(EARLY) PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT?

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LANGUAGE INPUT IN EARLY ENGLISH PROGRAMMES TO PROMOTE L2 PRODUCTION SKILLS

ANNA POCHYNOK
S2687097

MA in Applied Linguistics
Faculty of Liberal Arts
University of Groningen

Supervisors:
Dr. Merel Keijzer
Prof. Dr. Marjolijn Verspoor

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years teaching English to young learners has become a global trend with about five hundred million children worldwide learning English in the early stages of their compulsory school education, while more and more children are being introduced to English in pre-school programmes from age 3 onwards. Our study focused specifically on the Dutch context of primary education and on those educational settings where English is taught in minimal input set-ups (up to 60 min per week). Such a minimal input situation, which is by far the most common one, has been shown to result in the development of very basic receptive skills and virtually absent productive skills (Aarts & Ronde, 2006). In our study we wanted to see if children’s receptive and, more importantly, productive skills in grade 1 (age 4 and 5) improve when taught only 60 min per week, but with the help of very specific methods of storytelling and fingerplay. The time span in which this study was carried out was two weeks. Our results show that even under minimal input conditions there was a radical improvement in both receptive and productive skills of children and, moreover, a complete retention and even a slight improvement of these skills four weeks after the end of the intervention programme. Our findings suggest that it might be that even with 60 min per week children still can develop their language skills as long as language learning takes place in an engaging, meaningful, and scaffolded ways. One of the ways to provide this kind of learning is through the methods of storytelling and fingerplay.
Introduction

Over the past decade more and more children have started English learning in the early years of their school education, with an estimated number of about five hundred million children around the globe. This trend of early English has even been termed “an educational revolution” (Copland & Garton, 2014). In the Netherlands, approximately 14% of primary schools offer early English program from group 1 (age of 4) onwards (Thijs, Tuin, & Trimbos, 2011). Such an interest in an early start with English is mainly caused by pressure from parents who believe that younger is better for language learning and who want their children to have future social and economic benefits in an increasingly globalized world.

Whether there are any benefits of early introduction of English and the optimal age to start foreign language learning are widely debated topics (Muñoz, 2006). Numerous studies have shown that, when comparing older and younger learners in the same situation and under the same conditions, older learners make more rapid progress in much less time and are more efficient learners (Cenoz, 2003; García Mayo, 2003; Naber & Lowie, 2012). Moreover, children involved in early English programmes within minimal input situation, which is by far the most common implementation of early English instruction, i.e. 60 minutes or less of weekly exposure to English, show very limited progress especially in their productive skills (Aarts & Ronde, 2006; Unsworth, Persson, Prins, & De Bot, 2014). But perhaps this focus on the earlier the better is fundamentally wrong. Indeed, as pointed out by Rixon (1999) it is not an optimal age but optimal conditions that counts. And one of such crucial conditions is quality of language input received by young learners.

Up to now quality of input has only been investigated in terms of teacher’s level of language proficiency, i.e. whether a native speaker is needed for significant development or
whether a rather high level of proficiency of regular teachers is sufficient (Unsworth et al., 2014). Arguably, there is a need to examine the effect of language input from the perspective of teaching methods and approaches: “future research should focus on didactic procedures and classroom activities, which then have to be related to language proficiency scores” (Goorhuis-Brouwer & de Bot, 2010, p. 300). The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of early English methods on children’s linguistic outcomes, most specifically oral output. At present, various methods of early English teaching exist, among which Communicative Language Teaching, Total Physical Response, and CLIL as the most well-known variants. In the Netherlands, primary schools have a great autonomy in ways of organizing English instruction in early school years and this autonomy has very recently been increased even more with the government’s decision that primary schools can now offer from 30 to 50% of their curriculum in English. For this reason, there is no preferred or dominant early English teaching method (Thijs et al., 2011) in primary schools. In our study the methods of storytelling and fingerplay have been chosen for the experiment because of their proven effectiveness (see Read, 2008; Linse, 2007 for storytelling; Gullo, 1988 for fingerplay) as well as their suitability for minimal input situations (i.e. 30-60 minutes per week), which – as said - is common for most Dutch primary schools. Thus, the main research question in our study is whether children’s language skills will improve through methods of storytelling and fingerplay in the drip-feed situation of 60 minutes of English lessons per week.

The study involved 15 children from group 1 (age of 4) in a Dutch primary school. In the period of two weeks children received a total of 120 minutes of English instruction through the methods of storytelling and fingerplay and were then tested on their progress in both receptive and productive English language skills. The results were related to two individual difference variables: (1) short-term working memory capacity which has been associated with foreign language success in previous research (Unsworth et al, 2014; (French
(2) language aptitude, as assessed by children’s classroom teacher on the base of their L1 skills. An interview with the children’s classroom teacher was conducted to get information about any observed changes in the children from pre- to post-test level and during the two weeks of the intervention in general, specifically outside of the English sessions.

This thesis consists of six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 1 reviews literature on the topic of early English implementation, both internationally and that conducted specifically in the Dutch context. In addition, it reviews early English teaching methods and, in particular, the methods of storytelling and fingerplay. Chapter 2 covers the context of early English programmes in the Netherlands and the effect of these programmes on children’s linguistic gains. The methodological approach underlying this study as well as the key findings resulting from the data obtained are presented in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively. Chapter 5 includes a detailed account and interpretation of the results of the study followed by Chapter 6, which summarizes the main findings and outlines pedagogical and research implications of the study.
Chapter 1. Early introduction of English in the global context

First, this chapter explores the reasons why early English programmes became a global trend and the ways in which such programmes are implemented in different contexts around the world. Second, language teaching approaches for young learners are discussed in general and the methods of storytelling and fingerplay are described in more detail. As a terminological note, the term early foreign language (FL) start in the present study is used to refer to early English initiatives.

1.1 Early English as a global phenomenon

Over the last twenty years teaching English to young learners has become a global trend that has impacted the lives of millions of teachers, children and parents all over the world. As the age at which children start learning English continues to drop, Johnstone (2009) has described the introduction of early language programmes as “the world’s biggest policy development in education” (p. 33). Today about five hundred million children worldwide learn English in the early stages of their compulsory school education, with early stages being typically defined as between the ages of 7 and 11 (Knagg & Ellis, 2012) and, in addition, more and more children are being introduced to English in pre-school programmes from the age of three onwards (Pinter, 2006, p.2). There are several reasons for this global early English trend: (1) the widespread belief that younger is better when it comes to learning a foreign language, i.e. an early start with English will enable children to achieve greater overall proficiency; (2) a constantly increasing demand for English as a result of economic globalization; (3) the pressure from parents who want a brighter future for their children in
terms of social and economic benefits. However, evidence as to the benefits of an early FL start is controversial at best.

1.2 Is younger better?

It is widely believed (among educators and parents alike) that – in terms of language learning – the golden standard is the younger the better. This popular assumption is based on the concept of critical or sensitive period. The critical period hypothesis, or CPH for short, postulates that there is a critical period for language learning in children, usually assumed to slope down at the onset of puberty, after which children’s brains lose their plasticity and children are no longer able to learn another language effectively and – most of all – to a (near)native level. We will consider this idea in more detail from the viewpoint of research findings.

First of all, although there is a general consensus that a critical period exists for both mother tongue and second language learning in naturalistic conditions by young children of migrant parents (DeKeyser & Larson-Hall, 2005), there is little conclusive evidence to support the idea of a critical period for foreign language learning in a formal school ‘drip feed’ setting where children are lucky if they have one or two hours of English instruction a week (Larson-Hall, 2008; Rich, 2014). Moreover, in the situations of minimal input, recent studies of learners of English in Spain found absolutely no linguistic benefits for younger starters (aged 4 or 8) versus later starters (aged 11) in a foreign language setting (Cenoz, 2003; García Mayo, 2003; Muñoz, 2003). Muñoz (2001) suggests that the reason why early starters cannot gain positive effects from their early FL start in a formal school setting lies precisely in the insufficient input which, she goes on to claim, is necessary for the kind of implicit learning that is witnessed in children who are not yet cognitively mature enough to benefit from explicit instruction. Similarly, Marinova-Todd et al. (2000), having summarized a whole body of research done since the 1970s, conclude that – regarding the rate of language
learning – older starters (aged 10 or 11) progress more rapidly than those who start earlier. Partly on the basis of this, they formulate the strong viewpoint that, in terms of overall language pay-offs, an early FL start in a formal foreign language context is inefficient and a waste of resources. Overall, research has repeatedly shown that older learners have a better developed metalinguistic awareness, greater cognitive maturity and stronger learning skills, which make them much better and faster learners than younger children, who in turn are much slower in their learning and show much greater effort (Cenoz, 2003; García Mayo, 2003; Muñoz, 2003).

This general finding runs contrary to the general belief that early introduction of foreign languages in the curriculum leads to higher proficiency levels. This begs the question, more and more addressed in the literature, whether there are any other benefits of an early start other than linguistic in nature. First of all, younger children are considered to be less anxious and inhibited than older learners, enthusiastic, curious and open to new experiences (Read, 2003). For these reasons, an early start can indeed play an important role in the generation of positive attitudes towards the new foreign language and culture (Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2006), as well as in the development of intercultural awareness needed to build global citizenship (Read, 2003). Moreover, the regular use of two languages contributes to children’s cognitive development and language awareness, promoting creativity, flexible thinking and communication skills in both languages (Caccavale, 2007; Read, 2003). Thus, there are a number of advantages, albeit non-linguistic, that are related to an early start in formal school contexts. However, whether such an early FL start will be worthwhile in the long run depends on two important factors: quality of teaching and continuity throughout the school years (Nikolov & Djigunovic, 2006; Read, 2003; Rixon, 2000).
1.3 Factors influencing the success of an early English start

In order to maximize the potential that an early start can afford, it is crucial to promote high quality teaching practices that are appropriate to the social, psychological, emotional and cognitive needs of children. There is a general agreement that learners need an experiential approach in language learning which is activity-based and focused on meaning rather than on form (Moon, 2005). According to Read (2003), an early FL start is most beneficial when the learning that takes place in the classroom is (1) contextualized and part of real events; (2) interesting, enjoyable and relevant for children’s experience; (3) builds on things that the child knows; (4) is supported appropriately through visuals, mimes, gestures and feedback; (5) is memorable and engages multiple intelligences; (6) gives a sense of achievement and success. Read (2003) adds that the most important condition, in her view, to be created in the classroom is a situation in which the child wants to learn and that “making children ‘thirsty’ for learning in the primary years is one of the keys to long-term success” (p.7).

Another important prerequisite for the success of an early FL start is the type of teacher involved in the learning process. The ideal profile of an early English teacher has been elaborated by the European Platform (2009) and summarized below. It is important to mention that the competencies described below do not necessarily need to be present in one teacher, but expertise should be available in the school’s teaching team. The desired competencies are grouped according to three aspects: (1) proficiency levels of non-native speakers of English, (2) pedagogical and didactic skills, (3) background knowledge on early English education.

1. Proficiency levels of non-native speakers of English:
   a. The teacher has a minimum level of B2 for speaking, listening and reading. If the children are younger than 8 years old, a B1 level for writing suffices;
b. The teacher has an extensive knowledge of classroom English (language utterances specific for the classroom context such as *please sit down, look at me please*);

c. The teacher’s pronunciation does not have to be perfect, but does need to be internationally understandable and grammatically correct (i.e. should adhere to Global English standards);

d. The teacher is able to speak English during the entire English lesson: the target language is the language of instruction.

2. Pedagogical and didactic skills:

   a. The teacher can create a safe foreign language environment for his or her students;

   b. The teacher can correct students in a multitude of ‘safe’ ways, such as recasts, repetitions, question posing and non-verbal feedback;

   c. The teacher uses the foreign language in such a way that is stimulates children to use the language themselves as well;

   d. The teacher is able to provide foreign language lessons in an age-appropriate and stimulating manner;

   e. The teacher is able to differentiate between students and can offer tailored lessons;

   f. The teacher can take formal lesson goals and translate these to practical lessons that are age-appropriate;

   g. The teacher can find lesson materials and can assess these appropriately for their usefulness;

   h. The teacher can select lesson materials based on language proficiency level and interests of the children;
i. The teacher is knowledgeable about information and communication
technologies and how this can be used in the foreign language classes;

j. The teacher knows about stimulating activities that can also make students
enthusiastic, such as Total Physical Response, drama, music, puppets, games
and finger play;

k. The teacher is capable of implementing dramatic play;

l. The teacher is creative. In other words, he or she can make the most out of
several classroom situations that may arise in the foreign language classroom;

m. The teacher is able to assess his or her own early English lessons as well as
those of colleagues;

n. The teacher is capable of assessing the language proficiency of his or her
students.

