

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

Eva E. Chen

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Carrie Lau¹, Olivia Lo¹, Diana Lee¹, Yvonne Becher², Ben Richards¹,
Nirmala Rao¹

¹*The University of Hong Kong*

²*Child Development Centre*

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

Background

- 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

- Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities (EOC, 2011)
 - 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
- Oxfam Report (2014)
 - 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

OXFAM Report

- 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

- 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

Research Questions

- 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

	Parenting Skills	Child Literacy	Parent Literacy
3 interventions	Parenting Skills + Child Literacy + Parent Literacy Completed = 3		
2 interventions		Child Literacy + Parent Literacy Completed = 6	
1 intervention	Parenting Skills Completed = 59	Child Literacy Completed = 44	

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

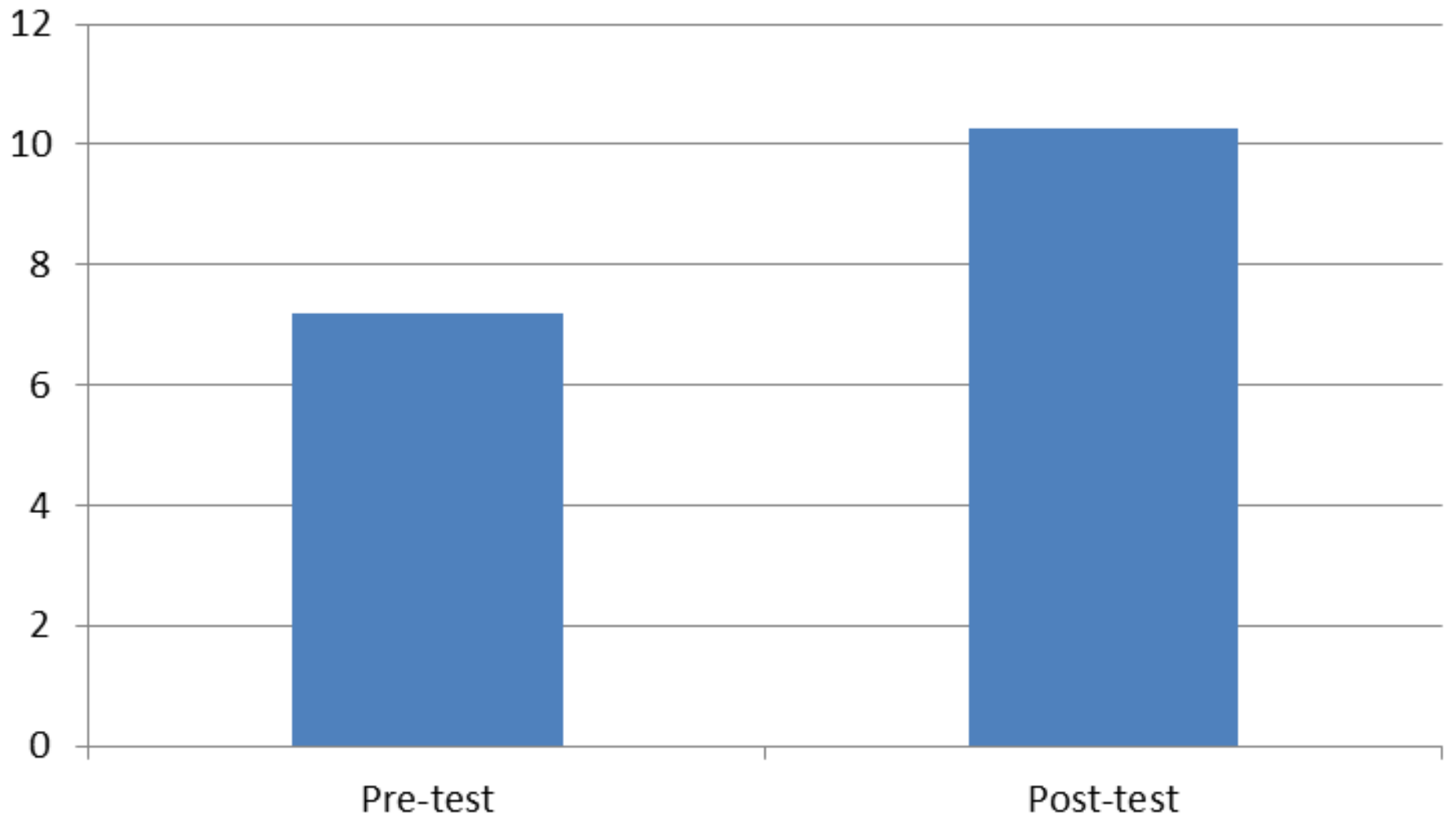
Parenting Skills Training

- 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

