

Oromia Parenting Programme Pilot

Evaluation Report: Findings, Learning and Implications

A joint report by the Oromia Education Bureau and Lively Minds

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Oromia Parenting Programme Pilot

In 2026, the Oromia Education Bureau (OEB), with technical advisory support from Lively Minds, piloted a school-based parenting course delivered through existing government systems by pre-primary teachers. **The parenting course aimed to address the lack of play-based learning: in classrooms and at home.**

Teachers in Oromia ran eight two-hour parenting sessions in schools using games, role-play, songs and storytelling to increase play-based learning. Core components from Lively Minds' proven parent-powered ECD approach in Ghana were applied to a new model. More contextual information can be found in Annex A.

The eight sessions were delivered in 4 weeks, from June to July 2026. The course ran in two districts, Fentale and Mana, where **1,803 parents enrolled across 40 schools**. Delivery ran through government structures using a cascade training model.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods, before-and-after design. Quantitative measurement was through attendance registers, a parent survey at the first and last sessions, home visits, session observations, teacher session records and classroom observations. Qualitative accounts were gathered through focus groups, family interviews and interviews with teachers and district officials.

The evaluation was designed around eight main learning questions, agreed between OEB and Lively Minds before delivery began (see Annex B).

Significant efforts were made to collect useful data during the pilot (Annex C), but given limited resources and self-monitoring it was not possible to compare outcomes versus a comparison group, and baseline/endline samples are repeated cross-sectional samples rather than longitudinal.



Headline findings

1

Homes showed more of both materials and interactions that support children's learning and health:

Homemade learning and play materials were observed in 42% of homes before the pilot and 100% afterwards (+58 pp), while suitable handwashing stations rose from 26% to 95% (+69 pp). Behavioural shifts were also observed in homes, such as an increase in conversation, storytelling, play, and learning interactions - up from 42% to 79% (+37pp).

2

Parents felt more confident supporting learning at home:

The proportion of parents who strongly agreed that they could help their child learn at home rose from 58% before the course to 79% afterwards (+21 pp).

3

Teachers appeared to carry play-based learning into their classroom teaching:

Games and learning materials were observed in 0% of classrooms before the pilot and 50% afterwards (+50 pp), while discovery-based teaching rose from 33% to 100% (+67 pp).

4

Government successfully delivered the programme through its existing structures :

Over 1,800 parents enrolled across 40 schools; 97% of observed sessions were running as planned, 85% of observed sessions fully followed the session guide; average attendance of 38 parents at sessions.



FINDINGS

Homes showed more of the materials and interactions that support children's learning and health

Following the course, substantial changes were observed in home environments and parent-child interactions that support play-based learning. For example, homemade learning or play materials were present in all homes in post-course observations (Table 1). Perhaps more significantly, there is also evidence of behavioural shifts at home (Table 1).

Indicator	Before	After	Change
Homemade learning or play materials present	8 (42%)	19 (100%)	▲ 11 (+58pp)
Children’s play materials within reach	4 (21%)	16 (84%)	▲ 12 (+63pp)
Books or picture books present	8 (42%)	10 (53%)	▲ 2 (+11pp)
Conversation, storytelling, play, or a learning interaction observed	8 (42%)	15 (79%)	▲ 7 (+37pp)

Table 1: Home visit observations

Annex D details further evidence that parenting behaviours shifted due to learning on the course.

"I produced learning aids from bottle caps for colour identification and counting, drew pictures of wild animals and showed them to children."
Parent, Focus Group Discussion

Handwashing was covered explicitly in the course, and home visit data found 18 of 19 home had a suitable handwashing station after (95%) compared to 5 of 19 homes before (26%; +69 pp). According to parents' self-reporting 46% of houses had a handwashing station before to 97% after (+51pp).



Parents felt more confident supporting learning

Before the course, just over half of parents *strongly* agreed that they feel confident to help children learn at home (58%), but this changed to around 4 in 5 parents afterwards (79%; +21pp) [Figure 1]. Note that 100% agreed that they felt confident (combining *agree* and *strongly agree*).

Similar shifts in knowledge are evident in other aspects of child learning. Parents' understanding that children 'learn by doing,' rather than only by listening or watching, was almost universal after the course (99%) [Figure 1].

"We thought the role of teaching is for the school, but now we are able to teach our children at home. We now have awareness."