3. Background knowledge early English education

a. The teacher knows about language learning and foreign language learning in
particular and how this takes place across difference age stages of the child;

b. The teacher knows about (different stages of) language development in babies,
toddlers and kindergartners, as well as school-aged children;

c. The teacher has specialized in language development in the age group he or
she teaches;

d. The teacher is aware of the fact that the foreign language is a communication
tool.

Moreover, for an early start in foreign languages to be ultimately successful, there is a
vital need for coherence between primary and secondary schools to provide development and
continuity from one year to the next (Johnstone, 2009; Read, 2003). Such a coherence in
policies needs to be reflected in language planning curricula; in evaluation and assessment
programmes that involve appropriate instruments and objectives at each age and stage; in an increased awareness and understanding between primary and secondary teachers and schools in a way that primary teachers will know how to prepare their pupils for secondary school and secondary teachers will have a clearer idea of what language skills to expect from the children.

In summary, although an early FL start in the formal teaching context of minimal input does not suggest bigger linguistic gains than a later start, there do appear to be other benefits for children who begin their foreign language learning earlier, the most important ones being the development of a more positive attitude towards the foreign language and culture, development of metalinguistic skills and powerful cognitive development that in turn enhances creativity, problem-solving and flexible thinking. In order to realize the potential that an early start can afford, there is a need for high quality teaching practices that involve age-appropriate methodology and continuity between primary and secondary curricula.

1.4 Implementation of early English programmes in a global context

Recently, a number of trans-contextual studies have appeared with the aim of examining early English programmes as a global phenomenon. Here we will summarize findings of three such studies, namely Garton et al. (2011), who examined responses of primary English teachers in 144 countries around the globe; Emery (2012), who inquired into the professional conditions for primary English teachers in 89 countries and the most recent study by Rixon (2013), which looked into the teaching contexts in 64 countries. The implementation of early English programmes will be discussed on the basis of 7 pillars: starting age, teacher supply and qualifications, teaching approaches, number of hours of English per year, transition from primary to secondary school and language achievements.

Regarding starting age, there is a wide divergence among countries that implement early English initiatives, as is shown in Table 1.
Table 1. The starting age of compulsory English language learning in different countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting age of compulsory English language learning</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 years</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>Croatia</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rixon (2013)

Concerning teacher availability, over two-thirds of the countries participating in the surveys experience a shortage of primary English teachers. Overall, there are four types of teachers involved in early English teaching: (1) the children’s normal ‘homeroom’ teacher, (2) a specialist teacher of English, (3) a qualified teacher who has no formal qualifications in English but who knows English, (4) someone who is not qualified as a teacher but who knows English, most often a native speaker of the language (Rixon, 2013). With regard to the teaching qualifications, a wide range of possible qualifications was found, from no formal qualifications but proven competence in English up to first degrees, pre- and in-service teaching qualifications and higher degrees. Many teachers also reported the lack of specialized training aimed at equipping them with age-appropriate teaching methods (Emery, 2012).

Regarding teaching approaches, the surveys report a wide variety of activities used in the classroom, from more ‘traditional’, e.g. listening to the CD, repeating after the teacher, reading aloud, filling the gaps, grammar exercises, to more ‘creative’, e.g. drawing, colouring, games, songs, role-plays (Garton et al., 2011).
A considerable variation in the total hours per year devoted to English was found across the countries, with 44% of contexts allocating from 30 to 80 hours per year and only 30% of contexts over 100 hours of English per year (Rixon, 2013). This is a surprising finding considering the high ambitions expressed for an early start in English in many countries.

Generally across the world, contacts between primary and secondary school teachers of English are weak to non-existent, which creates a danger that the achievements at primary school will be undervalued and underexploited at secondary school, which in its turn has serious consequences for the ultimate level of attainment (Rixon, 2013).

International comparisons of English language outcomes following classroom instruction are generally absent from the research literature (Hayes, 2014). However, in the European context the ELLiE (English Language Learning in Europe) project was set to clarify what can realistically be achieved in classroom contexts of minimal input in state primary schools. ELLiE involved 7 countries – England, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Croatia. According to the project’s final report (Enever, 2011), the average ELLiE learners approached A1 level (according to CEFR) in their speaking and listening skills during the first four years of instruction. For the context of the present study, examining 4- and 5-year-old children in the Netherlands, it is most useful to point out the results of the youngest learners in the ELLiE project. In terms of speaking, the number of different words produced in year 1 ranged from 6 to 14 words, and in year 2 from 9 to 24 (Szpotowicz & Lindgren, 2011, p. 128). In terms of listening comprehension, learners gave 44.9-91.1% of correct answers in year 1 and 46.6-94.6% of correct answers in year 3 (Szpotowicz & Lindgren, 2011). Overall, finding of ELLiE projects reveal the complexity of factors at play in successful language learning, involving effective teacher training, adequate and appropriate resources used in the classroom, enjoyable class experiences and school environments that are themselves highly conducive to learning the language.
In sum, there is a wide divergence among countries in the way early English initiatives are implemented in primary schools concerning (1) a starting age that varies from 5 to 11 years, (2) teacher qualifications that range from no formal qualification to a higher education degree, (3) teaching approaches that range from traditional to creative, (4) number of hours per year that varies from 30 to 100. The next chapter will examine two language teaching methods for young learners, namely storytelling and fingerplay.
Chapter 2. English language teaching methods for young learners

The importance of high quality foreign language teaching in the classroom and age-appropriate methodology has been emphasized throughout the literature, as discussed above. This section will explore two such methods that have proved to be successful for language teaching to young learners – storytelling and fingerplay.

2.1 Storytelling and drama

2.1.1 The benefits of storytelling

Countless advantages of storytelling have been explored and discussed by various authors. According to Fisher (2005), stories provide a key means for children to understand the world around them as well as other people and themselves. MacIntyre (1984), in his book on moral philosophy wrote: “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted…” (p.216), meaning that if we fail to bring children in contact with stories, we risk leaving them with an impoverished identity and limited capacity for understanding and finding their way in the world. The value of stories in children’s first language was explored in Gordon Wells’s (1986) longitudinal study of children in the UK, who showed that children who are read to and told stories from a very young age have substantial advantages later on at school, not only in the development of literacy skills, which can be expected, but also in the development of social skills such as sympathizing and being able to relate to others. In contrast, children who are not exposed to stories at an early age, are likely to do less well later, both in terms of literacy and in terms of cooperating with others at school.

Moreover, stories develop thinking skills, concentration skills, emotional intelligence and respect for other cultures. “In using stories in language teaching we are using something much bigger and more important than language teaching itself” (Wright, 2003, p. 7). Egan
identifies a story as one of the most successful tools for communicating new information to young learners. Lugossy (2006) argues that “stories function as schemata on the basis of which we make sense of the world” (p. 77), and by exposing children to stories we enable children to interpret new information and gradually develop abstract ways of thinking. Moreover, children also develop learning strategies and thinking skills such as predicting, hypothesizing, guessing and inferring meaning (Read, 2007). The excitement and drama of storytelling creates an atmosphere that holds learners’ attention (Cooter, 1990). Furthermore, stories also help young learners to develop aspects of emotional intelligence, e.g. empathy and relating to each other (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Stories provide an opportunity for a rich variety of activities which develop positive attitudes to the target language as well as respect for other cultures or understanding content from other school subjects (Read, 2007). In addition, stories that are read or told orally help children develop skills necessary to be successful readers (Hudelson, 1994).

A famous specialist in primary English teaching, Carol Read, has published a number of articles and has given numerous conference presentations on the advantages of using storytelling and drama with young learners in a foreign language classroom based on her own experience of teaching children as well as empirical research findings. What follows is a summary of the benefits of using storytelling and drama with children, as discussed in Read’s (2007; 2008) works.

First of all, stories and drama build on children’s inherent capacity for fantasy and imaginative play. Through stories and drama, children develop an understanding of themselves and the world around them. While exploring the differences between stories and real life, children expand their potential for creativity and imagination in a way comparable to when they are engaged in play.
Secondly, stories help children to explore significant issues that touch their own daily lives closely, in a safe and amusing way due to the distance offered by characters and events which are fictional. Maintaining such a distance from the events and issues of the story gives children an opportunity to reflect more securely and openly on matters important to them and helps to create appropriate emotional conditions for learning. Bruner (1996) stated that we live our lives and shape our identities through stories. Bettelheim (1975) has shown that the psychoanalytical constructs of fairy tales reach deep into problems of self, identity and family at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Third, stories engage multiple intelligences. The concept of multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner (1983) includes seven intelligences: (1) linguistic intelligence that involves sensitivity to written and spoken language and using language as a means to remember information; (2) logical-mathematical intelligence that entails the ability to detect patterns and think logically; (3) musical intelligence that encompasses the ability to recognize and compose musical pitches, tones and rhymes; (4) bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence that involves the ability to use one’s body in highly differentiated and skilled ways for expressive and goal-oriented purposes; (5) spatial intelligence that entails the potential to recognize and use patterns of wide space and more limited areas; (6) interpersonal intelligence that is concerned with the ability to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people; (7) intrapersonal intelligence that entails the ability to understand oneself, to appreciate one’s feelings, fears and motivations. Stories and drama provide opportunities to use various combinations of children’s multiple intelligences as “entry points” to learning (Gardner, 2000, p. 169). By engaging different intelligences, storytelling and drama activities provide opportunities for individual children to use their personal strengths in order to enhance, extend and deepen their learning.
Fourth, and related to the third point discussed above, stories and drama appeal to different learning styles. A variety of storytelling and drama activities potentially match up to children’s diverse learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, kinaesthetic or combinations of these). Since young children’s learning styles are only emerging at this age, a wide range of storytelling and drama techniques can help them discover and develop their own individual learning styles and preferences.

Finally, stories and drama are shared, communal classroom events that provide an opportunity for the children and teacher to be “intersubjectively engaged”, i.e. in a situation in which “participants are jointly focused on the activity and its goals, and they draw each other’s attention in a common direction” (Van Lier, 1996, p. 161). This aspect of stories and drama provides a framework for fostering social skills and attitudes such as cooperation, collaboration, listening, turn-taking and respect for others in a positive way and helps to create proper affective conditions for learning to take place.

Looking specifically at the context of early English introduction into the curriculum, an essential feature of storytelling that emerges is that it caters to children’s diverse learning needs and varying levels of English by allowing children to participate successfully at the level they are ready to do so (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Read, 2010). By the end of the storytelling process some children may only be able to produce key vocabulary or phrases from the story, whereas others may know the whole story off by heart, and others may be ready to compose their own. In each case, stories provide a context for learning which allows all the children to be fully involved and unlock their own individual potential for learning.

Many authors emphasize the importance of stories for second language learning by young children. First of all, stories provide a natural, relevant and enjoyable context for exposure to language and an opportunity to familiarize children with the sounds, rhythm and intonation of English and thus develop a ‘sense’ or ‘feel’ for the target language (Wright &
Maley, 1995). Moreover, the narrative structure of discourse provided in stories gives children an opportunity to engage not only with the micro-structure of grammatical forms but also with the macro-structure of narrative discourse which is crucial for language learning (Edelenbos & Kubanek, 2009). Similarly Ellis, Brewster and Girard (2002) have suggested that narrating stories creates ideal learning conditions by providing meaningful context for engagement with a language. Furthermore, stories represent a holistic approach to language learning by surrounding children with rich, authentic uses of a foreign language (Cameron, 2001; Pesola, 1991; Wright & Maley, 1995). Garvie (1991) adds that a story is “the carrier of life’s messages” (p. 56) and has a vital part to play in the education of young children, particularly in the development of language since it not only stimulates children’s interest and enjoyment but also offers a meaningful context which children can relate to their own experience. Ultimately, since children enjoy listening to stories over and over again, this frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being reinforced. Natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures inherent in many stories help children to remember every detail and encourages children to participate in the narrative, thus providing language practice in a meaningful context (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). Moreover, repetition is key to language learning since it can provide ‘overlearning’ conditions where different aspects of a story are picked up during each repetition, allowing for the greatest learning gains.

To sum up, stories present a powerful and valuable instrument for teaching a foreign language to young children due to the following reasons: (1) through stories children develop better understanding of themselves and the world around them; (2) stories help children to deal with significant issues that touch their own lives closely in a safe and enjoyable way; (3) stories engage multiple intelligences enabling children to build on their own strengths in order to enhance their learning; (4) stories appeal to different learning styles, creating opportunities
for a child’s own learning style to emerge; (5) being a shared classroom experience, stories promote cooperation, turn-taking and respect for others as well as create an appropriate emotional atmosphere for learning to take place; (6) stories cater for diversity in the classroom, enabling children to participate successfully at the level which is appropriate for them; (7) stories provide rich, authentic, meaningful contexts essential for language development; (8) stories develop children’s abstract thinking skills, concentration skills, emotional intelligence and respect for other cultures.

