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# Immigrant and Refugee Hmong Parents: Parental Involvement in Their Children's Schools

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**Immigrant and Refugee Hmong Parents: Parental Involvement in  
Their Children's Schools**

by

Amy Danielle Yang

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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### **Abstract**

One of the largest Asian ethnic group in Minnesota are the Hmong. Its population has continuously increased since 1976. Many Hmong were not educated before they settled to the United States, as immigrants or refugees they encountered many barriers. Language and transportation was a problem for many, which hinder them from being involved in their child's education. Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to examine Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' perception and attitudes toward their child's education, homework help, and school participation in K-12 education. The focused participants in this study include a sample of seven Hmong immigrant and refugee parents. Qualitative data collection methods included a face to face semi-structured interview in English or translated in Hmong as needed. The end results defined how parents perceive child's education, educational experiences as an immigrant or refugee parent, barriers of parental involvement, and frequency in parental involvement.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **My Hmong Experience**

Growing up in a Hmong family, my parents have always encouraged me and my siblings to value education as our main priority in life. To this day, both my mother and father have continuously supported my education from childhood to adulthood. It is not only their words of encouragement that takes part in being involved in my academics, but their presence as well when I had conferences, school activities, or needed transportation. Their support was consistent throughout elementary school, middle school, and high school. Recalling back to when I was in kindergarten, my father was the only working parent in the household and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. There were many occasions that made me wonder why my father was not present during certain educational events in my life.

When my parents and their family arrived to the United States, they did not know any English at all. My mother and father experienced challenges with language barriers as they tried to assimilate themselves into the American society. However, with the support of their sponsors they were able to obtain their general education development (GED) shortly after resettlement. They both were advanced learners that in no time, they became familiar with the English language and were able to accustom themselves into the western culture. Then not too long after, my mother gave birth to my siblings and I who were all born in the United States. It has been 28 years since my parents have relocated to the United States and they have remarkably enhanced their English vocabulary and grammar.

I was very grateful to have my mother as a stay-at-home mom because it allowed her to be involved in my education. As a little girl, I could not have imagined having both of my

parents working and not having a parent to guide me throughout my educational experiences. Although my mother did not have the chance to pursue a higher education, she remained supportive of her children's education, goals, and dreams. She made sure she never missed conferences, transporting her children to and from school as well as after-school activities. As a child of refugee parents, I was fortunate to have at least one parent involved in my academics when I was younger. Not all children are granted this opportunity because some may have two working parents that are occupied with full-time jobs, two jobs, or even overtime shifts.

Families become involved in their children's education based on the following three factors: role construction—accepting the differences in involvement amongst immigrant and native-born parents, self-efficacy—when parents have high self-efficacy they are more prone to participate in their children's education, and self of belonging—parents are more likely to be involved when they learn about opportunities and feel they are welcomed and important (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Harkness & Super, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Moles 1993; Tang, 2015). The school system in the United States may differ extensively from the home country of immigrant parents. They may not be familiar with it and believe they do not have ability to help with their children's academics. For many immigrant parents, they struggle to communicate effectively and confidently with their child's teacher due to the deficiency of necessary English language proficiency. (Pena, 2000; Ramirez, 2003; Tang, 2015).

### **Importance of the Study**

The study of Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' involvement in schools is important, because it enhances academic outcomes for children and provides ways to support Hmong parents negotiating schools in the United States. Minority families are extremely interested in their children's schooling, they also have high expectations for their children's academic achievement (Boethel, 2003; Coleman, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patel & Stevens, 2010). Although Asian immigrant parents may not be engaged in schools frequently enough, outside of school they are actively involved in their children's education. They have a high tendency to set high academic standards, but they make sure those standards are met for their children by arranging resources (Crosnoe & Urban; 2010; Kao & Thompson, 2003). Compared to higher-income Caucasian parents, minority parents are less likely to participate in school activities. Therefore, they are less noticeable at school and are misjudged for not valuing education (Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Patel & Stevens, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a need to learn more about how Hmong immigrant and refugee parents can improve participation in their child's education to better communicate and build stronger relationships with teachers. Both communication and improved relationships will provide parents with opportunities to better engage in schools more frequently. When parents and educators acknowledge the importance of parent involvement, they can fulfill children's educational needs together as a team. The purpose of this study was to examine Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' perceptions and attitudes toward their child's education,

which could include school participation in K-12 education as well as homework help at home.

Therefore, the goal of this research project was to: 1) define Hmong immigrant or refugee parents' views toward their child's education, 2) describe the educational experiences for Hmong immigrant or refugee parents, 3) define the barriers of parental involvement for Hmong immigrant or refugee parents, and 4) determine the amount of time spent for homework help and participation in school settings.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the experiences as a child of refugee parents, I wanted to further explore parental involvement in the Hmong immigrant or refugee community by addressing the following questions below.

1. How do Hmong immigrant or refugee parents perceive parental involvement at school?
2. How do Hmong immigrant or refugee parents participate in their children's education?
3. What barriers challenge Hmong immigrant or refugee parents' involvement in their children's education?

### **Definition of Terms**

The *Hmong* is an Asian ethnic group, meaning free people (Vang & Flores, 1999).

*Immigrants* are people who have the choice to leave their own country to permanently relocate in a different country (Miller, Thomas & Fruechtenicht, 2014; United States Conference on Catholic Bishops, 2013).

*Refugees* are people who have escaped from their own country due to persecution of race, religion, nationality, social group association, or war (Miller, Thomas & Fruechtenicht, 2014; United States Conference on Catholic Bishops, 2013).

