

HMONG PARENT EDUCATION AND INVOLVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT
ON CHILDREN: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Hmong Parent Education and Involvement and its Impact on Children: A

Correlational Study

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The presence of the Hmong population in the United States has brought up many issues and concerns since they began immigrating here shortly after their tragic loss of the Vietnam War. Among these concerns is the area of education. The language barrier has presented many challenges for the Hmong with their education. The researcher believes a thorough understanding of the Hmong background and their life in the United States can be beneficial in assessing their needs in improving their education.

Parents were assessed in this study from a survey developed by the researcher supplying insight on Hmong parents and their involvement and influence on their children in education. Children were assessed by using the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR). The parent and children data were then correlated to provide the findings for the study.

Results from this study show that a positive correlation exists between parent education level, parents providing homework assistance for their kids, the amount of English spoken in the home, and the number of years living in the United States with the students' grade equivalency scores (GES) on the STAR.

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	6
The War in Laos	
The Journey of the Hmong	
Hmong Settlement in the United States	
Statement of the Problem	
Null Hypothesis	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	11
Parent Education	
Researcher Insight	
Parent Involvement	
Parental Influence	
Acculturation	
III. METHODOLOGY.....	18
Subjects	
Instrumentation	
Procedures	
Data Analysis	
IV. RESULTS.....	20
Standardized Test for Assessment in Reading (STAR)	
Parental Education and STAR Scores	
Homework Assistance	
Years Living in the United States	
Other Survey Results	
V. DISCUSSION.....	26
Purpose	
Limitations	
Critical Analysis	
Conclusion	
VI. REFERENCES.....	31

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Vietnam War will always be a sensitive topic of discussion for many American families. It took away thousands of lives of dedicated soldiers, as well as permanently scarring the memories of those who survived. But what makes it most tragic is the question of why America was even involved at all in this war. Were these lives senselessly wasted?

What many people don't realize is an even far greater tragedy of this war. The Hmong people of Laos were directly invaded upon and forced to defend their homeland and country. Thousands gave their lives fighting for the United States, and today hundreds of thousands of Hmong feel the affects of this tragic war.

The 1962 Geneva Accords guaranteed that Laos would remain a neutral state and act as a buffer zone between the communists of North Vietnam and the noncommunists of South Vietnam. The Accords prohibited foreign troops and the establishment of foreign bases in Laos (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). Since the North Vietnamese were involved in a war with the South Vietnamese, the communists used Laos as a natural way of transporting troops and supplies into South Vietnam. This short cut through Laos became known as the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail and directly invaded the lands where the Hmong people lived, thereby breaching the 1962 Geneva Accords (Thao, 1994).

Not to be outdone, the United States became involved in this conflict and attempted to counteract the communist's strategy. American bases were set up in Laos and the United States Secret Army (USSA) was formed. The United States employed many Hmong people in the USSA. The USSA attacked the communist Vietnamese along

the Ho-Chi-Minh Trail, in hopes of reducing the amount of troops and supplies going into South Vietnam (Thao, 1994).

The Hmong were dedicated allies to the United States and risked their lives to defend their homeland and rescue American soldiers. They fought in some of the worst conditions and battles of the Vietnam War, ending in tragedy and defeat. When American troops withdrew in 1975, the Hmong were abandoned and encountered a terrible battle of chemical warfare from the communist North Vietnamese (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993).

America's use of Laos and its people had a devastating impact on the country. It's estimated that at least 10% of the population of northeast Laos lost their lives due to the war (Thao, 1994). Because much of the U.S. involvement in Laos was a secret, many of the battles in Laos were known as the "secret wars" (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). Initially after withdrawing from Vietnam, the United States did very little to help their allies from Laos. But because the Hmong had been employed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Congress authorized the State Department to allow Hmong refugees to enter the United States (Thao, 1994). The story that follows is one of just many that demonstrates the struggles and difficulties the Hmong had in search of their freedom.