2.1.2 Storytelling and drama for oral skills development

There is a general expectation on the part of parents and curriculum planners that by the end of primary school children who have had an early start in English will not only be able to sing songs, say rhymes and name familiar objects but will also be able to communicate with others about things concerning their daily lives and world. However, as Moon (2004) has shown, in terms of developing productive skills, and in particular, interactive and extended discourse skills, certain types of language programmes are not necessarily successful in achieving this aim. One of the possible solutions in this situation, as argued by Read (2004; 2008), could be introducing stories and drama that provide multiple opportunities for supporting or scaffolding children’s talk and language learning.

Read (2004) argues that the related concepts of Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) and ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) can provide a useful framework for building up and gradually extending children’s interactive and discourse skills at different ages and stages of development. What follows is a brief account of Vygotsky’s ZPD and its relationship to scaffolding as described in Read (2004).

Vygotsky’s theory of learning is discussed in a wide range of educational literature (e.g Lee, 1999; Meadows, 2006). From Vygotsky’s viewpoint a child develops cognition and language as the result of communication with more knowledgeable others in the undertaking
of everyday problem-solving tasks. Gradually, external, socially-mediated dialogue becomes internalized and turns into an inner, personalized resource for the child’s own thinking. At first, an adult guides the child through relevant behaviour until the moment he or she is able to cope with the task independently and successfully. The area in which the child can perform an action or task with the help of a more skilled and knowledgeable person Vygotsky labelled the ‘zone of proximal development’. He defined this as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.76). In the classroom context, ZPD can be described as a gap between a task that a child is able to do easily on his or her own and a task which is simply out of reach for the child at present and cannot be completed without guidance and help from a more knowledgeable adult. In such a way, ZPD provides a valuable conceptual framework for identifying the level of challenge in the activities that will stretch and extend learning but which are also achievable and which allow for success.

Scaffolding is a metaphor used to describe the interactive verbal support provided by adults to guide children through the ZPD and give them the opportunity to perform a task that they would be unable to do on their own. Though originally the concept was developed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in the context of first language acquisition, it became widely used in other learning contexts as well. For Bruner (1983), scaffolding refers to “a process of ‘setting up’ the situation to make the child’s entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it” (p. 60). Thus, scaffolding represents a particular kind of help or support and thus relates closely to Vygotsky’s concept of learning as the result of joint participation in a goal-oriented activity. Gibbons (2002) argues that it is only when scaffolding is required that learning actually takes place since it is only then that work is taking place within the child’s ZPD.
In their original framing, Wood et al. (1976) identified six features of effective scaffolding: (1) creating children’s interest in the task; (2) breaking down a difficult task into stages; (3) keeping children on track by reminding them of the goal; (4) pointing out other ways of doing the task; (5) controlling the child’s frustration during the task; (6) demonstrating an idealized way of doing the task. As has been pointed out by many authors (e.g. Cameron, 2001; Gibbons, 2002; Van Lier, 1996), all these features are absolutely valid for the context of teaching a foreign language to children in a way that they combine the secure, familiar, non-threatening and predictable with space for development, creativity and change.

Scaffolding children’ learning is vital in the process of storytelling and drama (Read, 2004). Since over a series of lessons children will come back to the story three or four times, the nature and extent of the scaffolding will change each time children will re-engage with the story. First, children’s initial comprehension will be supported by the teacher’s gestures, voice, intonation, pictures. Children’s initial responses are likely to be in their first language (L1) as they spontaneously express their opinions, show empathy or dislike for the characters, relate what happens to their own experience, enjoy humour, predict, guess and imagine, in a way that would not yet be possible for them to do in English. Children’s use of L1 at this stage hence provides an important scaffold from the familiar to the new. The scaffolding in subsequent lessons changes and moves on, guiding children through their individual ZPDs, to internalizing more language and using it in a more confident and independent way. Thus, every time children engage with the story, they are increasingly able to respond and participate in English due to the cyclical process of coming back to the story and practicing language and vocabulary that the story contains.

In order to help children to gradually internalize language from the story Read (2008) suggested the following stages: (1) arouse interest, attention and curiosity in the story; (2) pre-
teach and make vocabulary which is necessary for the story memorable; (3) facilitate initial comprehension with the help of illustrations, mime, facial expression, voice including pitch, tone and intonation as well as closed and open questions; (4) retell or act out the story; (5) enable children to think from within the story and explore significant issues; (6) provide opportunities for children to transfer the language they learnt from the story to other personalized, relevant and meaningful contexts. As a result of a carefully planned scaffolding process which engages children with the story in pleasurable, challenging and significant ways, with flexible and appropriate support, children will be able to internalize language and learning from the story (Read, 2008).

To conclude, stories and drama provide rich opportunities for oral skills development. First, stories motivate young learners to engage with the language by creating meaningful context and to deal with issues that are significant for children’s lives. Second, although in the beginning children give their responses in the L1, every time they come back to the story they are gradually able to participate more in English as a result of scaffolding provided by the teacher in the form of mime, gestures, voice, pictures, open and closed questions, recasts and feedback in order to support children’s learning and guide them through their individual ZPDs. Finally, due to the cyclical process of engaging with the story and scaffolding techniques, children’s skills gradually develop from receptive understanding to oral production and internalization of the language, i.e. when the children are able to act out the story as well as use the language from the story in new contexts.

2.1.3 Empirical studies on the effectiveness of storytelling techniques

Overall, the actual effect of using storytelling and drama in the classroom has not been fully investigated yet and the lack of research in this area has been emphasized by Fitzgibbon and Wilhelm (1998), who conclude that qualitative and quantative studies focusing on specific linguistic, interpersonal and cognitive aspects of storytelling are needed in order to
understand the full benefits of this approach from both a teaching and learning perspective (p. 29).

However, a number of recent studies on using storytelling with young children found positive effects on grammar, vocabulary, length of utterance and sentence formation (Chou, 2014; Hsieh, 2006; Speaker, Taylor, & Kamen, 2004), while other studies found enhancement in listening and reading skills (Biegler, 1998; Huang, 2006; Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007; Wang & Lee, 2007). A noticeable improvement in speaking skills has been reported in the studies by Cary (1998) and Linse (2007). Moreover, there are studies which found an increase in children’s motivation and engagement (Biegler, 1998; Chou, 2014; Hsieh, 2006), as well as an improvement in developing social skills and emotional intelligence (Baskerville, 2011; Pedersen, 1995). The studies on using drama in the classroom of young learners showed a significant improvement in speaking skills and motivation to learn English (Chang, 2012; Hines, 1995).

2.1.4 Why storytelling and drama are not widely used in the classroom

Despite the availability of numerous handbooks for teachers that deal solely with storytelling techniques (Gerngross & Puchta, 1996; Wright, 2003; Wright & Maley, 1995; Zaro & Salaberri, 1995) and the established positive effects of using storytelling in a foreign language classroom, many researchers point to teachers’ resistance to using stories with their learners. For instance, in their report on global practices in teaching English to young learners, Garton, Copland and Burns (2011) conclude that “one very noticeable absentee from the list of frequently used activities is storytelling” (p. 12). In their study, involving 4,696 responses of teachers from 144 countries, only 42% of teachers reported telling stories in every lesson or often, while 17% said they never or rarely read stories to their students. The authors found this fact surprising when taking into account the importance of storytelling in the literature on young learners.
A possible reason for such a resistance to the use of stories in the classroom has been attributed by Ellis and Brewster (2014) to a lack of confidence among teachers in their ability to tell stories or read them aloud. Many teachers have not been trained specifically in teaching young children and are not familiar with the methodology for teaching a foreign language to this particular age group. Indeed, the importance of proper teacher training for teaching a foreign language to young learners including storytelling and drama techniques has also been stressed by Fojkar, Skela and Kovac (2013) in their study on Slovenian primary English teachers.

In conclusion, storytelling is an effective approach in language teaching to young learners since stories engage multiple intelligences and different learning styles, provide meaningful, rich and authentic input essential for language development and create conditions for internalization of language and speaking skills development. However, storytelling is not widely used in the primary classroom, possibly due to the lack of training in this kind of method.

### 2.2 Fingerplay

Fingerplay is a very old activity for children that can be traced back to Rome and, specifically, to 50 AD (Scott, 1983), and is present in the folklore of any nation. Fingerplays are defined as short stories that contain rhyme and can be dramatized by fingers (Baker, 1993). There are two types of games: fingerplays that combine finger movements with short rhythmic poems and are performed while sitting and action rhymes that include not only fine motor skills but whole-body movements, e.g. jumping, running on a spot, movements of arms, legs and head (Рузина, 1999). In spite of their simple nature, fingerplays are crucial for children’s speech development.
Numerous physiological and psychological studies have emphasized an important role of fine motor skills in the development of speech (e.g. Dewey, 1993; Newmeyer et al., 2007; Колыцова, 1973; Колыцова & Рузина, 2004; Фомина, 1971). In the 1970s, Koltsova and her colleagues from the Saint-Petersburg Institute of Physiology of Children and Adolescents conducted a number of experiments with infants and toddlers and found that fine finger movements are of paramount importance for the formation of speech functions, as the development of speech areas in the brain are influenced by kinaesthetic impulses coming from fingers. Two of these studies, mentioned in Koltsova’s (1973) work, will be briefly considered here. The first one is an electrophysiological study by Khrizman and Zvonareva (1970 as cited in Koltsova, 1973), who showed that when the child performs rhythmic finger movements, the activity of his or her frontal brain area (where the motor speech zone for speech production is located) and temporal brain area (where the sensory speech zone for speech perception is located) increases sharply. This is explained by the fact that brain centres responsible for finger movements and speech are neurologically located in close proximity. The second study by Panashenko (1969 as cited in Koltsova, 1973) involved new-born babies during their first two months of life. As a starting point, bioelectric currents in the brains of six-week-old babies were recorded, then an experimental training was performed that involved massaging a baby’s hand during which an adult was bending and straightening the baby’s fingers. One month later, high-frequency brain rhythms became distinctly noticeable in the motor projection areas, whereas two months later, they were detected in the future speech area. Both of these studies demonstrate that speech areas are formed under the influence of impulses coming from fingers.

An interesting account of the fact that finger movements are closely related to speech functions is given by Koltsova (1973) in her book, where she states that this relation can be explained by human evolution. Thus, the first form of communication between primitive
people was gestures, where the role of the hand was especially important. It was hands that gave an opportunity to develop a primitive language with the help of which early humans were able to communicate. Further development of hand and speech functions took place in parallel. The speech development of a child undergoes similar stages: first, fine finger movements develop and then, articulation of syllables emerges. All further speech development in a child depends directly on the degree of finger movement training. Koltsova (1973) concludes that there is every reason to consider a hand as a speech organ, similar to the speech apparatus, and that from this point of view, a hand projection is another speech area in the brain (p. 132). Finger training is hence seen as a powerful physiological stimulus to speech development in children.

A number of other researchers emphasized an important role of hand movements for speech development. For instance, Bekhterev proved the influence of hand movements on the functions of higher nervous activity and speech development; he demonstrated that simple hand movements could improve pronunciation of most sounds and thus develop the child’s speech (as cited in Савина Л.П., 2000). Having conducted numerous experiments and having investigated a large number of children, Fomina (Фомина, 1971) identified a trend: if the development of fine finger movements is age-appropriate, then the speech development is also within normal range and, vice versa, if there is a delay in the development of fine finger movements, then the speech development will also slow down, though gross motor skills can develop normally. Dewey (1993) investigated children with developmental coordination disorders and found that similar errors in motor planning were detected in both motor and speech skills in this population, indicating a common link between the planning and processing of speech and fine motor skills. Newmeyer et al. (2007) studied children aged 2 to 5 and found that there was a correlation between the presence of speech-sound problems and impairment of fine motor skills. More than 200 years ago the German philosopher Immanuel
Kant already wrote that “the hand is the visible part of the brain” (Ackerman, 1991, p. 76). A famous Ukrainian education pioneer Sukhomlinski (Сухомлинский, 1985) said that the child’s intelligence is at the tips of his fingers, that, metaphorically speaking, from fingers stem the finest threads – tiny streams that nourish the spring of creative thinking (p. 17). Thus, the importance of the relationship between fine motor skills and speech development is recognized by researchers in different parts of the world, and research of this kind dates back quite some time.

In the recognition of fingerplays in pedagogical practices, German specialists have played a pioneering role. As far back as 1873 an outstanding German educator, Friedrich Froebel, emphasized the educational value of fingerplays and included them in the syllabus of the kindergartens that were subsequently founded by him (Кольцова & Рузина, 2004, p. 178). Froebel put forward an assumption that it is association of the sound and meaning of a word with the child’s own body that best suits the style of teaching young children. In those days no theoretical underpinning of this method existed, and Froebel reached his conclusions as a result of his own experience and intuition. Winters and Griffin (2014) pointed out that rhythm and physical engagement, experienced by children during fingerplays, are crucial for vocabulary acquisition since they encourage children to actively embody and imitate rich language. Moreover, when a child claps to the rhythm of the poem, he begins to understand the basic processes of segmentation (knowing where words begin and end), which is essential for vocabulary building process and even future reading and writing skills, since the pre-literate ability to segment words or distinguish rhymes facilitates comprehension of printed text (Montgomery, 2012).

