores 90 min.

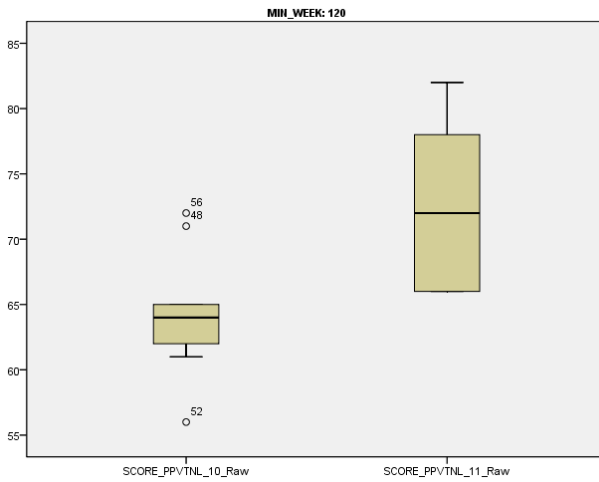


Figure 25 – Raw PPVTNL scores 120 min.

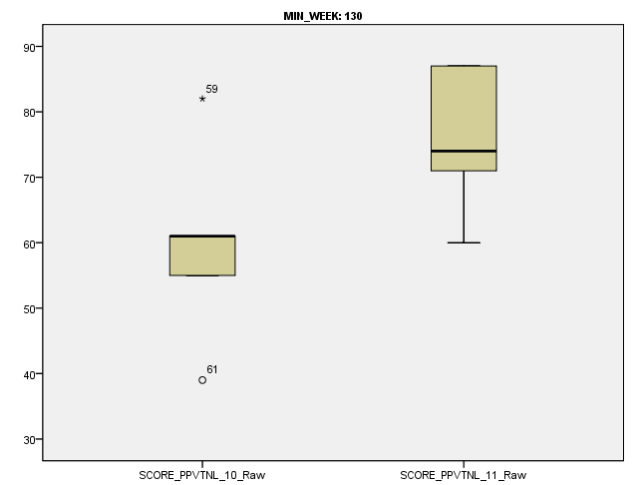


Figure 26 – Raw PPVTNL scores 130 min

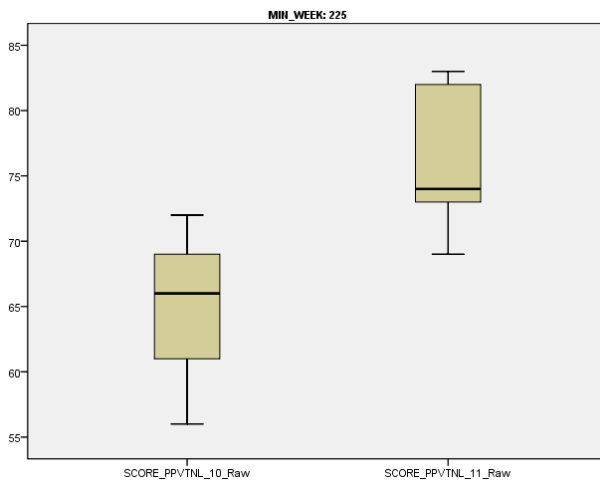


Figure 27 - Raw PPVTNL scores 225 minutes

### Minutes of English per week PPVTEN:

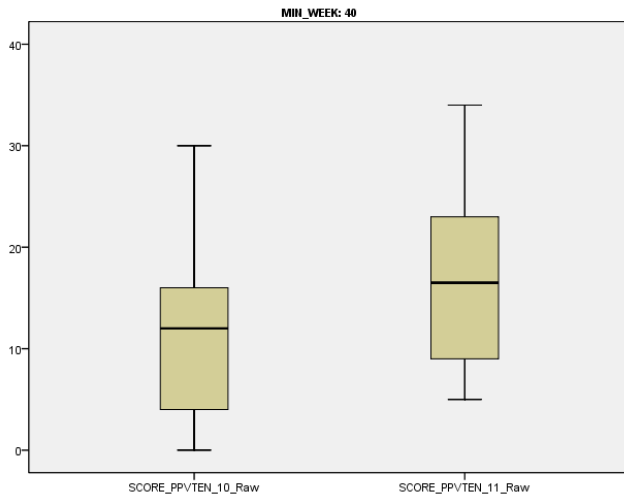


Figure 28 - Raw PPVTEN scores 40 min.