*Parent involvement* is generally defined as participation in a child's education such as attending school activities and parent-teacher conferences. Including the responsibility of a child's attendance, behavior, eagerness to learn in school, and the ability to provide help to school and home on a daily basis (Brain. Reid, 2003; Department for Child, Schools, and Families, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Nam & Park, 2014).

*Clan* is a social group that consists of 18 surnames in the Hmong society and each clan shares paternal ancestry: Cha (or Chang), Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Kha (or Khang), Kong, Kue, Lee (or Ly), Lo (or Lor), Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang (Moua, 2004; Vang, 1992).

*Literacy* is when an individual is able to express themselves through reading and writing in his or her daily life (Ntiri; 2009; UNESCO, 2008).

*Illiteracy* is when an individual is not able to read and write (Gavriliuk, 2007; The Habitat Debates, 2000).

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

Hmong immigrants and refugees experienced life threatening events that caused separation from families and forced them to relocate from one country to another. Their culture is made up of strong rituals and family ties that are passed along to generations after another. Before migrating to the United States, the Hmong did not recognize the importance of education because their life primarily consisted of agriculture for survival. Shortly after resettlement Hmong parents came to realization that education is the key to success for their children in America. Although parents learned to acknowledge the importance of education, they lacked participation in their child's academics due to barriers such as language and transportation (Thao, 2000; Timm, 1992).

### **Parent Involvement in Schools**

Parent involvement is generally defined as participation in a child's education such as attending school activities and parent-teacher conferences. Participation in a child's education also includes the responsibility of a child's attendance, behavior, eagerness to learn in school, and the ability to provide help to school and back to home on a daily basis (Brain & Reid, 2003; Department for Child, Schools, and Families, 2008; Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Nam & Park, 2014). Having been extensively researched, parent involvement is one of the most essential predictors of a child's academic success (Davies, 1993; Smit & Dreissen, 2007; Vera et al., 2012).

Parental involvement greatly impacts, not just younger children, but children of all ages. When parents are involved in their children's education, children are more likely to have

higher attendance, achievement levels, and optimistic attitudes toward school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Vera et al., 2012). However, not every parent can easily support their child's educational programming. It is challenging for immigrant or refugee parents who are not accustomed to U.S. schools or do not have models of parental involvement to navigate or make connections within foreign systems of education (Epstein, 1988, 2005; Lee, 2016).

### **Immigrant or Refugee Parent Involvement in Schools**

The most crucial time for developing family-school connections are during the early school years, but student demographics are quickly changing when these relationships are in the process of building. In the United States, as much as 30% of children will live in immigrant in families by 2020 (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2004; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Since the passage of the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act there has been 20 million immigrants entering the United States, more so than any nation in the world. In 2000, there were 1.2 million people immigrating to this country (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Turney & Kao, 2009). On average, immigrant and native-born Caucasian families are more likely to participate in schools than immigrant Asian and Latino families (Tang, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Immigrant families experience socioeconomic and linguistic barriers, but also sociocultural obstacles to educational involvement. Often immigrant parents struggle with their self-worth, they also doubt their ability to communicate with educators and help their children with school work that is difficult for them to comprehend (Bohon, McPherson, & Atilas, 2005; Sibley & Dearing, 2014). Family differences such as cultural background,

working conditions, and economic situation may hold parents back from being involved (Harkness & Super, 2002; Tang, 2015). It is a common belief for East Asian families that it is the child's responsibility to excel in school, while parents are rather accountable for their children's educational funds (Schneider & Lee, 1990; Tang, 2015). When parents are absent from school involvement, they are often misinterpreted as not interested in their children's education (Comer, 1986; Peterson & Ladky, 2007).

### **History of the Hmong**

The term "Hmong" signifies as "free people," as they are an Asian indigenous group that does have their own country. They are also known as "Miao" or "Meo" to the Chinese and other groups in Asia. About 4,000 years ago, the Hmong originated from northern China and made their way south and west into highland areas. The Hmong have endured through many life crisis events such as changes, battles, and eras of conflict and amity (Corrigan, 1995; Quincy, 1988; Yang, 2003). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hmong people were oppressed by the Chinese government due to refusing to assimilate into the Chinese society. Therefore, they began to relocate in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma (Trueba et al., 1990; Vang & Flores, 1999). The Hmong have endured through three wars while they lived in Laos. Three years after the French colonized Laos, the first war occurred in 1986. Then, between 1919 and 1921, the second war called the "War of the Insane" arose. In order to protest heavy and unjust taxation, these first two battles were compensated against the French colonial government in Laos (Yang, 1993; Yang, 2003). The Secret War was a significant highlight for the Hmong, which occurred in 1961 and concluded in 1975; it was the last war that took place in Laos (Warner, 1995; Yang, 2003).



Over 47,000 persons of ethnic minorities from Laos immigrated to the United States from 1975 to 1980 with more than 90% of this population included the Hmong (Vang, 2010). Through sponsorship by religious organizations, followed by family members who provided initial support with housing allowed Hmong families the opportunity to relocate to the United States (McCall & Vang, 2012). Approximately 750 Hmong came to the United States in early 1976, since then the Hmong population has gradually increased (Yang, 2001). About 90% of the Hmong refugees settled in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2012; Xiong & Lam, 2013), as well as other countries such as France, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and French Guyana (Xiong & Lam, 2013). The largest Hmong community in the nation resides in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, which has roughly 60,000 Hmong (Yang, 2001).