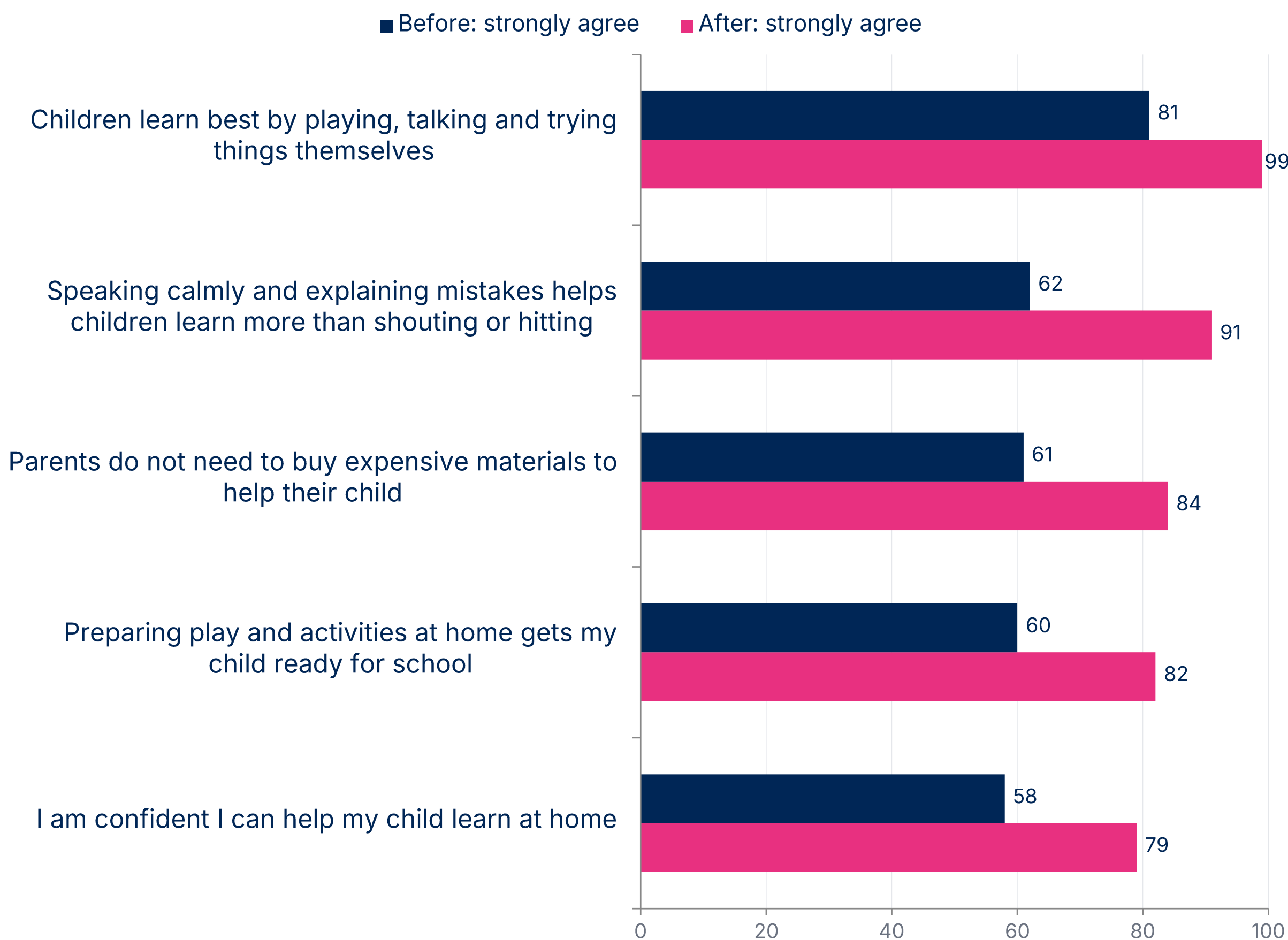
Parent, Focus Group Discussion

Linked to confidence, more support appears to be available for parents – in the community as well as at home. After the course, focus group and interview participants described being closer to schools and teachers, talking about children with other parents, and forming closer bonds at home.

"It has improved my relationship with my children and husband. As I speak, my husband is taking care of the last born at home whilst I am here to participate in the session."

Parent, Interview

Figure 1: Parents' views on Early Childhood Development



Parents who 'strongly agree' with each statement, before and after the parenting course, %

FINDINGS

Case studies illustrate how the parenting course translated into changes at home

HAWI – BB XUXXUUXII, Fentale

Hawi (name changed) lives in Fentale district and is connected to BB Xuxxuuxii school cluster. She is a mother in her early 30s. When her home was visited before the course, enumerators saw only occasional communication between her and her child, with limited play or storytelling. There were no household learning/play materials visible, and encouragement of her child's independent thinking was inconsistent.

Hawi joined the parenting workshops and was unsure how to integrate ideas from them into daily routines. But during the pilot, she began experimenting with homemade play materials and storytelling activities. She reported that the most useful workshop idea was encouraging her child to try things independently.

After the course, enumerators observed continuous positive communication, consistent storytelling or play, and visible play materials in Hawi's house. She explained that she now spends more time talking with her child and encourages them to solve small tasks alone.

"I used not spend time playing with my children but now I spend more time telling them stories... Enabling the child to do things on their own."