Movement provided by fingerplays is a vital part of language learning as it helps children develop word meanings and deeper comprehension (Winters, 2013). A number of studies reported by Koltsova (1973) have shown that, for the child to be able to generalize a
particular word to other contexts, not only the number but also the type of connections made for this word matter: the more motor reactions are associated with a word, the better the child can apply this word to different contexts (p. 97). Furthermore, fingerplays facilitate vocabulary development in children with different learning styles where teachers need to integrate enactive, iconic and symbolic modes to maximize comprehension (J. Bruner, 2004). The enactive mode engages children in actually doing something in order to relate it to the language (e.g. performing a fingerplay) whereas the iconic mode uses concrete objects or pictures of objects to support understanding. Thus, gradually children can begin to associate the symbolic mode (e.g. letter, word, number) with the enactive and iconic modes through fingerplay.

The importance of fingerplays for language acquisition was also supported in the works of Gullo (1988) and Churilova (Чурилова, 2003), who state that the relationship of words to actions is very powerful and that one of the primary preconditions for language acquisition is to hear the language and observe the reality associated with it simultaneously, which is exactly the type of associative experience provided by fingerplays. Moreover, fingerplays promote the development of cognitive processes – memory, thinking, perception, imagination, creativity (Zīriņa, 2009). Fingerplays provide a source for strengthening language experience by creating opportunities for listening, speaking, developing sentence structure, working with rhyming words and initial sounds, and increasing the attention span (Baker, 1993). Furthermore, the language structures and vocabulary used in fingerplays are developmentally beyond what children will use spontaneously. In this way, fingerplays enable children to engage with the language that is yet to develop (Gullo, 1988, p. 12). The importance of fingerplays for language development is also emphasized in the works by Baker (1989; 1992; 1993), Stoltz et al. (2013) and Watson et al. (1994).
There is an important advantage of fingerplays over other types of activities that develop fine motor skills in children. For example, other fine motor skills activities, such as threading beads and rings, weaving around cardboard, drawing, painting, clay modelling, lacing etc., engage only the first three fingers – thumb, index finger and middle finger (the so-called 'social hand zone') – while the ring finger and pinky finger remain passive. This in turn weakens the effectiveness of this method by more than by one third (Рузина, 1999). Moreover, the main movement involved in these activities is pressing, whereas stretching and relaxing are rarely or never involved, although these precise movements are necessary for fine motor skills development. Thus, Ruzina (Рузина, 1999) recommends to combine three methods while practicing fingerplays: pressing, stretching and relaxing, as well as to use separate movements of each finger to make the fingerplay method as beneficial as it can be.

To conclude, being a very old and traditional activity for children, fingerplays are crucial for speech development, as reported in numerous studies around the world. Experiments with infants and toddlers have demonstrated that the development of speech areas in the brain are influenced by kinaesthetic impulses coming from fingers. Speech development in a child correlates directly with the degree of finger movement training, which makes it possible to consider a hand as a speech organ. Furthermore, the reviewed studies demonstrated that fingerplays meet one of the primary prerequisites for language acquisition, namely the association between the sound form of the word and the observed reality related to this word. Thus, finger training in the form of fingerplays is considered a powerful physiological stimulus to speech development in children. Moreover, fingerplays involve rhythm and rhyme, both of which are beneficial for language acquisition. Rhythmic engagement with the language promotes understanding of word segmentation which is crucial for future writing and reading skills. Besides, fingerplays create an opportunity to engage with the language structures and vocabulary that are developmentally beyond what children are
able to use spontaneously, enabling them to work within Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. Finally, fingerplays provide opportunities to involve movements of all fingers and in different modes (not only pressing), which makes this method much more effective compared to other fine motor skills activities.

Chapter 3. Early English programmes in the Netherlands

3.1 Main features of early English instruction in Dutch primary schools

English has been a compulsory school subject in the Netherlands since 1986 and as such should be mandatorily introduced in the final two years of primary education (grade 7 and grade 8). However, schools are not restricted in their choice to start English instruction earlier and over the last 20 years there has been a significant growth in the number of schools offering English from grade 1; with 850 schools in 2011 compared to only 25 schools in 2002 (Europees Platform, 2011). The motives to introduce an early FL start that have been pointed out by schools are as follows: (1) pressure from parents who believe that younger is better in terms of language sensitivity of young children and cognitive benefits of foreign language learning, (2) growing globalization that calls for proficiency in foreign languages especially English, (3) a need for raising awareness of cultural diversity and better understanding of children with a different first language (Herder & de Bot, 2007).

At present there are three main types of foreign language provision in Dutch primary schools: (1) Standard EIBO (which is short for the Dutch phrase Engels In het Basis Onderwijs freely translatable as English in Primary Schools, and is offered from grade 7, i.e. age 10-11 onwards), (2) Early EIBO (from grade 5 or 6, i.e. from age 8 onwards) and (3) VVTO (short for Vroeg Vreemde Talen Onderwijs, which translates into Early Foreign Language Education. This is offered from grade 1, i.e. from age 4 onwards). The vast majority of schools (66%) start English in grade 7 or 8, 17% of schools start in grade 5 or 6
and 17% start in the lower grades of 1 to 4 (Thijs, Tuin, & Trimbos, 2011). The present study deals with the area of VVTO. According to Persson (2012) the concept of “typical” VVTO-school does not exist since early English education in the Netherlands is a bottom-up process, with limited governmental regulation, and hence what instead characterizes VVTO education is a great deal of autonomy in how schools organize English instruction, which results in a large variation in time allocated for English per week, teacher qualifications and language skills, teaching methods and type of schools. The FLiPP project (the Foreign Languages in Primary Schools Project), which was a collaboration between the University of Groningen and Utrecht University that started in 2009, surveyed 58 schools. Out of these 58 schools, 26% of schools indicated to offer 0-30 minutes of English instruction per week, 26% - 30-60 minutes per week, 40% - 60-90 minutes per week and only 8% offered more than 90 minutes per week. Moreover, in the vast majority of schools (86%), English was taught by the primary class teacher, in a small number of schools (14%) a class teacher was found to work with a (near-)native-speaker specialist English teacher and in just a few schools (1%) a (near-)native-speaker specialist teacher was solely responsible for teaching English (Thijs et al., 2011). Language skills of regular primary school teachers in the Netherlands vary from A1 to C2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001), with B1 level desired at the end of the teacher-training colleges and B2 preferred, though this level is not always attained by teachers (Persson, 2012; Thijs et al., 2011).

Though being a compulsory subject in grade 7 and 8, English is not part of the Cito final test, which is commonly administered at a national level at the end of primary education. However, there is a separate voluntary Cito test that primary schools can administer called Me2! English, which is meant to measure progress of students in English after 2 years of instruction in grade 7 and 8. This test is aimed to determine the command of English just
before the transition to secondary education. This is a method-independent test consisting of 120 questions to assess students’ listening, reading and vocabulary skills. Unfortunately, the Cito Me2! English test is only used by 3% of schools (Thijs et al., 2011), which means that at the start of secondary school it is unclear how substantial the variation in proficiency levels among students is. As a result students feel frustrated because the secondary school curriculum does not correspond to what they have already mastered and primary teachers conclude that their FL instruction is not taken seriously (Oostdam, 2010).

Moreover, the difficulty with the assessment of English is the lack of clear guidelines as to the level which is supposed to be achieved at the end of primary school in order to provide a sufficient basis for a good start in secondary school (Lobo, 2013). For this reason, there has been a recent suggestion by the Onderwijsraad (i.e. School Inspection Board) (2011) to make English a compulsory part of the final exam in primary school in order to standardize the level of English achieved at the end of primary school and encourage a more results-oriented approach to English teaching.

Regarding methods employed for foreign language teaching in Dutch primary schools, Huizenga and Robbe (2005) distinguish three main approaches: (a) traditional, (b) thematic and (c) integrated. As part of the traditional method, the curriculum is divided into different domains of reading, listening, speaking, grammar and vocabulary. An advantage of this method lies in the opportunity to provide language instruction in a structured way. In the thematic method learning is organized around certain topics which are explored and deepened through various activities. Children are often excited about this form of education since topics are closely related to their world and children have an opportunity to take part in meaningful and interesting activities. In the integrated method, natural interaction between teacher and students is of great importance, which provides rich opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills of children. The interactive method is based on three central features –
social learning, meaningful learning and learning strategies – and requires a high level of didactic skills on the part of the teacher. A substantial number of primary teachers (76% in 59 VVTO schools in Thijs et al.’s (2011) survey) feel that they are insufficiently aware of didactic approaches to language teaching and that courses in Teacher Training College do not equip them well enough for teaching English to young learners (Oostdam & Toorenburg, 2002).

One of the best known methods of early English teaching is the so-called Early Bird programme, originated in Rotterdam, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.2 Early Bird and other methods

Early Bird is a relatively recent initiative (2003) introduced by the board for Public Education in Rotterdam to offer a form of improved early English foreign language learning. However, it has grown from a regional to a national initiative, and with that from two schools in 2003 to 150 schools in 2013 (Lobo, 2013). According to the programme’s website (www.earlybirdie.nl), the methods of Early bird are designed to let children engage with English in a natural way, i.e. through games, practical experiential activities and interaction. The emphasis is on communication skills – listening and speaking, though gradually reading and writing are also introduced in the curriculum. According to Herder and de Bot (2007) there are three stages in the Early Bird Model, each with their own intensity of English instruction: (a) in grades 1 and 2 (kindergarten age), children get 4-5 hours of English per week, typically taught by a native speaker, and through a variety of playful activities during which implicit learning is intended to take place; (b) in grades 3-5 children consolidate and expand their acquired skills with 1-2 hours of English lessons per week; (c) in grades 6-8 English is offered for an average of 9 hours per week in combination with other subjects.
taught by their primary class teacher or an English teacher. The choice to reduce the number of hours of English instruction in grades 3-5 appears to be a conscious one and is made due to the fact that during this time all attention is focused on learning to read and write in Dutch. Early Bird tries to provide a rich learning environment and exposure to authentic English by using digital learning materials.

Another commonly used digital-based method is GrooveMe (www.groove.me), which focuses on language learning through songs. As opposed to the Early Bird programmes, it is a minimal input-based method, with times that can be allocated to this method varying from 30 to 60 minutes on a weekly basis. Songs are seen as effective for language learning since they provide authentic language use and rhythm of the language, are appealing to children in terms of style and content, and engage multiple intelligences when supplemented by other motor and visual activities. Teaching materials that form part of the GrooveMe method are divided into three levels: (1) for grades 1-4; (2) for grades 5-6 and; (3) for grades 7-8. All materials for all levels are organized around themes that are relevant for children at a certain age. For instance, in grades 1-2 songs cover the topics of four seasons, parts of the body and family. Moreover, the GrooveMe method contains so-called routine songs, for example, for cleaning the table or washing hands, that can be easily and naturally integrated into everyday classroom activities. The method is very flexible in its implementation, with opportunities to teach from 5 to 20 minutes English per lesson.

3.3 Effectiveness of early English programmes in Dutch primary schools

There are currently very few studies investigating linguistic outcomes in the lower years of Dutch primary education and the studies that do exist point to limited benefits of early implementation of English. An exploratory study by Aarts and Ronde (2006) was conducted with 6-year old children at the end of group 2 who had had 60 minutes of English
instruction per week. A native or near-native speaker teacher had taught the children using a thematic approach with songs and games. The results showed that at the end of year 2 children had only basic receptive skills, being able to understand instructions and commands while productive skills were virtually absent and also vocabulary acquisition was very limited. A similar study by Goorhuis-Brouwer and de Bot (2010) showed that after two years of English provision with 3 hours per week children acquired some basic skills in English corresponding to a native age equivalent of 2.5 years for comprehension and 2.1 years for language production. In addition, the most rapid development was witnessed in the first years, while in the second year development was found to be much slower, possibly attributable to the limited amount of time spent on English or by the teaching method that does not encourage further language development.

A large-scaled longitudinal government-funded project FLiPP (Unsworth et al., 2014) looked at the effects of early start with English in 14 Dutch primary schools from different provinces of the Netherlands. The study was mainly concerned with two factors affecting early English learning: teacher’s proficiency and amount of weekly classroom exposure. Teachers’ proficiency levels ranged from A1 to C2 and natives, while weekly classroom exposure was measured in minutes per week and included 60 minutes or less, 60-120 minutes and more than 120 minutes per week. The results of receptive vocabulary and grammar tests showed that children with 60 min and less per week scored significantly lower than those with more than 60 min of weekly classroom exposure, suggesting that 60 minutes or less of English instruction might not provide sufficient input for noticeable language development to take place. The language proficiency of the teacher turned out to be a good predictor of children’s scores: children with a non-native speaker teacher of English at CEFR-B level scored significantly lower than children with a native-speaker teacher or non-native at C level. Although as part of the FLiPP project, children were only tested on their receptive skills, Liv
Persson who was part of the project mentioned that productive skills of children in drip-feed contexts of less than 60 minutes per week were also very limited (personal communication, March 10, 2015).