### **Hmong Cultural Background**

The Hmong value great kinship to one another by expressing themselves as highly respectful, supportive, and compassionate. As part of the Hmong culture, it is important to understand the commonalities of ancestor worship, ceremonies of ancestor worship, and funeral rites (Thao, 2000). Family is highly valued within the Hmong culture; it is prioritized before other duties and interests. Many Hmong children are raised to obey their parents and support their families (Lee & Hawkins, 2008; McClain-Ruelle & Xiong, 2005). In the Hmong culture, the practice of strong traditional gender role differentiation is acknowledged, which comprises of getting married at a young age, giving birth to children, and for women, withdrawing out of school early (Adler, 2004; Lee, 2001).

The Hmong society consists of 18 clans: Cha (or Chang), Cheng, Chue, Fang, Hang, Her, Kha (or Khang), Kong, Kue, Lee (or Ly), Lo (or Lor), Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue,

Xiong, and Yang (Moua, 2004; Vang, 1992). When a child is born, he or she automatically belongs to their paternal clan and is a member for a lifetime. If the child is a female, she will become a member of her husband's clan and no longer identify in her father's clan once she gets married (Moua, 2004; Thao, 1999; Walker, 1989; Yang, 1993). Hmong families avoid being a part of the social and legal system, because they want reassurance that issues are resolved according to their culture. By doing so, each clan has their own leader who takes on the role of a mediator and resolves conflicts for them (Conroy, 2006; McInnis, 1991; Watson, 2001).

Individuals are restricted from marriage if they claim to identify in the same clan because they would be considered as siblings in the Hmong culture (Thao, 2000). It is forbidden, but if it was to happen, it would be a disgrace for both the groom and the brides (Lee & Hawkins, 2008; Lor, 2008). It is most common between the ages of 20 and 30 for men to settle down and begin a family, whereas it is between the ages of 14 and 18 for women. Unmarried children usually remain in the same household with their parents until marriage (Lee & Hawkins, 2008; Vang, 2003). Traditionally, a woman has to leave her father's family and household when she weds, because she then belongs to her husband's clan and family. As part of the Hmong tradition, women are allowed to have only one husband, but men have the advantage of having multiple wives as they desire (Conroy, 2006; McInnis, 1991).

### **Views on Education**

The Hmong community, likewise other immigrant groups, have a strong belief that the key to social mobility is education (Lee, 2005; Lee & Hawkins, 2008; Louie, 2004; Ogbu, 1987). Even though Hmong males seem to consider education more valuable, there has increasingly been more Hmong females who are likely to continue their education onward to college (Adler, 2004; Lee, 2001). Before settling to the United States, many of them did not have the opportunity to attend school or even consider about pursuing an education. Their everyday life consisted of only agriculture by working in the highland mountains. They mainly made a living as self-owned farmers and did not believe it was essential to obtain a degree of any kind (Lee & Green, 2008). When the Hmong started their lives in America, they began to realize that in order to survive in this country their children must take advantage of education (Ly, 2005; Thao, 2000; Lee & Green, 2008). Although they understand that education is essential, they also believe that it is a mirror image of parents when children are academically successful, whereas it is a humiliation on parents when children are unsuccessful (Lee & Hawkins, 2008; McClain-Ruelle & Xiong, 2005).

### **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

A most common barrier for Hmong immigrants and refugees is the deficiency of an illiterate background. When the Hmong settled to the United States, approximately 70% of them were illiterate. A profound inconvenience that they faced was the idea of using written language, which created struggles to make a living, support their family, communicate with outsiders, and be involved in their children's academics such as homework help. It was extremely challenging for them to assimilate into the western society when they were not able

to read, write, and operate up-to-date tools (Thao, 2000; Timm, 1992). Language differences is a major constraint to Hmong parent involvement, because their native language was commonly spoken at home by parents and English was most often used as communication by their children (Adler, 2004).

Another barrier for many Hmong immigrant and refugee parents is transportation. If parents are not able to comprehend the English language, it is unlikely for them to obtain a permit or driver's license. Without transportation, they have to rely on others such as friends, relatives, or their spouse to transport them and possibly their children from place to place. When parents struggle to find transportation, their chances of attending school conferences, meetings, and events are less likely to happen (Timm, 1992; Thao, 2000).

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Overview**

According to Cobin and Strauss (2008), “qualitative research can refer to research about persons’ lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movement, cultural phenome, and interactions between nations” (p. 11). This study used a qualitative research approach, which focused on Hmong immigrant or refugee parents’ perception and attitudes toward their child’s education, homework help, and school participation in K-12 U.S. education. A sample of six Hmong immigrant or refugee parents were included as part of this study. I used qualitative data collection methods, which included a face-to-face semi-structured interview for each participant. The researcher, who is fluent in Hmong and English, conducted the interviews and translated as necessary. If parents were not able to read in English, they had the option for the researcher to translate the interview. The conclusion to this study defined how parents perceived child’s education, educational experiences as an immigrant or refugee parent, and frequency in parental involvement.

### **Research Design**

To meet the purpose of this research project, I employed a face-to-face interview research design to gather narrative data.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Hmong immigrant or refugee parents perceive parental involvement at school?

2. How do Hmong immigrant or refugee parents participate in their children's education?
3. What barriers challenge Hmong immigrant or refugee parents' involvement in their children's education?

### **Setting**

The interview questionnaire was conducted during one-on-one sessions held at the local Hmong markets in a large metropolitan city in the Upper Midwest Saint Paul, Minnesota. I chose to conduct my research at the markets because they serve to promote the Hmong ethnicity and are the largest attractions for many Hmong families in this urban area.