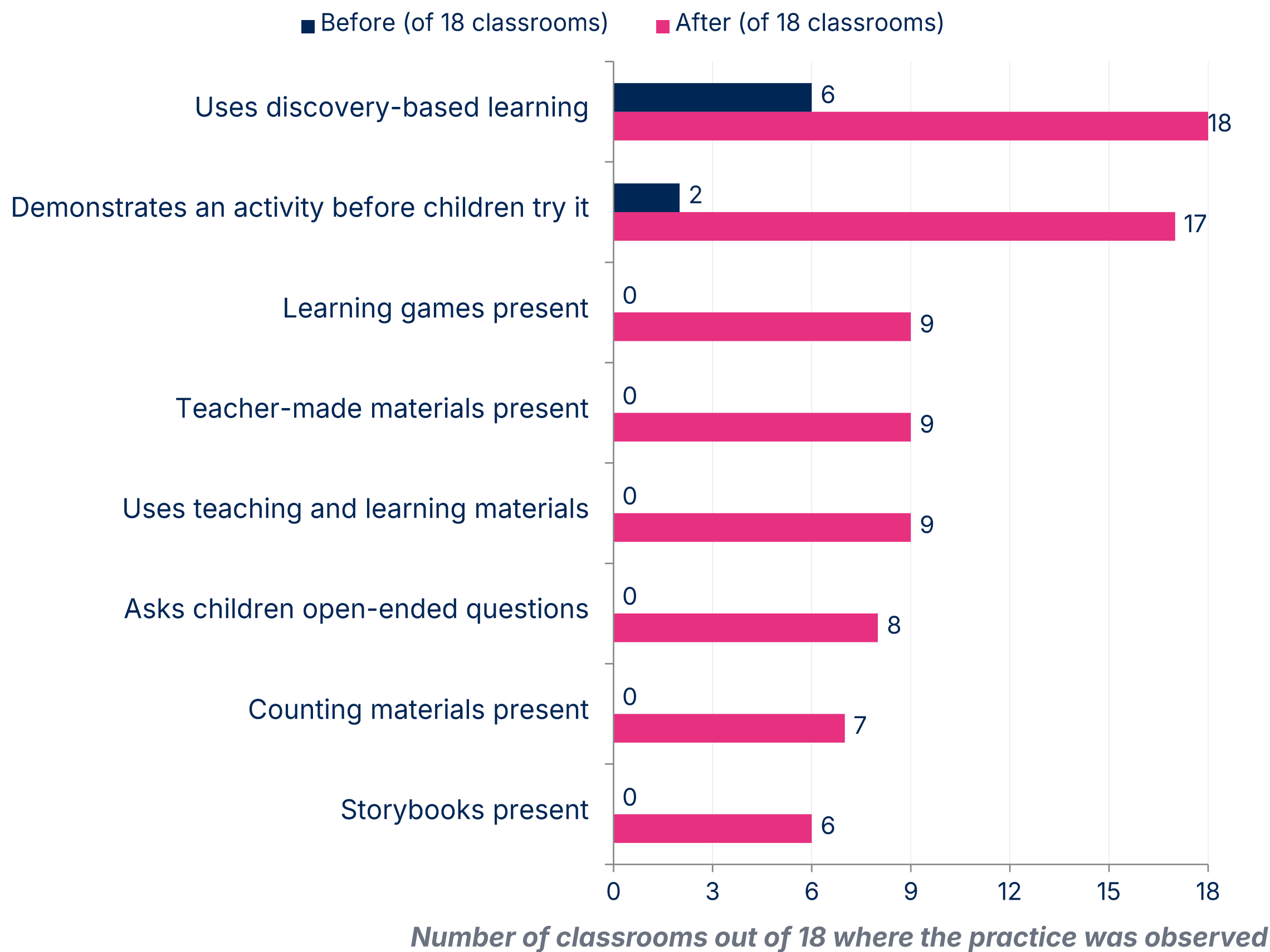
Hawi, BB Xuxxuuxii, Fentale

A further case study can be found in Annex E.



Increased usage of play-based learning by teachers

Figure 2: Practices used by teachers in classrooms



In follow-up observations of classroom teaching, more teachers were using games and other learning materials after their training. Games and learning materials were both present in 9 out of 18 observed classes after the course (50%), compared to 0 out of 18 beforehand (0%; +50pp) [Figure 2].

This was reinforced by self-reported data from teachers which suggested that nearly all had used the programme's games in normal lessons in the previous week (94%). Two in three said they were using them daily (63%).

Discovery-based teaching was seen in all 18 classrooms afterwards (100%) compared to 6 out of 18 before (33%; +67pp), meaning children could handle materials, try things and work out answers, instead of typical rote learning or passive learning [Figure 2].

Teachers received three days of training to run parenting sessions. During this training, they were taught and encouraged to apply the play-based learning approaches to their classroom teaching. The above results provide suggestive evidence that teachers did so. Further information on the impact of the training is found in Annex F.

"I have more focus on the use of play, stories, songs as opposed to just 'telling' in the teaching learning process."
KG teacher, Interview

FINDINGS

Government successfully delivered the programme through existing systems



Government officials and teachers delivered the programme reliably and to a good standard. The cascade training worked effectively: teachers were found to be fully prepared in 92% of sessions, the session had been practised in advance in 91%, and the session guide was followed fully in 85% [Figure 3].



Mobilisation by teachers appears to have worked : a total of 1,803 parents enrolled across 40 schools with an average attendance of 38 parents at sessions. Half of those enrolled attended six or more sessions (49%), and the average enrolled parent attended 5 sessions (see Annex G).

Figure 3: Teacher performance at parenting sessions



Share of the 115 observed sessions in which each aspect of delivery was rated fully done, %
Note: The remainder were rated 'partly' done rather than not done.

Sources: Parenting session observations, n=115 sessions, recorded by 46 named observers (68 district education experts, 22 zonal experts, 7 zonal staff, 6 OEB project team, 7 Lively Minds). Attendance registers, 1,803 parents across 40 schools. Training attendance: Oromia ToT observation analysis, 5 observed training days.

Strong support from officials, teachers and parents for continuing the programme

4 of 4

district officials

rated the programme very relevant and recommended expanding it. All four had personally observed sessions and had attended the training themselves.

"The leadership at various levels should own the programme and OEB should budget the programme."
District education official, Fentale

6 of 6

teachers interviewed

recommended continuation and scale-up. Five of the six reported no significant problems implementing the programme.

"The training is very useful. It needs to be scaled up."
KG teacher, Fentale

9 of 9

parent focus groups

asked for the programme to continue, and several recommended for it to be extended to other communities.

"The training is very important. Thus, OEB should support us continuously in future."
Parent, family case study

Endorsement of the OEB/Lively Minds parenting programme was unanimous across the interviewed stakeholder groups (parents, teachers and officials). Officials went further than approval in that they also named the mechanism that would make it permanent: OEB budgeting for it rather than treating it as a project.

Suggestions and requests on how to improve the programme were practical rather than fundamental i.e. suggested changes concerned timing, duration, supervision or logistics. Nobody questioned the design, the content, or the community's appetite.

 **The pilot also provides encouraging early evidence that a lean advisory model may be sufficient to support effective government-led delivery.**

It was delivered through a nine-month advisory engagement, with two Lively Minds staff seconded into the OEB team. Overall, sessions were delivered, supervised and valued by participants with relatively limited direct involvement from Lively Minds in day-to-day implementation. This is consistent with the intended model: Lively Minds provides the curriculum, technical expertise and implementation know-how, while government owns, manages and delivers the programme.

Key learning from the evaluation

The pilot provides encouraging early evidence that the parenting programme can strengthen play-based learning at home and in classrooms, while being delivered through government systems.

