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HOW HMONG STUDENTS PERCEIVE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A MASTER'S THESIS
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OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

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PHENG VANG

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HOW HMONG STUDENTS PERCEIVE ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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APPROVED

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Abstract

The Hmong people have been a part of the United States of America since the 1960s. Three generations of Hmong people have learned to assimilate while balancing their customs and traditions. Older generation Hmong parents want their children to carry on the traditions and customs, as they have done for many years. In schools, there is limited support for Hmong students as the culture is not well known to most teachers and administrators. Hmong students striving for academic success are faced with barriers both academically and culturally. With pressure in the home to uphold cultural practices, and lack of supports in the school system, Hmong students' must define for themselves what academic success means, and fight for balance between two worlds.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last 40 years, the Hmong people have found refuge and safety within the United States. They have worked to acculturate to a new way of living while at the same time uphold their own traditions and practices. During this process, young Hmong students have struggled to be successful in receiving education beyond 12th grade. There are barriers challenging the success of these students and their own academic goals. The purpose of this thesis is to review current literature related to Hmong students' cultural perceptions that influence their academic success.

Historical Background

Historically there has been a disconnect between American and Hmong cultures which has created multiple barriers in education. This disconnect stems from traditions and values which have been misunderstood and overlooked by both cultures, and a failure to acknowledge the importance of such traditions and values. In order to understand the disconnect between American and Hmong culture, both the background and traditions of the Hmong people need to be considered.

Since the first known Hmong immigrants came to the United States in 1975, it has been reported that over 260,000 Hmong now reside within the country's borders. The main reason for immigration is the closure of many refugee camps in Thailand where Hmong sought refuge. Due to the involvement that the Hmong had in aiding the U.S. Army in Vietnam, the Hmong families of those who served were granted entrance to the United States as refugees (Vang, 2013). Beginning in 1975, there have been waves of immigrants seeking refuge in the United States from Thailand since the closing of the refugee camps from whence they came (Grigoleit, 2006).

Upon entering the United States many have sought to find the balance between traditional practices of their culture, and acculturating to the new customs and lifestyles of America.

Cultural Context

Traditional practices and values of the Hmong culture have an emphasis on prioritizing family, language, and gender obligations. While transitioning to the United States and a more modern lifestyle than what they had known before, the Hmong learned how to navigate the common practices of American culture while still maintaining their own. When it comes to family, tough love is one of the most influential and rooted traits acknowledged by all generations across the Hmong culture (Hutchinson, 1997; Kotyk, 1998). Supple and Small (2006), Xiong (2008), and Yang (2003) found that Hmong parents display and express their love with very little warmth. Instead they focus more on controlling the behavior of their children. Their findings also show a high level of conflict between parents and their children.

Language is an important aspect to the Hmong culture because it is a symbol of perseverance and cultural identity. French and American missionaries developed the Hmong language in 1952. The language is of Sino-Tibetan dialect as the Hmong people first lived in northern China, and it consists of eight different tones (McGinn, 1989). The language works as a connection among generations of Hmong people; it is a piece of culture that the Hmong people can take with them and pass down to future generations, so that it is not forgotten.

The Hmong culture is male dominant, and inequality between male and female genders is a strong cultural characteristic. According to Supple, et. al. (2010), boys are valued and appreciated more than girls, as the boys carry on the family name. If a son is well behaved in public or around elders, then they are spoken of with great pride. In addition to the pride that comes with having a son in the Hmong culture, there are other roles and responsibilities that go

specifically to each gender. For a son, these roles and responsibilities include helping with family disputes, communicating with elders and leaders in the clan, and overseeing or leading common ceremonies in the culture. They carry out the norms and customs that are most important to the Hmong Culture.

Hmong females tend to be undervalued compared to males, and are obligated to perform most, if not all, the duties in the home. Hmong females are often working in the kitchen and tending to their children, along with serving their husbands and other males in the community. Modern Hmong females who seek higher goals may feel the pressure of these obligations from older generations to carry on these traditional roles. According to Vang (1999), Hmong females are obligated and expected to marry, become homemakers, and bear children while they are still young. Even those who have immigrated to the U.S. are not expected to get an education nor help the family financially.

Rationale for the Study

Limited research is available on Hmong people and little attention has been given to their success in education (McCall & Vang, 2012; Vang et al., 2013). Some studies focus on acculturation and lifestyle when they first found refuge in the United States during the 1960s; however, the national growth rate of the Hmong population had increased considerably. The 2010 Census reported that in the 50 United States, 260,073 people represented the Hmong population. This also includes Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. This information shows us that there was a 40% increase in Hmong population in the United States when compared to the 2000 Census which reported a total of 186,310 Hmong people. The majority of this population could be found in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California. (Pfeifer, et. al., 2012)

Hmong students not only face difficulty in the educational system due to limited support, attention, and resources to help them succeed, they also face barriers that come from home and culture (DePouw, 2003; Vang et al., 2013). There needs to be a balance of understanding from the education system that encourages the furthering of education in minority groups such as the Hmong, which also supports and understands the cultural barriers that these students may face at home (Lee, 2001).

Research Question

In addition to limited knowledge and support for Hmong students in the education setting, there is inadequate understanding of Hmong students' own perceptions about their family, education, and their own personal identity. Many Hmong students have learned to adapt and find a balance between two worlds all on their own. Some have risen to the occasion and found an internal motivation to reach their full potential in academic success. Others have struggled to find that same motivation. Regardless of effort or motivation, Hmong students in the education system face the very real challenge of balancing two worlds, looking for support, and deciding for themselves what success means and how to achieve it (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018). Therefore, the guiding research question for this thesis is as follows: How do Hmong students perceive academic success?

Key Terms and Definitions

The following key terms and definitions are referred to in this literature review (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021):

Acculturation—The cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture.

Barriers—Something material that blocks or is intended to block passage.

Culture—The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group: the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.

Hmong—A mountain-dwelling people inhabiting southeastern China and the northern parts of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Immigration—Travel into a country for the purpose of permanent residence there.

Minority—The smaller in number of two groups constituting a whole: a group having less than the number of votes necessary for control.

Perception--To attain awareness or understanding of; to become aware of through the senses.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to review literature that answers the research question: How do Hmong students perceive academic success? Peer-reviewed and empirical sources were retrieved from the ERIC and JSTOR databases. Key words and phrases used in the search included “Hmong culture,” “academic barriers,” “cultural history,” and “academic achievement.” When the Hmong arrive in the United States, they experience challenges in adapting to a new lifestyle, preserving their cultural identity, and navigating a new educational system.

Adapting to a New Lifestyle

Rudin (2009) and Schwartz et. al. (2010) explained how the process of acculturation may require individuals to discard aspects of their original culture and take on characteristics of the host culture. Since transitioning to the United States, Hmong people have sought to find a balance between the new modern lifestyle in America, while still holding onto the traditions and practices of their own culture. In seeking this balance they struggled with acculturation.