In May 1986, ten young men form a team and embark on what turns out to be a twenty-eight day journey in search of freedom. They travel only on foot, mostly during the pitch darkness of the night, so they wouldn't be discovered. They have very little food and water to nourish their already weak bodies. During the journey, their leader is shot and killed, yet they press on towards their goal. The nine men reach a river in which they are forced to cross. Only one man possesses the skill to swim. He ties a rope to himself

and to another member of the group, and tries with all his might to get the two of them to the other side, but they fail. The group is then forced to walk further down the river until they reach a point where they can safely cross. Once on the other side, they backtrack the many miles along the river until they are within feet of the Thailand border and freedom. But all of a sudden, the group is turned away from the border and ordered to go back. The mere change in emotion from high to low is enough to make them question whether life is worth living or not.

But one particular man from this group was determined to gain the freedom that he knew he deserved. This young man, who will be referred to as “Ben,” completed a second twenty-eight day journey back to Thailand. Upon arriving at the border, Ben was arrested and placed in jail. For the first two weeks he lived in very cramped quarters under poor conditions. For the next year Ben was sent to a concentration camp. It was here that he met a woman from the United States and where his search for freedom began to see some hope. Ben made an agreement with the woman that he would teach her the Hmong language if she would teach him English. Finally his one-year term ended and Ben was granted legal refugee status.

Ben’s next goal was to get to the United States. A series of obstacles kept this dream from becoming a reality too quickly. Ben did not have a sponsor in the United States, nor did he have any relatives living in the U.S. Then he discovered one day that he could be granted acceptance into the United States because his father was hired by the CIA to fight the war. Ben was then faced with the difficult task of proving what his father had done. After months of discussions, testimonials, and writing letters to the U.S. Embassy, Ben was finally granted a special case status and allowed to enter the United

States. His knowledge of the English language was a big reason that helped him in this process. After five long hard fought years, Ben finally found the freedom he was looking for.

His new journey landed him in Syracuse, NY. He stayed there for about a month, then moved on to Wisconsin where he searched for a larger group of Hmong people and an education. Ben spent his 23rd, 24th, and 25th birthdays in high school getting his GED. He soon followed that up with his Bachelor's Degree, and is currently working towards his Master's Degree in psychology. Ben learned a lot through his struggles and hardships, and is very happy where he is in life right now. But he would never wish upon anyone the road he traveled to get to this point (Anonymous, personal communication, April 19, 2000). Ben's journey is not unique. Thousands of Hmong have had a similar path to the United States.

It's estimated that 80,000 Hmong have entered the United States from Laos (Thao, 1994). The Hmong settled in eleven of the fifty states in the U.S. Of these, 68% of the Hmong have settled in California, Minnesota and Wisconsin. In California and Minnesota, they have settled in two major communities (Fresno and the Twin Cities). But Wisconsin is unique in that aspect because the Hmong have settled in over thirteen different communities (Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, 1997). According to the 1990 United States Census data, Wisconsin ranks second in the largest concentration of Hmong (Thao, 1994).

The 1990 U.S. Census data also reveals that 72% of Hmong adults have less than a high school education, and over half of these have no education at all. About 4.5% of Hmong adults possess a bachelor's degree or above (Thao, 1994). During the 1995-1996

school year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) states that there were 15,798 limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the state. Of these, 9,319 (59%) were Hmong students (Thao, 1994).

The researcher feels fortunate to have been given the opportunity to work very closely with the Hmong population for the past six years. Interest in performing this study comes from the desire to further help the Hmong continue with their successes and help overcome the barriers they still face today. The purpose is to help other educators develop a better understanding of the Hmong culture, and more specifically discover ways in which they can help Hmong children and parents in the area of education. The goals are to: 1) assess Hmong parents in the area of education, 2) determine how crucial the link between parents and children is in the area of education, and 3) suggest plans or strategies that may help Hmong children improve in education.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of correlation between parent educational level, as measured by a survey, and student grade equivalency reading level, as measured by the Standardized Test for Assessment in Reading (STAR), for Hmong families at River Heights Elementary School in Menomonie, Wisconsin in the spring of 2000.

Null Hypothesis

There is no statistically significant correlation between education level of parents and student grade equivalency reading level for Hmong children at the elementary school level.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss evidence and findings supporting the statement of the problem. Included will be the topics of parental education, parental involvement, and parental influence as they relate to children's school performance. Acculturation of the Hmong into the United States is another topic addressed in this chapter. In addition, the researcher provides personal testimony as evidence to the struggles that Hmong parents attempt to overcome.