The pilot produced encouraging early-stage markers:

- **Parents began changing what they do at home.** Homes have play materials, places to handwash and there's evidence of new parenting behaviour - and parents have more confidence and support to teach at home.
- **Teachers learned new skills.** Three days of training left teachers able to deliver the parenting course – but also changed how they teach day-to-day.
- **Government delivered the programme and want more of it.** Officials asked for expansion and suggested OEB budgeting as the route to permanence.

See Annex H for findings broken down by research question and Annex I for further ideas for strengthening the programme from this pilot.

Next Steps: OEB and Lively Minds are strengthening the programme content based on pilot learnings and exploring opportunities to scale the programme in the region.



01



SECTION 1

Annexes

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Oromia Parenting Programme Pilot – Context

The challenge: children have too few opportunities to learn through play – both in the classroom and at home. Oromia Education Bureau (OEB) has invested heavily in expanding pre-primary education. In the last few years thousands of pre-schools have been built, and the pre-primary workforce has expanded rapidly – but learning outcomes are not yet increasing.

The joint OEB-Lively Minds pilot aims to increase play-based learning in both settings. It trains pre-primary teachers to **make and use simple games and play-based activities in their classrooms, and to train parents to use these activities with their children at home – increasing children’s opportunities to learn through play throughout their day.**

Lively Minds helps governments deliver quality early childhood development at scale by activating the most underutilised resource in education: parents. Around the world parents are overlooked as educators, by systems and often by themselves. Children spend more time at home than at school, but parents often mistakenly feel they’re unable to educate their children; don’t have the resources or schooling to do so; or don’t think it’s their role.

Parents can accelerate learning. An independent RCT of Lively Minds' Ghana programme found parents can drive significant improvements in children's school readiness, regardless of their own education or socioeconomic status.¹ Further analysis suggests every \$100 spent improved students' school readiness by the equivalent of an additional 1.4–2 years of school.² This is despite the fact that over 70% of the 130,000 mothers now teaching weekly in Ghana's kindergartens are illiterate.



1. Augsburg B, Attanasio OP, Dreibelbis R, et al. Lively Minds: improving health and development through play—a randomised controlled trial evaluation of a comprehensive ECCE programme at scale in Ghana. *BMJ Open* 2022;12:e061571. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2021-028157

2. <https://poverty-action.org/effects-play-based-preschool-learning-program-rural-ghana>

Key learning questions

PARENTS AND TEACHERS

- Q1** Does the programme improve parents' knowledge, attitudes, confidence and practices on home learning and engagement with school?
- Q2** Do parents find the workshops relevant, engaging, enjoyable and useful?
- Q3** Does the programme improve play-based teaching in the classroom?

DELIVERY, GOVERNMENT AND SCALE

- Q4** Is the training-of-trainers cascade feasible at scale?
- Q5** Does government have the systems to implement and scale it?
- Q6** Do government and stakeholders value the programme and want to scale it?
- Q7** Lively Minds' advisory approach of a lean, time-bound Technical Advisory model sufficient?
- Q8** *What would it cost at scale, and is that viable? (not measured this phase)*

To answer these questions, the pilot evaluation used a mixed-methods, before-and-after design. Quantitative data was collected through attendance registers, a parent survey at the first and last sessions, home visits, session observations, teacher session records and classroom observations. Qualitative accounts were gathered through focus groups, family interviews and interviews with teachers and district officials.

Data collection

A range of data collection instruments were used to triangulate data - administered by government education officers, delivering teachers and independent researchers.

Tool	What it measures	Sample	Collected by
Parent attendance registers	Enrolment and attendance, per parent per session	1,803 parents (1,149 Fentale, 654 Mana), 40 schools	Teachers
Parent survey	Self-reported practices, attitudes, knowledge	582 before, 382 after	Teachers
Home visits	Observed home learning environment	19 households before, 19 after	Independent researchers
Session observations	Delivery quality, fidelity, parent response	115 sessions (75 Mana, 40 Fentale)	District and zonal education officers
Session completion forms	Per-session delivery record	261 forms, 40 schools	Teachers
Classroom observations	Play-based teaching practice	18 classrooms before, 18 after, different schools	Independent researchers
Teacher training records	Attendance, knowledge, feedback	102 attendees; 55 completed a pre-test, 75 post-test	Lively Minds project team
Interviews, focus groups, case studies	Experience in participants' own words	9 focus groups (89 parents), 17 parent interviews, 6 teacher interviews, 4 gov official interviews	Independent researchers and Lively Minds