### **Participants**

For the purpose of this study, participants were required to be 18 years or older in order to complete the interview questionnaire. All participants had to identify as an immigrant or refugee parent, before they were given a consent form to view and sign for confidentiality and ethical purposes. The sample consisted of participants recruited through a convenience sample. Members were selected somewhat randomly as not every individual at the markets participated, **but** they were recruited on the spot. The Hmong parents who participated in this research study did so willingly. For those individuals who were uninterested in participating, they could reject. Please refer to Appendix A for the consent form used in this research study.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

The data collection strategy that I used in this research project was face-to-face interviews. Instead of pre-arranged interview appointments, I invited participants on the spot to complete the questionnaire. Open-ended interview items were employed to gather narrative

responses. Where necessary, I followed up the initial interview questions with probing questions.

### **Instruments Used**

The type of instruments used for this research was a structured interview protocol. As the researcher, I designed the interview questionnaire and pilot tested the interview items on two participants who are Hmong immigrant or refugee parents. The protocol was adjusted as necessary to improve the instrument's reliability and validity. Please refer to Appendix B for the interview protocol.

### **Procedures**

Participants were supervised by the researcher during the interview, which were conducted by the researcher from beginning to end. Participants were asked to complete the interview, which took approximately 5-10 minutes. They were also informed that they could skip any questions they would like to and that there are no right or wrong answers. As stated in the consent form the participant's identity and responses were confidential. Before the interview, each participant was given a letter of consent stating their willingness to participate in the study. A hand written thank you card was provided as compensation to all participants who completed the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Participants will be voice recorded, so that interviews results can be transcribed at a later time. These narrative data will then be analyzed by a content analysis that yielded themes of results to answer the three basic research questions.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Presentation of Demographic Results

This research study involved seven Hmong immigrant or refugee parents from a large metropolitan city in the Upper Midwest of the United States (U.S.) who voluntarily participated in the research project interviews. The group of participants was comprised of five females and two males, who ranged in age from 33 to 49 years old. All participants have resided in the U.S. for at least 10 years. Each participant identified themselves as an immigrant or refugee parent and have at least one child currently attending a K-12 school.

Table 1

#### *Participant Demographic Results*

Participant (P)	Children Under 18 Years	Marital Status	Years living in the United States	Age
P1	4	Married	22	35
P2	4	Married	18	33
P3	2	Married	10	35
P4	3	Single	30+	49
P5	1	Married	24	46
P6	1	Married	26	47
P7	4	Married	26	42

***Interview Item: How many children do you have under the age of 18?*** Each participant has the number of children attending K-12 as in the following: 4 children for P1, 4 children for P2, 2 children for P3, 3 children for P4, 1 child for P5, 1 child for P6, and 4 children for P7.

***Interview Item: What is your marital status?*** All participants identified as married besides P4.



**Interview Item: How long have you been living in the United States?** All participants identified the number of years they have been living in the United States as the following: 22 years for P1, 18 years for P2, 10 years for P3, 30+ years for P4, 24 years for P5, 26 years for P6, and 26 years for P7.

**Interview Item: Do you mind sharing your age with me?** All participants identified their age as the following: P1 as 35 years old, P2 as 33 years old, P3 as 35 years old, P4 as 49 years old, P5 as 46 years old, P6 as 47 years old, and P7 as 42 years old.

### **Thematic Presentation of Narrative Results**

My content analysis yielded six themes that are associated with Hmong immigrant and refugee parental involvement in their children's schools. These themes, along with the number of participants who produced each finding, are listed below.

1. Participants spoke in Hmong and preferred their native language (n = 7/7 participants).
2. Participants read and wrote equally well in both Hmong and English (n = 5/7 participants).
3. Communication with children's teacher were often done through phone calls and visiting schools for school meetings or conferences (n = 6/7 participants).
4. Participants attended school conferences and met with teachers when appointments are scheduled (n = 6/7 participants).
5. Participants helped their children with homework with words of encouragement (n = 3/7 participants).

6. Participants had positive experiences at their children's school and believed teachers were very helpful (n = 6/7 participants).

**Theme #1: Participants speak in Hmong and preferred to speak their native language.**

**Interview Item: What language do you speak?** When asked what language each participant spoke, all but P2 and P6 spoke other languages besides Hmong and/or English. P1, P4, and P7 communicated in both Hmong and English. P2 spoke in Hmong, Thai, and English while P3 and P5 was fluent in Hmong only and P6 spoke Hmong, English, Thai, and Lao. For instance, Participant 1 responded, *"I speak in Hmong and English."* Or, Participant 6 indicated, *"I speak in Hmong, English, Thai, and Lao."*

Table 2

*Language Preference by Participant*

Participant (P)	Spoken Languages	Language Preference
P1	Hmong, English	Hmong, English
P2	Hmong, English, Thai	Hmong
P3	Hmong	Hmong
P4	Hmong, English	Hmong, English
P5	Hmong	Hmong
P6	Hmong, English, Thai, Lao	Hmong
P7	Hmong, English	Hmong

**Interview Item: What language do you prefer?** All participants, but P1 and P4 preferred to speak primarily in their native language when asked which language they favored. For example, Participant 1 replied, *"I prefer to speak in both Hmong and English, but mostly in English."* Or Participant 2 mentioned, *"I prefer to speak in Hmong."*

**Theme #2: Participants could read and write equally well in both Hmong and English.**

*Interview Item: Do you read and write in both Hmong and English equally well?*

Participants were questioned if they read and write in both Hmong and English equally, the majority of them were fluent in both languages.