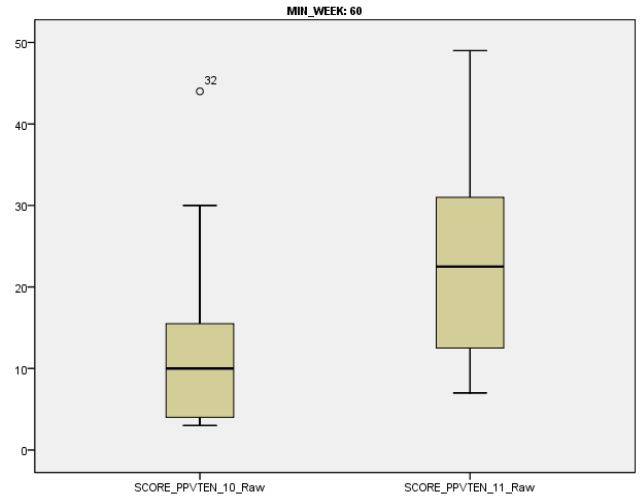


Figure 29- Raw PPVTEN scores 60 min.

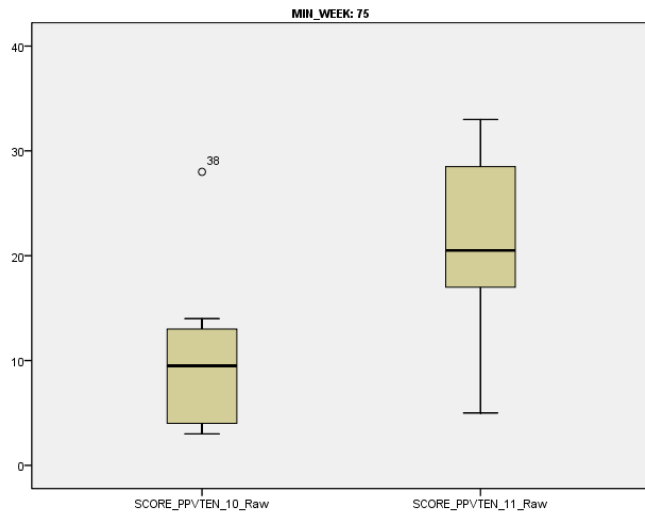


Figure 30 - Raw PPVTEN scores 75 min.

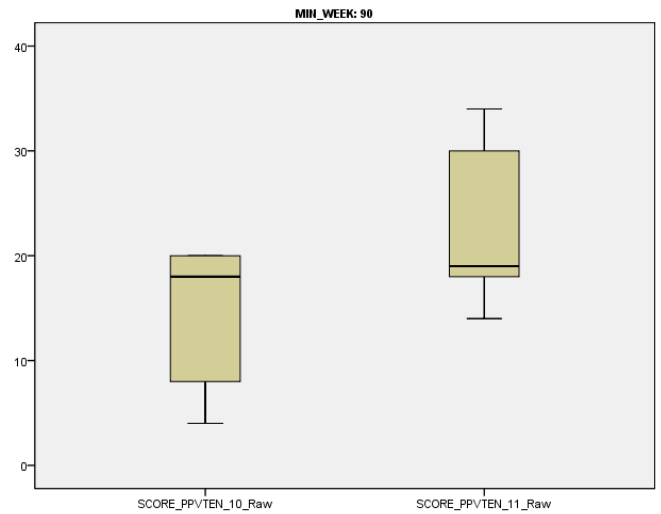


Figure 31 - Raw PPVTEN scores 90 min.

