

Involvement in the Educational System among Hmong Parents

by

Khou Xiong

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

School Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Barbara Flom, Ph.D.
Barbara Flom

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

December, 2009

**The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI**

Author: Xiong, Khou

Title: *Involvement in the Educational System among Hmong Parents*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS School Counseling

Research Adviser: Barbara Flom, Ph.D.

Month/Year: December, 2009

Number of Pages: 33

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

The Hmong immigrated to the United States about 30 years ago from their homeland Laos after the defeat of the Vietnam War in 1975. They have been faced with many struggles as the Hmong try to settle into a culture so different and demanding as compared to their homeland. It has been a difficult journey for many Hmong as they try to assimilate to the American culture while holding onto the customs and traditions they all believe in.

The Hmong are still faced with many difficulties and barriers after all these years. However, they value education very much as they believe that education is the way to be successful in America. Although most Hmong value education and understand the importance of it, they have a difficult time being involved in the educational system and their child's education. This is due to many barriers that they are faced with: language barriers, their own lack of education, poverty, teacher perceptions, and cultural differences.

The purpose of this critical analysis of research is to examine the different barriers that Hmong families and parents are faced with that impose as a hindrance on involvement in their child's education. It examines language barriers, education level, poverty, and cultural differences. Furthermore, it looks at teacher perceptions which also act as barriers for parent involvement.

Finally, this critical analysis of research will give recommendations for future research after analyzing current research available. It will also give recommendations for educators as they work with Hmong parents and families to try to bridge the cultural gap that exists.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Barbara Flom, Ph.D., first and foremost, who served as my thesis advisor. Her guidance, patience and support were greatly appreciated, much more than words can express. Thank you for your patience with answering the many endless emails that went back and forth.

I would like to thank my husband, Moua, daughters Sommer and Emmerson for their support and continuous love through this journey and seemingly endless process. Without them cheering me on, day after day, I would not be where I am today. I could not have done this without the encouragement of my mother and father, also my sisters, Yia, Pa, and Chue. Thank you all so much. I love you!

Lastly, I would like to thank all the School Counseling professors; they have graciously helped me through this journey. They have been nothing but wonderful in helping me through these two years. Thank you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	3
<i>Purpose of the Study</i>	3
<i>Assumptions of the Study</i>	3
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	4
Chapter II: Literature Review	5
<i>Parent Involvement</i>	5
<i>Culture Theory and Hmong Parent Involvement</i>	6
<i>Hmong Parent Beliefs about Involvement in Education</i>	6
<i>Barriers to Hmong Parent Involvement</i>	10
Chapter III: Literature Review Analysis.....	16
<i>Summary</i>	16
<i>Critical Analysis</i>	19
<i>Conclusions and Recommendations</i>	21
<i>References</i>	26

Chapter I: Introduction

The Hmong people have settled into the United States for about 34 years from their homeland, Laos. Life for many Hmong people in the United States has been filled with hardships and adversity. They struggle to keep the Hmong culture and traditions alive while trying to assimilate to the American culture and their way of life. Education has always been viewed as very beneficial and important even back in Laos when only selective males were allowed to attend school. That belief and value towards education has been brought to the United States with the Hmong people as they have come over.

The tale of the Hmong people is one that is tragic and poignant. The journey that the Hmong people have encountered is ongoing and enduring. Hmong people journeyed from the small mountain villages of Laos to many different areas of the world, with the majority of Hmong people settling in the United States. Laos lies between China, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The settlement of the Hmong people in the United States began after 1975 with the fall of the Lao democracy.

In the early 1950's communists began to come into Laos, which during this time, forced many Hmong people to either join them or move. However, in early 1960, the Hmong people were contacted by the United States to help them fight the communists. Many people joined the United States in fighting the communists and fought with them for nearly 15 years in helping keep the communists from winning. The Hmong were dedicated allies to the United States and risked their lives to save their homeland and rescue American soldiers. During this time, the Hmong were called the "US Secret Army" because people in the United States did not know about them until after the war (Lewis & Vang, 1990).

However, in 1975, the Vietnam War ended in tragedy and defeat. The American troops withdrew leaving the Hmong abandoned fighting for their own lives. This terrible battle would continue for the Hmong as they encountered chemical warfare from the communist North Vietnam (Hamilton-Merrit, 1993). As a result of fighting with the enemies against North Vietnam, Laos, which they called home, was no longer their homeland.

An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Hmong died while fighting the Secret War (Lewis & Vang, 1990). In 1975, approximately 3,500 Hmong arrived in the United States, and about 15% of Hmong arrived in the 1980s (Yau, 2005). But it wasn't until 1979 that President Carter acknowledged the war in Laos in which many Hmong lost their lives.