Table 3

*Literacy Skills by Participant*

Participant (P)	Reads Hmong	Writes Hmong	Reads English	Writes English
P1	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
P2	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Unable
P3	Proficient	Unable	Unable	Unable
P4	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
P5	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
P6	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient
P7	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient	Proficient

The gathered responses were as follows: P1 read and wrote in both languages. P2 read in both languages, but wrote in Hmong only a little. P3 read in Hmong only and did not write in neither language. P4 read and wrote in both languages equally. P5 read and wrote perfectly in Hmong, but not in English. P6 and P7 read and wrote in both languages. For instance, Participant 3 replied, *“I can read Hmong only, but I cannot write in either Hmong or English.”* Or Participant 4 stated, *“Yes, I can read and write in both Hmong and English.”* Or Participant 5 noted, *“I can read and write in Hmong, but I can only read and write a little in English.”*

**Theme #3: Communication with children’s teacher was often done through phone calls and visiting schools for school meetings or conferences.**

**Interview Item: How do you communicate with your child's teacher?** Majority of the participants in this research study connected with their children's teachers by phone calls and school visits.

Table 4

*Teacher Communication Mode by Participant*

Participant (P)	Communication Mode
P1	E-mail, phone, school website
P2	Phone, conferences
P3	No communication
P4	E-mail, phone
P5	School meetings
P6	School meetings
P7	No communication

P1 communicated with teachers through e-mail, phone, and the school's website. This participant remarked, "*We communicate through e-mail and phone. I do check the school's website too.*" P2 has spoken with teachers at school conferences, otherwise teachers would call. P3 is not fluent in English, so only her husband communicated with teachers. This participant commented, "*I cannot speak English, so my husband does all the talking with the teachers when we meet with them at school.*" P4 connected with teachers through e-mail, otherwise they would contact each other by phone. P5 and P6 communicated with teachers when appointments are scheduled only. P7 is the only working parent in the household, so he is not very involved in his children's academics. He does not communicate with the teachers at all, but his wife does. This participant stated, "*I do not communicate with my children's teachers at all, only my wife does.*"

**Theme #4: Participants attended school conferences and meet with teachers when appointments are schedule.**

*Interview Item: What kind of things do you do to help your child in school?* All participants mentioned that they help their child in school by attending conferences. P2 and P5 also brought up that they have attended field trips as well. For instance, Participant 2 indicated, *“I have attended conferences and also field trips when my daughter was younger.”* Or, Participant 4 mentioned, *“I do not usually go to field trips, but then yes conferences.”* Or Participant 5 commented, *“I attend school meetings, conferences, and sometimes field trips.”*

**Theme #5: Participants helped their children with homework with words of encouragement.**

*Interview Item: How do you help your children with their homework?* Participants were asked to answer how they help their children with homework.

Table 5

*Homework Help by Participant*

Participant (P)	Homework Help Approach
P1	Spent individualized time each evening to complete homework
P2	Spent time to help solve questions, discussed about homework instructions
P3	Used words of encouragement
P4	Spent time to explain homework instructions, seek help from older siblings when needed, online search
P5	Child did not seek for help
P6	Used words of encouragement
P7	Used words of encouragement

As displayed in Table 5, each participant responded as in the following. P1 spent time with her children each night to complete homework. P2 made sure her children could

comprehend homework by discussing about the instructions, afterwards she would help them solve the questions if they do not know the answer. P3 is not capable of helping her children with homework, because she is not fluent in English. Regardless, she encouraged her children to do their homework. This participant mentioned, *“I don’t know any English, so I cannot help my children with homework at all. But I will encourage them to start or complete their homework. I would ask if they started their homework yet or is it done.”*

P4 tried her best to help her children with homework; she would explain the instructions thoroughly so they have a better understanding of it. If they both have no idea how to answer a homework problem, they would seek assistance from older siblings. This participant commented, *“Yes, I try my best to help with homework. Sometimes they already know what it is. I just have to kind of talk to them further about how to do it, so they have a better understanding of the questions. If we do not know the answer we will ask the older ones or look online.”* P5 is not educated, so her child does not ask for any help. P6 mentioned that not often does he help his child with homework, but he encouraged his child to complete homework by making sure it is done. This participant shared, *“I do not really help her with homework. When my children were younger, I would help them but once they are knowledgeable I only encourage them to do homework with my words.”* P7 is not as involved as his wife when it comes to homework, but he made sure that his children met their deadlines.

**Theme #6: Participants had positive experiences at their children’s school and believed teachers were very helpful.**

***Interview Item: If you have visited your child's school, how was your experience?***

The following answers were shared when participants were asked to describe their experiences at their children's school: P1 has a daughter with special needs and frequently received valuable information from teachers. The teachers never failed to inform P1 about her daughter's progress at school. This participant responded, *"I have a special needs daughter, I learned a lot from the teachers about what how she is doing in school. I always communicate with the teachers about her progress."* P2 believed that her children's teachers are very helpful. Teachers have asked for her input about their school curriculum, and they always made sure to address any concerns about her children immediately.

P3 found it to be accommodating at her children's school because teachers would take the time to schedule appointments to discuss her children's progress at school together. The school provided staff to help navigate her to the correct classroom when she needed assistance. This participant noted, *"When teachers make appointments for us to meet with them, they are helpful. There is always a staff present to give us directions to get the correct classroom and make sure we get there."* P4 had only good experiences at her children's school; she is very thankful for all the teachers. She fully understood that they do their best to teach students and believed they are doing their jobs. P5 mentioned that her children's teachers are helpful and resourceful; their school district is excellent because they live in the suburbs.

P6 has always enjoyed meeting with teachers and having conversations about his child's progress in school. Overall, he had a very good experience during the times he has visited his child's school. This participant stated, *"It was a very great experience to go see*

*how my child learns in school. I have always liked to meet with teachers and discuss about my child's progress in school.*" P7 has never visited his children's school, only his wife has because she does not work.