Parent Education

According to Drazen (1992), in a study measuring student achievement and its relationship to family socioeconomic standing, the level of a parent's education is a factor that directly affects student achievement. This longitudinal study was conducted in 1972 with 19,000 students and again in 1988 with 25,000 students, in the areas of reading and math.

In 1972, factors that affected student achievement in reading were 1) level of parent education, 2) time spent on homework, 3) non-minority racial status, and 4) parental income. In 1988 the factors were 1) level of parent education, 2) non-minority status, 3) family income, and 4) time spent on homework (Drazen, 1992).

In 1972, factors that affected student achievement in math were 1) non-minority status, 2) being male, 3) level of parent education, and 4) time spent on homework. In 1988 the factors were 1) level of parent education, 2) non-minority status, 3) family income, and 4) time spent on homework (Drazen, 1992).

These studies have shown that 75% of the time, level of parent education was the number one factor related to the performance of their children in the areas of reading and math achievement.

A comparative analysis conducted by Mueller (1993) of parents of kindergarten children in Saint Paul, Minnesota revealed that 60% of Hmong parents had no formal education. Only 43% of Hmong males and 21% of Hmong females graduated from high school. In comparison, 75% of all other parents were high school graduates. Studies (documented in Mueller's publication, 1993) conducted in the United States have shown that low parental education is a risk factor for poor academic achievement in children.

Heller and Fantuzzo (1993) indicate a high correlation between the level of parent education and the academic achievement of their children in school. They feel children and schools will benefit by providing parents with programs promoting parent education and awareness. Hmong parents, already at a disadvantage because of the language barrier, can benefit the most by teaching them how to become more involved in their child's education.

Researcher Insight

In the researcher's six plus years of working with youth in a drop-in center, these statistics appear valid. A high percentage of the youth came from single parent or two working parent families. Many of them struggled in school, so they were referred to a tutoring program each night. Tutors were available to help kids from all levels with their homework and projects. By the high rate of increased scores and grades, this program definitely made a positive impact. The first point this presents is that parents are simply not available to help. The next point, and most significant point, is that these children needed help because their parents were not able to give them the necessary assistance.

Lower educated parents were replaced with highly educated tutors in order for children to learn and understand in school. The program helped a good number of students, but there still are concerns about the number of other children who have no one else to turn to. Having a parent at home that can help a child with their homework presents the same results as children having a tutor for them.

Parent Involvement

A study by Steventon (1990) finds a significant body of research that links parent involvement to student achievement. The author claims that children need more help in their academic lives today than they did in the past. The researcher believes this can be directly linked to the makeup of today's family structure (increased divorce rates, more families with two working parents, and increased single-parent family households).

A short survey, developed for guidance counselors, revealed the following information about student performance: 77% of the counselors agreed that parent education can improve parent perceptions of their parenting skills; 68% agreed that parent education, which addresses individual student and parent needs, can improve the school performance of students; and 64% agreed that parent education, that improves student school performance, can also improve teacher perceptions of that student (Steventon, 1990).

An article written by Fehrmann, Keith, and Reimers (1987) from the University of Iowa discussed how parent involvement is a crucial influence on the academic achievement of students. They view parent involvement in many different aspects: 1) expectations of school performance, 2) encouragement of school work, 3) direct reinforcement in improvement of grades, and 4) monitoring activities and educational progress. For example, the authors suggest that even though a parent may not be able to

help their child with math they can still be involved by monitoring the amount of TV children watch, how much time they spend interacting with friends, and how much they read each night. 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.

Parental Influence

In an article appearing in School Psychology Review, Heller and Fantuzzo (1993) discuss how parents are the earliest and most lasting influence that their children have in their lives. They note that until the age of 18, children only spend 13% of their waking hours in school and 87% of their time with families. Research and studies have shown that parents play a key role in enhancing the cognitive development and school achievement of their children. The article further discusses that schools need to play a key role in developing ideas which will encourage greater parent participation and involvement in their children's lives. Teachers who include parent involvement in their classrooms on a regular basis notice two results: 1) parents feel more positive about their contributions and abilities within themselves, and 2) students show improvement in the areas of academic achievement and attitudes.