Table 2: Data collection tools used in the evaluation

New habits of child interaction appear to be forming in homes

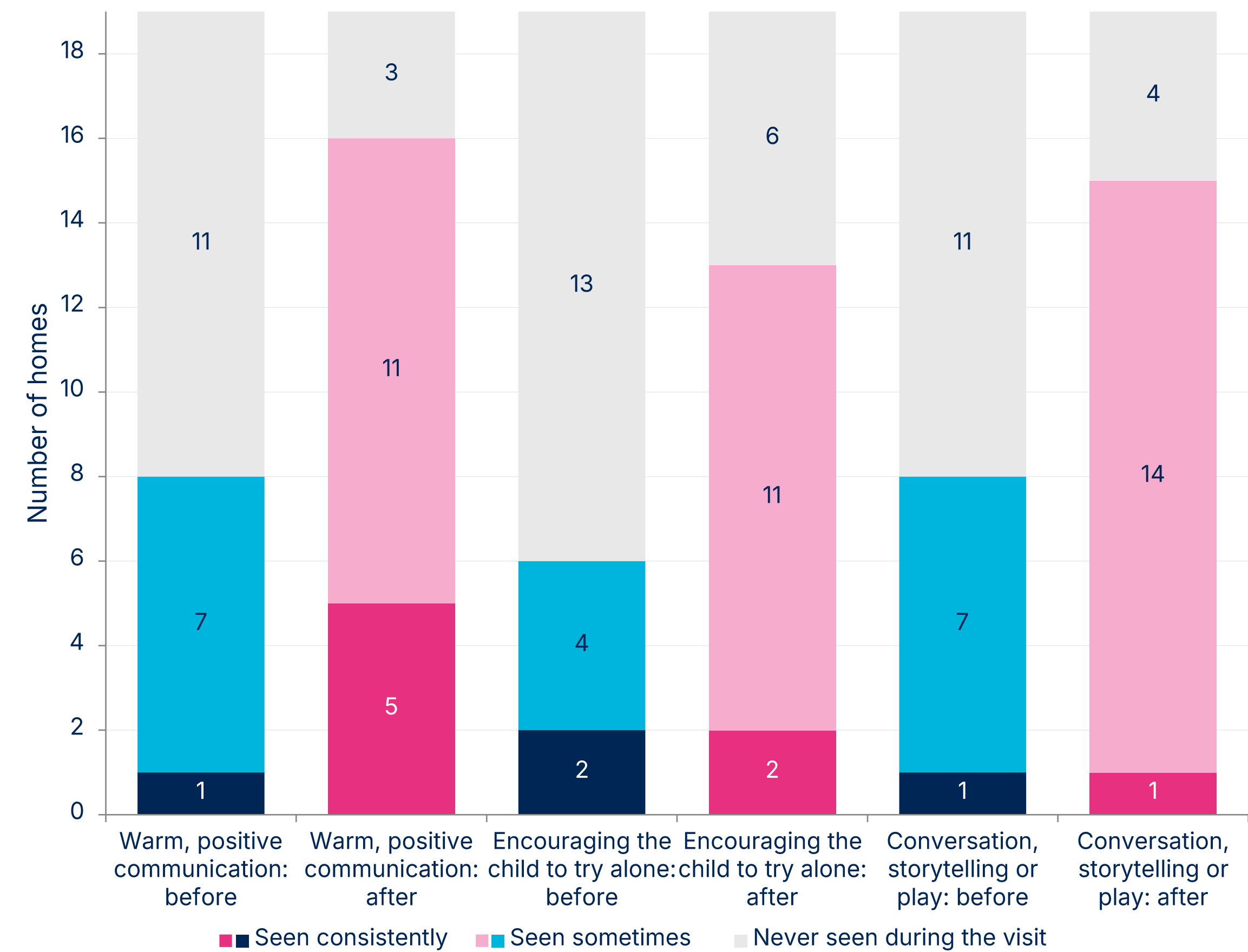


Figure 4: Home visit changes in observed behaviours: before and after participation in the parenting course

There is some observed evidence that the course has encouraged positive behaviours in homes where they were previously absent.

For example, warm, positive communication was seen at least sometimes in 16 out of 19 homes (84%) after the course, an increase from only 8 out of 19 homes (42%) before the course (+42pp) [Figure 4].

Various other data provides support for the idea that parents are applying lessons from the course at home:

- In 90 of 115 parenting sessions, it was observed that parents could describe activities they had tried at home since the previous week.
- In several focus groups, parents raised positive discipline unprompted, describing themselves as being less aggressive, with one group committing to avoid physical punishment altogether.

Additional case study

BONTU – BB XUXXUUXII, Fentale

Bontu (name changed) is a mother in her late 20s who also lives in Fentale district and is linked to BB Xuxxuuxii school cluster. Before attending the parenting course, Bontu occasionally used harsh language at home and admitted that shouting was sometimes used as a disciplinary measure. Researchers found that positive communication was inconsistent, at best. Like Hawi (earlier case study), no play materials were seen in the house. and Bontu struggled to find time for play.

At the parenting workshops, Bontu learned about topics including calmer discipline, how to create play opportunities, and encouraging learning through household activities. She particularly liked the idea that she could use everyday household tasks as learning opportunities and that “play and learning can happen with simple household items.”

“I now give them tasks in the form of games when I am cooking. So they try matching colours [for example].”

Bontu, BB Xuxxuuxii, Fentale

During the pilot, she began to reduce shouting and harsh language, and she experimented with storytelling and play at home. At the endline house visit, enumerators did not observe any harsh language. Instead there was consistent positive communication. In her interview, she explained that – thanks to the workshops – she now avoids shouting and instead uses calm communication.

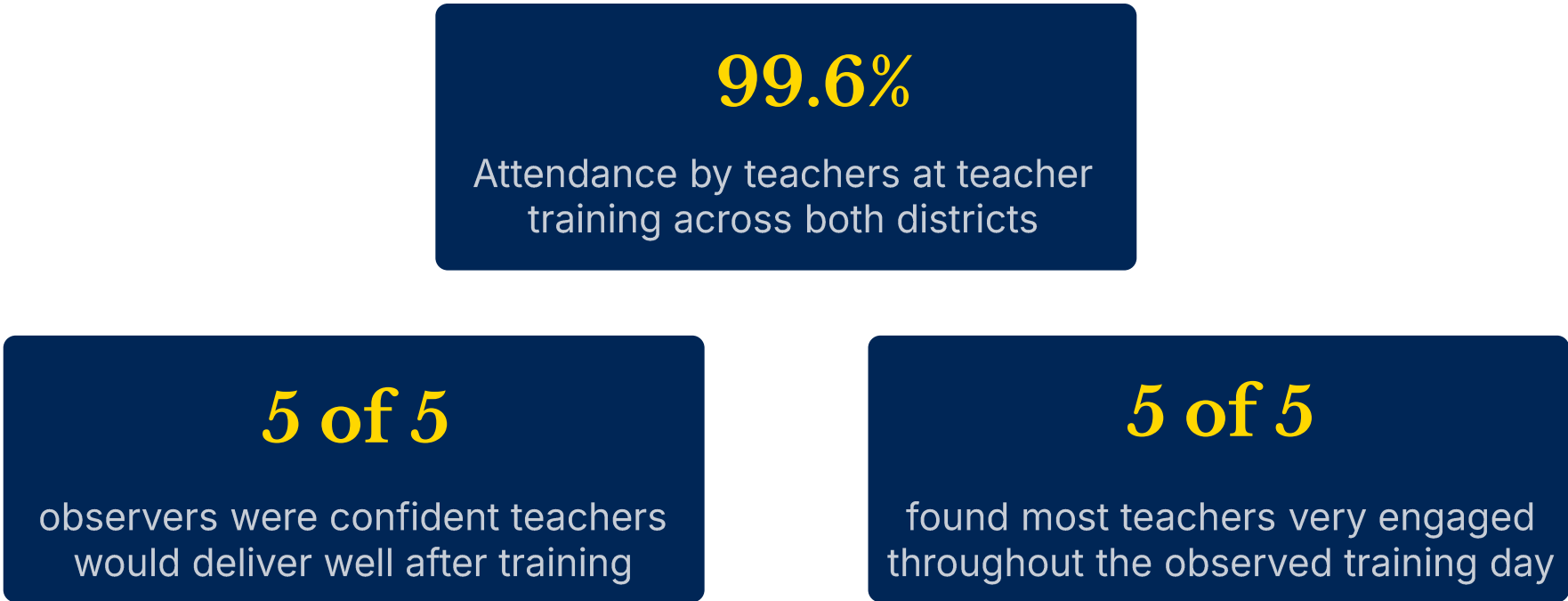
“I used to be busy with my household chores... I now correct my child in a calm way.”