### **Summary**

The overarching purpose of this study was to examine Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' perceptions and attitudes toward their child's education. More specifically, for the purposes of this study parental perceptions and attitudes included school participation in K-12 education as well as homework help at home. Chapter IV presented the results from the face-to-face interviews that were conducted at two local Hmong markets. This chapter included demographic results such as number of children, marital status, number of years living in the United States, and age presented in a table and narrative results categorized in themes of findings that are illustrated in tables.



## Chapter V: Discussion

### Brief Overview of Findings

This study examined Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' perceptions and attitudes toward their child's education, homework help, and school participation in K-12 education. The participants in this study included a convenience sample of seven Hmong immigrant and refugee parents. Qualitative data collection methods included a face to face semi-structured interview in English or translated in Hmong upon the participants' request. The end results defined how parents perceived their child's education, their experiences as an immigrant or refugee parent in their child's school, barriers of parental involvement, and frequency of parental involvement at school.

### Hmong Parent Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Their Child's School

Hmong immigrant and refugee parents' perception of a positive school experience consist of receiving information about children's academic progress, good communication with teachers, educators being open to share thoughts and ideas, and schools providing bilingual staff. Schools can enhance a welcoming environment by making sure educators are understanding and supportive of families from a multi-cultural background, providing use of cultural navigator for parents with language barriers, and repeat use of the same interpreter for families. Parents have positive attitudes toward their children's schools, primarily because teachers are helpful and informative. For example, Participant 2, remarked "*Teachers are helpful. They have asked me for my input about their curriculum and would let me know about any concerns they had about my children.*"

I believe parents have positive experiences at their children's school, because schools are welcoming in ways which they have accommodated to the needs of parents and have included parents as part of the school curriculum. Even so, Hmong immigrant and refugee parents can be more involved in their children's schools by attending parent education courses or workshops offered at school sites and field trips or activities that allow volunteer opportunities for parents to engage with their children, teachers, and other parents.

Possibly this positive experience is in part that there appears to be an unwritten understanding that Hmong parents assume a passive role in contacting their children's teachers. Often parents with language barriers relied on teachers to reach out to arrange appointments to discuss their child's progress. For example, Participant 6, stated "*When teachers make appointment then I will go meet with them at school.*" Teachers seem to be the leader in setting contact with Hmong parents. One parent initiated by checking the school's website, but for the most part – parents passively respond to school's invitations to become involved. This is a topic will be added as a next step in research.

### **Implications of Findings for Hmong Parents and Educators**

While immigrant and refugee parents from the Hmong community reported involvement in their child's education, more can be done to strengthen parent-school relationships. Based on the preliminary findings from my Thesis research project, I believe in a general sense that Hmong parents and their children's schools have an admirable beginning toward parental involvement. Yet, there is more work that can be done to better support parental involvement for this community of parents.

Possibly most importantly, Hmong parents do not always have to be at school physically to be involved in their child's education. They can be involved in their children's education at home as well by intentionally working to preserve their child's Hmong heritage. Parents can talk about their own educational experiences as child—or lack thereof if that is the case. Parents can share their immigration or refugee stories with their children. On a daily basis, parents can also read books in English or in their native language to their children. Schools can support the provision of books if Hmong families are in need. Otherwise, oral story telling such as in bedtime stories told in their native language can be aspirational to children too.

For instance, to increase Hmong immigrant and refugee parental involvement and build strong teacher-parent relationships schools and educators could develop a literacy, math, and science after-school-program that is designed particularly for ESL (English as a second language) students. This program could be staffed with bilingual personnel and Hmong parent volunteers. As an on-going program throughout the school year, parents would get to be more involved in their children's education which could possibly increase higher academic achievement for their children. They would also be able to connect with other parents and help other students that are struggling in certain subjects. Parents would be able to address questions and concerns in relation to homework help with bilingual staff.

By providing bilingual staff for this after-school-program, it allows parents to have a better understanding of what subjects are being taught by teachers and how to better help their children with homework. Bus transportation should be provided as needed for children who are attending after school programs and parents who volunteer at school activities. Also with

funds available to schools an iPad or tablet should be donated to each child with audio recordings of class newsletters translated in Hmong, it is important that training is available to parents, so they know how to access the application. Lastly educators should be clear about the opportunities that are available to multi-cultural families and establish a support system for them.

### **Barriers to Hmong Parents' School Involvement**

Language was a barrier for Hmong immigrant or refugee parents who did not speak any English, which strayed them from being involved in their children's academics. Parents were less likely to be involved in their child's education when they did not speak or understand English. For instance, Participant 5, responded "*I am not educated, so my child does not ask me to help with homework.*" It is also possible that this language barrier may affect Hmong parents' ability to initiate contact with their children's teachers to be more involved at school. In other words, teachers may more naturally take the lead in arranging Hmong parents' school involvement when not hampered by speaking in a language other than their native language. The answers to this question were not as in-depth as I would have expected them to be. Therefore, this topic will also be further addressed as a next step in research.

### **Study Limitations**

A limitation to this study was the small sample size. Many participants that involved to participate in my interviews declined. It became a pattern across two Hmong markets where many Hmong immigrant and refugee parents refused to participate. I think that they were unsure of their capability to speak fluently in order to be audio recorded even though the

interview items could be answered in either Hmong or English. Other potential participants were simply not interested or made it clear that they did not have time to be interviewed.

