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INTRODUCTION

Children (L1 and L2 speakers) from low social economic status families are at risk of delayed language development. If children have a delayed language development at the start of their formal education, they are likely to have problems throughout their primary school years. An important aim of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is to promote early literacy and language development of children in at-risk situations during preschool and kindergarten. 'Language Route' [Taallijn] is designed as a supplement to strengthen ECE programs in its language stimulation. Language Route stimulates young children's vocabulary, verbal linguistic skills, and early literacy skills. This research project investigates whether Language Route can effectively stimulate the language development in L1 and L2 Dutch speaking toddlers and young children.

METHOD

Intervention

- Two parallel longitudinal studies
- Pretest-Posttest control group design
 - Language Route experience group
 - Language Route beginner group
 - Control group
- Teacher skills (interactive reading)
- Focus: vocabulary, oral communication, early literacy, ICT experience, parental involvement.
- Intervention year, 4 themes:
 - Body & senses, Sinterklaas, How we live, Spring

Participants

Study 1:

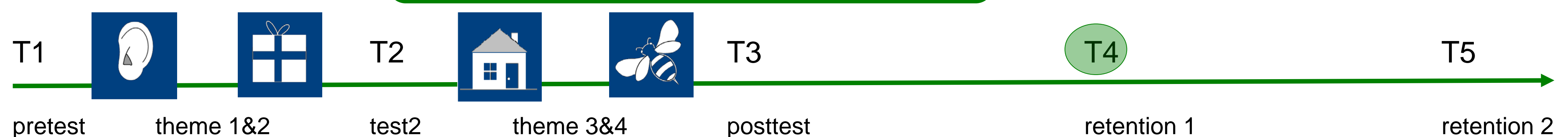
- 70 preschools
- 460 toddlers (238 boys)
- At T1: 2,5-2,5 years of age (M= 36 months)
- 6,2 months at preschool

Study 2:

- 13 primary schools, kindergarten
- +- 550 children
- At T1: 4-5 years of age

TIMELINE

Study 1: 2010-2013
Preschool



Study 2: 2011-2014
Primary school

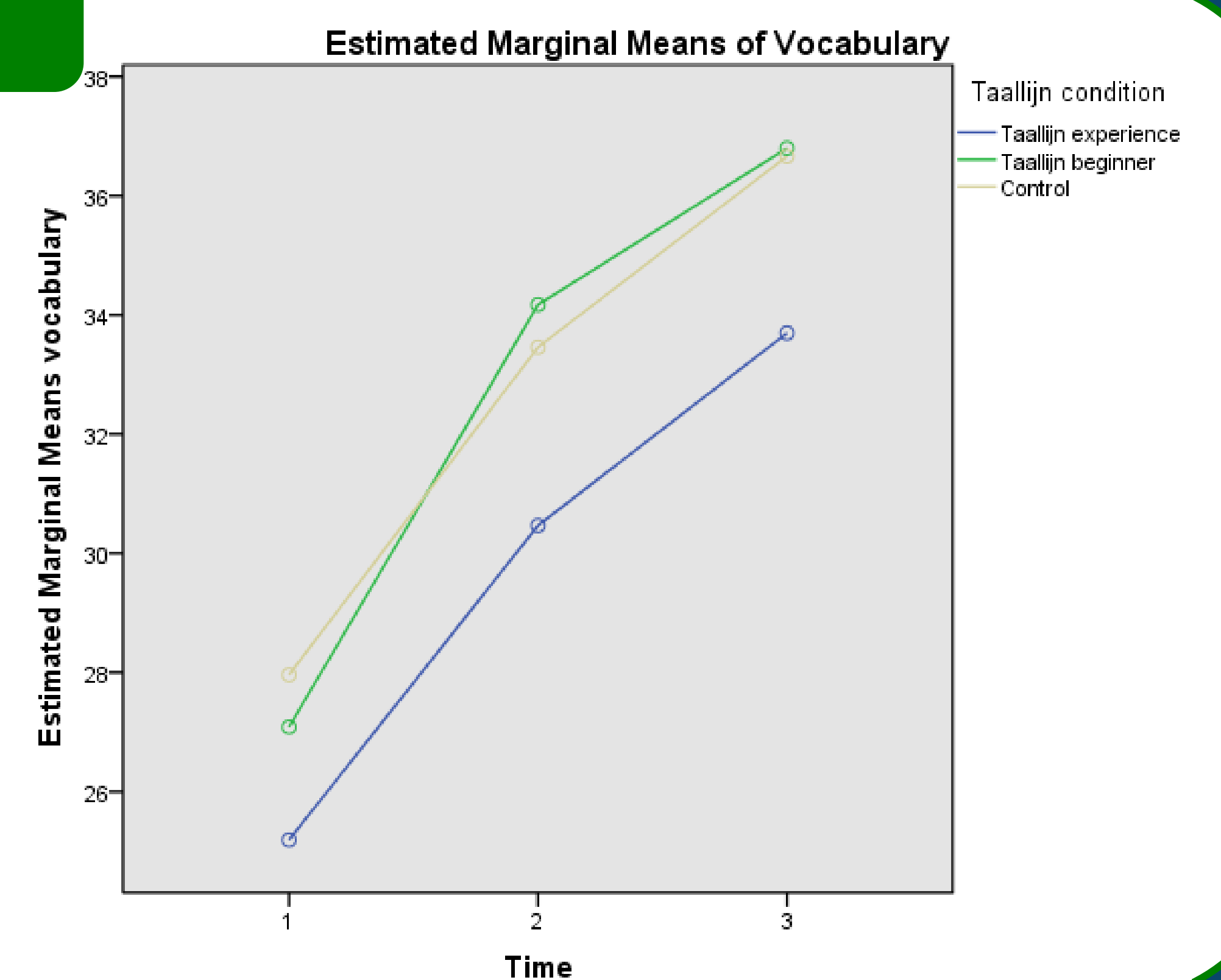


PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The figure shows toddlers' vocabulary growth over three measurement periods for the three Language Route conditions.

Results indicate that:

- Toddlers in the 'beginner group' show a larger growth in vocabulary from T1 to T2, than the toddlers in the experience group and control group ($F(2,424) = 3.03, p < .05$).
- From T2 to T3 the vocabulary growth subsides for all three groups.
- Toddlers in the experience group have all over lower vocabulary scores.
- Future research: multilevel analysis will be used to further explain these results.



DISCUSSION

The results seem to indicate that Language Route has a positive influence on toddlers' vocabulary. The effect is found in the first intervention period in the Language Route beginners group. In this group, the teachers received their training more recently compared to the experienced group. It is possible that the recent training provides an explanation for the difference between the two Language Route groups.

A reason for the decrease in vocabulary growth within all groups may be that some children were too young at T1 for the test used in this study. Therefore they scored lower, and had more room for improvement from T1 to T2.

The experienced Language Route preschools have a larger population of 'at risk' toddlers which could explain the lower vocabulary scores in the experience group.