Bontu, BB Xuxxuuxii, Fentale



The teacher training (ToT) was delivered to a high standard

The Lively Minds teacher training ran for three days in each district, and appears to have been effectively delivered. Teacher feedback on the training was consistently strong. Every teacher rated the organisation of the training good or very good (100%).



A knowledge quiz was used to test understanding before and after [Figure 5]. Average correct responses across the three comparable knowledge questions increased from 65% to 76% (+11pp). Understanding of school readiness clearly increased between the before and after samples, though the question on brain development ages did not show an increase in correct responses [Figure 5].

Teachers also left the training with the vast majority able to answer the practical questions the role demands, including what to do when parents stop attending [Figure 6].

Figure 5: Percentage of answers correct, for the three knowledge questions asked both before and after the training

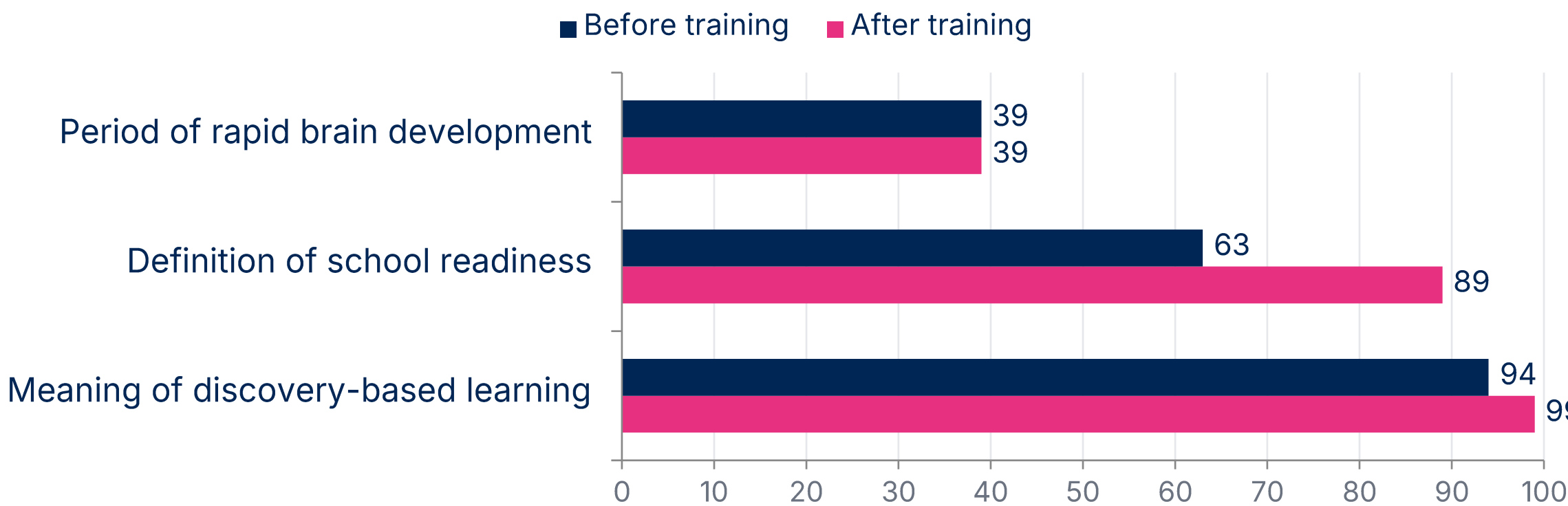
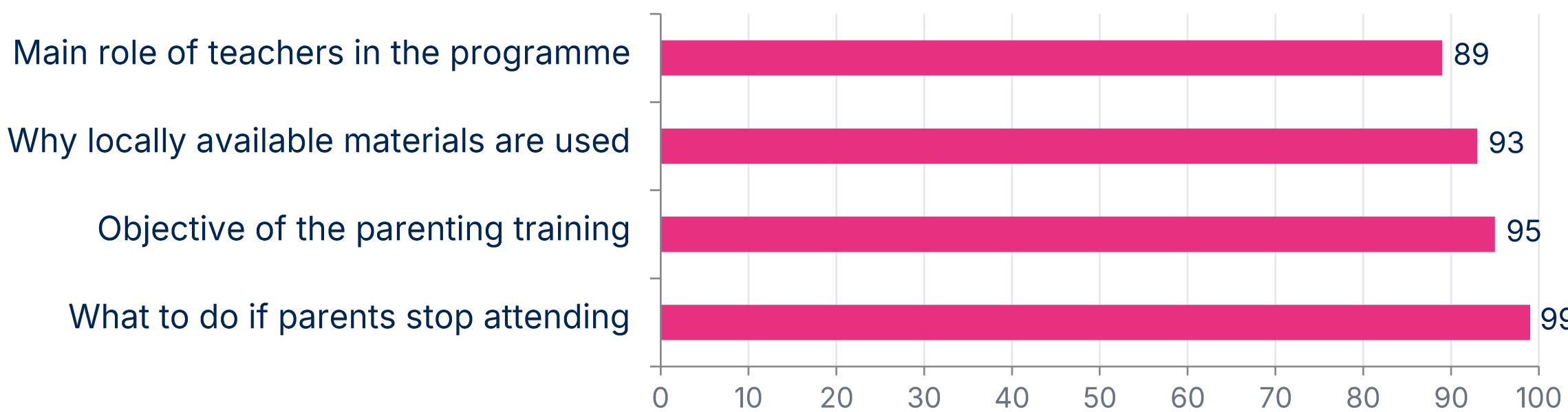