A gender balanced sample was a limitation as well. Most of the Hmong market vendors were females, which made it difficult to find male participants. It was not guaranteed that I would find more male participants than females, even when I went on different days of the week. Another limitation was imprecise information given from participants. Responses from certain participants were not specific enough and should have been more detailed. For instance, when asked about parent's experience at their children's school, Participant 4 stated, *"It's good, I'm very thankful for all the teachers. To me, I fully understand that they do their best to teach the students. They are doing their jobs."*

I may have been able to present probing follow-up questions more than I actually did in my interviews. It is possible that it was an interview technique that could be pursued in more detail in future research. Barriers emerged as a finding, but was not addressed specifically by an interview item. It could have been followed up with probing questions.

Lastly, my personal bias in conducting this research project was undoubtedly a limitation. My Hmong heritage supported my implementation of study because my parents are refugees, I could understand where other immigrant and refugee parents were coming from. It was difficult when I interpreted data since I tried to be unbiased, most of the participants responses did not take me by surprise. To be able to obtain more trustworthy and consistent outcomes for future research, I would include a member check by asking participants to read their narrative results and make sure it fully represents their thoughts. Another

recommendation would be to complete a reliability check where I would ask another bilingual researcher to redo my content analysis to compare those results to my own.

### **Recommendations for Future Research and Implications**

For future research and implications, the following recommendations include a larger study size and expanded gender size, use of quantitative research to analyze data collection, survey questionnaire vs. interview questionnaire, and advise participants to explain responses more thoroughly. Other suggestions consist of reaching out to public schools to connect with Hmong immigrant and refugee parents for more precise results. Further, I believe that it is important to address the topic of teacher leadership in contacting Hmong parents, barriers to Hmong parents' school involvement, and as the pattern of initiating Hmong parent involvement in their children's schools.

### **Conclusions**

The more specific results from this interview research project disclosed that most Hmong immigrant and refugee parents are fluent in both Hmong and English, but prefer to speak in Hmong within their household. In order to communicate with teachers, parents would attend school meetings and conferences or speak with teachers when they call. I discovered that when it comes to homework help, parents typically seek assistance from older siblings or use words of encouragement to engage their children if they are not knowledgeable in the subjects being taught. Hmong parents sometimes find it difficult to help their children with homework, because they are either not educated or English is not their first language.

Overall, parents have had only positive experiences when they visited their children's school. Parents believed that their children's teachers are very helpful, because teachers have

reached out to them to set up appointments to discuss their children's academic progress. Teachers have also made sure they feel comfortable and welcomed by providing bilingual staff to help them navigate the school building. It appears from the findings of my research study that there is an emerging foundation of Hmong parent involvement in their children's schools on which to build increased parental involvement in the future.

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## Appendix A: Implied Consent

### Immigrant and Refugee Hmong Parent: Parental Involvement in Their Children's Schools

#### Consent to Participate

You are invited to participate in a research study about “Immigrant and Refugee Hmong Parent: Parental Involvement in Their Children’s Schools” directed by Amy Yang and sponsored by Saint Cloud State University.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete an interview questionnaire conducted by the researcher, which will be audio recorded and take approximately 5-10 minutes.

Benefits of the research include having the opportunity to ask questions after completing the interview questionnaire. Risks and discomforts include no harm or discomfort. Data collected will remain anonymous such as names and responses.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Amy Yang at [yaam1102@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:yaam1102@stcloudstate.edu) or research advisor, Jane Minnema at [jeminnema@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:jeminnema@stcloudstate.edu). Results of the study can be requested from the researcher or online at the St. Cloud State University Repository.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may feel free to stop at any questions and skip any that you wish to without giving reasons. There will be no compensation for participating in this research study.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your completion of the interview questionnaire indicates that you are at least 18 years of age and your consent to participation in the study.



### **Tsab Ntawv A: Kev Yeem Ntawm Koj**

#### **Cov Niam thiab Txiv Hmoob Tawg Teb Chaws Uas Los Muaj Kev Koom Tes Nrog Lawv Cov Menyuum Lub Tsev Kawm Ntawv Kev Yeem Ntawm Koj Los Koom Tes Nrog Pev Cos Kws Tshawb Fawb**

Peb thov caw koj koom tes nrog peb los pab tshawb fawb txog “cov niam thiab txiv Hmoob tawg teb chaws uas muaj kev koom tes nrog lawv cov menyuum lub tsev kawm ntawv.” Tus kws tshawb fawb yog Amy Yaj thiab lub tsev kawm ntawv tswj ces yog Saint Cloud State University.

Yog hais tias koj txaus siab koom tes pab peb, koj yuav tau teb peb cov lus nug ntawm tus kws tshawb fawb, uas yuav siv lub suab kaw thiab sij hawm 5-10 nas this.

Tom qab koj teb peb cov lus noog tag, koj muaj dab tsi nug los tau. Tej yam uas yuav nyuaj rau koj hauv kev tshawb fawb no yuav tsis phom sij. Peb yuav tsis tshaj tawm koj lub npe thiab koj cov lus teb hauv kev tshawb fawb no.

Yog hais tias koj txiav txim siab pab los tsis pab, nws yuav tsis muaj feem cuam dab tsi nrog lub tsev kawm ntawv St. Cloud State University los sis yog tus kws tshawb fawb. Yog hais tias koj txiav txim siab koom tes, koj tawm thaum twg los tau.