A 1993 study (Benjamin, 1993) revealed that one of the most important factors that influences a child's achievement in school, particularly reading level, is the level of the mother's education. Data obtained from the 1990 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), from a sample group of fourth grade students, finds that the average level of proficiency is lower for students with mothers that did not graduate from high school. It was found that more highly educated mothers succeed greater in providing their children with the cognitive skills that promote achievement in school.

Parents who are not as highly educated have a tendency to be more isolated and fear commitments and responsibility when it comes to involvement in their child's academic life (Austin & Martin, 1990). Factors other than directly helping children with homework were also found to have a strong effect on student achievement. These factors include: 1) parent involvement and support in child's after school activities, 2) time spent interacting with the child at home, 3) emotional climate at home, 4) level of financial stress of the parent, and 5) enrichment activities (Benjamin, 1993).

This same study also focused on the influence low-literate mothers have on their children. As mothers enhance their own literacy skills, they are more likely to positively influence their own children in academic achievement. Approximately 7 out of 10 children benefited from mothers who participated in adult education programs. As mothers became more confident in their own abilities, they made greater efforts to contribute to their children's academic growth and achievement (Benjamin, 1993).

According to author Daniel Mueller, research has shown that as the number of siblings in a household increases, academic achievement tends to decrease (Mueller, 1993). With Hmong families typically averaging between five and ten siblings, this becomes a concern for their education.

Acculturation

An issue that has been a conflict for the Hmong people is that of acculturation into American society. As the Hmong enter second and third generations of their people, this conflict becomes more prevalent. Refugee parents view American culture as being too permissive. With the deterioration of the American family (high rates of alcohol abuse, drug abuse, divorce rates, teenage pregnancy and domestic violence), it's no

surprise that Hmong parents don't want to assimilate into American culture (Hughes, 1990).

A major issue Hmong parents face is the loss of authority and control over their children. Factors such as lack of education, particularly in English literacy, and the lack of familiarity with the American culture are key reasons for this struggle (Mueller, 1993).

Researcher Insight

Some of the experiences the researcher has encountered with Hmong children are congruent with these factors. A youth club in central Wisconsin had a high number of Hmong children participating in programs each night. Near the middle of the school year, a drastic drop in the number of Hmong children was noticed. After weeks of this occurring, the researcher began investigating the cause. It was discovered that, even though the club closed at 7:00pm, many of the Hmong children were not returning to their homes until closer to 9:00pm. The children told their parents that they had to stay at the club until 9:00. Since many of the parents did not speak English, they believed their children. For these two hours, the kids were wandering the town unsupervised. To correct the problem, the researcher worked closely with the schools as a means of communication between the club and the parents. Keeping parents informed allowed them to regain the control they lost over their children due to the language issue.

As indicated by the literature, there is a strong correlation between parent's educational level, involvement, and influence with the academic performance of their children in school. In addition, Hmong parents experience a greater disadvantage due to the acculturation factor. The literature has indicated that enhancing parent education can improve the school performance of their children. Educators need to be made aware of

these issues and develop strategies that will promote positive study habits and improve education for the Hmong in the United States.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the subjects for the study, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis of the results.

Subjects

In this study, 20 Hmong parents, 10 male and 10 female, that have children attending River Heights Elementary School in Menomonie, Wisconsin, were surveyed. From these 20 parents, 36 students' scores were available for the study. The subjects were chosen at random from a list available from the school.

Instrumentation

Data from the Hmong parents will be collected using a survey specifically developed for this study by the researcher. This short survey will identify information regarding parent's gender, age, number of years living in the United States, ability to help children with school assignments at home, number of after school programs attended, the amount of English spoken at home, number of parent-teacher conferences attended, and the highest level of schooling completed.

Data from the students will be collected by obtaining scores on the Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR). The STAR is a computer-adaptive, norm-referenced reading test that can be completed within fifteen minutes. Students are given a sentence and they need to choose the best word that completes the sentence. Based on the answer given, the program presents the next question at the difficulty level appropriate for that student.