Figure 6: Percentage correct on questions asked only after the training



Parents attended consistently and were engaged during the sessions

A total of 1,803 parents enrolled across 40 schools. Half of those enrolled attended six or more sessions (49%) [Figure 7].

5 out of 8
average number of parenting sessions attended by enrolled parents

While the attendance suggests that parents were happy to keep attending, most parents did not receive the full 8-session course – likely due to farm and household work. Only 1 in 5 attended all eight (17%).

There were different attendance patterns across the two districts. In Fentale, attendance gathered momentum towards the end of the course, while in Mana the initial 83% attendance eased to 60% by the last session.

Parents' participation was sometimes affected by water collection, livestock and other domestic duties."
District Education Official, Fentale

Data gathered in the evaluation suggests that parents were largely engaged and active during the parenting workshops. Across 115 observed sessions, most parents understood the key messages in 90% of sessions, actively took part in the session in 89%, joined the activities in 87%, and were able to lead the games in 87% [Figure 8].

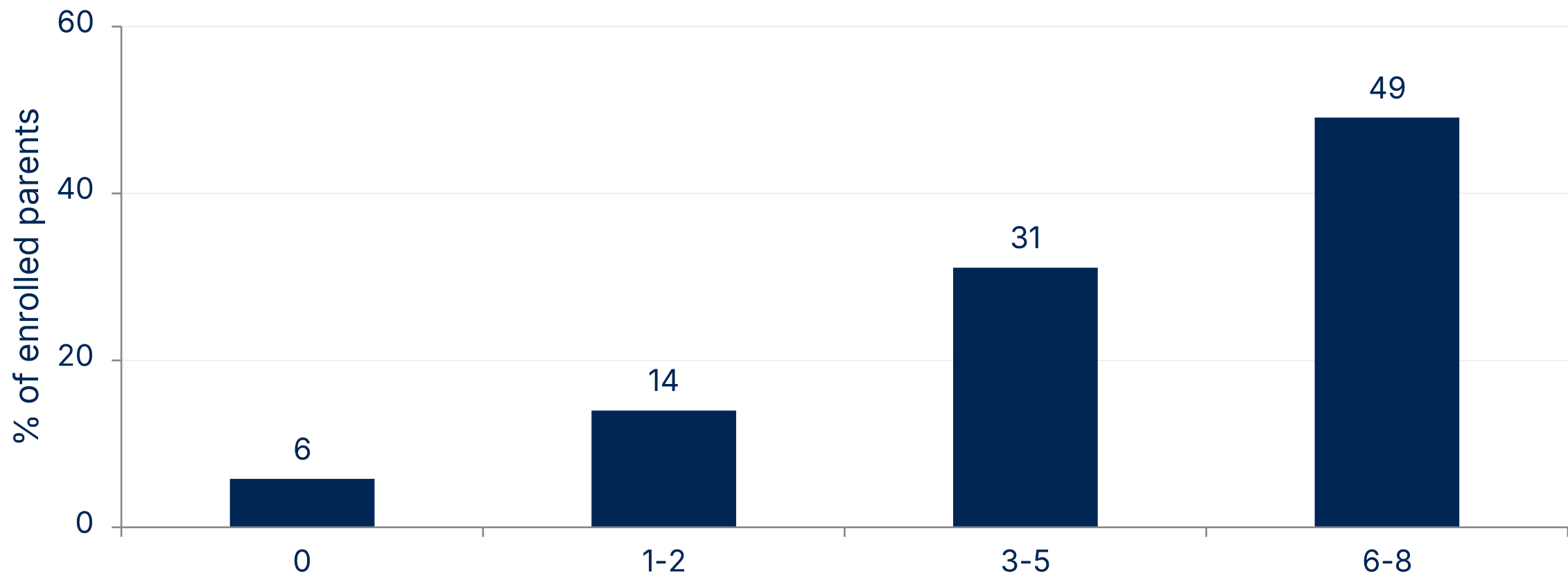


Figure 7: Sessions attended, of 8, by % of parents enrolled

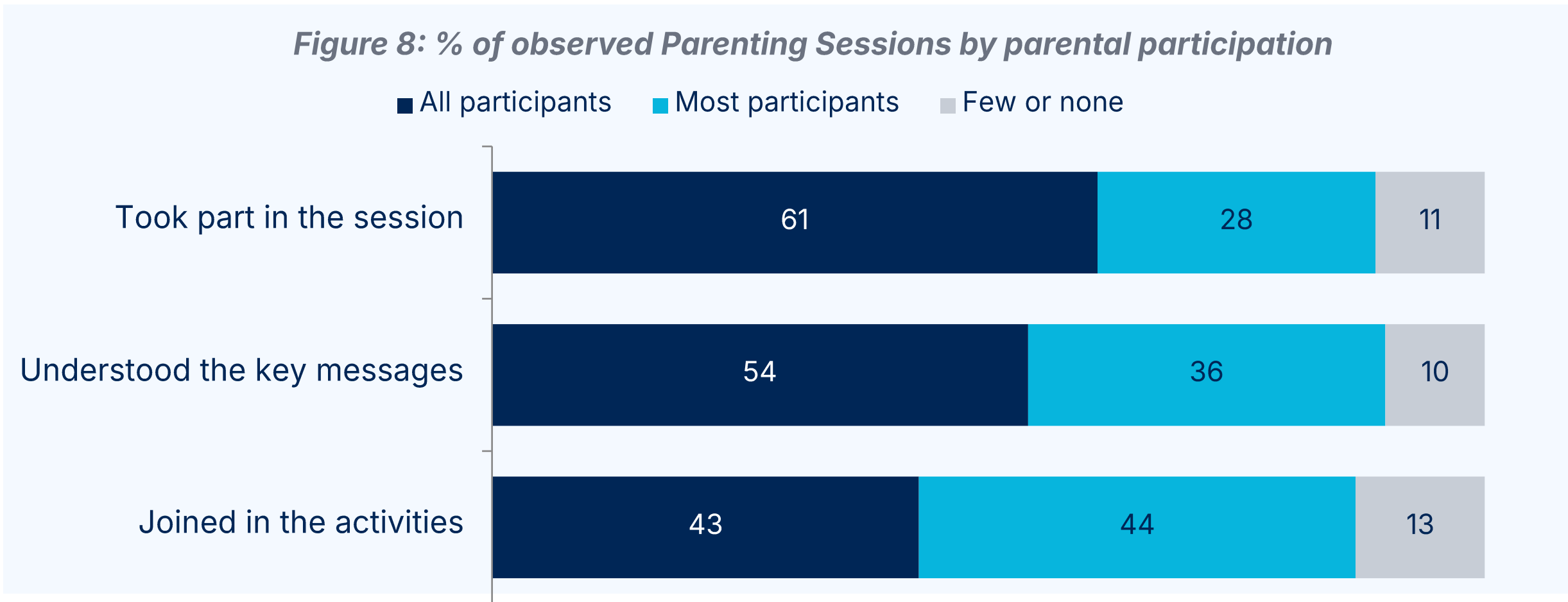


Figure 8: % of observed Parenting Sessions by parental participation

Findings by research question

	Q	Key research question	Verdict	Evidence
PARENTS AND TEACHERS	1	Does the programme improve parents' knowledge, attitudes, confidence and practices on home learning and engagement with school?	YES	Parents report large increases in play (share reporting play on three or more days a week rose from 29% to 73%), as well as storytelling and focused time; observers found the same changes inside homes; certainty about parents own ability to teach rose (79% strongly agreed they could teach at home, up from 58%) and more support is available.
	2	Do parents find the workshops relevant, engaging, enjoyable and useful?	YES	Half of all enrolled parents attended six or more of eight sessions; engagement in the room was high (most parents understood the key messages in 90% of sessions).
	3	Does the programme improve play-based teaching in the classroom?	YES	Classrooms went from almost no learning materials to teacher-made materials in half of those observed; Discovery-based teaching was present in all observed classes after the course (up from 6/18 before).
DELIVERY, GOVERNMENT AND SCALE	4	Is the training-of-trainers model feasible for implementation at scale?	YES, WITH SMALL TWEAKS	Three days of training left teachers confident and knowledgeable, and that confidence held through delivery. Small content gaps and timing fixes were identified by teachers – but nothing transformative is required.