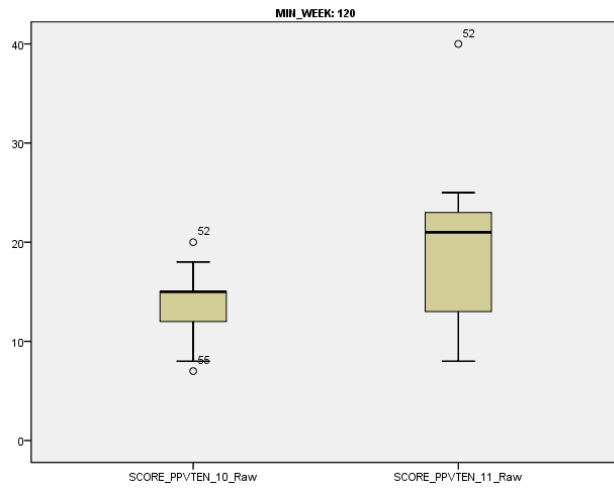


Figure 32 - Raw PPVTEN scores 120 min.

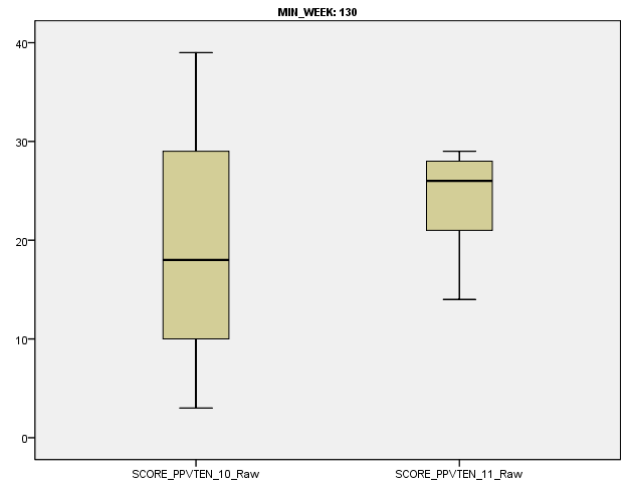


Figure 33 - Raw PPVTEN scores 130 min.

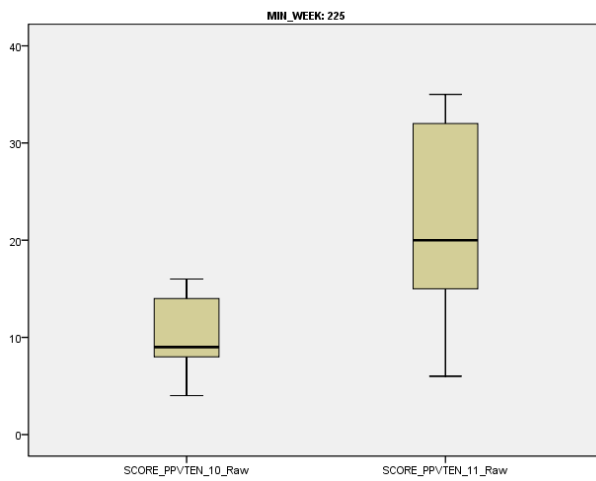
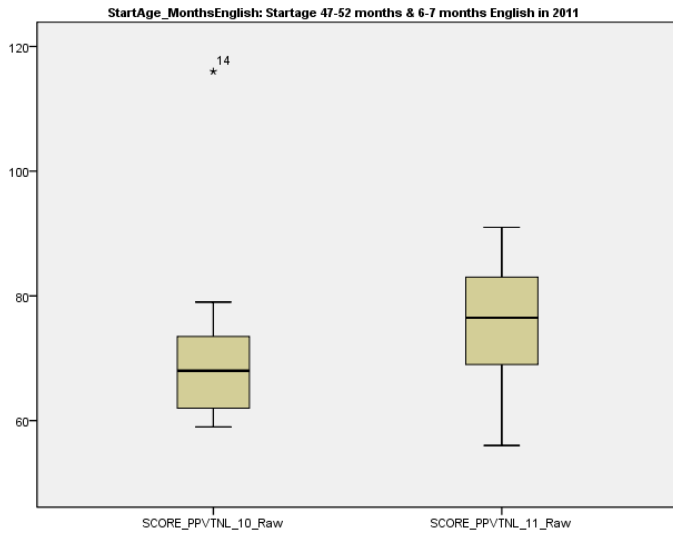
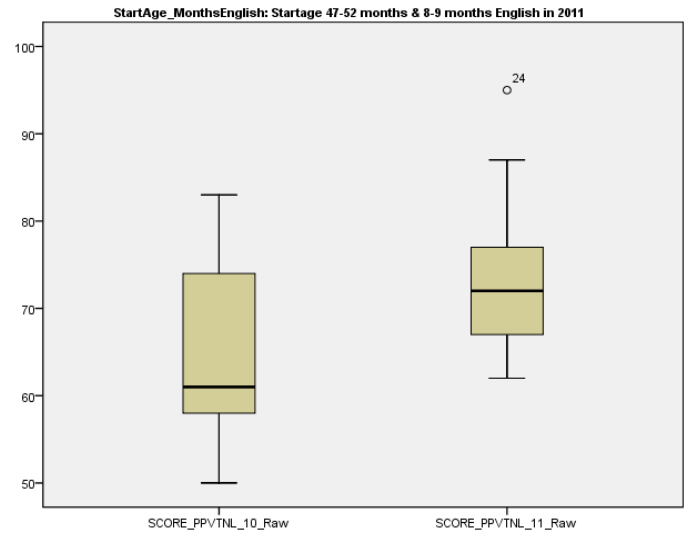