To sum up, early English programmes in the Netherlands are characterized by a great deal of variation in terms of time spent on English per week, teacher qualifications and language skills, teaching methods and type of school. Such a diversity is caused by the lack of government regulation in the VVTO area, as a result of which a great autonomy of schools in the ways they organize English instruction. Among various approaches to teaching English to young learners, the Early Bird method is very well-known in the Netherlands and is mainly designed to develop communicative skills in children through games, interaction and experiential activities. The studies investigating linguistic outcomes of the early start in English in Dutch primary schools overall point to limited linguistic benefits after two years of English provision.

3.4 Research questions

At present the investigation of input quality in Dutch schools within the FLiPP project has been limited to teacher’s language proficiency only, suggesting that more factors need to be taken into consideration and, in particular, what happens in the classroom: whether “1 hour of really good teaching is more effective than 3 hours of mediocre teaching” (de Bot, 2014, p. 415). For this reason in our study we would like to investigate the impact of quality of language input on children’s proficiency in English from the perspective of methodology and teaching approaches in the situation of minimal input settings (60 minutes or less per week), which is common for 75% of Dutch primary schools (Thijs et al., 2011). The main research questions are as flows:
(1) Do children’s language skills (both receptive and productive) in grade 1 (i.e. 4 and 5-year-old children) improve with minimal input time (60 minutes per week) through methods of storytelling and fingerplay after two weeks of instruction?

(2) To what extent do individual variation variables, as measured by phonological short-term working memory, but also language aptitude as assessed by the children’s primary teacher predict children’s language outcomes?
Chapter 4. Method

In our study a (predominantly) quantitative approach was adopted to investigate the effect of storytelling and fingerplay methods, designed for the development of listening and speaking skills in young learners, over the course of 6 lessons of 20 minutes. The main research question was what effect the combination of storytelling and fingerplay methods would have on receptive and productive skills in the situation of minimal early English input.

4.1 Subjects

The study involved 15 young foreign language learners (8 girls and 7 boys) aged 4 and 5 (M age = 4.8), who all attended a Dutch primary school that offered early English from grade 1 (Samenwerkingsschool Meeroevers). Meeroevers is situated in the rural eastern side of the city of Groningen, in the North of the Netherlands. It serves a new development area, with most families living there being of an upper intermediate to upper social status. All the children were enrolled in the same class and had Dutch as their first language. The early English teaching method used at the school was the GrooveMe method, which offers early English education through the medium of songs (see section 3.2). The classroom teacher reported providing English instruction through this method for approximately 20-40 minutes per week and using both Dutch and English during these lessons. There was a variation among children in terms of their start at school: some children had started school 5 months ago and others a year ago. Such a variation is common for Dutch primary schools since children start attending school as soon as they are 4 (after they have their fourth birthday). The level of English language proficiency of the children was reported by the teacher from her personal observation as homogeneous and characterized by very basic receptive skills and absent productive skills. However, there were two exceptional cases: two boys in this class
were more advanced in their level of English proficiency due to their 1-year residence in the USA and attendance of an American state preschool during this year, where the boys had been exposed exclusively to English and as a result had developed their listening and speaking skills in English.

4.2 Teacher involved in the study

The researcher (female, Ukrainian, 28 years old) took part in this study as the primary language teacher that offered the early English classes. This decision was considered essential for successful data collection for the following reasons: (1) the researcher is an advanced speaker of English (C1 level on the CEFR); (2) the researcher has more than 6 years of experience of teaching English as a foreign language to various age groups including children aged 5; (3) the researcher has an in-depth understanding of the storytelling and fingerplay methods used in the treatment; (4) teaching would not be dependent on an external teacher; (5) organization and planning could be streamlined. In addition, the researcher did not have any knowledge of the Dutch language, which was regarded as beneficial for the study since the children would immediately understand that their teacher could not communicate in their L1 and hence would be more motivated to interact in English.

4.3 Materials

A series of six 20-minute lessons were developed to teach children about Jungle Animals. This topic was chosen due to the fact that it had not been previously taught to children but present in the curriculum. The overall aim at the end of 6 lessons was for children to be able to understand (receptive skills) 32 words and say (productive skills) 21 words (see Appendix B) as well as answer 3 questions: What’s this/that? – It’s a toucan. What’s he doing? – He’s walking. How’s he feeling? – He’s angry. (Please note that the answers
presented here are model answers and are therefore not fixed). There were 4 groups of words: (1) emotions (2) animals (3) actions (4) other vocabulary. Vocabulary items which were Dutch-English cognates (e.g. giraf-giraffé, olifant-elephant) were excluded as much as possible since they would complicate the assessment of linguistic progress in children. The entire list of words that formed the basis of the lessons can be found in Appendix A. The story for the lesson series was *A Walk in the Jungle* taken from the [www.supersimplelearning.com](http://www.supersimplelearning.com) website. This story was chosen because it fitted well with the topic and was considered to be interesting for the age group of 4 and 5. The story was about four children who were brave enough to go to the jungle on their own, where they met four animals with which they eventually became friends.

The methodology underlying the lessons structure combined two major methods – storytelling and fingerplay. The combination of these teaching approaches has been chosen due to the following factors: first of all, the method of storytelling has been proven to be effective for foreign language skills development (both receptive and productive) of young and very young learners because (i) stories build on children’s capacity for imaginative play, (ii) issues touched upon in the stories are closely related to the child’s world and get young learners interested in the learning process, (iii) stories and storytelling activities provide opportunities to engage multiple intelligences and different learning styles (see section 1.2.1). Secondly, the method of fingerplay has been shown to be beneficial for speaking skills since kinaesthetic impulses coming from fingers stimulate speech areas in the brain (see section 2.2).

Each lesson had a similar structure and involved 5 main stages:

1. Greeting (2 min)
2. Pre-teaching new vocabulary (7 min)
3. Engaging with the story (3 min)
4. Practising vocabulary and language structures from the story (6 min)

5. Saying goodbye (2 min)

Each stage involved a variety of activities including fingerplays, flashcard games, miming games, games with different toys, rhythmical games, digital board activities, role-plays and songs. The activities of each lesson were carefully chosen and structured to ensure that during the 20-minute span all 7 intelligences (linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal) were engaged. The indication of the intelligences engaged in every activity as well as detailed lesson plans of all 6 lessons can be found in Appendix A. During the two weeks of the lesson series children did not have their usual English instruction through the GrooveMe method in the classroom.

4.4 Instruments

In order to assess children’s English language development two tasks were used. First, to measure receptive vocabulary skills, an adapted form of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) was used, where children had to listen to a word and point to a corresponding picture out of four different picture alternatives. The test was adapted because we wanted to assess children’s knowledge on the specific vocabulary of jungle animals, emotions, actions and other items used in the lessons series. Second, to measure productive skills, a picture description test was used, where children were prompted to say (1) which animals they saw (Prompt: What’s this? Answer: It’s a hippo), (2) what they were doing (Prompt: What’s the hippo (she) doing? Answer: The hippo (she) is running) and (3) how they were feeling (Prompt: How is the hippo (she) feeling? Answer: The hippo (she) is happy). There were three pictures that included 10 animals, 7 actions and 4 emotions to be named. An example of a picture used in the test is provided in Figure 1, and all the pictures can be found in Appendix C.
The gain in productive and receptive English language skills was related to two individual differences measures: working memory capacity and children’s language aptitude (as assessed by their primary class teacher). This was done in an attempt to look at individual differences in the language proficiency gains. To assess the contribution of working memory capacity for all children individually, and more specifically phonological short-term memory, two subtests were used of the Automated Working Memory Assessment (AWMA; Alloway, 2007) (forward digit span and non-word repetition), adapted for the current study. The tests were conducted in the children’s L1 (Dutch). Since the researcher did not speak Dutch, the instructions had been pre-recorded by a Dutch native speaker and were played during the tests by the researcher. The transcript of recorded instructions given to children for short-term memory test can be found in Appendix D.

The attendance of children during the lessons series was noted down by the researcher in her journal. In addition, an interview with the children’s classroom teacher was conducted to get the information about (1) her impression of the method used and whether the activities are easy to implement at the English lesson in general; (2) the observed changes in the children and their engagement with English outside the lessons (e.g. if the children produced any words learned from the lesson outside the lesson context); (3) the individual differences among the children in their L1 (Dutch) skills, classified as language aptitude. Indeed, the children’s L1 skills were indicated by the teacher in response to the question: ‘Hoe talig zijn
de kinderen? (freely translatable as: How good are the children at language learning?) on the 5-point scale ranging from 1 (weak L1 skills) to 5 (excellent L1 skills).

4.5 Procedure

Table 2 provides information as to when the tests and lessons took place.

**Table 2. The dates and times of data collection.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>07.04.15</td>
<td>09.30-11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
<td>13.04.15</td>
<td>13.00-13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>14.04.15</td>
<td>13.00-13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>16.04.15</td>
<td>13.00-13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>20.04.15</td>
<td>13.00-13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 5</td>
<td>21.04.15</td>
<td>13.00-13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 6</td>
<td>23.04.15</td>
<td>11.00-11.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test I</td>
<td>23.04.15</td>
<td>11.30-13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test II</td>
<td>21.05.15</td>
<td>09.00-11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological short-term memory test</td>
<td>22.05.15</td>
<td>09.15-11.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview with the classroom teacher</td>
<td>22.05.15</td>
<td>12.00-12.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The entire data collection process was conducted by the researcher. The pre-test, post-test I and post-test II involved exactly the same procedure – first, receptive vocabulary skills were tested by means of an adapted version of the PPVT and then productive skills were assessed through the picture description task. The time period between post-test 1 and post-test 2 was 4 weeks, three of which the children were on holiday and did not attend school. Post-test 2 was designed as a retention test and was aimed at testing how many items (i.e. words) children were able to recognise receptively and how many they could use in speech, after not having been actively engaged with the materials for effectively a month. All the tests were conducted with each child individually in the reading corner of the corridor, close to the children’s classroom. All the lessons were taught at the same time slot from 13.00 to 13.20 to keep the interval between the lessons the same. The post-test was planned to take place the
day after the last lesson (lesson 6) but practically this did not turn out to be feasible, due to other school activities on that day so that lesson 6 was scheduled earlier from 11.00 to 11.20 and post-test 1 was conducted straight after the lesson from 11.30 to 13.50.

The whole data collection process including pre-test, post-tests, short-term memory test and 6 lessons was video recorded using an Apple MacBook Pro (MC024/A 17’’), which was placed in a static position. Although the laptop remained unobtrusive during the lesson, its static position had its limitations. For example, during the activities performed in a circle, some children whose backs were facing the camera, could not be caught on camera. In addition, the sound quality of the video recording was obviously dependent on the laptop position in relation to the group. Despite the mentioned limitations, the video recordings provided interesting material for general observation purposes and provide realistic impression of the data collection process. All the video recordings of 6 lessons can be viewed on the following website: https://sites.google.com/site/tigerslessons

4.6 Data analysis

The study investigated the effect of a set of lessons based on the methods of storytelling and fingerplay in increasing children’s language proficiency in English.

Language proficiency was operationalised as the ability to recognise vocabulary items receptively and produce them in speech. As such, the independent variable in this study was instruction and the dependent variables were the scores on the pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2 of an adapted version of PPVT and picture description task. The scores on the adapted version of PPVT were calculated as the number of pictures identified correctly, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 32. Similarly, the scores on the picture description tasks were calculated as the number of words (animals, emotions and actions) named correctly on the pictures, with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 21.
Phonological short-term working memory was measured by means of a digit forward span and non-word repetition task. The number of digits repeated correctly formed the WM digits score, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 9. Similarly, the number of non-words repeated correctly formed the WM non-words score, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 9.

To examine learning gains, a repeated measures ANOVA analysis were conducted in SPSS to examine the differences between pre-test, post-test I and post-test II scores. Separate repeated measures ANOVAs were run for the PPVT and picture description task. Bivariate correlation analyses were run in SPSS for two reasons: (1) to assess the correlation between the scores on the PPVT and the picture description task; (2) to determine which factors (phonological short-term memory, L1 skills) best predict children’s outcomes at post-test 1 and 2, with separate analyses for receptive and productive skills. Additionally, in order to see exactly how much receptive and productive vocabulary children retained four weeks after the end of the programme (post-test 2) the difference between post-test 1 and post-test 2 scores was qualitatively looked at using MS Excel for each child on PPVT and picture description task separately.
Chapter 5. Results

5.1 Language proficiency

Language proficiency of the children was measured on two aspects – receptive (listening comprehension) skills and productive (speaking) skills. Table 3 provides the raw scores on receptive and productive vocabulary tests with means and standard deviations for the three time points – pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2. To present the differences between the mean scores on both tests over time visually, Figure 2 has been plotted.