The 2000 Census counted 170,049 who self-identified as Hmong in the United States (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). The Hmong have resettled all over the United States; however, the majority of them have settled in California with 41,133 (40 %), Minnesota with 26,234 (or 26 %), and Wisconsin with 19,349 (or 19 %) (Yau, 2005). In California and Minnesota, they have settled in two major communities, Fresno and the Twin Cities.

Hmong people lived in peace, and their way of life was a simple agrarian life in the hills of Laos. Their daily life consisted of farming in which the entire family took part. Many of the homes were made from bamboo and tree branches. Farming was the way of life for the Hmong people in Laos and is still very much a way of life today in the United States. Although the majority of farming has been taken over by factory and other laboring jobs, many Hmong families and daily life remains rather simple.

The number of Hmong refugees in the U.S. is increasing. In 2004, a total of 15,000 individuals moved to establish Hmong-American communities in four U.S states, including Wisconsin. That meant, approximately 1,500 Hmong children from refugee families started

attending public schools within the states (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2004). And although the Hmong people have been here in the United States for more than 30 years, many still don't know the Hmong history or understand their culture. Many Hmong parents still believe that education is important even though many of them haven't had any form of schooling. They know and understand that to be successful here in America, education is a must.

Statement of the Problem

Hmong parents believe that education is important and is the key to being successful. However they may be less involved in their children's education than non-immigrant parents. The problem being investigated in this study is why Hmong parents are not as involved in their child's education as they could be and as compared to other parents.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to review current literature and research on factors that hinder Hmong parent involvement in their child's education. This study will examine the perspectives of Hmong parents along with the many different factors that hinder involvement. This will also serve as an educational tool for educators or other professionals to understand the Hmong culture better and help to bridge the gap between home and schools while answering curiosities. The following research questions help to understand the issue more.

1. What are the factors that hinder Hmong parent involvement with the educational system and their child's education?
2. What beliefs do Hmong parents have about being involved in school?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

One assumption of this review is that there is research available to be able to determine what factors play a role in parent involvement. It is further assumed that recent research will be

available on the Hmong culture and population to determine the key factors that play a role in parent involvement. In addition, it is assumed that this research review will include evidence from peer-reviewed journals and other professional literature; however, it is also assumed that there will be resources and materials used that are not from professional and peer reviewed literature because these are so limited. Some of the literature used that is not from professional and peer-reviewed journals will consist of theses and archives. I assume there is some research I did not uncover therefore this research may not encompass every factor.

There are limitations of the study that are recognized by the researcher. The first limitation of this study is that research is limited on the Hmong population in the United States. There have not been many peer reviewed studies or literature published on the Hmong group.

Definition of Terms

Clan: The large extended family belonging to a common ancestor, all clan members have the same last name.

Hmong. (Mong) Of Asian descent from the mountainous regions off Southeast Asia.

Low income. Household gross income below \$55,515 for a family of eight or more.

Poverty. Household gross income below \$37,010 for a family of eight or more.

Refugee. A person who flees from another country for refuge from invasion, oppression, or persecution.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the evidence and findings supporting this study. The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of Hmong parents and factors that hinder the involvement with the educational system and their child's education. Included will be the topics of parental involvement, culture theory and Hmong parent beliefs about involvement with school, barriers that hinder Hmong parent involvement and recommendations for Hmong parent involvement.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in general, can be conceptualized into three categories: parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, and parent involvement at home and school. Casas, Furlong, & Ruiz (2003) state that there is a positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. Parent involvement increased student achievement in academic performance, improved self-esteem, reduced behavioral problems, lowered dropout rates and helped to increase child's level of competence (Casas et al. 2003). Additionally, parent involvement has also improved attendance, increased homework completion, improved grades and test scores, and promoted greater enrollment in post secondary education (Henderson & Berla, 2004).

In spite of the research that has been done on benefits of parent involvement, there are reasons as to why parents are not as involved. Raffaele & Knoff (1999) stated that parent involvement is higher among those who have had more education than parents with little or no education. Such involvement includes their child's education both at school and at home. Additionally, Desimone (2001) reported that "low-income minority parents often have different

beliefs about parents' role in school involvement and are less involved in school activities than higher income, nonminority parents" (p. 12).

There are four types of parental involvement: home-based, school-based, decision-making, and advocacy (Ozaki & Koshino, 2008). A home-based type of parental involvement would consist of engaging in conversation with your child about their education. A school-based type of involvement would be attending parent/teacher conferences or volunteering at their school. Schools are encouraged to include parents in making important decisions regarding school, which would be a decision-making type of parent involvement. Lastly, advocacy would be to simply express their concerns and desire to teachers about their child (Ozaki & Koshino, 2008).