A student can take the STAR up to five times per year. Advantages of this test include quick results, dependable scores, easy administration, simple tracking and reporting of student performance, and useful information that allows teachers to make appropriate adjustments to student's education.

Procedures

Parent surveys were completed in May 2000 with the assistance of a Hmong faculty member at River Heights Elementary School, through parent meetings and personal contacts. The researcher feels this approach will result in a higher number of returns compared to mailing a survey. This approach should result in a higher rate of return as opposed to a survey that is mailed by the researcher to parents. The researcher also feels that information gathered by the Hmong faculty member will be much more accurate and real than if gathered by the researcher.

Students were tested in the spring of 2000 on the STAR. Staff at the elementary school matched the parent information with the student scores, thereby increasing the privacy and confidentiality of the study.

Data Analysis

Once student scores were matched with parent information, data was examined to determine the effect parental education and influence has on student achievement. Other factors measured by the survey also provided information regarding student achievement. Graphs will be developed specifically displaying links between the information on the parent survey with student scores on the STAR.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Twenty parents completed the survey for this research project: ten males and ten females. This resulted in the availability of thirty-six elementary school students' scores for the study.

The Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading (STAR) gives a score that is representative to a particular student's reading level grade equivalency. The score is presented in decimal form, ranging from .1 to .9. Each of these increments represents a month in the student's typical nine-month school year. For example, a third grade student in their second month of school ideally would score a 3.2 (representing third grade, second month). If this same student would score a 2.2, that means they would be at a reading level of a second grade student in their second month of school, or one year behind. If this student scored a 4.2, they would be at a reading level one-year ahead of their grade equivalency.

The main focus of the survey was to compare the student scores from the STAR with the highest level of education the parents completed. Additional items on the survey will also be discussed, including the parent's ability to help their children with homework, how often English is spoken in the home, age of the parents, number of years they have lived in the United States, and participation in their children's school programs.

Parent Education and STAR Scores

Eleven responses were available in this question for parents to choose from, indicating their highest level of education completed (no education, elementary school, middle school, high school, refugee camp schooling, Laotian schooling, vocational

classes, Associate Degree, Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree, or other). All twenty parent responses fell into six of these categories. Table 1 shows the distribution of parent responses, the number of students within each parent group, and the range and mean of student scores on the STAR.

Table 1

Parent education

Education level	Parent-student responses	STAR range	STAR mean
No education	6-13	-0.4 to -2.9	-1.7
Laotian schooling	3-4	-1.2 to -2.9	-2.1
High school	4-9	-1.4 to +0.2	-0.5
Associate	1-1	No range	+0.1
Bachelor	4-4	-0.2 to +1.4	+0.4
Master	2-5	+0.1 to +0.7	+0.4

As indicated in Table 1, a positive correlation appears to exist between the level of parent education and student scores on the STAR. The students' grade equivalency scores (GES) are below average one year and 7 months for parents with no education, two years and 1 month for parents with Laotian education, and 5 months for parents with

a high school education. Student GES are above average by 1 month for parents with an Associate degree, and 4 months for parents with a Bachelors or Masters degree.

From the study, it was found that in cases where parents had a high school education or below, only 2 out of the 26 students (8%) were at or above their GES. For parents with an Associate degree or higher, 8 out of 10 students (80%) were above their GES.

Homework Assistance

A question on the survey asked parents if they were able to help their children with homework on a daily basis. Overall, 19 of the 36 students received help with their homework from either mom or dad, and 17 students did not receive any help from their parents. For students scoring below their GES, 6 parents responded “yes” they were able to help and 8 parents responded “no” that they were not able to help their children with homework. For students scoring above their GES, 5 parents responded “yes” and 1 parent responded “no” concerning helping their children with homework. Table 2 reflects the number of students in the study affected by their parent’s ability to assist them with homework.

Table 2

Homework assistance

Are parents able to help with their children’s homework?	Number of students scoring below grade equivalency score (GES)	Number of students scoring above grade equivalency score (GES)
YES	10	9
NO	16	1

As indicated in Table 2, 90% of the students scoring above their GES received daily help on their homework from parents. Whereas, only 38% of the students scoring below their GES received help from their parents.