Immigrant Paradox

The Hmong acculturation experience can be explained by the immigrant paradox. According to Vang et al. (2013), the immigration paradox shows how recent immigrants are more successful than established immigrants. For example, third generation Hmong who were born in the United States tend to have more education and higher socioeconomic status than second and third generation Hmong. Vang et al. (2013) explained the generations of immigrants as follows: The first generation were born in their homeland and culture such as Thailand. As they immigrated to the United States, they had a harder time acculturating to the new life, struggled more with learning the new language, and did not seek higher education. The second generation of Hmong are most likely to have been born in Thailand or another Southeast Asian

country, and then they immigrated to the United States with their parents or family members, and they have very few, if any, significant memories from their previous life. This generation had the opportunity to be more exposed to the English language, as well as grow up around more academic and extracurricular activities of youth in America. The second generation has been seen to have a better chance at academic and socioeconomic success due to these factors. The third generation are born in the United States, speak fluent English, and are more accustomed to American ways than perhaps those of the first- and second-generation Hmong. They are prone to engage in reckless activities involving alcohol and drugs.

Through these three separate generations the culture and traditions of the Hmong group slowly starts to dilute as more of the American culture is accepted and practiced. While there are still traditions and practices that the Hmong strive to uphold, there are new expectations that the first generation has placed on the second and third. As a first-generation Hmong there are disadvantages which decreased the likelihood of educational and economic success in the United States. Lack of fluency in the English language is one of many. As each new generation is born, and accustomed to the language and systems, more expectations for success are placed on them. Through the eyes of a first-generation Hmong parent or grandparent, second or third generation Hmong already have an advantage and should have an easier time at achieving success. However, while certain aspects may be easier for these later generations than the first, they do not consider the new challenges and barriers that have arisen since that first generation came to the United States. Pressure from family is but one of the many challenges that young Hmong generations face as they look to further their education and socioeconomic success. Racism, minority status, labels and stereotypes also impact the success rate of these second and third generation Hmong in America (Vang et al., 2013).

Hmong boys and girls were also married and had children at a very young age, around thirteen to fourteen. These rooted moral obligations to parents, family, and community are often a driving factor to Hmong students' academic success. In fact, there are youth who would report they do feel a strong sense of family obligation to their parents, and those are the same youth who also have reports of putting forth more effort in school. (Fuligni, Tseng, and Lam (1999). Along with having the expectation that their children will carry on the cultural traditions passed on to them by their parents (Supple, et al., 2006) recent studies suggested that a sense of cultural obligation and parental cultural socialization are factors that promote academic success for Hmong youth.

Family Systems

In traditional Hmong culture, obligations to parents and family often come before the individual. Therefore, it is also likely to be a driving factor toward Hmong students' academic success. Siu (1993) identified family factors that can affect academic success in Hmong students such as demonstration of support, interest in the students' success, and encouragement for students to value their education, be a positive role model, and have a strong work ethic. While there are cultural values and practices that pose challenges for Hmong students in pursuit of a higher education, there are also certain aspects that contribute to Hmong students' academic success as well. For example, parental financial and emotional support (Lor, 2008; McClain-Reulle & Xiong, 2005); spiritual support, as well as academic support (Lor, 2008). Lee (1997) added to the list of factor spousal support for women who are trying to further their education (Lee, 1997).

In the traditional family system, there are specific roles of both the Hmong men and women which are extremely important (Vang, 1999). Vang also added that in the Hmong society

men and women are strongly viewed based off of the role that they play in their family structure. Since immigration to the United States the responsibility and obligation among Hmong families have changed quite a bit between male and female. Although many Hmong parents are now encouraging their daughters to pursue higher education, they are still required to meet certain requirements and expectations such as attending colleges close to home, pursuing a lower level of education, or marrying and having kids before pursuing a higher education. Since Hmong women were raised and taught to become homemakers and mothers first, many young girls have difficulty dealing with both Hmong and American cultures, in which Vang (1999) described as:

If they are unable to complete their high school due to early marriage and pregnancy, they may find themselves in poverty. If they will eventually acculturate to American society, the traditional division of labor in the home will be eroded. If Hmong girls are expected to do household chores and duties and work outside the home, the traditional division of labor will be a major problem among Hmong in the future. (p. 29)

Still, Vang observed that Hmong girls will eventually break away from the traditional female roles to reach their academic and professional goals but at a lower rate in comparison to Hmong males. However, Supple et al. (2010) added that Hmong girls will experience much greater cultural pressure when it comes to upholding their connection to the Hmong home culture, even more than Hmong boys.

Hmong males on the other hand, are considered to be the heads of their households. In a study conducted by Supple et al. (2010), male participants “described their cultural responsibility to carry the Hmong legacy (e.g., name and caring for elder parents) and also reported being motivated by a sense of obligation to strengthen the family name” (p. 15). The Hmong males are also required to take an active role in administering or overseeing cultural ceremonies, help keep

the peace within the family when there are disagreements, communicate with other clan leaders, and carry out and uphold cultural justice in a way that is respectful of the Hmong customs.

(Supple et al., 2010). Supple also shares how “The male participants also reported that excelling in school was influenced by their goal to be the pride of their parents”. While this may be the case among most Hmong males, many of them feel unprepared for and overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Unlike the modern American cultural students, Hmong students are usually bound with cultural obligations that neither their teachers nor counselors know about. These obligations are often the leading causes behind their academic failures because it is what they considered to be priority and most important (Supple et al., 2010).

On the surface Hmong parents can be seen as an academic barrier, due to their lack of display of love, harsh discipline, and strict upbringing, toward their children. However, we must look at how their display of love and support is conveyed from a cultural perspective to understand the cultural miscommunication of Hmong parents and their children. Affection in the Hmong culture is conveyed much differently than the typical American assumption of what it should be. In American culture, affection is often associated with the display of hugs and kisses, saying I love you, family dinner at the table, or talking about problems. In the Hmong culture it is quite the opposite. Hmong parents display affection through working hard to provide for their family, and strive to protect their children by displaying more restrictive parenting styles (Xiong et al., 2004) and implement harsh disciplines when their children misbehave or are deviant from traditional ways. As one participant from the Supple et al.(2010) study said:

I was going to say, umm, in our culture, like, the girls aren't allowed to hug their dads, you know, it's kind of like taboo or something, but I think our parents, the way they were raised, it's like, no hugs and kisses, “just know that we love you”...its not like physical

affection, it's more of just like, umm, you just know they love you by the things that they do for you. Like, they don't have an education or anything, but they go to work every day and work for you so you can go to school. (pp. 17-18)

Also, failing to complete tasks or achieve educational goals would often result in parents' threats, shaming, and punishments. "Outside of the context of Hmong (or perhaps other Asian) culture, some of these behaviors would be classified as coercive, authoritarian, or highly controlling and considered detrimental to academic achievement" (Supple et al., 2010. p. 29). However, despite the harsh and misunderstood display of affection from traditional Hmong parents, Hmong students have also acknowledged that some of these actions were what disciplined them to achieve their academic goals. In fact, Vang (2005) observed two of the seven characteristics in successful Hmong students are the ability to discuss educational situations with parents who listen to their stories, and parents who advise and guide them. In the Supple et al.(2010) study of parental influence, the Hmong student participants shared that they knew their parents style of showing love was different, and that it is shown less in outward or public displays of affection, and more in the actions. For example, the participants mentioned that even though their parents lack the outward display of verbal or physical affection they do so through means of rewards and gifts such as money, phones, laptops, or cars when they achieved their academic goals.

Furthermore, Vang (2005) suggested that in some cases a Hmong parent's own educational background could be directly related to the success academically of their children. For example, Ima and Rumbaut (1989) found that parents' educational backgrounds, their pre-arrival education from refugee camps or native countries, and their perception of the American educational system played roles in their children's academic achievement. However, the students whose parents are most proficient in their primary language, or are not well versed in the English

language, are more prone to have lower motivation to achieve in school, (Vang, 2005) because they are unable to provide the proper academic support at home.