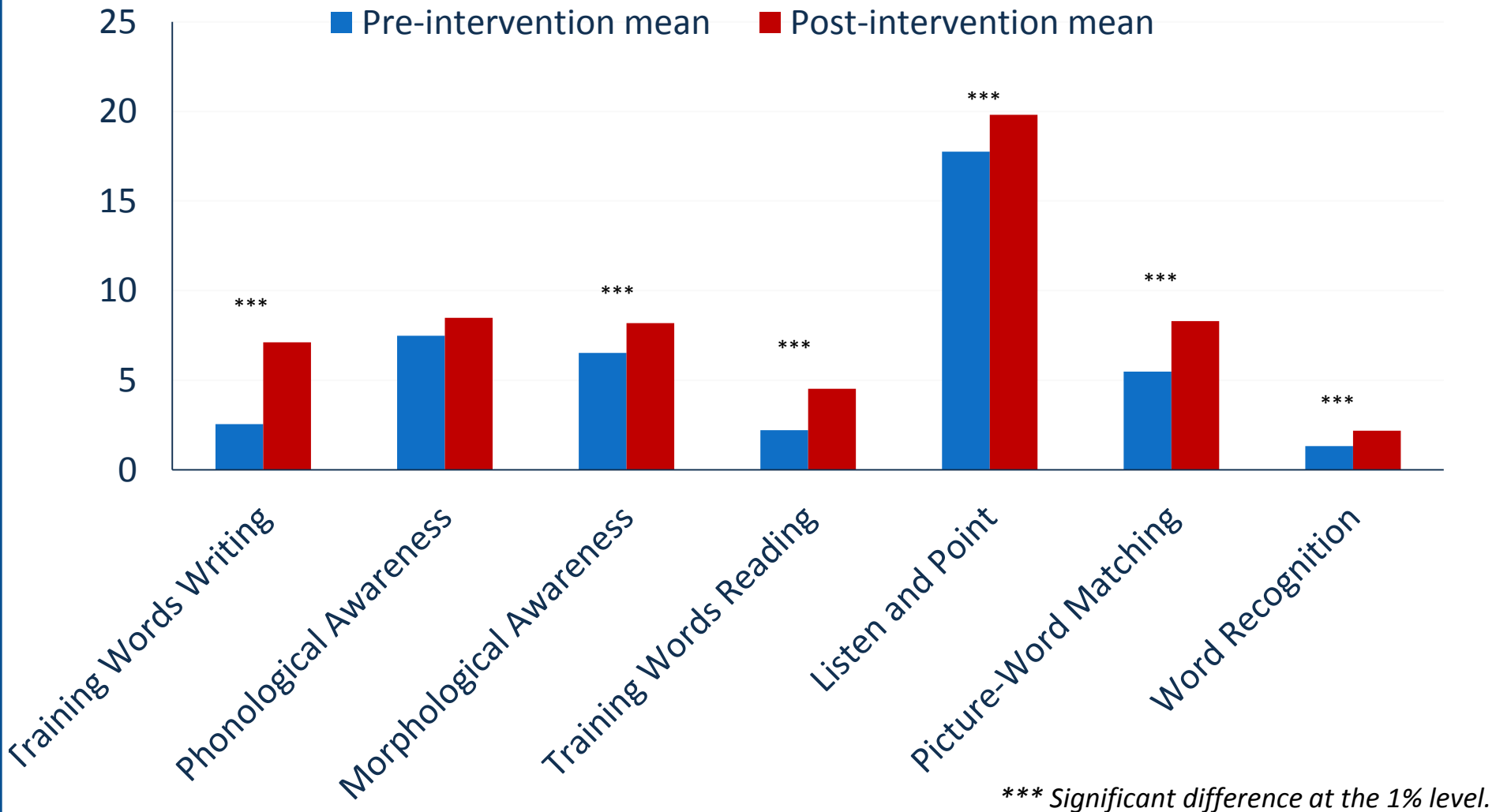
Method

- 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

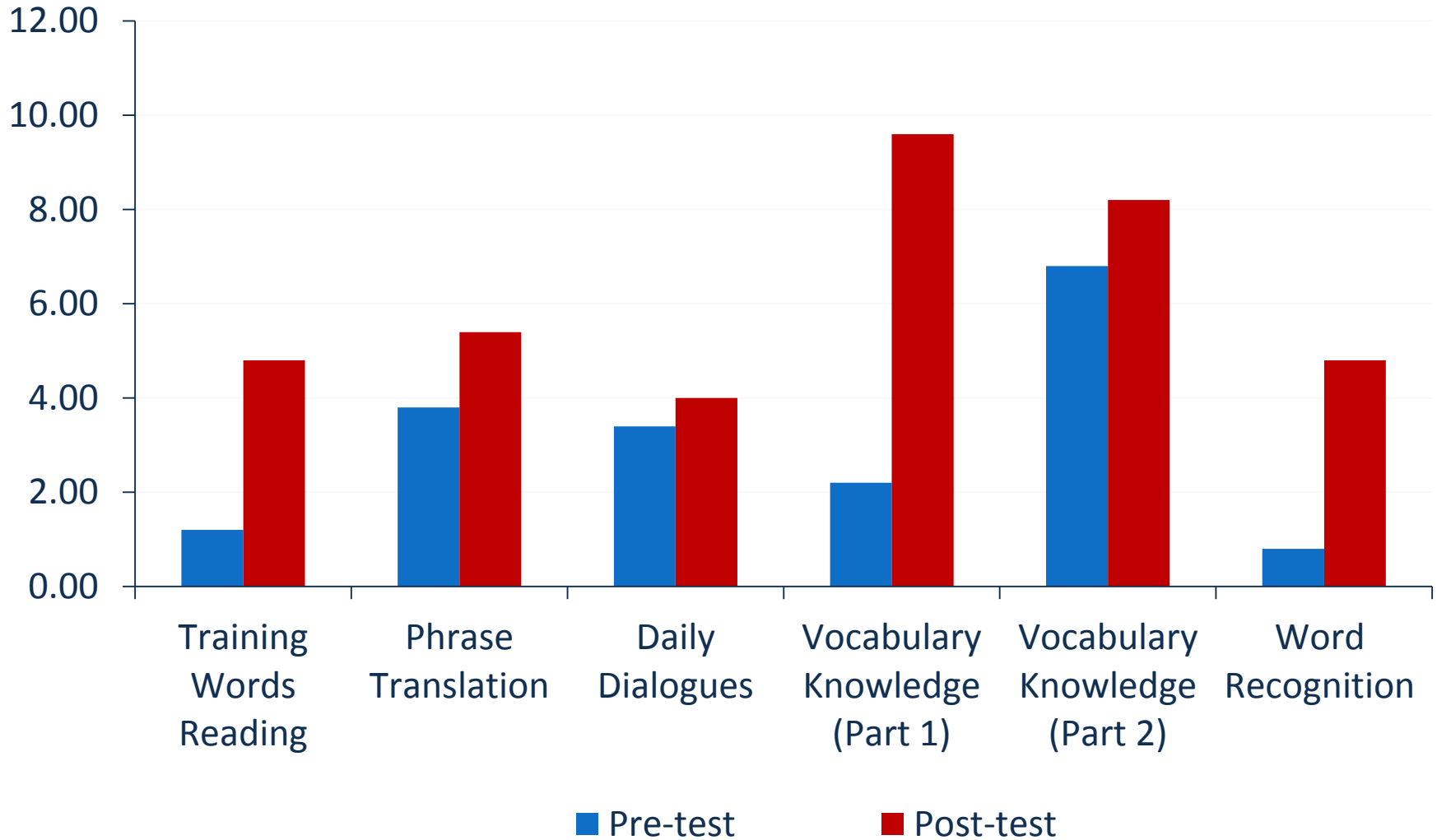


Chinese Language and Literacy Test

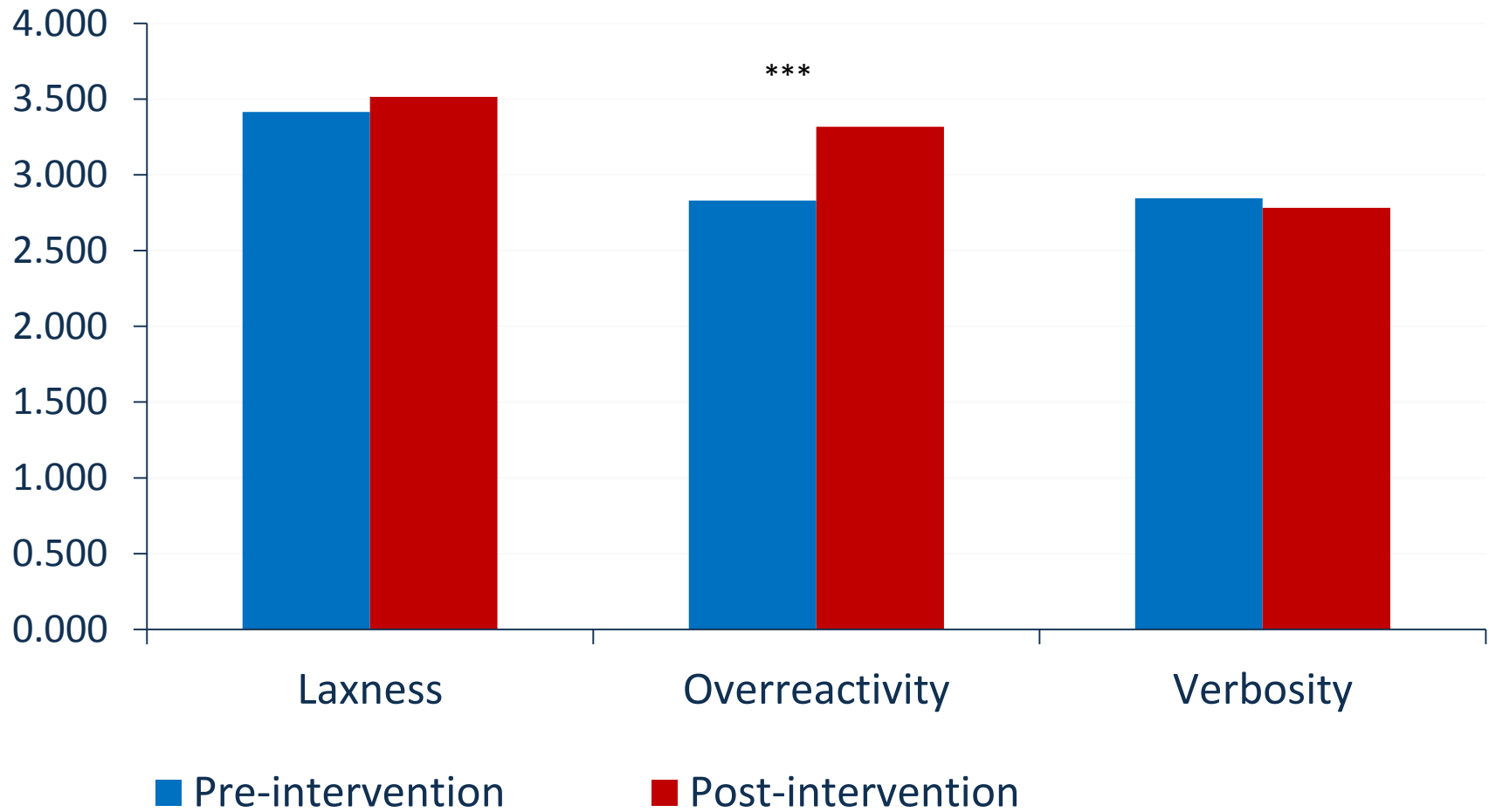


*** Significant difference at the 1% level.

Caregivers' Knowledge of Chinese



Parenting Skills Intervention



*** Significant difference at the 1% level

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!