It may be more difficult for Hmong parents to accomplish all four types of involvement but even to carry out one would be beneficial. The first type of involvement may be the easier one for many Hmong parents to execute, which would be home-based parental involvement. Some of the things that fall under this type of involvement might be engaging with children at home or asking them how their day was. Additionally, even though parents may not be able to directly assist their children with homework, they can still be involved by instilling studying habits that promote greater academic achievement. Also, Henderson and Berla (1994) state, parents can be involved in the child's education in various ways. Parents could encourage more reading at home by keeping reading materials other than textbooks at home, or show interest in the student's life by attending school related events, etc.

Culture Theory and Hmong Parent Involvement

According to Handlin's theory of culture shock, immigrants who came to a society vastly different from their own find it more difficult to adjust than immigrants arriving from

similar backgrounds (Handlin, 1951). Even for the Hmong who have settled into the United States for years, it is still very difficult to adjust to the American culture and way of life. Although there are Hmong families who have adjusted and assimilated well to the American culture, there are many Hmong families who struggle with this issue of acculturation. This is especially true for those who still strongly value traditional Hmong cultures and beliefs.

It is evident that the younger Hmong families or generations are slowly acculturating to western society, whereas the elder Hmong generation is maintaining native traditions and customs (Tatman, 2004). This causes major stressors within families between elder generations trying to keep traditional customs and beliefs alive while the younger generation tries to assimilate.

The Hmong culture and customs are much different than American customs and culture. Many Hmong families still hold and practice traditional customs that were practiced in Laos. Although many families still practice traditional customs, there are also many Hmong families that have other religious faiths, mostly Christianity. However, it is important to keep in mind that Hmong lifestyles are changing and not all Hmong are the same (Lao Family, 1997).

Family is one of the most important things in the Hmong culture. Families consist of not only moms, dads, and grandparents, but uncles, aunts, and other relatives. There is an extensive amount of family ties with large networks that one can turn to for help and support. Many families live together as extended families and are very protective of one another. Elders and teachers are greatly respected in the culture because they are the ones with the knowledge and wisdom. Both are greatly respected among old and young generations because they help to teach and educate those around them. This is an unwritten rule that all Hmong live by and attain. From early on, Hmong children are taught their roles and expectations within the family and society.

Children develop a sense of moral obligation and loyalty to their family and understand that good values uphold and enhance the family name (Morrow, 1991).

Gender roles in the Hmong family also play an important part of parent involvement. Gender roles are much different in the Hmong culture compared to the American culture. Hmong males are superior and have more authority, making them the decision makers in the family. This is why many Hmong women are not allowed to have any schooling or education due to the fear of women becoming more smart or superior to their husband (Bulk, n.d.), thus making involvement in their child's education more difficult especially for women. This is apparent in many families that still hold traditional beliefs. However, many families that have assimilated to the American culture have allowed women and wives to seek education.

According to Dao (1991), parents are not culturally and linguistically prepared to provide academic assistance to their children because the American school system is different from the traditional Southeast Asian education system. Many parents follow the "pride and shame" concept which refers to parents and the entire family feeling embarrassed and ashamed of their child if they are referred to administration, counselor, or psychologist for a behavioral problem. In addition, Hmong parents as well as the family have a hard time accepting a disability, if a child were to have one.

Another very important aspect of the Hmong culture is the clans which consist of many individuals who are highly respected and are looked upon for advice, guidance, and encouragement. Clans are constructed by the last names of groups such as the Vang clan, Xiong clan, Yang clan, Moua clan, etc. Families belong to one of the 18 clans. There a total of 18 clans hence 18 surnames or last names; all 18 clans are represented today in the United States (McInnis, 1991). Clans serve as a form of authority and leadership to advance the needs of their

members and form a coherent network that brings families together, work as liaisons between non-Hmong and Hmong communities, and be a mediator in resolving inner clan conflict. Clan leaders are asked to resolve disputes between husband and wife or between child and parent. McInnis, (1991) states “this is to avoid involvement in the social and legal system outside the Hmong culture and ensure that resolutions to problems are compatible with Hmong ways” (p.573).

Not only do clan leaders help to resolve issues within the family, but they also help to resolve issue with children in school, social services, or health care system. Clan leaders frequently are the decision-makers as well as parents and professionals. Parents may not seem as cooperative or involved when working with teachers or educators because many times parents will seek clan leader advice and ideas. Teachers and educators must be aware and sensitive to the powerful roles of the clan leaders in the lives of Hmong families because attempting to restrict clan involvement may lead to total alienation and withdrawal of the Hmong family (McInnis, 1991).

In Laos, Hmong couples were expected to have large families. Children were considered assets to the families which was necessary for their agrarian lifestyle. This has made transitioning and settling into the United States very difficult for Hmong parents, because it is expensive to support children. In addition, childcare or daycare is very expensive which many Hmong families cannot afford. This leads to many mothers and older siblings caring for younger children in the household. This is one of the reasons why it may be difficult to meet with Hmong parents, thus making parents seem as though they are not as involved or willing to work with educators or schools.