Successful Hmong students who understood the cultural display, and felt loved and supported by their parents, which then also instilled a stronger sense of obligation to their parents for their sacrifices. In fact, obligation to their parents was a key factor in Hmong student academic success. Often, Hmong students will point out that their motivation and drive to be successful is in part due to the desire to bring pride and honor to their family and parents, as well as to show appreciation for the opportunity that has been given to them. An opportunity that was not available to their parents (Supple et al., 2010). One participant in the study responded:

I mean it's like most of every guy's influence is the parents because they want to make their parents proud because we're the guys of the family. And, um, our parents...never got the chance...and we're here in America, we're the next generation, we have that availability to go and have an education and make something better of us. (p. 20)

The sense of cultural obligation is a custom practiced in Hmong families to promote socialization around achievement. Meaning that, Hmong students believe that they have a responsibility to achieve success when it comes to their fulfillment of the gender roles that have been established by their cultural values. (Supple et al., 2010). It is also important to note that while some Hmong students were able to achieve their academic goals through a sense of obligation to their parents' others have failed. This is often due to miscommunication of academic standards and expectations between parents and their students (Supple et al., 2010).

Future Family System

The Hmong family system has consisted of a pattern of tradition and behavior that continues to be passed down from generation to generation. It is based on gender roles within

the family, cultural obligation, and respect of the parents (Supple et al., 2010). Hmong parents have taken an approach to love which falls under more of the tough love category, and while Hmong youth are “used” to this style of parenting, a study done by Juang and Meschke (2017) had an interesting question. In this study, Juang and Meschke asked Hmong young adults about their upbringing, and if they could imagine themselves with children of their own (or if they had children of their own) would they parent them in the same way that their parents did for them. There were three categories that the Hmong adults identified that they would improve on in their own parenting: More open communication between the parent and child, less pressure on education, and less restrictions (Juang & Meschke, 2017).

Many of the Hmong adults in the study reported that they would focus on having better, and more open communication with their children on a regular basis. These adults said that when their parents would talk to them, it was not a conversation, but instead a lecture. They were spoken at, and not with. This made these adults feel stressed and as if their opinions and feelings didn't matter to their parents. One member of the study said that their parents never asked or brought up feelings, emotions or relationships. The conversations, one sided, were about whatever their parents wanted to talk about. Another Hmong adult shared that they believed a contributing factor of this communication gap was due to the lack of similar experiences. With these parents being first generation Hmong, they had little knowledge of what was happening in the lives of their children, and therefore talked only about what they knew. Many of these new upcoming Hmong parents agreed that moving forward with their parenting styles, they would strive for a more open communication with their children. They have the benefit of having more to relate to their children on, as these new Hmong parents have more in common with their children, and have more shared experiences (Juang & Meschke, 2017).

The second area that these new Hmong parents and young adults wanted to work on was having less strict of rules regarding social involvement. According to Juang & Meschke, thirty-seven percent of the participants said that they had so many restrictions on their time spent outside of the home (2017). This included not only time spent with their friends, but even participating in extracurricular activities at school. Participants expressed that they felt their parents were afraid the youth would get involved with gang activity, and therefore sheltered the youth from any possibility of that happening. This method of social protection was damaging to the social development of some of these adults though, and one participant reported that they were sheltered too much, causing stress and anxiety in social situations as adults, and also feeling a lack of understanding of certain social cues (Juang & Meschke, 2017). More participants want to encourage their children to be involved in sports, or extracurricular activities to promote happiness, interest, and healthy social development.

The final point that these Hmong young adults made was having less pressure on their children when it comes to academic success. Sixteen percent of the participants reported that while they had parental support in academics, the pressure they felt to do well was too much. Some parents went as far to pressure their youth to do well, telling them that a B grade was not enough, and they had to get A's in school to be seen as successful. These Hmong young adults shared that they want their children to do their best in school, and as parents will help them to do so, but do not want their children to feel like failures (Juang & Meschke, 2017).

The participants of this study made it clear that there are many changes they will make in their own family system going forward. A sense of understanding has emerged in them when thinking about the way they themselves were raised, and what perspectives developed in them during that time. For the participants of that study, many of the expectations and relationships

with parents influenced their perspective of success and worth. Going forward in their own lives, many expressed that these changes would not only build a healthier relationship between them and their children, but would also promote a stronger sense of identity and success in their children.

Preserving Cultural Identity

Hmong students who grasp an understanding and respect for Hmong and American culture are often more successful than their counterparts. However, that does not mean that a cultural gap does not exist. Although behaviors and poor academic performances are often the result of cultural gaps between generations, conflict between the younger and older generations is not out of the norm for Hmong families. The older Hmong generation has a hard time understanding the difficulties and challenges that arise for their youth as they try to fit into the new social norms of this new world. On the other hand, the younger generation lacks the understanding and point of parental control, along with the value of their traditional practices (Supple et al., 2010). Despite the cultural gaps in previous studies, Hmong youth delinquency and poor academic outcomes does not always align with cultural gaps.

In another study by Xiong and Lam (2013) on influence factors affecting student success, the Hmong student participants expressed that they receive cultural support from their families. They mentioned “emotional support, advice, attendance at campus activities and events, tangible care, high value on higher education and respect for their decision to pursue college education” (p. 139) as forms of cultural support. Some of these participants perceived academic success as a way of giving back to their families and culture. They also perceived academic success as a way of modeling academic importance for their siblings, instilling pride in their family name, and fulfilling their parents dream of having a successful son or daughter. Financial support was also a

huge contributing factor from their families as well. All of the experiences above are what led to the few Hmong students' academic success, however, limited studies also indicated that Hmong parents and cultural support may not convey the same experiences or message across each family, therefore academic experiences will vary (Xiong & Lam, 2013).

Cultural Values

DePouw (2003) described the pull that Hmong students feel as they find their balance between the world of their culture, and the expectations that the new American culture places on them. Not only are these Hmong youths faced with the pressure of family and upholding the values and practices of their ancestors, but they are faced with a sea of demands and requirements that does not allow for negotiation or consideration of race or ethnic diversity. Many students experienced any form of departure from Hmong tradition as a step toward delinquency and the challenges of maneuvering between race, culture, and class often left them feeling confused and alone. Cultural factors that may prevent Hmong students from academic success include gender obligations, cultural disconnect, parent-youth relationships dilemma, and cultural identity.

Along with the process of assimilating into American culture, Hmong students are experiencing the loss of their cultural and historical background from the same educational institutions that are teaching them to be successful. Recent studies reported that Hmong parents are frustrated because their children are unaware of all the cultural Hmong traditions, and they did not receive adequate training in the Hmong culture (Xiong et al., 2005). While some researchers may suggest that Hmong students are well adjusted in the United States and have adjusted well in the areas of education, regardless of any social, or cultural challenges or barriers, (Bosher, 1997), others argued that many Hmong youth are at higher risk of partaking in

behaviors of delinquency, academic failure, and truancy in their education (Faderman, 1998; Xiong et al., 2008).

