Closing the Gap: Supporting ethnic minority children and caregivers in Hong Kong

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What is the impact of intensive language and parenting skills interventions for ethnic minority children and caregivers?
Background

• Hong Kong census data indicate that ethnic minorities have been increasing in numbers
  – 2006: 5,532 children from EM families in kindergartens
  – 2012: 12,324 children from EM families in kindergartens
  – 27,188 EM students in kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools in 2012/2013 (7.5% in kindergartens)

• 2006 by-census results
  – The attrition rate by the time EM children reach post-secondary levels is high because of their inability to participate effectively in a primarily Chinese-language culture
Pre-primary school services are assumed to “level the playing field” for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children from low-income EM families in Hong Kong are doubly disadvantaged due to a dearth of home-based resources to promote their early development and their inability to benefit fully from the preschool curriculum because of their lack of Cantonese language skills.
Background

  – Problems for EM children learning Chinese (not enough support from government to schools)
  – Lack of expertise among teachers to teach Chinese as a foreign language
  – Chinese examinations in School Certification (in 2010)
  – Concerns of EM parents
Background

- **UNISON Report (2012)**
  - Survey on Kindergarten Education for Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong (102 responses)
  - Focus on educators’ views

  - Survey on the Chinese Learning Challenges South Asian Ethnic Minority Kindergarten Students from Low-Income Families Face (271 responses from low income families)
  - Focus on parents’ views
UNISON Report

• Chinese language ability varies greatly among EM students (69% of schools)

• Language barrier between EM parents and teachers (59% of schools)

• Language barrier between EM students and teachers (59% of schools)

• 93% of kindergartens experienced challenges with educating children from EM families
58% of parents could not read Chinese and about 27% could not speak Cantonese.

Lack of exposure to Chinese at home:
- Only 8.6% spoke mainly Cantonese at home.
- 60% of parents said their children only watched Cantonese TV for less than an hour a day or none at all.
- About 47% did not read Chinese books.
- 79% of parents said that kindergartens were the only places their children learnt Chinese.

OXFAM Report
Supporting ethnic minority children and caregivers in Hong Kong
About 53% of kindergartens did not provide South Asian students with additional support for learning Chinese.

Concern that the ‘Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework’ does not apply to kindergartens.

Curricula of Chinese Language classes for non-school ethnic minorities are not standardized.

OXFAM Report

Supporting ethnic minority children and caregivers in Hong Kong
What kind of impact does a targeted intervention program have on ethnic minority children and their caregivers’ knowledge of the Chinese language?

What kind of impact does a targeted intervention program have on the parenting skills of ethnic minority caregivers?
Project Aims

• Overall aim: To develop interventions facilitating the development and learning of socially disadvantaged young children from EM families in Hong Kong through interventions for children and their caregivers

• Specific aims:
  – To improve the Chinese literacy of EM children
  – To improve the Chinese literacy of EM parents
  – To improve the parenting skills of EM families
Interventions

• To improve the Chinese literacy of EM children ➔ *Child Literacy Training* to address children’s difficulties in learning Chinese

• To improve the Chinese literacy of EM parents ➔ *Parent Literacy Training* to address parents’ lack of knowledge of Chinese

• To improve the parenting skills of EM families ➔ *Parenting Skills Training* to address parents’ lack of knowledge of age appropriate stimulation at preschool age
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Parenting Skills</th>
<th>Child Literacy</th>
<th>Parent Literacy</th>
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<td><strong>Child Literacy</strong>&lt;br&gt;Completed = 44</td>
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Child Literacy Training

- Sixteen 45-minute sessions held over 8 weeks
- Focused on basic knowledge of Chinese
- Facilitated children’s reading and writing skills through vocabulary words, rhymes and songs, and character-writing practice
- Motivated children to learn Chinese through games and social interactions
Parent Literacy Training

• Eight 1-hour sessions, held once a week for 8 weeks

• Focused on the etymology and features of Chinese characters

• Learned about the orthographic structure of characters and stroke order

• Introduced and reviewed everyday Cantonese, such as recognition of common signs

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Parenting Skills Training

• Ten 2-hour sessions

• Utilized the Positive Parenting Program® (Triple P), a parenting and family support system designed to prevent – as well as treat – behavioral and emotional problems in children and teenagers

• Parenting strategies focus on developing positive relationships, attitudes, and conduct
Method

• Pre-post assessment of Chinese Literacy in children
  – Chinese Preschool and Primary School Chinese Literacy Scale (Li & Rao, 2000)
  – Chinese Language and Literacy Test (Training Words Writing, Morphological Awareness, Training Words Reading, Listen & Point, Picture-Word Matching, Word Recognition, Phonological Awareness)

• Pre-post assessment of parental Chinese literacy

• Pre-post assessment of parenting skills
Chinese Preschool and Primary Chinese Literacy Scale

- Pre-test: [Bar chart showing a value of 7]
- Post-test: [Bar chart showing a value of 10]
Chinese Language and Literacy Test

Significant difference at the 1% level.
Parenting Skills Intervention

**Pre-intervention** vs. **Post-intervention**

- **Laxness**: Pre-intervention (3.500) vs. Post-intervention (3.500)
- **Overreactivity**: Pre-intervention (3.000) vs. Post-intervention (3.500)
- **Verbiosity**: Pre-intervention (2.750) vs. Post-intervention (2.750)

*** Significant difference at the 1% level

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Focus Groups with Caregivers

- Parents enjoyed and appreciated interventions
- Experienced many challenges
- Experienced many challenges related to their children learning Chinese
Summary

• Child language and literacy intervention was largely effective

• Parenting language and literacy intervention seems effective, though expansion of the intervention is needed

• Parenting skills intervention was effective, especially in helping with the overreactivity
Conclusions

• Policy support
  – Social and educational policy

• Preschool environment
  – Support for children from ethnic minorities
  – Curriculum, teacher, school milieu
  – Evidence-based language pedagogy

• Parents
  – Parenting support (education and training)
  – Chinese language skills

• Support for the appropriate use of technology
THANK YOU!