Parents highly respect principals, teachers and other school personnel and believe they hold expert knowledge to understand and know what to do and how to educate their children without parental guidance (Morrow, 1991). Teachers hold high importance to the Hmong, second after parents. Hmong parents expect school staff to be accountable for student achievement. Because of this, many parents do not attend school conferences. There is no reason to attend because they believe they have nothing to contribute to the teacher's knowledge (Timm, 1994).

A study done by Ly (2006) examined how Hmong adolescents experience parental involvement in education. Ly found that Hmong adolescents were aware of their parent's limitations due to language and educational barriers. They knew their parents could not help them on their homework. As one student stated, "my dad used to be able to help me with my math, but now, he can't help me with my Algebra because it's too hard for him" (Ly, 2006, p. 68). It was difficult for their parents to attend school-sponsored activities or to be actively involved in school decisions.

Barriers to Hmong Parent Involvement

Hmong parents highly value education and know the importance of it and believe it is the key to success. However, Hmong parents are faced with many barriers when it comes to being involved in their own child's education. These barriers are looked at and discussed further in the following section.

Parent education. According to the 2000 US Special Census Report, the Hmong appear to have the lowest level of education of all southeast Asian-Americans (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Additionally, 59.6% of the population has less than a high school diploma. The reason for

this has partially to do with their agrarian roots, which did not include high levels of education or many times any education.

According to the 2000 Census, almost half (44.3 %) of Hmong Americans have no formal schooling compared to only 1.4 % of all U.S. population in the same category (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Only about 27.2 % of Hmong individuals obtained from the 2000 Census were high school graduates, 11.7 % of Hmong Americans held a Bachelors degree, and 1.5 % held Graduate degrees. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Instruction (DPI) stated that from the March 2008 Census of limited-English proficient students, there were 45,000 identified English Language Learners (ELL) K-12 in the state. Of these, 24 % were Hmong.

Additionally, parents' lack of experience with school or experience with their own school failure can lead to not trusting teachers or other professionals, thus making the parent feel not accepted or understood (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Parents may show lack of involvement with the child at home with such things as helping them with homework because they may not understand the materials. Furthermore, education has become more reliant on technology hence becoming more complex (Fine, 1990). This affects many Hmong parents because many schools are becoming more technological; grades and attendance are being put over the internet for parents to view. Because Hmong parents lack educational experience, they may find it hard to use the internet or may not even have a computer in the household. According to the 2000 Census Report, high income households are more likely to have computers or internet access than low-income households. Asian and Pacific Islanders had the lowest number of households with computers as compared to other races. According to Bondioli, (2000) in a correlational study, it states that Hmong parents with little or no education may find it very difficult to understand or help their children in the area of education.

Language. The Hmong language is one that is spoken more often than written. It has been an oral language for 4,000 years. The Hmong may have had it written from centuries ago but no one is quite sure, so during the mid-1950s, missionaries in Laos developed a way to write Hmong, using the Roman alphabet (Lewis & Vang, 1990).

Many Hmong, while in Laos, were not able to learn the written language in school because it was simply not allowed. So those that had the chance to attend school read and wrote in Lao. The Hmong language is difficult to learn to read because there are multiple tones, and if the tone is changed slightly, then the word has changed.

Because many Hmong parents are not educated, they also do not speak fluent or even any English. In many families, Hmong is spoken fluently but there is also difficulty reading the written language. This is also in part because there have not been many books published in Hmong. This may be one of the most prominent reasons for lack of involvement in the school setting. Since many parents are not fluent in English, they would have a hard time communicating with teachers unless there was a translator present. Many times, translators may be present or parents rely on other family members to do the translating; however, if these translators were not available, they would not be able to communicate with teachers about their concerns or ideas.

Language is one of the most significant reasons for lack of involvement or collaboration with teachers and educators. Collaboration with teachers and educators is a process that involves parents and school staff working together to accomplish a goal or task. However, with the language barrier, “this leaves many parents feeling hindered by lack of English skills and many school staff being limited by an inability to speak with the parents of their ELLs” (Waterman & Harry, 2008, p.5). This language barrier often prevents both oral and written communication

from school to home because many times, again, Hmong parents aren't able to read written English or written Hmong.

Socioeconomic status. Many studies show that parents from low socioeconomic status or in poverty are less likely to be involved in the school setting (Fine, 1990; Miranda, 1993; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Reality is that many of the families that fall into the poverty or low socioeconomic category are faced with difficulties. Some of these difficulties that individuals and families are faced with are having to work multiple jobs, working long hours, worrying about feeding the family, etc.