English Spoken in the Home

This question addressed how often English was spoken in the home. Parents could select from the following choices: never, seldom, sometimes, often, or always. Table 3 shows the distribution of responses.

Table 3

English spoken at home

Student scores	1	2	3	4	5
Below GES	9	5	9	3	0
Above GES	0	1	5	4	0

1= never 2=seldom 3=sometimes 4= often 5= always

As indicated in Table 3, a positive correlation seems to exist between higher GES and the amount of English spoken in the home. The results show that 54% of students scoring below their GES speak English less than half of the time at home, compared with 90% of students scoring above their GES speak English at least half of the time at home. (Note: a response in the “sometimes” category indicates English is spoken approximately half of the time).

Years Living in the United States

The results from the survey show that a correlation may exist between the number of years parents have lived in the United States and the scores from the STAR, as indicated in Table 4. This table is divided into five-year increments for parents, with the calculated average scores from the STAR next to each category.

Table 4

Years living in the United States

Number of years parents living in the United States	Average student scores on the STAR
0 to 5 years	-1.85
6 to 10 years	-1.48
11-15 years	-.28
16+ years	-.38

As parents live in the United States longer, the scores on the STAR approach the students' GES. There's one exception to this in the researcher's results where the average STAR score is one tenth higher for the 11-15 year category compared to the 16+ category. The numbers are very close though, and this also may be due to the fewer number of students in the 16+ category.

Other Survey Results

The average age of the parents completing the survey was 36.1 years old, with a range from 26 to 58 years old. The female average age was 31.2 years old and the male

average age was 41 years old. From the results of this study, there's no significant correlation between parent age and student scores on the STAR.

One other question on the survey was found to have no correlation with STAR scores as well, which pertained to parents attending after school programs. The results show that 16 out of the 20 parents have attended at least one of their child's after school programs this year, which could include plays, concerts and sporting events. The 16 parents attending these programs accounted for 32 of the 36 students, so the sample size became too small to find a correlation.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of correlation between parent educational level, as measured by a researcher designed survey, and the student grade equivalent reading level, as measured by the STAR for Hmong families at River Heights Elementary School. The importance of this study was to gain a better understanding of the Hmong and the struggles they have encountered in order to assess their needs in education. It is the hope of the researcher that educators will take a holistic approach when working with Hmong students. This means taking into account all aspects that effect their learning (family structure, background, history, personalities etc.).

Each Hmong family is unique and has endured different hardships. These differences could be factors that contribute positively or negatively to the school performance of Hmong children. By taking into account family background and history, and simply not just classroom performance, educators may find more effective strategies leading to increased classroom performance.

Limitations

This study focused on one elementary school within the district. The researcher would recommend repeating this study in other elementary schools within the same district, as well as in other school districts. In addition, this study was only done at the elementary level. A study at the middle and high school levels could be done as well. It would be interesting to compare the progress between each level. A broader, more diverse study could provide more accurate information about the Hmong, potentially leading to improvement in their learning and education.

One of the questions on the survey addressed parent-teacher conferences, but the only information gathered was how many of these conferences the parents attended. A more detailed question, explaining the purpose of the conferences, who initiated them, and the results would have been much more beneficial to the study. Simply knowing how many conferences were attended doesn't add adequately to the research. A parent may have attended a conference and contributed nothing, or they may have attended and worked progressively with that teacher to develop a plan for their child. More information in this area would be valuable.

Based on experience, the faculty at River Heights Elementary School believe the STAR is an accurate test for assessing their students. But the researcher should not solely consider the results of this test to evaluate the educational achievement of students. Reading comprehension is very important, but there are also many other facets of education to consider when evaluating students in an academic setting. Examining the whole student, academic grades, tests and assessments, behavioral records, and portfolios, would be the most ideal approach to truly evaluating a student.

Another interesting comparison could have been done by obtaining scores of the STAR from students other than the Hmong. This would have given a good perspective on whether or not the Hmong were behind in GES, or if the students as a whole were behind on scores. These results indicate that most of the Hmong from this school are testing at lower GES, but we do not know what the other students are testing at.