Figure 34 - Raw PPVTEN scores 225 min.

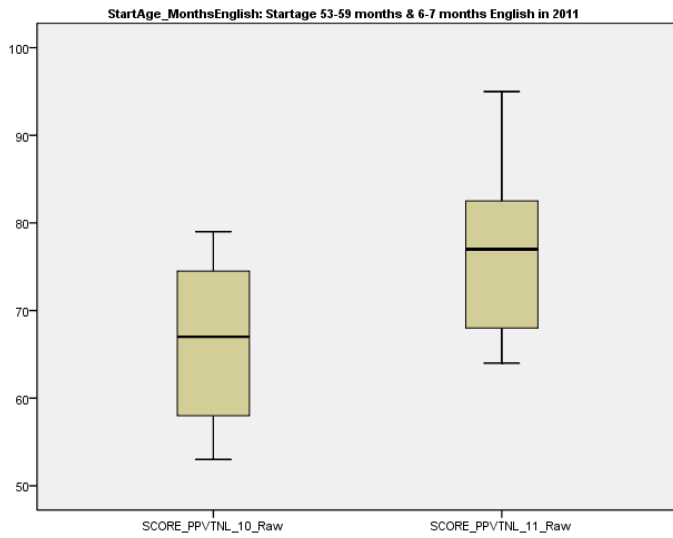
**Starting age combined with months of exposure PPVTNL:**



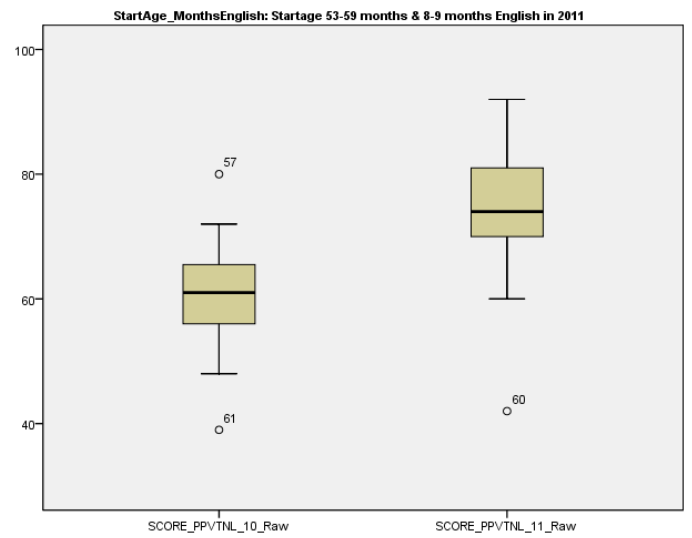
**Figure 35 - Raw PPVTNL scores 47-52 & 6-7**