Many Hmong families are faced with the hardships of poverty and low income. There are many factors that play into effect; many of these reasons have been discussed earlier such as lack of education or low education levels and language barriers. Hmong people are faced with these realities every day. According to Lee and Pfeifer (2007), 26.4% of U.S. Hmong families lived below the poverty level in 2006 compared to 9.8% of all U.S. families. Also, U.S. Hmong median family income in 2006 was \$42,875 compared to \$58,526 among the entire U.S. population.

More often than not, Hmong people are faced with many of these struggles on a daily basis. According to the 2000 Hmong Census Publication, 30 % of U.S. Hmong received public assistance income compared to 3 % of the entire U.S population (Lee et al., 2003).

Teacher perceptions. For professionals, personal biases and perceptions should not get in the way of educating students and making sure all opportunities are available for success. Although this should be the standard, there have been many studies done that say otherwise.

Teachers expect all parents to be involved in their child's education with school participation of functions to helping with homework at home. But teachers sometimes fail to

encourage family involvement. They may believe that it is too difficult to involve immigrant families because they don't speak their language (Borba, 2009). In addition, teachers state that they get frustrated in attempting to involve parents who are rather disengaged. Such frustration on the part of teachers leads to assumptions that parents "just don't care" and are unwilling or unable to work with the school (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999).

According to Fine (1990), teachers and schools often feel uncomfortable in involving parents in the educational programs. They view parents as intrusive and often would rather prefer to not have to individual family and student interference. Additionally, teachers may view parents as incompetent and incapable in skillfully participating in collaboration.

In many schools, teachers and staff are also limited in their ability to welcome and include parents while working toward the shared goal of supporting academic success because many teachers find it difficult to communicate with ELL parents (Waterman & Harry, 2008). Not only are parents the ones worrying about the language barrier, but so do many school staff members who lack familiarity with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Parents' unfamiliarity with U.S. schools can also impede effective parent-school collaboration (Waterman & Harry 2008).

Many teachers not only struggle with communicating with parents because of a language barrier but also struggle to communicate with their students in the classroom. Teachers have asked parents who are limited in English to speak only English at home (Borba, 2009). However, this interrupts children's cognitive development, and these parents are not good role models in English which could contribute to poor language skills (Borba, 2009).

Some of these biases and perceptions stand in the way of getting to know the child and their family. However, these biases and perceptions are evident and real, which sometimes makes it harder and hinders parent involvement.

Through this enduring journey that the Hmong have been on, they have been faced with many hardships and difficulties. Hmong families and parents are also faced with many limitations that act as barriers in their everyday life. Hmong parents are faced with many barriers to participating in their children's education. These include lack of parent education, language, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, and teacher perceptions. Many of these barriers hinder Hmong parent involvement in their child's education even though they themselves strongly believe that education is a valuable asset. Hmong parents are just like every other parent, not only do they want their children to attain an education, but they want their children to be as successful as possible.

Chapter III: Literature Review Analysis

This chapter discusses the results and will serve as a summary of the literature review. Results of the research, critical analysis of the current research and implications for future research will be discussed in this chapter. The literature reviewed in this work represents the scarce and limited amount of information available on the Hmong culture and perceptions of Hmong parent's involvement in their child's education. Conclusions and recommendations provided are based on the information attained from these findings.

Summary

Many factors play a part in the involvement of Hmong parents in their child's education. However, before discussing those factors, it was important and significant to the research to inform and expose the Hmong culture. In understanding the Hmong history, who they are and what their culture is all about, the factors stated in chapter two will make more sense.

Handlin's theory of culture shock states that immigrants who came to a society vastly different from their own find it more difficult to adjust than immigrants arriving from similar backgrounds (Handlin, 1951). The Hmong have been in the United States for over 30 years and for the most part, have been assimilating fairly well. It has been easier for the younger generation Hmong parents and children to assimilate into the American culture while the older generations are faced with many difficulties. It has and will continue to be a struggle to keep traditional customs and beliefs alive while trying to understand and survive in a world of diversity.

The Hmong culture is very different from the American culture; however they do share some commonalities. The culture plays a very important role in the lives of Hmong people. It defines who they are and how they live. Life for many Hmong people even today, is simple and very much represents their old ways back in Laos. Additionally, the Hmong culture is very much family oriented with the elders and parents being at the center. Children raised in the Hmong

culture very strongly respect their elders as well as teachers and educators. Another strong aspect of the culture is the clan members which also play an important role. When there are issues or concerns within a family or in the community, clan members are called upon (McInnis, 1991).

Hmong parents trust and respect teachers and educators and believe that when their child is in their hands, they will be taken care of and taught. Parents highly respect principals, teachers and other school personnel and believe they hold expert knowledge to understand and know what to do and how to educate their children without parental guidance (Morrow, 1991).