Critical Analysis

The results from this study indicate that a correlation does exist between the level of schooling of Hmong adults and their children's scores on the STAR. On average, it

was found that the higher the level of education of parents, the higher the student scores were on the STAR. It appears that the more educated the parents are, the more they are able to pass along this education and help their children excel in school. These results correlate with Drazen's (1992) findings that the level of parent education is a factor that directly affects student achievement.

Parents with little or no education may find it very difficult to understand or help their children in the area of education. One item for educators to consider could be to offer programs or assistance to those parents with little education, thereby giving them a better understanding and increased confidence in their abilities. This could directly affect the academic performance of their children. Heller and Fantuzzo (1993) feel that children and schools will benefit by providing parents with programs that promote parent education and awareness.

This study also indicates that there is a high correlation between student scores and the amount of English spoken in the home. Of the students who are achieving above their GES, 90% of them speak English over half of the time in their households. This higher rate of English spoken in the home may contribute to a better understanding and comprehension of subjects taught at school, therefore helping students to achieve better grades. The article written by Heller and Fantuzzo reinforces the importance of parental influence to children's academic success, stating that parents play a key role in the cognitive development and school achievement of their children.

Results also show a high correlation between GES and the ability of parents to specifically help children with their homework. From the study, 90% of the students who achieve above their GES received help on their homework from their parents on a daily

basis. Fehrmann, Keith, and Reimers (1987) state in their article how parent involvement is a crucial influence on the academic achievement of students. It appears that parents, who are well educated and can help their children with homework, are able to positively influence their children to performing well in school. It's also possible that because the parent-child relationship is stronger in these cases, students have a more positive outlook on their education and may take a more serious approach to it.

One surprising statistic in this study dealt with the students whose parents had no education compared to those with a Laotian education. The mean score on the STAR of students which their parents had no education was -1.7 . The mean score for students whose parents had a Laotian education was -2.1 . The researcher would have thought that some education would be more beneficial to children's test scores than none, but the numbers from this study don't indicate that.

In a discussion with the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at River Heights Elementary School, he was surprised and puzzled with these results too. He suggested that perhaps the parents who had schooling in Laos were reluctant to lose a part of their heritage by learning the English language. It's possible that these parents don't want to acculturate and may present a more confusing atmosphere for their children. The children may be exposed to English for eight hours a day at school, but then once they're home they may be exposed only to the Hmong or Lao language and it's heritage. As mentioned in an article by Hughes (1990), with the deterioration of American families, it's no surprise that some Hmong parents don't want to assimilate into American culture.

Another reason for these results could be attributed to the fewer number of children in the Laotian group (4) as compared to the higher number in the no education group (13). Perhaps a larger sample size of children with Laotian educated parents would result in a different distribution.

Conclusion

With evidence from the literature and the study done at River Heights School, the researcher believes there is a link between level of parent's education for Hmong and the academic performance of their children. A crucial point to improving the success of these students is to first identify these families, and to next work collaboratively with other resources (i.e., Hmong Association, ESL teachers, etc.) to help the parents. Parent programs could be offered to help educate them, allow them to understand the educational system better, and to be more involved in their children's lives, which may improve their comfort level and hopefully the performance of their children in schools.

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Appendix
SURVEY OF EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF HMONG PARENTS

Please read each of the following statements and choose/write the best answer that pertains to YOU.

- 1) Circle one: Mother Father
- 2) Age: _____
- 3) How many years have you lived in the United States? _____
- 4) Are you able to help your children with their homework on a daily basis?
- Yes No
- 5) Have you attended any of your children's after school programs this year (plays, concerts, sporting events, etc.)?
- Yes No
- 6) Is English spoken in your home?
- Never Seldom Sometimes Often Always
- 7) List the number of parent-teacher conferences you have attended this school year for EACH child:
- Child 1: _____ Child 4: _____
- Child 2: _____ Child 5: _____
- Child 3: _____
- 8) Check the highest level of schooling you have completed:
- _____ No education _____ Elementary school
- _____ Middle school _____ High school
- _____ Refugee camp schooling _____ Laotian schooling
- _____ Vocational classes _____ Associate (2 year) Degree
- _____ Bachelor (4 year) degree _____ Master's Degree
- _____ Other _____