During the process of assimilating, Hmong students are faced with decisions and challenges that require them to choose between their tradition and the new culture. Many Hmong students struggled with the process of assimilation because to adapt means they will have to sacrifice a part of who they are. Hmong students living in America often feel that there is pressure on them to not only uphold their family obligations, but also to succeed academically. All the while staying true to the traditions of their Hmong culture (DePouw, 2003). This is a process that many schools fail to acknowledge due to it being outside of their standards and curriculum. In many cases, teachers and educational staff believe that the traditions of other cultures, including the Hmong, are more problematic and cause issues in the students' receiving proper education. (DePouw, 2012; Lee, 2001, 2005; Lei, 2003; Ngo & Leet-Otley, 2011).

According to Ngo (2017) he indicated that recent findings showed that there is a lack of resources, knowledge of other cultural groups, and overall a lack of consideration for cultural practices, and as a result there is a higher level of academic failure surrounding minority students. Other research studies done on minority groups also supported the facts that "the subtractive assimilationist policies and practices of school are designed to divest students of their linguistic and cultural knowledge and identities. Rather than neutral, schools' demand that students embrace a curriculum that either dismisses or derogates their ethnicity" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 451).

When Hmong students are faced with these challenges many fall back to their traditional roots, most often in first and second generations Hmong students. However, third generation students are more accepting toward fully embracing mainstream American culture not knowing

they are sacrificing their cultural and historical background to fit in and achieve their academic goals. In doing so they lose the knowledge and understanding of their culture. Hmong students have to grapple with two worlds to achieve their academic goals DePouw (2003). DePouw described the struggle this way:

Their parents, while working hard to support their educational achievements, also sometimes undermine their own support because of their fear that their children will lose their Hmong culture. Their teachers often do not know anything meaningful about Hmong culture or history, and work to assimilate Hmong American students into mainstream white American culture while periodically inserting shallow representations of Hmong culture during diversity week. (p.14)

When Hmong youth are disconnected from their cultural history and traditions, it creates a cultural generation gap between parents and their children. Yang (2003) reported that one of the biggest issues in the culture is how to address the cultural gap that some see forming between the younger more assimilated Hmong, and the older family members. Generational cultural gaps are associated with miscommunication and misunderstanding between Hmong parents and their children. According to (Xiong et al., 2004; Xiong et al., 2005) first generation parents are well rooted in traditions and cultural values and view autonomy in decision-making and peer associations from their children as counter to their own values As a result, studies suggest that Hmong youths who have a high level of conflict with their parents or older family members, say that they feel more symptoms of depression, have the urge to act out more, or engage in alcohol use, all which can lead to issues in school (Lee et al., 2009; Xiong et al., 2008). On the other hand, parents are exerting more effort to control their children's behavior such as: who they should date, how they should dress, and what career they should pursue. These disciplinary

actions are practiced across the Hmong community in the parents' attempt to retain Hmong cultural traditions in their children.

Cultural Identity

Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another” (p.13). It is important to understand how culture influences academic success from a psychological perspective. Damen (1987) defined it as, learned patterns for living that human’s share daily. In other words, through this exchange of information, individuals are able to experience different pieces of culture whether old and new, and embrace that which speaks to them in their own way. This then helps these individuals develop and understand their own cultural identity as it is unique to them (Schwartz et al., 2006).

In the Hmong community, cultural identity is often associated through a stereotypical reflection of an individual’s characteristics. Meaning that a person can either be identified as a traditionalist, FOB (fresh off the boat), or “Americanized.” These stereotypical characteristics include: their fluency in Hmong or English, how they dress, food they eat, music they listen to, or how they socially interact. In a study done by Vang (2013) on generational differences, 202 Hmong participants were asked to identify themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 as Hmong American, Asian, Asian-American, or Hmong. They were also asked to rate themselves as very Hmong, mostly Hmong, bicultural, mostly American, to very American. The trend showed that 73.9% first generation respondents identify themselves as Hmong and 54.8% of second generation respondents identified themselves as Hmong. However, 40.4% of the second generation identified themselves as Hmong American. The participants were also asked to

identify themselves based on their Hmong and English fluency, marital status, number of dependents, and education status (Vang, 2013).

As a result, the researchers found that the majority of participants reflected similar cultural characteristics to the identity they associated themselves to be. For example, the first and second generations who identified themselves as Hmong, were more fluent in Hmong language and literacy and more accepting of family practices such as young marriage and having children; it is common in the Hmong community for teenage pregnancy as it is acceptable for Hmong youth to get married at a very young age. (Vang & Bogenschutz, 2011). The second generation Hmong reflect more of white American culture like family planning, and waiting until they are older to get married. While the results may not be enough to represent the greater ratio of the Hmong population it does bring forth the fact that there are multiple representations of Hmong identity and that each of those identities are often reflected in the success and failure of Hmong students. Whether or not cultural identity may be a factor toward academic success or failure, it does present and attribute new cultural and academic challenges to second and future generations students as many are still struggling to find their identity between two cultures (Vang & Bogenschutz, 2011).

Hmong students who fully embrace mainstream American culture are now faced with the conflicting dilemma of cultural identity. Cultural identity according to Lo (2010) is the balance and level of an individual's identification of both their first culture, as well as that of their new culture. While acculturation was a necessary process for Hmong immigrants to survive in the United States, which means more than their social life, but also includes surviving financially, mentally, and being accepted in society (Vang, 2013), many young Hmong are dealing with the need to assimilate to the new norms of their peers, while at the same time learning the cultural

traditions from their family at home. Students must balance blending in with their non-Hmong friends, while also preserving their cultural identity. (Xiong, et. al. 2005). Vang (2005) found that Hmong children are becoming more and more Americanized by taking on more of the behaviors they notice in their mainstream American peers. When these youth change so much about themselves to adapt to the American ways, these changes can lead to academic failure, as well as even more cultural conflict within the family setting.

The loss of cultural identity according to Ngo (2017) is in part due to the language loss in Hmong students as a result of dominant White culture in schools, as well as a general lack of knowledge about the journey the Hmong people have taken as refugees, and the sacrifices that many of the elders have made in order for them to be a part of this new world. In his interviews of Hmong community elders, they expressed their concerns with schools' as a contributing factor toward identity loss because of their exclusion of Hmong culture from their curriculums. This is often true in many schools according to Crichlow, (2013), History curriculum in schools focuses on the singular view of the culture which is dominant. It excludes much of history that has to do with many minority groups or other differing perspectives. Milner (2015) also stated that Hmong students living in America are excluded from curriculum in schools, as well as any acknowledgement from their teachers and staff members. The Hmong community elders also implied, unlike the 1.5 generation, who came to the United States at a young age and are able to embrace both cultures, that the second and third generation are the complete opposite. Ngo (2017) states that this generation does not know the history of their family as refugees. They don't understand the pain and sacrifices, are ashamed of the poor lifestyle they live, and have poor work ethic. They have little understanding and therefore are not confident in their cultural identity.

The struggle of cultural identity often reflects in Hmong students' attitudes and perspective toward academic achievements. If they choose to pursue and prioritize their academic goals then they do so at the expense of their cultural traditions, parents and community expectations. If they choose the latter, then they are bound with the cultural obligations that often prevents them from the pursuit of their academic goals. Youth who have a weaker connection to their parents or their education may suffer from having negative ideations with being culturally Hmong. Because of these negative ideations and identifications with being Hmong, youths may engage more in behaviors such as joining gangs instead of focusing on doing well in school (Supple et al., 2010).