**Figure 36 - Raw PPVTNL scores 47-52 & 8-9**



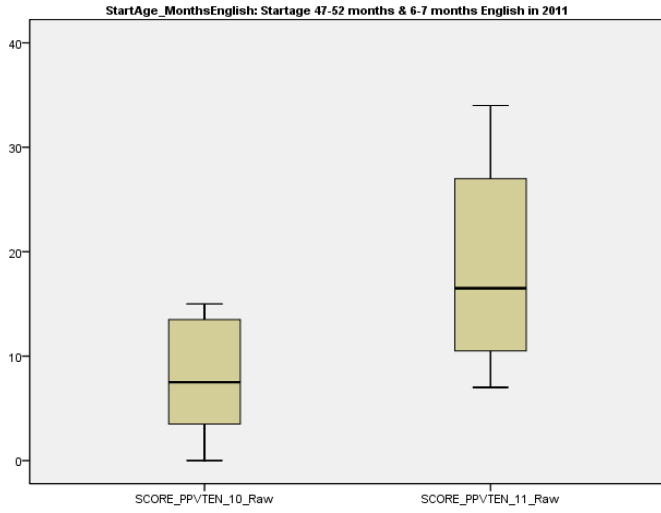
**Figure 37 - Raw PPVTNL scores 53-59 & 6-7**



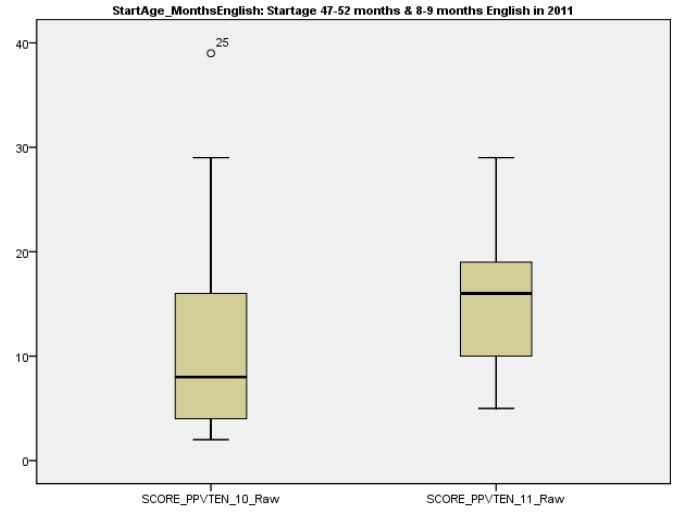
**Figure 38 - Raw PPVTNL scores 53-59 & 8-9**



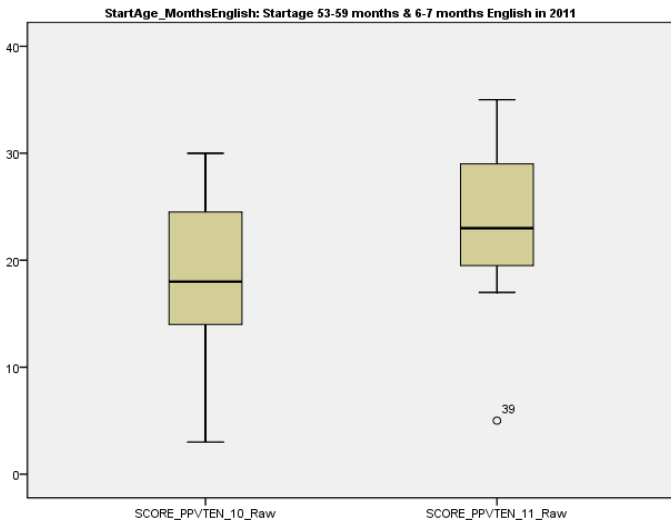
**Starting age combined with months of exposure PPVTEN:**



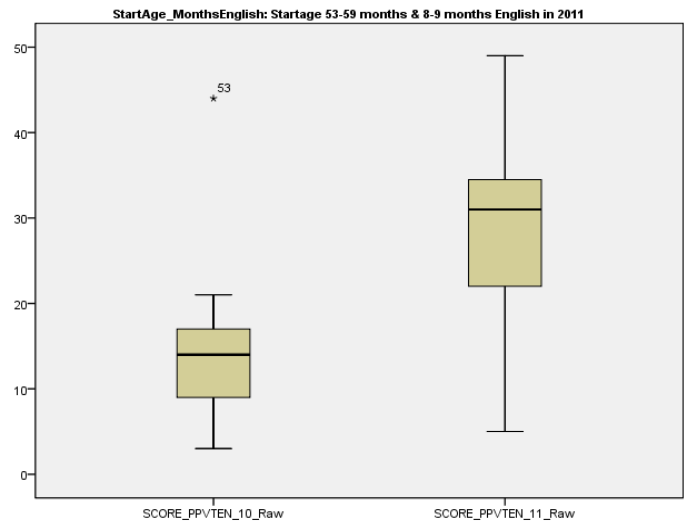
**Figure 39 - Raw PPVTEN scores 47-52 & 6-7**