Research indicates that there is limited parent involvement among Hmong parents in their child's education (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). The reasons for this lack of parent involvement are due to many different things. These reasons can be classified under four main groups: parent education, language, socioeconomic status, and teacher perceptions. These factors play a significant role in how involved parents are but also examine the hardships many families are faced with.

The first contributing factor that poses as a barrier to Hmong parent involvement is parent education. According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Hmong have the lowest level of education (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). Even back in Laos, only a few men were able to get any sort of education. Many Hmong parents today have less than a high school education therefore involvement at home and in school are limited. Raffaele & Knoff (1999) state that parent involvement is higher among those who have had more education than parents with little or no education. Such involvement includes their child's education both at school and at home. Although many parents have no education themselves, they do recognize the benefits of education for their children and highly respect it.

The second contributing factor to Hmong parent involvement is language. Language serves as one of the main barriers to parent involvement in the educational setting and with teachers. Because many Hmong parents are not educated, they too have a hard time learning and speaking English. Since many parents are not fluent in English, they would have a hard time communicating with teachers unless there was a translator present. Many parents will rely on translators to help communicate for them but they also depend greatly on other family members to help translate. This may be one of the most prominent reasons for lack of involvement in the school setting.

The third factor that posed as a barrier to Hmong parent involvement was socioeconomic status. There has been much research done to support the positive correlation between low socioeconomic status and parent involvement (Fine, 1990; Miranda, 1993; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Many Hmong families are faced with the hardships of poverty and low income. Hmong people are faced with these realities every day. According to Lee and Pfeifer (2007), 26.4% of U.S. Hmong families lived below the poverty level in 2006 compared to 9.8% of all U.S. families. Because many families are faced with poverty, parents are many times forced to work two or more jobs to make ends meet. Therefore, many parents and families living in poverty have many other things to worry about than being involved such as having a home and providing food and clothes.

Teachers play a major role in the success of a child, through their endless commitment to educate students. However, even teachers sometime find it difficult to work with students and their families due to their own personal biases and feelings. This not only acts as a hindrance for both parents and students but for the teacher.

Critical Analysis

Throughout this process of researching and gathering information on Hmong parent involvement, it has become apparent that there is a lack of information and research done on what things Hmong parents are doing to be involved in their child's education. This research paper makes it evident that, there have been many factors stated and looked at that hinder Hmong parent involvement but nothing about things Hmong parents are doing to be involved. In addition, there is a lack of research done on how Hmong parents feel about being involved in their child's education. Casas et al. (2003) have looked at the numerous benefits of parent involvement in child education; however, many Hmong parents may not know about them or even really believe them, so their level of involvement may not be as high and those reasons or perceptions have not been identified.

Furthermore, while Ozaki & Koshino, (2008) state that there are four types of parental involvement one could engage in, it still may be very difficult for a Hmong parent to take part in any of the four types. For example, one type consisted of engaging in conversation with your child about their education. For many individuals, this may not seem that complicated, but for Hmong parents, it may be much more difficult. Many of the types of parental involvement that Ozaki & Koshino, (2008) talked about again may not seem that difficult to execute, however, it seems to be more of a cultural trend and idea. Therefore, parental involvement types should be more culturally sensitive. There was lack of information on what Hmong parent involvement would consist of or look like. For example, a Hmong parent may believe that getting their child up in the morning is already being involved in their child's education, and hence they are doing what they need to help them succeed in school. Would this be wrong? There is no literature or research to support this type of parent involvement or say that this is not parent involvement.

Much of the research found on parent involvement and benefits of parent involvement is not culturally specific. There was little to no research that was available on specifically Hmong parent involvement. However, research was abundant and easy to find that addressed ELL or impoverished students in general. Desimone (2001) reported that “low-income minority parents often have different beliefs about parents’ role in school involvement and are less involved in school activities than higher income, nonminority parents” (p.12). Many Hmong families and parents certainly fall under this category of low-income and minority, but research does not specifically pinpoint what minority groups are involved in the study. This finding not only could be a little misleading but also could be difficult for Hmong parents to overcome, because all low-income minority groups are grouped together. In addition, this can pose as a challenge for educators to overlook because there is so much literature and research done on lack of parent involvement among low-income families.