Loss of cultural identity can contribute toward academic failure, however, Hmong students who have acknowledged and embraced their cultural identity used that as a driving factor toward their academic success. In the Supple et al. (2010) study, many of the participants expressed that they knew about a lot of the negative viewpoints and stereotypes directed toward the Hmong and talked about their awareness of the number of Hmong peers around them who were performing poorly in school. For many of them, realizing just how many of Hmong students fail in school, or do poorly was the motivation for them wanting to succeed. In the same study, they also stated that the students who work hard to achieve academic success do it to show not only people at school, but also American's in general that Hmong students are capable of success and have what it takes to do well in school. It was said that these students in particular are able to do this because they feel a strong sense of identity with being Hmong, and see it as a positive piece of their life. As one participant expressed:

I went to a middle school with a much bigger Hmong community [referring to Minnesota]. Here, (Hmong) people are quiet and passive. Teachers would overlook us. If a Hmong kid misses school, the teachers wouldn't care or wouldn't notice. (p. 23)

As a result, Supple et al. (2010) suggested that high achieving Hmong students were able to overcome the negative presumption that Hmong students cannot succeed by possessing a strong and positive sense of ethnic identification. Supple et al. also stated that:

Students who strive to achieve may do so to demonstrate to people at school and to American society more broadly that Hmong Americans can be highly successful, and they are motivated to do so because of a strong identification with being Hmong as a positive aspect of the self. (p. 23)

While other researchers such as Rumbaut and Portes (2001) suggested that harsh Hmong parenting may be the reason toward their children's loss in pride and Hmong identity, recent research suggested that the embracement of cultural identity can be used as a positive motive toward academic achievement.

Navigating a New Educational System

Education was a privilege that only few wealthy Hmong families could afford before their recruitment by the United States CIA during the Vietnam War. Wealthy families would send their children, mainly sons, to study in the big cities of Laos and Thailand. In a survey of educational attainment of Hmong adults conducted by Reder (1982), found that 73% had never attended public schools in Laos, 12% had one to three years of school, 7% had four to six years, 5% had seven to eight years, and approximately 3% had nine or more years. To put this into perspective, this means that only about 10% of Hmong adults have had some form of elementary or secondary education experience prior to their arrival in America. Therefore, many first

generation Hmong were uneducated and lacked the concept of education and its sufficiency in the new world because they never had a proper education (Reder, 1982).

According to DePouw (2003), many of the Hmong families upon immigrating to the United States were faced with challenges in schools right away. The academic challenges that early Hmong immigrants faced, and are still present in the third generation, include the lack of cultural and historical understanding from their teachers and administrators, ineffective academic supporters such as paraprofessionals and interpreters, and ineffective school expectations.

Academic Expectations

In recent years, studies have focused on the negative outcomes of Southeast Asian families based on the amount of school dropouts, mental health issues, activity with gangs, and more pointing towards the possibility of family and cultural processes being dysfunctional (Hsu et al., 2004; Lee, 1997; Lor & Chu, 2002; Xiong et al., 2008; Zhou, 2001). However, these studies are heavily influenced by the portrayal of correlation between delinquencies and cultural barriers with Hmong families and their students. (Supple et al., 2010).

According to Chadwick. et al. (2008), there are other factors that influence academic success, such as methods of teaching, differing cultures and cultural understandings. Each culture is diverse, which means that learning and understanding cannot be assumed to be the same across all cultures and backgrounds. These researchers suggested that evaluations of knowledge should be based on more than simply the academic products, but on the basis of culture and development. Unfortunately, not all share the same feelings and considerations when it comes to the education of Hmong students, and as a result they are caught between two worlds and two very different expectations of who they are supposed to be. However, there are individuals who were able to achieve their academic goals through cultural influence, embracing

both cultural identity with understanding and respect, parents and family support, and educator support. These are the factors we will focus on to see how Hmong immigrant students overcome cultural and academic barriers to achieve their academic goals.

The problem, however, was that early educational institutions in the United States have failed to acknowledge the effects of cultural factors in minority and immigrant students. Instead, schools often point to cultural differences and the inability to assimilate into school culture as the factors for these students' delinquent behaviors and as academic barriers. For example, Valenzuela (2008) pointed out the mindset of dominant cultures in western school, which focuses on the idea that all cultures are presumed to be the same in regards to habits and behaviors, and therefore are treated as equal. This however is not the case as Valenzuela continued to counter this argument saying that each culture should be seen as different and unique. This should be taken into consideration along with the attitudes and habits of each individual culture (Valenzuela, 2008).

Furthermore, in recent studies, scholarship programs have looked at the politics of education related to cultural differences and found that by subtracting the knowledge of other cultures or minority groups, there is a decrease in academic success for the students who are of color (Ngo, 2017). According to Valenzuela (2008), cultural factors like family, gender, work ethic, and responsibilities are manifested differently in different cultures. For example, the basic American cultural view of achieving success or the “American Dream” is solely based on the hard work of the individual. Other cultures may share similar cultural factors, but their views can be completely different. For example, within the context of some African culture such as Cameroon, people are not afraid to show their clear dislike of working (Valenzuela, 2008).

While schools viewed cultural differences as barriers in earlier years, recent studies suggest that it also motivates many students toward academic success.

This is the case for many highly successful Hmong college students. Cultural factors in the Hmong culture are usually founded in strong feelings of moral obligation to parents, family, and community. These moral obligations were rooted in Hmong children from a very young age, around four or five, from their parents. For the first generation of Hmong children, born and raised in Laos or Thailand before coming to the United States, they were brought up the traditional way. Hmong boys were taught to farm and harvest, hunt, herd animals, and provide for their family from their fathers. They were also taught to learn the traditional formalities of family and community meetings, weddings, funerals, and disputes to carry on the practices. The same goes for Hmong girls. They were taught how to farm, cook, clean, sew, and tend to her family's needs from their mothers. However, they were prohibited to lead or conduct traditional ceremonies or events as those are for the boys (Supple et al., 2010).

In DePouw's (2003) study, a school in Wisconsin was unprepared to meet the new diverse needs of the Hmong family. The teachers and social workers were unfamiliar with the Hmong culture and language and had little support for the Hmong families as they learned to adjust to a new modern world. Many viewed the uneducated Hmong community as primitive, setting stereotypes and racial boxes around them. As a result of this lack of support, North (2009) stated that these students experience feelings of helplessness and ultimately feel defeat, and therefore give up on any thoughts or actions on improving their life. According to the research students in DePouw's (2003) study, the teachers, administrators, and other staff members who had interactions with the students during their K-12 experience did not have prior knowledge of the Hmong people, the language or their history. The teachers at this particular school were also

predominantly white. Many of her students felt that their school personally did not seek out how to support their needs. For example, in their interviews one research student expressed the following to DePouw:

The counselors, I didn't feel like I could connect with or could connect with me, and they didn't seem like they, uh, cared as much. I didn't get a chance to go see them a lot, so...I just felt like the school could've done more, and I'm not sure why I feel this way, but you know, the school could've done more. (p. 9)

Another research student also expressed to DePouw:

I think a lot of it has to do with the teachers not understanding, like, where the students are coming from. I mean, they just expected to treat the Hmong students like white students. And, well, first of all, they're not white students, so their mentality is not like white students, you know? And the white teachers are there to teach them about white things. And then, you know, they don't like that, and then, you know, the parents at home don't understand them because their culture is totally different, you know. (p. 9)

The experiences of these research students reflect similarities among academic institutions across the United States, this neglect of the Hmong culture by teachers has been seen as institutional, and while it is helpful at times to the students, that brief attention from a few white American teachers does not make a big enough difference or change to the neglect that is clearly institutional (DePouw, 2003).