	5	Does government have the systems and structures in place to implement and scale it?	YES	Training cascades worked; sessions ran and started on time; teachers mobilised and delivered sessions effectively
	6	Do government and stakeholders value the programme and want to scale it?	YES	Unanimous across officials, teachers and parents, with OEB budget ownership set out as the condition for sustainability.
	7	Is Lively Minds' advisory approach sufficient?	EARLY POSITIVE	The programme was delivered through a nine-month seconded engagement and largely ran without Lively Minds in the room, which is an early indication that light-touch advisory can be enough.

Table 3: Findings by research question

Strengthening the programme

1

Reach fathers deliberately

Men enrolled less, attended less and were the less active voice in twice as many sessions as women. Test father-specific mobilisation through session timing, community and religious leaders, and invitation by other men. One school reached 80% male participation, which could serve as an interesting case to investigate.

2

Enrol fewer parents, and mobilise them better

Fentale enrolled 76% more parents than Mana and retained a far smaller share of them. Six per cent of enrolled parents never attended at all, and parents who joined late attended least reliably. Aim for committed cohorts that start together, with a defined route in for late joiners.

3

Fit the calendar around parents' work

Sessions running into the school closure period coincided with the coffee harvest and household work. This was the single most cited barrier to attendance by every group, and moving the training and the sessions earlier in the school year was the most common request from teachers and officials alike.

4

Add rehearsal time on scripted delivery

Working from a scripted lesson plan was potentially new to teachers. It appears to resolve with practice, but building more rehearsal into the three days, and concentrating supervision in the first few weeks of delivery, might help to close it faster.

5

Fix the gaps in training content

Understanding of when children's brains develop most rapidly did not improve at all, and the main role of teachers in the programme was the weakest of the post-training knowledge items. Both are small additions to a training that otherwise worked well.

6

Support the least confident parents

Combined results are strong, but sessions where every parent could understand the messages or lead a game remain a minority. This is likely to reflect how many sessions a parent attended and levels of literacy, and it points towards ensuring session design plans for the least confident parents.

7

Run the course at a weekly cadence

The compressed four-week delivery gave parents less time between sessions to try activities at home, and squeezed monitoring. Restoring the intended schedule would be ideal for testing.



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