Table 3. Raw scores on receptive vocabulary test (adapted PPVT) and productive vocabulary test (Picture Description) with means and standard deviations (SD) for the three measurements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PPVT (max 32 words)</th>
<th>Picture Description (max 21 words)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>Post-test 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ol</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ev</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 3 and Figure 2, most children improved their receptive and productive skills to a great extent at the end of the programme. It should be pointed out that at the pre-test stage the children were already found to possess some receptive vocabulary knowledge and could therefore successfully identify on average 8.33 (SD=6.04) words out of 32 as part of the adapted PPVT. In contrast, their productive skills were virtually absent, with mean number of words which they could produce being 0.27 (SD=0.7) out of 21. However, by the end of six lessons they were able to comprehend on average 27.8 words (SD=1.26) and produce 12.93 words (SD=5.22). The only exception is one child (Mi) who scored zero on the picture description task on all three measurements; despite being addressed in English, he consistently responded in Dutch.

To see if the difference between the pre-test and post-tests were significant, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted using Greenhouse-Geisser correction due to the violation of the sphericity assumption. Concerning receptive skills, the results showed that the mean scores on PPVT differed statistically significantly between time points (F(1.052; 14.734) =
210.58, p < 0.001), $\eta^2 = 0.94$. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that the intervention programme with the use of storytelling and fingerplay methods caused a large improvement in children’s receptive skills from pre-test stage to post-test 1 stage (p < 0.001). However, the difference between post-test 1 and post-test 2 scores was not statistically significant (p = 1).

Regarding productive skills, a similar tendency was revealed. The mean scores on picture description task differed in a statistically significant way as a function of time (F(1.218; 17.058) = 98.17, p < 0.001), $\eta^2 = 0.88$. Post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that after the intervention programme children’s productive skills significantly improved from pre-test to post-test 1 stage (p < 0.001). However, the difference between post-test 1 and post-test 2 scores was not statistically significant (p = 1).

To see how much receptive and productive vocabulary children retained four weeks after the end of the programme (post-test 2) a qualitative approach was used. Table 4 shows three possible trends in the children’s retention of skills between post-test 1 and post-test 2: an upward trend indicating an improvement in the performance (marked by a green arrow), a downward trend indicating a decline in the performance (marked by a red arrow) and a horizontal trend indicating no change in the performance (marked by a yellow arrow).

Table 4. Raw scores of post-test 1 and post-test 2 and retention ratios for PPVT and picture description task with mean values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PPVT (max 32 words)</th>
<th>Retention ratio</th>
<th>Picture Description (max 21 words)</th>
<th>Retention ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test 1</td>
<td>Post-test 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-test 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>103.70%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>96.67%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ra</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>96.43%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ol</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>103.70%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>103.57%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ev</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>107.14%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>27.87</td>
<td>100.27%</td>
<td>12.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the table, overall, there was a complete retention of receptive vocabulary skills (100.27%) and even a slight improvement of productive skills (102.89%), but there were substantial individual differences between the children.

The correlation between the overall scores on receptive and productive skills tests (PPVT and picture description task respectively) was rather strong and approaching significance, Pearson r (15) = 0.485, p = 0.067 (two-tailed), which suggest that the better the children scored on PPVT the better they would score on picture description task.

5.2 Individual differences and language proficiency

The individual differences in our study were measured by means of a phonological short-term memory test (forward digit span and non-word repetition tasks) and language aptitude assessment done by the children’s primary classroom teacher. Table 5 shows means and standard deviations on short-term working memory test and language aptitude assessment.

**Table 5. Means and standard deviations (SD) on short-term working memory test and language aptitude assessment.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WM (digits)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WM (non-words)</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language aptitude</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By looking at the means, we can see that children performed slightly better on forward digit span task than on non-word repetition task. Their language abilities in learning Dutch (L1) were highly assessed by the classroom teacher, with average rating 4.33 out of 5. She noted that this cohort was exceptionally verbally gifted in her experience.
In order to see the extent to which individual variation variables linked up with children’s language outcomes on post-test 2, bivariate correlation analyses were run. Pearson correlation analyses showed only one statistically significant and fairly strong correlation between the scores on picture description task and the language aptitude assessment done by the primary teacher. Thus, the higher rating children had received (by their primary teacher) on their language abilities in Dutch (L1), the better they scored on the productive skills test (picture description) in English, \( r(15) = 0.642, p = 0.01 \) (two-tailed).

5.3 Interview with the classroom teacher

The interview with the children’s classroom teacher was administered to gather information on two aspects: (1) the teacher’s own impression of the storytelling and fingerplay method and (2) observed changes in the children in terms of their engagement with English outside English lessons. The interview consisted of 5 questions and took approximate 10 minutes to administer. Below in Table 6 the questions and the summary of the teacher’s answers are given. Note that the intervention program in the interview is referred to as Tiger’s Lessons.

Table 6. The summary of the questions and answers from the interview with the children’s classroom teacher.

| Question 1: | Before Tiger’s Lessons how would you assess the children’s receptive and productive skills in English? |
| Question 2: | Did you notice any differences in the way the children engaged with English during and after Tiger’s Lessons? |
| Answer 1: | The children were able to identify some of the words from the topics they learned (school, spring, summer) while their speaking skills were very limited. |
Answer 2: Yes, I noticed that during our Maths lesson children said some numbers in English instead of Dutch. A lot of parents also mentioned to me that the children asked them if they could watch cartoons in English. Some parents also told me that at home their children repeated the names of emotions in English and sang the ‘Goodbye’ song performing the same actions as they did at their English lessons. One mother told me that during the lesson at the swimming pool, her daughter asked in English: Where’s hippo? while looking for a toy hippo around her.

Question 3: What do you think can be the reason for this? Why are the children trying to use English outside their lessons?

Answer 3: Because they liked the lessons, because they played a lot and had fun and they were very active during the lessons running, jumping and hiding in the classroom. This was very new for them and they liked it.

Question 4: Are the activities and games used in Tiger’s Lessons easy or difficult to implement with children?

Answer 4: I think they are rather easy to do with kids.

Question 5: Are you planning to do any of these activities with the children in the future? If yes, which in particular?

Answer 5: Yes, sure. I especially liked the game where the children gather in the ‘house’ and then have to go out to the jungle and look for animals. I also liked the game with flashcards in the box, and also Which is missing? game, miming games and Follow the rhythm game.

5.4 Summary

To summarize, the results showed that the children improved their receptive and productive skills to a great extent at the end of the intervention programme. This improvement was statistically significant. Moreover, four weeks after the programme the retention test (post-test 2) scores showed no statistically significant difference from post-test 1 scores on both receptive and productive tasks. In other words, the learning gains persisted after a longer time span as well. The results of the bivariate correlation analyses showed that language aptitude rather than short-term working memory ties in with the children’s scores on productive vocabulary test. However, neither language aptitude nor short-term working memory correlated with the children’s performance on the receptive vocabulary test.
Chapter 6. Discussion

Our first research question tapped into the question whether there was an improvement of 4- and 5-year-old children’s receptive and productive skills in English in the situation of minimal input (60 minutes per week) through the methods of storytelling and fingerplay after two weeks of instruction. The results showed that there was a steep learning curve for both receptive and productive skills in the children at the end of the program, though this improvement was not identical for both skills, with receptive test scores being higher overall than productive. This outcome is to be expected, since listening comprehension skills develop prior to and faster than speaking skills (Spolsky, 1989). Yet the magnitude of the improvement from pre-test to post-test 1 is large and, moreover, four weeks after the end of the programme (post-test 2) the children’s receptive and productive skills were retained, even with a slight upward trend. All this suggests overall success of the storytelling and fingerplay methods even with the minimal input time allotted to it.

The main question is what contributed to these positive effects. We assume that it is largely due to the methods of storytelling and fingerplay. First of all, building on children’s inherent capacity for fantasy and imaginative play, stories arise and maintain children’s curiosity keeping them actively involved in the learning process (Read, 2007). Involvement and active participation are crucial for the success in teaching young learners (Moon, 2004). Second, storytelling activities are relevant and make sense to 4- and 5-year-olds. For instance, looking for lost animals in the jungle or pretending to be angry, happy, scared, sleepy animals or matching parts of the body of different animals – are all meaningful for children of this age. Relevance, meaningfulness and age appropriateness of the material and activities are essential for language learning to take place (Read, 2007). Third, storytelling activities are balanced in terms of linguistic and cognitive challenge to make children fully involved in
their own learning process. For example, in the *Follow the Rhythm* activity (see Appendix A) children had to use both their memory and language skills to say a chant about animals using flashcards, some of which had just been taken away by the teacher. Fourth, storytelling activities engage multiple intelligences and different learning styles, providing opportunities to reach and teach every child and his or her unique combination of intelligences and ways of learning (Read, 2008). For example, the above mentioned *Follow the Rhythm* activity engages three intelligences: musical (children have to say words to a certain rhythm), linguistic (children listen to the sentences) and bodily-kinaesthetic (children have to mime animals as they name them) as well as audio, visual and kinaesthetic learning styles. By engaging different intelligences, storytelling activities enable children to use their personal strengths to enhance, extend and deepen their learning (Read, 2007). Fifth, storytelling activities cater to children’s varying levels of English by allowing them to participate successfully at the level they are ready to do so (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). In this way, storytelling activities give children the sense of achievement and keep them motivated in their learning. Moreover, stories provide rich and authentic input for language development and allow children to develop grammar and vocabulary skills as well as a ‘feel’ for the target language (Wright & Maley, 1995). Finally, storytelling activities provide opportunities for children to transfer the language they learnt from the story to other personalised, relevant and meaningful contexts resulting in children’s ability to internalise the target structures and vocabulary (Read, 2008).

On the part of the second method used in the programme – fingerplay – several factors should be mentioned that contributed to the overall improvement of the children’s skills. First of all, rhythmical movements, experienced by children during fingerplays, encourage children to actively embody and imitate rich language which in turn is crucial for vocabulary acquisition in young learners (Winters & Griffin, 2014). Second, fingerplays strengthen language experience by creating opportunities for listening, speaking, developing sentence
structure and working with rhyming words and initial sounds (Baker, 1993). Third, fingerplays provide opportunity to engage with the language structures and vocabulary that are developmentally beyond what children are able to use spontaneously (Gullo, 1988).

In addition, the children were exposed to extensive repetition of the key vocabulary throughout the lesson (on average 25 times per one item) as well as being encouraged to produce it (on average 14 times per one item). Repetition is seen by Larsen-Freeman (2012) as crucial for language acquisition, as it can provide essential overlearning effects. Furthermore, an emotionally positive atmosphere during the lessons, created by the teacher’s personality, lowered the anxiety levels of the children and is likely to have promoted their participation and engagement in the learning process. Finally, the intensity and pace of a lesson were rather high, including on average 8 different 2-3-minute activities (see Appendix A), which are likely to have kept the children involved and focused.

Overall, our results showed the effectiveness of storytelling and fingerplay method for the development of the children’s receptive and, more importantly, productive skills even with minimal input time of 60 minutes per week. Furthermore, the absence of the statistically significant difference between post-test 1 and post-test 2 indicates that the children retained what they had learned during the intervention programme, which we believe is mainly to the variety of teaching activities themselves and, in particular, the fingerplay and storytelling method.

An alternative explanation of the improvement in children’s receptive and productive skills in our programme could be the fact that children were exposed to English during this time. However, previous studies in the Dutch primary schools testify to the contrary. An exploratory study by Aarts and Ronde (2006) showed that children who were exposed to English on average 60 minutes per week demonstrated either poorly developed or absent productive skills after two years of English instruction. Moreover, a large-scaled longitudinal
project (FLiPP) showed that after two years’ time children with 60 minutes or less of English instruction per week demonstrated very limited outcomes in terms of receptive skills, which led the authors to conclude that this amount of time spent for English lessons might not provide sufficient input for productive language development to take place. Thus, the alternative explanation of the improvement in the children’s linguistic outcomes in our programme due to mere exposure to English does not seem plausible.

To sum up, our findings suggest that rather than purely being a time variable, the quality of the input is of pivotal importance: we believe that even in the situation of minimal input (60 minutes per week) children’s receptive and productive skills can be developed, provided that age-appropriate teaching methods are applied which (1) get children emotionally involved in the learning process, (2) provide context which is relevant and meaningful for the child, (3) encourage the use of language as a vehicle to do things that have real purpose, (4) appeal to children’s multiple intelligences and different learning styles. According to our results, one of such successful methods can be considered the method of storytelling and fingerplay.