As schools tried to best understand and handle the challenges of their Hmong students, many sought out Hmong paraprofessionals as means to support their students. Tanabe et al. (2001) explained the main reason for the Hmong paraprofessional support was to have someone else to relate to the young Hmong students and to help increase the communication going back

and forth between school and the students' home. However, many students fail to see these paraprofessionals as academic supporters but instead as authority figures and interpreters. The lack of cultural understanding led schools to believe that all that was required to be a productive paraprofessional was to be Hmong.

According to Gay (2000), it was assumed by the school district that if a paraprofessional was Hmong like the students, their needs would be automatically met through some kind of biological connection, rather than having paraprofessionals who were trained and prepared in the cultural and educational needs of the students they were supporting. In other words, these paraprofessionals did not have the same educational training or power as certified teachers and were often much older, therefore they lacked the academic knowledge, changing and challenging experience to connect with the students they are there to support.

While schools do provide interpreters, they are often tasked specifically with just that; interpreting. The problem with that, according to the experience of one of DePouw's research students while she was working as an interpreter, was that the school where she was working kept Hmong parents uninformed when it came to the educational needs or progress of their students. To the extent that parents would receive occasional phone calls from interpreters, or receive a permission slip from the school that was written in English (DePouw, 2003).

Teachers and educators were highly respected back in Laos and Thailand where many of these parents grew up which is why they put so much trust in schools. Therefore, they won't ask questions when they are told that their student is failing or misbehaving because they assume that it is the student's fault. The lack of context and cultural understanding from the schools along with little understanding of the American educational system often led Hmong parents to blame their students for failing in school. When really it may not be the student's fault, but the school

district for their focus on saving money by not adequately supporting their minority students. In doing so they are placing the blame and responsibility for Hmong student achievement on the new and learning Hmong families and their focus on their transitions and cultural values (DePouw, 2003).

Research from Vang (2005) suggested that the educational system has changed very little since Hmong students' arrival to the United States. Vang says, still today there are very few bilingual teachers who speak Hmong. Therefore, Hmong students continue to suffer in the area of academic language, and basic language skills, which puts them at huge disadvantage in a normal American classroom. The mindset of many Hmong families are still culturally reversed from that of American culture, due to the fact there is still a huge population of first and second generation Hmong parents. Therefore, many Hmong parents will still default to traditional ways for their children over the importance of education. While most Hmong parents today are concerned about their children's education, "many of them are refugees who have not had any formal education and lack the educational background to provide necessary support at home" (Vang, 2005).

This traditional mindset prevents Hmong parents from intervening in their children's education, not because they don't want to, but because they do not know how. The lack of support and understanding between Hmong families and schools is still an ongoing issue. Therefore, public schools continue to place Hmong students in classes such as English Second Language (ESL) and English Language Development (ELD) with low expectations. Hmong parents, on the other hand, may seek other bilingual institutions such as charter schools for their children. However, this itself presents controversies of "segregation based on socioeconomic status and cultural factors (Vang, 2005) While these academic classes and alternatives are

important, and sometime necessary, for Hmong newcomers, They are not adequate enough to supply the assistance necessary for the Hmong students to survive and succeed academically. (Lee, 2001).

Academic Achievement

When the first wave of Hmong students arrived in the United States, they were faced with many challenges. These first and second generation Hmong students, who had spent most of their early life in refugee camps, overnight are now in a country where nothing is familiar to them. They do not know the language or possess the academic background needed to be successful in school. The public schools that they attended were not prepared to meet the needs of these students, therefore treated them like every student. Recent research suggested that schools in the early years were a huge factor to Hmong students' academic failure due to the lack of academic support and cultural knowledge from teachers, administrators. Due to the lack of cultural understanding and academic support the school administrators and teachers felt that the Hmong students didn't have what it takes to reach scholastic achievement, largely due to the cultural barrier and deficiency in the English Language; because of this they did not feel that these Hmong students were cut out for college (Golstein, 1985).

According to Vang (2005) even after Hmong students were placed into English Second Language (ESL) classes, Hmong students stayed rather distanced from other students at the school, both socially and academically. This was also true for the methods in which the Hmong students were taught subject material. The poor evaluations done by administrators also placed Hmong students in classes based on an expectation that they would attend or pursue a higher education, however, administrators in public schools placed Hmong students in classes where

they would only complete the minimum requirements in order for them to graduate (Golstein, 1985).

While this is still the case for many schools, there have been cases where educators and school programs helped Hmong students to navigate and achieve their academic goals. In the same study by Xiong and Lam (2013), the Hmong student participation were able to identify sources of support which includes their professors, peers, siblings and programs designed to support their academic needs. One participant explained how her professor helped and guided her to write a research proposal, explained graduate programs and possible careers, and grade coaching (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Another participant described her professors as being very open, understanding, and easy to communicate with. Academic support programs such as the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) also contributed to participants' higher education. The EOP helped students gain familiarity with college life, the campus, as well as the new stress and load of work from what they were used to. This was done to help these students have a better transition into college life. (Xiong & Lam, 2013).

Unfortunately, not every Hmong student will know and take advantage of these supporting educators or school programs. Relationships between students and educators will vary due to factors in cultural difference, background knowledge, gender comfortability, or simply just not knowing the right questions to ask. In these cases, successful influence may come from their siblings, friends, and classmates. Participants have also indicated that their academic progress was influenced by those friends and family who they formed relationships with, depended on, and those who pushed them toward their goals (Xiong & Lam, 2013)

After almost 40 years of resettlement in the United States, the Hmong population has reached 260,073 (US Census Bureau, 2010). While Hmong students may experience risk factors

for college failure commonly shared by students who have low socioeconomic status (Heisserer & Parette, 2002), they are making traction since coming to the United states. Researchers Yang and Pfeifer (2004) reported that Hmong Americans have 27.2% high school graduates, 11.7% associate or bachelor's degree holders and only 1.5% graduate degrees. Even though the graduation percentages are extremely low in early years, it comes as a result in comparison to the total national population. However, recent research data show that there has been significant increases, and are continuously rising, in high school graduation and college degree attainment when the data is compared within the cultural boundaries.

O'Reilly (1998) reported that Hmong students continue to show acceleration academically, and their performance changes and increases as they assimilate to the American culture and integrate into the process of school. Lee (2001) suggested that the academic success of Hmong students comes from the practice of accommodation and accommodation without assimilation, which is the result of both cultural transformation and cultural preservation. Despite the slow progress of success in education, data show that academic success for Hmong students is emerging. For example, in a recent survey by Xiong (2010), in 1990, only 44.1 percent of Hmong males aged 25 years or older had obtained a high school degree or higher. However, by 2000, 53.1 percent of them had done so. Ten years after that, 69.8 percent of Hmong males had completed a high school degree or higher. Academic achievements in Hmong female students are also emerging. Whereas in 1990 only 3% of Hmong females (compared to seven percent of men) had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, by 2010, 15.1% of them had done so (compared to 14 percent of men) (Xiong, 2010).