**Figure 40 - Raw PPVTEN scores 47-52 & 8-9**



**Figure 41 - Raw PPVTEN scores 53-59 & 6-7**



**Figure 42 - Raw PPVTEN scores 53-59 & 8-9**

Deze vragenlijst kunt u ook online invullen via [www.project-flipp.com](http://www.project-flipp.com)

1. Naam kind:

2. Leerkracht: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Hoeveel minuten besteedt uw kind thuis wekelijks aan ...

	Aantal min. per week	Met wie? (meerdere opties mogelijk)	Dit is verspreid over...
Engelstalige verhaaltjes	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige gesprekken met familieleden / vrienden	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige sport spelletjes ( <i>Wii Sports</i> )	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige avontuur of simulatie computer spelletjes ( <i>SimCity</i> )	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Andere (deels) Engelstalige spelletjes: _____	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Nederlandse programma's met Engelse woorden ( <i>Dora</i> )	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige tv-programma's voor Nederlandse kleuters ( <i>Muzzy</i> )	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige tv programma's voor Engelse kleuters ( <i>Teletubbies</i> )	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige tv voor oudere kinderen en volwassenen (series of films)	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Engelstalige liedjes (popmuziek)	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag
Het herhalen van wat uw kind op school heeft geleerd (tellen, liedjes)	----- min/week	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Alleen <input type="radio"/> Broer/Zus <input type="radio"/> Ouders	<input type="radio"/> N.v.t. <input type="radio"/> Min of meer op 1 dag <input type="radio"/> Meerdere dagen per week <input type="radio"/> Iedere dag

**4. Met hoeveel verschillende mensen spreekt uw kind Engels?**

Met niemand

Alleen op school met de juf/meester

Anders: met \_\_\_\_\_ personen

Waarvan \_\_\_\_\_ personen moedertaalsprekers van het Engels zijn.

**5. Zijn er periodes (bijv. tijdens vakanties naar het buitenland of bezoek van familieleden) waarin uw kind veel meer Engels hoort dan gewoonlijk?**

Mijn kind hoort veel meer Engels: \_\_\_\_\_ weken per jaar

Mijn kind hoort meer Engels: \_\_\_\_\_ weken per jaar

Nee

**6. Wat is uw hoogst afgeronde opleiding? En van uw partner?**

Moeder / verzorger	Vader / verzorger
<input type="checkbox"/> lager onderwijs (basisschool)	<input type="checkbox"/> lager onderwijs (basisschool)
<input type="checkbox"/> lager beroepsonderwijs (lbo)	<input type="checkbox"/> lager beroepsonderwijs (lbo)
<input type="checkbox"/> middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (mbo)	<input type="checkbox"/> middelbaar beroepsonderwijs (mbo)
<input type="checkbox"/> voortgezet algemeen onderwijs (havo, vwo)	<input type="checkbox"/> voortgezet algemeen onderwijs (havo, vwo)
<input type="checkbox"/> hoger beroepsonderwijs (hbo)	<input type="checkbox"/> hoger beroepsonderwijs (hbo)
<input type="checkbox"/> wetenschappelijk onderwijs (universiteit)	<input type="checkbox"/> wetenschappelijk onderwijs (universiteit)
<input type="checkbox"/> anders, namelijk _____	<input type="checkbox"/> anders, namelijk _____

**7. Is uw kind het afgelopen jaar bij een logopedist geweest?**

Nee

Ja, i.v.m. \_\_\_\_\_

Het makkelijkst voor u en ons is om dit formulier online in te vullen via onze website

([www.project-FLiPP.com](http://www.project-FLiPP.com)). Indien u dit liever niet via internet doet, kunt u het bijgevoegde formulier invullen en inleveren op de school. We willen u vragen dit zo spoedig mogelijk te doen.

Hartelijk dank! Het FLiPPproject