Our second research question tapped the influence of individual variation variables, as measured by phonological short-term working memory and language aptitude, in being related to the children’s language outcomes. The results showed that language aptitude and not short-term working memory appeared to be linked to the scores on picture description task that tested their speaking skills. We can assume that the reason for this finding might be the way in which children’s language aptitude was measured. In our case, the children’s primary classroom teacher, who by the time this study was conducted had had experienced all the children daily in her classroom for the better part of the school year, provided a rather accurate assessment of the children’s oral performance in Dutch, which can thus explain a strong correlation between language aptitude and children’s scores on the production task.
Although the children’s receptive and productive scores between pre-test and post-tests are characterized by a general upward trend, there were also some individual differences in the children’s performance and the magnitude of their improvement. Thus, there was one exceptional case (Mi) in our sample that obtained zero scores on the production task over three measurements (pre-test, post-test 1 and post-test 2). These scores correlated with his language aptitude ranking (3 out of 5), which was the lowest of the group. In addition, the classroom teacher mentioned that this child was very immature for his age. It is likely that these reasons in combination with the mere two weeks of 120 minutes of instruction in total proved insufficient for his productive skills in English to emerge.

Regarding receptive vocabulary skills, neither short-term working memory nor language aptitude significantly predicted their receptive test scores. This is surprising since previous research on early second/foreign language learning, developing L2 proficiency has been related to phonological short-term memory (Unsworth et al, 2014; Service, 1992; Harley & Hart, 1997; Masoura and Gathercole, 1999; French & O’Brien, 2008). We suppose that short-term memory scores do not correlate with children’s scores on the receptive vocabulary test due to another more powerful factor that influenced children performance on the test – emotional involvement. We think that when new language items are emotionally coloured for the child, they might be better integrated into his or her lexicon due to the strong emotional associations formed for this language item. As stated by Griffith and Burns (2012), engagement or emotional involvement is “the fertile soil that enables sustainable learning to take root and flourish” (p. 8). On a methodological level, the phonological working memory test used was a short form of the AWMA (Alloway, 2007), which had not been standardized prior to the study. The short form was used because of time limitations involved in testing each child individually as well as the strain this would put on each child. However, different results may have been reached had the full standardized form been used.
The qualitative aspect of our research involved interview with the children’s classroom teacher who mentioned that children used English words and sang songs they learned in the intervention programme outside the English lessons context (during Maths classes, in the playground, swimming pool, at home) and were asking their parents to be able to watch cartoons in English. This suggests that children were on their way of internalising the language, were motivated to engage with the language outside the lessons and felt enthusiastic towards English learning as a result of the programme.

Concerning the teacher’s opinion of the method itself and the activities included in the lessons, the teacher pointed out that, in her view, the activities are easy and fun to do in the classroom and that she was going to try some of the activities at her lessons in the future. This suggests that teachers involved in Early English learning can easily implement and adapt the activities that we used in the storytelling and fingerplay as well as find a large number of new practical ideas for engaging and motivating activities for their lessons in the following books written by experienced teacher trainers, education consultants and researchers: Read (2007), Bettelheim (1991), Cameron (2001), Ellis and Brewster (2002), Fisher (2005), Phillips (1999), Wright (1995). It should also be noted that even in the situation of minimal time, teachers still can help their learners develop both receptive and productive skills when using methods and techniques that provide language learning context that is relevant and understandable for the child, allows for the discovery and construction of meaning, supports children’s understanding, arouses and maintains children’s curiosity, encourages the use of language in meaningful ways, helps to build emotionally positive attitude towards English learning.
Chapter 7. Conclusion

Every year more and more primary schools around the Netherlands start offering Early English programme for children from grade 1 (age 4). However, in the majority of schools the time allocated for English lessons in the primary curriculum is limited (up to 60 min of instruction per week). In our study we wanted to see if children’s receptive and, more importantly, productive skills in grade 1 (age 4 and 5) improve in the situation of minimal input (60 min per week) through the methods of storytelling and fingerplay after two weeks of instruction. Our results indicate that even with minimal input time there was a radical improvement in both receptive and productive skills of children after two weeks of the lessons and, moreover, a complete retention and even a slight improvement of these skills four weeks after the end of the intervention programme. Our findings suggest that it might be that even with 60 min per week children still can develop their language skills provided that language learning takes place in a meaningful, comprehensible and supported ways. We suggest that one of the ways to provide this kind of learning is through the methods of storytelling and fingerplay.

The present study had its limitations. First of all, the period of the intervention programme was only two weeks and so it is not clear what language outcomes would be like if the programme was more extended in time. However, this could also be considered as one of the main strengths of our study, since within as short a time span as two weeks children demonstrated considerable learning gains. Second, the number of subjects in our sample was only 15, which makes it difficult to generalize the obtained results. Third, there was no comparison with other methods of early English teaching that could show the strengths and shortcoming of the applied approach.
It would be interesting to keep adding to the research on the input quality in early English programmes in terms of teaching methods and approaches. More longitudinal and large-scaled studies on methods of storytelling and fingerplay could be performed in order to see the curve of language development over time with possible periods of fast development and stagnation. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate more methods that induce productive skills in young learners.
References


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Фомина, Л. В. (1971). Роль движений пальцев рук в развитии моторной речи ребенка. In Л. В. Фомина (Ed.), *Проблемы речи и психолингвистики* (pp. 36-40). Москва: МГПИИЯ.

Appendix A: Detailed plans of 6 lessons of the intervention programme.
Topic: Jungle animals

Aim: By the end of the six lessons the children will be able to understand (receptive skills) and say (productive skills) the following vocabulary items and language structures:

Emotions:
happy   angry   scared   sleepy   afraid

Actions:
clap     stomp    take a nap   walk   jump
skip     listen    stop*        run
spin around sit down*  stand up*  shake  turn left/right*

Animals:
frog     monkey    toucan   tiger   hippo
butterfly lion      snake    tortoise sloth

Other vocabulary:
step*    forward*   back*     jungle*     in*
again*   friends*   high*     fun*        had*

See you again!*

* - only receptive understanding

Language structures:
- What’s that/this? – It’s a tiger.
- What is he/she doing? – He/She’s jumping.
- How is he/she feeling? – He/She’s happy.
- Is it a tiger? – Yes, it is. No, it isn’t.
- We’re not afraid
- Let’s...
### Lesson 1

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will be able to say the names of 5 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo), show 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and will be introduced to 15 action verbs (clap, stomp, take a nap, jump, spin around, walk, skip, listen, stand up, sit down, shake, turn left/right, run, stop, see)

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30 sec</td>
<td>Greeting children and introducing the teacher</td>
<td>For children to familiarize themselves with a new teacher and feel comfortable</td>
<td>Teacher (T) smiles, greets the children and introduces herself saying her name and saying she is happy to see the children today.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 min</td>
<td>Greeting song</td>
<td>To introduce emotions and actions</td>
<td>T pre-teaches essential vocabulary for the <em>If you’re happy</em> song, i.e. 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and 4 actions (clap, stomp, say <em>Oh no!</em>, take a nap). T and children sing along with the music showing emotions and performing actions.</td>
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</table>
| 9 min  | Pre-teaching vocabulary for the story | To make essential vocabulary (jungle animals) memorable for the children | ‘*Magic box*’ game. T slowly and carefully takes out 5 animal flashcards from a box, names them together with children introducing the question and answer structure *What’s this? It’s a tiger.*  
‘*Miming*’ game. T names an animal and children pretend to be this animal while they hear the sound of tambourine, when the sound stops, children freeze.  
*Animals fingerplay.* T shows animals in the jungle with the help of fingers and says the rhyme. Children repeat.  
*This little monkey goes clap-clap-clap*  
*This little frog goes snap-snap-snap*  
*This little tiger goes hop-hop-hop*  
*This little toucan goes stomp-stomp-stomp*  
*This little hippo says ‘Stop’*  
(Repeated twice for right and left hands)  
‘*Magic eye*’ game. T sticks a set of no more than six flashcards in a row on the blackboard. T says the names and gets the children to repeat them two or three times. Then T removes the flashcards one by one. Point to where they were and children repeat the names as if they were still there with a certain rhythm by clapping hands.  |
| 30 sec | Lead-in                       | To arouse interest in the story                 | T shows the picture of a girl and a tiger in the jungle and gets children to predict what happens in the story. |
| 3 min  | **Telling the story**          | For children to experience                     | T tells the story using slides and facilitates                              |
Lesson 2

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will be able to say the names of 6 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo, snake), revise 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy), say 3 action verbs (walk, jump, stomp) and revise 12 action verbs (clap, take a nap, spin around, skip, listen, stand up, sit down, shake, turn left/right, run, stop, see)

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<th>Time</th>
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<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 min</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>To greet children and practice emotions and actions</td>
<td>T revises essential vocabulary for the <em>If you’re happy</em> song, i.e. 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and 4 actions (clap, stomp, say <em>Oh no!</em>, take a nap). T and children sing along with the music showing emotions and performing actions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 11 min | Vocabulary and grammar revision | For children to revise 5 names of animals and questions *What’s this? What colour is it?* | ‘House in the jungle’ T points to a piece of cloth on the floor and says: ‘It’s a house in the jungle. Let’s hide in the house!’ All children come and stand on the piece of cloth. T sticks flashcards with animals around the class and elicits the names of animals from the children. Next, T says: ‘Run to the frog!’ Children have to identify where the frog is and run to it as fast as they can and touch the flashcard. Children run and touch flashcards until all
animals have been named.
‘Butterfly’ T shows children a butterfly (a scarf) and says: ‘Look, in the jungle the butterfly is flying and flying, flying and flying and then she stops!’ T makes movements with the scarf as if the butterfly is flying and then suddenly covers one of the flashcards spread around the classroom. Children have to guess which animal the butterfly has covered. T asks: ‘What’s there?’ Children say: ‘It’s a snake.’
‘Close your eyes’ game (T sticks four flashcards with animals on the board. T says Close your eyes! and demonstrates this. T removes one of the flashcards. Then T says Look! and children call out the name of the animal which is missing. T then asks and gets children to answer What’s this? It’s a monkey.

‘Big dice game’ T brings two large dice made out of boxes and covered with pictures of 6 jungle animals. Children take turns to throw the dice and call out the animal. When the animals on both dice are the same, everyone claps. T asks and gets children to answer What’s this? It’s a monkey.

‘Feely bag’ game T puts small toy animals in a bag. Children take turns to put their hand in the bag, feel one of the objects and guess what it is e.g. it’s a frog! before taking it out to check. T asks What colour is it? and children answer It’s green.

| 2 min | **Telling the story** | For children to experience the journey to the jungle in English and revise names of animals and action verbs **Intelligences engaged:** linguistic, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic | T tells the story using flashcards and facilitation understanding using a different voice pitch and gestures. |
| 2 min | **Practicing vocabulary from the story** | For children to practice speaking skills (naming animals and actions) **Intelligences engaged:** linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily- | ‘Follow the leader’ game – role play the story. |
Lesson 3

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will be able to say the names of 8 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo, snake, butterfly, lion), revise 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy), say 4 action verbs (walk, jump, stomp, skip) and revise 11 action verbs (clap, take a nap, spin around, listen, stand up, sit down, shake, turn left/right, run, stop, see).

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>To greet children and practice emotions and actions</td>
<td>T revises the names of emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and actions (clap, stomp, say <em>Oh no!</em> take a nap) by showing flashcards with Tiger’s friends and asking: ‘Is he happy or angry?’ Children answer: ‘He’s angry.’ Next, T and children sing along with the music showing emotions and performing actions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 6 min | Vocabulary and grammar revision and introduction of new vocabulary | For children to revise 6 names of animals and questions *What’s this? What colour is it?* and practice names of 2 new animals | **Animal puzzles.** Using MS PowerPoint T shows children parts of the animals for them to guess which animal it is. Teacher asks: ‘What’s this?’ Children answer: ‘It’s a monkey’ **Follow the rhythm!** T covers animal flashcards on the floor with a scarf and says: ‘Let’s take a walk in the jungle! But be careful! The animals are sleeping’ Children walk around the scarf with animals and repeat after T: 
Clap..Clap..Clap..*What’s that?* 
Clap..Clap..Clap..*It’s an elephant!* 
Clap..Clap..Clap..*What’s that?* 
Clap..Clap..Clap..*It’s a frog!* T repeats and children call out the names of the animals. **Flash!** T shows each flashcard to the children in turn very quickly by holding it at the sides between her thumb, index and second finger and “flashing” it or |
turning it round very quickly and asking *What’s this?* Children look and say *It’s a* ... *(frog)*. T introduces the names of 2 new animals *butterfly* and *lion*.