In terms of the proportion with an associate degree or higher, Hmong females caught up to Hmong males in 2009 and, by 2010, surpassed them by four percentage points. Despite many

obstacles, the Hmong are showing success since their arrival. Since the Hmong's arrival, more than 173 Hmong have earned doctoral degrees in different educational disciplines, thousands have received master's degrees in various professional fields, and more than 10,000 earned their undergraduate degrees. Not only are Hmong students making progress toward academic success but there are also a number of Hmong professors, teachers, and academic administrators working across public schools, colleges, and universities (Xiong, 2010).

A limitation that the current education system faces in regards to Hmong student's learning, is the lack of information about their culture and language. Instead of having accurate data and background on these students, they are treated as if they were just like any other English language learner, or bilingual student. However, Hmong students have very unique differences compared to other bilingual students, and therefore the tools and strategies used are not adequate to assist and support Hmong students' academic success (Vang, 2005). Marshall (1998) adds that during the learning process for Hmong students, there are many things that are left out. Content, linguistics, and learning strategies being a few of them. Marshall went on to describe the challenges this causes Hmong students throughout their learning process.

In the Hmong language they understand the context, the language, and the manner in which the information is being presented. However, when you change those things, and have not taught learning strategies, Hmong students are left to piece it all together, which creates what Marshall (1998) calls Compensation strategies. These strategies are what Hmong students use to adapt to these new learning styles and contexts, and is how they manage learning new information in a fast-paced setting. The problem with this strategy is that it doesn't teach Hmong students how to generalize the information and context that is being taught. Therefore,

they understand less of the information, and are using what they have taught themselves to get by.

Despite the lack of context and resources surrounding the learning process, Vue and Rodriguez (2018) reported that many of the Hmong students in their study expressed motivation and determination to succeed, even if it meant finding ways to succeed on their own. These Hmong students reported that they did what they had to do, and relied on themselves to see their full potential was met. For Vue and Rodriguez (2018), this showed that there are areas that need improvement when it comes to better knowledge in regards to teaching Hmong students. These limitations affect the quality of support being offered to Hmong students, regardless of whether or not it negatively affects their perception of success.

Social Emotional Learning

While much of the focus in the current education system is around academic achievement such as scores of standardized tests, this is not the only way to measure success in the education setting. Standardized tests measure the cognitive abilities of our students, while social emotional learning focuses on the non-cognitive abilities and are not actively taught in the general education setting. The skills learned through social emotional learning play a huge part in the development of youths alike, and the skills that are taught through social emotional learning encompass behaviors that every student needs to be successful not only in the academic setting but also in everyday life (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018).

Because social emotional skills are not an explicit part of the classroom learning environment or curriculum, they are often over looked altogether. However, Vue and Rodriguez suggested in their study that social emotional learning can be taught in the classroom, and is often the most significant location and setting for students to practice these skills in (2018). In

addition, it is said that by focusing on teaching and practicing these social emotional skills, a classroom can become more equitable in the overall environment of learning for all students.

“All students, regardless of their background, benefit from positive social and emotional development. At the same time, building, nurturing, and integrating social, emotional, and academic development in pre-K-12 can be a part of achieving a more equitable society” (Jones & Kahn, 2017, p. 12).

Currently there is a lack of both knowledge and support for Hmong students in the education system. Because of this, teachers and administrators are unaware of techniques and strategies that would best help improve the achievement and overall development of Hmong students. Changing and adapting Hmong student’s external environment is one way to offer support to their growth and development, however, looking at ways to improve their internal environment and development may have a stronger, more positive affect. Once again, there is a lack of information and literature to help support educators in making these changes (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018).

When looking specifically at how social emotional learning affects Hmong students in Minnesota, and their perception of success, Vue and Rodriguez found that many Hmong students had a more positive outlook, even though some developmental skills were still lacking compared to non-Hmong peers. Although standardized test scores were still lower than non-Hmong students, the Hmong students reported a higher level of positivity towards their self-identity, as well as more of a commitment and drive for learning (2018). Some Hmong students also stated that there were no classes or guidance when it came to adapting to the American classroom and learning environment. They were simply expected to adapt to the new setting and model for learning. This left Hmong students on their own to determine what they needed to do in order to

succeed in school, and left them without social or emotional support or resources as they navigated this new education system. This being said, researchers proposed that teaching social and emotional skills may be more of what Hmong students need in schools, as they continue to learn to adapt (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018).

Hmong students report a higher level of commitment to their education, learning, and success. Interestingly, while reporting this higher level, they also reported a lower level of academic support from home when compared to non-Hmong peers. Hmong students in Vue and Rodriguez's study stated that while they still felt supported from their parents and family, it is more from the cultural viewpoint than academic. Hmong parents have a very different perception of what support is needed for their students than the parents of the non-Hmong students in the study (Xiong, 2012). Research suggests that Hmong parents believe their support to their student's education comes in the form of the basic needs of food, shelter, water and clothing (Vue & Rodriguez, 2018). With this information in mind, it is suggested that Hmong students also perceive family support differently from non-Hmong peers, and therefore still felt supported regardless of whether it was focused on academics or basic needs.

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

For the last 40 years Hmong students have sought to find the balance between holding onto traditions and beliefs, and adapting to a new life in the United States. In addition to cultural differences and challenges with acculturation, Hmong students living in America face additional challenges finding a balance between family obligations, cultural obligations, and a drive to achieve their own academic success. Historically, the Hmong people first started immigrating to the United States in 1975, and since then the population has continued to grow (Grigoleit, 2006). When the first Hmong people came to the United States, there was little information about the culture, and therefore little support or assistance for them. Because of this, there has been a huge disconnect and misunderstanding of the culture and traditions (DePouw, 2003).

While working towards finding the balance between their own traditions and cultural practices, and the new modern lifestyle, the Hmong strive to acculturate while adapting to their new life. There are certain traditions and practices that are extremely important to the Hmong people, such as family obligations, and a strong work ethic, according to Hutchinson (1997) and Kotyk (1998). Hmong parents will often express tough love to their children and will keep high behavioral control over them, says Supple and Small (2006), Xiong (2008), and Yang (2003).

Family obligations and gender roles are two very important traditions to the Hmong people, and they push future generations to continue these traditions and practices to this day. Males are dominant in the culture, and women are seen as only useful in childbearing, raising a family, and keeping a home. Females are often pressured to keep with these gender roles and obligations even as generations have continued. They are not often encouraged to further their education or explore options other than making a home. Males are seen as higher and more important than females, says Supple, et. al. (2010) , and it is the males job to provide for the

family, and tend to clan and family matters with leaders and elders. Males will also carry on the important traditions and ceremonies that are specific to the culture. It is their job to ensure that these small details are not lost as generations continue.

The purpose of the research gathered and reviewed is to examine and discuss the correlation between cultural barriers and the academic success rate of Hmong students in the United States. While students even today face the pressures of family obligation, gender roles, and cultural traditions, they also face barriers in the education system as lack of support are still evident in many schools across the country with a Hmong population. Due to the little information about the culture, there is a lack of understanding and willingness to pay much attention to the academic success of Hmong students, according to Vang et al. (2013).

There are many young Hmong students who have goals they seek to achieve, and aspirations of what else they could experience in life. They have come to a country of opportunity, and they wish to be given just that. The opportunity to do something more, to become something more, and to bring pride to themselves and their family. Unfortunately these students are caught between two worlds with little academic support in schools, and for some, a lack of support from their families as well. This study focused on the cultural barriers and perceptions that influence the academic success of Hmong students today (Supple, et. al. 2010).