In addition to the lack of research and literature that has been done on Hmong parent involvement, there is an even lesser amount of research and literature done to suggest culturally sensitive recommendations. Many of the recommendations that have been suggested do not address cultural groups or pose suggestions and ideas that are culturally sensitive. Ozaki and Koshino (2008) suggested that parents hold conversations with their child about their education or attend parent/teacher conferences as a way to be involved. However, to many Hmong parents or even other culturally diverse parents, holding a conversation with their child about their education may not be something they do or are able to do. In addition, many of the suggestions or recommendations in current literature do not support families’ lifestyles. For example, if a Hmong family is experiencing poverty and parents have to work two jobs to make ends meet, more than likely, holding a conversation with their child about their education is not the first

thing that comes to mind. Maybe if recommendations were more sensitive to culturally diverse and low socioeconomic families, they would be able to implement the recommendations more often on a regular basis and more effectively.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results from study indicate that although Hmong parents believe education to be a positive and beneficial asset, there are many barriers that hinder Hmong parent involvement in their child's education. All the barriers stated above pose as a hindrance for Hmong parents which they face in today's society.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides strong evidence that suggests that many Hmong parents are not as involved with their child's education as compared to other parents both at school and at home. As a result of the information provided, teachers and educators should be knowledgeable enough about the Hmong culture, understand the different barriers families and parents are faced with, and acknowledge their own thoughts and biases about the culture when working with this population. Not only will this help to open the doors to many families and parents but also allow parents and families to see that you as an educator are willing to help. To many Hmong families, providing the necessities for their children and oral encouragement are their ways of parent involvement since they lack the physical involvement.

Although Hmong people believe education is a good and beneficial asset for their children, many parents don't have an education of their own. This is partly due to their agrarian lifestyle in Laos and the opportunities that were available for Hmong people. Because many Hmong parents are not educated, they lack the knowledge to be involved in their child's education as compared to other parents. They are more likely to not be able to help their child at home with homework.

In addition, many Hmong parents lack the ability to speak and read English. Again, this may be because of the lack of education but certainly affects how involved they are in their child's education. Waterman and Harry (2008) said language is one of the most significant reasons for lack of involvement or collaboration with teachers and educators. The language barrier leaves many parents feeling hindered by lack of English skills while leaving school staff being limited by an inability to speak with the parents of their ELL students (Waterman & Harry, 2008).

If parents felt as though the school was in support and understanding of the difficulties they face, such as the language barrier, parents wouldn't be as reluctant to participate. According to Fine (1990), teachers and schools often feel uncomfortable in involving parents in the educational programs especially if those parents are of a different culture and barriers exist. Many Hmong parents know and understand the difficulties they face as parents and individuals in society, it doesn't make things easier for them if teachers are not willing to get to know them or understand where they are coming from and the difficulties they face.

All the factors that have been looked at that hinder Hmong parent involvement are important and allow educators to understand what Hmong parents are faced with and some of things they go through. Additional teacher training will help educators understand the Hmong culture a little more and some of the customs and beliefs many Hmong parents believe. By stating these factors and making them more apparent, it will hopefully bridge the gap between Hmong parents and their families and the educational system and educators.

There are limitations of the study that are recognized by the researcher. The first limitation of this study is that research is limited on the Hmong population in the United States. There has not been much peer reviewed journals or literature published on the Hmong group, therefore limiting the information stated in this study.

However, this is not because parents don't care but because there are a number of contributing factors. In fact, many Hmong parents encourage education and understand the importance of education. They understand the hardships they themselves are faced with because of a lack of education in their own lives. Many parents see education as a means of having a more successful life.

Recommendations for researchers. Future research should further explore any other factors that may pose as a barrier to Hmong parent involvement. This will help many educators in understanding why some parents may not seem as involved as others and help to close the cultural gap. There is a lack of information or research on longitudinal effects of parent involvement and lack of parent involvement on children, specifically in the Hmong culture. More studies assessing current parent involvement strategies from elementary or high schools to help increase parental involvement both at home and at school are recommended.

More research is needed to clarify and explore the perceptions of Hmong parents on how involved they want to be in the educational setting. There was a limited amount of research done on how Hmong parents feel and their perceptions of teachers and the educational system. Further research would help educators understand where parents are coming from and how they feel. This too would help close the gap between schools and home where teachers were able to connect better with parents and students.

Another recommendation would be to investigate whether there is a positive correlation between schools educating parents and parents taking initiative to become more involved. If schools could be the ones to help educate parents on different ways to be involved, advocating and encouraging for parental involvement both at home and school would allow parents to see the benefits of parent involvement academically. This will help give parents a starting point to becoming more involved in their child's educational life.

Recommendations for educators. Overall, it would be beneficial for Hmong parents to receive more information on ways they can be involved in their child's education and beneficial for teachers to be more aware of the culture. In order to insure success of all children, especially Hmong children in our schools, more research is necessary to understand their needs more as well as their culture and ways of living.

Because language is a one of the main barriers many Hmong parents face when working with educators, it is important for educators to be aware of body language and facial expressions. One recommendation is that educators should decide what the main point is to communicate and explain everything very clearly; don't assume that they just understand (Lao Family, 1997). Additionally, educators should understand that "yes" may not always mean "yes" when speaking with Hmong parents. Often times, "yes" will mean "yes I heard you and respect that you have a question, not yes, to the content of the question because many Hmong parent or adult considers "no" as disrespectful and will convey a no answer by saying yes" (Lao Family, 1997).