**Fingerplay.** T shows animals walking in the jungle with the help of fingers saying *What’s this? It’s a tiger. The tiger is jumping* and gets children to repeat. 
*Knock-knock-knock!* 
*What’s this? It’s a lion.* 
*Knock-knock-knock!* 
*What’s this? It’s a butterfly.* 
*Knock-knock-knock!* 
*What’s this? It’s a snake.* 
*Knock-knock-knock!* 
*What’s this? It’s a hippo.* 
*Knock-knock-knock!* 
*What’s this? It’s a monkey.*
(Repeated twice for left and right hands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 min</th>
<th><strong>Telling the story</strong></th>
<th>For children to experience the journey to the jungle in English and revise names of animals and action verbs. <strong>Intelligences engaged:</strong> linguistic, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic</th>
<th>T tells the story using puppets and facilitates children’s understanding using a different voice pitch and gestures.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 8 min | **Practicing vocabulary from the story** | For children to practice speaking skills (naming animals and actions). **Intelligences engaged:** linguistic, musical, interpersonal, bodily-kinaesthetic | ‘Follow the leader’ game – role play the story. 

**Jump to the flashcards!** T sticks animal flashcards on different walls in the classroom. T gives instructions to different groups in turn e.g. *Jump to the frog!* / *Stomp to the tiger!* / *Skip to the toucan!* etc. 

‘Miming’ game. T shows pictures of different animals doing different actions and asks *What’s this? (It’s a snake) What’s it doing? (It’s jumping) How is the snake feeling? It’s happy.* Children then mime the animal performing an action (8 animals + 4 actions + 4 emotions) |
| 2 min | **Saying goodbye** | For children to know about the end of the lesson and Children revise actions of the ‘*Goodbye*’ song and then sing and perform actions of the |
**Lesson 4**

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will revise the names of 10 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo, snake, butterfly, lion), revise 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy), say 8 action verbs (walk, jump, stomp, skip, shake, clap, run, listen) and revise 7 action verbs (take a nap, spin around, stand up, sit down, turn left/right, stop, see)

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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</table>
| 5 min| Greeting         | To greet children and practice emotions and actions                  | **Flash!** T revises the names of emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and actions (clap, stomp, say *Oh no!* , take a nap) by showing in turn very quickly by holding it at the sides between her thumb, index and second finger and “flashing” it or turning it round very quickly and asking: ‘*Is he happy?*’ Children answer: ‘*No, he’s angry.*’ **Song.** T and children sing along with the music showing emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and performing actions (clap, stomp, say *Oh no!* , take a nap).

‘**How are they feeling?**’ T shows PowerPoint presentation with different animals that have different emotions. T asks: ‘*How is the frog feeling?*’ Children answer: ‘*He’s scared*.’

| 7 min| Vocabulary and grammar revision and introduction of new vocabulary | For children to revise 10 names of animals and questions What’s this? What colour is it? How is the tiger feeling? | **Flash!** T revises the names of animals by showing in turn very quickly by holding it at the sides between her thumb, index and second finger and “flashing” it or turning it round very quickly and asking: ‘*What’s this?*’ Children answer: ‘*It’s a butterfly.*’

**Miming game.** T shows flashcards and asks: ‘*What’s this?*’ Children answer: ‘It’s a lion’ T: ‘What is the lion doing?’ Children: ‘He’s running’. T gets the children to mime the animal and the action it performs.

**Fingerplay.** T shows animals walking in the jungle with the help of fingers saying *This little frog is jumping, jumping. This little hippo is stomping, stomping etc.* and gets children to repeat.
### Lesson 5

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will revise the names of 10 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo, snake, butterfly, lion, tortoise, sloth), revise 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy), say 10 action verbs (walk, jump, stomp, skip, shake, clap, run, listen, take a nap, spin around) and revise 5 action verbs (stand up, sit down, turn left/right, run, stop, see)

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>To greet children and practice emotions and actions</td>
<td>T revises 4 emotions by showing a tiger puppet and miming his feelings. Children look and have to guess which emotion the puppet has. T asks: ‘How is the tiger feeling?’ Children: ‘He’s scared’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Intelligences engaged:</strong> musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 min</td>
<td>Vocabulary and</td>
<td>For children to revise 10 Animal puzzles. T shows PowerPoint</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Role playing the story</strong></th>
<th>For children to practice speaking skills while saying the text of the story. <strong>Intelligences engaged:</strong> linguistic, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic</th>
<th>T and children role play the story.</th>
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<tr>
<th>4 min</th>
<th>Practicing vocabulary from the story</th>
<th>For children to practice speaking skills ( naming animals and actions) <strong>Intelligences engaged:</strong> musical, linguistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, spatial</th>
</tr>
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</table>

| **Memory game.** T sticks a six animal flashcards in a row on the blackboard. T elicits names of animals and actions from children. T covers all the flashcards with a big scarf and asks: *What is the hippo doing?* Children answer: *She’s stomping.* T repeats the procedure with all actions on the flashcards. **‘Close your eyes’ game** (T sticks four flashcards with animals performing different actions on the board. T says *Close your eyes!* and demonstrates this. T removes one of the flashcards. Then T says *Look!* and children call out the name of the animal which is missing. T then asks and gets children to answer *What’s it doing?* (It’s running) *How is it feeling?* (It’s happy) |

| 2 min | Saying goodbye | For children to know about the end of the lesson and revise action verbs **Intelligences engaged:** musical, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic | Children revise actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song and then sing and perform actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song. |
| 4 min | **Role playing the story** | For children to practice speaking skills while saying the text of the story.  
**Intelligences engaged:** linguistic, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic | T and children role play the story with toys. |
| 6 min | **Practicing vocabulary from the story** | For children to practice speaking skills (naming animals and actions)  
**Intelligences engaged:** musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, linguistic, | **Guessing game.** T hides the animals under the scarf and says: ‘Look, the animals are hiding in the jungle’. Then T mimes one of the animals which is under the scarf and gets children to guess the animal and the action. T asks: ‘What’s this?’ Children: ‘It’s a sloth’ T: ‘What is the sloth doing?’ Children: ‘He’s sleeping’  
‘Close your eyes’ game (T sticks four flashcards with animals performing different actions on the board. T says Close your eyes! and demonstrates this. T |
removes one of the flashcards. Then T says Look! and children call out the name of the animal which is missing. T then asks and gets children to answer What’s he doing? (He’s running) How is he feeling? (He’s happy)

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<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Saying goodbye</td>
<td>For children to know about the end of the lesson and revise action verbs</td>
<td>Children revise actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song and then sing and perform actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Lesson 6

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson the children will revise the names of 10 animals (frog, tiger, monkey, toucan, hippo, snake, butterfly, lion), *revise* 4 emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy), *say* 10 action verbs (walk, jump, stomp, skip, shake, clap, run, listen, take a nap, spin around) and *revise* 5 action verbs (stand up, sit down, turn left/right, run, stop, see)

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Greeting</td>
<td>To greet children and practice emotions and actions</td>
<td>T revises 4 emotions by showing a tiger puppet and miming his feelings. Children look and have to guess which emotion the puppet has. T asks: ‘How is the tiger feeling?’ Children: ‘He’s scared’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 min</td>
<td>Vocabulary and grammar revision and introduction of new vocabulary</td>
<td>For children to revise 10 names of animals, colours (previously learned) and questions What’s this? What colour is it? How is the tiger feeling?</td>
<td>Animal puzzles. T shows PowerPoint presentation with animals falling different emotions. Two parts of the animal are covered with a cloud. Children have to guess which animal it is and how the animal feeling. T asks: ‘What’s this?’ Children: ‘It’s a tortoise’ T: ‘What is the tortoise doing?’ Children: ‘He’s jumping’ Song. T and children sing along with the music showing emotions (happy, angry, scared, sleepy) and performing actions (clap, stomp, say Oh no!, take a nap). Magic box. T takes out animals from the box and elicits from the children what the animals are doing. T asks: ‘What’s this?’ Children: ‘It’s a sloth’ T: ‘What is the sloth doing?’ Children: ‘He’s sleeping’ T gets children to mime the animals and actions from the flashcard. Flash! T shows each flashcard to the children in turn very quickly by holding it at the sides between her thumb, index and second finger and “flashing” it or turning it round very quickly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and asking What’s this? Children look and say it’s a ... (frog) T then asks What is the frog doing? Children: It’s jumping.

‘Miming’ game. T shows pictures of different animals doing different actions and asks What’s this? (It’s a snake) What’s it doing? (It’s jumping) How is the snake feeling? It’s happy. Children then mime the animal performing an action (10 animals + 10 actions + 4 emotions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>Activity Details</th>
<th>Intelligences Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 min</td>
<td>Watching a video of the story</td>
<td>For children to engage in the story and practice speaking skills while watching a cartoon</td>
<td>linguistic, musical, interpersonal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children watch a carton and sing along with the song.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 min</td>
<td>Practicing vocabulary from the story</td>
<td>For children to practice speaking skills (naming animals and actions)</td>
<td>linguistic, musical, interpersonal, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Find an animal.</strong> T asks children to close their eyes and hides animal flashcards around the room. Then T asks children to open their eyes and find animals. They then have to say the name of the animal and what it is doing. Then T gets children to mime the animal and the action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 min</td>
<td>Saying goodbye</td>
<td>For children to know about the end of the lesson and revise action verbs</td>
<td>musical, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Children revise actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song</strong> and then sing and perform actions of the ‘Goodbye’ song.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix B: Two lists of vocabulary items designed for receptive or productive skills development.**

**RECEPTIVE SKILLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Other vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. frog</td>
<td>11. clap</td>
<td>26. happy</td>
<td>31. jungle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. monkey</td>
<td>12. stomp</td>
<td>27. angry</td>
<td>32. friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. toucan</td>
<td>13. take a nap</td>
<td>28. scared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. tiger</td>
<td>14. walk</td>
<td>29. afraid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. hippo</td>
<td>15. jump</td>
<td>30. sleepy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. butterfly</td>
<td>16. skip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. lion</td>
<td>17. listen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. snake</td>
<td>18. run</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. tortoise</td>
<td>19. spin around</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. sloth</td>
<td>20. shake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. stop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. see</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. sit down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. stand up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. turn left/right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: **32** words

**PRODUCTIVE SKILLS**

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<td>20. scared</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. snake</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>9. tortoise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. sloth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total: **21** words
Appendix C: Adapted version of PPVT for testing receptive vocabulary skills.

Contents

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<th>Animals</th>
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<td>20. shake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. stop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. See you again!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23. sit down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24. stand up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25. turn left/right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Visual materials

(frog)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(hippo)</th>
<th>(butterfly)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Hippo" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Butterfly" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(butterfly)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Bee" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(lion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Lion" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(snake)

(sloth)

(tortoise)
(clap)

(stomp)

(take a nap)
(shake)

(see you again!)

(sit down/stand up)

(turn left/right)

(happy, angry, scared, sleepy)
(jungle)

(friends)
Appendix D: Picture description task visual materials

(It’s a sloth, he is happy, he’s jumping. It’s a tortoise, he’s scared, he’s shaking. It’s a butterfly, she’s happy, she’s sleeping. It’s a lion, he’s happy, he’s stomping.)
(It’s a frog, he’s happy, he’s sleeping. It’s a toucan, he’s sleepy, he’s sleeping. It’s a snake, he’s angry.)

(It’s a monkey, he’s scared, he’s jumping. It’s a tiger, he’s happy, he’s walking. It’s a hippo, he’s happy, he’s running.)
Appendix E: Transcript of recordings for AWMA test.

Recording 1:
We gaan een spelletje doen om te kijken hoeveel cijfertjes je kunt onthouden. Ik noem zometeen een cijfer op en die mag jij nazeggen. Klaar? Ze maar na: 2. Goed zo! Nu maken we het was moeilijker en doen we twee cijfertjes. Probeer ze maar in precies dezelfde volgorde te zeggen als waarin ik ze heb gezegd: Zeg maar na: 1-5. Heel goed! En nu nog wat moeilijker. Kijk maar of dit ook lukt: Zeg maar na: 7-4-8. Hartstikke mooi! Je snapt het helemaal. We gaan dit nu nog eens doen:

Zeg maar na: 5
Zeg maar na: 5-9
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8-1
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8-1-4
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8-1-4-7
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8-1-4-7-2
Zeg maar na: 5-9-3-8-1-4-7-2-6

Recording 2:
Ben je klaar voor nog meer spelletjes? We gaan nu kijken hoe goed je bent in het nazeggen van woorden, maar het gekke is dat die woorden helemaal niet echt bestaan. Probeer maar of het lukt. Zeg maar na: blig. Heel goed. En nu doen we twee van die gekke woordjes. Zeg het maar precies na in de volgorde waarin ik het zeg: glort flig. Super! En kun je het ook met drie woordjes? Zeg maar na: kwift vleg flof. Heel erg goed gedaan. We gaan er nu nog een paar doen:

Zeg maar na: grigt
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit - fling
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit - fling - snins
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit - fling - snins - zwit
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit - fling - snins - zwit - blops
Zeg maar na: grigt - zwop - kraam - knit - fling - snins - zwit - blops - drof