For centuries, the Hmong, had been at war to preserve only peace and their way of living. Prior to the Vietnam War, the Hmong were unknown to most of the world due to their isolation in mountainous regions in Southeast Asia. It was the hope of peace and preservation that they supported the United States in their mission to prevent the spread of communism. However, the war was lost and the United States pulled out of Southeast Asia, they were pursued and executed because of their alliances. The war cost the Hmong their homeland, families, and way of living

and were forced to seek refuge in different parts of the world. Since their immigration to the United States in the 1970's, Hmong students have slowly but steadily climbed over cultural and academic barriers to obtain their educational goals. They faced academic barriers in schools due to lack of cultural and historical understanding from their teachers and administrators (DePouw, 2003). They struggled between education and their cultural obligations and often failed to reach their goals because of misunderstanding and lack of support from their parents and schools. They struggled to understand and embrace their cultural identity in their process of assimilating to survive in the new world, and in terms lost the cultural characteristics that define who they are (Rudin, 2009; Schwartz et. al., 2010). Those who fully embraced mainstream American culture risk losing the historical knowledge, traditions, language, and appreciation for their culture. However, despite the academic and cultural barriers, Hmong students are also finding ways to achieve their academic goals. Hmong students who recognized and appreciated the support of their parents "tough love" were able to find academic success by the motive to bring pride to their family name (Supple et al., 2010). They took on and modeled academic achievement for their families and communities.

They have embraced their cultural identity and used that as a driving motive to represent their community through their academic accomplishments. Along the way, they have learned to trust and built relationships with friends, siblings, teachers, support programs, and counselors who they can depend on and trust to push them toward their goals. While academic and cultural barriers do still exist in the Hmong and school communities, data has shown that there is growth in academic attainment, both by male and female Hmong students (Xiong, 2010).

Professional Application

This research has explored multiple factors to gain insight on influences toward academic success in Hmong students. While the research may have included external factors from education, they are all vitally important to understanding the cultural mindset of these students. One of these factors include the understanding of Hmong culture and history. Like many public schools today, minority and immigrant students are often treated and taught the same as mainstream students. While this seems inclusive and equitable, these students are missing out on much of the information being taught because they have needs that are being overlooked or missed completely. What makes American public schools so great is the fact that there are resources and programs in place to meet the needs of each student where they are at. This, however, is not being done especially with the immigrant or minority students (Xiong, 2010).

A point that needs to be made is that public school teachers, specifically here in Minnesota, need to have a better understanding of all the students they are educating. To have the knowledge and background information on their students, their unique lives and needs. Public education has been focused on the high success rates of students on standardized testing throughout the years, and focuses less on building a passion and desire to learn and develop each student as a person. In this way, teachers may focus more of their energy or attention on the students who they can see will produce better scores on those tests, and help the struggling minority students just enough.

One of the most important applications from this research, is that those participants who have been academically successful, have had teachers and administrators who have taken the time to understand and build a personal relationship with them. Data has shown in many studies that when teachers take the time to understand those minority students, or any student personally,

those students are more likely to succeed. The current data that has been studied has been focused primarily on areas where there is a higher population of Hmong students, however, there are many other minority groups and students who are being passed over, especially in more rural areas, therefore further research and studies should be conducted to gain more understanding and insight for those locations and minority groups (Ngo, 2017)

Limitations of the Research

When researching this topic there were two main limitations of research that were found. These limitations of research can be divided into two categories: excluded research and limited current research. When looking through the research found on the topic of academics in Hmong students, some of the studies, though interesting, were not relevant to the specific topic of which is being addressed, and therefore was excluded. The other is that there was limited current research on this topic as most of the research was conducted during the time of the largest Hmong immigration more than 40 years ago.

Excluded Research

Due to the limited studies and sample sizes of Hmong student participants, graduation rates, and academic achievement from early to secondary education were excluded from this research. While this research did not exclude the challenges in those early years of education, there are a few factors to consider when cultural influences take effect. For example, there is an age gap between first and second generation Hmong students to that of mainstream students when they started school. For many first generation Hmong students they may be too old to start secondary school or older than the mainstream students if they did go to school. Depending on their age, second generation Hmong students may begin at a grade level that was deemed appropriate to their academic proficiency. Regardless of the grade level they began at, both first

and second generation Hmong students had a disadvantage when they started their education. Therefore, data collected from these students would be irrelevant because they have yet to understand the education system let alone the value of education of their new world.

Limited Current Research

Studies relevant to this topic focus primarily on second and third generation Hmong students. Therefore, the first limitation to this literature review is a lack of data showing the levels of education that have been completed by first generation Hmong. This data is important to understanding the success in education of all Hmong students, as there is a population of first generation Hmong students whose success rates have not contributed to the overall success of the Hmong. The data could also be used to help understand the level of cultural and academic influences that the first generation has on second and third generations.

It is only in recent years that the Hmong are slowly but exposed to the American general public, many still do not know who they are. The earliest Hmong to have come to the United States began in the late 1970's and then in waves into the 80s, 90s, and early 2000s. Within this timeframe little is known about them, who they are, or why they are here. Therefore, any data or research that is focused on academics is geared towards trying to understand their history and transition or assimilation to their new home in the United States. Although this research included multiple studies of Hmong students, it significantly lacks the proportion size needed to make any conclusion based on the entirety of the Hmong student population. There are also limited studies that compare or contrast Hmong students' academic success in the United States to countries that Hmong have also immigrated to such as France, Australia, China, Vietnam, and Canada.

Implications for Future Research

There are several implications and questions to be considered in future research to better understand the impact of cultural influences for future Hmong generations. For example, there are limited research studies done on third generation Hmong students and that is because many of them may have just completed secondary education or are in a post education program. Therefore, how does cultural influence affect these students toward higher education? Given that most third generation students have the opportunity to start their education at the appropriate age, what are the academic and cultural factors that contributed to their success, or failures? How much cultural influence do second generation parents instill in their children? If the same studies done on first and second generation students is to be conducted on third generation students, how might their answers be similar or different?

One of the most important observations from this research was the realization of the effects of assimilation on a culture. The success stories of the Hmong students in these studies were astonishing, but it came at the sacrifice of diluting their culture and identity. Therefore, the question to ask in the future will no longer be whether future Hmong students will achieve academic success. The answer is, yes! Instead, the question for future Hmong generations will be how Hmong students' academic success influences their cultural perceptions.

Conclusion

The results of this literature review on how Hmong students' perceive academic success suggest that to first and second generation Hmong, America may only slowly start to feel like home. Due to war, they were forced to leave their home and enter what seems like a futuristic foreign land beyond their comprehension. They yearn to go back to the home of their parents, grandparents, and ancestors—to the way things were before the war. As they struggle to embrace

and assimilate into American society, they strive to preserve their cultural identity in their children.

The literature identifies factors that influence academic achievement among Hmong students who are caught between two worlds. Studies show that with support, many Hmong students are motivated to achieve their academic goals while others are focused on cultural obligations instead. Studies show some encouraging progress in the Hmong community, but at the same time it has unveiled an important concern that Hmong students must sacrifice parts of their cultural heritage to reach their full academic potential. Educators must foster attitudes of respect and empathy for diverse cultural backgrounds. As Hmong students continue to pursue academic achievement, they must learn to perceive for themselves what academic success is, and how they can accomplish their academic goals while holding onto their cultural identity.

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