As stated before, parent education does act as a barrier for many Hmong parents when trying to help their children with homework at home. This causes difficulties for many parents because they don't understand the homework, therefore feeling helpless and not being able to

help. However, there are many things that all parents can take part in even if it's not helping them on their math homework.

Hmong parents believe that getting a good education is the way for their children to attain personal success and a good life (Timm, 1994). They understand the importance of education and the role it will play in the life of their children. Even though many Hmong parents don't even have a high school education, they still urge and advocate for their children to attend school and further their education.

As educators, successfully working with students and families is a goal. By detailing the factors that hinder Hmong parent involvement; this study will help educators work more effectively with parents and families, hence closing the cultural gap. In addition, this will help educators understand the Hmong culture better, again adding to effectively working with parents and their students in the most beneficial way to them both.

References

- Bondioli, C. (2000). *Hmong parent education and involvement and its impact on children: A correlational study*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin – Stout, Menomonie.
- Borba, M. (2009, May). Caring closes the language-learning gap. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90, 681-685.
- Bulk, J. (n.d). *Hmong history, customs and culture*. Retrieved October 27, 2009, from <http://www.uwlax.edu/faculty/bulk/soc225/hmongCustoms.pdf>
- Casas, M., Furlong, M., & Ruiz, C. (2003). Increasing Hispanic parent participation in schools: the role of the school counselor. In P.B. Pederson & J. C. Carey (Eds.), *Multicultural counseling in schools* (pp.105-131). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Dao, M. (1991). Acculturation issues for at-risk southeast Asian-American students. In Barbara J. Robinson Shade (Ed.), *Culture, style and the educative process: Making schools work for racially diverse students* (pp.51-62). Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Desimone, L. (2001). Linking parent involvement with student achievement: Do race and income matter? *Journal of Educational Research*, 93, 11-30.
- Fine, M. (1990). Facilitating home-school relationships: A family-oriented approach to collaborative consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 1, 169-187.
- Hamilton-Merritt, J. (1993). *Tragic mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the secret wars for Laos*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Handlin, O. (1951). *The uprooted*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap.

- Henderson, A & Berla, N. (2004). Parental involvement in education. *National Human Services Assembly*. Retrieved June 23, 2009, from www.nassembly.org
- Lao Family. (1997). Cultural competency-Working with the Hmong. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from http://www.laofamily.org/pdfs/Cultural_Competency.pdf
- Lee, T. & Pfeifer, M. (2007). *Building bridges: Teaching about the Hmong in our communities*. Retrieved June 22, 2009, from <http://hmongcc.org>
- Lee, T., Pfeifer, M., Seying, K., Todd, M., Grover, M., Vang, H., Vang, C., Xiong, Z., Tuicomepee, A., & Y, K. (2003). Hmong 2000 Census Publication: Data Analysis. Retrieved October 23, 2009, from <http://www.hmongstudies.org/HmongCensusReport.pdf>
- Lewis, J. & Vang, L. (1990). *Grandmother's Path, Grandfather's Way*. Rancho Cordova, California: Zellerbach.
- Ly, M. (2006). *How Hmong adolescents experience parental involvement*. Unpublished dissertation, Capella University
- McInnis, K. (1991). Ethnic-Sensitive Work with Hmong Refugee Children. *Child Welfare*, 70, 571-580.
- Miranda, A. (1993). Consultation with culturally diverse parents. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 4, 89-93.
- Morrow, R. (1991). The Challenge of Southeast Asian Parental Involvement. *Principal*, 70, 20-22
- Ozaki, N. & Koshino, K. (2008). Parental Involvement and Immigrants: Suggestions for Future Teacher Education. *International Journal of the Humanities*, 6, 99-104.
- Raffaele, L & Knoff, H. (1999). Improving home-school collaboration with disadvantaged

- families: Organizational principles, perspectives, and approaches. *School Psychology Review*, 28, 448-466.
- Reeves, T. & Bennett, C. (2004). We the people: Asians in the United States. *Census 2000 Special Reports*. Retrieved October 10, 2009 from, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf>
- Tatman, A. (2004). Hmong History, Culture, and Acculturation: Implications for Counseling the Hmong. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 32, 222-233.
- Timm, J. (1994). Hmong values and American education. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 27, 36-44.
- Waterman, R. & Harry, B. (2008). *Building collaboration between schools and parents of English language learners: transcending barriers, creating opportunities*. Retrieved October 2, 2009, from http://nccrest.org/Briefs/PractitionerBrief_BuildingCollaboration.pdf
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2004). *School district information packet about Hmong refugee students*. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from <http://dpi.state.wi.us/ell/pdf/hmgpkt.pdf>
- Yau, J. (2005). The foreign-born Hmong in United States. *US in Focus*. Retrieved June 21, 2009, from <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/>