Yog hais tias koj muaj lus nug txog qhov uas peb tshawb fawb, thov sau ntawv rau Amy Yaj rau ntawm [yaam1102@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:yaam1102@stcloudstate.edu) los sis nws tus kws qhia ntawv, Jane Minnema rau ntawm [jeminnema@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:jeminnema@stcloudstate.edu). Yog hais tias koj xav txais peb cov ntaub ntawv tshawb fawb tom qab peb xaus, thov tham nrog tus kws tshawb fawb los sis siv xamyas saib hauv lub tsev kawm ntawv St. Cloud State University.

Koj yuav koom tes nrog peb yog vim koj yeem ua. Koj xav tsum los sis tsis yeem teb peb cov lus nug los tau. Peb yuav tsis them nyiaj dab tsi rau cov uas koom tes rau qhov no. Qhov uas koj kos koj lub npe yog txhais tau hais tias koj muaj 18 xyoo rau sauv, koj tau nyeem txhua yam nyob rau hauv tsab ntawv saum toj, thiab koj yeem koom tes nrog peb.

Sau Npe \_\_\_\_\_

Hnub \_\_\_\_\_

Qhov uas koj pab teb peb cov lus nug txhais tau hais tias koj muaj 18 xyoo rau sauv thiab koj yeem koom tes nrog peb.

## **Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire**

### **Introductory Questions**

1. What language do you speak?
2. What language do you prefer?
3. Do you read in both Hmong and English equally well?
4. Do write in both Hmong and English equally well?

### **Mid-Section Questions**

5. How do you communicate with your child's teacher?

PROBE: Do you call the teacher(s) or does the teacher(s) call you?

PROBE: Do you use email?

PROBE: Do you access the school's Website?

PROBE: Do you participate in any groups for parents at school?

6. What kind of things to you do to help your child in school?

PROBE: Have you attended school conferences, field trips, parent groups or any other events?

7. How do you help your children with their homework?

8. If you have visited your child's school, how was your experience?

PROBE: What did they do that helped you?

PROBE: Who was helpful?

PROBE: Are there things that they could have done better?

### **Closing Section Questions**

9. How many children do you have under the age of 18?

10. What is your marital status?
11. How long have you been living in the United States?
12. Do you mind sharing your age with me?

## Tsab Ntawv B: Cov Lus Nug

### Hauv paus kem lus nug

1. Koj hais lus hmoob xwb los lus miskas thiab?
2. Koj nyiam hais lus hmoob ntau rua los lus miskas?
3. Koj puas paub nyeem ntawm hmoob thiab ntawm miskas?
4. Koj puas paub sau ntawm hmoob thiab ntawm miskas?

### Nruab nrab kem lus nug

5. Koj nrog koj tus menyuam tus nais khu tham li cas?

PROBE: Koj puas hu rau tus nais khu li los yog tus nais khu paus hu rau koj li?

PROBE: Koj puas siv email nrog tus nais khu tham li?

PROBE: Koj nkag puas tau hau internet mus siab lub tsev kawm ntawv qhov website li?

PROBE: Koj puas tau mus koom lub tsev kawm ntawv thau lawm muaj kev pab rau cov niam txiv li?

6. Koj pab koj tus menyuam hau tsev kawm ntawv li cas?

PROBE: Koj puas tau mus koom cov rooj sib tham peb tsev kawm ntawv thiab koj paus tau mus koom nrog koj tus menyuam thau tsev kawm ntawv muaj mus ncig ua si?

7. Koj pab koj tus menyuam ua homework li cas?

8. Yog koj tau ntsib nrog koj tus menyuam lub tsev kawm ntawv es zoo li cab xwb?

PROBE: Lawv puas tau ua dabtsi uas pab koj li?

PROBE: Puas muaj leej twg pab tau koj li?

PROBE: Pwas muaj tei yam lub tsev kawm ntawv los yog cov nais khu uas tau zoo dua?

**Kaw kem nug**

9. Koj muaj peb tsawg tu menyuam es tsis tau muaj kaum yim xyoo/muaj hnuv nyoo?
10. Koj thiab koj tus txiv/poj niam puas tseem sib yuav/nyob ua ke?
11. Koj nyob rau tebchaws miskas ntev npaum li cas lawm?
12. Koj muaj pes tsawg xyoo lawm?

### **Appendix C: Recruitment Script**

Hello, my name is Amy Yang. I am a graduate student at Saint Cloud State University in the Child and Family Studies Department. I am conducting research on Hmong immigrant and refugee parent involvement in their children's schools in the Twin Cities. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate if you are 18 years or older and identify as a Hmong immigrant or refugee parent with a child currently attending K-12 education. Participation in this research includes completing an interview about your perception of parent involvement, educational experiences as a parent, and barriers that challenge your involvement in schools, which will take approximately 5-10 minutes. If you have any questions, please feel free to address them before I conduct the interview.

### **Ntawv Nrhiav Neeg**

Nyob zoo, kuv lub npe yog Amy Yaj. Kuv yog ib tug tub ntxhais kawm ntawv peb Saint Cloud State University. Tam sim no kuv kawm txog kev tshawv fawb ntawm menyuam thiab lawm tsev neeg. Kuv qhov kev tshawb fawb no kuv yuav nug cov niam txiv Hmoob es tuaj peb nplog teb los thaib teb tuaj rau tebchaws miskas dhau los ib cog lus nug txog lawm cov menyuam thiab kev kawm ntawv. Kuv xav caw koj los koom qhov kev tshawv fab no yog hais tias koj laus tshaj kaum yim xyoo, yog cov niam txiv tawg rog, thiab tseem muaj menyuam kawm ntawv nyob rau qib K-12. Kuv yauv nug koj ob peb cov lus nug tej zaum yuav siv li tsib los kaum feeb. Yog koj muaj lus nug rau koj ces qhia rau kuv ua ntej wb pib.